

Chapter 1: Media and Performance

In 1949 the canvas was dripped and poured on by the American Jackson Pollock (*No. 1*), slashed by Argentinian-born Lucio Fontana (*Concetto Spaziale*) and punctured by Japanese Shozo Shimamoto (*Work [Holes]*). In each of these paintings, done within months of each other, the face of art was changed, contended American curator Paul Schimmel, as the painterly action took precedence over the painted subject. A worldwide contingent of artists including Allan Kaprow, Georges Mathieu, Yves Klein, Atsuko Tanaka, Otto Muehl, Gunther Brus, Joseph Beuys, Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint Phalle, Robert Rauschenberg, and Piero Manzoni, soon extended the gestural art of Pollock into actual Performances, Happenings, and Events. The social and sexual revolutions of the 1960s found expression in art that was directed away from the canvas into actions that incorporated the viewer into the work of art. For American artists at this time it was a short step from action painting (Jackson Pollock's all-over and free application of paint) to action itself as a form of art. Disenchanted with the canonization of Abstract Expressionism by critic Clement Greenberg and seeking greater freedom of expression in the spirit of the times, artists from New York, and, soon after, from California, declared their repudiation of the canvas. Writing in *Art News* in 1958, Allan Kaprow stated 'Pollock's near destruction of this tradition [painting] may well be a return to the point where art was more actively involved in ritual, magic, and life.' Though Performance art has assumed many forms, from Kazuo Shiraga's crawling through mud in 1955 to Ion Grigorescu's screaming alone in a Romanian forest in 1977, this chapter will deal with the uses of film and video in a variety of performance contexts.

1960s Multimedia Performances

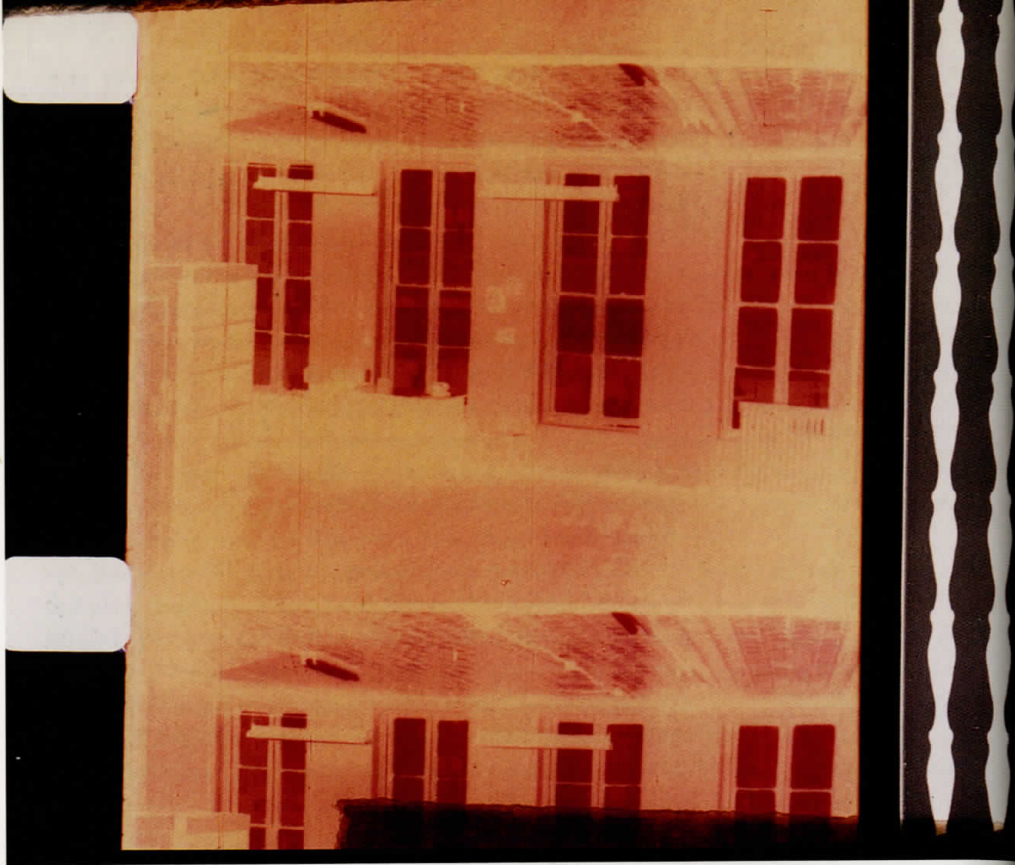
Performance was not exclusively related to the canvas: the cross-fertilization between theater, dance, film, video, and visual art was essential for the birth of Performance art. The dance and media experiments that flourished in New York in the 1960s among the Judson Church artists (an influential collective of choreographers and performance artists) extended to visual artists as well,

chief among them Robert Rauschenberg, who was an early proponent of the intermingling of art and technology. In 1960, Rauschenberg met Billy Klüver, an electronic engineer and sound wizard who had collaborated with several artists, most notably Jean Tinguely on his self-destructing machine, *Hommage à New York*. In 1965, Klüver worked with John Cage and Merce Cunningham in one of the earliest multimedia stage events, *Variations V*, for which Klüver devised a sound system that reacted to movements, sounds, and projections through a complicated system of photoelectric cells and microphones. The resultant sounds functioned as a kind of score for the dancers. Featured also were a film by Stan Vanderbeek and video images by Nam June Paik. Critic Söke Dinkla points out that this system anticipated the computer-controlled interaction between live performance and sound effects commonly seen in theater and dance since the early 1990s.

Rauschenberg, a close associate of Cage and Cunningham, was invited, along with them and other choreographers, including Lucinda Childs and Deborah Hay, to participate in the Stockholm Festival of Art and Technology in the summer of 1966. Although the Stockholm appearance did not take place, Rauschenberg and associates staged what they had developed in New York in October 1966, in *Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering*, a seminal event in

30. Photograph of Robert Rauschenberg's performance *Open Score (Bong)* from *Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering* held at the Sixty-Ninth Regiment Armory, New York, 14 October, 1966. Rauschenberg's *Open Score (Bong)* involved a tennis match between painter Frank Stella and professional tennis player Mimi Kanarek using rackets wired for sound as well as a video projection of infrared images of performance volunteers.



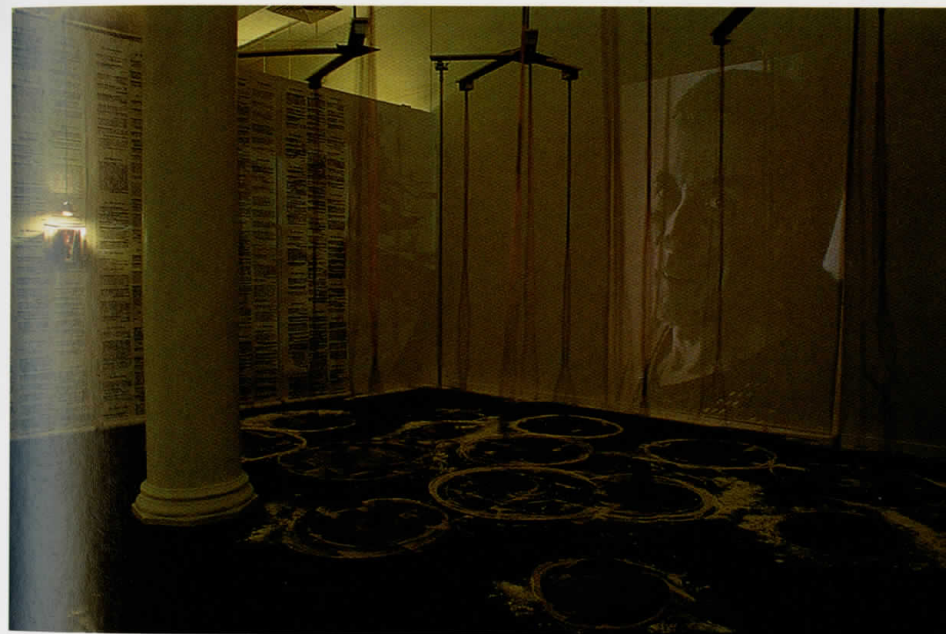


31. (above) **Michael Snow**, film still from *Wavelength*, 1967.

32. (above right) **Carolee Schneemann**, *Snows*, 1967. Schneemann used her own body as 'material' in her work. 'I wanted my actual body to be combined with the work as an integral material.' Though thinking of herself as a painter, she often uses photography, film and video in her work.

33. (below right) **Carolee Schneemann**, *Mortal Coils*, 1994–95.

performance and media held in the vast Sixty-Ninth Regiment Armory building on New York's East Side. For Rauschenberg's performance, *Open Score (Bong)*, approximately five hundred volunteers were gathered in a totally dark playing area performing simple gestures that were recorded by infrared cameras and projected onto three large screens. Also shown were projections of the darting movements of performers playing tennis with radio transmitting rackets. This is all the audience saw, for when the lights came on, the performers were gone. It was the artists' delight in the possibilities of the new technology that became the main event. In his performance work *Linoleum* (1966), Rauschenberg wore a plastic suit, wired for sound by Klüver, and projected a film he made from found footage of recreational water sports and military aircraft maneuvers. His collaborations with Klüver led to their founding EAT (Experiments in Art and Technology) in 1967, an enduring and influential collaboration between artists and engineers.



Rauschenberg and his collaborators, especially dancer-choreographers Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton, and Lucinda Childs, continued to stage their events in a variety of spaces, with the space itself often dictating the nature of the performance. The Filmmaker's Cinémathèque (whose name reflects the influence of the French *nouvelle vague* film directors, Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, and others) was such a venue. Robert Whitman's (b. 1935) *Prune Flat* (1965) featured live performers interacting with filmed images (often of themselves) which were projected onto the performers and onto screens behind them. Whitman, who began as a painter, thus transposed the flatness of the canvas to the flatness of the screen on which he attempted to visualize temporal relationships (past, as represented by the film, present and future in the gestures of the performers) in a spatial context. The same year, Canadian artist Michael Snow (b. 1929) literally tackled the role of cinema in art with *Right Reader*, a video performance in which he stood behind a plexiglass frame as if he were in a movie. He moves his lips in time to a recording of his own voice in which he comments on the sometimes banal nature of films. We think he is speaking in real time,

34. Robert Whitman, *Prune Flat*, 1965. Performed at the Filmmaker's Cinémathèque, New York. The photograph shows a more recent reconstruction of the same event. Photograph: Copyright © 1976, Babette Mangolte, all rights of reproduction reserved.



but soon we realize he is not: the whole experience, like film, is a contrived experience based on technology. Snow's innovative use of the camera in his films and video performances is also notable. He created a spherical machine for rotating the camera through 360 degrees; and, in *Wavelength* (1967) he made camera tricks ('panning,' 'trucking,' and 'dollying') the protagonists of the film.

