

THE FOLLOWING FOUR TEXTS WERE PRESENTED AT ARTISTS WEEK, 2006 ADELAIDE BANK FESTIVAL OF ARTS. ARTISTS WEEK WAS CONCEIVED BY JULIANNE PIERCE, VISUAL ARTS CO-ORDINATOR AND CURATOR, TO RESPOND TO THE “FORWARD-LOOKING” THEMES ENCOMPASSED BY THE ADELAIDE FESTIVAL. CHRIS KRAUS AND NIKOS PAPASTERGIADIS WERE KEYNOTE SPEAKERS, 6 MARCH AND 7 MARCH RESPECTIVELY; REX BUTLER PARTICIPATED IN THE ‘MODERNISM REVISITED’ FORUM, 5 MARCH, (HIS ‘SPOKEN TONE’ IS RETAINED) AND ASTRID MANIA, THE ‘INDELIBLE VIDEO’ FORUM, 6 MARCH; ALL WERE HELD AT THE ELDER HALL, UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE.

# Indelible Video

## CHRIS KRAUS

The complete ubiquity of video—and other digital forms—within contemporary art has rendered discussion about it, as a medium, obsolete. There is no longer anything singular about video. Images are everywhere. To attempt any one definition of video would be as meaningless as asking ‘what is contemporary art?’ All art now is conceptual, defined by its stance in relation to other art and its place in the market. It would be more fruitful and interesting at this point to ask how can an image transcend other images, how can the market be used to do what art used to do?

Baudrillard speaks of the ‘transaesthetic’, the mechanism through which contemporary art raises everything to aesthetic banality. What, he asks, could art possibly mean in a world that has already become hyperrealist, cool, transparent, marketable?<sup>1</sup> The depressed anti-hero of Eldon Garnet’s satirical novel *Reading Brooke Shields* gets picked up by Lisa and Bob, two earnest Canadian swingers. Once inside the apartment, he’s shown a seat on the couch. Bob grabs the remote and turns on the couple’s widescreen TV. On the screen, a blond woman is sucking a penis. Moaning. Lisa is leaning back against the screen, crackling electric static, wrapping her body up against it. Moaning. Is there no escape from the image?<sup>2</sup>

Video—moving digital images—now comprises a part of most art installations, although equally and increasingly the artist’s videotape, sold to collectors in limited editions that render modernist questions of authenticity completely banal, have become stand-alone works. The art world is now the venue for works that, two decades ago, would have screened as ‘experimental cinema.’ The flat monotony of Andrea Fraser’s *Untitled* is viewed on a monitor set into the wall of a gallery, but its polemic-durational quality has much in common with films made by Guy Debord and Chantal Ackerman. Andrea Bowers spends months taping interviews with veteran activists from Greenham Common, but the finished work, a documentary film, really is shown as an art piece—a slight shifting of emphasis. There is no longer an audience, no system in place, for non-narrative film, but its affects have migrated into the art world. Consequently, the film becomes less an autonomous act—a thing hurled into the culture—and more like an artefact, a branded product, viewed through the career of the artist.

The New York artists’ collective, The Bernadette Corporation, found this to be true when they produced *Get Rid Of Yourself* two years ago. The tape is a feature-length, neo-Godardian interventionist work about the Genoa anti-globalist riots. In it, high fashion images are cut against hand-held street footage of anarchist youths smashing ATMs and looting supermarkets. In the twentieth-century cinematic tradition, *Get Rid Of Yourself* provides a startling snapshot of somebody’s present. Still, its makers soon discovered their movie was completely unshowable outside the art world. There is no longer a first-degree context for activist film. A film like *Get Rid Of Yourself* can only truly be viewed when recontextualised as a conceptual art work, a part of Bernadette’s overall project performed in the shadow of Situationist art.

This is very complex, but in a good way. With conceptual art, there’s always a bottom; or, if we think hard enough, the concept always loops back to its origins after moving through multiple tropes, like an old-fashioned, well-crafted story. Immobilised as we are, it is more pleasurable to think along these lines than to ponder the workings of the World Trade Organisation.

