DIGITAL VIDEO
MY REVELATION

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Daniel Shellenbarger, B.A., M.A.
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The Ohio State University
2001

MFA Committee
Professor Ken Rinaldo, Adviser
Dr. Wayne Carlson
Professor Ardine Nelson
Professor Todd DeVriese

Approved by
Adviser
Department of Art
ABSTRACT

Digital video has enabled a revolution that affects production. It is assisting the reinvention of art on video. The revolution is not without a history. Film and television have provided a grammar that informs digital video while providing new tools to expand and stretch this grammar.

My work has been realized through this revolution. I have used it to recreate the idea of documentary. My work is about the documentation of my response to an event. It is my hope that both the event and my response will cause a reaction from the viewer.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my adviser, Ken Rinaldo, for his patience and his encouraging insights to my work. His enthusiasm served to help me complete my program as well as to give me a greater understanding as an artist.

Also special thanks to my committee, Wayne Carlson for helping get into the program and his wealth of knowledge that fueled my interest in electronic arts, Ardine Nelson who helped me with her insightful approach to my work (and for helping break the habit of smoking videos), and Todd DeVriese whose aesthetic compassion made me push harder.

The staff at Ohio Government Communications provided unending patience while I sprinted from work to school and back. They did not defect. For this, I am grateful.

I am indebted to my family for moving in and dealing with the rehab of the house and keeping me sane during those months.

Marthe, Donna, and Cathy, whom all should be commended for helping me go through the paperwork, scheduling, and challenges of grad school. For this I say: “Thank you very much!”

And, thank you to Heather who through her creativity and artistic talent provided the inspiration and fire in me to never give up on a vision.
VITA

1988  B.A., The Ohio State University
      Major: Journalism
      Minor: Photography

1992  M.A., The Ohio State University
      Research Area: Educational Telecommunications
      Thesis: Developing a New Model for the Analysis of Television

1996 – present  General Manager, Ohio Government Telecommunications

1999- 2001  Graduate T.A. Department of Art, Art and Technology Program
            The Ohio State University

1999-2001  Web developer, Department of Art, Art & Technology,
            Media Arts and Culture Colloquium, The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Digital Video Art
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Introduction

I began my graduate program with the desire to produce traditional documentaries. I was interested in documentaries not for just their informative vantage point, but also for their aesthetic expression. The rich, multi layers of video can present a subject in an intoxicating manner. Surrounded by sight, sound and information video can coax viewers to deeper reflection.

The advent of broadband, the World Wide Web and digital video broadened my hope for a different kind of documentary. No longer was it necessary to spend thousands of dollars to rent equipment and then several more thousands for distribution. The process could be done alone, with consumer-priced gear that provides broadcast results. The web makes a perfect distribution system, unchained by the traditional and closed broadcast network.

With all of these tools and capabilities at my disposal I was in a perfect position to move forward with my plans. Except for one brilliant issue: the documentary in its traditional form, as I understood it, no longer interested me.

Uninspired I began to formulate alternative approaches and question the rubric of traditional broadcast television. I had become seduced by the interactive. I proposed that with the web, one-way programming and distribution were displaced. The Web also is a new medium and therefore approaches to video must also be reassessed and recreated.
I was at a mental impasse. To create is to begin anew. Video is drenched in semiotics, culture and meaning. The music needs to be reinvented, not just rewriting lyrics to a familiar tune. As history is descriptive it is also reflective. My aesthetic goals did not let me create in a familiar manner. I needed to consider the medium itself.

Beginnings

Video cannot be examined without considering related history. Film began an evolution in the early 1900s becoming less about simply recording what was there and more about telling a story. This was simultaneously an evolution of visual literacy. While framing was borrowed from the great painting masters, the major innovation in film was the discovery that perception could be altered even further through the use of projected images.

Almost fifty years later television borrowed from this evolution but soon developed an entirely new class of moving pictures. In addition to changing perception, television was developing culture. This seemingly benign glass screen in millions of homes was doing more than entertaining; it was influencing thought, action, and opinion.

Now, fifty years following the explosive rise of television, digital video has created another revolution. Digital video—the video that can be viewed live or downloaded on a computer is creating yet another class of moving pictures. It carries traits from its original parent, yet is evolving new characteristics that do not match the traditional line. In order to understand the field of digital video it is important to examine the lineage it has followed.