In 1967 an important work in the history of media and performance was performed by Deborah Hay, one of the Judson Church choreographers. *Group One* consisted, in part, of a black and white film projected onto the corner of a gallery space. Men and women in dark suits and dresses were shown engaging in everyday walking patterns that, while choreographed, retained their naturalness. After the film, other performers enacted similar sequences live. The result, for American historian Michael Kirby, was a new form of art dance in which people and film 'were used as elements out of which an architectonic or sculptural human mass could be assembled in relationship to an actual architectural element, the corner of the room.' The film added another perceptual illusion: the use of black and white suggested figures from another time moving along its walls.

American painter Carolee Schneemann (b. 1939) created private actions she called *Eye Body* (1963) which she documented through photography. In these bodily 'still lifes,' which anticipated body and performance art, she re-created mythical goddess imagery, using her own body as sculpture. Her 1967 multimedia performance work *Snows* was an elaborate interaction of 16-millimetre and 8-millimetre film, slides, revolving light sculpture, strobe lights, and eight racially diverse performers. Underneath randomly chosen seats in New York's Martinique Theatre (a Broadway house) Schneemann and her engineers fixed microphones that transferred signals into a silicon-controlled rectifier switching system. Any motion by an audience member in these seats would set off the system, which, in turn, activated the media elements.

Like Schneemann, Joan Jonas (b. 1936) has worked with media and performance from the 1960s to the present day. While a graduate student in New York she participated in dance workshops with the Judson Church group, which included Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer. Each of them shared a sensibility that embraced conceptual, cultural, psychological, as well as performative issues. Trained as a

sculptor, Jonas was initially attracted by the sculptural elements of performance and film. 'I brought to performance,' she said in a 1995 interview,

my experience of looking at the illusionistic space of painting and of walking around sculptures and architectural spaces. I was barely in my early performance pieces; I was in them like a piece of material, or an object that moved very stiffly, like a puppet or a figure in a medieval painting... I gave up making sculpture and I walked into the space... What attracted me to performance was the possibility of mixing sound, movement, image, all the different elements to make a complex statement. What I wasn't good at was making a single, simple statement—like a sculpture.

35. (below) Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy/Vertical Roll*, 1972/1994.



36. (right) Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*, 1972.

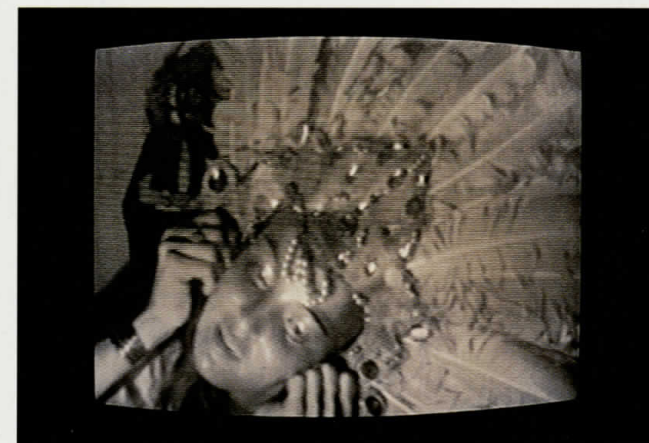


From the beginning, her performances have incorporated first film and then video. Her first public performance, *Oad Lau* (1968; the title is the name of a Moroccan village that translates as 'watering-place'), contained the film *Wind*, which dealt with wind and water as basic elements. Jonas used the camera and monitor both as theatrical props and as sculptural elements in her performances. Like Nam June Paik before her, she bought her own Sony Portapak camera in 1970. Finding video 'very magical' and imagining herself as 'an electronic sorceress conjuring the images,' she invented the name Organic Honey as an alter ego. *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972) was a performative video featuring a 'set' or installation in which Jonas created a room out of Organic Honey's imagination. The video of Jonas's movements supplied a mirror-like reflection of the action that altered the audience's perception of what they were seeing. These performances would change often, displaying Jonas's versatility as a performer and 'conjurer,' a role she assumed by wearing long blue robes and carrying a magician's funnel hat.

Funnel (1974) incorporated three performance areas, separated by curtains, in which Jonas performed rituals based on her interest in magic and the traditions of the native Americans of the American Southwest. In one area a live video was projected on a monitor, providing a detailed view of her whole performance. Jonas returned to several of the images used in *Funnel* in her 1998 installation at New York's Pat Hearn Gallery. *My New Theater II (Big Mirror)* is a video theater mounted inside a large funnel-like structure supported by two saw-horses. Peering through the funnel, the viewer sees Jonas on a screen performing daily routines (such as sweeping the

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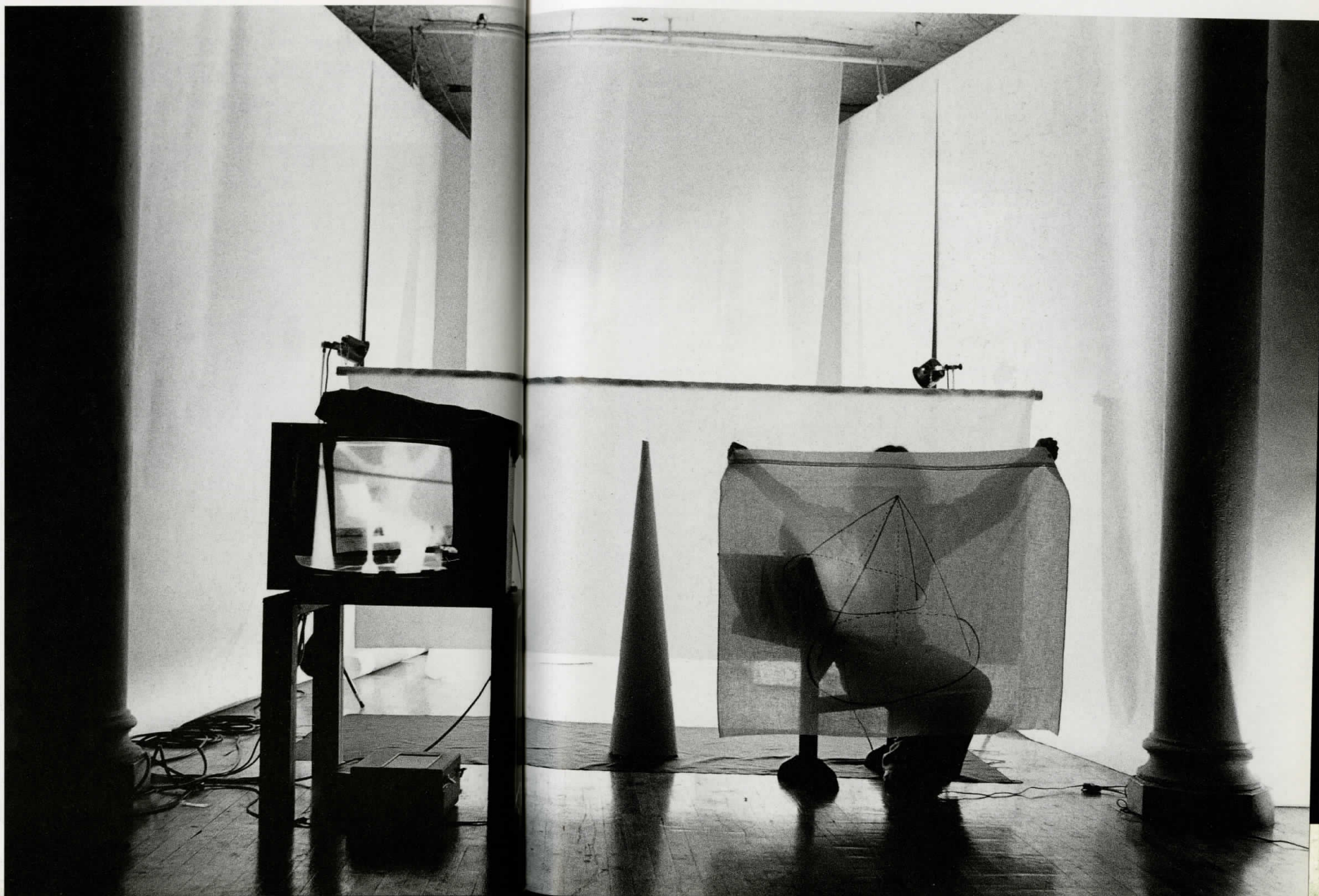


floor) that turn into frantic stomping dances, while songs and texts are heard on the soundtrack (including William Carlos Williams's poem 'Big Mirror', and folk songs that speak of friends who have died).

