Michael Fried and Beholding Video Art

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, I consider Michael Fried's recent contribution to the debate around the experience of video art, made in relation to the work of Douglas Gordon. Fried speculates that issues of antitheatricality may in fact be key to specifying the medium of video installation. While Fried's position offers a useful way of framing the relation with the beholder in video art, I question how theatricality is to be thus defined. Referencing the beholding of painting, I distinguish the implicit beholder from the literal spectator, and claim that the distinction has relevance for video art. However, we might welcome what seems to be an explicit acknowledgment from Fried that the position of the spectator is a contributory factor in what he terms empathic projection. I argue that video art, as a *spatial* practice, offers a distinct mode of reception by problematizing the position of the spectator in relation to two-dimensional figurative space to which she is excluded.

1.

The hybrid nature of much contemporary art practice poses particular difficulties in terms of characterizing the phenomenology of the experience of the artwork. This is particularly true of a type of work that despite its interdisciplinary nature has become a staple of gallery art, the video or film installation. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to visit any major contemporary art event without confronting such work. And yet there is little serious philosophical investigation as to how the experience of the moving image is altered by its migration to the space of the gallery. As an artist who makes sculptural installations incorporating video projection, this has

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been particularly disappointing. So the recent, and typically provocative, contribution to the subject by art historian and critic Michael Fried is most definitely welcome.

Of course, the challenges posed by interdisciplinary practices are hardly new. Indeed, it is now over forty years since Fried wrote his seminal (some would say 'infamous') 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood' (1998, pp. 148-172). Fried defined the so-called minimalist art he opposed by its ideological commitment to a hybrid practice that was neither sculpture nor painting. This was an art that Fried labelled *literalist*, in that unlike the self-sufficient art of high modernism, where internal relational properties effect a supposed indifference to both the presence of a beholder and the space of the gallery, minimalism was an art that specifically sought to address the subjective embodied experience of the spectator (1998, p. 149). Indeed, it is with the development of a 'situational' art in the 1960s that the literal presence of a beholder is theorized as both definitive of the new art *and* inherently problematic. Minimalist art opened up new possibilities for drawing a spectator into indeterminate experiences that now included the gallery space as spatial container. Fried's polemical essay unequivocally condemned minimalist artists' blurring of the boundary between painting and sculpture, their inclusion of 'real' objects, and their direct address to an 'audience', all of which threatened the autonomy of the art object.

Fried continues to maintain that the minimalist art he characterises as *literalist* 'is not an isolated episode but the expression of a general and persuasive condition' (1998, p. 149) – a condition of *theatricality* that Fried makes direct parallels to in his consideration of eighteenth-century French painting in his 1988 book *Absorption and Theatricality* (1988). Indeed, it is arguably only when set against such a context that Fried's designation of restrained minimalist works as 'theatrical' makes any sense. Fried shares the eighteenth-century philosopher and critic Denis Diderot's antagonism to the theatrical, proposing the Diderotian notion of an absorptive art, an antitheatrical art - such as that of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin - that presents 'the image's absorption in itself', oblivious to the presence of a beholder in front of the canvas (1988, p. 50).

By way of contrast, Fried writes disparagingly of the notion that with literalist art 'someone has merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one – al-

most as though the work in question has been waiting for him' (1998, p. 163). Rather, Fried champions the kind of antiliteral and antisituational sculpture of artists such as Anthony Caro that maintain an ontological distance, and cannot be entered. And of course Fried is right to register the engagement of a spectator as a defining feature of the new art he so opposed, to the extent that theoreticians potentially hostile to his position, such as Claire Bishop, can likewise claim that 'an insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art' (2005, p. 6). Fried thus, albeit from a highly critical perspective, anticipates the move to an art practice that privileges the experience of 'a *situation* – one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*' (Fried 1998, p. 153). This challenges modernist sculpture's self-containment by opening up a situation that includes the beholder's *body*, and threatens an autonomy conceived as both spatial and, importantly, temporal. As Rosalind Krauss (a key adversary) notes:

> With regard to sculpture, the point on which the distinction between itself and theater turns is, for Fried, the concept of time. It is an extended temporality, a merging of the temporal experience of sculpture with real time, that pushes the plastic arts into the modality of theater. While it is through the concepts of 'presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theater' [Fried 1998, p. 167]. (Krauss 1981, pp. 203-204)

