

THE MYTH OF TOTAL VIDEO

by

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ABSTRACT

Originally known as the visual component of the televisual signal, video has since evolved into a number of devices and cultural practices. This thesis traces these various evolutions and creates an ontological and historical topography of the medium's fluid nature. It also examines the influence of video on the realism of television and cinematic representations, as well as the production and viewing practices involved in their creation and reception.

After a general overview of video's historiography, various formats and numerous practices in chapter 1, chapter 2 investigates the medium's correlation with television and its influence upon the status of reality on TV. Chapter 3 examines the changing face of cinematic realism in the context of video's rampant development and its infiltration of feature film production and viewing, and examines a number of films that have incorporated video both formalistically and narratively over the past two decades. I conclude with a general overview of the major points and provide a working definition of the multifaceted medium that is video.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will address the influences of video on the status of realism on television and in film today by considering arguments from classic and contemporary scholarship in the disciplines of film, media and cultural studies. More specifically, I will argue that video and television, two media that are often viewed as ontologically interchangeable, have significantly modified the ways in which films are made and watched. An exploration of video's role in shifting the perception of reality in various media is important to forming an understanding of how technological advancement works together with emerging aesthetics and politics to reflect various truths and ideologies. Video's development as a technology or tool, and its evolution into various cultural practices, makes it difficult to categorize and define. Because video is such a multifaceted concept, this thesis will also attempt to construct a working and precise definition of what video is, as well as trace its changing significance over the decades, while outlining its complex relationship with and influence over other media.

As the title of this thesis suggests, my methodology is in part indebted to the work of André Bazin, more specifically his two essays "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," and "The Myth of Total Cinema." I hope to redefine his theories about realism in the context of video, a medium whose full potential and ramifications Bazin did not live long enough to fully appreciate and examine.¹ Thus, one of the primary goals of this thesis is to provide an ontological examination of video in its manifold incarnations. This ontological paradigm of analysis will allow me to reexamine the canonical definitions of reality and the imaginary (Casetti 19), in light of the emergence of video and as compared to the essential properties of film. Parallel to this investigation, my methodology will take on the form of "field theory" (Casetti 13), which will draw upon numerous disciplines in order to focus on specific questions regarding the medium of video. In this instance, I will focus on the systematic influence of video on cinematic representations. By examining specific paradoxes that various video practices give rise to, I will demonstrate the way in which the medium manages to both shed light on and be defined by these contradictions.

Video has considerably "altered our understanding of what André Bazin once referred to as 'the ontology of the photographic (and cinematographic) image'" (Belton 61). This is especially true when one considers that emerging video technologies are highly susceptible to electronic and digital manipulations and thus have "no inherently indexical relationship to a profilmic event" (Belton 62). The last point becomes especially clear when one views analogue film as a referential medium that has a direct link to reality. According to Bazin, the filmic or photographic image, which is created by light hitting photosensitive material, embalms reality in an attempt to overcome time and outlast death, while creating a "world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny" (1967b 9). In fact, Bazin views film as a means of automatically forming an image of the world, an image that is the object itself, "freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it" (1967b 13-14). While Bazin considers photography and the cinema to be "discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism" (Bazin: 1967b 12), he does later admit that these various cinematic and photographic practices seek "to give the spectator as perfect an illusion of reality as possible within the limits of the logical demands of cinematographic narrative and of the current limits of technique" (Bazin: 1972 26).

The term "realism" originated as a nineteenth century literary and artistic concept that went against the "tradition of classical idealism and sought to portray 'life as it really was'" (Hayward 298). The camera is seen as a "natural" means for portraying realism, a mode of representation that "purports to give a direct and 'truthful' view of the 'real world'" on "both the narrative level and the figurative (that is, pictorial/photographic)" (Hayward 298). However, the illusion and aesthetic of realism are themselves constructs, so-called "reality effect(s)" that are carefully contrived in an attempt to efface "the idea of illusion" (Hayward 299). Realism can also be viewed as the link between cinema and reality. For certain critics, realism has been a "recurrent conviction," while others view it as a "presupposition to be destroyed" (Casetti 42). The acknowledgment of the illusionist nature of realism is even reiterated by Bazin who prominently advocated the realist aesthetic during the 1950s. In his essay, "The Myth of Total

Cinema," Bazin openly admits that the "guiding myth" that inspired the invention of cinema lies in its alleged ability to reconstruct "a perfect illusion of the outside world" and in its promise to recreate "the world in its own image" (Bazin: 1967a 20-21). As the title of this thesis suggests, I will attempt to demonstrate the ways in which video has been instrumental in heightening the illusion of realism in both television and cinema, as well as in dispelling this very myth.

Although providing viewers with a much greater sense of pictorial realism, usually through preexisting connotations, the video image can and should be viewed as a much less stable representation than the one produced by film, especially when considering the essential way in which its images are formed. Chapter 1 traces the history of video's development from its "economic infrastructure" to its "ideological superstructure" (Bazin: 1967a 17), by examining the medium's economic origins and the development of its artistic and political potential. An examination of video's historiography helps reveal numerous intrinsic differences between the film and video images and their formation by exploring its various formats and practices. It explores the medium's connection to television and acknowledges the fact that before the development of video as a recording technology in 1957, the term "video" was originally used to describe the visual component of the TV signal (Belton 63). Starting in the 1960s, video crossed over from the mass medium of television into "institutional and consumer domains" (Antin 160) in the form of the portable video recorder. Its distribution was limited to institutions and individuals that were able to absorb the relatively high cost of the new technology.

Contemporary critical discourses surrounding video regarding this period hail it as a democratizing and utopian force that resulted in the advent of various video practices that ranged from underground video collectives that redefined the meaning of activism and documentary, to video artists who explored and manipulated the normative uses of the medium. These emerging video practices also included the recorder's incorporation into television programming and greatly contributed to and redefined TV's electronic news gathering capabilities and styles of representation.

The 1970s mark a period in the history of the medium that includes various "spin-offs" (Winston 126) made especially for the domestic space and marketed to the mass public. These include the VCR in its various formats, which have shifted and problematized the audience relationship with television, by giving them the promise of greater control over network programming. The 1980s mark the widespread proliferation of the VCR and the development of the camcorder, a device whose significance was not truly realized until the appearance of the widely publicized footage of the Rodney King beating in 1992. At that point, an amateur format devoted for home use became an electronic news gathering device, and the recording of contemporary media events fell into the hands of the unsuspecting video consumers who serendipitously found themselves armed with camcorders in the midst of unfolding current events. The chapter concludes with a description of the development of digital technologies and the increasingly prominent role that they have played in cinematic productions. The role of video vis-à-vis film production has shifted from a useful technology in the production to post-production stages of filming and editing, to, in many instances, threatening/promising to replace film altogether as the medium of choice for prominent filmmakers.

Chapter 2 explores several nonfiction televisual genres in order to shed light upon various video practices within the realm of television and the way they have influenced the status of reality on TV today. It traces the effect of video in shifting modes of representation in order to create an interpretive framework for the last chapter that will deal with the influence of video on cinematic realism. It explores television as a cultural forum and the main means of video distribution and exhibition. The concept of remediation enters this discussion as an interpretive tool for surveying the ways in which new media technologies improve upon and remedy their predecessors, while new media refashion prior ones (Bolter 273). Intermediality, on the other hand, acknowledges the fact, that more often than not, more than one medium is involved in the processes of representation and expression. The goal of these media operations seems to be the attainment of an ultimate realism, an unmediated visual experience (Bolter 4), which would provide the viewer with "special access" to reality. However, the impossibility of this is

demonstrated by the fact that numerous television programs are increasingly disclosing and exhibiting their means of expression, and exposing the "seams" of the mediated experience. This is best exemplified by the discussion of the ideology of "liveness," which is the technological capacity of video to transmit images of events instantaneously, and has been exploited by completely intermediated news programs in order to give their audience the illusion of immediacy and unity. The concept of "liveness" is best demonstrated by the discussion of the Rodney King beating footage, its various interpretations, as well as its fictional recycling and "fabularization" in television programs and feature films that have adopted and incorporated not only video, but the modes of representation associated with the medium. Last, but not least, the last section of chapter 2 traces the history of "reality television" in its numerous incarnations, in order to illustrate the paradoxes involved in the use of video for the purpose of mass entertainment. The numerous realities that these shows reveal demonstrate video's ability to indirectly provide evidence of difficult social truths and our society's attempts to deal with them, as well as the medium's limits.

Chapter 3 moves into the realm of cinematic representation and video's influence upon it. I have chosen to discuss fictional feature films that have systematically incorporated video into their narrative and formalistic aspects, in order to examine the use of video outside its normative uses in television, especially in a non-documentary context. The chapter begins with a general examination of the way in which video and television has shifted the viewing practices of the general audience. This discussion further accentuates the essential differences between film and video by examining emerging exploration of film signification and subject positioning that have been substantially influenced by artists and filmmakers who have consciously and effectively used the medium's various incarnations. Often, the use of video and its numerous connotations results in a "crisis of legibility" (Corrigan 51), where intermediated features that use video in self-reflexive ways and capitalize on nonfiction modes of representation in order to create works of fiction, render homogeneous film readings impossible. I concentrate on early uses of analogue video by Canadian filmmakers such as David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan and their

preoccupations with the medium's influence on personal and collective acts of remembering. I continue with an analysis of the incorporation of digital video by fiction films, and the filmmakers for whom it has become the medium of choice. In this section, I examine, among other fiction features shot on digital video, several Dogme 95 films and the methods by which the films expose the illusion of transparency that accompanies any realist aesthetic. Finally, the chapter examines video's influence on genre by analyzing two popular art films, Spike Lee's Bamboozled and Lars von Trier's Dancer in the Dark. The two films are ideal specimens to analyze in light of concepts such as remediation, liveness and genre, in that they draw upon previous modes of televisual representations and participate in the creation of new generic cycles, in order to question previously accepted and often conservative notions of reality and the ideologies they reflect.

The thesis concludes with a general summary of major points and the overall results of the research presented by providing a concise and chronological definition of video and its significance in each decade of existence. Ultimately, I demonstrate that "reality" is itself an ideological construct, and while the use of video technology in non-fiction television programming can certainly "invigorate" their appearance and illusion of immediacy, it ultimately helps to preserve the hegemonic ideological constructs of the dominant media systems. The use of video and similar aesthetics of realism in cinematic works of fiction, on the other hand, proves to be much more endemic to recapitulating and questioning notions of truth, "reality" and the ideologies they reflect.

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

¹ The bulk of André Bazin's work was done in the 1950s. He died prematurely in 1958 at the age of 40. At that point in time video technology was in its primitive stages and critical discourses about the medium were virtually non-existent.

Chapter I. Video's Curious Infiltration: The Trickle down Effect

Video, it is already almost a truism to say, is not essentially any one thing at all. At root, 'video' might be held to be a recording medium, using the magnetic alignment of particles of oxides as a means of storing sound and images electronically.... [T]his description is not merely inadequate, but...it is seriously misleading, even disabling. What is at stake is what I like to think of as video *culture*, that is to say, a set of relations around the uses of videotape, a set of practices and a set of possibilities concerning what these relations, uses and practices may become.

-- Sean Cubitt¹

An investigation of the corresponding historical topographies of video's emergence in the United States and Canada will not only illustrate one of its original roles as a sort of utopian project, but will also reveal many of the paradoxes that plague the medium up to this very day. These paradoxes are crucial to understanding the medium's ontological and historical underpinnings. A meticulous scrutiny of video's economic origins, its artistic and political potential, as well as its commercialization and constant resistance thereof, is needed to bring forth these contradictions. They can be further illuminated by an investigation of video's movement from a democratized technology, whose hopes were constantly dashed and renewed, to an aesthetic of choice for mass and commercial media, one which steadily reemerges in various formats and practices that continually push and challenge the discourse boundaries of truth and "liveness". Video's history is also inevitably linked to its emergence out of the medium of television, as well as with its rapid technological development. From the raw recording material known as videotape, first used for television broadcasts, later with the Sony Portapak, to the VCR, camcorder, and the present day emergence of digital video technologies that hold the future promise of a digital cinema, which many view as an impending doom for analogue film, the medium of video is an inherently polyvalent and mutable one.

It is extremely important to view video's history in terms of a complex model of borrowing and appropriation, for it is not only the commercial and mass media that have co-opted the aesthetics of emerging and marginal videographers. Instead, this intricate type of

arrogation has occurred on both sides, as numerous artists and activists alike took it upon themselves to confront the state and economic apparatuses of film, television and the commercial art world by appropriating and subverting the very technology and aesthetic tools that they were trying to critique. This notion resembles the concept of "remediation" that Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define as a process by which new media refashion prior media forms (273).

Remediation is the springboard for my concept of video as a progressive medium of defiance and will be defined and further discussed in the next chapter. It is a notion that takes into account the wider socio-political and aesthetic implications of a process by which economic necessities have generated video. Therefore, in certain instances, video can be viewed as an invention whose consumer spin-offs have generated "sites of resistance," moments in the medium's technological development where it has exposed and continues to challenge unexamined cultural "truths" and assumptions, while partially fulfilling the viewer's insatiable desire for immediacy.

The era in which video evolved was intensely active and idealistic, now seen as the primary moment of radical social upheaval in North America and Europe (Sturken 106). It was a pivotal moment of idealism that was fueled by the possibility of cultural and socio-political change. It was also a moment that echoed and came on the heels of movements such as Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité, as well as numerous realist aesthetic shifts that follow any emergence of new lightweight and affordable recording equipment, from the availability of sync-sound 16-millimeter portable cameras in the 1950s, to the present day emergence of portable digital cameras. For many of those working with video, it represented a method of revolting against the establishment of commercial television, while others used it as a tool against the commercial art world (Sturken 106-107). Either way, the medium has been viewed as a democratizing force that has made video technology available to groups and individuals who otherwise may never have had the access to such equipment, had it not been for the "trickle down" effect that had placed it within their reach. Despite the inevitable commercialization of its spin-off products, video continues to display numerous "sites of resistance," moments in the medium's development when the technology's numerous formats have been inadvertently used in

ways that the industries that produced them had not intended. These insurgencies are made evident by various instances in the history of the technology's proliferation, and range from video's infiltration of various Third World countries through the black market during the 1980s, to North American cases of individuals using camcorders in "non-prescribed" ways to police the state, as exemplified by the 1991 video of the Rodney King beating.

However, this concept of innovation, which is associated with an emergence of a utopian practice, can never be entirely separated from the influence of mass media, commercial film and television industries, government policies and funding apparatuses. These influences have played a crucial role in the development of the medium, but have also inadvertently inhibited its development. Whether exploring the effects of government funding in the United States, or the network influences on video's aesthetics and ideology of "liveness," a clear dichotomy can be seen between the potential of the medium and its capacity to thoroughly fulfill its utopian promise. The same can be said for the latest attempts by the American film industry to bring cinema into the 21st century with the development of a digital cinema. While cutting distribution costs, the industry, through the systematic conversion of movie theaters from analogue to digital projection, is not only attempting to enhance the "movie-going" experience by improving the overall audiovisual quality of the films exhibited, but is also trying to grant less commercial filmmakers an affordable means of distribution, while granting audiences greater variety of choice through easier access to independent films (Sabin 1). Whether or not this is a realistic conjecture is yet to be seen and the potential implications of such an endeavor are yet to be fully examined. Meanwhile, one can only speculate on the capacity and limits of video, a medium that has managed to branch out, mutate, trickle down and crawl right back up the economic and social ladders, all the while resisting complete assimilation by remaining somewhat accessible to the masses in various affordable formats. A historical account will shed light on the potential of video and its technological and aesthetic infiltration into the media of television and film, while establishing a technological "genealogy"² and conceptual framework based on economic and cultural accounts of the medium's evolution.

i. The Televisual Connection

In its very essence, the medium of television is hybrid in nature, since it combines "the photographic reproduction capacities of the camera, the motion capabilities of film, and the instantaneous transmission properties of the telephone" (Antin 151). David Antin thoroughly and insightfully examines the social "matrix" that defines the formal properties of the medium and that has created the normative asymmetry of communication that is not inherent to television (150). According to him, despite its transmission properties, the social relation between "sending and receiving" is fundamentally "unequal and asymmetrical" due to the social and economic constructs from which television emerged (149). It is ironic to note that after WWII, it was the powerful and commercial radio networks that controlled the new medium and made up the single and largest customer for the electronic technologies and inventions of television; these inventions and technological advancements were made for and directed solely at the convenience and profit of these networks, and as a result of this, recording or "picture-taking" and transmission was made exceedingly expensive and thus affordable only by the corporations (149).³ In fact, the only reason that these corporations underwrote the high cost of mass producing television receivers or sets was to increase the "exchange value of transmission time sold by the transmitter to his advertisers" (149-150). Thus, the expensive technology was paid for by the receiver's ability to bring advertisers and salable goods into the homes of the masses (150), and as an economic means to a profitable end, the portable technology of the television made its way to the public.