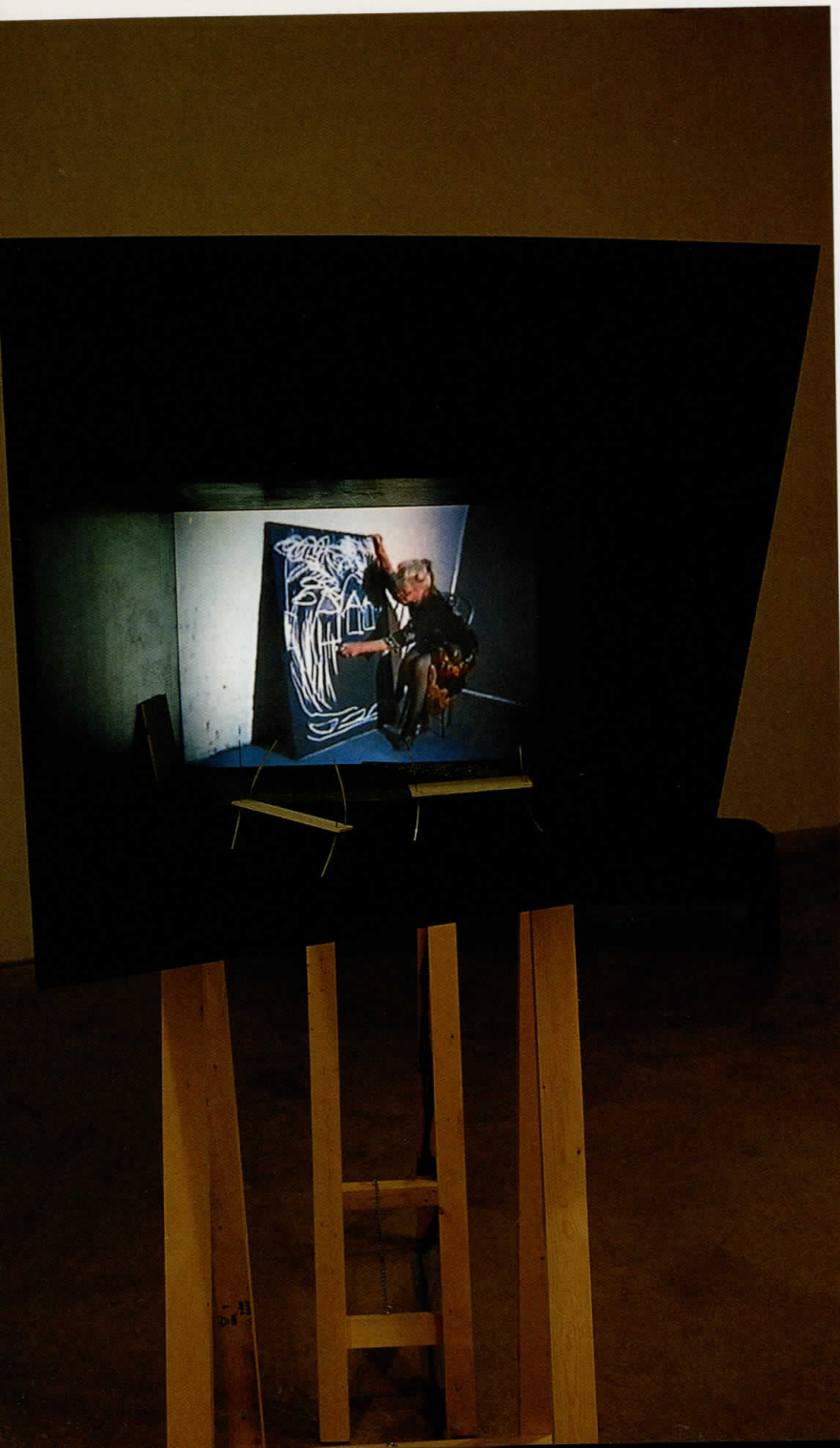
Jonas continues to break new ground decades after her early work caused such a stir, a rare achievement. After experiencing a 'slump,' as she calls it, in the mid-1980s, when the art world was changing radically and her old brand of formal experimentation

was on the wane, Jonas re-emerged in 1987 with a sweeping media performance piece, *Volcano Saga*, based on a thirteenth-century Icelandic poem; in 1994, she created *Sweeney Astray*, based on a medieval Irish poem and commissioned by the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, for their retrospective of Jonas's work. Reflecting her enduring interest in the various perceptions and misperceptions afforded by the video camera in a performance context, Jonas here

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37. Joan Jonas, *Funnel*, 1972.
Performance at The Kitchen,
New York. Photograph: Copyright
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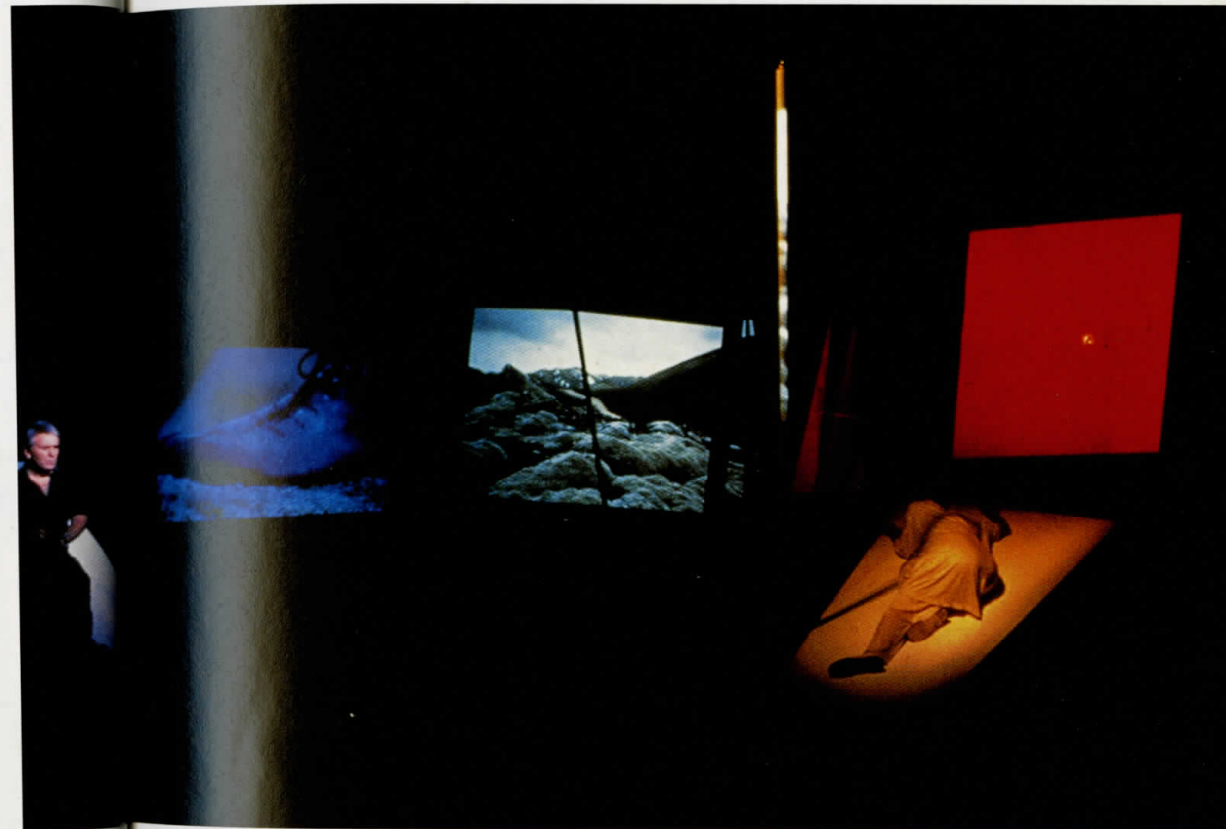
38. (left) Joan Jonas, *My New Theater II (Big Mirror)*, 1998.

39. (below) Joan Jonas, *Volcano Saga*, 1987. After visiting Japan in 1970, Jonas bought a Portapak camera. 'This device,' she says, 'enabled me to add another reflexion, and to relate to the audience through close-up on the live transmission, closed-circuit video system. The monitor is an ongoing mirror.'

placed a camera under a glass table to record performers acting on top of the table. These shots were projected onto freestanding scrims, with camera operators, performers, and musicians all visible to the viewer.

'Studio' Performances

The video camera became a partner in the performances of several influential artists drawn to electronic media, recording intimate, often ritualized actions. Although there is, arguably, an historical continuum from Dada performance to Fluxus, Happenings and Performance art, 'media and performance art' does not fit neatly into it. Unlike their Dada predecessors, artists like Bruce Nauman (b. 1941) and Vito Acconci (b. 1940) did not set for themselves the goal of interactivity with an audience. Sometimes their performances were private affairs, exercises performed in their studios, that were videotaped but not necessarily shown. Instead of marketable objects (such as paintings or sculptures), the physical



process of art-making became the work itself. The video camera represented 'the other,' or the audience. It was also instrumental in these artists' attempts to free themselves from the confines of traditional art-making.

The private media-based performances of Nauman and Acconci refer to the artist alone in his studio. Showing in isolation their bodies (hands, fingers) and their movements (hands painting or sculpting), they created works that made explicit the artist's fundamental gestures. According to Acconci, 'If Minimalism was so great, what could I do? What was missing was the source. I had to reveal the source;' by this he meant the body and movement of the maker of the art. In the iconoclastic spirit of the 1960s, Acconci and others sought to free themselves from the influence of art history by eliminating all but the process from their work. 'People did performance in order *not* to do painting and sculpture,' Acconci says. 'Painting and sculpture had the power of the One True God of Art; performance was a way to intrude, in the middle of a single belief system, the swarm of multiple gods.'

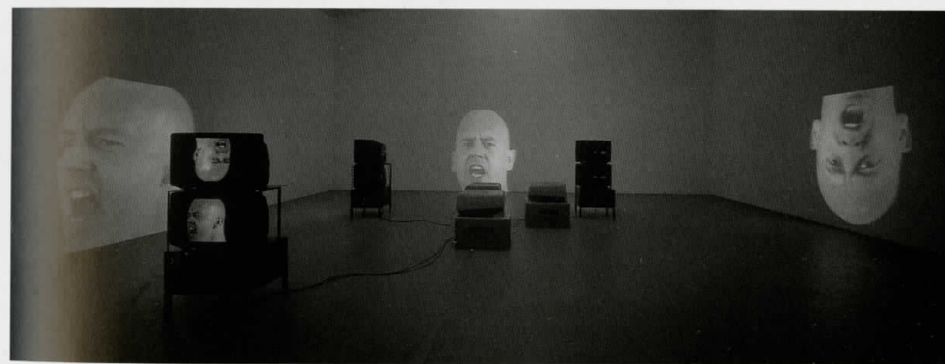
For Nauman, his private performances, or 'representations,' as he called them, explored the relationship between his sculpture (for example, *Neon Templates of the Left Hand of My Body Taken at Ten Inch Intervals*, 1966, or his wax over cloth *From Hand to Mouth*, 1967), and his own activities in the studio. In one of his performances, he assumed discrete positions (including sitting, bending, squatting), creating a 'living sculpture' with his body. Nauman, also a musician, was deeply influenced by the extended sense of time in serialist compositions by Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Terry Riley. Reich's *Violin Phase* (1967) featured one basic pattern played repeatedly by several violins. Nauman incorporated this open-ended format (a seeming lack of beginning or end) into his video performances, which made use of a fixed camera recording gestures and movements that he considered art in themselves. The view that even ordinary movements could be considered art owed something to choreographer Meredith Monk whom he met in 1968. During the 1960s Nauman made about twenty-five videotapes consisting of repetitive, mundane actions. This was an approach to dance which had its origins in the pioneering work of San Francisco choreographer Anne Halprin (b. 1920) whose workshops were frequented by such future influential dancer/choreographers as Trisha Brown (b. 1936), dancer turned filmmaker Yvonne Rainer (b. 1934), and Simone Forti (b. 1935).

The interplay of performance and sculpture in Nauman's work was also influenced by the Viennese philosopher Ludwig

Wittgenstein and Irish dramatist and novelist Samuel Beckett. Wittgenstein exerted an influence on several Conceptual artists who were drawn to his exploration of the philosophical implications of ordinary language. It was the variety of language-games, as he called them, which revealed meaning, derived from the way words were used. 'The term language-game,' Wittgenstein wrote in *Philosophical Investigations*, 'is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.' Language as an activity that can be at once revealing and secretive, a source of bonding as well as of separation, has occupied Nauman in many performative video installations. In *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Facing Camera)*, 1991, and *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Spinning)*, 1992, Nauman collaborated with performance artist/musician Rinde Eckert whose face he filmed in close-up engaging in the Wittgensteinian language games of play-acting and singing phrases ('Help me, hurt me sociology; feed me, eat me anthropology').