Now this is familiar and well-rehearsed territory. Indeed, Fried himself claims that the battle he had fought for the autonomous work of art had been essentially lost: the insistent rise of postmodernist thought and situational art practices has been manifest in a shift away from painting and sculpture to installation and (of particular relevance here) video art. Nevertheless, Fried's recent writing on photography (2008a) and, of greater relevance to this paper, on video art, presents an intriguing new twist, in that he claims that these media once again raise a burning question for contemporary art around issues of theatricality and objecthood. Given Fried's known predilections, the recent attention that he has given to the gallery based video art of Douglas Gordon, an artist best known for his 1993 work *Twenty Four Hour Psycho*, is especially surprising. Fried's forthcoming book *Four Honest Outlaws* (2011) devotes an entire section to Gordon's work.

Fortunately, Fried's arguments have already been well rehearsed in a number of prominent lectures, one of which to which I will refer (2008b).

Given his commitment to the 'purity' of art mediums, Fried himself acknowledges the unexpectedness of this championing of the works of a video artist (2008b). It is especially unforeseen given Gordon's frequent use of found footage, a kind of cinematic readymade, and his employment of projection or projections that engage both the beholder's movement and the space of the gallery. Yet Fried uses Gordon's work to suggest that the ontological issues of absorption that came to the fore with the encounter between modernism and minimalism in the 1960s are once again at the top of some contemporary artists' agendas. In a deliberately 'provocative remark', Fried claims 'not only that Douglas Gordon, especially in works involving film, is a consistently antitheatrical artist', but that antitheatricality as defined by Fried 'may be the key of any attempt we wish to make to specify the medium of work like [Gordon's 2000 three-screen projection] *Déjà-vu*' (2008b). I will go on to evaluate such a claim. But first, I address some more fundamental disagreements with Fried on how theatricality might be defined.

2.

Fried states that his opponents have not contended the claim that literalist art is theatrical; rather, they have attempted to reverse his negative assessment of theatricality itself (1998, p. 52). This is only partially true. While the situated nature of such art and the involvement of the literal spectator *are* by and large uncontested, its designation as theatrical has certainly been questioned. I would like to propose that not all works seeking to engage a spectator are necessarily 'playing to an audience', and thereby, by definition, theatrical.

I contend that a theatrical relation, in the specific sense used by Fried, should be one that not only feels 'staged' for an audience, but disregards the ontological divide between the fictive and real - to flout an intrinsic metaphysical separation that is both spatial and temporal. I limit myself to four consequences that follow such a claim:

(i) The minimalist insistence on non-referential real space and real time

may challenge the autonomous status of the work of art, but it does not bridge any metaphysical divide. This is why Donald Judd labels his work *specific objects*, insisting upon their non-referential status as things in the real world. Works by Judd, Carl Andre and Dan Flavin thus evade issues of theatricality/ antitheatricality in that they do not propose a self-contained virtual space separated from the space of their architecture context. Many contemporary art installations, by contrast, might justifiably be termed theatrical, in that we enter into a parallel self-enclosed world by our physical participation: we might think of works by Mike Nelson or Ilya Kabakov (see Bishop 2005).

(ii) Works that invite an identification with an *imagined* presence within the self-enclosed virtual space of the artwork cannot be construed as theatrical. As Richard Wollheim notes in *Painting as an Art*, Fried fails to distinguish between *internal* and *external* spectators (1987, p. 365). Wollheim distinguishes the spectator *in* the painting from the spectator *of* the painting: the former occupies an implied extension of the virtual space of the painting, whereas the latter occupies the space of the gallery or room in which a work is placed (1987, ch. III). Wollheim argues that a limited category of aesthetically significant paintings afford a 'distinctive access' to the content of the picture through an imaginative identification with the implied but unrepresented spectator (p. 129). In identifying with this internal spectator, the beholder imagines the depicted scene through the eyes of the adopted protagonist from a viewpoint which is *internal* to the virtual space of the painting, and hence such works pose no ontological anomaly.