It is alongside television that one has to consider video, because of the latter's direct emergence as a component of the former. Video's technological development in the 1950s is indiscernible from the development of television and broadcasting; it is a direct result of an 'industrial and cultural formation which grew up and around the expansion to television,' which lead to a series of "spin-off" or non-broadcast uses/inventions, such as the VCR and camcorder (Winston 126). At this point, it should be noted that before the invention of the recording material known as videotape and until the 1950s, the term "video" was used to describe the

visual component of the television signal (Belton 63). From its inception, television mainly incorporated live broadcasting for transmitting news and studio performances, and it was this feature of "instantaneity" that provided for the filming/recording of unpredictable and serendipitous events (Antin 152). "Kine-recording," the method for filming these shows directly off the TV screen, was in use because of the broadcasting delay of East Coast shows for the West Coast audiences (Antin 152), and although this method served its purpose, the resulting "filmed" transmissions were of a noticeably inferior quality as compared to their "live" counterparts. In the United States, video technology is said to have served "to synchronise the various time zones of the continent along the median of a television programme," and the technology was specifically developed "to facilitate the manufacture of simultaneous TV experiences, to standardise TV time as social time" (Zielinski 238). Thus, video's invention was an economic and practical necessity, since previous methods of filming television shows off a kinescope were impractical, inferior in quality and costly, as they required hundreds of million of feet of film each year in the United States alone (Abramson 20). 1956 marks the emergence of the videotape recorder by Ampex, whose time shifting capabilities did not compromise the image quality. It is in this context that the videotape recorder came to be seen as a "time machine" (Zielinski 239), a device that unified all the American time zones into one.

The new technology did not only improve image quality, but can also be hailed as the vanguard for perpetuating the television viewer's often-misleading discernment of what is live and pre-recorded. According to a standard television direction and production handbook published in 1968:

[B]y 1957 a new TV revolution was under way. Undistinguishable from live TV on the home receiver, video-tape quickly replaced the kine-recording done by the TV networks. Not only did the stations put out a better picture, but the savings were tremendous...Live production, video-tape recordings by 1961 became so commonplace that the true live productions -- reaching the home at the moment of its origination -- was a rarity limited largely to sports and special events. *The live production on video tape, though delayed in reaching the home by a few hours or a few days was generally accepted as actual live television by the average viewer* (qtd. in Antin 153).⁴

One can certainly see how the public's perception of the medium, and its significance in maintaining an illusion of immediacy and liveness, was shaped by video's emergence. Anything filmed off a kinescope had a specific look and texture to it, and was immediately discernible as being a record or documentation of an event or program that had taken place in the past. Filmed televisual images have an essence of conservation, a process of documenting and preserving images that had a fleeting existence upon an electronic screen. Video, on the other hand, despite its time-shifting qualities and potential, provides for an immediacy of "liveness," indiscernible from actual live transmission.

I would take this point even a step further and explore the idiosyncrasies and singularity of the televisual experience vis-à-vis the intrinsic differences between the film and video camera. Unlike film, video uses no photographic emulsions; instead, like in a television camera, the lens focuses the image onto an inner tube that converts the image into an electrical impulse. This signal is then recorded on tape similar to that used by an audio tape recorder (Pincus 17). The image of the video camera can be viewed as "live," and it can be recorded and played back instantaneously on the VTR (video tape recorder), without the need to be developed. In addition, when the electrical impulse passes from camera to recorder, or from one recorder to the next, the footage can be altered in many ways. This manipulation may include anything from a simple manipulation of color and contrast, to the creation of special effects by a generator that can combine, distort, freeze or replay at varying speeds, the images and/or footage recorded (Pincus 17-18). Most television viewers are very well acquainted with computer generated manipulations of the video image (Pincus 18), effects that are most apparent in early music videos. I would thus conclude that it is the past viewing experiences of the television audience that have "trained" the spectator's eye to react specifically to the aesthetic idiosyncrasies of video, and have imbedded in the public's mind the intrinsic qualities and discourses that make the electronic medium inherently different from film.⁵ These specific aesthetics and discourses, as well as their implications, will be further explored in chapter 2.

ii. The Utopian Project and the Emergence of "Video Vérité"⁶

Most historical accounts of video's crossover from the medium of television to the mass population begin with the Sony Corporation's introduction of its portable video recorder in the United States in 1965. The artistic and political communities had to wait for the television industry to expand the market for its relatively new video technology into "special institutional and consumer domains" (Antin 160). This is to say that although the technology was made available to the "consumer public," its accessibility and affordability was still out of the reach of the masses, and I would argue that its availability went only as far as the institutions that were financially able to acquire the new product, or the individuals that were able to afford it. The Portapak consisted of a small and mobile camera, and a reel to reel, half inch, black and white videotape recorder with about 30 minutes of recording time available. It weighed about 20 pounds (Winston 138), and if combined with a microphone and a small monitor for instantaneous playback, cost around \$2,000 (Antin 160). This basic kit was said to "release the medium from the economic, ideological and aesthetic confines of the television studio and placed it in the hands of individual artists" (Hanhardt: 1986 16).

Within the underground video movement, the Portapak allowed "video freaks" to roam the streets (Boyle in Hall 51), and shoot footage that, with little or no editing, was turned into novelty documentaries on street life. This movement also turned the limits of the new technology into a fresh new style (Boyle in Hall 52), with its gritty and shaky images, and instantaneous playback. Many artists even used surveillance cameras, bringing a new perspective to reality that was captured without a viewfinder or a camera operator. Towards the end of the 1960s, collective groups appeared throughout the United States, but New York served as the center for the underground movement. This movement consisted of groups such as Videofreex, Global Village and the Raindance Corporation (Boyle in Hall 52), just to name a few. Collectively, all these groups shot hundreds of hours of documentary tapes that included works on the "New Left polemic and the drama of political confrontation as well as video erotica" (Boyle in Hall 53). These videos challenged "the boob tube's authority," and attempted

to counterbalance the often-negative representations of youth protests and rebellion within the counterculture (Boyle in Hall 53), while presenting their own version of the movement. It was not long before broadcast television became interested in the work that was being done by these groups, and attempted to incorporate it into its programming. By the fall of 1969, CBS invested thousands of dollars into the ill fated "Now" project, a magazine show that consisted of video documentary "vignettes that promised to show America what the 1960s youth and culture rebellion was really about" (Boyle in Hall 53). Although nearly everyone in New York who had a Portapak worked for the broadcast giant, CBS was especially interested and invested in Videofreex, because of the group's cutting-edge footage, including a tape of Black Panther Fred Hampton, which was made only days before he was murdered. The ninety minute pilot entitled "Subject to Change," was ultimately rejected by CBS executives because it was deemed too "ahead of its time" (Boyle in Hall 53).

The "Now" project marked a significant shift in the history of underground video, as it not only became co-opted, but also rejected by CBS. The 1970s witnessed the "surfacing" of underground video and its shift into "alternative TV" (Boyle in Hall 56). A community of artists and activists started out on a road to create a utopian project, and in 1971, a manifesto entitled "Guerrilla Television," written by Raindance member Michael Shamberg, was published and outlined a plan to decentralize television and create a medium that "could be made by as well as for the people" (Boyle in Hall 55). The title of the manifesto was derived from the phrase "cybernetic guerrilla warfare," an expression coined by Paul Ryan who believed that conventional guerrilla terrorist tactics were "ecologically risky" (Boyle: 1997 30). Ryan was an advocate of portable video, and felt that in conjunction with "cable TV, satellites, cybernetic craft industries, and alternate lifestyles," the burgeoning medium was potentially better in combating the "perceptual imperialism of broadcast television" (qtd. in Boyle 30) than traditional guerrilla strategies. This "guerrilla warfare" (Boyle: 1997 30) outlined in the manifesto was aided by federal rules and regulations that mandated "local origination" programming and public access channels for most cable systems throughout the United States (Boyle in Hall 56). By then

the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), was established by Congress in order to provide funding for “a new and fundamental institution in American culture” (qtd. in Rae Huffman 81), as was the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), which ensured artists access to television (Rae Huffman 81). The most significant of these guerrilla television collectives was Top Value Television (TVTV), a group that made its name with two “behind-the-scenes vérité” documentaries on the 1972 Democratic and Republican political conventions (Sturken 109). In these tapes, TVTV not only subverted the traditional documentary modes of representation, but also undermined the conventional techniques of television reporting. They were able to catch subjects off guard, and had access to spaces that cumbersome network camera equipment did not. The novelty of these techniques soon wore off, as television news began reflecting guerrilla television’s influence. By the end of the decade, many of the distinctions between the two began to disappear, as the networks reclaimed “the style and content of independent work, as well as many of its practitioners” (Boyle in Hall 59).

This co-option reflects many of the paradoxes within the medium, and within the context of certain institutions and funding apparatuses. In her essay, “Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form: Great Expectation and the Making of a History,” Marita Sturken traces the contradictions and discrepancies within the historical accounts of video. She begins with a critique of the video collectives that have been historically portrayed as being “anti-establishment,” and structured in a “supportive” and “egalitarian” matter (108-109). The reality of many of these collectives, especially Raindance, was that they were started as profit-making corporations with male-dominated hierarchies (109). Also, the impact of many groups such as TVTV weakened over time as its members were seduced by the entertainment industry; several of TVTV’s former practitioners are now Hollywood producers (109). In most historical accounts, it is also often noted that artists made tapes that were deliberately “antagonistic and antithetical” (109) to mainstream television. Yet it is ironic to note that most of these artists tried to get their material on television through experimental workshops, or broadcast television, as was the case with the never-aired CBS pilot “Subject to Change” (109).

According to Sturken, despite the fact that a majority of early video activity took place outside of social organizations and museums, the funding apparatus ensured that this autonomy would not last very long (111). The Rockefeller Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) began allocating large sums of money by 1970, two years after most artists began using the new technology (111). Because, by law, the NYSCA and the Rockefeller Foundation can only fund organizations such as public television stations and art institutions, these establishments became the “primary arbiters of taste” (112). Their policies became instrumental in defining art and differentiating it from activism. One can see this concept at work with the actions of Howard Klein, the director of the Rockefeller Foundation. He saw the funding of video art as a chance to develop television research and experimental TV workshops (112). On the other hand, institutions such as the NYSCA began to move away from funding community-based and information-oriented videos, while lending its aid to what it considered purely aesthetic “video art” (112). The “all-for-one camaraderie” that characterized the budding video community began to break down, as early as when collectives scrambled for CBS dollars in the late 1960s (Boyle in Hall 56). This created a dichotomy between the activists and artists, which was further intensified by the specific stipulations of funding institutions. The result was a fissure within a group of video practitioners that until that point was “diverse yet somewhat coherent” in its design (Sturken 112).

iii. Meanwhile, North of the 49th...

In Canada, the cumbersome one-inch video recorders were already being used at the National Film Board by 1966. They were treated as sound and image recorders and were used at the “storyboard level” by producing instant rushes for the Educational Film Department where Robert Forget had been producing documentaries since the year before (Bégin 100). Robert Forget was one of the producers with the Challenge for Change program, and acquired the first Portapak (portable half-inch video recorder) in Canada from New York in 1967. Forget played a key role in encouraging the use of the new equipment in a whole range of experimental

methods, which included archive creation, critical distancing and self-criticism, during a time when the use of video was considered to be a process that was still in its “mirror phase” (Bégin 100). By 1970, video formats were standardized, and the NFB made a block purchase of all Portapacks available in Canada (Bégin 100).

Any historical account of video's origins in Canada begins with the indisputable presence of the National Film Board's Challenge for Change program. The program was initiated with subsidies from several government departments in 1967, and was meant to reinforce the image of Canada as “an advanced democratic nation” (Marchessault 13). The project's aims were to give the “disenfranchised and marginal communities of Canada a voice” by initially providing them with access to film, and later to video and cable television (Marchessault 13). The community members were encouraged to make their own views and concerns heard and visible by taking the media into their own hands. The intent of the program was not only to encourage dialogue, but also to promote social change around issues such as poverty. Challenge for Change sought to confront the NFB's “technocratic elitism” and sought to transform government sponsored film projects into public platforms for the people (Marchessault 15). By the end of the sixties, the program advocated video production because it was cheaper and easier to use than film. Participating community members were integrated into all aspects of production and distribution, and their finished products were used as lobbying tools, to inform the general public, and to communicate with fellow communities (Shaw 31). The program's goals and video's unique properties conspired to decentralize the roles of the directors, and left them to train community members to use the newly available technologies to express concerns they found to be central. It also eliminated the distance between the filmmakers and their subjects, by making them one and the same. This “participatory approach” (Marchessault 16), ensured that the participants would be able to view their own behavior, and constructively create better solutions for their predicaments.

Janine Marchessault accurately traces the fall and drawbacks of the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program in her essay, “Amateur Video and the Challenge for Change.”

The "videos produced through Challenge for Change, although emerging from a diversity of communities, tended to look the same" (Marchessault 19). The façade of accessibility and the ease with which the video equipment was associated discouraged experimentation and provided little aesthetic or formal diversity. Further, the videos did little to challenge authority, since the process of putting the media directly into the hands of disenfranchised communities was largely directed by the Liberal reformers and government sponsorship (21). "One of the main criticisms of Challenge for Change has been that it worked to diffuse direct action, to contain and stabilize, as television can do, the potentially explosive effects of difference" (21). A similar situation occurred in the broadcast and distribution end of the program's utopian intentions. When cable television was introduced in the early 1970s to the different communities, it was done so in the form of a *service* (22). Although the companies were encouraged to open time slots for the community programming, only about a third actually did so. Perhaps only with the exception of Quebec, no state funding has ever made available for community access. Marchessault points out that the community access model has been far more successful in the States, not because it is without flaws, but "perhaps because the market driven institutions of television are more readily apparent" (23). Despite its good intention of wanting to help disenfranchised communities help themselves, the creators of Challenge for Change did not fully consider how the resulting products would be disseminated and received. The videos and films produced were "mirror reflections" that soon were turned into the repetition of "the Same" (20), and did little to rise to the challenge of the program and affect meaningful change.

