

On Stage : the Theatrical Dimension of Video Image

Matilde Roman

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Reviewed by Mike Leggett

Creativity & Cognition Studio

University of Technology Sydney

legart@ozemail.com.au

Between the original French title and the recent English translation of this lucid commentary, there are indicative shifts in meaning between the terms 'stage' and 'theatrical'. These point towards the nuanced domain of contemporary video installation where the audience are often given agency to determine the duration and quality of the encounter, not exactly actors or stage props nor seated audience; 'Far from acting in the space of the work, they are acted by it.'

Occasional reference is made to cinema precursors of the early 20th Century, and to the minimalism of 60s and 70s video art, bound by the technology of the day into the inelegant furniture of the television monitor and its

placement in the gallery. The focus initially is on the advent of the video projector and high quality, film-like moving image work emergent in the first decade of the 21st Century.

In considering the work of some sixteen artists, tendencies and approaches are grouped as a series of case studies. The mind of the curator is very much in evidence here, weighing details of appearance and substance with the dimensions of the black box spaces afforded by modern art museums and galleries. The insights, a mix of analysis and anecdote, of moment to moment descriptive narrative of a work, are valuable as documentation of an approach to making art, a practice both complex to mount as an exhibit and liable to technical if not aesthetic occlusion as the technology of visibility inexorably moves on. Computer presented, interactive / responsive video work is avoided, perhaps for that very reason; the microprocessor, vulnerable to upgrades and obsolescence remains problematic to the presentation of all modes of digital image.

The second of the three areas of work considered brings performers and even actors into the moving image frame, exemplified by the entertainingly perceptive work of Michael Snow, re-aligning the codes and gazes of television and cinema into confections which maintain the viewer in an '...awareness of their receptive position'. The largely improvised approach the artists take to involving performers, lead to the curator's commentary and description in an exhibition catalogue or book. Through that responsive act, probably mirroring the responses of an audience, the narrative structure becomes traceable

as a written account. By being produced at the end of the process rather than, with a scenario or script at the beginning, the conventions of cinema are again transgressed.

The third area examined is the architectural, whereby the artist designs the space and context in which the moving images are presented. A work from the early 1980s by Dan Graham exemplifies the principle in a Cinema designed for the ground floor corner of an office building. The two-way mirror affords the gaze from the outside to those viewing inside, and for those spectators to choose between seeing the fiction, or the real.

The Slovenian artist Tobias Putrih goes so far as to provide seating which discomforts in a setting constructed as an obstacle course, preventing any suspension of presence, accentuating '...a plurality of sensations ... that reaches beyond the edges of the screen.'

The artists gathered here work with the moving image as a component of an artwork larger than the cinema screen, using the tools and materials of the sculptor and painter, the expectations of the sceptic. They are not interdisciplinary but whilst they may collaborate with or employ others expertise, their vision is singular and attuned to the vagaries of the contemporary art markets and its collectors. The author in avoiding the intricacies of critical theory, delivers a snapshot of responses to the institutional spaces and some of the work installed, considering in careful detail the often disregarded aspect of the moving image in relation to its periphery.

The volume includes a bibliography and index.

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