Outside on the South Loop Chicago street where I live, students flip open their cellphones and gaze at the tiny rectangular screens as if they were oracles. Cellphones are the most brilliant invention. Youth culture is seized and sold back to itself; you can talk to your friends. Urban youth can no longer expect to have their own rooms, let alone their own apartments, but you can carry your personal space in the palm of your hand. Since The Bernadette Corporation formed in the late 1990s to investigate forms of blankness, and adopted their name as a fuck-you to contemporary art’s star-system of branding, the film’s inevitably ironic cast wasn’t lost on them.

The video frame is not a rectangle, the godfather of structuralist film Hollis Frampton observed less than one decade after Nam June Paik first picked up a Sony video Porta-Pak. It is a degenerate amoeboid shape passing for a rectangle to accommodate late night TV’s cheap programming.<sup>3</sup> Film, Frampton believed, looks at itself—the frame’s radiant rectangle asserts its perimeter. The rectangular edge of the frame marks the boundary between the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, what is present and what is completely elsewhere. Looking into the degenerate amoeboid box of the



video monitor, Frampton saw “a mandala of feedback.” Feedback feeding back on itself... five hundred and twenty-five lines of pixels thrusting and closing. He was the first person to look at video’s electronic surface and see a covert circularity, a fabulous orgy of onanism between image and mind. It was a romance, Frampton feared, doomed to end badly—the mandala turns into a navel, a sucking and spitting vortex into which the whole household is drawn.<sup>4</sup>

The same year that Frampton published these observations, Nancy Holt and Richard Serra acted them out in their ten minute videotape, *Boomerang*. In this tape, Serra records Holt in a tight close-up, wearing a headset. She’s asked to speak, continue to speak, while her own voice feeds back at a fractional second delay through the headset. She struggles against her own voice and loses her place.

In her 1976 essay *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism*, Rosalind Krauss describes the terror of this:

*The prison Holt both describes and enacts, from which there is no escape, could be called the prison of a collapsed present, that is, a present time that is completely severed from a sense of its own past. We get some feeling for what it is like to be stuck in that present when Holt at one point says, “I’m throwing things out in the world and they are boomeranging back... boomeranging... Eranging... anging.” Through that distracted reverberation of a single world—and even word fragment—there forms an image of what it is like to be totally cut off from history, even, in this case, the immediate history of the sentence one has just spoken. Another word for that history from which Holt feels herself to be disconnected is text.*<sup>5</sup>

Video enacts a collapsed and continuous present, a perpetual motion of things feeding back on themselves—to be smothered by one’s own image. Krauss watches Vito Acconci’s *Air Time* and sees the artist skewered on his own image. She likens this state to that of Lacan’s *analysand*, forced to speak into a vacuum of silence until his most heartfelt confessions become no more than air, until all sense of him ‘self’ is thrown into question. For both Frampton and Krauss, the loss of ‘self’ and of ‘history’ was a thing to be feared.

This grim totalitarian prison of self was a far cry from Nam June Paik's delirious vision of a future (our present) when the "TV Guide will be as thick as the Manhattan phone book." (*Global Groove*, 1973) Nam June Paik, an early member of Fluxus, saw the "mandala of feedback" as a gateway to ecstasy:

*My TV is NOT the expression of my personality,  
but merely PHYSICAL MUSIC, he wrote in 1963.  
My TV is more than the art and less than the art.  
I can compose something which lies higher than...  
or lower than... my personality.*<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps video is not very different from any other art object—perceptual historiography. The object alone doesn't move us, what matters is what we project onto it. Like the Talmud, all the action lies in the analysis and counter-analysis. But this, too, is old news. Sitting out World War I at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Hugo Ball, a founder of dada, read Kant and looked at a shoe polish can and threw up his hands in horror. "Today I saw a shoe polish with the inscription, 'The Thing In Itself.' Why has metaphysics lost so much respect? The citizen nowadays is a commodity, too. For the State."<sup>7</sup>

I live on the twenty-eighth floor of a building that's managed by Wackenhut Prisons. The guards down in the lobby—tough, middle-aged black women—wear the tight navy blue trousers and shirts of police officers. Each guard wears a shiny aluminum badge with the company logo, a triangular hut, shaped like the dollar-bill pyramid, over the left breast pocket. Wacken-hut. Whacking off in the hut? There's a cheap calendar hung up over the guard desk with an American flag superimposed over dreamy American grain fields.

