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INTRODUCTION
On the Horizon

Gabrielle Jennings

Abstract art is propelled by . . . hope and hunger. It reflects the urge to push toward the limit, to colonize the borderland around the openings onto nothingness, where the land has not been settled, where the new can emerge.

KIRK VARNEDOE, *PICTURES OF NOTHING: ABSTRACT ART SINCE POLLOCK*

Video art has rarely been analyzed through the lens of abstraction; it is often amorphous, ungovernable, and disembodied with spaces that confound Renaissance perspective and encourage contemplation. As the late art historian Kirk Varnedoe put it, "pictures of nothing."[1] And of everything. In light of scholarship on abstraction in other mediums, it is useful to consider this history because video has transformed from an essentially narrative analog form (TV) to a pervasive digital art medium. This collection examines abstraction in video art after 2000—moving image artworks that were made just after analog video nearly went extinct and bytes and pixels became dominant.

Video Art has had film and television, the twin hounds of narrative, nipping at its heels for decades now, referencing these forms while distinguishing itself through various means—reflexivity, nonlinear narrative, and medium specificity, to name just a few. The title for this volume, *Abstract Video: The Moving Image in Contemporary Art,* illustrates its own problematic: it carries a history of video art proper that points towards both its predecessor (film) and its offspring (new media art). Like the horizon, abstract video is visible but unattainable, an idea as much as an image, looking left and right, an interrupted and a continuous line, movement and stillness embodied.

This volume examines the term *abstract* in traditional ways that modernism embraced but also in the ways that film historians discuss Structuralist and experimental film, according to perception and duration, and in ways media historians use the term in referring to the digital. It looks at how we think through abstraction and tracks changes as the medium itself continues to evolve. Though video emerged with the advent of videotape, the term *video* now encompasses all moving image media.

The closest Varnedoe comes to discussing moving image works in *Pictures of Nothing* is his consideration of James Turrell's light installations, *Afrum-Proto* (1966), and *Wedgework* (1974).[2] These works exemplify important formal qualities of abstract art: they don't exist in the natural world, and like architecture and film, they reference things outside themselves. These phenomenological events are a useful place to begin a consideration of abstraction in video art because, like video, they are made of light and are best experienced through prolonged viewing. Crucially, *movement* over time is not a quality of either piece, but it is an essential aspect of this book.

The only mention of the moving image in *Pictures of Nothing* is in the discussion of two feature films: Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). It seems no coincidence that these masterpieces of modern cinema contain the peculiar sense of the abstract often found in science fiction: the unknowable colliding with the familiar. Varnedoe reminds readers of the "great, grey, forbidding slab that first appears to a group of apes at the beginning of *[2001]* and later reappears on the moon, sending out a piercing signal in the direction of Mars" and connects modernist sculptor John McCracken's "planks" to the monolith.[3] The sculptures are very much about presence and in this context pose an important question in regard to the moving image: can an image—which is not a thing, which may be fleeting, and is always moving—have the same kind of gravity and presence as an actual object? Varnedoe refers to *Blade Runner* in the context of an android's expiration, thereby illustrating his inability to be comprehensive in the span of six lectures and hinting at the heartache of his terminal illness. It is tempting to think that, had Varnedoe had more time, more lectures ahead of him, that he would have wanted to consider new forms of abstraction—experimental film, video, and new media practices among them.

Aesthetic dialogues used to occur in parallel worlds—painting, sculpture, and film each on fairly separate tracks. This has changed. Previously concurrent discussions now intersect regularly, requiring greater elasticity and new definitions. For this book, I asked a diverse set of writers and practitioners to attend to the abstract in the contemporary moving image, to contextualize, and to guide the reader through the countless streams of light.

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Ecstatic Resistance is an inquiry into the temporality of change. Time, the time of transformation, the duration and physicality of the experience of change. And drama—the arc of history. The temporality of the ecstatic opens a non-linear experience in which connections are made at breakneck pace and a moment later time appears to stop us in the dynamism of one challenging thought.

—EMILY ROYSDON, *ECSTATIC RESISTANCE*

With a fair bit of excitement, I opened *Abstraction* (2013), the latest anthology in the Whitechapel: Documents in Contemporary Art series.[4] The collection runs the gamut

from social and political utopias to a more Greenbergian "focus on medium-specificity and self-reflexiveness" and opens up the field in expansive ways though not specifically in terms of moving image practices.[5] Similarly, most of the essays in *Abstract Video* shrug off the enticing conveniences of formal abstraction in favor of examining the topic by looking through the lens of film and video art itself—imagery that literally moves over time; "the medium is the message" and "the medium is the medium."[6] Nevertheless, it still seems appropriate to begin again, with a look at the differences between the abstract, the nonrepresentational, the nonfigurative, the nonobjective, and the slightly different but useful term *abstracted*. To be abstract is, according to Webster's dictionary, to be "disassociated from any specific instance [or] . . . having only intrinsic form with little or no attempt at pictorial representation or narrative content." To be nonrepresentational or nonobjective means "representing . . . no natural or actual object, figure, or scene." It is my hope that *Abstract Video* will widen these definitions since, as we will see, abstract video works include much more than nonrepresentation. Abstraction in the moving image is, and has always been, an artistic strategy (or result) used in a myriad of ways towards infinite ends.