(iii) The distinction between internal and external spectators is worth pursuing further in that it helps clarify the nature of the beholder excluded by so-called absorptive strategies. This might be illustrated by comparing works by Johannes Vermeer with one of his contemporaries, Nicolaes Maes. Maes's *The Eavesdropper* (1655) [FIGURE 1], part of the Collection of Harold Samuel, is a painting where the maid's gesture directly addresses the external viewer *as* audience, the equivalent of a theatrical aside. The art historian Louis Marin would refer to the maid as a 'figure of the frame', an internal figure aligned with the work's boundary whose role is to in-

vite comment upon the anecdotal content (1995, pp. 83-84). To adopt Wolfgang Kemp's terminology, the gesture forms part of the work's 'outer' rather than 'inner' apparatus, in that it is there to be interpreted by the spectator *of* the picture, the viewer standing before the work (1998, p. 191). We experience the maid's gesture from outside of the world the painting presents, as an audience external to the fiction. The *trompe l'oeil* curtain encourages and delimits our participation; it entices us to draw it open while detaching us from the fictional space. The work thus foregrounds its own fictional structure in a way that is genuinely theatrical, though one might also say that the problematizing of the spectator position in a sense becomes its content.

FIGURE 1. Nicolaes Maes: *The Eavesdropper* (1665), Collection of Harold Samuel, London.

This theatrical tradition is not entirely absent from Vermeer's *oeuvre*. In the early work *The Procuress* (1656), the figure on the left similarly invites the viewer to comment on rather than participate in the scene. Our externality is insisted upon by the objects piled up against the picture plane, an equivalent device to Maes's protective curtain. A profound shift seems to have taken place with *Woman Interrupted at her Music* (c. 1660-61) [FIGURE

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2]. The much tighter framing of the image and greater intimacy suggests an interruption that is now entirely internal to the scene, an intrusion within the inner logic of the work's narrative. The implicit spectator the woman addresses now inhabits the space of the representation as a familiar presence that no longer transgresses the metaphysical divide between fictive and real.

FIGURE 2. Johannes Vermeer: *A Girl Interrupted at Her Music*
(c.1660-61), The Frick Collection, New York.

Around this time, in works that Fried rightly designates as absorptive, Vermeer starts to use a natural pause in the action to suggest the obliviousness of the depicted figure to anything other than the object of their internal absorption. We might think of works such as *A Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* (c. 1662-64), or *A Woman Holding a Balance* (c. 1662-64). I would like to suggest, however, that the beholder excluded is not the spectator *of* the picture, but Vermeer's new conception of the spectator *in* the picture

– the implied beholder of a work such as *A Lady Writing a Letter* (c. 1665-66) [FIGURE 3]. This meditation on distance is reinforced by an intriguing pictorial strategy that registers the artist's detachment while effectively excluding the viewer. In an astute observation, Lawrence Gowing notes:

> In only three of the twenty-six interiors that we have is the space between painter and sitter at all uninterrupted. In five of the others passage is considerably encumbered, in eight more the heavy objects interposed amount to something like a barrier and in the remaining ten they are veritable fortifications. It is hard to think that this preference tells us nothing about the painter's nature. In it the whole of his dilemma is conveyed. (1997, p. 34)

FIGURE 3. Johannes Vermeer: *A Lady Writing a Letter* (c. 1665-66), National Gallery of Art, Washington.

We have already noted the 'fortification' presented by *The Procuress*, which despite (or, perhaps, because of) its evident theatricality seeks to limit our participation. But there is a decisive shift from the insistently 'staged' frontality of barriers used in early works such as *The Procuress*, *A Girl Asleep* (c. 1657) and *A Lady Reading at the Window* (c. 1657-59) (the latter which employs a *trompe-l'oeil* curtain), where the presence held back is still external, to the integration of furniture and objects as barriers in works such as *Woman with a Lute* (c. 1662-64) or *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* (c. 1664) [FIGURE 4] in a way that now feels entirely natural relative to a point of view internal to the scene. This arguably suggests that the beholder so persistently excluded in such absorptive works is not, as Gowing assumes, the painter, nor, indeed, Fried's antitheatrical notion of the spectator standing *before* the painting. Rather, Vermeer constructs barriers to a presence now potentially internal to the scene.