Founded by former FBI operative George Wackenhut, the company pioneered outsourced surveillance and terror. During the 1960s, they gathered files on four million American suspected dissidents and went on to open privatised prisons all over the world and six immigrant detention camps in Australia.<sup>8</sup> In the early 1980s, Wackenhut entered into a partnership with the Cabazon Indians to build a munitions factory on sovereign Indian land. This factory supplied covert shipments of weapons to the Middle East and Nicaragua.<sup>9</sup> In Texas, Wackenhut prisoners build Microsoft circuit-boards for \$1.25 an hour.<sup>10</sup> Intensely supervised and centrally located, Wackenhut prisons compete well with outsourced assembly in the global south. Since 1999, the company has appeared in the USA Federal court sixty-two times on human rights charges lodged by present and former prisoners.<sup>11</sup> I'm not in prison, but in the faculty apartment of a Chicago art institution. When I remark on the Wackenhut presence I'm told: "Oh, but these guards have different training."

In 1965, Nam June Paik pointed a new Sony Porta-Pak outside a New York taxicab window. He was the first person to purchase and use this equipment, which had just been launched in the USA for the consumer market. Suddenly everyone could make movies and within a few years thousands of hours of tape had been shot by new documentarians. The equipment was awkward and heavy, but the process was instant. Because of the extremely difficulty of editing half-open reel tape, most of these works were composed by stopping and starting the camera. Video collectives like Raindance, TVTV and Videofreex produced alternative news shows, street tapes, tapes about childbirth, alternative soap operas like *The Continuing Story of Carol and Ferd*, about the marriage between a porn star and a bisexual junkie.<sup>12</sup>

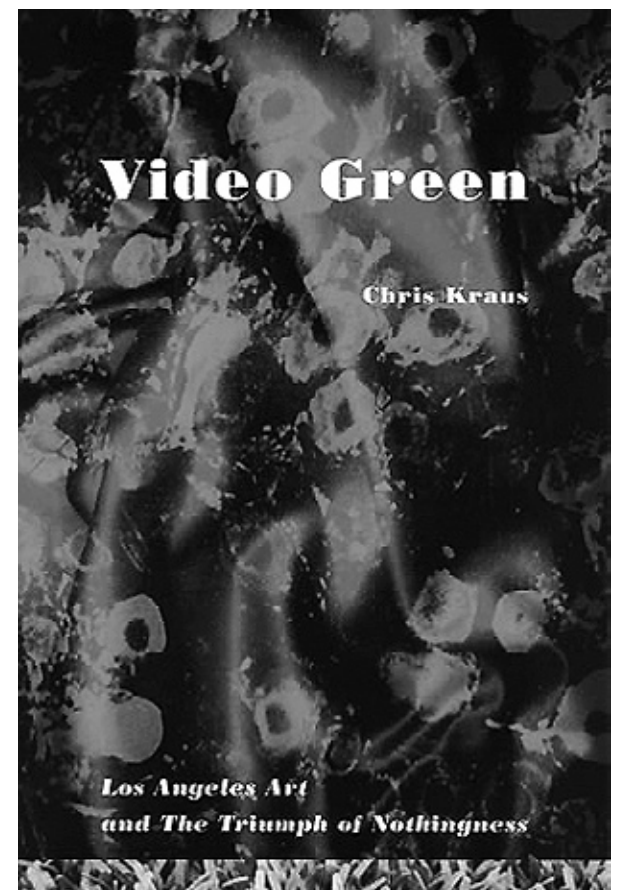
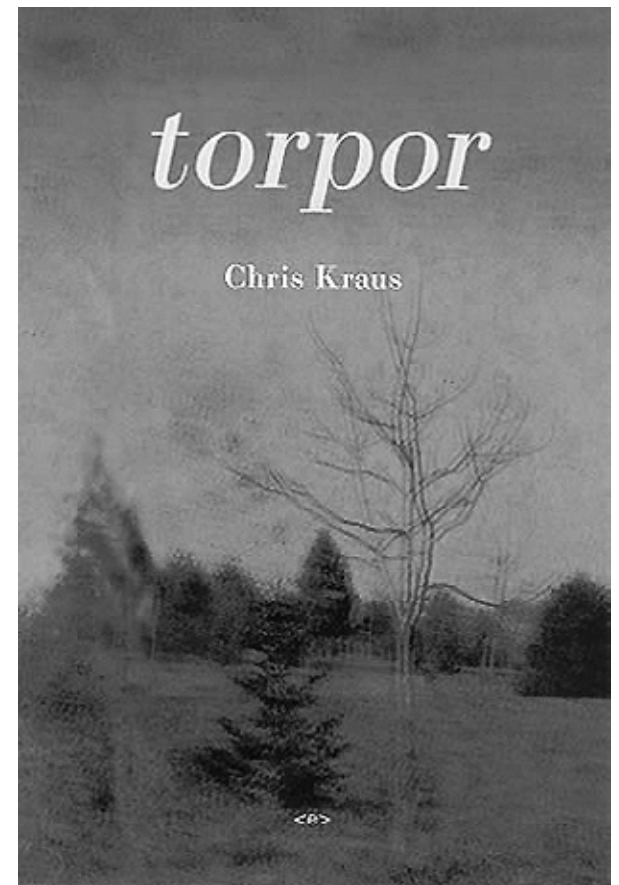
The aesthetic was process, and for a short time many people truly believed that this new technology would transform media culture into an open, interactive democracy. Alternative media access systems were being proposed via the proliferation of channels on cable. What happened was history, a history to be repeated in similar words during the early days of the internet, but public access TV (finally put out of its misery by Reagan's deregulation of cable) died a slow death because, given the choice between it and CNN, HBO, MTV, no one wanted to watch it. What happened instead was that the visual style pioneered by these early collectives—jumpcuts, hand-held vérité, reality shows—migrated to mainstream TV along with some of its makers.<sup>13</sup> The credits of *Confrontation*, an early HBO reality-show, in which crime victims confronted their jailed assailants, read like a Who's Who of Global Village and Film/Video Workshop, two long defunct early non-profits.<sup>14</sup>