Hans Richter's classic avant-garde film from 1921, *Rhythmus 21,* is an early experiment in moving image abstraction. The piece, which evolved from the artist's painting and graphic design practice, is derived from geometric abstraction and has been called an "absolute film." Squares and rectangles of black, white, and gray appear and disappear in various configurations, expanding, contracting, mutating. In the first issue of *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung* (1923), a magazine Richter edited, he wrote this of *Rhythmus 21:* "An attempt has been made to organize the film such that the individual parts stand in active tension to one another and to the whole, such that the whole remains intellectually *[geistig]* mobile within itself."[7] Even here, in the context of a nascent film practice, the filmmaker exhorts an active reading of the piece. We will see, in *Abstract Video*, that the writers have engaged the subject with this same kind of *"geistige Mobilität."*

Since we are well into the cybernetic, digital age—what Michael Sanchez calls our "liminal media-historical moment"—where the moving image is already an abstraction (as opposed to celluloid and electronic tape, which have a physical reality), the abstract is all around us.[8] Abstract painting is, for the most part, handmade, whereas film and video—unless you are a Structural or experimental practitioner like Len Lye, Stan Brakhage, or Jennifer West—are not.[9] And in the case of the moving image, a one-to-one, physical relationship with the medium never existed. Film and video already contain the idea of abstraction in their very ability to hold images that are not immediately visible or tangible: Film is a photographic medium and therefore has to be developed, and video can be seen as it is being recorded. However, unless it is closed circuit or webcam, video requires replay and, in the case of the digital, cannot ever be literally grasped: the data that make up the digital image are, as Boris Groys writes, "invisible."[10] Here we can start to talk about the differences between being in the presence of a painting or a sculpture, where we can physically identify with a gesture, and being in the presence

of electronic light and movement, where there is an extreme acceleration—usually the still frames that constitute a moving image are moving so fast that we can't see them individually (works like Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* being the exception).

Video then is not about a bodily relationship with a thing, but instead about the *speed of thinking*. This of course becomes more complex with video installations, where often the most critical thing is the viewer's body in relation to the work. A body moving in space perceiving is very different from a body sitting and *watching:* a sense of the overwhelming sublime, for instance, is achieved very differently in video than in an abstract painting like a Rothko. There is a perceptual difference between looking *at* a surface and *into* an electronic moving image. The space of a painting requires a leap of imagination, a sensorial looking that is felt differently than when virtual movement is in play. Movement is understood on different levels depending on the medium: In painting, we can sense movement as gestural, narrative, or a compositional pointing from one place to another through such factors as color, form and location. In the moving image, movement can be understood both inside and outside the frame, through the actual speed of recording or playback, through montage and editing, as well as through the narrative unfolding. Time functions differently in a painting than in the moving image, primarily because in one it is imagined, and in the other, temporal-spatial relations are brought to the fore and put into question. These are but a few ways in which we might begin to discuss abstraction from painting through to moving image artworks.

Abstraction is unruly. As a culture, we have become savvy image consumers. We are fluent in the language of the moving image; we take for granted conventional filmic techniques that create a sense of continuity as well as the "mixed-up" narrative—most notably in the films of Mike Figgis, David Lynch, and Tom Tykwer. In the medium formerly known as video art, there are so many differing strategies today in regard to narrative that it is impossible to list the artists representing them all—Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Stan Douglas, Cao Fei, Mark Lewis, Pipilotti Rist, and Mark Tribe are only a small start. Elliptical storytelling à la early Pierre Huyghe and the essayistic or narrative montage have also become commonplace in wider cultural production. The Structural, the pseudo-documentary, the performative, the rhetorical, the activist, the abject, and the textual/linguistic—these approaches, which almost constitute a catalogue of the history of video art, make their appearance in this collection. There have also been many important advances in thinking about time as material in film and video.[11] Related and important ideas that are not explicitly discussed in this volume are (1) presence—as in Simon Payne's color field videos,[12] where the viewer is immersed in pure color and form (much like the early Turrells) but with the added perception of movement over time—and (2) the abstract as enabling the representation of memory (or its incomprehensibility)—as in a piece like Stan Douglas's *Win, Place or Show* (1998). Abstraction alone is all but absent from the video art canon. Even now, after a century of nonrepresentation in painting, entering the world of abstraction in video is like venturing out of the house alone for the first time, at once thrilling and frightening, the sublime might be met along the way.

Paul Pfeiffer, *Morning after the Deluge,* 2003. 8mm film transferred to digital video loop; projection dimensions: 144 × 192 inches; 20 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Thomas Dane Gallery, London.

