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## Interrupting the Program:

De-scrambling Television through Video

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*“To a great extent the significance of all types of video art derives from its stance with respect to some aspect of television, which is itself profoundly related to the present state of our culture. In this way video art embarks on a curiously mediated but serious critique of the culture. And this reference to television, and through it to the culture, is not dependent on whether or not the artist sees the work in relation to television. The relation between television and video is created by the shared technologies and conditions of viewing...Nevertheless, an artist may exploit the relation very knowingly and may choose any aspect of the relation for attack.”* (David Antin, “Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium,” published in *Video Art – An Anthology*, 1976),p.181.

Many artists using video have chosen to comment on the effects of mass media by utilizing an apparatus that is inherently connected to the source. Even before the portable video camera and player appeared on the market, artists were using the technological abilities of the television in order to produce a comment on the TV’s place in society. In 1965 Nam June Paik made a piece entitled *Magnet TV* which employed neither videotape or broadcast images but instead was created by moving a large magnet across the surface of a television set in order to produce a moving abstract pattern.<sup>1</sup> Paik, a member of the Fluxus anti-high art movement, created works in which the television was emptied of its regular function and transformed into a statement about technology in general.

During more recent years artists have appropriated aspects of television within video works and manipulated its structure, creating a critique towards the dominance of televisual ideology. In Stan Douglas’ *Television Spots* (1987-88) Douglas mixes a format usually associated with dramatic programs into the fragmented commercial category leaving the viewer wanting more information, ironically commenting on the actual incommunicable nature of television. Douglas’ *Television Spots* consist of twelve ‘commercials’, each 15 or 30 seconds long, which contain incomplete and unresolved narrative fragments borrowed from typical television storylines. The *Spots* deny viewers’ expectations and people are forced to question why this disruption of expectation is taking place. These works were broadcast on public television and were intended to break the systematic structure of television in order to examine the reactions of the mass audience and question the effects that this controlling device has on

individuals. The idiosyncrasies of television are also currently being ridiculed on certain TV programs that have been designed to poke fun at the medium's formats and conventions.

Michael Nash, in his article "Vision After Television: Technocultural Convergence, Hypermedia, and the New Media Arts Field" of 1996, declares that the battle lines between television and video art have become completely blurred. Nash proceeds to state that, "in fact, television's critique of itself is more pervasive, and in some ways is more persuasive, than its critique by media art."<sup>2</sup> Among the "antitelevision" programs that Nash lists as being 'critical' of TV is *The Larry Sanders Show* – a comedy which situates itself 'behind the scenes' of a hit talk show. The show, currently only aired in reruns, allows the audience to witness the events involved in the production of an entertainment program while eluding to a sense of truth about the broadcasting field. Nash overlooks the fact that this is an imagined reality of TV and that this show along with others is not depicting the reality of television but is merely making the viewer feel as if he or she is a part of the deception. I believe that television is in fact a non-critical medium, a form of technology that resists a closed meaning partially because of its extremely fragmented structure and discontinuous text. John Fiske writes about TV's inability to produce coherent meaning in his book Television Culture when he states, "its attempts at closure, at a unitary meaning, or a unified viewing subject, are constantly subjected to fracturing forces."<sup>3</sup> Critical assessment of television is not being performed by the medium itself. There is a crucial need for this analysis through the use of video.

Video art has not succumbed to the powers of television and rather, in some cases, video is taking TV out of its normal viewing context and creating a critical situation for the TV viewer to contemplate. It seems ironic that such a disjointed media format/entertainment device has had such a strong effect on subject formation and self-development. Recently I read something that Raymond Williams wrote in 1974 in his book Television: Technology and Cultural Form. Williams has been quoted several times within other articles and books written around the subject of television and is most known for his conception of the term "flow"- the incorporation of interruption within TV until it becomes naturalized in the stream of images. The word "flow"

first emerged out of Williams' writings after visiting the United States and witnessing the difference between the extremely interrupted style of American television and the more subdued nature of the British television experience. In Britain commercial breaks, with the inclusion of a visual signal, had become common but in America commercials were inserted into programs much more frequently and advertisements for upcoming shows disrupted current programs on a regular basis. Williams writes about the difficulty to respond and to interpret television's intrinsic visual experiences and how there is a lack of description surrounding the topic. Despite this unwritten account of the visual experience, Williams states that the attentive moments belonging to the viewer may be one of the most significant aspects of the medium's power. He states,