I recently re-watched Chris Burden's 1971 videotape, *Shoot*. What makes the work thrilling four decades later is not the smeary black and white lines of the video, or the act itself, but the wilfulness with which it is executed—the friend's words, "Are you ready?"—just barely audible—Burden's tense, "Yes go ahead"—the way his body freezes just before impact. The fractional second before the bullet grazes his arm holds all the drama.

I travelled in January to Puerto Angel, a small Oaxacan beach town that was the scene of my friend, the late David Rattray's story, *The Angel*. David and his best friend, Van Buskirk, went there in 1961. They were both twenty-five, Van was dying of a rare strain of leukemia. Their general plan was to live there and write books. Forty-five years ago, Puerto Angel might as well have been on the moon. Power lines weren't run out to these towns until the late 1970s. Puerto Angel got its first payphone two years ago and this phone is shared by four coastal pueblos. In his story, David recalls the flickering light of a kerosene lamp at a beach-side café. He imagines himself engraved in a pictorial magazine feature, circa the 1870s. Déjà vu of another century. "As I pause from writing," David notes, "I can look straight up into the Milky Way. When I climb into the hammock, my feet will point west, towards the Pacific. Van says poetic license is the freedom to do exactly what you feel like doing from one minute to the next."<sup>15</sup> Time still moves at a different rate in southern Mexico. There are internet cafes and hotels, but the houses behind the main street are still made of palm leaves and wattle. Staying fifteen miles north in Mazunte, it took over an hour to reach the payphone in Puerto Angel. First you flag down a taxi truck into the next town, Zippolite; then you wait for for the colectivo taxi that won't start its run with less than five passengers.

Two hours inland outside the village of Santa Maria, an American botanist who's building a field research station in the jungle, tells me the workers he hired spend forty-five minutes to straighten a single bent nail. Living without running water in wattle huts and working for \$10 a day, they have all the time in the world. Nails are a rarity.

"The only wars now are not of space, but of time," says the philosopher of speed, Paul Virilio. Last year, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation allocated \$35 million—money accrued, in some small way, through the labor of Wackenhut prisoners—to purchase mosquito bed nets for eighty percent of the people of Zambia. Although bed nets have long been acknowledged to be the single most effective means of preventing malaria, no one, until now, has addressed the spread of this



Opposite page: Chris Kraus  
Above: book covers *Torpor* (2006) and *Video Green: Los Angeles Art and the Triumph of Nothingness* (2004)

disease so directly. Simply give nets away. With this and a half dozen other programs, the Gates Foundation has become the single largest provider of African aid in the world. It's a strangely utopian image, this transfer of capital, ie., of energy, across the matrix. Stranger still that these funds are derived from the sale of computers, the single most powerful agent in the collapse of space/time at the end of the twentieth-century. Technology changes the world, and for the better. Technology changes the world into the matrix.