Nauman dealt with issues of identity in four silent 16 millimetre films from 1967 to 1968. Called *Art Make-Up*, they show him applying different colors to his skin to mask his identity. This motif surfaced later in his clown videos. Nauman frequently used the clown as an icon in performance videos that illustrate the artist's interest in language and the extremes of human behavior. The clown in *Clown Torture* (1987) was forced to stand on one leg, and at another time, to balance two fish bowls and a bucket of water, all the while shouting 'No, no, no,' and 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' over and over. This interest in extreme behavior reflects Nauman's keen interest in Beckett whose spare narratives often portray people in impossible situations: constrained in garbage cans or buried neck-deep in sand. Nauman's performative video, *Slow Angle Walk* (1968) which he subtitled *Beckett Walk*, shows the

40. Bruce Nauman, *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Spinning)*, 1992.



artist performing a strained walk around his studio. He lifts a stiffened leg high into the air, then swivels his body in a half turn before letting the leg land on the floor. One can imagine Buster Keaton, whom Beckett chose as the performer in his only film, entitled *Film* (1964), inventing such a move. Destructive actions, such as those by Italian Gina Pane who slashed her toes in her performance sculpture *Le corps pressenti* (1975), recur in the work of artist Pier Marton (b. 1950) whose series *Performance for Video* (1978–82) contained sequences where Marton would beat himself with a guitar until it disintegrated. Portrayals of extremes of language and gesture recall Bertolt Brecht's notion of alienation in theatre as a paradoxical means of drawing an audience closer to the play. By arousing their emotions, even in a negative way, the artist involves the audience with the action or narrative.

Acconci, whose involvement with media spans single-channel video (one tape on one monitor), installation, and performance, expressed the essentials of his performative art in a 1979 essay, *Steps Into Performance (And Out)*:

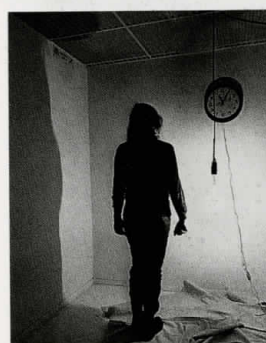
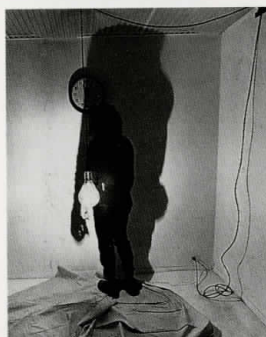
if I specialize in a medium, I would be fixing a ground for myself, a ground I would have to be digging myself out of, constantly, as one medium was substituted for another – so, then instead of turning toward 'ground' I would shift my attention and turn to 'instrument,' I would focus on myself as the instrument that acted on whatever ground was available.



41. (right) Bruce Nauman, still from *Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk)*, 1968. In his video and performance work Nauman was interested in presenting the viewer with an unfolding process as opposed to a completed, objectified work of art. Clowns and people trapped in extreme situations also reflect his interest in the work of writer Samuel Beckett.

42, 43. (far right) Bruce Nauman, two stills from *Clown Torture*, 1987.





Acconci saw the film or video frame as separating him from the outside world, placing him in an 'isolation chamber,' as he said, where he was intimately connected to his primary material, his body. He made his first video, *Corrections*, in 1970 at the request of American writer and curator Willoughby Sharp, who founded the short-lived *Avalanche*, a magazine devoted to body art, process art, and video. *Corrections* reflected his interest in the immediacy of video. Able to see himself on the monitor as he was recording, Acconci tries to burn off a tuft of hair from the back of his neck using the image on the monitor as a guide. Earlier that same year he made an 8-millimetre film, *Three Adaptation States*, a simple recording of movements in his studio, which he saw as his transition from the page (he had been a poet) to the activity of art. 'I had to leave the page,' he says, 'and I at least got to the floor.' In *Centers* (1971), alone in his studio with a fixed video camera, he points to the lens in a gesture that turns the camera back on the viewer. He stands blindfolded in *Contacts* (1971) with a woman kneeling before him, holding her hand over different parts of his body without actually touching him. Again, a fixed camera records his attempts to name the parts of his own body as she moves her hand around him.

Acconci disliked the term 'performance' for its associations with theater: 'We hated the word "performance." We couldn't, wouldn't call what we did "performance"... because performance had a place, and that place by tradition was a theater, a place you went toward like a museum.' Nevertheless, he did perform in public. In *Pryings* (1971) and *Pull* (1971) Acconci and Kathy Dillon engage in a battle of desire and resistance as Acconci tries to prise open her closed eyelids or each of them tries to mesmerize and control the other with eye games.

Acconci brought his explorations of time and the body into the gallery space in his 1971 collaboration with Dennis Oppenheim and Terry Fox at the Reese Paley Gallery in New York. Facing a large wall clock, his back to the audience, Acconci engaged in private movements as the other artists lay on the floor near a video monitor and sound system. In his 1974 *Command Performance*, Acconci confronts the gallery viewer, by incorporating him into the video environment. In a narrow room, the viewer sits on a stool in front of a monitor, which lies on the floor. The monitor shows a tape of Acconci, also lying on the floor, on his back, straining his head toward the camera, imploring the viewer to seduce him in a rambling monologue that repeats phrases like 'Come on, baby, win me over.' On another monitor behind the

stool appears an image of the viewer who is being taped from a camera fixed to the wall above the stool. Everyone becomes a voyeur in this dance of multiple seduction.

Also working in media and performance at this time was Nam June Paik. During his Fluxus period in the early 1960s, in numerous collaborations with musician Charlotte Moorman, Paik created music and video performances that challenged the way music was traditionally played and heard. In *TV Bra* (1968) Moorman is taped, topless, playing the violin, and wearing two circular mirrors on her breasts which reflect cameras focused on her face. He and Moorman were arrested in 1967 for having Moorman perform topless in *Sextronique*, during which Paik's shirtless back became the 'bass' for Moorman's bow string. 'I wanted to stir up the dull waters of sexless men and women in black suits playing music,' he once said. Paik and Moorman collaborated on several such projects, including *Concerto for TV, Cello and Video Tape* (1971) in which she ran her bow across stacks of television sets containing prerecorded and simultaneous images of her running her bow across the televisions. His particular interest was in visualizing time. 'It must be stressed,' he wrote in 1962 prior to his show at Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 'that my work is not painting, not sculpture, but rather a Time art: I love no particular genre.'

While Paik abandoned live performance in the 1980s, turning to massive, multi-monitor video constructions, his connection to performance remains evident. It is as if he has made the monitor a

44–47. (left) Vito Acconci, *Second Hand*, performance at the Reese Paley Gallery, 1971.

48. (right) Vito Acconci, *Command Performance*, 1974. Acconci's first artistic practice was poetry which he thought of as 'movement over the page.' Performance became for him a way to move from the page to an 'outside physical space.'



50. (far right) **Nam June Paik**, *Family of Robot*, *Aunt and Uncle*, 1986. Paik was fascinated by the scientific notion that the human brain grew only after man started walking upright. By 1986 he had created a family of robots, including grandparents, aunt and uncle, parents and three children.

performer in its own right. He injects such frenzied life into his installations, with images racing across screens, that the video sculptures can appear more like mechanized organisms than inert monitors. He has, in fact, made several 'video robots' since 1964, including *Family of Robot*, *Aunt* (1986) and *Family of Robot*, *Uncle* (1986) in which the main visual impression is created by the television sets rather than the images contained in them. He now creates what might be called performative installations.

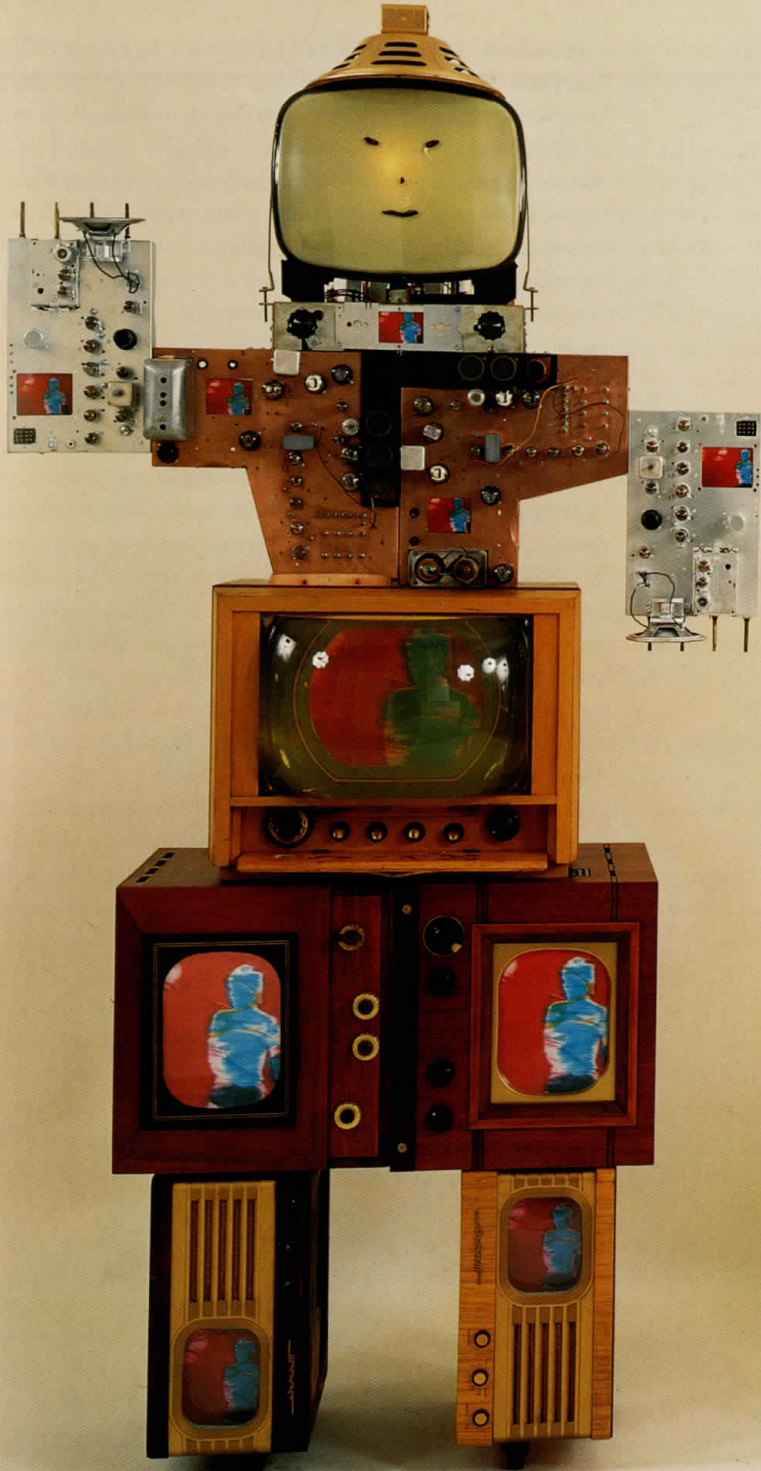
Japanese Gutai and Viennese Actionism

Prominent in Japan from 1954 to 1958, though it existed until 1972, was the Gutai Group of painters and performers. In response to the devastation of the Second World War, Gutai artists expressed a violent engagement with their material. Films such as *Gutai on Stage* (1957) and *Gutai Painting* (1960) show artists 'shooting' at canvases with arrows tipped with paint; or pounding canvases with paint-filled boxing gloves; or crashing through paintings with their own bodies. Though eager to have their anti-art actions seen and recorded, the Gutai Group remained involved in painting rather than exploring new media. It was only later that groups in Japan such as Dumb Type fully engaged the media the Japanese, especially the Sony Corporation, had pioneered.