Reverse zoom out through the evolution from the photographic to the electronic, from film through video to the digital, from analog to digital and linear to rhizomatic, to this moment where an abbreviated history of the horizon and the spiral in the moving image proves useful. A line is an abstract form, while the spiral is a line made figurative. First consider the horizon: a line that stretches as far as the eye can see in both directions, separating sea or land from sky. It has been made to mean any number of things: limitlessness, stability, flatness, the edge of the world, a place from which sailors plunged to their demise. How we see comes into play here—the perception of something that is at once there and not there. The horizon, like the abstract, is the representation of an unreachable place. The horizon has always signaled a certain kind of looking beyond, a looking towards and away at once. *Morning after the Deluge* by Paul Pfeiffer (fig. 1.1) is a video projection of a wavering horizon. The piece merges two film images of the sky over the ocean on Cape Cod, one of sunrise, the other sunset, one inverted so that the two half suns become one, with the horizon line joining the two. The effect is a certain kind of timelessness, at once a literalization and an abstraction of what we know to be scientifically true.[13] Pfeiffer has said that around the time he made this piece, he

began working in Manila, and one can begin to see this doppelganger sunrise/sunset as a looking both towards and away from the artist's homeland.[14] The artist's newer works tend to be collaborative and sculptural, and embedded in them is a sense of a cultural past and present colliding. This notion of the eternal, or the infinite, is essential to the digital in a way that analog, a linear form, was not. Video can be thought of as moving horizontally, whereas film is a vertical medium, having, until recently, moved downwards, snaking through the film projector, propelled by parallel sprocket holes. In the digital age, the two have combined to form an ever-present-now wherein there is neither up nor down, left nor right, here nor there—an abstraction to be sure.

Enter the spiral: a line made representational and a symbol for the sun, the hypnotic, dizziness, and a movement from the inner to the outer and back again. A spiral has an implied depth or perspective and indicates a movement from one place to another. This undulating target, pulsating vortex, swirling sign for the unconscious, comes to visit the filmic avant-garde early on in Oskar Fischinger's and Marcel Duchamp's works from the 1920s, in Jean Cocteau's *The Blood of a Poet* (1930), and in Richter's *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1947), for which Duchamp and John Cage collaborated to make the famed *Discs* sequence—one of seven surreal dream sequences inserted into a more traditional narrative and crafted by a who's who of avant-garde artists. Alongside these corkscrews are appearances of the spiral in mainstream Hollywood films such as *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Vertigo* (1958). In the art realm, there is, of course, the legendary film *Spiral Jetty* (1970), written and directed by Robert Smithson and shot by Smithson and Nancy Holt. Besides documenting the building of the jetty, the film stands as a record of Smithson's philosophical ideas as well as providing what the artist called a "cosmic rupture"—a state of disorientation that frees the viewer from the dialectic of history.[15]

It is not insignificant that two female artists, Jennifer West and Elaine Sturtevant, have remade (one more literally than the other) works by two of the most celebrated and mythic male artists of the last century—as Siona Wilson posits in chapter 4, theirs is "repetition with difference." In 2013, Jennifer West made her own Spiral Jetty films: *Spiral of Time Documentary Film* (fig. 1.2) and *Salt Crystals Spiral Jetty Dead Sea Five Year Film*. The films circle back, revisiting the now-fabled place while literally, textually, and conceptually layering upon it, history and materiality with a sight line towards and away from the temporal. Sturtevant remade Duchamp's *Discs* and titled it *Dreams Money Can Buy* (1967). A digital projection, this piece follows Sturtevant's practice of remakes and has been shown in installations along with other Duchamp look-alikes. The master copier remaking a piece by the original ready-maker, "Sturtevant repeats works for the necessity of a catalytic recognizability," says art critic Bruce Hainley, "sparking an investigation of what allows 'art' to be, so that the entirety of the structure of art is reconsidered horizontally not linearly."[16] Writing about Sturtevant's work, Hainley configures and reconfigures her practice and teases out a call to view art anew—as part of the whirlpool of images, not a chronology but something more akin to a helix, moving in and out of history, around the central axis called Time.
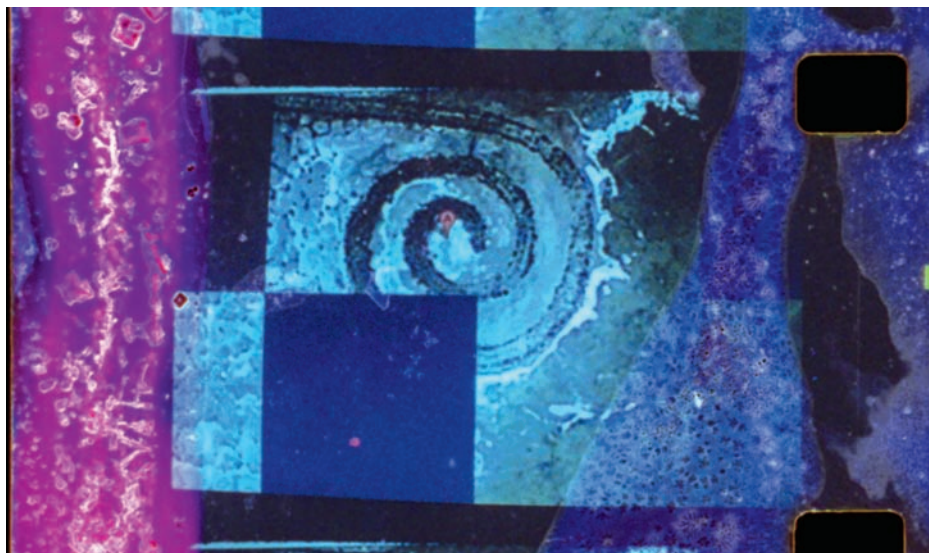
Nonrepresentation then, is where this book begins: the "Transmission" section discusses moving image artwork that descends on the one hand from abstraction in experimental film and on the other from television and early video art. The second section, "Interference," ranges between video, media art and "net art" and shows how these genres, from virtually all angles, have embraced the abstract from the beginning. The essays in "Interference" make possible those in the third section, "Reception," which discusses the abstract in video art from the inside out—those strategies that are not formally descendent from earlier traditions—disembodied digital plays with movement, time, space, sound and narrative, and color as metaphor.