Some of us—mostly those born in 1966 or before—who work in the conceptual echelons of the first world maintain a faint vestigial awareness that life was not always this way. We remember that cigarettes once took the place of cell phones and if you wanted to reach someone quickly you would not instant message or voicemail but actually leave your apartment and knock on their door. We recall an intricate, unwritten protocol surrounding the visit, the duration of face-to-face meetings in domestic settings measured out in consumable signifiers—one or two cigarettes, a fresh pot of coffee versus what was left in the pot, a cold drink or a bottle of wine. We have an awareness that the most envied, desirable consumer items—plasma TVs, houses and cars, all these possessions—are not an end in themselves, or even a trigger to increased consumption. They are the tools of increased mobility, an eternal conduit used to enhance the transaction of business, keeping things moving. Therefore, the most desired plateau is not the stability once implied by the object, but perpetual flux. Far more creativity goes into the marketing of products than into the products themselves. Likewise, the fact of the disappeared object is key to conceptual art, a term that is oxymoronic—all art now, is conceptual, deriving its value only through context, at a second remove.

The first structuralist film that I saw was *Chicago Loop*, James Benning's nine-minute fixed-tripod shot of steam rising out of an industrial chimney. It was a strange and primitive thrill, the idea that you could sit and watch nothing, a film about nothing. The image gave what it could, but what happened was all in your mind. A decade ago, the structuralist moment returned, slightly revised, to address the new formal properties inherent in digital video. The phenomenological question "What does the world look like through a video camera?" engaged this new generation of artists. Attending graduate programs on the west coast that sought to distance themselves from yesterday's 'criticality' by celebrating essentialist qualities like beauty and the sublime, they embraced the fluidity of digital video. The coolness of ambient art defined the aesthetic, the equipment was cheap, the Los Angeles spaces were massive.

Far better trained than the original structuralists, the next generation devised a rhetoric completely devoid of structuralism's wit and original charm. Whereas the films of Hollis Frampton, James Benning, Ken Jacobs, Stan Brakhage seemed to speak, on some level, to our incredulity, asking the obvious question—Why are we watching this?—with a measure of self-deprecation, the new video structuralists, steeped in critical theory, were very well armed.

"Just as the structuralist film makers used 'film' in such a way as to reveal a materiality, a shape and a form that characterise it, so must we be able to make the material 'video' speak of a signal, tape, camcorders, monitors and projectors," the artist Diana Thater wrote ten years ago, reinventing the structuralist wheel.<sup>16</sup> Video, enthused Jessica Bronson, offers a whole "different kind of happiness that has to do with shining surfaces or spinning movement."<sup>17</sup> The critic Peter Lunenfeld praised Thater's use

of the "techno-sublime."<sup>18</sup> Her multi-channel installations of dolphins and flowers are notable for their "displacement of narrative onto separate textual systems."<sup>19</sup> For a while, it seemed as if the liquidity of digital media itself was once again news. The critic Christiane Paul describes "a paradigm shift in which the artworks cease to embody 'artistic truth' and become 'conditions of possibility,' that is, fluid interactions between manifestations of information."<sup>20</sup>

Deeply reactionary, these works cob together bits of phenomenology and post-structuralist theory to propose that the dematerialised nature of digital media itself is a worthwhile subject of scrutiny. By observing video's properties, Thater concludes, "We may better use the latent qualities of the medium which in and of themselves, resonate."<sup>21</sup> But do they? And how, against what? The critic Bruce Hainley watches Bronson's world picture *1998*, a video installation of a Los Angeles police car chase and wonders at its utter exclusion of race, class and humor. He sums the project up in three words: "Vroom fucking vroom."<sup>22</sup> "Van's mind is like an all-night movie house," David Rattray writes in *The Angel*. "I sleep, then wake up, the bus standing still. Van tells me there was a couple fucking in the driverback seat. The driver and his Cuban assistant joked about the floor show. We just reached the head of the pass. From here on, until we reach the coast tomorrow morning, it's downhill."<sup>23</sup>