Similarly, Kevin Dowler, in his essay "Interstitial Aesthetics and the Politics of Video at the Canada Council," traces Canadian video's development and shortcomings vis-à-vis the cultural policy and funding apparatus of the Canada Council for the Arts. Although the video program at the Canada Council was not officially established until 1975, it effectively started in 1967 with a grant of forty thousand dollars awarded by the Visual Arts Section to the Vancouver group, Intermedia (Dowler 35), an interdisciplinary collective of writers and artists (Tuer 108). Members of this collective used the new technology to further blur the boundaries "between art

and life and art, the private and public,” by obsessively documenting everyday events, while “counterculture lifestyles provided the thematic focus” (Tuer 108). When the group collapsed five years later, under the “weight of its own utopian aspirations” (Dowler 36), the Council attributed Intermedia’s failure to its split into two separate directions of “artistic research” and “social and educational development” (qtd. in Dowler 36). The Council was unable to reconcile the two concepts due to the fact that it was established “for the encouragement of the arts, humanities and social sciences” (qtd. in Dowler 36). Awarding grants for the purpose of social development and/or education would not only be going against its original mandate of supporting the arts, but would also infringe on the jurisdiction of other government agencies (Dowler 36). In order to establish a fund to sponsor video production, the Council had to coordinate its policy with other sectors of the government and cultural agencies, and make a clear differentiation between the practice of video art and the “‘industrial’ organizations of television production” (Dowler 38). “It was in contrast to this industrial model that the Council would define a ‘beaux-arts’ model of video production” (Dowler 38). These strategies were not only meant to avoid conflict with the other agencies, such as the NFB, but also allowed for the artists themselves to question and transform the binding definition of art.

The Council was also careful to indicate that it was concerned only with “professional development of film-makers” and organizations that “offer support services for non-commercial or experimental films” (qtd. in Dowler 39). This was a clear attempt at establishing a unique aesthetic that would differentiate the Council’s support from that of other agencies. To further stay clear of any possible friction, the Council simply widened the scope of what constituted art (Dowler 43). By endorsing a growing community of video artists, the Council inadvertently supported a group that was highly critical of broadcast systems (Dowler 46). It was precisely this mix of video as an art form, and as a form of social critique, that led to the conclusion that a separate video program needed to be established, one which would consist of an array of individuals familiar with the aesthetics and politics of the new medium (Dowler 47). Thus the council was able to accommodate “the ‘utopian moment’ of video, and develop a funding

mechanism to encourage work in this medium, despite resistance from both within and without the Council" (Dowler 48).

In 1972, following the collapse of the "all-encompassing utopian project" of Intermedia that attempted to turn life into art, a number of splinter collectives, having to do with the production and distribution of video, emerged (Tuer 109). These include Metro Media, which was associated with community activism, the Video Inn and Western Front, which were committed to artistic experimentation, and Women in Focus, a gender oriented collective (Tuer 109). In 1971, as part of the NFB's Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program, Vidéographe, the first independent production and distribution organization devoted exclusively to video, was founded in Canada, followed two years later by Vancouver's Satellite Video Exchange Society / Video Inn (Gagnon 137).⁷ A year before the creation of the Video Inn, Michael Goldberg, the video artist of Metro Media fame, created the International Video Exchange Directory. According to Goldberg, the idealistic purpose of this endeavor was to create "communication links around the world, decentralizing media processes away from the elite" (Diamond in Gale 170). The purpose of both the society and the directory was to provide video viewing and distribution opportunities for independent producers and community groups who required exhibition spaces for their work and did not have "access to alternative media for the public at large" (Abbott 124). The aim of this active exchange of videotapes was the global dissemination of information that would convert the medium of video into a communication system; at least that was the utopian vision.

iv. Artists' Video or Video Art?

The previous discussion of the development of video's early documentary tradition and its many drawbacks creates an ideological underpinning for further discussion of the dichotomy that was created between the medium's political promise and its potential as an art form. The distinction may not always be clear, yet one cannot ignore the emergence of the multifaceted medium and/or genre of video art. As video began to rapidly generate new and accessible

formats, many cultural critics were swift "to dismiss the new technology as being only fit for deep-freezing holiday pictures and family celebrations or other very private uses including erotic stimulants" (Zielinski 237). Of course these critics ignored "the cultural process that availed itself of [sic] this media technology," and refused to engage in discourses that acknowledged video artists who creatively utilized video to artistically objectify the medium's unique properties through the preservation and exhibition of "time processes, particularly those cast in everyday banality" (Zielinski 237). Loosely, one would define video art or artists' video as an art form that "consists of works produced by the manipulation of video as a medium – either through special video installation pieces, through experimental play with prerecorded material or with synthesized images, through film-like documentaries, through an artist's own performances recorded on video, or through production of original works on video that explore the nature of the medium" (Belton 64). Even John Belton's concise and general definition underlines the medium's intrinsic qualities and ontological specificity. Meanwhile, video's early and binary existence as either a catalyst for art or activism can be attributed to the limited discourses that have surrounded it since its inception. However, what is most important to remember about video art is that it is "a unique appropriation of video technology" that "regularly explores, manipulates and/or violates its normal usage" (Belton 71n), in an attempt to undermine normative uses of the medium by both the television industry and video consumers.

The aforementioned developments in video technology, aesthetics, and politics, often serve as the basis for this art form, and in the modernist sense, its utopian or activist capacity often crosses over with its purely artistic potential. An examination of the various video practices and their constant evolutions is crucial for attaining a full understanding of the technology and exploring this multi-faceted medium. Most of the historical renderings of the birth of video art in the United States can be traced back to Nam June Paik and his incorporation of the television set in his artwork. Some of these renditions have taken on mythical dimensions:

The elements of the myth thus include an Eastern visitor from a country ravaged by war (our war) who was inoculated by the leading U.S. avant-garde master while in technology

heaven (Germany), who, once in the States repeatedly violated the central shrine, TV, and then goes to face the representative God on earth, capturing his image to bring to the avant-garde, and who then went out from it to pull together the two ends of the American cultural spectrum by symbolically incorporating the consciousness industry into the methods and ideas of the cultural apparatus – always with foundation, government, museum, broadcast, and other institutional support (Rosler 45).

This rather sardonic and humorous observation by Martha Rosler, herself an essential figure in the development of video art, accurately traces the tale of the Korean-born Nam June Paik who is considered the father of American video art. His inclusion of the television set in many of his sculptures, prior to the emergence of the Portapak, marked a subversion of the normative uses of the technology and undermined the networks' authority by putting on the TV screens images other than the ones transmitted by the stations. Before moving to the United States, Paik lived in Germany where he was influenced by avant-garde artists such as the musician John Cage (Rosler 44), who is known for his compositions of prolonged silences. After moving to the United States in the 1960s, he is said to be the first “consumer” to buy the still rather cumbersome Portapak (Boyle in Hall 51) that had just arrived from Japan, which he purchased with a grant from the John D. Rockefeller the Third Fund. In October of 1965, while on his way home from making his purchase, he produced the first publicized video documentary while riding in a New York taxicab during the pope’s visit (Rosler 45), which he showed that night at Café à Go Go (Sturken 104). This historicized event is hauntingly reminiscent of the Lumière brothers and the premiere of their actualités at the Grand Café in Paris, almost seventy years earlier. Although Paik’s short documentary contributed to the mythical beginning of the so-called “underground video” movement that started a tidal wave of “street tapes” (Boyle in Hall 51), made by anyone and everyone who had access to the new technology, the works of Nam June Paik have become co-opted, much like pop-art. Paik’s artistic output, which originally intended to critically comment on the televisual apparatus and was created in the spirit of the Fluxus movement that attempted to subvert the high brow cultural standards of traditional art, were ironically turned into works of art to be displayed in museums and galleries, and the artist himself has become a prominent

figure in the art world, worthy of countless publications and retrospectives. This phenomenon shrouds video art in a shadow of irony, where the art form becomes a means of expression for "a special class of people -- artists -- whose works are exhibited primarily in what is called 'the art world'" (Antin 147).

However, this view of video art, as either an exclusive artistic medium or a tool of great political potential, is too narrow. Video art creates potential for thinking and reevaluating its content in the contexts that the works are made. For the past three decades, video works have challenged the historical distinction between "art video and community video" (Marchessault 23). Outside of creating a critical discourse about the medium of television and the commercial art world, themes that are more heterogeneous have emerged in the last twenty years. These motifs have ranged from the scrutiny of history and memory to reexaminations of issues such as gender and sexuality, as well as race and identity. All of these themes are not necessarily exclusive from each other, and all work towards shifting and creating new discourses regarding issues that have been either ignored in the past, or not at all addressed. All these leitmotifs have also been presented in various guises and have been expressed through art forms that range from video sculpture, performance and interactive installations, to documentaries, fictional narratives and visual diaries. A considerable number of these works, often by minority artists, have provoked contentions in the realms of public broadcasting and museum exhibition and have sadly resulted in various forms of censorship. Although not exclusively, I am specifically referring to video art that deals with sex and sexuality. Two examples that come to mind are works by Marlon Riggs and Paul Wong. Riggs's video, Tongues Untied (1989), a highly personal and subjective documentary that describes the American black gay experience, was labeled as offensive, and in 1991 many public television stations in the United States refused to air it as part of the P.O.V. series. Riggs's artistic attempt to "shatter this nation's brutalizing silence on matters of sexual and racial difference" was met with censorship campaigns by the likes of the conservative American Family Association (Riggs 185). Paul Wong faced similar censure in Canada. Wong's Confused: Sexual Views (1984) was commissioned by the

Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) as part of its opening show. The comprehensive video project included a multi-channel installation made up of documentary interviews that openly dealt with sex and sexuality. The gallery deemed the exhibit's "documentary" format and content too controversial and consequently cancelled the show (Diamond in Renov 199).

The fact that such works are necessary to the advancement and exposure of mariginalized groups and their voices, as well as the fact that many of these projects incite controversies, demonstrates the medium's resistance to complete co-option. Video's essential properties grant the medium with significant potential, especially when in the hands of stalwart individuals willing to affect change. According to Sean Cubitt, "[t]hought of culturally, video is both a symptom of the societies in which it has emerged and is being used, and a tool in their further development" (1993 xvii). He continues by saying that "[t]he purpose, then, of video art in video culture is to attack and destroy mediocrity; not in the name of the popular or the high brow, but in the name of real diversity, real difference" (1993 204). Video art reflects an ongoing technological and cultural revolution, which is in full swing, and continues to defy any of the confines of government, network, museum or other institutional support. The pluralist nature of video and its polyvalent qualities are the ideal way of exploring the artist's relationship to society and culture. However, as Ron Burnett points out, even this relationship is unstable:

The continual process of renewal means that no society is ever in stasis long enough to bracket out the shifts it creates. The social is an ever-expanding movement along a distinctly non-linear path and this results in reciprocal exchanges between tradition and innovation, a production of boundaries and historical markets, all of which can be dissolved and recreated. The parameters of this dialectical process are forever changing (148).

The dichotomy or split between video art and activism is not a natural one; it has been fostered by institutions, government policies and ruling critical discourses. The liminal position of video vis-à-vis institutions and discourses, truth and fiction, as well as art and activism will be further accentuated by a discussion of the medium's "spin-off" technologies and their ability to surpass their intended design.

v. The "Spin-offs": Video Goes Domestic

The domestic video cassette player and recorder is a "spin-off" from the network recording technology discussed earlier in this chapter, and was viewed as a potential home technology as early as the 1950s (Winston 128). To this end, by 1970, there were six competing "cassette TV systems" in development to be marketed within the next few years (Friedberg 443). This set off a proliferation of "mutually incompatible boxes" and eventually saw the prevalence of the half-inch tape size, in a number of revised formats (Winston 128). The Sony Betamax was introduced in 1975, and used the half-inch videotape in a cassette format, but could only record for an hour; a year later, a competing half-inch VHS (Video Home System) was introduced (Friedberg 443). One of Sony's first advertising strategies for selling the Betamax format video recorder was by labeling it as a "video time-shift machine" that could record and play back television programs (Marlow 120). The new product promised to return control of TV programming into the hands of the viewer with slogans like "YOU SHOULD CONTROL TV, IT SHOULDN'T CONTROL YOU," and promises of improved familial relations with catch phrases like "[y]our kids can see the shows they want at the time *you* want (Marlow 124),⁸ as well as guarantees that "THIS AMAZING MACHINE CAN ADD HOURS TO YOUR DAY" (Marlow 125). A noteworthy battle ensued between the Beta and VHS configurations, and was concluded in the 1980s with the latter winning the dominance of the domestic market, since the cassette recorder's primary use was for recording broadcast feature films (Friedberg 443), and the VHS cassettes were an hour longer than the 60-minute Betas. Beta, despite its superior image quality, was only able to maintain "the edge as the last non-digital professional standard" (Winston 128-129). The previous account of the development and evolution of the VCR is best summarized by Siegfried Zielinski in his book, Audiovisions: Cinema and television as entr'actes in history, where he makes the connection between video as a both an industrial and cultural medium. Zielinski traces this maturation back to the 1960s:

With respect to the interrelation between techno-industrial and socio-cultural factors, this [the development of the video recorder] was a striking process of development for an

innovation for the mass market: since the 1960s, all attempts on the part of industry to market devices that could only play back filmic commodities had been unmitigated disasters and spectacularly bad investment for the firms concerned. Only when the artefact [sic] had been poured into the mould of a television recorder, relatively easy to operate, and with magnetic tape enclosed in cassettes that was [sic] long enough to record at least one feature film, was it able to arouse the desires of many potential customers (239).

Here, he not only succinctly outlines the shortcomings of various attempts at practically and economically fulfilling video's technical potential, but also acknowledges the medium's flexibility and ability to fit into various "moulds" or formats.

The 1980s also brought about a global consumer boom and the VCR became the "major innovation in home entertainment since television" (Gray 1). The infiltration of VCR technology was staggering. In the United States alone, between 1980 and 1995 the number of VCRs grew from 1.8 million to 86 million; 90 per cent of those households that already had a television set, had a VCR by 1995; each of these households was renting a video nearly every week, and in addition to these rentals, each household was buying about four videos per year (Winston 126-127). The issue of copyrighting (Friedberg 444) overshadowed the widespread appeal and success of the VCR. United Artists and Disney brought legal action against Sony, claiming that the VCR was in violation of basic copyright laws since it could record/copy copyrighted material; hence the new technology was not in the "clear" until October of 1982, when a United States court ruled that no copyright violation was involved in recording television signals (Friedberg 444, Winston 127).

This "spin-off" technology is said to fit in "culturally" and "meshes with abstractions such as the ongoing drive to put entertainment in the home" (Winston 127). Also, as previously mentioned, it breaks the "tyranny" of television scheduling (Winston 127) and puts the "power" back in the hands of the consumer/viewer. Two decades after its development, video was passed into the hands of the television viewer, and provided for "the production of anarchic televisual relations," at least in the temporal sense (Zielinski 239). Although the use of the term "anarchic" may seem a bit of an overstatement, it effectively comments on video's modification of the

viewer's relationship to the networks' regular television programming. While the original intent of the video technologies vis-à-vis television was to unify time zones, and construct the illusion of temporal unity, the purpose of the VCR was to deconstruct time "as fixed by the provider, i.e., the heteronomous [sic] raster [sic] of programmes for the subjects of reception" (Zielinski 238). Last, but not least, these spin-offs were and continue to be relatively inexpensive and allow the viewer to enjoy theatrically-released feature films, while considerably slashing the cost of the cinema going experience (Winston 127). It is ironic to note that a similar pattern of breaking institutional "tyranny" can be traced in the VCR's dissemination around the world. In its first decade alone, starting in the mid-1970s, it not only became widespread due to the pornography market and the desire to watch adult entertainment in private, but was also able to penetrate even the most restrictive nations, often in large quantities (Ganley xi). A study done in 1983 demonstrated that the infiltration of the VCR into the Third World surpassed the growths of television (Friedberg 444).⁹ The infiltration can be accounted for by the black market, which posed a threat to the "information monopolies" and restrictive governments of many of these nations (Ganley xi). VCRs were used to watch "contraband" material: "Indian films in Pakistan and Bangladesh, Western films in Eastern Europe, pornography everywhere" (Friedberg 444). VCRs "have brought to many countries de facto media decentralization" and have given control to private individuals over a technology that facilitates the production and dissemination of materials and information to a wider audience without the involvement of any official institutions (qtd. in Ganley 4).