FIGURE 4. Johannes Vermeer: *A Woman with a Pearl Necklace* (c. 1664), Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.
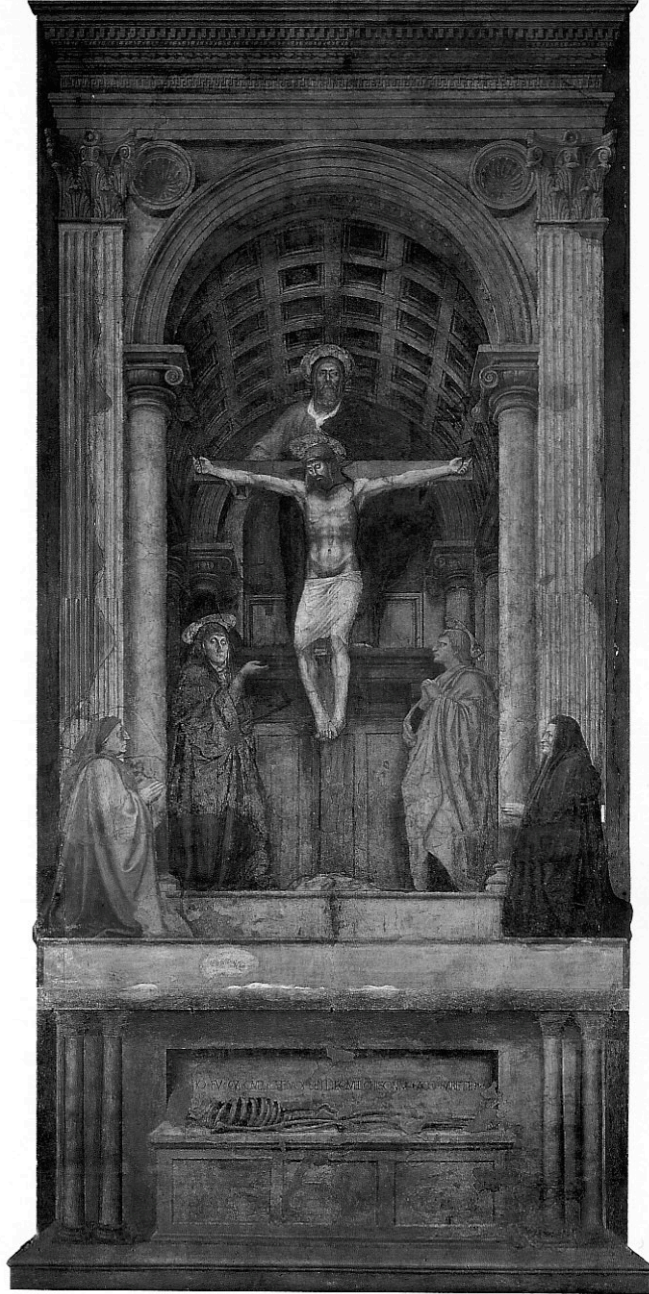
Figure 5. Masaccio: *Trinity* (c. 1425-27),
Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

(iv) There are works that structure the presence of a beholder standing before them that nevertheless might still be described as absorptive. Fried's one-sided position negates what Sven Sandström refers to as the use of differentiated levels of unreality (1963). If paintings implying an internal spectator invite reciprocity but resist theatricality, through an imaginative identification with a spectator internal to the figurative space of the painting, there are also situated works where the virtual space might be said to encompass something of the real space of the beholder. Such works, in Fried's terms, theatricalize the encounter but then resist theatricality by placing strict limits on the degree of participation, crucially allying these limits to the work's religious content. With a work such as Masaccio's *Trinity* [FIGURE 5], fully integrated into its architectural setting, the beholder enters only that part of the fictive world depicted as being *in front of* the picture surface, the work thus drawing the 'real' space of the spectator into its domain. Masaccio differentiates between painted realities in a way that accentuates the work's religious content. The intersection is conceived as a threshold between two coexistent realities, the spatiotemporal reality of the spectator (which shares aspects of the painted 'reality'), and that of the religious representation, the spiritual realm, lying 'behind' the physical reality of the wall's surface. The very inaccessibility of the fictive chapel ensures that care is taken, as Sandström notes, 'to put a brake on the observer's illusion of being present'; Masaccio ensures that 'the gradation of reality is made in accordance with the logic of the picture's content' (1963, p. 30). And while Mary engages the viewer with a gesture of the hand that invites us to reflect upon the Trinity, she is presented as completely absorbed in her own thoughts – an absorption we are invited to share.