“To get this kind of attention, it is often necessary to turn off the sound, which is usually directing us to prepared transmissible content or other kinds of response. What can then happen, in some surprising ways, is an experience of visual mobility, of contrast of angle of variation of focus, which is often very beautiful .... To most analysts of television, preoccupied by declared or directed content, this is, if seen at all, no more than a by-product of some other experience. Yet I see it as one of the primary processes of the technology itself, and one that may come to have increasing importance. And when, in the past, I have tried to describe and explain this, I have found it significant that the only people who ever agreed with me were painters.”<sup>4</sup>

This ‘primary process’ of the technology is an important area to analyze since so much of the visual content of TV has been carried over to information technology, which seems to be dominating every aspect of our society. One could say that television is the base structure for the current state of visual culture. Its fragmented and repetitive design offers a viewing situation intended to be internalized by a series of disconnected “glances” as opposed to the cinematic gaze, a subject of which has been written about profusely. I feel this visual design has been carried over to the world wide web where the entire animated computer screen has become one image in itself, pulling its users in all sorts of directions analogous to the aesthetics of channel surfing.

The term “teletopological puzzle” has been used in relation to this visual experience within various writings. The “teletopological puzzle” is an expression for all objects of visual culture combined– television, cinema, photography, the internet and all other singular forms –

not as a totality but as a constantly shifting constellation of fragments.<sup>5</sup> I will expand on the idea of the teletopological society later in this paper with an examination of how video art is being used to comment on the effects of this type of culture. This paper will discuss how certain video works have illustrated the associations between the non-unified viewing subject of the television and personal identity by analyzing the relationship between the TV viewer and the medium.

### **Television vs. Video: ‘Taking it Personally’**

Early examples of videos managed to combine an intimate approach with the examination of technological influences on society. Richard Serra’s piece *Television Delivers People* (1973) consisted of critical statements about commercial broadcast television that rolled up a blue screen like credits at the end of a TV program.<sup>6</sup> Statistics about the impact of television on a viewing public and its relationship to humans were part of the viewer directed text:

You are the product of t.v.  
 You are delivered to the advertiser who is the customer  
 What television teaches through commercialism is  
 materialistic consumption.  
 Popular entertainment is basically  
 propaganda for the status quo.  
 Control over broadcasting is an  
 Exercise in controlling society.  
 You are the product of t.v.  
 Television delivers people.

In 1981 Elizabeth Vander Zaag produced a video entitled *Thru the Holes* in which the focus was placed on the fragmentation of the video screen, not the usual soap opera content of other video art created in the early 1980s. The simplistic style of the video actually points to the complexities surrounding the human’s relationship with technology and seems to bring forth a general assessment towards society still being applied today. Throughout the video a human presence is felt as shadows of a figure filter through the “holes”. The video ends with the flash of a face that appears on the screen for less than five seconds. Vander Zaag creates a relationship between the human and the machine in which the latter is seen as more predominant,

however, the digitized voice seems to suggest something critical: “I can see right through the holes....Now I can see right through the screen....” The voice may be an indication of the individual, the TV viewer, having some authority over the image on the screen and perhaps even an understanding of the media’s control in general. *Thru the Holes* is a video that seems very relevant to much of the work being done today that is exploring the individual’s relationship with media as culture, in particular television.

Current video work is addressing technology and the variety of effects it has on identity issues within an increasing digital world. Television is being examined not only for the content that it airs but also for its ability to intrude into the everyday lives of its viewers. Kristin Lucas, a video artist working out of New York, has been creating works that portray the psychological response of the television viewer within a collaged environment that references the structure of television itself. This paper will include a discussion of two works by Kristin Lucas – *Cable Xcess* from 1996 and *Host* from 1997 – within a larger discussion of the effects of televisuality on identity formation. Kristin Lucas’ examination not only demands us to question our relationship with what we watch on television but also encourages us to acknowledge its influence unto other computer based systems that we deal with on a daily basis. Video art is questioning the media -absorbed viewer by allowing a personal viewpoint to disrupt the shifting landscape of the media rather than the other way around. The impersonal nature of television and technology becomes personalized by the artist, allowing authoritative qualities of the medium to diminish. The loosely montaged format of Kristin Lucas’ pieces create a visual equivalent to the individual’s experience within today’s society of which television is a major part. Video can be used to speak about the transference of televisual language, derived from TV and other infotainment devices, onto the individual being. The layered use of montage within Lucas’ works, as well as the work of other artists using video, effectively represents the psychological similarities between the TV and its viewer in regards to how it deals with visual information.