TRANSMISSION

In one sense, this collection is an experiment, to see what happens when a significant variability of opinions on a topic are brought together. The volume intends to acknowledge the history of abstraction in painting, sculpture, and experimental film without remaining there. Instead, its purpose is to pick up where studies of abstraction plateau—

in film, where P. Adams Sitney began; in video, where John Hanhardt left off; and in new media studies, where the exhibition *Abstraction Now* and media scholars like Lev Manovich continue—and to examine not only where we've been but where we are now.[17]

Fifty years have passed since the death of John F. Kennedy was captured on 8mm Kodachrome film, on November 22, 1963, and later transmitted around the world. Fifty years have also passed since *Dr. Who* first aired on the BBC. (Legend has it that the first episode was delayed by ten minutes due to extended coverage of Kennedy's assassination the previous day; in fact, the show aired only eighty seconds late.)[18] The opening title sequence appears as if out of the tailpipe of a rocket, smoke dissolving into clouds that disperse into fog (fig. 1.3). The accompanying soundtrack can only be characterized as space-cowboy, and the mood as interstellar psychedelic, even in black and white. The video feedback "howl-around" technique was created by BBC electronics engineers Ben Palmer or Norman Taylor, and the titles created by graphic designer Bernard Lodge.[19] I was told by the artist and film historian Lutz Becker that he collaborated with Palmer to develop visual effects that would later appear in Becker's *Horizon* (1967), titled after it was broadcast as part of the BBC documentary series *Horizon: Will Art Last?* (1967).
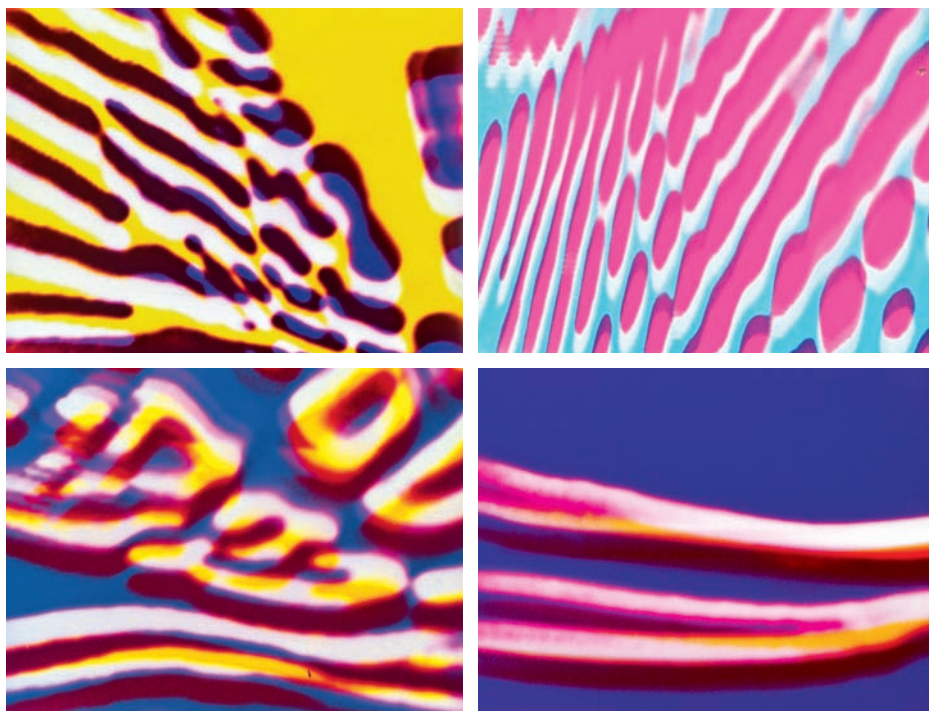
Lutz Becker, *Horizon,* 1967. 16mm film, color, sound; 3 minutes. Copyright Lutz Becker.