In order to consider digital video it is difficult to follow a single vein from its early history to its contemporary state. Film and television has been modeled along a variety of different areas: cultural, psychological, political, and aesthetic. In determining exact pathways of evolution there is much crossover. One cannot remove the semiotic
meanings of the screen from both an aesthetic and psychological perspective. As with early film makers, and early video artists like Dara Birnbaum, Vito Acconci, and Andy Warhol, digital video artists are left with very little material to develop within the parameters of a completely new medium.

“In the early years of cinema, filmmakers found themselves in a creative atmosphere with no clear idea of how to create a work of fine art...Cinematic directors and their audiences found the new visual recording process marvelous and the images in motion so startling that few asked critical questions.” (Berton, p. 5).

The relationship to digital video’s emergence from television follows similar lines to this earlier process but with a notable exception. That exception is “access to distribution.” However, currently available bandwidths for this distribution remain the major limiting factor.

**Aesthetic dissonance**

I was interested in the traditional documentary due to its instructional capabilities. The director takes the audience to a subject and provides (with hope) objective coverage of the matter. Cognition and understanding is a result of the viewer drawing his or her insights into the documentary. This follows a constructivist approach to education: the instructor (director) is not a sage in as much as he or she is a guide, traveling as one of the group. This democratic and egalitarian approach removes the artist, I feel, from the steeple of ego. To me, ego is necessary in the transcription of an art product. We need to have faith in our skills and knowledge. However, the idea of the artist as an uber-citizen seems wrong and counter to continual improvement in the craft of art.

Art, to me, is as much about the constant discovery of ourselves and the world in which we live and interact, as it is about the aesthetic object that is produced. I believe
that the production of an art object is simply our reaction to life events or occurrences. I also feel that an artist serves as an instructor, the lesson living in the artwork.

When one considers the traditional documentary it is usually dealing with a subject beyond the auteur. From my experiences I became less interested in subjects in the world around me and more interested in my reactions to the world around me. My documentary subject was to be me. But the work is not about me, rather, I want it to be about my reaction to events, occurrences, and incidents. This is an important distinction. Within this boundary I hope my work leaves space for viewer’s reaction both to me and the subject at hand, a duality for higher understanding or at least consideration. In a sense, my approach to the documentary is to document myself, specifically my reactions to an event. From this reaction I hope to generate consideration from the viewer, both in response to my reaction and their own response to the particular event. Unlike "traditional" documentary I am not purporting any type of truth or objectivity in my work. That is insignificant. The work is about reaction, the viewer and mine.

Since my work necessitates a viewer, the ability of the Web to gain access to viewers without the traditional costs of broadcast television allows me to continue to create. I would also argue that digital video on the web has its own unique grammar, some modified from its predecessors of film and television, but also some that is unique to itself. In create a doctrine to ensure the proper use of the tool; to use the tool in new ways, I needed to dissect the preceding mediums.

Basic Characteristics of Film and Television
I will first review film and television along the same four areas essential to film, television and digital video: image, place, sound, and control. Then I will consider the aesthetic aspects of all three mediums.
Film

Film might have been invented in the late 1800s but it really became meaningful only when it broke from the mundane recording of events and became a potent messaging device for expressing narratives. There are a profusion of theories regarding film and film aesthetics. There are however, basic and essential characteristics of film and television that are evident in both media. Some of the essential characteristics of film can be seen as superficial. Gary Gash, a media theorist, provides a context for the comparison of film and television. A part of Gash’s comparison is used here.

1. The Image:

The scale of film is variable—often it is huge in size. New theaters help to accommodate all viewers so they have the full impact of the images. Objects, people and things appear larger than life. New technological advances in cameras and supports also allow for newer and arresting angles. The size of film permits greater latitude of the scale to what is shown. Film also is presented on a strong horizontal in a more than a 2:1 aspect ratio, which more closely relates to the human field of vision.

Film has, depending on the stock, a high visual resolution. Colors, light values, brightness and contrast ratios are reproduced incredibly well in this medium. Both slow motion and speed doubling—which carry with it enormous psychological and aesthetic impacts are usually completed within the camera and result in a very natural appearance.

Film is never viewed as live. Film, the medium, needs film, the product, to exist. Film cannot be distributed from the camera to the audience without several off-line processing steps.
2. Place:

Film is viewed in theaters. Many films are also viewed on television after they are released on video or DVD, however I am interested in the primary use of film, and that is for theatrical release. It is delivered in the context of a gathered audience. It is difficult to ignore the responses of other viewers when watching a film. It is a communal activity. Film provides no chance for a break in the events on screen. Indeed, the size of the screen itself makes it difficult to turn away from any particular scene. “Film is screened not just played….film is not just part of the screen, or the projector: it’s part of the whole room itself. Theater is first of all a theater. Film takes the theater stage and seemingly projects it out into the room.” (Gach, p.3).