## Disassembling the Media: A Construction of New Meanings

Typical television formats are torn apart and manipulated within video art with an intention of disrupting normal viewing habits. The obstruction of normal TV language is usually achieved by either an exaggeration or an inversion of the strategies used within the entertainment industry. A popular strategy that has been used for years within television broadcasting is the “direct address”<sup>7</sup> approach, also referred to as the “talking head”. Within this format the head of an individual is seen addressing the TV viewer in a one-way conversation while the camera shot never veers far from the person’s face. The method is used in news broadcasts, commercials, televangelist programs and many other shows that presumably “inform” us yet control us at the same time.

Monologues within videos, particularly ones that are directed towards the viewer, speak of the “informative” aspects of television that control culture. Tom Sherman’s work from the 1980s was greatly based around the idea of him making the territory of television his own. In his *Exclusive Memory* (1987) he uses the direct address approach to tell personal stories to a viewer who presumably is a machine, a robot, learning the ways of the world.<sup>8</sup> Stan Douglas also incorporated this structure within his TV Spots in “My Attention”. (see Figure 1) In this particular *Television Spot* Douglas films the talking head of a man who recites a monologue that reveals a sense of identity confusion felt amidst a world of distractions. The monologue is directed towards the TV yet the output is intended for the TV viewer who is forced to comprehend the one-way conversation. The actor says, “I’m speaking to *you* right now...but I can still hear voices coming from *you* and down the hall...” The narrative seems to be focused around the individual’s inability to concentrate on anything other than the sounds and images emanating from technological devices, the television. He stresses his desire to “shut these things out” and states how he attends to things even though he doesn’t even find them interesting. The viewer is forced to comprehend this dialogue as well as its connection with the other spots, some of which contain no talking whatsoever and are generally very different. The black and white image distances itself from over-resembling one of those confessional commercials in which an

actor admits to being controlled by a bad habit that has now been eliminated by the birth of a new commercial product. Tom Sherman also eliminated colour in his *Exclusive Memory* video. Peggy Gale, author of *Videotexts*, stated that Sherman's eschewal of colour insinuated a desire to reduce the physicality of the on-screen image and its reference to television advertising.<sup>9</sup> Kristin Lucas reduces a connection to TV ads even further in *Cable Xcess* by not only incorporating the use of black and white footage but also through distorting the reception of the image itself.

Within *Cable Xcess*, the artist portrays herself as an amateur, transforming the visual language of television to produce a personal statement about the human's exposure to TV and the effects it can have on one's health. This piece exaggerates the dangers involved with watching television yet effectively illustrates the anxiety the TV viewer may feel when there is a power failure (see Figure 2)– ultimately revealing contemporary society's dependence on this object of technology. The direct address technique is appropriated in this video through a method that speaks more about the individual's response to television formats and its content. It is taken out of its corporate context and used on a personal level as the artist recites messages to the viewer through a screen filled with static and interspersed with fragmented television imagery. The video reveals the hand of the artist battling the medium, disrupting the TV viewer's ritual of watching in a technically imperfect manner. The results are an intentionally amateurish piece where the artist appears to be breaking through the broadcast waves. (see Figure 3) In an article written about her work Joe Hagan noted that Lucas is "bringing the technology down to the 'tool level', so that she can control and manipulate the media devices that produce the images we consume every day."<sup>10</sup> What separates this piece from the above-mentioned works that have appropriated the direct address approach is the confrontational element between the artist and the medium.

Lucas complicates the usual use of the direct address approach by incorporating layers of information that the artist has to "speak" through. The end product is one in which the artist appears to be prevented from looking directly at the viewer and instead is attracted to the screen, which seems to be consuming her image. The character in Douglas' "My Attention" also seems

to be addressing the screen at the same time as he speaks to the viewer, illustrated through the somewhat schizophrenic monologue he recites. But in *Cable Xcess*, through the use of transparent layering and filtered effects, the individual within the monitor is at more of a distance from the viewer as the focus remains on portraying the fragmented televisual experience.