3.

I now return to the issue of video art, and specifically its relation to notions of theatricality. I propose to take seriously Fried's claim that antitheatricality may be the key to any attempt to specify the medium. I start with a point of agreement. Fried has consistently maintained that cinema evades theatricality through the viewer's engrossment in its narrative. The action is often so vivid that the viewer becomes oblivious to the configurational

aspects of the film's construction, such as the film set and props, the operation of the camera and lights, and the acting. While we certainly *can* attend to these aspects (and with 'art' films frequently do), we often lose ourselves in the story told. What Fried stresses is that figural presences on screen, inhabiting a self-enclosed world, remain oblivious to the existence of the audience.

Now many narrative based contemporary moving image installations, whether they use video or film, likewise evade the issue of theatricality by replicating the cinematic experience. While the screen image might have shifted from the cinema to the space of the gallery, the content of the projected image is experienced in an essentially cinematic way, in a 'black-box' environment reminiscent of Fried's 'self-forgetting darkness of the cinema' (2008b). Galleries now provide seating for films that have a defined beginning and end. But what happens when the beholder is free to move around, and the image looped?

It has become almost obligatory to distinguish video art from cinema by its more participatory experience. John Ravenal, for instance, argues:

> Many video installations … draw attention to the viewer as being external to the imagery, thereby raising issues of perception, observation, and spectatorship. Unlike film's stationary audience, viewers of projected video installations are often active participants who move through the surrounding space. The heightened awareness of the conditions of spectatorship often becomes, in some ways, the subject of the work. (2002, p. 2)

Now the viewer of cinema is also external to the imagery – she is not so much transported into its fictional realm, as absorbed by its narrative. Indeed, there is much confusion about the illusory nature of film. I agree with Robert Hopkins that the illusionistic nature of cinema is at the level of its theatrical presentation (the term 'theatrical' used somewhat differently to Fried's use), not its photographic presentation – what Hopkins refers to as 'collapsed seeing-in', where through the subject's engrossment in the narrative she no longer attends to the film's configurational properties (2008, pp. 149-159). The illusion is one where in experiencing cinematic events she forgets that she is watching actors on a carefully lit and framed set, not an illusion that she is witnessing such events face-to-face.

Ravenal, nevertheless, is right to suggest that at least with some video art the heightened awareness of the conditions of spectatorship becomes part of the work's content, and this might be seen as a defining feature of the experience of non-cinematic video art. But the interesting question is to what effect? What is gained by this foregrounding of the conditions of spectatorship? And here Fried makes a particularly welcome intervention into the debate around video art. In a lecture given at the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in May 2008 (2008b), he discusses Douglas Gordon's installation *Déjà-vu* (2000), which comprises a three-screen projection of Rudolf Mate's 1949-50 film *Dead On Arrival*. Three adjacent digital projections are set at slightly different speeds of twenty three, twenty four and twenty five frames a second, a minor change that results in unexpected juxtapositions of scenes from the film. Fried claims that *Déjà-vu* 'opaques' the movie. Frustrated by our inability to get a hold of the narrative, we shift from projection to projection, examining them in close up as we physically approach the large screens. The experience 'takes place almost entirely in the realm of the real world, and of one's actual circumstances, standing in a gallery or museum exhibition' (2008b). In other words, expelled from the narrative, we start to experience a heightened awareness of the configurational aspects of the film. Fried states:

> And now something extraordinary happens. Instead of feeling simply shut out, or, indeed, alienated from the content of the projections, the viewer discovers another source or basis of interest, and even of involvement – namely the exemplary absorption [of the actors] in the performance of their roles. That is, being distanced from the narrative and being denied the kind of involvement with the characters on which movies are predicated, the viewer nevertheless becomes first aware of, and then interested in, and then ... fascinated by the projections' presentation of especially the leading actors' commitment to [their] professional task. (2008b)

Fried claims that *Twenty Four Hour Psycho* [FIGURE 6] might likewise be said to 'anatomize' film acting. In this work Gordon stretches the running length of Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho* to twenty four hours, projected onto a single screen which might be approached from both sides.