Lutz and Palmer shot the images produced by a feedback loop between a television camera and a monitor on black-and-white 35mm film. The film was later colorized with an optical printer, edited and output to 16mm film for inclusion in the BBC *Horizon* show, which had just recently begun broadcasting in color. The result is an ecstatic, oozing, microcosmic array of bright white and yellow organic shapes outlined with fuchsia on a background of deliciously vivid grape (fig. 1.4). The images look like neon and are clearly not of this world—meaning electronically generated, wholly nonrepresentational. Becker recalls, "The music, only used in the broadcast, was played and composed as a solo piece by cellist Joy Hall. It was quite experimental containing fragments of harmonies and a mixture of noise effects she created on the cello. Otherwise the film was projected silent, like 'music for the eye.'"[20] Becker has said that his "ambition was to be able to create some kind of visual equivalent to electronic music."[21]

In addition to being an example of Visual Music, Becker's *Horizon* is also a link between then and now: a television camera transmitting images to a monitor while simultaneously being recorded (an electronic proto-selfie).[22] The piece is an early example of a generation of experimental works made in conjunction with technicians working

in the bowels of television studios. Engineers like Palmer, Shuya Abe, and David Jones, made groundbreaking innovations in video possible through the development of early video-processing tools—namely, synthesizers, sequencers, keyers, and colorizers.

Technical developments in video have gone hand in hand with what artists have made and how it has looked. The 2009 exhibition *Abstract Cinema and Technology* at MOCA North Miami, curated by then–executive director and chief curator Bonnie Clearwater, elucidated the relationship between technological developments and artistic innovation from early film by artists associated with the Visual Music field (such as Fischinger, James Whitney, Jordan Belson, and Len Lye) to early video pioneers (such as Nam June Paik) and more recent practitioners (such as Cory Arcangel, Jeremy Blake, and Jennifer Steinkamp). The exhibition traced a technological evolution from film to video and then the digital, and although these distinctions are useful, the aesthetics of such varied media, the *what* and *how* they say, have, until this volume, been left largely unexamined.

This is where this volume begins. The writers in the "Transmission" section take on the hard questions: What does it mean when notions of the abstract change over time? And what does the abstract say when it appears as an embedded system and not necessarily as a visual sign?

John G. Hanhardt's 1995 essay "Film Image / Electronic Image: The Construction of Abstraction, 1960–1990" begins this exploration. The essay (chapter 2) details the interrelation between video art and the history of avant-garde cinema during the twentieth century and proposes "that a specific body of film and video works has explored the issue of abstraction as a means to define their respective media." This has been done, Hanhardt points out, "by choosing the basic temporality of the moving image and the material basis of the image itself as sites for an epistemological inquiry into the viewing experience, thus exploring the perceptual transaction between spectator and text." Hanhardt shows some of the fundamental interconnections between video art and the history of avant-garde abstractionism, for example, as reflected in the work of experimental filmmakers like Stan Brakhage.

Two years after Becker's *Horizon* aired on the BBC, artist Joseph Kosuth mounted an exhibition titled *Joseph Kosuth—October 1969* at the Douglas Gallery in Vancouver. The piece involved a media intervention appearing as unexplained text from Roget's thesaurus on Canadian television. In chapter 3, "Joseph Kosuth's *The Second Investigation* in Vancouver (1969): Art on TV," art historian John C. Welchman argues that Kosuth's piece was part of one of the most significant projects of early Conceptual Art. Germane to this volume, the Douglas Gallery show raises a number of key questions about the relation of art and media, as well as new ideas about color, abstraction, and public encounters with art at the end of the 1960s.

Siona Wilson's contribution, "Abstract Transmissions: Other Trajectories for Feminist Video" (chapter 4), associates video art with habits of television viewing and the idea of transmission as a way to recontextualize early feminist video art, and then moves into the contemporary space to see how this reframing informs recent video made by

women. She asks, "What kind of a feminist politics emerges, both then and now, when we shift the lens towards the abstract?"

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's essay, "Abstract Video" (chapter 5), contemplates video as a sensation, the electronic as a medium that produces abstraction in the absence of the kind of physicality that is the basis for a medium like painting (or writing, for that matter). This piece explores the relationship of the abstract to the photographic and then proceeds to consider what the properties of an abstract video might be, using the examples of two works that deal with the formless in different ways—one, an LCD-light–based work by James Turrell and the other, a video work by Diana Thater. Just as Varnedoe says of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty,* "the overhead view of things unintelligible from the earth speaks to enigma and to mystery,"[23] Gilbert-Rolfe describes a looking up and out, beyond our own vision.