### **Collage: The Televisual Experience**

The flow of television can be disrupted within video art either by breaking it down and isolating certain elements or by exaggerating the fragmented system to its full extreme. Within Frederic Jameson's often debated article entitled "Reading Without Interpretation: Postmodernism and the Video-Text" of 1987, the author describes how Raymond Williams' idea of the ongoing 'total flow' of television has emptied any kind of critical distance for the viewer. Jameson also insists that the total absence of memory in relation to television further separates it from the analysis of film and its process of interpretation when he writes, "...memory seems to play no role in television, commercial or otherwise (or, I am tempted to say, in postmodernism generally): nothing here haunts the mind or leaves its afterimages in the manner of the great moments of film."<sup>11</sup> Jameson complains that no specific forms from within video art can be taken out of the context of television to be remembered in any relevant way.

Contrary to Jameson, however, the flow of television can in fact be critiqued within video with the intention of disorienting the viewer out of the normal television experience and encouraging him or her to become aware of their own relationship to the medium. Lucas appropriates the televisual experience within her videos and seems to be illustrating how the fast-paced style of television has expanded into the routine interactions we perform with other technological systems on a daily basis. By using a repetitive system of collage, the artist critiques the "message"<sup>12</sup> of the medium through an exaggerated design that speaks about the nature of the television.

Collaged imagery within video references the televisual experience both in regards to how TV is watched while performing other activities as well as how its images are consumed. The “collection-consumption” effect has been referred to as a characteristic of television and is seen in contrast to the voyeuristic nature of the cinema. John Caldwell, author of Televisualist: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television, writes about the difference between the two media formats and how each of them construct a relationship with the viewer. The collection-consumption effect is a term he uses to describe the hyperactive pace at which images are gathered before the viewer during the TV watching process. Within this process the only power that exists within the television viewer is one that controls an immense quantity of imagery not the psychosexual illusion of dominance that one has over the ability to see and not be seen in return.<sup>13</sup> Through video this “collective” experience that the TV viewer undergoes can be examined through a collaged structure of imagery and sound that demonstrates a specific psychological reaction or it may be manipulated through more of a montage system that produces an effect that seems less random.

The difference between collage and montage is an area I plan to research more fully, however, for the purposes of this paper the two terms will be used in conjunction with each other. The word ‘collage’ can be understood as a description of the structure of television itself and is used within video as an overall effect that references the experience of the medium. The word ‘montage’, on the other hand, may be applied to the analysis of televisuality within video as a structural device. Montage techniques, or the juxtaposition of imagery, have historically been used to create allegorical statements unto larger social structures that exist beyond a constructed work of art. Benjamin Buchloh, relying on Walter Benjamin’s theories of contemporary montage, once defined the procedure of montage as, “one in which all allegorical principles are executed: appropriation and depletion of meaning, fragmentation and dialectical juxtaposition of fragments, and separation of signifier and signified.”<sup>14</sup> In his article “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,” Buchloh reiterates Benjamin’s description of the viewer’s reaction to montage: “The allegorical mind arbitrarily

selects from the vast and disordered material that its knowledge has to offer. It tries to match one piece with another to figure out whether they can be combined. This meaning with that image, or that image with this meaning...”<sup>15</sup> Definitive terms aside, the visual and mental experience of the collection-consumption effect and the “glance-like” mode of attention of the typical TV viewer are both brought to mind with Lucas’ videos.

A visual montage is created within Lucas’ work that reflects the collaged system of TV as well as the mental state of the television viewer, thereby producing a sense of instability and randomness. Within *Cable Xcess*, Lucas overlaps found images from television with footage of herself in conjunction with the monologue that she recites. For instance, when the artist talks about how she has joined the resistance and has been taking mineral supplements to counteract the effects of television, images of prescription drugs are interwoven throughout other video footage of the pharmaceutical industry. (see Figure 4) The visual imagery is linked to the audio but the connection between the actual footage is random and only relatable to each other in terms of the monologue being recited.