Following the portable video camera's political beginnings, the medium and the modes of representation it encouraged were not only co-opted, but also commercialized. The reel-to-reel, portable recording devices proved too bulky and costly for home use; consequently, the development of 8mm video was followed in 1984 by Sony's creation of the tiny Betamovie camcorder, as well as the onslaught of a VHS version (Winston 139). The technology evolved so rapidly that the quality of color video recording that could have only been made available in studios with bulky, nonportable equipment in 1975, was being attained in 1982 with handheld

cameras, which had the VTR (video tape recording system) built into them (Pincus 12). The use of the video camera became widespread through the sudden accessibility of the video cameras for personal or home use. "Reality" videos became entertainment commodities with the creation of shows such as America's Funniest Home Videos. When the show was first broadcast in January 1990 (Brooks 41), camcorders donated by manufacturers to ABC were made available to viewers for test shoots (Citron 5). An increase in the demand for such videos not only increased the sales of video cameras to consumers, but also created a desire or need to capture home images (Citron 5). These videos and their predominant content are typical of the representations that are created by a need to represent "the good times" and capture events which can yield the favor of the voting audience, as well as the \$10,000 grand prize. Zielinski points to the advantages of the user-friendly and accessible camcorder format:

[T]he video recorder enabled the individual to preserve pieces of life-time -- events, and occurrences that he/she wished to keep and, if and when so desired, to retrieve in a technically estranged, and in some cases, processed form, to watch them again and evaluate them. Unlike the technique of the narrow gauge film, which had been available to the hobby filmmaker since the 1920s but for technical and economic reasons only allowed the inscription of brief pieces of photographic film, it was possible to store much longer events without breaks on magnetic tape. The price of the material was low and there were no additional costs for developing as the tape did not require chemical processing (237).

The rewards and intended uses of the new gadget were clear. Almost half a million camcorders a year were being sold in the United States by the mid-1990s, but it was the camcorder recording of Rodney King's beating in 1991 that marked "the machine's coming of age as a fully diffused device," (Winston 139). Consumer technology that was originally intended for personal and entertainment use was once again taking on documentary aesthetics, as well as public and political implications, issues that I will further explore in chapter 2.

The VCR and camcorder formats are of course now becoming supplanted by digital technologies. The DVD (Digital Video/Versatile Disk) player is said to be the next VCR, just as CD players have replaced record players. The DVD technology is offering instantaneous access

to different sections of recordings, without the time-consuming processes of fast-forwarding and rewinding videotapes (Friedberg 445-446). Unlike the laser discs and CD-ROMS, and because of its advanced "image compression algorithms," a DVD can hold an entire feature film (Friedberg 446). The digitizing of images was marketed as early as 1990 with still cameras that took advantage of the CCD (charge couple device), an electronic receptor chip that was already being introduced into analogue television cameras as early as 1984. In 1990, Sony marketed an amateur version, but the format did not make much progress outside of the newspaper industry, since by the mid-1990s, it was unable to achieve the resolution of traditional photography (Winston 139). By the second half of the decade, camcorders that were also equipped with CCDs, along with other professional and video equipment, were all going digital. Digital camcorders that were as small as the amateur ones were producing images that were compatible with professional quality, and although expensive by consumer standards, the devices were relatively cheap for professional needs (Winston 140). This has generated a great deal of hyperbolic talk about digital video's potential role in greatly reducing production costs (Winston 140), the possibilities and consequences of which will be discussed in the next section.

vi. Reinventing Cinema in the Age of Digital Video

It is interesting to trace the way in which video and digital technologies have shifted from the arenas of production and post-production of feature films, to the area of product distribution. This pattern is nothing new, and has been previously witnessed with the consequences of spin-off formats such as the VCR and camcorder. However the implication of digital video's infiltration into commercial cinema may herald the end of film as we know it, and may be the single most important transition and technological conversion since the coming of sound. Video has been a part of cinema since 1960, when Jerry Lewis created the video assist, a process which enables the director to watch a take on a miniature monitor as it is being filmed (J. Kaplan 60). This useful technique for producing films has evolved into the so-called "video taps," with which most film cameras are equipped and that allow for the video recording and instant playback of

the scenes that are being filmed (Pincus 19). This of course is a time and money-saving device that provides filmmakers with much more precise ideas of what they are capturing on film (Pincus 19-20), without the extra costs and/or delays of developing dailies. Video is also useful in the area of postproduction, especially editing. The transfer of raw film footage to videotape can help save time and money when editing, since one is able to previsualize various montage effects, such as fade-ins, fade outs, or double exposures, techniques that, until the emergence of video, were only viewable after the film had been edited and printed by the lab. This method has been greatly upgraded by the digitization of footage, and the capabilities of computer editing. In fact, digital, non-linear editing, as well as the production of computer generated special effects facilitated by digital video, have not only paralleled, but have also exceeded the capabilities of film (Sabin 22).

The first *major* feature to be shot entirely on video -- George Lucas's Star Wars: Episode II -- is currently in post-production (Sabin 1). In fact, the *New York Times* has heralded Lucas as the "closest thing we have to the father of digital cinema" (Sabin 1), an exaggeration and presumption that ignores precursors such as the films of the Dogme 95 group, Mike Figgis's Timecode (2000), Lars Von Trier's Dancer in the Dark (2000) and the most recent, not-so-major feature made by the first A-list film director to shoot his film almost entirely on high definition digital video (Quart 48), Spike Lee's Bamboozled (2000). The aesthetic and socio-political implications of these films will be discussed further in chapter 3. For now, however, it is important to note that George Lucas is using the medium to facilitate his forte in special effects, and has tested and declared that the cutting edge technologies in digital video are currently close to indistinguishable from the high resolution and image quality of film. His interest in digital video can be viewed as a result of the dramatic reduction in costs and new possibilities in special effects, and outlines the industry's concern for the bottom line. Many support the widely held theory that within five years, "mightier chips, improved cameras and refined processing techniques" will "beget" features that look "normal," but are cheaper and more compliant to special effects (Quart 49). For the previously-mentioned filmmakers, who have worked outside

of the commercial mainstream, the implications of the new technologies take on the democratizing aspect of experimentation and resistance of studio control, where aesthetics and personal politics can be further explored, without great financial risk or reliance upon studio support, while the difference between film and video are put in the forefront and explored in inventive ways.

Despite the fact that digital projection has already become "de rigeur" at most major film festivals (Sabin 22), George Lucas is also hailed as an essential figure in the ongoing quest to convert exhibition of films into the digital format. Two years ago he converted the first episode of his Star Wars prequel into digital data and ran it for two months at four theatres (two in Los Angeles and two in New Jersey) that exhibited the feature with high definition video projectors. The exit polls showed that the viewers were happy with the results, and many have argued that the new technology will vastly improve the movie-going experience due to the fact that the films will not suffer damage or loss of image quality that is usually associated with film prints (Sabin 22). Some have even speculated that the low cost of distributing films digitally will allow megaplexes to substitute smaller independent works for "aging blockbusters" or "slow nights," (Sabin 22) and provide greater exposure to independent filmmakers, as well as greater choice for audiences that do not live in major urban centers. Despite the lower cost of production on digital video, many independent filmmakers are still not assured proper distribution due to the fact that their features must still be blown up to film and bear the enormous expenses of this costly process. Thus, widespread digital exhibition will allow "art-house" cinema to be shown in places that do not usually have access to it because of the high cost of making and distributing prints (Sabin 22); at least those are the industry insiders' speculations.

Meanwhile, companies like Technicolor, the largest supplier of movie prints to the industry, have taken a leading role in introducing the technology to the public and underwriting the initial cost of what appears to be the start of a world-wide conversion. With the help of several theater chains and Texas Instruments, the company has financed the installation of thirty-one digital projectors in North America, Europe and Asia (Sabin 22). A system is also being

tested that would allow original digital film masters to be beamed down from satellites to participating movie theatres, the possibility of which would revolutionize the movie-going experience as we know it, with the prospect of transmitting live events such as Broadway shows, and engaging the audiences with live interactive games (Sabin 22). Pragmatically speaking, a total conversion of this sort is still decades away. However, the very way in which video technology has managed to "crawl" right back up the industrial ladder and create the possibility of a new digital cinema, demonstrates the medium's unparalleled utopian potential and commercial flexibility.

The next chapter will discuss the influence of video on the state of reality on TV by examining news coverage of the modern event, as well as the emergence and unparalleled popularity of the "Reality TV" genre. It will explore the stylistic shifts of video, and the "taming" or appropriation of its documentary aesthetic, realistic techniques, and technologies that have been appropriated by commercial industries "in the service of seeming spontaneity" (Miller 227-228). "Liveness" will be looked at as a product of the televisual medium and its technological development of video, and as an ideology that simultaneously illustrates, critiques and reaffirms the "fictional recycling" (Torres 144) in which it participates, in a constant pursuit of the elusive goals of truth and realism.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

¹ Cubitt: 1991 1

² Alissa Quart uses the term "tech genealogy" to trace every "democratizing postwar cinematic innovation from Super 8 to handheld video" (49). I have adapted the term to strictly trace the technological evolution of video.

³ Antin also notes that the commercial and economic structure of television was not only patterned on commercial radio networks, but was also controlled by them. These networks made up a private monopoly that was essentially protected by the government and helped shaped the "communication characteristics of the new medium" (149).

⁴ Antin's italics.

⁵ It is important to note that 35mm film is often used for television movies and commercials because of its unparalleled sharpness and color reproduction capabilities (Pincus 20). I should also note that this practice may soon become obsolete due to the constant improvements and developments of digital video, a development that will be further discussed in section vi of this chapter.

⁶ Frank P. Tomasulo uses the term "video vérité" to describe an observational mode of shooting footage, which consists of the single uninterrupted long shot that "effaces the overt presence" of the videographer in favor "of the transparent reality before the lens," when describing the aesthetics of the infamous Rodney King tape (75). I have appropriated the term to label and describe video's documentary tradition.

⁷ Today, the Video In (previously known as Video Inn, due to the various artists and activist who made the organization their temporary home) has one of the most significant, noncommercial video art libraries in Canada that is open to the public. It contains more than 3,000 titles. Its role as a dominant force for social change is still evident from the organization's support of marginalized groups and disadvantaged individuals. Elaborating on work done with First Nations and women's groups, Video In is currently working on a program called "Deaf at Video In," which helps hearing-impaired individuals find appropriate and artistic means of expression through video. Video In remains a training ground for up and coming video artists, and serves as a media access center, where various works can be both produced and exhibited (Cramp 63).

⁸ Emphasis is my own.

⁹ 1982 statistics have shown staggering examples of intercultural VCR usage with some significant discrepancies: 92 per cent of TV households in Kuwait had VCRs, 82 per cent in Panama, 70 per cent in Oman, 43 per cent in Bahrain. Meanwhile, in 1984, the figure in France was only 10 per cent, 26 per cent in Japan, 62 per cent in Singapore, 75 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and 30 per cent in the United Kingdom (Friedberg 444).

Chapter II. "Live on Tape": Video and the Status of Reality on TV

*The air has eyes that scan us from the skies
And ears that listen from the blue...So you needn't roam
From your own happy home,
The world will pass you in review.*

-- Song sung during the 1936 opening program of the world's first regular public service of television¹

Making history or making news on television has become so embedded as social practice in our daily lives that it has reached the ultimate fate of postmodern culture: commodification. If history has become a commodity, then television news programming has become its sales pitch. It is both journalism and show business, history and dramatic entertainment.

-- Frank P. Tomasulo²

Television yields a massive and fertile area for investigating various video practices and their influence on televisual and cinematic modes of representation. It is the purpose of this chapter to concentrate on the influence of video on the "realism" of mainstream television, by contextualizing it as a practical medium that has generated specific aesthetic and stylistic strategies of representation, across various televisual genres. More specifically, I will explore the "Reality TV" genre and its unruly explosion onto the landscape of television programming in the last decade, its stylistic origins in nonfiction cinema, as well as aspects of news programming that have in numerous instances crossed over from informing to entertaining and vice versa. By examining video representations of "authentic" events, "real" individuals and their lives, as well as the truth values associated with the "realism" implied by the use of video, I hope to peel away the layers of constructed representations created in the name of "realism," and in turn challenge the resulting cultural conception and critical responses of an audience that has been heavily influenced by television viewing. When exposed, these modes of representation, which promise their viewers tangible and indisputable proofs of authenticity, are in crisis. Consequently, television's dual functions of informing and entertaining often overlap, despite the highly calculated and often fictionalized disguise of nonfiction. The old adage that truth is often

stranger than fiction may be adequate to describe the state of reality on television today, as is the fact that reality TV programs, while propagating dominant ideologies, often reveal more about society than may have originally been intended. Concepts such as "liveness," immediacy and hypermediacy respectively become the dominant ideologies and obvious goals that eclipse the outdated, if not superannuated critical concept of and need for the ever-elusive and slippery term known as "realism," and any critique of the televisual medium must be a critique of the society that transmits and maintains the dominant ideology (Newcomb 504).

Parallel to these ever shifting modes or styles of representation are constantly multiplying and accelerating technological developments. Thus, one can easily conclude that "[n]o technology develops autonomously. It is always a direct or indirect product (or by-product) of other technologies, which leave their imprint upon it" (Belton 61). These ever-evolving technologies not only influence other technologies, but also leave an imprint upon the aesthetic and stylistic trends within various media. Television and cinema, as well as those responsible for their production, profit, both financially and artistically, from the exploitation of new, cheaper and more convenient technologies, which in turn lead to new styles that benefit "artists" who work within these media. It is also plain to see that it is television that "has been the dominant medium of the second half of the twentieth century," especially in the Western world (Frith 33). Television and video have invaded the domestic space and have greatly influenced the viewing practices of those who inhabit it. Television can be seen primarily as "a transmission technology," and has modified the process of gathering and disseminating news, through ENG (electronic newsgathering) devices such as the portable video camera. News is now made "public" in the privacy of one's home. TV has also come to dominate "the household world and has reshaped domesticity," as it represents the core "of what is now meant by commercialism, advertising and selling" (Frith 33).

Simon Frith not only recognizes the cultural importance of television in his essay, "The black box: the value of television and the future of television research," but also further elaborates upon the far-reaching predominance of the medium:

It shapes both low culture and entertainment and high culture and art. The other mass media -- radio, the cinema, recorded music, sport, print -- feed off television (which can reach far greater audiences than any of them), and as members of the television public we now take it for granted that our knowledge of the world -- or of faraway events, scientific advances, other ways of life -- is first mediated by television (33).

Parenthetically, it should be noted that television has also revolutionized the ways in which entertainment is consumed within "mass urban cultures" (Mulvey 80). The communal audience has been broken up by television, and has evolved into a "home-based mode of consumption" that was preceded by radio, but had no mass visual entertainment "precedent" (Mulvey 80). Forasmuch as cinema was "posited on 'going out', television appealed to 'staying in'" (Mulvey 80), and the witnessing of communal events shifted from the public sphere to the privacy of one's home. Home video, in the VCR format, not only sold the public the means for the private commodification of the "time-jam" of television programming (Gitlin 521), but also provided the home viewer with a new way of watching cinematic works. Television should also be seen as possessing a "different imaginary" from cinema, by creating a distinct subject position and by generating a separate way of looking, which does not correspond to the "mirror identification and voyeurism" associated with theatrical film viewing (Feuer in MacCabe 103). Instead, the gaze associated with the film-going experience is transformed into a fractured glance, a point that will be further developed in chapter 3, and is reflected by the "magazine format" of non-fiction television programming (Feuer in MacCabe 103). As I will further discuss in the section dealing with the ideologies and modes of address associated with the concept of "liveness," the television medium "sets up an idealised quasi-nuclear family whose unity is seen as an attribute of the medium itself" (Feuer in MacCabe 103), despite the actual fragmented nature of the medium's transmissions. This so-called "representational strategy" is best exemplified by the "mode of address" that can be succinctly embodied by the maxim, "from our family to yours"³ (Feuer in MacCabe 103). In this case, the metaphor of the family is used as a unifying and stabilizing cultural force.