The most radical, postwar expression of media performance was that of the *Wiener Aktionisten*, the Viennese Actionists, principally, Hermann Nitsch (b. 1938), Otto Muehl (b. 1925), Kurt Kren (b. 1929), and Valie Export (b. 1940), many of whom had begun as painters. Repelled by war, Nazism and its legacy, while rejecting museum-embraced modernism, these artists sought to make an art that was programmatically sensational. They sought inspiration both from Freud's understanding of the unconscious and



49. (right) **Nam June Paik**, *Concerto for TV*, *Cello and Videotape*. *TV Cello Premiere*, 1971. Nam June Paik constantly challenges the notion of the 'reality' of the television image by placing television sets in unexpected positions or distorting the images on the screen.



also from the liberated art practices espoused by Fluxus. With the exception of Valie Export, whose artistic reach was perhaps broadest of all of them, extending to sculpture, video, film, photography, installation, as well as performance, the Actionists exalted 'destruction' as a primary pathway to artistic and social freedom. 'I can imagine nothing significant where nothing is sacrificed, destroyed, dismembered, burnt, pierced, tormented, harassed, tortured, massacred... stabbed, destroyed, or annihilated,' Muehl wrote in 1963. The actions which arose from this way of thinking often involved bodily mutilation, sado-masochistic sex, animal dismemberment and misogynist practices all performed for the camera, sometimes with onlookers (audiences), often without. In *Funèbre* (1966), an early filmed action by Muehl, a naked body lies on a bed and is sprayed with pigment and manipulated by other naked figures. Muehl made Yves Klein's early 1960s performances with naked models and paint seem like innocent parlor games. Most extreme was *Scheiss-Kerl* (Shit-Guy, 1969), a 16-millimetre film which graphically depicts acts of coprophilia. Such extreme behavior on film would resurface in the 1980s in the work of Americans Paul McCarthy and Ron Athey.

For Muehl, acts normally seen as perverse or degrading were actually means of escaping the confines of social mores. By 1971 he abandoned art and actions to form a commune, which exists to this day, in which free sexual expression and uninhibited interactions are prescribed. When some of these practices were discovered to involve children, Muehl was imprisoned for seven years, from 1991 to 1998. His alleged utopian practices and transgressions were, not surprisingly, intolerable to the society he saw himself as trying to liberate.

Kurt Kren, who collaborated as a filmmaker with several Actionist artists, was particularly interested in the technical capabilities of editing and image manipulation. He had been making experimental films since the 1950s that were structurally influenced by serial music practices of the same period. Fast editing and single-frame techniques highlighted the material qualities of film, while at the same time providing a new vocabulary for 'time,' as experienced by the viewer. Kren was attracted to the visual complexity of the actions of Gunther Brus (b. 1938) and Muehl, and saw in them the potential for creating his own type of collage on film. As art historian Huber Klocker describes it: 'Kren's films are collage-like pictorial storage media organized in a new form of space and time which compress the pictorial mass like a machine and convert it into pure energy.'

The three-minute color film *Leda and the Swan* (1964), one of Muehl's graphic actions, becomes, in Kren's hands, a syncopated aria of chaos and abstraction.

Valie Export, who participated in the tail end of Actionism, has created performances, videos, films, and media events since the mid-1960s which are bold and often graphic examinations of woman's role in society. She was a founder of Austrian Filmmakers Co-operative and her early experiments in performance and film (*Menstruationsfilm*, 1966, *Orgasmus*, 1966) placed her in the forefront of feminist performance, strongly countering the abuse of women found among other Actionists like Muehl. Her feminist performances and films, as well as her early experiments in still photography, are also marked by technologically sophisticated inquiries into perception, the photographic and filmed image, and the language of the body. By the early 1970s she was using video in performances such as *Bewegungsimaginationen* (Movement Imagination, 1974) which features recorded images and live video. By the mid-1980s she was combining media (still photography, video and 16-millimetre film) in works such as *Syntagma* (1983). Export's long-term aim is to reclaim the female figure in art. 'In film,' she says, 'the woman's body becomes the woman's image to the extent that the history of film and the history of the female body are virtually one.'

As the Viennese Actionists were supposedly exercising their liberation from National Socialism, artists from the Eastern bloc were consigned to secret activities which, if discovered, were punishable by imprisonment. Cameras and videos were surveillance tools used to spy on citizens and were not to be in the hands of individuals, much less artists, who might use them in subversive ways. Among the most isolated artistic groups in Eastern Europe were the Romanians for whom any type of unauthorized public gathering was prohibited. Thus performances, such as they were, were mostly private actions. Ion Grigorescu created several short films and photographic essays that explored his sense of a self fractured by the lies and secret codes required for survival in a totalitarian state. In Super-8 films like *Boxing* (1977), *Man as Center of the Universe* (1978), and *Dialogue with Nicolae Ceausescu* (1978) he records himself in the seclusion of his own room or in a remote field reflecting the utter confinement of his situation. He often used multiple images of himself within the frame to suggest the fragmented self and the elimination of personal identity imposed by the government.



51. Valie Export, *Syntagma*, 1983. This film opens with a shot of two female hands forcing open a space between two strips of celluloid. The well manicured hands then begin to 'speak' in sign language, spelling out the name of the film.

Still little known outside of his native Hungary was Tibor Hajas (1946–80), whose photo-performances in the 1970s were as dangerous as they were subversive. In *Dark Flash* (1976), he was hung from the ceiling of a darkened room by a rope which was tied around his hands. Holding a camera in one of his bound hands he attempted to photograph light flashes that occasionally pierced the darkness. At the end of the performance there was an enormous flash of magnesium as Hajas, now unconscious, was released from the rope.

Relatively subdued in contrast was the media and performance tableau created by noted postwar German artist Gerhard Richter and his associate Konrad Fischer with the assistance of painter Sigmar Polke. Together they organized *A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism* (1963), during which they occupied a fully decorated corner of a furniture store, and reprogrammed a television set with politically charged images. Certain visual links can be made here with Vostell's *TV De-coll/age*, and Richard Hamilton's collage, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956), challenging the seeming tranquillity of domestic life with implications of political and social upheaval.



52. Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956.

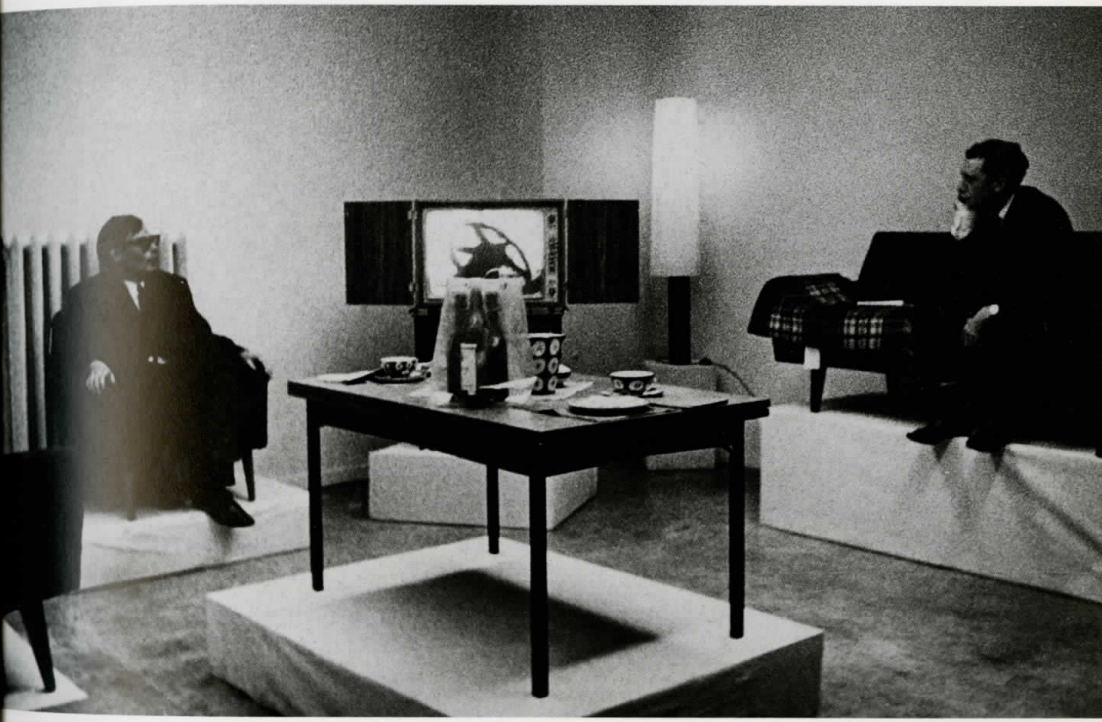
Gender and Media Performance

Art historian Moira Roth makes the connection between feminist performance art and so-called 'street theater' engaged in by feminist activists, such as the disruption of the 1968 Miss America beauty pageant. Feminist outrage at constricted gender roles was part of a cultural pattern of liberation movements around the world that included students, people of color, and gays. With Jonas and Schneemann as models, feminist artists embraced media as part of their performance actions.