Back in Los Angeles after visiting his family in Lima, Peru, the filmmaker George Porcari looks at the framed photographs of coffee plantations that decorate Starbucks and finds them predictably blank. In one, a dark-skinned man stands in a sea of coffee beans and squints at the camera. He's reminded of Sharon Lockhart's series of photos shot in Brazil, the ones where a dark-skinned woman holds various kinds of fruits in her left hand. "She is self-conscious," Porcari observes, "complicit like the man in the Starbucks picture."<sup>24</sup>

Both sets of images seem to reference a twentieth-century humanist genre, *The Photography of Concern*, while deliberately placing themselves outside of it. Both sets of images co-opt that visual language, yet share none of its intentions, none of its content. Comparing Lockhart's photography with the pictures at Starbucks, Porcari sees the images mirror each other, "but as in any mirror everything is reversed. What," Porcari asks, "is everything? Why is one picture in a coffee shop and another in an art gallery? Where is the difference, how can we find it?"<sup>25</sup>

As art becomes a corporate enterprise, it could be that corporations like American Apparel now fill the vacuum left by contemporary art. The favorite leisure pursuit outside the home in the USA is shopping. And from its manufacturing philosophy to its ads and its marketing, to the gallery-esque design of its stores and their deliberate location in changing neighborhoods, American Apparel resonates within the culture like a large-scale work of conceptual art, breathtakingly brilliant in scope. "We called ourselves Chia Jen, or The Family," the choreographer Simone Forti recalls of the collective she lived in during the late 1960s. "The life we lived in common provided a matrix for the profuse visions we lived out in various twilights."<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, American Apparel galvanises the lives of some five thousand employees across the globe.<sup>27</sup> Money, the movement of capital, is just one of its mediums. The company keeps apartments in dozens of cities, where employees hang out and take retro-porn pix of each other that will be used in company ads. Business is transacted as flow.

**Meet P.J.**

The self-proclaimed Pop Evangelist & multi-international media icon came to NYC via via Goose Creek, SC. Who among us can forget him as "Ken" in the highly acclaimed ABC After School Special, "Don't Touch Me There Coach"? His will recognize him as that hot hottie in "The Disney Show" & later tons in his iconic string-ent as a sewing corpse in "It Bury You Remember". In spite of his glittering success, P.J. has switched focus from singing, dancing & acting to follow in his Grand-Paw's footsteps, now studying to become an armoire minister, when not sewing capes & bodacious football boxers, he goes to the gym.

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Opening: 11-19-2005

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"By relentlessly pursuing efficiencies in management and production, we aim to make the use of exploitative labor tactics not only unnecessary but actually counterproductive."  
—Dov Charney

**American Apparel™**  
Sweatshop Free • Brand • Free Clothes

Above: from American Apparel's website—<http://www.americanapparel.net>; 'Gallery' provides access to "Photo Collections, Amateur Photography, Deep Thoughts, Special Collections, American Apparel Culture, Conferences, Photoshoots". The 'Gallery' byline reads, "At American Apparel our true inspirations for the 'perfect fit' are ordinary people and their landscapes. Take a look at our archive of short films and photographs to get a better idea."; (<http://www.americanapparel.net/gallery>)

Founder Dov Charney and his colleagues have ingeniously channelled the most loaded social concerns of the decade into the ‘work,’ which is much more than the production of T-shirts. At the dawn of the century, when artists like The Bernadette Corporation expressed their generation’s disgust with the proliferation of brand: “There is no where to go or hide or to remain untagged, unlogged, undiscovered, unstamped... Names and tags will hover over every cosmic labyrinth,”<sup>28</sup> Charney launched the unbranded T-shirt, creating his own anti-brand. When young consumers organised boycotts against outsourced sweatshop production by Nike and Gap, Charney introduced sweatshop-free manufacturing in downtown Los Angeles. Based on a high-wage system of piecework, this move at once established the company as a hip anti-brand and effectively pre-empted unionisation. If (often undocumented) immigrant assemblers could earn \$15 an hour, why pay union dues?