Twenty Four Hour Psycho again frustrates our attempts to engage the narrative, insistently refocusing our attention onto the film's configurational presentation. Fried notes that here 'the import of the extreme slow motion is precisely to show the mutual interpenetration of, and therefore the impossibility of distinguishing between, the natural behaviour of the actors, including breathing, blinking and other autonomisms, and their professional behaviour as actors committed to a role' (2008b).

FIGURE 6. Douglas Gordon: *Twenty Four Hour Psycho* (1993).

So Fried also seems to be suggesting that one way by which the experience of video installation might be said to differ from cinema is this foregrounding of the configurational properties of film: rebuffing the illusory pull of its narrative representation, the pull by which Fried claims cinema escapes theatricality. While this might be said to heighten the conditions of spectatorship, at least with Gordon's work this is not an end in itself. Fried intriguing states 'I think of that opaquing as a kind of theatricalizing of the movie itself, a theatricalizing that is then precisely defeated or overcome, to use the language of "Art and Objecthood", by the reorientation of the viewer's attention' (2008b). In other words, it is the literal presence of the spectator, her freedom to physically wander through the gallery in real time and space (the experience which characterises so-called literalist art), attending to the projection(s) but *distanced* from the narrative, which

facilitates this intense engagement with how the film is constructed, an engagement that runs counter to the so-called transparency of the medium. It allows us to experience a very particular sense of the image's absorption in itself, via our involvement with the actors' absorption in their roles.

Fried is certainly not the only theorist to introduce the notion of video art 'opaquing' film, but what distinguishes his position is the aligning of this opaquing to antitheatrical or absorptive ends. With Gordon, he claims that distancing devices that draw attention to the situated positioning of the viewer within the gallery paradoxically refocus attention onto one aspect of the foregrounding of a film's configurational presentation, namely the acting (an aspect which forms part of what Hopkins terms the film's theatrical presentation). But is this compensatory involvement with the actors' absorption in their tasks the only gain of a foregrounding of the conditions of spectatorship?

FIGURE 7. Anthony McCall: *Line Describing a Cone* (1973).

There is a long tradition of so-called expanded cinematic practices that oppose narrative content and, importantly, the immersive pull of cinematic spectacle within a gallery context: the kind of spectacle typically offered by some of Bill Viola's recent work, where the viewer is immersed in enveloping spectacles of sight and sound. This other tradition also sets out

to heighten the conditions of spectatorship, but in order to expose the 'illusory' and 'ideological' construction of the image *as* spectacle (though we should here refer back to misunderstandings as to the illusory nature of film). Though we might question some of the underlying Debordian assumptions, what is indisputable is that such practices foreground the very apparatus that many contemporary digital video installations now seek to hide: drawing our attention to the mechanisms of projection, the configurational properties of the *photographic* rather than *theatrical* presentation. Here, far from overcoming the 'theatricalizing' of the image (leaving aside any reservations about the applicability of Fried's term), like minimalist art these works insist on a non-referential and material film practice. One might think of the 'light sculptures' of Anthony McCall [FIGURE 7], which go as far as to deny any implied filmic space, shifting attention to the cone of light so reminiscent of smoky cinemas. Like minimalist sculpture, these 'films' are manifest only in real time and real space. Other film and video artists highlight configurational properties by means such as exploiting the sculptural properties of monitors, the technical limitations of the media, or emphasising the materiality of the film strip or individual frames.

FIGURE 8. Dan Graham: *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974).

Video technology's facility for instant or time delayed playback can also be used to literally draw the viewer's presence into the work's content (in what is often referred to as reflexive work, where self-referential content is drawn from the situated context of the work's showing). Dan Graham, for instance, uses mirrors and video to create a dialogic, reciprocal situation, where the viewer interacts with both themselves and others. In *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974) [FIGURE 8], a time delay of 8 seconds between a wall-mounted camera and monitor means that a viewer sees herself in the monitor as she appeared 8 seconds earlier, plus a reflection, in the rear mirror, of the monitor recording her a further 8 seconds back in time: a reflective sequence which regresses backwards in time. Dan Graham conceptualizes the viewer's position here in a way that problematizes the relation between implied and literal spectatorship by overlaying levels of reality mediated by technology. But he also reveals the means by which he constructs this relation.