In her *Video Live Performances* from the 1970s, German artist Ulrike Rosenbach (b. 1944) set up graphic tableaux which were performed for the camera only. Her public multimedia performances, which became in essence feminist actions, included *To Have No Power Is To Have Power* (1978). Here the artist is suspended, trapped in a net, as images from art history and popular culture flash on screens behind her.

Since 1974, French multimedia performance artist Orlan has literally re-sculpted her body using video digitalization and recordings of surgical operations in which she alters the shape of her body and face. She created psychological self-portraits in

53. Gerhard Richter and Konrad Fischer, *A Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*, 1963. Gerhard Richter and Konrad Fischer form a tableau vivant in a furniture store as politically charged images flash on a television screen.



works such as *The Re-Incarnation of St Orlan* and *Image(s)/New Image(s)*, 1991, during which she was videotaped performing, while under local anaesthesia, as her chin was surgically remodelled into the chin of Botticelli's *Venus* (from *The Birth of Venus*) or her nose into the nose of *Psyche*, as in Gérard's *Le Premier Baiser*



54. (right) Ulrike Rosenbach, *To Have No Power Is To Have Power*, 1978.

55. (below) Orlan, *Le Visage du 21 siècle*, 1990. French artist Orlan has undergone a series of cosmetic surgical operations to transform herself into the female form most idealized by male artists throughout history.



de l'Amour à Psyche. She remained conscious in order to 'direct' the surgical performance for the camera. No less committed to a feminist vision is Friederike Pezold, who since the early 1970s has created video performances like *The New Living Body Language of Signs According to the Laws of Anatomy, Geometry, and Kinetics* (1973–76) in which she attempts to shift the focus of architecture, which she sees as traditionally phallogocentric, to the female body.

Minimalist and Conceptual Trends

A Minimalist aesthetic in media and performance is most evident in the work of Robert Wilson (b. 1941), best known for his monumental stagings of original works such as *A Letter for Queen Victoria* (1974) and *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). Wilson, who trained in interior design, architecture, and painting, actually began his own art work with *Slant*, a ten-minute abstract color film he made in 1963. One of his earliest performances (probably late 1964) was presented in a movie house near the Pratt School of Art and Design in New York, where he was studying, and consisted of choreographed movement accompanied by film. His *Theatre Activity (1)*, 1968, presented at the Bleecker Street Cinema in New York, featured a photograph of a cat superimposed over a film loop of grass. Several other early works, especially *Deafman Glance* (1971), included film. While Wilson continued to make videos and films (his forty-seven minute video *La Mort de Molière*, 1995, was presented at the 1997 Whitney Biennial Exhibition), filmed media were not present in most of his large stage works until 1998 when he and Philip Glass, his collaborator on *Einstein on the Beach*, presented *Monsters of Grace*, based on a text by a thirteenth-century Persian mystic, Jelaluddin Rumi. Combining live stage action and a 3D computer-animated film (made by Jeffrey Kleiser and Diana Walczak), the piece weaves back and forth between illusion and reality, all under the control of a computerized masterboard.

American composer Robert Ashley (b. 1930) has created experimental operas since the 1970s that combine music driven by the sound of a spoken text and projected video images incorporating abstract images, appropriated images (sometimes from television shows) and words. *Music with Roots in the Aether* (1976) was a fourteen-hour work based on the music and writings of contemporary composers, including Philip Glass, Alvin Lucier, and Steve Reich. Ashley's *Dust* (1999), a fragmented meditation on loneliness in contemporary America, incorporated five electroluminescent screens as well as a large horizontal screen above the

performance area, on which were projected a dizzying array of images designed by Japanese artist Yukihiro Yoshihara. For Wilson and Ashley, as for many other artists who incorporate media into their work, video and film provide additional architectural elements to the stage environment and allow for greater manipulations of time.

Eiko and Koma, Japanese-born dance artists associated with Minimalism and Japanese avant-garde theater, used both film and video in their 1998 project for the Whitney Museum, *Breath*, in which they appeared live in the midst of an environment of film and video projections. Fluid landscapes of shapes from nature and changing forms from their moving bodies suggested relationships between the live body and the 'live' film image.

The malleable nature of viewers' perceptions of reality is paramount in the work of Douglas Davis (b. 1933). In 1977, as part of *documenta vi*, Davis devised an international satellite telecast to over twenty-five countries. Davis, who was in Caracas, Venezuela, performed *The Last Nine Minutes*, in which he addressed the audience about the time/space distance between them. Included in the transmission were performances by Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman (*TV Bra*, *TV Cello*, and *TV Bed*) and a performance/lecture by Joseph Beuys on one of his utopian theories of art. Davis extended this same practice in 1981 with *Double Entendre*, another live satellite performance, linking the Whitney Museum in New



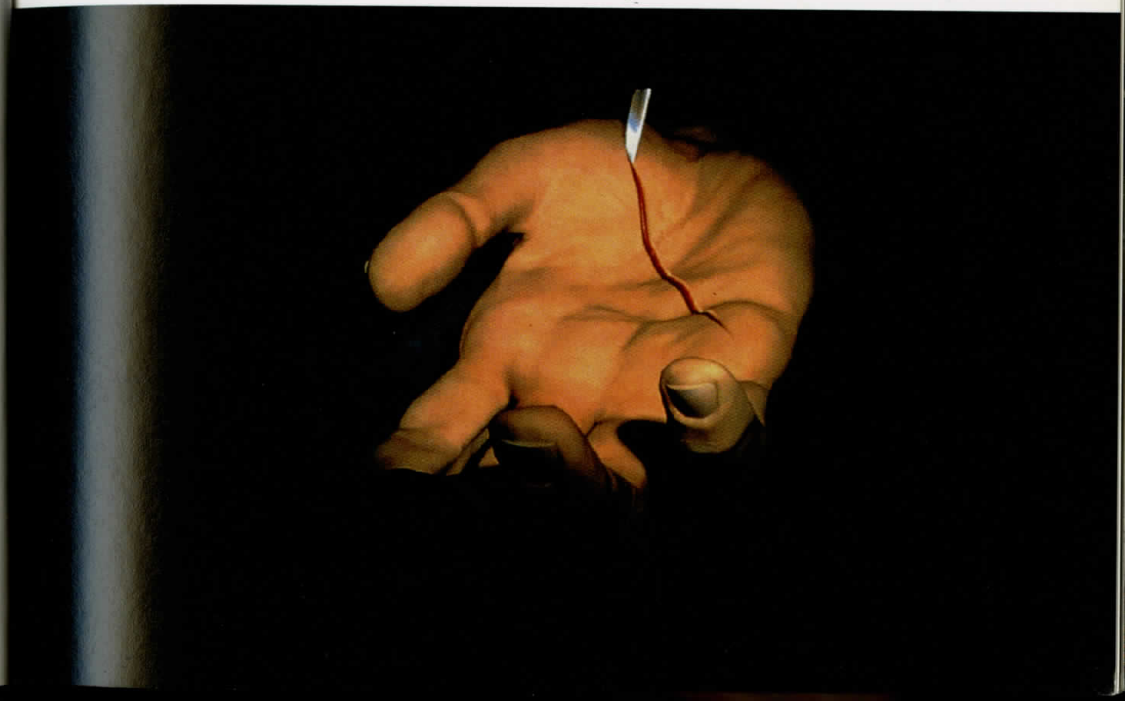
57. (above) Dan Graham, *Performance/Audience/Mirror*, December, 1975.

58. (below) Robert Wilson and Philip Glass, *Monsters of Grace*, 1998. For Wilson, design elements do not merely support the work, they are the work, the very content of his theater. 'Listen to the pictures,' he says.

York with the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, in which Davis explores a transatlantic love affair. Along the way he challenges notions of electronic linkage, cultural and sexual boundaries, as well as language theories; all of which was based on French theorist Roland Barthes' text, *A Lover's Discourse* (first published in France in 1977, English translation, 1978).

Intellectual involvement with architecture, theories of public and private space and issues of perception led Dan Graham (b. 1942) to performance and installation works that engaged viewers by directly focusing on their own position as viewers in a given space at a particular time. He often uses mirrors, closed circuit video systems, and complex viewing environments to engulf the viewer in his ideas about spectatorship and physical space. In *Performance/Audience/Mirror* (1975), Graham positioned himself in a performance space, his back to a mirror, facing an audience. He discussed his audience's movements and what they might signify and then proceeded to face the mirror and discuss his and his audience's movements as 'filtered' through the mirror. Issues of subjectivity/objectivity, the observer and the observed, audience and performer were engaged as varying and very subjective relationships. As he became more sophisticated in his use of video technology, Graham began incorporating video into his mirrored environments. His 1983 *Performance and Stage Set Utilizing Two Way Mirror and Video Time Delay*, created for his retrospective at

56. Robert Wilson, *Deafman Glance*, 1971.





59. Dan Graham, *Three Linked Cubes/Interior Design for a Space Showing Videos*, 1986.

the Kunsthalle in Berne, consisted of musicians and audience sitting facing each other through a large two-way mirror. A live feed video with a six-second delay was projected on the mirror, creating a virtual kaleidoscope of perception-bending images during which the audience watched the performers only through the filter of the mirror and video as they were also watching themselves and the performers on a time delay. This sense of disorientation challenged their position as observers. Graham continues to create viewing environments, such as *Three Linked Cubes/Interior Design for a Space Showing Videos* (1986), a space with transparent and mirrored glass, featured in the Guggenheim Museum's 1997 exhibition, *Rooms with a View: Environments for Video*; and an updated version of this, *New Space Showing Videos* (1995). In both cases the environments allow for viewing and being viewed; the viewer becoming at once the performer and the audience.

Politics, Postmodernism, and the New Spectacle

Graham's interactive practices reflect the theories of the Situationist International, a loose collective of European artists and intellectuals, whose chief spokesman, Guy Debord (1931–94), had a profound influence on artists in Western Europe and America. Central to Situationist thought (a combination of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and existentialism) was that theory can and should be the locus for 'aesthetic actions' by artists and other concerned individuals. Guided by Debord, especially in his 1967 essay 'The Society of the Spectacle', Situationists, largely through writings, agitated for popular control of urban spaces. One of their publications, *On the Poverty of Student Life* (1966–67), foreshadowed the



60. T. R. Uthco and Ant Farm (Doug Hall, Chip Lord, Doug Michels, Judy Procter), *The Eternal Frame*, 1975. Abraham Zapruder's amateur 8-millimetre film of President Kennedy's assassination has received more frame-by-frame scrutiny than any other film in history.

worldwide student uprisings of 1968. Artists like Graham and Doug Hall reflected variations on the Situationist manifestos in their own work. Hall became directly associated with political theater as one of the founders of the San Francisco-based, multimedia performance collective T. R. Uthco. Begun in 1970, the group became known for its 1975 collaboration with another media watchdog group, Ant Farm, on *The Eternal Frame*, a filmed re-enactment of Kennedy's 1963 assassination. Combining live performance spectacle, archive footage of the actual assassination, and spectators' filmed reactions to the 're-staging' of the event, this project became a biting record of American fascination with myth, heroes, and the televised image.