Thus, perhaps it is most adequate to describe media constructs, such as television and video, as "cultural industries." This hybrid expression links both the industrial and artistic aspects of the media, as well as their cultural and social roles. Despite this major shift in viewing, from public to private spheres, theoretical and critical analysis of television has always had a cultural basis. The concept of culture itself is a broad term that can define "a whole way of life," and can embrace a wide variety of practices, which may include more than just a "specific corpus of elite practices" or "a definite canon of works" (MacCabe 2). This notion that the medium of television is intricately interlaced with numerous cultural factors is persuasively outlined by Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch in their essay, "Television as a Cultural Forum." In it, the authors describe this cultural foundation as a "bridge" that connects TV as a "communication medium" that is central to contemporary society, with its other incarnation as an "aesthetic object" and "expressive medium" that analyzes culture through its "storytelling" (503). They elaborate by writing that embedded in "the pleasant disguise of fiction entertainment" are dominant images and ideologies, as well as critiques of the society that transmits, maintains and consumes these messages and images, as well as those who control the communication industry and business end of the medium (504). Of course, the notion of dominant ideology is itself a difficult concept to define and establish, since the "control" of and power over this imaginary ideological terrain can be viewed as being held by members of the "Right," who see "American values" as being subverted by members of the "Left," who in turn view these same values as being imposed by the former. As the authors point out, these binary speculations assume that the audiences share the same values and derive corresponding meanings from their viewing experiences (504). This chapter includes a discussion of the contradictory reactions and court rulings surrounding the video footage of the Rodney King beating. These irreconcilable factors demonstrate that the American public does *not* indeed conform to a uniform value system.

Perhaps it is fair to point out that television serves a third function, outside the realms of informing and entertaining. This third function seems to be a bit subtler and involves society analyzing itself through the medium of television, and, in turn, video. Newcomb and Hirsch

express this notion when they write that "contemporary cultures examine themselves through their arts, much as traditional societies do via the experience of ritual. Ritual and the arts offer a metalanguage, a way of understanding who and what we are, how values and attitudes are adjusted, how meaning shifts" (506). The authors go on to describe television as a medium that fulfills the "'bardic function' of contemporary societies":

In its role as central cultural medium it presents a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic dominant point of view. It often focuses on our most prevalent concerns, our deepest dilemmas. Our most traditional views, those that are repressive and reactionary, as well as those that are subversive and emancipatory, are upheld, examined, maintained, and transformed. The emphasis is on process rather than product, on discussion rather than indoctrination, on contradiction and confusion rather than coherence. It is with this view that we turn to an analysis of the texts of television that demonstrates and supports the conception of television as a cultural forum (506).

It is also with this account of television as a cultural forum that I will examine video's role in the creation and expansion of the Reality TV genre, and the way in which its significance and impact has spilled over and beyond the boundaries of entertainment and documentary. The paradoxes seen in television shows such as these, as well as the contradictions witnessed in the news coverage of *not* "made-for-TV" events, such as the Rodney King beating, reveal television's capacity to raise deep and probing questions, rather than its capacity to answer them, as well as the multiple meanings, interpretations and ideologies that can be derived from the same evidentiary footage. Newcomb and Hirsch raise this very point when they suggest that in TV and popular culture, in general, the divulgence of conflicts and contradictions is as important as finding their solutions (507). In fact, it is these conflicting points of view on social issues that construct most television programs (508). Ideology is not only "relayed" through television, but also "register(s) larger ideological structures and changes" (Gitlin 516). This is the main characteristic of what Todd Gitlin describes as tautology, or the process in which each "society works to reproduce itself -- and its internal conflicts -- within its cultural order" (516). Gitlin points out that television is one of the main cultural systems that promotes this sort of reproduction (516). This is best summarized by Eileen R. Meehan, who writes that there are two

main critical inquiries into television: one that examines the corporate structures, production processes and technical innovations, and the other that consists of a scholarly exploration of the "interplay of audio, video, and narrative elements to uncover the modern mythos, symbolic representations, and ideologies that constitute American culture" (Meehan 563). This chapter will provide plentiful examples of social issues and conflicts that are reproduced and repeated within and by the news and entertainment genres.

The development and evolution of the medium of video can and should be examined in a similar context, since its initial creation can be viewed as an industrial formation that has branched out into numerous other practices. This is illustrated by previously discussed moments in the historiography of the medium, as it shifted from an industrial formation to a medium of great artistic and political potential when it became more readily available to the public and was "re-released" in various formats or spin-offs. Like television, video cannot be reduced to just an industrial product or a cultural relic (Meehan 563). Instead, as previously stated, it must be looked at as a cultural industry, a medium that has emerged during "modern capitalism's industrialization of culture" (Meehan 565). It is also important to note that in "liberal capitalism," "hegemonic ideology," an overused concept that can simultaneously explain everything and nothing in the cultural context (Gitlin 517), "develops by domesticating opposition, absorbing it into forms compatible with the core ideological structure" (Gitlin 532). A similar domestication can be seen in the formal aspects of television, video and other media, as constant medial shifts can be viewed as either co-options, or simple borrowings, which are a result of aesthetic and ideological changes. Here, the concept of remediation becomes helpful in shedding light upon this inevitable tautological process where society, media and various modes of representation converge and infinitely reproduce themselves.

i. Mediating Reality : Remediation and Intermediality

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define the central concept and title of their book, Remediation, by quoting the indispensable Marshall McLuhan: "the 'content' of any medium is

always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph" (45).⁴ The authors point out that McLuhan's observation summarizes "a more complex kind of borrowing in which one medium is itself incorporated or represented in another medium" (45). They write, "[o]ur culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them....both new and old media are invoking the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in their efforts to remake themselves and each other" (5). The authors find this to be a crucial process in all new and old media, "one that involves contradictory but interrelated impulses" (Shepperd 2) for immediacy, a style or strategy of representation that is transparent and makes the viewer forget the presence of the medium, and hypermediacy, style or strategy of representation that serves as a constant reminder to the audience of the medium they are watching (Bolter 272-273).

It is also important to point out, as the authors do, that more often than not a sense of "immediacy depends on hypermediacy" (6). This is well illustrated by highly mediated television news programs that combine images of live anchors, moving ribbons of text, photographs, graphics, live and prerecorded footage, all in an effort to create an often imagined sense of spontaneity and liveness. A similar observation can be made about music videos in that they "rely on multiple media and elaborate editing to create an apparently spontaneous style," and "take great pains to achieve the sense of 'liveness' that characterizes rock music" (Bolter 9). Of course, one could argue that the style of shooting on numerous "reality television" shows reflects the paradigm of "the observational documentary" style, one that can be attributed to film movements such as "direct cinema and cinema vérité" (Shepperd 5). But ultimately one should remember that television's methodology is rooted in the illusion of immediacy (Kruger 58) and liveness, and that it is this constant "remediation," an attempt to make film and television more "real" and "live," that has led to constant shifts in technological advancements, as well as aesthetic tastes/preferences.

On another level, one that goes beyond the recycling of aesthetics and styles, the concept of intermediality comes into play. It is a concept that is perhaps a bit more comprehensive than remediation, in that it focuses mainly on the various media involved and their respective importance in the infinite processes of expression. The very term "remediation," through its very prefix, refers to doing something again or with more intensity, or simply implies the creation of a new medium to replace preexisting ones. It has connotations of replacing, substituting or even superceding previous media, and in turn, places qualitative attributes on various media, while implying a hierarchical system of appropriation and co-option that bears undertones of contention. The concept of intermediality, on the other hand, implies a reconciliation or blending of pre-existing media. The term's origins can be traced back to Dick Higgins, a prominent member of the previously mentioned Fluxus movement. The goal of this alternative approach to art was to tear down "the barriers between traditional artistic disciplines," while "dispensing with the heroism of aesthetics and the individual artist" and finding alternative places for producing and displaying various works (Halbreich 11). The name of the movement itself, a Latin term that means "flow" denotes a fluid and continuous exchange between media. In 1966 Higgins wrote "Statement on Intermedia," an acknowledgment of new and emerging media, as well as their inevitable cross-fertilization. He outlined an "intermedial approach" that would "emphasise [sic] the dialectic between the media" and provide artists with tools necessary to communicate their messages with an immediate impact (172-173). When writing this, Higgins surely thought of ripening means of communication such as television, and developing media such as video, as well as their role in influencing and fusing with other media and modes of expression.

Werner Wolf in his book, The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality, expands this concept further and defines intermediality as "the participation of more than one medium of expression in the signification of a human artefact [sic]" (1). Although Wolf's book concentrates on the similarities and comparability between "literary texts and music" (11), the term does denote a special relationship between media.

Intermediality can be viewed as "a term constructed in analogy to 'intertextuality' as the best-known 'intersemiotic' phenomenon to date," that "clearly has something to do with relations between media just as intertextuality designates certain relations between (verbal) texts" (Wolf 35).

Intermediality and the studies surrounding it should also be viewed as a "continuation of the interest in 'intertextuality', which has emerged since the 1970s (intermediality is in fact often conceived of as a special case of intertextuality" (Wolf 1-2). Wolf points out that these research fields can be affiliated

with a broader cultural context of our time, in which an anti-essentialist tendency and a distrust of 'closure' may be seen at work: a stress on signifying processes which involve a plurality of discourses, an emphasis on discursive exchanges and contacts rather than on essential qualities of logocentric differences, as well as a concern with various kinds of 'Others' with regard to what traditionally had been in focus (Wolf 2).

Wolf writes that similar tendencies can be seen in other academic disciplines, as a sort of "interdisciplinarity" is increasingly dominating various academic settings and theoretical discourses, including cultural studies. Hence, he notes that

there is a marked tendency towards intermediality in our century and especially in postmodernism, a tendency which is so apparent that one is inclined to add yet another -- and in part related -- 'turn' to the 'linguistic' and the 'metatextual' turns as cultural features of contemporary cultural history: the 'intermedial turn'. The creation of an almost perfect illusion of reality in multi-media cyberspace is the most recent and most spectacular, but certainly not the only example of the intermedial turn (Wolf 2).

These medial "transgressions" are abundantly evident in any mediated landscapes, including the televisual and cinematic ones. It is also important to remember that the "development of media can be better understood through the category of interrelation," (Spielmann 135) as new media influence "existing media, and vice versa" (Spielmann 131). Wolf's definition of "media" lies somewhere between the narrow limits of the technical means or institutional channels of communication, "such as print, radio, TV, CD, public performance etc.," (Wolf 35) and Marshall McLuhan's definition, which describes a medium as any "extension of man" (Wolf 35). Wolf chooses an intermediate denotation that finds its place somewhere between the two extremes.

He defines the concept of medium as a "conventionally distinct means of communication, specified not only by particular channels (or one channel) of communication, but also by the use of one or more semiotic system serving for the transmission of cultural 'messages'" (Wolf 35-36). Based on this definition of "medium," Wolf views the term "intermedial" as a highly pliant adjective that can be broadly applied to "any phenomenon involving more than one medium" and "these 'phenomena' may be single works but also, e.g., general cultural or aesthetic trends which disregard or transcend medial boundaries" (Wolf 36).

Wolf even makes distinctions within the concept of intermediality by quantitatively weighing the intermedial "blends" that occur between and within various media. He makes the differentiation between "total" and "partial" intermediality. He illustrates these concepts by comparing a comic strip, entirely made up of words and illustrations -- two modes of expression that are evenly balanced -- as an example of total intermediality. On the other hand, the occasional intermedial element, such as an illustration in a novel, is an example of partial intermediality (38). Wolf does note that partial intermediality "always coincides with the quantitative dominance of the one and the non-dominance of the other medium," while total intermediality always coincides with the absence of such dominance (Wolf 38n). From its inception, video can be seen as a medium that has, at various stages, existed in relationship to other media and fits into the former category. In the early days, it was used to electronically record live transmissions of the culturally "larger" medium of television. It was not until the previously discussed emergence of spin-off products that video liberated itself from the grips of television, by allowing individuals to utilize the new equipment to record and circulate information solely through recording and playback video technology. The medium of television still looms large over video, and often continues to be, the main, if not the most effective, mode of video's dissemination and exhibition. Similarly, video's role and/or function in cinema has evolved from a partial to a total intermediality, as the technology and the medium of video has become increasingly present and visible in film production, a conjecture that will be discussed in

greater detail in chapter 3, as will the ways in which video and digital technologies have transformed the cinematic image.

However, for the purposes of this chapter, one should note that television is an ideal medium to discuss in the context of the concepts of remediation and intermediality. After all, it can be viewed as a "national medium," which has replaced the media of "film, radio, picture magazines, newspapers," which "once served a familiar function" (Newcomb 505). Those who contribute to or "create for such media" can be seen as what anthropologist Marshall Sahlins calls "hucksters of the symbol" (qtd. in Newcomb 505), or "cultural *bricoleurs*" who search for and create "new meaning in the combination of cultural elements with embedded significance" (505). Newcomb and Hirsch denote the great importance of these individuals as interpreters of current events:

They respond to real events, changes in social structure and organization, and to shifts in attitude and value. They also respond to technological shift [sic], the coming of cable or the use of videotape recorders. We think it is clear that the television producer should be added to Sahlins's list of "hucksters." They work in precisely the manner he describes, as do television writers and, to a lesser extent, directors and actors. So too do programmers and network executives who must make decisions about the programs they purchase, develop, and air. At each step of this complicated process they function as cultural interpreters (Newcomb 505).

Viewing those who work within the media and the arts as "bricoleurs" or "hucksters" leaves much room for the visual media to achieve their cultural significance and fulfill their goals by giving tribute to, competing with and recycling earlier media. In terms of intermediality, it should be pointed out that "a dialectical process" of old and new media occurs, especially in the face of increasingly accelerating technologies (Spielmann 132). The remediation or refashioning involved can be seen as a result of manifold causes that range from technological advancements, to political and ideological shifts, and can explain the co-option and cross-fertilization that occurs between various media, in a process though which, according to James Carey, "reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed" (qtd. in Newcomb 505). The next section will tackle this very notion of producing and transforming not only reality, but also the truth-values

associated with it. It will do so by delving into the way in which video has refashioned or remediated television, and the way in which "liveness" has been recycled by fictional programming.

ii. The Ideology and Illusion of "Liveness "

As I indicated in the first chapter, video's technological development in the late 1950s is indiscernible from the development of television and broadcasting and can be directly linked to the concept of "liveness". Often, live productions recorded on video, though delayed in reaching homes by a few hours or a few days, was generally accepted as actual live television by the average viewer (Antin 153). One can certainly see how the public's perception of the medium, and its significance in maintaining an illusion of immediacy and liveness, was shaped by video's emergence. Temporally speaking, the medium not only instills its viewers with the connotations of liveness and an aesthetic of instantaneity, but literally provides us with an "instant translation of images" (Petit 39). One should also remember that the aim of this electronic medium is to "command attention universally and simultaneously" (Dayan 332).