Film is scheduled for viewing on a timetable. Viewers select options afforded by this timetable.

3. Audio:

With Dolby THX sound and well-placed speakers, the sound for film can be universally experienced by each audience member. Attention to design and delivery is be an integral part of the revealment of the story.

4. Control:

Film is a very closed medium with only a few distributors in charge of what films are available to audiences. While there has been a growth of independent productions, they are limited in reach by a marketing and distribution chain designed to serve the large, commercially produced film industry.

Film is purchased by the viewer. The exchange imbibes the film with a sense of value and helps to endear the viewer through ownership of a commodity.
Television

1. The Image:

The scale of television is much smaller than that of film. Due to the relative size of television the close-up is used more often to accommodate the smaller screen size.

Television provides the effect of “staring into the light.” Whereas film is projected, television is radiated directly to the viewer.

Current television carries with it rather poor optical resolution compared to that of film. Television is capable of a lighting ratio in the neighborhood of 30:1, film is closer to 100:1. Film can resolve out to 800 lines and higher depending on the format. Television resolves no more than 525 lines. However digital television as mandated by the United States’ FCC, in 2006 stands to rival the resolution of film. As with resolution, current contrast ranges within the existing standard are fairly short-lived. Digital television will help to increase the contrast range but will not exceed the contrast range of film.

Television can exist outside of videotape; it can be broadcast live without being converted to another format. Due to this phenomenon, television is seen as a “reality” medium. Viewers are quite used to the direct broadcast capabilities of the medium.

2. Place

Television is ubiquitous. It is in our homes, stores, bars and clubs. It is at the gym, at work, and even in our cars. The television usually resides in the most popular area of family homes. It is comfortably viewed alone or with small groups of people.

It is much easier to turn away from television than from movies. As such there are breaks in the programming, commercials, which allow the viewer time to leave the television. Since television exists in our homes, it can also sit in the background and receive only cursory attention. It does not rivet us to our seats demanding our attention, as is often the case for film. Television (without a VCR) does not permit viewing outside
of a set schedule. The viewer has little option to watch programming outside of its assigned time slot.

I would also posit that commercials are what keep people from investing completely in the narrative of television. There is an inherent knowledge that the program will be interrupted. Made for television programs are scripted to use these breaks as emotional pauses. However, in the pause we become somewhat divested in the story. An ironic fact to this is that commercials are scripted to grab emotional investment right away and in a very short time. Commercials have been both the bane and the drive for television; in fact many commercials have driven the aesthetic development of television. The aesthetic appeal of commercials can be reflected in the case of the video artist, Dara Birnbaum who was hired by the Remy Martin company to produce a video work that dealt with their product. The Gap, Volkswagen and Levi's commercials have all been integrated into cultural references and their creation is sometimes (many times) more notable than the programming to which they are attached. The short time frame of a commercial bears important relevance to my work as will be explained later.

3. Audio

The audio of television is relatively poor compared to that of film. The user has the ultimate control of the volume and viewing areas differ so greatly, sound design is often ruined upon transmission. Millions of television sets currently in use have mono sound only. Digital television will have ample bandwidth to improve the current audio capabilities.

4. Control

Television is more open than film but still very controlled. Instead of box office receipts to win as in the case with film, television must contend with market share and
commercial appeal. Access to television is much easier than that of film and this access has enabled the almost complete diffusion of television throughout our culture and the world. The programming blocks of television make it easy to part from but almost impossible to leave.

Film and Television, A Design Aesthetic

An overall design aesthetic exists that is inherent to both film and television. Mostly this aesthetic does not differ between the media except in the case of scale. Rogena Degge’s work provides a brief overview of the similarities and differences inherent in the mediums.

Degge indicates there are three groupings of design operands: visual elements, color and light; organization, composition, and continuity; and transition, camera switching, and movement. These operands affect the program and meaning of the program. The features of these operands can be further divided in the following manner.

Grammatical. Shows are composed of a “chain of shots” much like a sentence is composed of words. These shots each have specific meanings and purposes such as the close-up, reaction shot, and zooms.

Formalistic. These features include design elements such as figure-ground relationship, continuity, and the illusion of depth. Also included are the traditional aesthetic elements of light, color, and framing.