Hall also parodied American politics in his video performance *The Speech* (1982), during which he delivered an empty, cliché-ridden stump speech while standing on a platform surrounded by 'media' and 'supporters.' In *Amarillo News Tapes* (1980) and *This Is the Truth* (1982), Hall contested the very notion of 'truth' in the context of media, while engaging his ongoing inquiry into the power of language in the context of 'the public spectacle.' Making no apologies for a lack of intellectual content, Mike Smith (b. 1942), in his performances, videos, and installations since the late 1970s, has skewered the banality of US commercial television in the person of his fictive character 'Mike.' Mike, with no ideas of his own, is a welcome, empty receptacle for all television has to offer. Smith created numerous performance comedies, showcasing his deadpan, conceptual humor in works such as *Down in the Rec Room* (1979), *Secret Horror* (1980), and *Mike Builds a Shelter* (1985).

61-65

Such 'conceptual humor' was evident from the late 1960s and reached an apotheosis in 1980s postmodernism. While scholars still argue over definitions of postmodernism, certain trends in the practice of artists help us to define it. In multimedia theater, the hyperkinetic works of New York's Wooster Group are representative of postmodern performance. The group offers media-mingled interpretations of classic plays such as Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, first performed by the group in 1994, *Hairy Ape*, 1995, or *House/Lights*, 1997, based on Gertrude Stein's *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*. The plays' original texts, though intact, are almost unrecognizable in the midst of high decibel sound scores, amplified voices, and live performers competing for viewers' attention with videotaped versions of themselves on multiple monitors that litter the stage. In capitalizing on the uniqueness of O'Neill or Stein, they offer graphic representation of what social theorist and critic Fredric Jameson cites as the postmodern artist

66



61, 62. (above right, right) **Mike Smith**, *Down in the Rec Room*, 1979, re-edited 1981.

63. (below) **Mike Smith**, *Mike Builds a Shelter*, 1985. Mike Smith's alter-ego 'Mike' is a living sponge for all that mass media have to offer. He easily succumbs to the lure of advertising but has nightmares over all that he's trying to consume.

64, 65. (far right) **Mike Smith**, *Secret Horror*, 1980.



66. Wooster Group,
House/Lights. Performance at the
Performing Garage, New York,
October 1998.



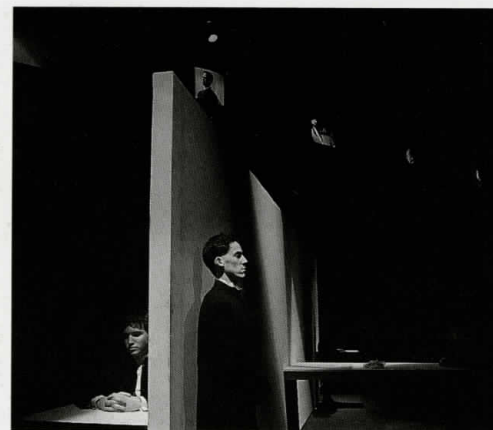
67. Wooster Group,
Brace Up!, 1991.
Actors including
Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk.
Photograph: Paula Court.
The Wooster Group turns classic
plays into media frenzies with
multiple video monitors and
fractured texts.



'seizing on their idiosyncrasies and eccentricities to produce an imitation which mocks the original.' But, rather than participate in the banality of media culture, these artists (led by Liz LeCompte who directs most of their productions) actually elevate media culture through their sophisticated use of technology to an artistic level of its own that eschews low-tech associations with the commonplace satirized by Mike Smith. If anything, the Wooster Group creates high-brow art as evidenced by their attraction to writers such as O'Neill or Stein. Among their collaborators is one of the principal architects of postmodern theater, Richard Foreman, founder of the Ontologic Hysteric Theatre, who wrote *Miss Universal Happiness* and *Symphony of Rats* for the Group.

John Jesurun's media theater illustrates another tenet of post-modern genres, namely what French theorist Jean Baudrillard called 'the death of the subject.' Spewing forth comments on everything from old films, to rock music, to pop psychology, Jesurun's theatrical pieces, which often incorporate multiple video images of the actors, feature characters lost in a universe of words and emotional deprivation. Jesurun's 'subjects', or characters, are in a sense dead, drowned in a sea of free associations and psycho-babble that suggest a disembodied mouth in a Beckett play that rambles on eternally. Unlike Beckett, however, whose poetic tracts are more akin to romanticism than postmodernism, Jesurun creates settings which evoke paranoia and hopelessness, like *Deep Sleep* (1985) in which live actors gradually become 'consumed' by filmed images of themselves, or *Slight Return* (1994) in which the audience only sees the projected video image of a performer trapped in a room with a surveillance camera.

68. John Jesurun, *Everything
That Rises Must Converge*, 1990.
Photograph: Paula Court.





The Wooster Group and Jesurun have influenced many younger artists in the United States and abroad, especially another collective called the Builders Association, whose self-description is a virtual definition of a postmodern media theater: 'We reanimate classic theatrical texts by infusing them with new media, and then re-working them within the chaotic context of contemporary global culture.' Their 1997 *Jump Cut (Faust)*, with texts by Jesurun, and staging clearly influenced by the Wooster Group, involved highly sophisticated interactive video scenes in which characters from Goethe's *Faust* played off scenes from a silent era film of *Faust* (1926) by F. W. Murnau, and reacted to live video feed from a camera placed on stage.

Like Robert Wilson, French-Canadian director Robert Lepage works in large, multimedia formats. With his company Ex Machina, he has created several media-based theater works, including *Polygraph* (1990), *Needles and Opium* (1992), and *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* (1996), a seven-hour work that combined film, video, music, and Japanese Butoh and Kabuki-inspired dance. This elegy for the twentieth century was inspired by his visit to

69. (left) Robert Lepage, *Polygraph*, 1990.

70. (below left) Robert Lepage, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, 1996. For theater and opera director Robert Lepage, video and film become living characters alongside actors in his technology-based stage works.

71. (below) La Fura dels Baus, *F@usto: Version 3.0*, 1998.

Hiroshima; it is a complex work which collapses time by weaving together lives of people who experienced the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the AIDS epidemic. 'The theater is implicitly linked to technology,' Lepage has said. 'There is a poetry in technology, but we try to use it in a way that does not eclipse the action on stage.' La Fura dels Baus, the international performance group founded in Barcelona in 1979, confronted media head on in their phantasmagoric *F@usto: Version 3.0* (1998). Bloodied bodies and hellfire projected onto huge screens and actors swinging from the ceiling or floating through the air in water-filled, mechanized 'wombs' made boldly graphic representations to illustrate Goethe's tale of the pact between a man and the devil.

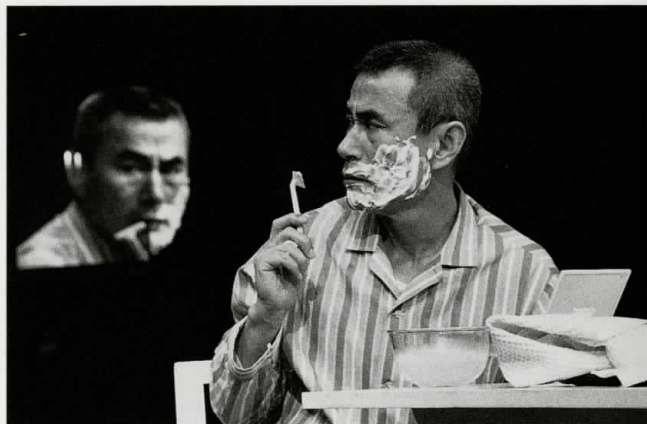
Lepage states that he was influenced by the improvisatory working methods of British theater director Peter Brook (b. 1925), whose Paris-based international company has created works often based on literary and classic sources (e.g. *The Mahabharata*, a nine-hour epic developed over several years in the 1980s). Although Brook was also a film director early in his career, he is not associated with media. Nonetheless, he made significant use of large format, live video in his





72. (above) Robert Lepage,
Needles and Opium, 8–12
December, 1992.

73. (right) Peter Brook,
The Man Who, 1992.
In Brook's adaptation of Oliver
Sacks's *The Man Who Mistook
His Wife for a Hat*, video images
function as mirroring devices for
the central character who forgets
moments as soon as they pass.



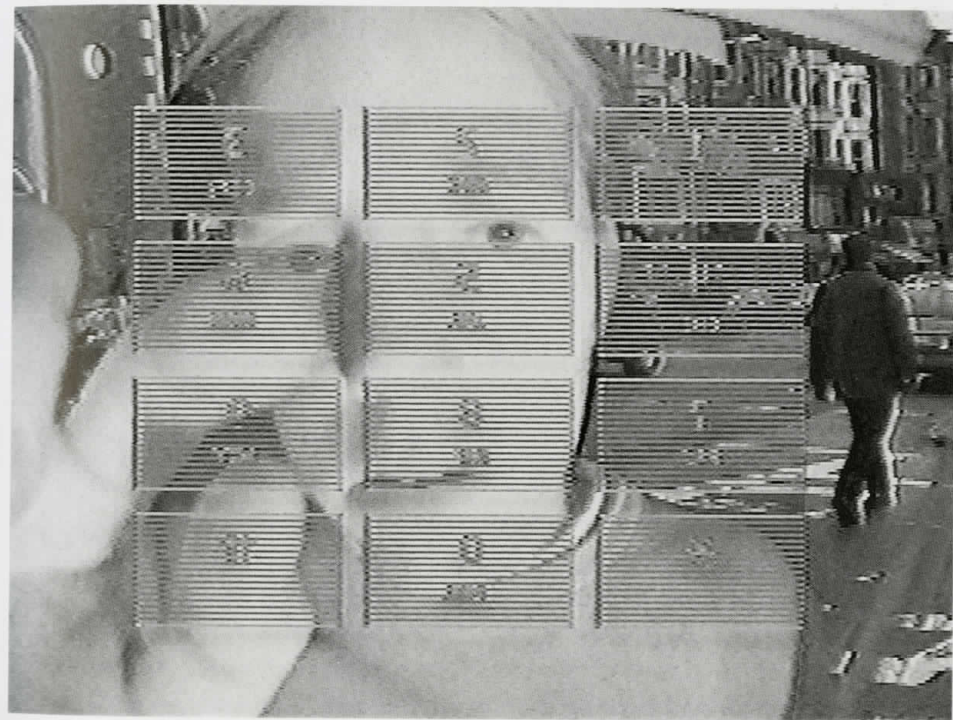
1992 production, *The Man Who*, based on Oliver Sacks's book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* about a man with brain damage.