INTERFERENCE

Early in her seminal essay "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," Rosalind Krauss noted that artists' video, like Pop Art, "is largely involved in parodying the critical terms of abstraction."[24] Among these strategies, she identifies a "pointing towards the center" typified by Vito Acconci's work *Centers* (1971), in which he literally points at his own video image for the duration of the twenty-minute tape—the length of a ¾" field tape. The theorizing of video as the medium of narcissism is born.[25] Rewind back to our electronic selfie, *Horizon*. An example of this kind of video feedback loop (the mirroring of the filmed subject in between camera and monitor being the thing that was missing from Becker's *Horizon*) is Nancy Holt and Richard Serra's video *Boomerang* from 1974. The piece sets up an audio feedback loop wherein Holt hears her own reactions, both voiced in the present and almost simultaneously played back through her own headphones. This leads to a feeling of "self-encapsulation" resulting in an exaggerated presentness.[26]

The essays in the "Interference" section consider artworks characterized by a pulsing mandala; tearing, scratching, screeching visual noise; chance encounters; a breaking apart of the image; and code, hacking, hypertext, and interactivity. Two essays in this section consider glitch art, an early example of which is Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll* (1972), which deconstructed both the televisual medium and the performing subject through the use of a persistent interference mechanism—the vertical roll—an aesthetic annoyance that most of us who grew up with cathode-ray-tube television had the luck to behold, but that has now gone the way of the dodo bird and been replaced by the glitch.[27] This section opens with "Visual Music's Influence on Contemporary Abstraction" (chapter 6), by Cindy Keefer, director of the Center for Visual Music. Keefer curates and restores works of such experimental-film luminaries as Oskar Fischinger and Jordan Belson, whose works serve as precursors for contemporary Visual Music practices. One of the earliest genres of abstraction in film, Visual Music explores the myriad relations

between image and sound. Keefer's essay discusses classics of Visual Music in order to introduce contemporary works associated with the genre.

Gregory Zinman's essay, "Chance and Glitch in Contemporary Video Art" (chapter 7), delves into the work of three artists—Lynn Marie Kirby, Takeshi Murata, and Jennifer West—who use the fabric of film and video to lay bare inherent limits, sensitivities, and random properties. Here different sorts of "messy" material manipulation produce remarkable (and arguably, "handmade") abstract imagery that often includes shredding the figurative image.

"Delirious Architectures: Notes on Jeremy Blake, *Liquid Crystal Palace,* and Digital Materialism" (chapter 8) is an interview with curator Michael Connor by art historian Johanna Gosse. The conversation centers on topics inherent in *Liquid Crystal Palace,* an exhibition that Connor curated with Nate Hitchcock in 2014. The exhibition takes as precedent Blake's feverish *Liquid Villa* (2000), placing it alongside pieces by a new generation of artists working in moving image abstraction, or what Connor calls "digital materialism." From there, they get to the differences between the material and "philosophical abstract." The discussion moves nimbly between "fantasy architecture" and abstraction as a visual style and concludes with the sublime, the psychedelic, and the decorative.

Chapter 9, "Abstract Video: Net Art2," is a virtual roundtable, bringing together a diverse group of media scholars invested in Internet art: Tilman Baumgärtel, Sarah Cook, Charlotte Frost, and Caitlin Jones. The discussion is wide ranging, moving between ASCII works, webcam cinema, online glitch, and animated GIFs. The writers astutely identify the means, complications, and sign systems at work in online moving image art practices through four examples that embody the ever-unfolding nature of artistic techno-strategy at play on the Internet, giving interpretation, disconnection, interruption and dissociation particular agency.

In chapter 10, "Interactive Abstractions—Between Embodied Exploration and Instrumental Control 'Underneath Your Fingertips,'" art historian Katja Kwastek discusses abstract moving images generated or shaped by means of real-time audience interaction. The essay outlines the development of interactive works from their analog beginnings in the 1960s, via their diverse directions in the form of screen-based interactions, environments for bodily experience, and audiovisual instruments/apps for mobile devices. Kwastek argues that such "interactive abstractions" often make visible the processes of interaction, involving what we may think of as "virtual reality," and encourage viewers to create their own abstract animations. She finds that though such interactive abstractions are often neither narrative nor figurative, they may well be referentially representational.

RECEPTION

The Kitchen, a New York artist collective founded in 1971 by video artists Woody and Steina Vasulka, supported many early video artists and continues to operate today as a

space for experimental multimedia works. Lumi Tan, associate curator at this institution, has contributed *Real Time, Screen Time* (chapter 11), an investigation into how the "presence of the apparatuses of production [in the exhibition space] shift the viewer's perception of time." Tan examines the live-mixing, production-based work of Mika Tajima, New Humans, and Charles Atlas before turning to the performative video work of Alix Pearlstein. Through this exploration, abstraction can be found in the spaces left when conventional viewing habits are uprooted and time becomes slippery.