The rhythmical manner of Lucas’ work, through the use of a quick montage method, demonstrates the habitual act of watching TV that is created over short periods of concentration. In *Visible Fictions* of 1982, John Ellis first used the word “glance” to describe how television is watched in comparison to the cinema: “TV’s regime of vision is less intense than cinema’s: it is a regime of glance rather than the gaze.”<sup>16</sup> After an amount of debate about the level of audience attention to the image, Ellis now admits that television can be watched in a more intense way but its styles of visualization, even if they aim to elicit gazelike viewing, will only be consumed over short periods of concentrations or glances.<sup>17</sup> In *Cable Xcess*, the successive movements between television footage and camera shots of the artist reveal the fragmented structure of the medium as well as the interrupted attention span of its viewer. Most importantly, the use of collage seems to illustrate Raymond Williams’ point stated earlier in this paper. The difficulty to respond to and interpret television’s visual experiences in words, a problem Williams writes about, may best be dealt with visually. Williams insinuates a need for a painterly approach to television’s inherent

qualities as a way of understanding its visual significance. The layering of images within Lucas' video work, whether described as collage or montage, references painting in a formal and psychological way, as images continuously build on top of each other layering front to back and back to front. The collaged screen not only demonstrates the televisual experience but also reveals the individual's mental state.

### **The Transference of Zapping**

The constantly shifting channels of the television on top of the already segmented structure of the medium can be carried over to the viewer through a process called "zapping." This rapid succession of TV, evading any sense of meaning, may be perceived as similar to the experience of the individual within today's fast-paced society. John Fiske describes zapping as an activity that the television viewer participates in as he or she switches from one program to the next, never watching one show in its entirety. Fiske states: "Zapping allows the viewer to construct a viewing experience of fragments, a postmodern collage of images whose pleasure lie in their discontinuity, their juxtapositions, and their contradictions. This is segmentation taken to the extreme of fragmentation and makes of television the most open producerly text for it evades all attempts at closure."<sup>18</sup> This segmented encounter with TV seems to be similar to other experiences people deal with on a daily basis in a world engulfed by the moving visual image, whether it be when driving beside animated billboards or spending time on the internet. The character in Lucas' *Host* undergoes a similar experience as she tries to communicate with an automated machine.(see Figure 5) This experience seems to relate to the zapped experience of watching television. In *Host*, a therapy session is directed by the system operator of a streetside multimedia kiosk. While the artist indulges in a virtual conversation about a troublesome relationship, the session is transformed into an amalgamation of daytime television and tabloid,

as the system operator/therapist almost seems to have control of the remote control.<sup>19</sup> As the artist tries to express her feelings and her desire to “slow things down”, she is continuously interrupted by the system/therapist she is dealing with.(see Figure 6) Fiske once wrote that the term flow was an unfortunate metaphor on the part of Williams, in Lucas’ *Host* the fragmented design of television does anything but flow.

Within *Host* it is almost as if the inability of television to be perceived in a coherently meaningful way, due to its segmented visual language, is transferred over to its viewer – ultimately effecting the viewer’s perception of him or herself. The artist in front of the camera in this video now becomes the ununified viewing subject as her therapy session switches back and forth from a focus on her to an acknowledgement of the mediated system that she is dealing with. The monologue seems to be a combination of the psychological assessment of herself and a sociological assessment of her placement in a technological society. As the monologue proceeds, the viewer of this work begins to question what relationship it is that the character is having problems with. It becomes uncertain if she is involved in a human relationship or one with a piece of equipment as words like “upgrade” are brought into the conversation. Looking closely, one notices the flickering images in the individual’s eyes perhaps an indication of the ongoing flow of imagery before her. In the same way that the aesthetics of television add to its own disconnected meaning, the televisual aspects of society interfere in the individual’s own realization of the self.

### **“Worst Episode Ever”: Working Through Television**

The exaggerated appropriation of the flow of television within video can create a contemplative mindset within its audience that may distract them from becoming absorbed into the medium. Not only can television episodes be manipulated within video art in an attempt to

raise questions about their impact on society but psychological reactions or “episodes” may be triggered within the viewer. By creating an intense experience that exemplifies the nature of the televisual form to its extreme, the TV viewer is questioned. Within Lucas’ works, the flow of television becomes represented as a stream of information that the individual, the artist herself, is placed within and “works through”.