The ‘vertically integrated’ American Apparel plant has done more to broadcast the obvious cultural links between Los Angeles and Mexico City than any municipal government. Advocating more open borders, the billboard above their Echo Park storefront says “Legalise LA.” Discourse transcends the limits of objects. It took Los Angeles art institutions until last year to mount a major exhibit of art from Mexico City. Meanwhile, American Apparel produces a free cultural zine from its apartment in Mexico City. The art work displayed in its stores (produced by amateurs) reprises most of the high-points of past and present conceptual art. The Echo Park store has two series of ‘found’ archival images (mug-shots of women arrested during the 1960s by the LAPD; bikini-clad students on Spring Break), evoking Mike Kelley, Christian Moller. In Hollywood, a surveillance camera pointed out on the street feeds back passers-by to themselves on a monitor, just like the early video work of Dan Flavin. And in an homage to MFA work produced in the ‘90s, there’s a series of blown-up cibachrome photos of interstitial car hoods and trees.

American Apparel, says its founder Dov Charney, “is a fantasy. It’s make-believe. We can do whatever the fuck we want.”<sup>29</sup> “We knew one another, trusted one another’s range of possibilities. There was no yardstick to measure individual achievement,”<sup>30</sup> Squat Theater collective founder Eva Buchmiller recalls. “We all have our fucking dick in it, it’s not just any one person,”<sup>31</sup> Charney says of his corporate philosophy. Recruiting talented young women as both content advisors and sex partners, Charney creates a paradigm for how life can be lived a different way. The purchase of an American Apparel T-shirt is more than a purchase—it’s an endorsement, a means of participating in the brand.

Video art was once seen to “enact a collapsed and continuous present.”<sup>32</sup> This now universal, collapsed present might now best be seen in the action of commerce. Using conceptual art’s self-reflexivity, anti-brands like American Apparel reach more deeply into the culture than art ever can. Douglas Davis wrote in *The End of Video: White Vapor*, in the mid-1970s:

*Objective perception never reflects anything beyond itself. To know what is there is not to know what isn’t. The makers of television-present-tense are fully as intelligent as those who criticise it. They know what we know. Therefore. It is my task—your task—to act beyond the medium, from within ourselves.*<sup>33</sup>

While the neo-formalist celebration of video’s liquid and transient properties during the 1990s didn’t yield many new ideas, we still live amongst images, saturated by images.

The philosopher Avital Ronnel looks at the video-chip implants used to engender memory in *Total Recall* and sees that they co-exist with a condition of stated amnesia. Images come to infuse an amnesiac subject. But these images aren’t the same as remembering; rather, they help keep their subjects in a state of eternal amnesia, channel-surfing through blank zones of trauma.<sup>33</sup>

Video works like Candice Breitz’s *Mother and Father* (2005) show that it might be possible—with great difficulty and by reaching within ourselves—to dislodge chunks of these coded images and allow them to act out other stories, sub-textual stories which have always been there. It’s a little like William Burroughs and Brion Gysin’s idea of the textual cut-up, developed in magnificent leisure at West London’s Beat Hotel the same year Nam June Paik bought his first Porta-Pak. Burroughs and Gysin believed that by folding in pages, manipulating fragments of text, the true hidden message of the once-opaque text will arise. In Breitz’s work, the earnest clichés of parenting spoken by Hollywood actors, once abstracted and recombined, become cries of unspeakable terror. In his short videotape *Flex*, Zwelethu Mthethwa abstracts the bodies and faces of weightlifters in a lyrical collage the flows between body and mind. The Israeli artist Guy Ben-Ner uses video to produce a series of ongoing domestic dramas that arise from his decision to work at home while taking care of his children. His work—which conflates sexuality and domestic entrapment—is an hilarious flip on feminist work. Flattening his penis with a rolling pin in *Untitled* (1998), Ben-Ner leaves himself open to the same charges of self-indulgence and narcissism that feminist works have traditionally borne. No matter how many references critics make between it and conceptual body-art classics, the tape is a pungent one-liner, proving that contradictions between family, self and desire are more circumstantial than gender-defined.

“Know all you wish about video,” Douglas Davies admonished in 1975. “Its privacy of perception, its line, color and tone, its symbiotic link to living time—and you still cannot change it until you bury it.”<sup>34</sup> But while we may know all we that we need to know about the phenomenological nature of electronic media, we don’t know what video has to tell us. In their brilliantly curated 2004 *Time Zones* film and video show at the Tate, Jessica Morgan and Gregor Muir assembled ten moving image works by international artists from countries as far-flung as China, Albania, Turkey and Indonesia.<sup>35</sup> A discreet manifesto of the persistence of cultural difference across the globe, *Time Zones* slyly suggests that our perception of ‘hot’ new technology will, for the foreseeable future, be undermined by how different parts of the matrix live and experience time. Walking through the large galleries, Anri Sala’s ghostly durational video of sunlight hitting two Albanian billboards plays on one wall, while NASCAR-style monster trucks in Yael Bartana’s *Kings of the Hill* futilely claw their way up an Israeli sand dune across the hall.