The very properties of video (light, sound, movement) can produce not only a wavering and questionable sense of time but also, as Christine Ross argues in "The Spreadability of Video" (chapter 12), a permeability that allows for an unfolding, malleable multiplicity. This becomes fully apparent through her close reading of *Pierre Huyghe* (2013), the artist's mid-career retrospective at the Centre Pompidou in which discrete works—including video, performance, and participatory works—were exhibited in close proximity, thereby producing an organic, radically alive environment.

Maria-Christina Villaseñor's essay "Spectral Projections: Color, Race & Abstraction in the Moving Image" (chapter 13) looks through Paul Pfeiffer's *Home Movie / Four Locations for a Home Movie* (2012), Cory Arcangel's *Colors* (2006), Rico Gatson's *The Promise of Light* (2013), and Ariel Jackson's *Here's Hoping (AKA The Blues;* 2013) to form a theory of electronic color that illustrates the complex ways that media artists are using color as an abstract sign.

The Abstract, like the Beautiful and the Sublime, appears from out of nowhere, as if from a dream, formless and evasive, surprising and obscure. And yet we know it when we see it—sometimes geometric, other times symmetrical, and again, fluid, oozing. "Go With the (Unregulated) Flow: Fluidity, Abjection, and Abstraction" (chapter 14) is a conversation between writer Trinie Dalton and video artist Stanya Kahn. The piece is a lively, meandering discussion that leaves us with the notion that the abject is its own sort of abstraction and that fluidity has everything to do with narrativity.

The spiral, like the labyrinth, allows a retracing of past steps, a return from whence we came. Audiophile and artist Philip Brophy's "Sine Qua Son: Considering the Sine Wave in Video Art" (chapter 15) doubles back to listen closely to the sine wave tone—the tone by which millions of televisions in a bygone era bid generations good night. The "sign-off" often consisted of a high-pitched tone accompanied by video static or snow (the electronic abstract). The piece is a thoughtful meditation on a sound that is at once recognizable and abstract, a floating, dislocated signifier.

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The word *abstract* gets conjured up in regard to the word *idea,* as something existing in the ether—up there in the clouds, outside the airplane window; more and more, the invisible is expressed everywhere: networks and cloud computing, Facebook and Twitter, modes of communication made visible (which, these days, means "real") on screen. To examine the multivalent aesthetics of abstraction in contemporary video art

is to study artists' interpretations of the always, already digital now: the embodiment of systems—the visual representation of ideas. Why is it important to look at these images, these ideas? If, at this moment, we fail to thoroughly inspect the "abstract" in moving image artworks, we risk being swept away by the dumb stream of images that surrounds us. This collection establishes a critical dialogue regarding the complexity and richness of abstraction in video art and, at the same time, extends scholarship on abstract art.

The essays in *Abstract Video: The Moving Image in Contemporary Art* fill a gap, bring us up to speed, help us awake from the post–post-historical twilight of modernism to come fully into the brightness of the *video now,* to wade into the river of pixels with our eyes wide open, to see where abstraction can be found clinging to the banks, the roots on the shore, or letting go, diving in, understanding there is where we've been, this is where we are, attentive to where we are going. Abstraction defines our age, and the moving image artworks that capture instances, point them out, isolate them for a moment are essential to the thinking of this period; they say, "Look, I can be this, and this, and this. I am incessantly moving, changing, morphing. I am a shapeshifter, a seer, and I can escape the forest of signs."

NOTES

Epigraph: Kirk Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 43.

1. Varnedoe, *Pictures,* 1. "The main title of this year's [2003] Mellon Lectures, 'Pictures of Nothing,' is from an essay by William Hazlitt about one of his contemporaries, the early-nineteenth-century English painter J. M. W. Turner."

2. *Afrum-Proto* (1966) is a tungsten projection that forms the illusion of a cube of light in a corner, and *Wedgework* (1974) is a glowing rectangle of red light that, at first glance, resembles a projection but, upon further inspection, is revealed to be a rectangular hole in the wall with fluorescent tubes mounted inside.

3. Varnedoe, *Pictures,* 93. See also Frances Colpitt, "Between Two Worlds: John McCracken," *Art in America* 86, no. 4 (April 1998): 91.

4. Emily Roysdon, *"Ecstatic Resistance,"* in *Abstraction,* ed. Maria Lind, Documents of Contemporary Art (London: Whitechapel and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 222. Text from *Ecstatic Resistance,* typographic poster work (2009) reprinted in *Microhistorias y macromundos,* vol. 3, *Abstract Possible,* ed. Maria Lind (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2011), 178–84, www.tenstakonsthall.se/uploads/65-MicrohistoriasYMacromundos3MariaLinded.pdf.

5. Maria Lind, "Introduction," in *Abstraction,* 10.

6. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 7. Riffing off McLuhan's famous statement, in 1969, WGBH television invited six artists to work with television technicians for the creation of "The Medium is the Medium," one of the earliest examples of collaboration between public television and the emerging field of video art in the United States. The film is available from Electronic Arts Intermix, www.eai.org/title.htm?id = 1443.