"Liveness" is thus "a term derived from the technological capacity of electronic media to carry an event virtually simultaneous to the event's occurrence" (Williams 292). But it is also important to note that beyond just being a technological capacity, "liveness" can be seen as a "mode of televisual address" that "pertains to the various uses of prerecorded material" (Williams 293). Jane Feuer defines liveness as the promise of presence and immediacy offered by video technology, with its capacity to record and transmit images simultaneously, a capacity that film lacks (Torres 141). According to Feuer's seminal 1983 essay entitled "The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology," she points out that "[t]elevision exploits its assumed 'live' ontology as ideology" by emphasizing the concept of live television, flow and unity in order to give the viewer a sense of immediacy and wholeness (16). As previously mentioned, it is safe to assume that a viewer often cannot tell the difference between live and recorded material. This concept is concisely described by the perspicuous coinage "live-on-tape," which describes the

paradoxical nature and perception of video, and the fact that video and television images, despite their content, appear more real to the viewing audience (Feuer: 1983 13-14). Television is made to be experienced in the present-tense, and is structured to maintain the illusion of immediacy and liveness, despite its fragmented structure and time-delayed transmission. TV jargon such as "live," or "taped as-if-live," (Timberg 275) emphasize these contradictions. Feuer further illustrates this point by examining the television program *Good Morning America*. The magazine format of the morning show constantly alternates media, such as live footage, film, and video, while numerous and diverse segments "emanate" from various national and international locations (1983 17). The hosts function as parents on a set that is meant to resemble a fictional living room, and the program's "mode of address" can be seen as an attempt to overcome this structural fragmentation and to repress contradictions, while both producing and reproducing "its ideological problematic of family unity and national unity-within-diversity" (1983 17-19). Such television programs in their liveness, their immediacy and reality can create families and unity where none exist.

Sasha Torres in her essay "King TV" explores this concept further and explores it in the context of fictional forms such as prime-time dramas. She identifies a "'ripped-from-the-headlines' aesthetic" (144) and, as her title suggests, the headline she examines is the home video footage of the Rodney King beating, as well as the massive riots that followed the criminal acquittal of the police officers involved. Torres examines the method by which fictional genres have appropriated and recirculated news coverage of the rebellion and its aesthetic of liveness. She illustrates this by discussing the prime-time drama *L.A. Law* and its incorporation of not only the actual events into its story lines, but also the show's imitation of the "video vérité" (Tomasulo 75) aesthetic of the beating as well, and the "high-angle" shots of the police and news helicopters that covered the rebellion (150). She ultimately points out the shortcomings of this fictional recycling and its attempts at "promoting national unity-in-diversity" by aligning the view afforded by its cameras with the perspective of the police who regularly patrol Los Angeles in helicopters (Torres 143). By aligning the fictional show's point of view with that of the police

and frightened suburbanites, many of whom watched the unfolding events from "one side of the thin blue line" (150), Torres ultimately concludes that liveness in both news and fictional representations often serve "to authorize a textual racism" (7) and "maintain cultural hegemony" (Shepperd 9). The last two points are best summarized by John Caldwell who points out that the particular modes of representation employed to cover this modern event demonstrates the "lack of knowledge" on the part of the networks about the Los Angeles communities involved, and proves that "television during the rebellion quickly brought to bear a large number of other, nonverbal tactics for containing the dangerous other" (163).

Whether examining the actual footage of the riots, or the recycled and fictionalized "reenactments," the point of view of the cameras rarely, if ever, originates from within the tumultuous community of malcontents. Matthew McDaniel's Birth of a Nation 4/29/92 is an exception to this. The video documentary, the title of which ironically references D.W. Griffith's racist masterpiece, was shot entirely from within the Los Angeles communities afflicted by the riots, and should be viewed as a means of "extending the community of resisters" (Gaines 96) and representing the events from an angle that is not usually privileged by the commercial media. Unfortunately, documentaries such as this one were scarce and uncommon during the riots. This disparity in representation is well illustrated by "reality" shows such as *COPS*, where the point of view is usually that of the police officers, who are followed by camera-operators. The perpetrators shown are usually lower-income, often agitated, under the influence and disorderly. So, although members of a marginal class are represented, it is usually in an altered state and with their heads pressed against the hoods of police cars, and thus the representation can not be considered to be in any way "progressive" (Shepperd 8-9). The last point is well depicted and discussed in detail in the next section that not only deals with the overwhelming significance of the King tape, but also the seemingly objective, but often "non-progressive," even reactionary strategies of representation and interpretation that surrounded the beating.

iii. The King Tape: America's Saddest Video

We will no longer let them use their clubs on us in dark corners. We are going to make them do it in the glaring light of television.

-- Martin Luther King Jr.⁵

The George Holliday [sic] videotape is the most viewed and I daresay the most important videotape of the twentieth century.

-- James Jordan, Halliday's Attorney⁶

One of the biggest ironies surrounding the Rodney King beating is that the event itself would have hardly caused a stir in the fabric of American society was it not for a chance video camcorder recording of the incident. A more profound paradox surfaces when one realizes "that justice was defeated in Simi Valley because the evidence of aggression was stylized and overworked" (Caldwell 161). An electronic record of the event was "played in slow motion, freeze-framed, talked over, interpreted, distributed, and -- most damaging of all -- closely analyzed" (Caldwell 161). For many critics, this redundant "deconstruction and overanalysis" of the evidence (Caldwell 161) raised a number of polemics and paradoxes. Among them is the fact that the event was not so much defined by its own reality, as much as the discourses *surrounding* it. Frank P. Tomasulo demonstrates this by quoting Hayden White for whom "the narratives imposed on 'real events' constitute 'appropriate ways of endowing human processes with meaning'" (qtd. in Tomasulo 69). The events themselves can be summarized as follows: on the night of March 3, 1991, from the balcony of his apartment, George Halliday videotaped with his minicam as 27 L.A. police officers "swarmed,"⁷ beat and arrested Rodney King, an African-American motorist who led the officers on a high speed, 100 mph car chase. During his encounter with L.A.'s finest, King received two 100,000-volt taser blasts, 6 kicks and 56 metal baton blows. Halliday later sold this footage to a local television station for \$500, which swiftly released it to CNN and subsequently to all major networks for rebroadcast and dissemination. The footage of King's encounter with the L.A.P.D. ran almost nine and a half minutes, but public judgments emerged from the repeated media replay of an eighty-one second excerpt (Tomasulo 74-75). The fact that in the first trial, the four police officers involved were found not guilty to

state charges of assault and excessive force in apprehending the suspect, while during its federal "sequel" two of the defendants were found guilty of civil-rights violations (Tomasulo 74), demonstrates the ideological inconsistencies involved in "translating" visual evidence, and the fact that the respective juries projected either a "lawful apprehension of a criminal perpetrator" or "a racist beating" (Tomasulo 75), onto the seemingly self-evident and objective footage.

Thus, the handheld, poor-quality, low-resolution footage has been viewed by some as "electronic noise" (Caldwell 164), "a tabula rasa for mass market mental projections and readings" (Caldwell 165). This is to say that, on the one hand, the footage is composed of electronic impulses that epitomize video's intrinsic qualities as an ephemeral, transitory medium, susceptible and malleable to electronic manipulation, as in the case of television networks "encrusting" their logos over the footage or incorporating the "beating icon" into computer generated graphics such as network marketing tools, intros, previews and computer generated "postcards" (Caldwell 164-165). On the other hand, as pointed out by Torres in the previous section, another form of borrowing takes place, independent of the "stylistic fixations" (Caldwell 169), one where the footage is invested and reinvested with various meanings, not only in the kangaroo courts of law and popular opinion, but also in the ideologically invested fictional revisitings in prime time dramas. Even the art world took the infamous footage on and displayed it as part of the 1993 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The amateur footage that was turned into a notorious piece of news media, was once again being transformed in the context of an art show, and hastily hailed as prefiguring "a new form of documentary" (Hanhardt: 1993 46).

Cinema, too, has been responsive to these influences and has demonstrated instances of partial intermediality. Spike Lee's 1992 biopic, Malcolm X, is a prime example of this. The beating footage is intercut with the opening titles, while Denzel Washington as Malcolm X, the Black Muslim leader, makes one of his famous and emotionally-charged speeches pleading for brotherhood in the face of a racist America. As the speech reaches its fever pitch, so does the beating. Simultaneously, the American Flag that composes the background of the opening titles

is gradually burned down to resemble the letter X. Lee's politics are explicit, and the images are inflammatory, as is his choice to tackle a complex and controversial figure such as Malcolm X. His choice to update his historical depiction of Malcolm X demonstrates the malleability of the video image and the way in which contemporary and historical events resonate and often overlap, as well as illustrates that despite decades of seeming social progress, the constructs of power and racism have remained firmly in place. Intermediality plays an important role here on several levels: the video footage is intercut with film footage of a flag burning and the opening film titles; it is accompanied by a voice-over that consist of a passionately uttered speech that ends with the flag forming the letter X. Written and spoken language is simultaneously presented to the audience, and is layered on top of the visual base of the King beating and the opening titles. On another level, the opening is intertextual in that it anachronistically makes references to actual events in the context of a historical figure whose life and times are recreated for the screen. Certainly one can see this film as using video in terms of partial intermediality, where video is mixed with the medium of film, but only at the beginning of the feature.

The aforementioned not-guilty verdict was followed by the worst riots that the United States has witnessed in the last century, with 58 dead, 11,700 arrested (Miller 188), and \$1 billion in damages (Tomasulo 75). However, to view the verdict as the singular cause of the subsequent uprising is to ignore the more subtle dynamics and constructs within American culture and society. Jane Gaines makes the insightful observation about the multi-dimensional and complex causes of the riots when she subtly equates the beating footage with a "representation [that] acquires the power of the represented -- so much so that it seems that it is the representation that *makes* people do things" (96). Gaines further elaborates her subtle observation:

It seems that the footage of police brutally beating a black man *made* disaffected African Americans and Asians in South-Central Los Angeles riot and loot, when it was actually the *world* of the footage -- the world within which police conduct humiliating strip searches on young black men -- that *made* people riot (96).

Gaines makes a very shrewd point here that undermines the conservative presumption that violence in the media results in "mimesis" or mindless imitations. The notion that the King tape incited the violence that followed is a narrow view that ignores the surrounding social context, and turns a blind eye to the fact that "the looting and burning in the aftermath of the Rodney King verdict could be seen not only as the speech of the voiceless but as an 'immanent critique' of mainstream politics" (Gaines 98). The disturbances may have been incited by the verdict, but the verdict itself and the upheavals can be viewed as symptoms of a much more profound miscarriage of justice, one which is at the root of the American nation's creation, and can be characterized by economic inequality and racial injustice. Hence, the modern event immortalized by Halliday's tape can be seen as a constructed narrative account that has been shaped by the dominant guiding principles of ethics, which in turn are clear reflections of the ruling class and "moral" majority.

The uprising that followed was not only the most extensive in U.S. history, but also the most mediated and widely witnessed. This, as well as previous modern media events and many that have followed, confirm the way in which television has challenged the previous "well established separation between public and private by turning political events into spectacular drama acted out within the confines of the home" (Mulvey 98). In this case, potentially explosive footage that was serendipitously recorded by equipment meant for domestic and entertainment use, was widely disseminated and politicized, recycled in entertainment formats, and reinvested with political penchant through cultural criticism and social scrutiny. The coverage of the unfolding events also demonstrates the present day ubiquity of recording and broadcasting media, as well as the narrative and fictional "spin" that has been imposed upon the events. The coverage also illustrates a need of the news organizations to constantly imitate and exceed the sense of immediacy and liveness offered by the Halliday video, in order to maintain their position as the cutting-edge and "truthful" minstrels of current events, while making the audience forget the presence of the medium. This is concisely explained by Sasha Torres who delineates the importance and potential of the home video image and exposes the televisual

apparatus's use of the medium in bringing to national attention the unfolding events in Los

Angeles:

[T]he liveness of the rebellion coverage also served particular functions within the television industry, occurring as it did at an historical moment in which the boundaries of *liveness, fictionality, and the real* were being actively reorganized, as television news organizations considered the limitations and advantages of using amateur tapes and network entertainment divisions searched for more ways to exploit the profit potential of 'home video.' TV news used its live coverage of the rebellion to reclaim for itself the functions of immediacy and presence that Halliday's video, and other amateur videos like it, threatened to usurp. Of the very rawness of Halliday's tape had established the 'authenticity' and if Halliday's fortuitous presence at the scene served as a powerful if implicit indictment of TV news's claims to timely ubiquity, then TV news reactivated and reappropriated the prestige function of liveness with its coverage of the verdict's aftermath (143).⁸

Here, Torres outlines TV's culpability in disseminating graphic images and important information, as well as its appropriation of modes of representation used to convince its audience of the authenticity of network broadcasts and their reputed objectivity. Simply put, this reappropriation can be seen as a form of the aforementioned remediation, an incorporation of an amateur home video aesthetic into a news-disseminating medium and fictional prime time formats.

The dissemination of the graphic images also illustrates the video camcorder's evolution into a "fully diffuse device" (Winston 139). George Halliday, the "amateur videographer" who captured the footage, recorded it alongside images of his family playing video games and a cat licking its paws, possible entries for *America's Funniest Videos*, as well as clear and banal examples of the camcorder's original home and entertainment purposes. It is his haphazard recording of the beating shot from the balcony of his apartment that illustrates even the camcorder's flexibility, its capability to function and reach beyond simple home use, and take part in the surveillance of the Los Angeles police. Ultimately the videotape served a greater goal than the obvious evidentiary one. The legal battles, ideological debates and violent outbursts that resulted in the examination and dissemination of the tape proved to be a trajectory "to the

American social unconscious -- where our central contradictions of race, class, and violence secretly lurk and where the laws of socioeconomic fatalism supervene" (Tomasulo 78). Of course, the inflammatory and political potential of this video, even in its commercial minicam formats, is reminiscent of the early days of the Portapak and its democratizing potential. This capacity of video is often overlooked, especially today, in the shadow of the ever-expanding entertainment genre known as reality-based television.

iv. A Case Against the "Real" in Reality TV

One Spring day in New York, while on a mini-break from my thesis-writing regimen, I noticed an advertisement on the side of a bus travelling down Fifth Avenue. The ad, a pitch for one of the cable channels famous for its constant flow of classic situation comedies, was making a plea for "Unreality Television," with images of the smiling faces of the cast from *Three's Company*. An outright rejection of the recent miasma of Reality TV, the poster represented an appeal to the nostalgia of television viewers, for the good old days of fiction and "unreality," when Jack Tripper (John Ritter) was forced to pretend he was gay in order to platonically live with his two female roommates, the sexy Chrissy (Suzanne Somers) and the brainy Janet (Joyce DeWitt). The masquerade kept Jack in the apartment and the show on the air for almost seven years. It also made it acceptable for Jack to pretend that he was gay for the sake of the conservative majority and the various building managers, as long as when he was "off-duty," he constantly proved his masculinity by chasing and dating beautiful women.