Formulaic. Television and films exhibit basic categories. The most basic is the three-act structure. This structure controls almost all categories. More specifically, programs can be divided into dramas, documentaries, action adventure, sports, commercials, and etc.

Degge departs from the equality of the media when considering the phenomenological perspective of the television experience. Her operands manifest themselves uniquely to television. Television alone exhibits the following characteristics.
Immediacy: Television contributes to the feeling that the viewer is part of a larger audience and that what is happening on the screen is actually happening at that very moment. A very typical parlance in the industry is the “live to tape” broadcast where shows are recorded at earlier times then played back later. This lends to the feeling that the show is actually live.

Reality: Viewers tend to suspend disbelief and feel that the characters portrayed on the screen are real people. Examples of this are “Roseanne” and “Ally McBeal” The multi-programming nature of television assists with this illusion. Dramas are bumped next to talk shows or news programs. Viewers are confronted with degree of veracity without out any real transitions.

 Authenticity: Degge posits we can alter or modify the presentation of a program in ways unlike this capacity with other visual arts. On the most basic level, viewers can alter the color or sound level of the program. More experientially, viewers can have different experiences of programs relative to the context in which they watch the program. A political debate will be viewed differently in a living room than in a bar.

Time: Time applies similarly to both media. The perception of time affects a viewer’s sense of reality. A number of devices are used in television to manipulate time. Cuts, fades, dissolves and split screens each carry with them specific meanings in relationship to time. Within the space of one program several years can pass seamlessly in front of viewers’ eyes.

The Revolution Becomes a Revelation to Me

To use the new medium in a new way I needed to establish a doctrine for my work. This doctrine became my manifesto. As with any approach to art the rules are made to be broken. But, I found it difficult, without any type of structural rubric, to break from the influence of television and film. I would argue that the effects of these mediums infuse
our everyday thought process, we think and recall similar to films and television. The
manifesto helps me work in a manner that diverges from the content of the preceding
mediums.

The DV Manifesto

Digital video is democratic

Digital video is free of expensive broadcast constraints. The tools are reasonably
accessible, there are no set broadcast restrictions in terms of content or technical issues,
and it can be controlled by an individual.

Creation is definition

The digital video aesthetic is being defined and altered as the technology changes and
the medium percolates into the culture. It is the making of digital video that defines
digital video. An act of art helps to define itself.

The gallery is the computer

Digital video art does not have to be immersed in the rigors of traditional gallery
viewing. Once on the Web it can avoid the mostly closed system of gallery shows.
Using the Web, artists can link from or to sites. On the Web the gallery is never closed.
It can be viewed in an environment more controlled by the artist. The artist can embed
the player in such a way the video will only be seen in a certain manner. Traditional
video art needs specific viewing environments, usually the type of environments galleries
have to cobble together to provide only a modicum of a solution.

Access is everywhere

Digital video created for the Web has no barriers for distribution. Anyone with
access to a computer, either in the home, office, or in the community can have access to
the art. More than half of the U.S. population now owns a computer. For those that do
not or cannot own a computer public libraries and community computing centers have
been established around the country. As computers become more ubiquitous, the numbers of people with computers increases internationally as well.

**Tape is for acquisition only**

Digital video prevents technical imperfections associated with analog recording. Dubs are generation free; they look as good as the original. The weakest link in digital video production is the tape. It does not allow for non-linear access and it can become brittle and lose its oxide. In digital video you want to get it to the computer (hard disk) as soon as possible. Ideally, in a few years tape will be replaced by direct hard drives.

**Digital video breaks tradition**

This is a new medium. It is cheaper to produce than film or television, it is smaller and as such needs a smaller crew (only one in many cases) to produce, the aspect ratio does not have to be confined to a box or a rectangle, it can be integrated with interactive elements on a Web page, it looks different than film and television, it can be distributed by an individual as opposed to a company, and it has even more subtle and not so subtle differences than film and television. As it is a new medium, a new grammar must be created and applied. The rules of broadcast television, video and film no longer have to, or need to, drive the medium.

The digital video medium extends beyond the belief that an artist is only as good as his or her tools. I would contend that in this case the artist is left to constantly create new tools in this new medium. In order to help guide myself in a new direction I needed to contextualize digital video and it predecessors.

**Digital Video**

The ability of streaming video on the Web has paralleled the revolution that is occurring with associated equipment. Ten years ago the costs to professionally produce a
program would be tens of thousands of dollars, at times exceeding hundreds of thousands of dollars for shooting and editing. Now with the advent of mini digital tape and equipment and software, such as iMovie, one can own the equipment for a few thousand U.S. dollars and produce an infinite number of programs at negligible costs.