7. Jannon Stein, "Abstract Films from the 1920s: Making Rhythm Visible," *The Getty Iris* (2011), http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/abstract-films-from-the-1920s-making-rhythm-visible/.

8. Michael Sanchez, "Painting and Screen Otherwise," *Whitney Biennial Catalogue,* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2014), 114. Sanchez was writing about Ken Okiishi's recorded paintings on flat screens.

9. For more, see Gregory Zinman's essay in this volume (chapter 7) as well as his excellent website *Handmade Cinema* (www.handmadecinema.com/), "a guide to the people, practices, and themes of artisanal moving image production."

10. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 83.

11. See Amy Cappellazzo, Adriano Pedrosa, and Peter Wollen, *Making Time: Considering Time as a Material in Contemporary Video and Film.* (Lake Worth, FL: Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, 2000); Sean Cubitt, "Vector, Space, and Time," in *Resolutions 3: Global Networks of Video,* ed. Ming-Yuen S. Ma and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 297; and Los Angeles Filmforum at MOCA screening *Time as Material* (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013).

12. Though the works of artist Simon Payne are not covered in this volume, it is worth mentioning the extraordinary screening series he curated for the Tate Britain: *Assembly: A Survey of Recent Artists' Film and Video in Britain 2008–2013,* November 23, 2013–March 15, 2014, www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/eventseries/assembly-survey-recent-artists -film-and-video-britain-2008–2013. See also the artist's website: www.simonrpayne.co.uk/.

13. Gabriel Coxhead, "Berlin: Carlier Gebauer: Paul Pfeiffer: *The Morning after the Deluge,*" *Contemporary* 60 (2003), www.contemporary-magazines.com/reviews60_3.htm.

14. Paul Pfeiffer, artist lecture (Graduate Seminar Lecture Series, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA, March 11, 2014).

15. Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty, 1970," *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings,* ed. Nancy Holt, (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 109–13. Virginia Dawn and Douglas Chrismas funded the film *Spiral Jetty.* Chrismas's gallery was also responsible for the Kosuth piece discussed by John C. Welchman in chapter 3 of this volume.

16. Bruce Hainley, "Erase and Rewind, Elaine Sturtevant," *frieze* 53 (June–August 2000): 84.

17. P. Adams Sitney. *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943–1978.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); John G. Hanhardt, "Film Image/Electronic Image: The Construction of Abstraction, 1960–1990," *Visible Language* 29.2 (May 1995): 138–59 (reprinted as chapter 2 in this volume); Sandro Droschl and Norbert Pfaffenbichler, eds., *Abstraction Now* (Graz: Edition Camera Austria, 2004); and numerous essays by Lev Manovich at http://manovich.net/, including "Abstraction and Complexity" (2004), http:// manovich.net/index.php/projects/abstraction-and-complexity, and "Data Visualization as New Abstraction and Anti-Sublime" (2002), http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/data -visualisation-as-new-abstraction-and-anti-sublime.

18. *"Dr. Who," Wikipedia,* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_Who, which cites David J. Howe, Mark Stammers, and Stephen James Walker, *The Television Companion: The Unofficial and Unauthorised Guide to Doctor Who,* 2nd ed. (Tolworth, Surrey: Telos, 2003).

19. *"Dr. Who:* Evolution of a Title Sequence," h2g2: *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy:* Earth Edition, created December 27, 2002, updated September 13, 2010, http://h2g2

.com/approved_entry/A907544. There is some controversy about who "discovered" the remarkable video effect, but it seems to be agreed that even though Bernard Lodge received the accolades for the *Dr. Who* title sequence, it was one of the engineers, Ben Palmer or Norman Taylor, who originally thought to point the television camera at the monitor, with Hugh Sheppard working the camera. Lutz Becker, e-mail message to author, November 22, 2013; Anthony Hayward, "Norman Taylor: Creator of the 'Howl-Around' Visual in the Original *Dr. Who* Title Sequence," Obituaries, *Independent,* March 10, 2011, www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/norman-taylor-creator-of-the-howlaround-visual-in-the-original-dr-who-title-sequence-2237431.html; and "Norman Taylor's Story of *Dr. Who,*" A Tech-Op's History, posted November 28, 2010, http://tech-ops.co.uk/next/2010/11/norman-taylors-story-of-dr-who/.

20. Lutz Becker, e-mail message to author, November 27, 2013.

21. Lutz Becker, "Lutz Becker: Electronically Generated Moving Pictures 1966 to 1969," unpublished manuscript, November 22, 2013.

22. The term *selfie* was Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year in 2013. "Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013" (press release), Oxford Dictionaries, November 19, 2013, http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/press-releases/oxford-dictionaries-word-of-the-year-2013/.

23. Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing,* 160.

24. Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* 1 (1976): 50–64.

25. Krauss, "Aesthetics of Narcissism," 50.

26. Krauss, "Aesthetics of Narcissism," 53.

27. For more on Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll,* see Siona Wilson's contribution to this volume (chapter 4).