About a month and a half later, I was watching one of the first episodes of CBS's *Big Brother 2*, a fusion of reality TV and game show, and a far cry in intellect and intensity from the Orwellian reference of its title. The show's premise revolves around 12 strangers who have volunteered to live for several months in an isolated house on the network's studio lot. The aim of the game is to vote a member of the household off the show on a weekly basis, until one remains to claim the monetary prize. In this particular episode, I was perturbed to see Bunky, a 36-year-old technical writer from North Carolina, struggling to "come out" to the considerably

older and seemingly more conservative Kent. Kent, the fatherly figurehead, was seemingly accepting of the younger Bunky and admired his "courage to be gay in a straight country." He asked Bunky whether he would choose to be straight with a "snap of the fingers," to which Bunky answered affirmatively, expressing his desperate desire to become part of the straight majority. Kent's perpetually patriarchal position seemed to be reinforced, while his personal value system appeared a bit less offended by ample evidence of the young man's self-loathing. Although the trope of the gay man struggling to come out of the closet has been present in film and television for a number of decades now, the fact that it still exists and is eagerly exploited by prime-time programming illustrates how limited the ideological shifts on television have really been. The image of a gay man is still considered much more agreeable and permissible if accompanied by a dose of self-reproach. The lesson derived from this subsidiary story may be that the melancholy urge for the arcadia of unreality or fiction television, expressed by the ad I saw on the side of the bus, may be explained by a universal longing for a time when a fictional character *had* to pretend that he was gay in order to live with two women. The charade was necessary in order for him to continue living in the apartment with two women, and although the show's message was superficially progressive, Jack's "homosexuality" was acceptable only if he proved his heteronormative masculinity through an excessively macho lifestyle. At the time of the show's production, this message was acceptable, and continues to be embraced by those who would rather view straight men pretending to be gay, than actual homosexuals on their boob tube. Despite their heavily and carefully constructed settings and casts, reality shows such as *Big Brother 2*, reflect difficult truths about our culture as a whole, a society where young men like Bunky are still tortured by their personal identities in the face of an unrelenting majority and overbearing ideals.

Of course, scenes like the one mentioned are lost in the race for ratings in which CBS's *Big Brother 2* has been engaged. Due to poor ratings during the first season, blamed on the tame behavior of the previous cast that tended to chickens and grew vegetables, the American producers of the European import have spiced up the program's image with a much more risqué

cast. In their interview tapes, this season's crop of hopefuls expressed eager willingness to cheat, lie, double cross, and do everything possible to win the main prize. The household activities have been spiced up as well, and compared to last season's arts and crafts projects and dance marathons, the upgraded pastimes involve a hot tub, whipped cream, strawberries and no hands. During the first week of the program's broadcast, internet viewers witnessed Justin, following a night of drinking and urinating out of a window, jokingly place a knife to Krista's neck while kissing her, asking if she would be mad if he killed her. Krista laughed the inebriated Justin off, but the concerned producer swept him away to talk to a show psychologist, who after two hours deemed Justin's behavior as unhealthy and recommended that he be banned from the house. The concern of the producers, who ultimately decided not to broadcast the "disturbing" footage, seems ironic. Their ethical dilemma appears moot in light of the fact that they participate in the production of a show based on a premise that might be categorized as less-than-healthy: twelve strangers being locked in a home for months, deprived of all contact with the outside world, under constant surveillance by thirty-eight cameras and sixty-two microphones, not to mention, a massive television audience, and an internet viewer base that has surveillance access to the house 24-7. Meanwhile, the housemates are asked to engage in asinine games in order to be rewarded with prizes such as a gourmet meal or a functioning basketball, and form alliances while backstabbing each other to win the main prize of \$500,000. Most critics and chat room commentators fail to observe this paradox, as they treat the program as a form of a peep show, a real-life soap opera, where the contestants and their actions are constantly under surveillance by strategically placed cameras. Chat rooms, internet access to the live surveillance footage or streaming video, as well as the controversy surrounding the show, all contribute to the spectacle of the program that is no longer contained within the television set, and help create a whole other discursive realm.

Very few viewers or critics have commented on the plans for *Survivor 3*, a CBS reality game show, and its newest location in the Shaba National Reserve in Kenya. American men and women will meet physical challenges, and deprive themselves of food and water for the chance

to win a million dollars, as did the contestants in the first two seasons of the show. The only difference is that this time it will be happening in a place where many do not have the luxury to choose to live under these conditions, and for whom survival is hardly a game, but a way of life. Marc Lacey of the *New York Times* has articulated this irony best in an article entitled "TV Adventure Show Ignores the Real Survivors":

The local people had not heard of the show when "Survivor" first began setting up in May. And even after the concept was explained to them -- 18 contestants out in the wild struggling to survive -- the people who eke out an existence here do not fully understand it. Surviving in the wild, after all, is everyday life for them with little chance of a payoff (A4).

For some of the local inhabitants, who make their living trekking through the inhospitable countryside and performing various odd jobs, an admission that they can and *have* lived for several days without eating, is not a boast but a harsh reality. Some Kenyans are being hired by the production crew to work on a "set" that has been shrouded in mystery and deemed off limits to tourist and local shepherds. They carry brush to the set so that set designers can construct "authentic-looking huts" (A4), foregrounding yet another paradox in a genre that attempts to capitalize on the illusion of truth, realism and immediacy.

Perhaps behind the unapologetic quest for creating entertainment and making profits, television programs such as *Survivor* mirror a prevalent social tendency to dramatize the "real." Janet Staiger tactfully tackles this concept in her essay "Cinematic Shots: The Narration of Violence." In it she identifies narrative as one of several "'cultural tool kits' that permits mastery and transfer of knowledge and skills" among people and cultures (41). She quotes Jerome Bruner from the aptly entitled essay "The Narrative Construction of Reality":

We organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative -- stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on. Narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery....Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve verisimilitude (qtd. in Staiger 41).

Certainly, fictionalizing the reality of modern day Africa by ironically placing a group of North Americans who get to "play" survivors, reflects a deeper denial of the political and economic realities, both at home and abroad. Perhaps this can be categorized as a cultural phenomenon, a need to contextualize, construct and compartmentalize in order to deal with the enormous wealth of information and events in need of representation. These themes have been reflected in the previous discussion of the fictional recycling associated with the events that followed, not so much the actual event, but the widely-disseminated video recording of the Rodney King beating.

With the Emmy Awards creation of a nonfiction special class category to include such shows in its annual celebration, the message is clear: with the advent of affordable and portable video equipment and an endless supply of good-looking and nonprofessional cast members scrambling to audition, "original" programming, like reality TV, which promises immediacy and interactivity, is here to stay. Reality TV is getting serious recognition, if not becoming a serious business. The genre is also being "[a]dvanced by digital cameras and discreet camcorders," providing "high-tech mass entertainment," while "providing reckless eyeballing the whole jaded family can enjoy" (Wolcott 128). This leads me to a discussion of video's central role in the proliferation of this reality genre, its origins, modes of representation and role in the social and televisual landscapes. "Reality TV" is itself a vast and varying landscape, a genre that includes everything from "law enforcement shows such as *Cops* and live high-speed car chases on Los Angeles expressways to the slow-drip documentaries of Frederick Wiseman to undergrad psychodramas such as MTV's *The Real World* and *Road Rules* to Internet sites such as voyeurdorm.com to human-laboratory experiments such as *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and PBS's *The 1900 House*" (Wolcott 134). Wolcott's insightful description of the ever-expanding panorama, in my opinion, incorporates the essential elements, and significant milestones in the history of reality television. Rightfully, he mentions Frederick Wiseman, an important figure in both the American Cinema Vérité movement and the "uncontrolled documentary" group, made famous for his documentaries that were heavily doused with the sense of spontaneity and raw vitality. With the development of lightweight cameras and portable sound recorders, Wiseman's

contemporaries, fellow "observer-documentarists" (Barnouw 234), documented everyone from politicians and rock stars, to high school kids in their natural habitats, to police officers on the beat. They achieved this with as little interference as possible, often with the support of network and public television, and the films that emerged from this period should be viewed as precursors to contemporary reality shows. A police documentary such as *COPS*, is not only stylistically indebted to Wiseman's work, but should also be viewed as a significant benchmark in the onset of reality television. The show falls on the brink of documentary and prime time entertainment, as the use of video in capturing unscripted police work became increasingly common in the late 1980s. *COPS* is chronologically followed by the *original* reality show, *The Real World*, a cable production that set the format and premise for many reality shows to come. This show has been most praised by critics and viewed as least exploitative of its cast members. The previously discussed "shameless twin-pack" of *Survivor* and *Big Brother* figures prominently on Wolcott's list (128). These two shows represent a new stage in the evolution, or rather, devolution of the genre; they are two of the most unapologetically brazen popularity contests that are laced with careful product placements, and game show elements that raise the stakes, increase the drama and give them a brand new edge. Internet sites can also be included in this category, and are at the low-end, if not lowbrow end of the spectrum. They include pornography sites, where young women record their busy and imaginative daily routines wearing little or no clothes, and 24-hour feeds into dormitory rooms and their daily developments.

Even the reputable BBC has been influenced by the vogue of reality TV with *The 1900 House*, a program where a family is chosen to live in a house built in the year 1900. Set in a Victorian home that has been restored to its original condition, the show documents the trials and tribulations of a modern family living under these circumstances. The historical transformation includes everything from the way they eat and dress, to the way they cook and bathe. The show does provide some dramatic and funny moments, as the family adjusts to their new predicament without a microwave or shampoo. However, despite its reality TV strategy of representation that involves combining film and video footage of the daily mishaps and occurrences, the show

remains characteristically British and primarily educational, and has helped PBS gain some of its largest national ratings. In fact, the only characteristics these shows share in common are the "amateur casts" and "deceptively raw surface which creates the illusion of blemished life caught off guard" (Wolcott 134). This is reminiscent of the goals outlined by filmmakers, such as Wiseman, involved in direct cinema and cinema vérité movements and their fly-on-the-wall mode of capturing "unaltered" reality. This may be true of certain reality shows that incorporate footage from surveillance cameras during store robberies, or from "dash cams" that "objectively" record high-speed chases as they unfold in real time. However, an overwhelming majority of these shows include individuals who are keenly aware of the camera's presence and often acknowledge it. Wolcott's condensed and keen description of the genre does provide a concise lineage of sorts, an evolution of various styles of reality, realism and/or immediacy that has shifted alongside the development of digital video and the emergence of smaller and more powerful formats that can go anywhere and record under the most disadvantageous shooting conditions. Tracing these developments not only exposes the aesthetic modes of representation involved and the influence of television's cultural and economic power, but also aids in reinforcing video's central role in implementing and merging previous methods of representation to create new forms of documentation and entertainment.

Perhaps the FOX network show *COPS* can be seen as the inauguration of reality TV programming, and marks a start of a craze that seems to have just recently reached its pinnacle of popularity and prevalence. First broadcast in 1989 and still going strong, the show is categorized as a "Police Documentary" (Brooks 208). Heavily indebted to cinéma vérité and direct cinema, it follows patrol cops into the "dark underside of America" (Brooks 208). Upon its original syndication, critics called it "unlike anything in prime time" and a gripping series that showed "*real* cops chasing *real* criminals down *really* mean streets" (Brooks 208).⁹ Of course, such programming was long present on the televisual landscape, and these critics did not take into account the role of television in the development of the documentary movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although commercial television in the United States was "seldom hospitable to

the ambivalence of direct cinema," noncommercial or "public" television became a source of much needed support for members of the nonfiction movement such as Frederick Wiseman (Barnouw 244). Wiseman, a former lawyer, made his films about institutions, and rejected traditional documentary strategies of explicit narration and descriptions. His most well known documentary, Titicut Follies (1967), was made in a Massachusetts institution for the criminally insane. It was followed by High School (1968) and Law and Order (1969). It is perhaps Law and Order that bears the strongest resemblance and can be situated as an imminent precursor to *COPS*. It is an account of the daily police routine in a predominantly black neighborhood in Kansas City. Stark and violent in content, the film includes a scene of a black prostitute who is almost strangled to death by a police officer. True to his personal style and convictions, Wiseman avoids creating explicit commentary on the issue of police brutality. Instead, he provides the viewer with multiple points of view of the situation, allowing the audience to derive its own assumptions regarding the source of the social dysfunction that propagates both the criminals and the "crooked" members of law enforcement.

It is Law and Order that looms as the natural predecessor to *COPS*. However, the show's concept of having production crews outfitted with portable video equipment accompany police officers on their nightly rounds, provided for a hit show which has chronicled police activity in over 100 U.S. cities, as well as various international urban centers in Europe, Asia and South America. The crews typically shot one hundred-twenty minute videotapes to get 22 minutes of broadcast material, and the audience was rarely spared glimpses of corpses, unruly suspects being slammed against the hoods of patrol cars or pavements, or scantily dressed prostitutes being busted. In fact the show has often been criticized for being "exploitative and intensely voyeuristic," especially in instances when the camera often lingered on "the sleaziest aspects of a scene," such as suspects mooning the camera or the "intense emotional trauma" of children caught in the midst of a drug bust (Brooks 208). Despite its similarities in content and aesthetics, *COPS* differs from Law and Order, in that it is a low-concept show made for commercial television, and sadly, on a weekly basis has a larger viewing audience than any of Wiseman's

invaluable films ever will. Also, the view afforded to the camera of *COPS* is usually that of the police officers patrolling the streets, with the real-life cops addressing the camera operator and ultimately the audience that finds itself in the passenger seat, as if they were going along for the ride. This obviously provides the viewer with an exclusive and privileged point of view, from the perspective of the police officers. The officers provide an expository narration of the events unfolding, something that is absent from Wiseman's films. In addition, a legal sticking point in both instances is that of participation. The individuals encountered by the police officers are never prepared for their encounter with the camera crew. On rare occasions, the faces of the suspects are electronically obscured to protect privacy and maintain anonymity. Most of the time, the suspects give permission to have their faces shown for various reasons, which may range from "fame or immortality, or to have a videotape to claim innocence" (qtd. in Brooks 248).

Certainly, the problematic and paradoxical nature of video as evidence was discussed at great length in the previous section about the videotape of the Rodney King beating, as was the questionably progressive and ethical values of shows such as *COPS*, that often exhibited not only what Sasha Torres has termed "textual racism," but a privileged point of view disassociated from the individuals that are caught on tape and their actual stories. Viewers do get to see the belly of the beast and witness how the other half lives. However, unlike in Wiseman's films, TV police documentaries limit the extent to which we view a complete picture of the plight of the marginalized individual. Instead they present their subject at their "worst," at the moment of incarceration and often intoxication, and consequently narrowly contextualize them as part of the problem. Despite these subtle realities and paradoxes of the genre, especially in the police category, the credibility of the video or television image seems to be on the decline. Perhaps this is in part due to the particularly non-discriminating viewers whose majority consider shows like *COPS* or *America's Most Wanted* "to be news" (Staiger 44). In part this may also be due to the network producers, who in order "to avoid the problem of meeting network standards for the authenticity of material for news programs," simply "move any questionable programs out of

news and into 'entertainment'" (Staiger 44). The emergence of Reality TV represents a space where "meaning and event run together," and the abundance of new subgenres such as the "docu-drama," "faction," infotainment," "the fiction of fact," and "historical metafiction" all represent "events that cannot be remembered *nor* can they be forgotten" (Staiger 40, White 18). Hayden White attributes these emerging and hybrid genres to aspects of modernism that informs their creation, a sort of "*post-modernist*, para-historical representation," where "the taboo against mixing fact with fiction" is said to be "abolished" (White 18). This is especially significant if one were to agree with White's presumption that the root of "Western realism" consists of "the *opposition* between fact and fiction" (18). Although White's insightful observation refers to traumatic historical events, I do believe that the same ramifications can be applied to numerous examples of Reality TV. The content of police documentary alone provides copious material and plentiful evidence for emerging and problematic social polemics. Even instances of shows that highlight their entertainment and deny any pretence of a social message, put into motion discourses that reveal "the lack of an ability to describe or explain" (Staiger 40) not only current events, but modern cultural and social phenomenon. *The Real World* is a prime example of this, as in its near decade of existence, it has dealt with issues that have ranged from racism and abortion to homosexuality and AIDS, phenomenon that are difficult to both describe and explain, and continue to be often labeled as taboo and controversial.