The two largest software packages that permit the viewing of video on the Internet, QuickTime and Real Media, have reported more than 300 million downloads of their combined software worldwide. This has a significant impact on the penetration of digital video in the world market. Unfortunately, most digital video produced on the net closely resembles its earlier media formats or is an exact duplicate of them. In fact, Web sites such as iFilm.com and Undergroundfilm.com use digital video to simply promote their screen counterparts.

Digital video can be compared with the aesthetic characteristics and design operands of television and film, but it also deviates from the aforementioned categories. The design and aesthetics of digital video seem to be inhibiting to it as a medium, especially when it is compared to television and film. I feel that these inhibitions can be controlled and exploited to positive aesthetic ends.

1. **The image:**

Currently digital video is small in scale. Even if it is screen doubled it is not even close in dimension to a typical television screen. There is really no scale contrast with digital video. Even vast wide shots appear miniscule on current computer screens.

The resolution of digital video is at present, limited and of poor image quality. Higher bandwidth connections have significantly improved the look of digital video, but it the visual equivalent of early radio. QuickTime’s “fast start” feature, which permits video to be downloaded on a computer and then viewed off the hard drive as opposed to a streaming video connection from a server also has helped image resolution. Indeed many
of the film trailers viewable on Apple Computer’s web site demonstrate an improvement in the image quality. The display size, however, limits the effect of the visual verisimilitude that is experienced in television and film.

Digital video can be viewed live just as in the case of television. It shares the same characteristics with television in that it can also carry with it the perception of being live though it is often delayed.

Digital video is not limited to an established screen ratio. Any ratio can be used in the production and transmutation. Due to the early stage of development of the media, most digital video is mirroring its predecessors.

Like television, digital video also is a “stare into the light” medium. Unlike television however, the media player competes with other items present on the screen. The media player usually takes up only a small portion of screen real estate and desktop pictures and file icons or other open software programs also compete for visual attention. Digital video will be viewed differently by different operating systems, platforms, and hardware. I feel the mesmerizing glow of any screen can perform as a fixative environment for a viewer. We are literally “drawn into the light.” Unlike television or film, how the video is embedded into the site has bearing on what the viewing experience can be. Also, depending on the user’s machine, the video can be competing with any number of flashing, beeping, moving articles on the computer screen or contained in the browser.

2. Place:

Digital video is confined to the computer screen and is not quite as wide spread as television. There are more than 300 million downloads of RealPlayer and QuickTime Players internationally. However, digital video programming on the web is becoming ubiquitous. Web cameras are being installed everywhere. Anyone with a phone line and
a few hundred dollars can set up a camera directly to the web and begin their own programming.

3. Audio:

To date, audio quality in digital video is inadequate. Since the medium relies on compression, much of the bandwidth for delivery of digital video is given to the video side of the transmission. Compression usually takes the form of reducing audio to (at best) a 22kHz signal from 44 or 48 and transferring it mono. Stereo broadcasting is the highest achievement to date. Surround sound or Dolby 5.1, widespread in commercial television broadcasting, is currently impossible to reproduce within the available bandwidth on the web. Moore’s Law is making systems more widely available.

4. Control:

This is the major innovation of digital video. Whereas film is controlled by a select few, and television is controlled by larger but still very limited collective, digital video is controlled by anyone with a camera, computer and web access. This is truly a medium of the masses, yes a wealthier mass, but access to production and distribution has never been as wide open as it is now.

Access to digital video is frequently free. The software needed to view digital video is a free download in basic versions. One can create digital video that requires a fee for viewing, but this is not the case for the majority of video on the web.

Digital video has completely redirected a medium of communications from one of a “media to the masses” to one of communications of the “masses to the masses.”

Digital video shares many of the similar design elements that Degge introduced for television and film. The phenomenological ramifications of digital video are also similar to those of television. Digital video, however, is unique in the area of interactivity.
Early historical efforts were made to make television programs interactive. Qube cable in Columbus, Ohio actually test marketed the first interactive cable box. Viewers were given the chance to participate in quiz shows and collectively choose the outcomes of programming by pressing buttons on the cable box. This box was back connected to the cable head end and viewer votes were collected. It was an interesting early experiment. The one-way hierarchy of television is a difficult tyranny to topple. Upon reflecting on the actual interactivity of the programming it is easy to see that viewers really did not have true choices. Viewers were still selecting from a relatively short list of decisions that were all programmed for predetermined endings. Also, the interactivity was collective. A viewer had to “cast a vote” if their wish was not the wish of the mass, then they did not receive their choice.