Several other experimental theater companies that often use media in their work include groups like Squat Theater (founded in Czechoslovakia), Japan's Dumb Type, Impossible Theater (a 1980s American collective whose use of sophisticated media methods in productions like *Social Amnesia*, 1986, was intended as a critique of technology) and companies associated with

74. (right)
Ping Chong, *Deshima*, 1993.

75. (below)
Kristin Lucas, *Host*, 1997.
The video camera functions as
an extension of her own body
for Kristin Lucas, who often
straps small cameras and
projectors on her head during
live performances.

alternative performance spaces, like LaMaMa ETC in New York, for which artists like Ping Chong, trained in film and dance, and the author of this book, who trained in theater and photography, use media as poetic elements in abstract works that combine music, dance and texts, in imagistic visual environments.



Though sophisticated use of media entered experimental theater productions in the 1980s, plenty of low-tech performance is practised by younger artists whose pared-down presentations are more akin to Fluxus events than theater. In the United States Kristin Lucas (b. 1969) is representative of an energetic young breed for whom the hi-8 video camera functions like a found object, allowing the creation of media collages (or 'video improves,' as she likes to call them) that are elegant in their simplicity. Strapping a camera or a small projector to a helmet, Lucas, often dressed in a pair of orange workers' overalls, as in *Host* (1997), makes real-time performances, projecting recently recorded images of encounters with policemen or other

76. Broadway staging of the musical *Tommy*, 1995. Video technology has become a trademark of rock music shows and many large-scale commercial theater productions such as The Who's *Tommy*.



people she meets onto the walls of makeshift gallery or performance spaces.

By the late 1990s, multimedia techniques, begun so spontaneously by experimental dance and theatre groups in the late 1960s, had infiltrated mainstream theater and stadium spectacles, especially rock music shows. The Broadway musical *Tommy*, written as a rock opera by The Who in the 1970s and presented on Broadway in 1995, featured multiple video projections around the theater's proscenium. Nearly every rock show now offers live feed video projection of the performers, which serves to expand the viewing field for large crowds and also adds to the feeling of a hyperkinetic, 'significant' event occurring on stage.

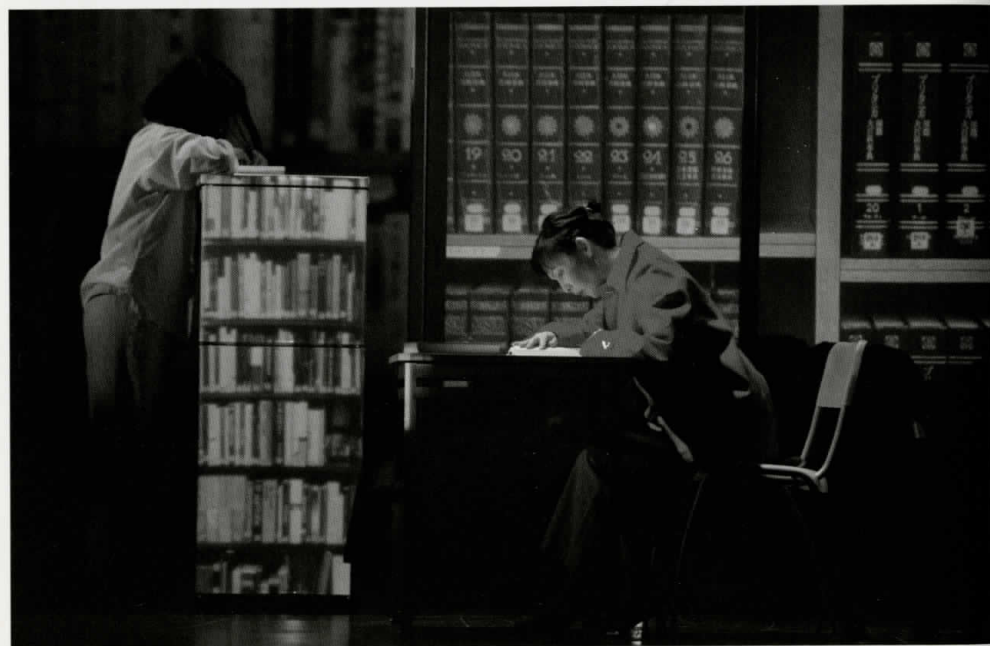
77. (below) Samuel Beckett's *Foires/Fizzles*, adapted and directed by Michael Rush, 1994. Moving and still camera images add layers of time and memory to the voices of Beckett's characters.



Located behind the scenes of most contemporary, large-scale media-infused performances are digital control boards that, with a touch of a button, control lights, sound, videos, films and much else. The British-based performance company Complicite, founded in 1983 by Simon McBurney (b. 1957) and a few collaborators, demonstrated the highest level of media sophistication in their 2003 production *The Elephant Vanishes*. Based on the short stories of Japanese writer Haruki Murakami, McBurney and company explored the emotional turmoil of contemporary city life through surreal events occurring to three characters whose routine, everyday lives appear anything but. Objects, projection screens, videos, and all manner of technology conspire to visualize the dreamy scenarios of Murakami's narratives.

Reflecting on the complexity of this project, McBurney writes: 'His [Murakami's] stories are extraordinary, springing out of ordinary, mundane urban life. People iron their clothes, make dinner, go to work, watch TV, listen to Haydn and Mozart, get into bed and start again the next day. Yet extraordinary things happen to his characters. They cease to sleep, monsters crawl out of the ground or the television and change their lives. The effect of these intersecting events is to slice through to the heart of what it means to live in this ultra-consumer, disconnected world of ours.'

78. Complicite, *The Elephant Vanishes*. Performance at the Lincoln Center Festival, New York, 2004.



McBurney describes Complicite's work as a series of 'intricate collisions' with stories, memories, movement, technologies, and everyday objects.

The American artists Paul Kaiser (b. 1956) and Shelley Eshkar (b. 1970) have been pushing the boundaries of dance into the realm of new media since the late 1990s with works such as *Biped* (1999) and *Motion-e* (2002–5). In *Biped*, an otherworldly dance project choreographed by Merce Cunningham, Kaiser and Eshkar projected digitally animated figures that interacted with live dancers on stage. In a similar vein, *Motion-e* is a series of virtual dances Kaiser describes as 'realtime, interactive, motion-capture-based performances,' made in collaboration with US choreographers Bill T. Jones (b. 1952), Bebe Miller (b. 1950), and Trisha Brown. Brown, who has been at the forefront of experimental dance for more than forty years, created one of the first media dance performances in 1966. In *Homemade*, a collaboration with artist and filmmaker Robert Whitman, she attached a projector to her back which thrust prefilmed images of the same dance she was performing live onto a screen at the rear of the stage. This self-reflexive act operated on many levels. It was both spectacle and challenge. How could the live performer compete for viewers' attention with both the mystery and beauty of the filmed image? Which performance was more 'real,' the filmed or the live? The filmed dancer was, in a sense, both a ghost and a companion, a reflection and a mirage.

In contemporary dance, the artist most identified with media and choreography is Cathy Weis who has been staging dances with interactive video projections for several years (e.g. *Face to Face*, 1996; *A Bad Spot Hurts Like Mad*, 2001).

Not all artists work at such a level of technological wizardry. Some are decidedly and determinedly low-tech. The German-born but US-based Oliver Herring (b. 1964), an artistic descendant of John Cage, who built an artform around highly aesthetic and conceptual chance encounters, believes in the potential artfulness of everyday gestures and mundane objects. *Spit Reverse* (2003) is a multi-screen, videotaped performance that explores his interests in the ever-new 'vocabularies' that emerge when a group of strangers (previously unknown to the artist as well) come together for a self-generated, unscripted performance. Here participants are filmed playing a water-spitting game and the action is projected in reverse.

Herring's video projects link his performances to the sculpture and painting he has practiced in other contexts. For Herring artistic media, whether paper, Mylar, videotape, or the body, serve

79. **Oliver Herring**, *Gloria*, 2004. This sculpture consists of thousands of photo fragments mounted on a polystyrene base, resulting in a work that is at once hyper-real and otherworldly. Echoing Warhol's Polaroid-based silkscreen and painting portraits and Hockney's photo assemblages, Herring's sculpture pays homage to the photographed image even while deconstructing it.

Following pages:
80. **Shelly Eshkar** and **Paul Kaiser**, *Arrival*, 2004. In this installation, viewers look down at small, cyborg figures moving in a non-specific, but familiar-looking space. Some figures move forward in time, others in reverse. Looped to play endlessly, the video makes time and human interaction appear terrifyingly mechanized.

his need to explore ideas, emotions, and new modes of communication. A painterly sensibility permeates his videos. From his earliest *Videosketch #1* (1998), through *The Sum and Its Parts* (2000), *Little Dances of Misfortune* (2001), and *Sleepless Nights* (2001), among several others, performers appear with bodies painted in Mondrianesque patterns or shielded with fluorescent paint. Herring films the performers often through grueling hours of minute gestures and physical interactions. Eschewing digital after effects, he creates his complex-appearing choreography through stop-motion filming, much like early cinematic innovators Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin.

The South African-born artist Robin Rhode (b. 1976), who now works in Berlin, also uses the stop-action technique in his videos, which are taped street performances that incorporate drawing and movement. In *White Walls* (2002), for example, the artist is taped drawing a car (in the manner of early Jean-Michel Basquiat or Keith Haring) on a large street wall. In the animated video, Rhode jacks up the car to fix a tire. For viewers, this is as close to a live performance as a tape can get. The same can be said of the Indian artist Sonia Khurana's (b. 1968) video *Bird* (1999), in which, nude and unselfconsciously porcine, she engages in a wild dance that is her attempt to fly.

The pervasive presence of Performance in contemporary media art is undeniable. The link between video and the body from the early 1970s to the present day has been central to the work of numerous artists, including, to name a few, Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, Joan Jonas, Robert Rauschenberg, Carolee Schneemann, Nam June Paik, Valie Export, Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Robert Wilson, Martha Rosler, Jurgen Klauke, Steve McQueen, Lucy Gunning, Tony Oursler, Paul McCarthy, Gary Hill, Klaus Rinke, Nayland Blake and Pipilotti Rist.

It has been the availability of affordable technology that has always paralleled developments in art and media. At the same time that artists were taping performances in their studios or incorporating film and video into Performance art and theater, artists were making single-channel videos that were often personal responses to a medium that rarely professed to be art: television.