The term “working through” is derived from psychoanalysis and is known as the point of therapy when the subject realizes something relevant and feels a need to replay and reanalyze things continuously. Freud coined the term, describing it as the boring part of the process from the analyst’s point of view as he states, “this working-through of the resistances may in practice turn out to be an arduous task for the subject of the analysis and a trial of patience for the analyst.”<sup>20</sup> In the recently published book Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty, Ellis adopts this phrase to describe the way TV currently uses its information. Ellis states that within current television there is a reworking of imagery and content that we have already been witness to. He writes of how the medium constantly makes and remakes meanings: “Television attempts definitions, tries out explanations, creates narratives, talks over, makes intelligible, tries to marginalize, harnesses speculation, tries to make fit, and, very occasionally, anathemizes.”<sup>21</sup> Ellis describes this therapeutic process as a characteristic of contemporary television, however, the term can also be applied to the TV viewer’s situation of watching as well.

Reserving the phrase “working through” for the object of the television itself seems ironic since the roles of the human and machine are insinuated to be reversed. It is as if one is saying that the TV has now become the psychiatric patient and is having problems identifying with itself. Interestingly enough, it has been noted that “television seems to want to be anything *but* television, anything but its own unique medium,”<sup>22</sup> as other visual art forms like photography and film have revealed themselves within its televisual form. The working through that television is involved with influences the psychological state of the TV viewer, possibly placing the viewer in a never-ending therapy session. A therapy session not unlike the one portrayed in *Host* where the system operator could be interpreted as the television, a mechanism in charge of

several operations at once.(see Figure 7) The shared psychological similarities between the make-up of television's imagery and the mental state of its viewer are effectively represented through the rapid montage in both *Host* and *Cable Xcess*.

Lucas' manipulation of television footage in *Cable Xcess* and her use of computer and video game imagery in *Host* could be viewed as similar to or influenced by certain experimental animation that used single images one after the other in quick succession, fusing into motion. Robert Breer, who became most known for his rapid montage technique, first began experimenting with this technique in 1954 when he created a 10 second looped film that contained 240 frames of distinctly different optical sensations.<sup>23</sup> In the artist's *Recreation* of 1956 he combined split second shots, which had no relationship to each other, into a sequence that makes the viewer uneasy and nearly nauseous. But as the viewer becomes used to the pace, the images seem to appear static and we become aware of our subconscious minds. Breer writes about his intentions of pushing the visual vibration of animation to its extreme as he states, "I began treating the single images as individual sensations to be experienced separately, more in counterpoint than in harmony."<sup>24</sup> I feel that Robert Breer's *Recreation* of 1956 exemplifies the televisual experience of today and that Kristin Lucas' video collages, whether knowingly or not, bring to surface much of the same ideas that Breer was experimenting with. Through video, contemporary concerns of a digital based society and the fragmented structure of communication systems can be examined. (see Figure 8) The shifting fragments of the teletopological puzzle and its effects on subject formation are played out in the video *Host*.

### **Personalizing the Impersonal – Confronting the Teletopological Puzzle**

In Kristin Lucas' videos the artist personalizes the impersonal and brings the viewer's attention to the authority of the media. The reality of the "teletopologically fashioned subject" and the media's consumption of personal identity is addressed within these video works. The

teletopologically fashioned subject is written about by Victor Burgin in In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture as he discusses how an individual's memory can become distorted by the media: "In the memory of the teletopologically fashioned subject, actual events mingle indiscriminately not only with fantasies but with memories of events in photographs, films, and television broadcasts."<sup>25</sup> Burgin references the sociological studies done by Marie-Claude Taranger spanning the period from 1977-1987 in which the results spoke of an "almost universal tendency for personal history to be mixed with recollections of films and other productions of the media."<sup>26</sup> By interviewing subjects, the study found that subjects tend to subconsciously reconstruct their hybrid personal history through mediated memories in order to create order within the "teletopological puzzle".