Interactivity to date has been viewed as a contained phenomenon that takes place within established programming blocks. I would argue that to be truly interactive established constraints for programming need to be removed. In examining the traits of interactive art, Soke Dinkla has established six implications of interactivity (Dinkla, p. 8). These implications are richly integrated within the digital video framework.

**Power and play**

Within digital video the user/producer can create any reality. Characters, scenes, and truths are alterable within the context of the digital video. The power is in the hands of both the producer and player. Within this condition one can imagine a situation where a viewer-participant is able to create their own characters that respond to characters created by other viewer-participants. Ken Goldberg has created a “Teleactor” which is a human that is interfaced to the web and will take commands from users. Here, however, everyone plays the actor and the controller and yet no one has the control. The lack of central control helps to make this a truly interactive potential.
Participation versus interaction

Dinkla largely created her model for the assessment of art objects. If the word "participation" was substituted with "access" a better idea for digital video interactivity can be established. Through the aforementioned example access could be given to anyone with access: access to the Web and production equipment. Interaction occurs within the participation. A participant would not be able to exist as a removed, passive viewer. To participate would be to interact and cause residual effects to this interaction.

Proximity and manipulation

To be interactive is to be democratic. Any and all should have access to the means of play. Currently computer ownership is largely a factor of economic status. This is not the case with television. Very shortly there will be a price match between a desktop computer and a television set. Indeed, there are close similarities of price points of off-brand computer systems and major label televisions. As the Web becomes more diffused into our culture, perhaps ownership of a computer will be as common as television. However, libraries, schools, and community centers are ways in which anyone with modest economic means can have access to computers. Many web sites now also are providing free, albeit small, web space to store files.

Bandwidth has been an obstacle to digital video. This is another area that is rapidly becoming more widespread in our culture. DSL and cable modems are now able to provide impressive access speed to the Internet at a cost only slightly higher than some traditional dial-up Internet Service Providers, ISPs. Editing and software access has been another factor. Traditional digital-based editing systems have required extensive training and were cost prohibitive. Programs such as Apple’s iMovie makes editing very simple (the program doesn’t even come with a manual due to the ease of its interface) and costs less than $50. Few limiting factors exist to the placement of digital video on the web.
The Internet has created a worldwide audience. Broadcasts do not have to be confined to network coverage. A digital video can be accessed internationally.

**Strategies of seduction**

We are a nation (world?) of television addicts. In many cases we will watch anything that is broadcast. It is hard to resist a television set that is on. Even when it is tucked in a corner of a bar, its volume low or competing with the atmospheric din, our eyes are drawn to its glassy surface. When the bandwidth and resolution issues are overcome in digital video, it too will potentially have similar hypnotic effects.

A major disadvantage to the television screen has been the passivity it promotes. Digital video needs to reach out to the viewer-participant to reestablish the viewer’s relationship to the screen. For more than 50 years people have settled in to watch television without any expectation to participate in the programming. Programming has been developed to encourage this phenomenon. Incumbent upon digital video is the need to seduce people from the television trance.

**Nonlinear narration**

Within a system of interactive digital video, a story or an event would be experienced without a traditional linear narrative, three-act structure. The system can promote open-ended involvement. The nature of participation can closely resemble that of real-life. Characters enter and leave our lives at random, each altering our perception, actions, and involvement. Widely considered to be the first interactive video disk, created in 1984 by artist Lynn Hershman, *Lorna* can be controlled by the user/viewer (Hall and Fifer, p. 269). I would argue that though it is interactive, Hershman’s video is still operating in a closed system in that it can only be controlled by what is programmed on the disk. The Web permits a much more open environment. In addition the Web and digital video help to create a system for interaction, allowing for what Bertold Brecht had hoped for at the beginning of last century, a method of interaction that helps to define itself through user
interaction (Dinkla, p. 2). The web and digital video provides both one-way and two-way opportunities to create narrative stories and other works.

**Remembering, forgetting, and reconstructing**

In more of a meta consideration, a new system of interactivity should help to forget the traditional paradigm of television programming. To be interactive is to create new situations/realities outside of the framework of what is real. To be in a new reality is to, in a sense, forget the reality of the present. Film and television has a long history of viewers’ suspending disbelief and of creating an illusion of reality. Digital video and its history of relation to these two media carries with it the implicit ability to do this.