The revealing of the configurational properties of film in moving image installations might thus be said to structure a mode of reception distinct from film, but in a wider sense than Fried's specific focus on antitheatricality. One might claim that this heightens what Ravenal refers to as the conditions of spectatorship, *structuring a particular tension between theatricality and antitheatricality*, immersion and distance. Thus conceived, this tension is not, as Fried suggests, one between opposing 'traditions', but might be thought to be at play within the work of individual artists (one might think here of Vermeer), and even individual works of art. It might certainly facilitate the kind of compensatory absorption to which Fried refers, but it might equally facilitate the kind of intrusion of the real to which Fried has always so pointedly objected, drawing attention to a complex overlaying of reality/unreality that draws upon a situated positioning of the spectator. And this tension is, I believe, essential to Gordon's work, where the 'real' continually intrudes to disrupt our absorption with the screen image.

(Of course, video art is also supremely able to construct theatrical relations with its audience precisely because of its spatial presentation of the animated figure. We might think of the unashamedly theatrical work of the video artist Tony Oursler, who 'animates' sculptural objects through projection, or projects spectral presences onto smoke, referencing the

phantasmagoric potential of pre-cinema. Vito Acconci's notorious one-to-one confrontations with the filmed artist, his head tightly framed by a video monitor, might also be construed as theatrical, in that they exploit an ontological divide.)

FIGURE 9. Douglas Gordon: *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003).

We can go somewhat further, however. In relation to Gordon's 2003 installation *Play Dead; Real Time* [FIGURE 9], where on two large screens and a monitor cropped images are presented of an elephant that continually falls, and then struggles to get up again, Fried claims that such a work 'lays bare, makes available to our attention, the empathic projective mechanism that lies at the heart of our response to often minimally demonstrative motifs' (2008b). Fried suggests that in projective art there is a fitting connection between empathic projection and the technological, where 'the two modes of projection meet and mingle on screen' (2008b). Crucially, this is dependent upon the kind of situated encounter Fried, in earlier writings, had seemed to have been at pains to deny – what Thomas Puttfarken terms a figural presence (2000). What video art seems especially capable of doing is structuring something modernist painting and sculpture seemed to

preclude, an encounter with a figural presence that problematizes the beholder position relative to the virtual space of the artwork. Whether such relations are construed as theatrical or antitheatrical, they are likewise dependent upon the fact that video art, as a hybrid form, is able to construct a particular tension between the virtual and the real. I would go as far as to suggest that any ensuing empathic projection is in fact dependent upon an artist exploiting ambiguities of 'where' this figural presence is relative to the beholder – a beholder who is both an implicit presence *and* external to the image.

FIGURE 10. Ken Wilder: *Plenum #2* (2004).

My own work specifically sets out to explore such ambiguities of location through the possibility of embedding within the sculptural object something that sculptural experience specifically lacks, a distinct perspective or point of view. I attempt to construct a complex relation between the external spectator and a notional implicit beholder, anticipated by the work. Installations such as the series entitled *Plenum* (2004-) [FIGURE 10], where a life-sized breathing figure periodically occupies an otherwise empty niche, specifically set out to structure a problematic figurative presence that invites empathic projection. *Chamber* (2005) [FIGURE 11] dupli-

cates implicit and actual viewpoints the spectator is forced by the structure to adopt, the film image reflected in the water filled room beyond suggesting a secondary vanishing point that continues the descent of the stair.

FIGURE 11. Ken Wilder: *Chamber* (2005).

Intersection (2006) [FIGURE 12] is a work that overlays video footage of a framed metal object (a raised corridor through which a woman occasionally walks) onto the object itself. This duplication structures different levels of reality by integrating the frame into both the work's inner and outer reality. The work structures two 'ideal' viewpoints, suspended in space, from which projected reality and physical object coincide. Of course, it is unlikely that the beholder adopts either position, so the viewer struggles to relate the seemingly distorted virtual space of the film to the actual space of the object. The installation thus juxtaposes situational concerns that activate the beholder's space with explicit references to perspectival painting, where the relation to the virtual is problematized and the viewer externalized. It is this potential not only for problematizing the spectator position, but intimating proximity and distance, presence and absence, which might perhaps define a distinct mode of reception for such video art.

FIGURE 12. Ken Wilder: *Intersection* (2006).

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