At once documentary and formal, these modest non-narrative works are not easily described. Facts are presented only as they arise; the camera insinuates itself within its surroundings, forlorn, steady and vibrant. They are indelible videos, in which video finally gets rid of itself and acts as a spy.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2006: 26

<sup>2</sup> Eldon Garnet, *Reading Brooke Shields: The Garden of Failure*, New York: Semiotexte, 1992

<sup>3</sup> Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion: Film Photography Video Texts 1968–1980*, Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop, 1983

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Rosalind Krauss, ‘Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism’, *October* Vol 1 No 1, Spring 1976, reprinted in Gregory Battcock, *New Artist’s Video*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978: 48–49

<sup>6</sup> Nam June Paik with Charlotte Mormon, *Video, Vidiot, Videology*, New York: Fluxus Newspaper, June 1974, reprinted in Gregory Battcock, *New Artist’s Video*, op.cit: 130

<sup>7</sup> Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, John Elderfield (ed.), Ann Raimés (transl.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996: 12

<sup>8</sup> Arun Pradhan, ‘Wackenhut: prisons, profits and golf umbrellas’, *The Green Left Weekly*, www.greenleft.org.au

<sup>9</sup> Wackenhut, ‘Top Secret Military Bases’, www.geocities.com/Area51/Shadowlands/6583

<sup>10</sup> Arun Pradhan, op cit.

<sup>11</sup> Greg Palast, ‘Gilded Cage: Wackenhut’s Free Market in Human Misery’, [http://www.guerrillanews.com/corporate\\_crime/doc2099.html](http://www.guerrillanews.com/corporate_crime/doc2099.html)

<sup>12</sup> Deirdre Boyle, ‘A Brief History of American Documentary Video’, *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, (eds) Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, Aperture in Association with Bay Area Video Coalition, 1990: 51–55

<sup>13</sup> Deirdre Boyle, op cit: 59

<sup>14</sup> Chris Kraus, *Torpor*, Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2006: 249

<sup>15</sup> David Rattray, ‘The Angel’, *How I Became One of The Invisible*, New York: Semiotexte, 1992: 35

<sup>16</sup> Diana Thater, ‘I Wanna Be Your Dog’, *China* (catalogue), Chicago: The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1996: 12

<sup>17</sup> Jessica Bronson, ‘Conversation with Jan Tumlir’, cited by Giovanni Intra, *Interruption* (catalogue), Govett Brewster Gallery, New Zealand, 1998

<sup>18</sup> Peter Lunenfeld, ‘Constraint Decree’, *Art/Text* 62, 1998: 68

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Christiane Paul, in Saul Anton, ‘Net Gains, a Roundtable on New Media’, *Artforum International* Vol 39 No 7, 2001: 121

<sup>21</sup> Diana Thater, op cit.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce Hainley, ‘Jessica Bronson, MOCA exhibition review’, *Artforum International*, Vol 37 No 6, 1999: 103

<sup>23</sup> David Rattray, op cit: 30

<sup>24</sup> George Porcari, ‘Playing Out the Photography of Concern: Starbucks in LA, “Teatro Amazonas” in Brazil and Werner Bischof in Peru’, *Art news*, (see [http://nyartsmagazine.com/pages/nyam\\_document.php?nid=44&did=437](http://nyartsmagazine.com/pages/nyam_document.php?nid=44&did=437))

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<sup>26</sup> Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, New York: Halifax and New York University Press, 1974: 17

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<sup>30</sup> Eva Buchmiller and Ana Koos, *Squat Theater* (catalogue), New York: Artist’s Space, 1996

<sup>31</sup> Claudine Ko, ‘Meet Your New Boss’, *Jane Magazine*, July 2004

<sup>32</sup> Rosalind Krauss, op cit.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas Davis, ‘The End of Video: White Vapor’, *New Artist’s Video*, op. cit: 32

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas Davis, op cit: 35

<sup>36</sup> Jessica Morgan, *Time Zones* (catalogue), London: Tate Publishing Ltd., 2004