Digital video needs to break from its past and establish itself as a new medium and simply acknowledge its hereditary ties to its predecessors. Part of the disruption of the new medium is found in its inherent nature to be interactive. Interactivity however will only truly work on a systemic basis. It is not programming in itself, it must reach farther and deeper. There has never been a more opportune time for such a radical innovative contribution to a mass medium. It will be up to us, the artist-user-participant to learn to design for this revolutionary medium. The digital video artist needs to be as revolutionary.

**Influences**

I became aware of Sadie Benning due to my early addiction to MTV. Benning had been hired early in the station’s life. Her work existed as short films dealing with standard issues of youth. However, she dealt with it by using paper cut-outs and taping them in the manner of an animation or stop action. But the characters did not move. It was a lo-fi approach to video that I became immediately attracted to. However, it wasn’t
until I saw her longer piece *Flat is Beautiful* that I became more aware of her use of space and low-tech approach to attain high concept ideas. A large portion of *Flat* is recorded with a Fisher-Price Pixelvision camera. This camera was available on the market for only a short time. It was inexpensive, less than $100. It made video images that were pixilated due to its low resolution. In *Flat* Benning had all of her characters, none of which were professional talent, perform with her trademark paper masks. Her shots included the characters but they also included more outside the characters. The "mise-en-scene" would include dripping faucets, televisions and empty streets. It was the space she recorded in-between her characters that fascinated me. Benning elevated the mundane for me.

Andy Warhol saw the use of less expensive film cameras, namely the Bolex 16mm models, along the same line that we see lower quality broadcast video cameras: a way to use a main stream (film) medium to make person expressions. Warhol mastered the art of the mundane, but more artfully, I feel, than expressed in his work *Empire* which consisted of a single shot of the Empire State Building. He did a series of work that consisted of a single shot of a face (he used many celebrities). These shots lasted by about three minutes, which is the length of film in a 100 foot roll, a standard size for the Bolex. To me these images were fascinating in the amount of emotion and information that was packed in a few minutes. Both Benning and Warhol were able to express without fancy effects or large budgets. Stories do not have to be buried in narrative structure.

Humor can be a double-edged sword. It can help with accessibility to work, but it can also diminish a work. Though not traditionally considered a video artist William Wegman’s video work also helped shaped my ideas in creating. Like Benning and Warhol, Wegman looks to the simple for inspiration. A video, shot in black and white, shows Wegman spitting milk in a line along the floor, one of his dogs follows him licking
up the milk. What might be dismissed as a “stupid pet trick,” can also be considered along lines of power and play, along trust and desire, and along the lines of performance, not to mention the ever present question of “is it art?” Wegman, through irony or smugness manipulates his body and his dogs in ways that are both seen as funny and profound.

Other artists who have influenced me would include Vito Acconci, Bill Viola, Bruce Nauman, Lucy Gunning, and Alex Bag.

My work

With the advantages of this tool I have set out to record what my reactions are to events, thoughts and aspects of my life. My video work began with edited versions of my writing and collections of my photographs. Reflections on this work do not inspire any great feelings of accomplishment; rather they feel as if they are misplaced along a pathway.

I began to feel that my expression was not complete along an unconnected, abstraction. What I wanted to produce was something that dealt with issues of self, but in an open-ended fashion. My conclusions are simply for me. They are not intended to be universal. It is my hope that they are not finite. I provide a response to a situation. In viewing my work I hope the viewer is able to react—both to my response and to the subject matter at hand.

I remain interested in the idea of interaction, but feel, along the lines of Bertolt Brecht, that interaction is a system. I am interested in fostering a reaction to my reaction, which is a reaction to something either real or created. Ideally, there would be a space to respond via video, to my work. I have not created that space, and I am not completely sure of the appropriateness of this mechanism. If I am able to inspire any reaction from the view then I feel artistic closure.
Smoking Work

I have always been interested in the images of smoke. There are obvious references to the soul and spirit, but smoking has always appeared to be self-pleasing. Smoking is surrounded by its own rituals and artifacts—the way ashes are flicked, the lighters, the ashtrays, the pauses taken to smoke, the way the cigarette is held, how long the smoke is contained in the body. I began recording people smoking as more of a study. However, I began to feel a sense of comfort in watching others smoke. It is a virtual experience without the nicotine.