In *Host* the viewer is confronted with a monologue recited by the artist that seems almost schizophrenic, creating questions about the type of relationship the individual is having problems with. The dialogue that the artist is directing towards the therapist/system operator becomes even more confusing when she begins to discuss how the relationship has turned into a game. Video images of Atari screens and Nintendo games begin to control the screen from this point on.(see Figure 9) The conversation turns into a description of how many points the artist has gained and what "level" she has positioned herself on. One begins to question if this troubled relationship is even real at all or if it has been derived out of a computer game, similar to the way the subjects in Taranger's study illustrated a type of memory that was based upon mediated experiences. With *Host*, Lucas has created a piece that acknowledges the psychological effects of televisual mediums on the "teletopologically fashioned subject". By using the term televisual mediums, I am referring to the technologically based systems we interactive with visually such as the automated machines and video games that are portrayed in the artist's work.

We have begun to rely on these devices similar to the way we have become addicted to the television remote control and this dependence has seeped into our cognitive thoughts surrounding our own personal identities. Lucas puts herself within this "space-time of visual representations"<sup>27</sup> and addresses her own existence in relation to the larger structures of society.

In a written conversation between Tony Oursler and Gary Simmons, co-curators of the exhibition “Station to Station”, in the Artists Space Newsletter (Apr/May ‘97) a discussion takes place about the work of Kristin Lucas and her attempt to criticize the medium. Oursler states that Lucas has, “taken the Nam June Paik wall of media and personalized it.”<sup>28</sup> Simmons, describing not only Lucas’ work but a new generation of artists using video, replies back pointing out that ,”(t)here’s a thread going through – a curiosity and wanting to present interior events: personalize the impersonal.”<sup>29</sup> Video can be used to comment on personal experiences with technology in a way that raises more awareness of the psychological control of the media. The manipulation of the televisual style, a style that has been carried over to other mediums from the television, effectively alters our normally uncritical views of the form

The video works described in this paper use the inherent relationship between video and television as a means to comment on visual culture. Peggy Gale wrote about video’s ability to create a powerful message due to its’ conditions of viewing being similar to that of television: “Video is no mirror but it offers a particular “as if” image: as if television, as if live, as if permanent, as if central to current technology.”<sup>30</sup> Video has now become an effective way to examine other ‘televisual mediums’ that have gained a significant place in contemporary society alongside the television. Kristin Lucas asks her viewers to acknowledge the role that technology plays in our lives and uses the confused pace of televisuality to encourage us to do so. Video art has been analyzed by many writers as a format that demands "sustained evaluation" since it moves at a slower pace than the normal "fragmented speed" of television. However, with a video collage that actually references and exaggerates this fragmented speed, the viewer is encouraged to question the disruption of the normal viewing experience...in regards to the way television is absorbed and video art is watched.



Figure 1  
"My Attention", *Television Spots*, Stan Douglas, 1987-88  
(video still)

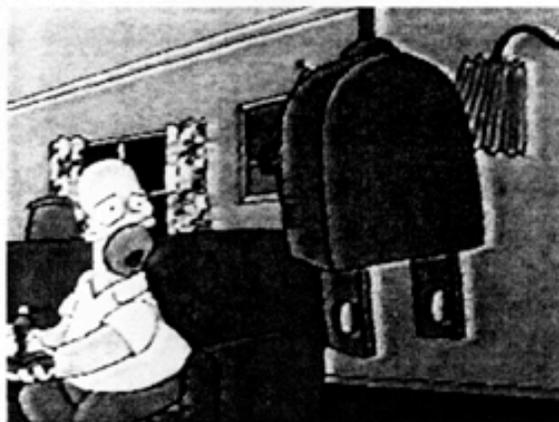


Figure 2  
*Cable Xcess*, Kristin Lucas, 1996 (video still)



Figure 3  
*Cable Xcess*, Kristin Lucas, 1996 (video still)



Figure 4  
*Cable Xcess*, Kristin Lucas, 1996 (video still)



Figure 5  
*Host*, Kristin Lucas, 1997 (video still)



Figure 6  
*Host*, Kristin Lucas, 1997 (video still)



Figure 7  
Host, Kristin Lucas, 1997 (video still)



Figure 8  
Host, Kristin Lucas, 1997 (video still)



Figure 9  
Host, Kristin Lucas, 1997 (video stills)