I think often about what goes on in peoples’ minds, especially friends and lovers. I ask questions because I continue to want to know what people think and how they think. Training a camera on people and asking for them to sit and think fascinated me. The video reveals nothing else but a person in thought. Chairs are important to this piece the chair accepts the body which produces the thought. Usually we watch videos while sitting. The viewer and the subject are on equal terms. The subject knows they are being viewed—they were aware of my camera and the viewer knows they are watching someone, in a sense they become the camera. In this space thought happens.

I dealt with smoking in several ways, always experimenting with the screen shots, background and the pace of editing. The two examples I have included in the show are two different interpretations. In the first I wanted to create a video that defined a rhythm in both its audio and in the images. This was for two reasons: aesthetic and technical. The stopping of video (in still frame) draws more attention to the image. Video is captured at almost 30 frames per second. This interests me as a photographer. We do not get to see the image as captured and displayed, rather we barely perceive the individual images as they flash by on the screen. A frozen image helps to encourage reflection. As I intended the video to be broadcast on the Internet, I wanted to be able to present high
quality images, yet at slower download speeds. The built in breaks allow the player to catch up with the encoding and help to provide a better looking experience.

Smoking involves a ritual. Viewers of video can process quite a large bit of information at once. Combining these two ideas I set out to create a piece that recorded the ritual while reducing the smoking experience from a seven to ten minute task to less than one minute. This was done through overlapping the video simultaneously on the screen. In watching the video, the viewer can choose the frames on which to concentrate, hopefully adding to the experience.

Circles

I spent a week walking along 9th Avenue in New York City attending a workshop. I began to notice the prevalence of the circle. I wondered about the visual signs we are given and what spurs recognition. Were there more circle images than usual or did my recognition create an abundance? I thought about the concept of visual cues given to us throughout our lives and the role of perception and memory to interpret these cues. I used my digital camera to begin recording the circles. I then edited the circles in an intuitive manner; intuitive to me. My desire was to see if the ordering of the images based on feeling provided any visual narrative that might be instructive. The sound of traffic was always prominent during my shooting. I used this sound, manipulated into a rhythmic pulse to attempt to form a backdrop for the imagery and possible story.

Stare

Throughout a period of a year I stared into the lens. I was looking into the camera to help look into myself. These images dissolve along each other. My wish is that the stare into the camera is a stare to the viewer. Stares give a chance for longer study and consideration. The consideration might occur both upon the subject, the person staring at
you and your reaction to the stare. How do you feel? Why stare? Will something happen? These questions might give rise to personal questions of the self, of comfort, of image.

After working the staring pieces in different forms I settled on using only four shots, cropped and overlapped. The stare lasts less than one minute and dissolves into a reflection of a light in a puddle. The consideration of a reflection may or may not purport an emotional state. A reflection is not a person nor object, it is a facsimile. Will gazing at a reflection of face create different thoughts than a light in a puddle? Is our perception of reality a reaction to something or a reaction from ourselves?

**Distraction**

Inspired by Alex Bag, I began keeping a video journal of my life at a time when I was going through many changes. It was reviewing the tapes and my written journal that I began to see parallels in how I deal with life. Distraction represents one of the biggest challenges I face as an artist and a person: the lack of focus. What is interesting is that due to the mechanics of the camera I do not appear in focus, what is in focus is my finger, which of course represents distraction. The video is unrehearsed, and raw. You can hear the sounds of the street in the audio track. It is meant as a spontaneous performance.

**Cure, Nature, Work, $3 Candy, Lost, Trip, Pills**

I began to layer my audio with the hope that the listener could actually process more information than is usually presented in a standard narration. The multiple tracks also help to provide contrast—sometimes the statements counteract each other. The surrealists desired to stimulate the subconscious through the use of uncharacteristic comparisons. I wish to touch cognition through additive information.
This work is completed without any effects. The edits are simple; the shots are largely illustrative to the audio. I use empty, blank (black) spaces to further emphasize a point and to encourage mental imagery. Hollywood films are becoming less about story and more about effects. I am interested in the special effects and imagery actualized within our own minds—tying the mind to image concepts and then allowing, perhaps seducing the mind to create more images. This completes a form of interaction, where the viewer is responsible for the completion of the video and each viewer will have a different reaction to and image of the work.

In all of my work I seek perhaps more questions than answers. I do not feel as if my quest will uncover ultimate mysteries, in fact I think I would feel disappointed if it all could be easily explained. It is the questions that we ask that begin to define our understanding. Understanding is never complete. We are complete only in our lack of understanding.
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