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> John G. Hanhardt, "Film Image - Electronic Image," Visible Language, V 29.2, 1995, p. 150.
- <sup>2</sup> Michael Nash, "Vision After Television: Technocultural Convergence, Hypermedia, and the New Media Arts Field," Resolutions – Contemporary Video Practices. Ed. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 383.
- <sup>3</sup> John Fiske, Television Culture. (New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1987), p. 105.
- <sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, Television: Technology and Cultural Form. (London: Wm Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1974), p. 77.
- <sup>5</sup> Victor Burgin, In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 22. The term teletopological puzzle was coined by Paul Virilio and is used throughout Burgin's book.
- <sup>6</sup> John G. Hanhardt, "Film and Video in the Age of Television," Image World, Art & Media Culture. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1989), p. 99.
- <sup>7</sup> 'Broadcast TV very often uses forms of direct address from individual in close-up to individuals gathered around the set. This is very different from cinema's historic mode of narration, where events do not betray a knowledge that they are being watched. Broadcast TV is forever buttonholing, addressing its viewers as though holding a conversation with them. Announcers and newsreaders speak directly from the screen, simulating the eye-contact of everyday conversation by looking directly out of the screen and occasionally down (a learned and constructed technique).' John Ellis, Visible Fictions – Cinema: Television: Video. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1982), p. 132.
- <sup>8</sup> Peggy Gale, Videotexts. (The Power Plant - Contemporary Art Gallery: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1995), p. 133.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 135.
- <sup>10</sup> John Hagan, "Live on Tape – Video Artist Kristin Lucas Modifies the Mainstream", 1997.
- <sup>11</sup> Frederic Jameson, "Reading Without Interpretation: Postmodernism and the Video-Text," in Nigel Fabb et al. (Ed). The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature. (New York: Methuen Inc., 1987), p. 202.
- <sup>12</sup> The 'medium is the message' is a phrase coined by Marshall McLuhan who has written and theorized extensively around the subject of television and media culture. In his book Understanding Media (1964) and throughout several other published writings, the author proposes his ideas of media mysticism within an electronic global village.
- <sup>13</sup> John Caldwell, Telesuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 243.
- <sup>14</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," Art Forum, V 21, September, 1982, p. 44.
- <sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Zentralpark," in Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 1, 2. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p.660. (sited by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh in "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," Art Forum, V 21, September, 1982, p. 46.
- <sup>16</sup> John Ellis, Visible Fictions – Cinema: Television: Video. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1982), p. 137.
- <sup>17</sup> John Ellis, Seeing Things – Television in the Age of Uncertainty. (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2000), p. 100.
- <sup>18</sup> John Fiske, p. 105.
- <sup>19</sup> Kristin Lucas, artist statement, Vtape, 2000.
- <sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, repeating and working-through' (1914) in Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, vol XII, ed James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p. 155. (sited by John Ellis in Seeing Things – Television in the Age of Uncertainty, 2000, p. 79.
- <sup>21</sup> John Ellis, Seeing Things – Television in the Age of Uncertainty, p. 79.
- <sup>22</sup> John Caldwell, Telesuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television, p. 149.
- <sup>23</sup> Robert Russett, Experimental Animation. The Origins of a New Art. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), revised 1988. (Litton Educational Publishing), p. 134.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 135.
- <sup>25</sup> Victor Burgin, p. 226.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 226.
- <sup>27</sup> Burgin uses this phrase in his book In/Different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture in relation to his ideas of not being able to treat imagery of visual culture as discrete and bounded objects. 'Such hybrid virtual objects take provisional form in a teletopological space-time largely indifferent to the physical bounds of TV screens and program times. The peculiarity of this space-time of visual representation, the shifting coordinates in which imaginary identities are "fixed," is the object of this book.' Victor Burgin, p. 23.
- <sup>28</sup> Tony Oursler, Artists Space Newsletter, Apr/May, 1997.
- <sup>29</sup> Gary Simmons, Artists Space Newsletter, Apr/May, 1997.
- <sup>30</sup> Peggy Gale, p. 137

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\*\*artist statements and formal descriptions of *Thru the Holes*, *Prime Cuts*, and *How to Read Macho Mouse* were supplied by: Video Out Distribution, 1965 Main Street, Vancouver, B.C. V5T 3C1

\*\*artist statements and formal descriptions of *Host*, *Cable Xcess*, *Happy Lucky Fun*, and *Pre-existing Conditions* were supplied by: V tape, 401 Richmond St. W., Suite 452, Toronto, ON, M5V 3A8