The 1992 premiere of MTV's *The Real World* marks an essential breakthrough in the development of the reality show genre. Considered the original reality show, this "documentary" show continues to create subsequent seasons that include various casts and locations. The premise of the cable show is to bring seven strangers to live together in a sizeable apartment for three months. The cast members must audition to participate, and despite their various backgrounds and sensibilities, all of them are usually young, good looking, articulate and of course "videogenic."¹⁰ Most of the cast mates usually aspire to be in the art and entertainment industries (Brooks 844-845). The show's format is laced with voyeuristic undertones, as the camera follows the youngsters and their encounters with urban living. Their daily routines of

living together and leading their individual lives is edited with footage of the individuals addressing the camera and recalling or narrating the "dramas" objectively caught on tape. Often footage from the "confessional" is shown in order to counterbalance the "action," and reveal the private and intimate thoughts of the youngsters, who usually seek the comfort of the camcorder-equipped room in moments of rage or despair. The small rooms within the cast's lodging are areas where "members are encouraged to 'confess' to the camera outside the space of social negotiation" (Muñoz 198). This is to say that the video confessionals provide the cast members with a personal spaces "where they could perform their selves solo and in private" (Muñoz 198), a site that is of course highly mediated by the show's producers and is eventually made available to a mass viewing audience. Scholars and critics like José Esteban Muñoz, have also reinvested the site of the confessional with greater significance by not only recognizing it as a space of "self-formation" that is "highly mediated by MTV," but also as a place that consists of "counterpublic-building possibilities" (Muñoz 198), where minority voices can be heard and previously marginalized individuals can be represented. This point will shortly be discussed in greater detail when considering Pedro Zamora, a gay, HIV-positive, Cuban cast member from *Real World IV*.

The intimate setting of a video confessional also provides the viewer with a sense of intimacy and immediacy, heightened by a setting where privacy is a distant memory, as the only time the cameras are not on the cast members is when, according to the show's producer and co-creator John Murray, they're "about to score or in the bathroom" (qtd. in Brooks 845). These precautions have been openly disregarded by recent additions to the genre such as *Big Brother 2*, where nothing seems private or sacred anymore, and bathrooms are under constant surveillance, while bedrooms are equipped with infrared camera equipment. Witnessing intimate and private moments has become the aim of situation reality shows such as *The Real World*. However, this objective to shift from the public sphere and penetrate into the private, seems to go back to the very invention of image making and reproducing technologies. In an essay describing the implications of the detective camera, a still camera made popular in the late 19th century that

captured images of its subjects with their knowledge, Tom Gunning assumes that the initial drive behind cinema is to document. He describes the dominant myth of the initial reception of cinema as being plagued by a series of paradoxes:

Private and furtive acts become public and exposed. The apparatus of the cinema allows this passage from private to public space and its role as simultaneously witness and record endows it with a juridical effect, providing both evidence of wrongdoing and the occasion for judgment and punishment. The viewer of the film negotiates this propulsion of private deeds into public exposure, positioned as both voyeur-witness and moral judge through the surrogate apparatus. But the power of this fantasy of potent vision also contains its inverse, the paranoia of constant surreptitious surveillance. The enclosure of private space becomes porous and uncertain. This mythic reception of the invention of cinema reflects a growing awareness of a society increasingly based on surveillance in which technology stimulates a fear of constant observation based, like Bentham's panopticon, on a concealed apparatus of vision. The peculiarly modern sense of the self as composed on a fragile borderline between public and private became threatened in these accounts with a drama of collapse triggered by making visible to all that which one would hope to conceal (46).

Gunning identifies a strong temptation for documenting "ordinarily concealed aspects of daily life," which reveals "an unacknowledged drive behind the documentary impulse," that was demonstrated by the Lumière brothers at the end of the 19th century, and is illustrated in contemporary times by "America's home videos" (63). The attraction to and popularity of reality-based television may perhaps be best explained by a subconscious form of *schadenfreude*, an enjoyment obtained from viewing the trials and travails of others, conceivably in an attempt to escape and forget one's own.

However, the very fact that the participants have auditioned for the show and consented to the documentation of their daily routines, undermines the key element of voyeurism, that can be defined as the "act of viewing the activities of other people *unbeknown* to them" (Hayward 393).¹¹ It also elevates the accountability of the individuals who participate in such spectacles and their personal liability for their own exposure. None of the participants can be categorized as what Alfred Hitchcock called the "noncinema man," someone who is *not* acting primarily for the camera (Miller 187). This shifts the dynamics of power from their role as innocent

bystanders, whose lives and private moments are exploited without their knowledge or permission, to consenting adults who are keenly aware of their function within the frameworks of such shows. Unlike the police documentary discussed, or even the Rodney King tape, where subjects do not have the privilege of choosing to be filmed or recorded, and in certain instances have no say in the dissemination and viewing of such material, the sense that the individuals observed in high-concept, tightly edited programs such as *The Real World* are unaware that they are being watched is somewhat weakened. This brings into discussion the complimentary element to "the age-old temptation to watch," which is the "increasingly urgent desire to be seen" (Wolcott 128), and the way in which the formats and the aesthetics of what I would call "situation reality shows," have evolved over the past decade or so.

In an increasingly media saturated world, voyeurism is not enough to draw an audience. A dramatic story line is needed to attract and engage viewers week after week and season after season. Unscripted tension and conflict is counted on to attract viewers. From season one, the strategy of a show such as *The Real World*, was to recruit young people of various backgrounds, as to accentuate their differences and hopefully encourage conflict. To some extent it did work. Julie, the wide-eyed teenager from Alabama, living in New York for the first time, stirred up tension during one of the first episodes when she innocently asked Heather, a Black rapper, whether her beeper signified that she was a drug dealer. *The Real World*, a first-of-its-kind trial in controlled chaos, placed emphasis on the differences between the strangers, counting on the fact that even the most like-minded people would eventually lose their cool when forced to live under one roof with six other strangers. As the seasons progressed, so has the formula for increasing the drama. Exploiting ego and personality conflicts witnessed during the first season, the formula reached its turning point during *Real World II*, set in Venice, California, when a seemingly innocuous prank that included Dave, a comedian, pulling the covers off an underwear-clad Tami, ended up in the cast ganging up on Dave and expelling him from the house.

The show reached its dramatic climax in 1994, when *Real World III* was set in San Francisco. The cast included a gay Cuban, Pedro Zamora, who was HIV positive, and bravely

dealt with the disease on camera. Subsequent to his exposure on the show, Pedro's death in November of 1994 was well publicized. Up until that point, he weekly received thousands of fan letters. One, written by a South Carolina viewer, reads: "I never thought anyone could change my opinion of homosexuals and AIDS. Because of you I saw the human side of something that once seemed so unreal to me" (qtd. in Muñoz 195). The "spectacle" of Pedro, a Latino queer activist, speaking frankly and openly about AIDS, sex, and homosexuality, becoming engaged and married to a Black, HIV-positive man, and battling numerous ailments that afflicted his weakened immune system, was central to the show's dramatic arc and was the most open and detailed depiction to date (Muñoz 216). This was indeed something new, a representation that has not previously graced the televisual landscape. Pedro's "performance" on the show, his representation of the other, an individual whose identity did not "correlate with socially prescribed identity narratives" of the time, represents not only a resistance of "dominant modalities of governmental and state power," but also the commencement of "new social formations" (Muñoz 198). Pedro's exposure and popularity can be seen as defiant resistance of the Republican Party's "anti-immigrant and 'pro-family' (which is always antiqueer [sic]) rhetoric" of the early 1990s (Muñoz 200). The documentation of Pedro's predicament, as well as his life's work as an AIDS educator and gay activist, emphasized his "alternative" identity. Despite MTV's attempt to maintain an "inane multicultural pluralism," gay and bisexual cast members, who have been present in *almost* every season since the show's inception, have usually been "rendered harmless within the channels of the electronic media and the majoritarian public sphere," by becoming "narratively subordinate" to the cast's heterosexual members (Muñoz 206).¹² During *Real World III*, for example, the show's perhaps-inadvertent attempt to raise AIDS and gay-rights awareness was counter-weighted by, if not overshadowed, by Puck, whose disgusting habits, bellicose nature, attention-grabbing antics, homophobic comments and unapologetic attitude brought about numerous conflicts and confrontations, and eventually resulted in his expulsion from the San Francisco home.

Since then, MTV has attempted to renew viewer interest by annually assembling colorful casts in unusual locations. They have created a spin-off called *Road Rules*, that takes the original concept a step further and places the strangers on road trips in various locations. James Wolcott points out the formulaic and constructed nature of such shows:

The faces may change, but they're shuffled and dealt like cards from a marked deck. Askew camera angles and flighty conversations camouflage a clockwork reliance on shots and situations that ditto [sic] from year to year: the laughing newbies forming a flying wedge as they hit the town, holding hands or linking arms; outside night view of the house, its movie-set light lapping onto the lawn; the homesick phone calls, where the caller hangs up as if the governor refused to grant a pardon; the ping-pong versions of the spat or misunderstanding between housemates, delivered straight to the camera like opposing editorials; the ankle-deep flotsam of a laundry buildup that threatens to engulf them all (144).

The roles filled by the cast members seem to have remained relatively the same as well: there's the wide-eyed innocent, the attention grabbing exhibitionist, the babe, the stud, the troublemaker, the obligatory minority, usually Black, as well as gay or bisexual cast member, just to name a few. What all of these young people have in common is the desire to be seen. They seem to be keenly aware of the show's format and past seasons, as repeatedly they seem to be performing their cookie-cutter roles and playing up their typecast characteristics. Perhaps it is this fictional recycling or "substitute narrative" (Staiger 40), a fictionalization of "reality," that fills in the voids left in a capitalistic society on the brink of a technological revolution. The information highway, constant televisual flow, and seemingly superficial programming filler known as Reality TV, all illustrate not only quest for realism, but also the inability to "describe or explain," even come to grips with "modernity's historical realities" (Staiger 40). The next chapter and its discussion of video in the realm of feature film production will hopefully illuminate the medium's influence on fictional modes of representation and narration, as well as its potential as a technology of truth in a context of fabrication. The recognition of realism as an ideological construct and of video's role in its perpetuation, provides a strong base for examining the way in which modern Western cultures decipher the link between truth and fiction. While the use of

video and realism in nonfiction television has often been proven to be insidious, the use of similar constructs in cinema may be much more endemic to recapitulating and questioning truth, “reality” and previous representations of gender, race, class and power.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

¹ Anthony Smith 1

² Tomasulo 84

³ According to Jane Feuer and her essay "Narrative Form in American Network Television," these are the actual words used at the end of many Holiday messages sent to the viewer families by many of the local network and news team members (103), who are often shown with their loved ones and family members during programming breaks.

⁴ Although one could argue that speech is not the only content of writing, and that the written text contains thought processes as well, it is important to remember that rather than constructing an exact semiotic model, McLuhan's instead composes an accessible paradigm that directs attention to the fact that various modes of communication are always based on or contain other means of expression.

⁵ Qtd. in Tomasulo 77

⁶ Qtd. in Tomasulo 75

⁷ According to Frank P. Tomasulo, "[s]warming is a technical term in L.A.P.D. jargon for the tactical method used to subdue resisting suspects. It involves surrounding the individual, then moving in closer, and using 'escalating force' to handcuff the perpetrator" (86).

⁸ Emphasis is my own.

⁹ Emphasis is my own.

¹⁰ José Esteban Muñoz uses the clever term "videogenic" to describe the youngsters as photogenic (205). It is interesting to note that the term itself brings to the foreground the difference between capturing images on film and video, suggesting that similar subjects may be "captured" differently by the two media.

¹¹ Emphasis is my own.

¹² Muñoz has aptly pointed out that during the following season, the *Real World IV* London, the cast consisted of only one ethnic minority and had no homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered cast members. He argues that this could be seen "as a backlash of sorts, which is to say it was an escape from North American politics and social tensions to a storybook England, a fantasy Europe that had none of its own ethnic or sexual strife. (The roommates actually lived in a flat that was made up to look like a castle" (206-207). Although the first portion of this observation is credible, to say that Europe has none of its own racial or sexual problems is an understatement. The comment seems to ignore various tensions within Europe, especially the United Kingdom, and instead, seems to solely address the American view of "a fantasy Europe," associated with the show's MTV producers and their target audience.

Chapter III. Video Replay of Cinematic Realism

[T]he Bazinian notion of the morality of cinema ("truth 24 times a second" as Godard put it) entered into a profound mutation, one that increasingly (in film theory) focused on the constructed or semiotic nature of realism and (in filmmaking) explored the media reality which the ubiquity of television, video and their enormously enhanced power of imagining had created.

-- Thomas Elsaesser¹

Today a technological storm is raging, the result of which will be the ultimate democratisation [sic] of the cinema. For the first time, anyone can make movies. But the more accessible the media becomes [sic], the more important the avant-garde.

-- from the "Dogme 95 Manifesto"²

Hailed as the most significant technological development since the coming of sound, digital video has invaded film. Providing the future promise of a high-definition digital cinema, or what some would call a threat to the analogue medium of film, the influence of digital video is being felt everywhere, in all national cinemas, independent productions, and yes, even Hollywood. While George Lucas is being acclaimed as the "godfather of digital cinema" (Sabin 1), his yet unfinished Star Wars: Episode II is being recognized as the first major Hollywood film to be entirely shot on digital video. The privilege of this title seems to be a bit misplaced, if not several decades late. It is also very much like Hollywood to take credit for leading a so-called "revolution" and staging a press conference with heads of major studios posing for photos while discarding film reels into a garbage can marked "obsolete," meanwhile promising to underwrite the initial cost of converting movie theaters to digital projection systems that promise to vastly improve the film-going experience by one day beaming down from satellites digitally scrambled films and live transmissions of Broadway shows, while engaging the audiences with interactive games (Sabin 1, 22). In fact, the presence of video in cinema -- a category that should be expanded to refer to film and video makers (Marks: 2000 6) -- can be traced back several decades to documentary videographers and video artists. Both these groups were discussed to some extent in chapter 1 and have in various ways exploited video's unique properties, as well as examined its ubiquitous presence and influence in our lives. Cinema as well, has responded to

the changing technological and social conditions that inform and shape its viewing (Corrigan 1). At the heart of these changes have been various video practices that have ranged from artistic expressions to the "discursive functions of documentary media" that are, at an astonishing rate "recording, preserving, persuading, and analyzing events -- public and private, local and global" (Renov xv). We are indeed living in a "society of the spectacle," a term derived from the ubiquitous presence of "suspect media representation in all avenues" of contemporary life (Tomasulo 70). As a society, we are increasingly relying on digital and electronic evidence for our depiction and understanding of daily events and reality (Tomasulo 70).

An exploration of video's recent role in changing or, rather, enhancing the perception of reality in fiction films is important to forming an understanding of how constant technological developments are key in shifting cinematic paradigms of production aesthetics, viewing practices, and (re)emerging genres, as well as in examining the ideologies and implications that these changes reflect. Video's development as a tool or technology for television, its role as an experimental art medium and an amateur technology, as well as its evolution into a cinematic aesthetic, makes it difficult to narrowly categorize and define. Perhaps this is due to the fact that video has fit into various moulds, has had numerous incarnations, and consequently has crossed over numerous medial boundaries. Because of this, video has not only been incorporated by other media, but has gradually replaced some of its predecessors. However, this "repurposing" reflects a remediation of sorts, a process where one medium is represented in another (Bolter 45) to "fulfill our apparently insatiable desire for immediacy" (Shepperd 2). It is important to reiterate that this fluid process depends on immediacy, a transparent, unobtrusive strategy of representation, and hypermediacy, a mode of representation that serves as a constant reminder of the media employed (Bolter 272-273). At this point, it is perhaps appropriate to look again at remediation and intermediality in quantitative terms. In turn, cinema, with the emergence of analogue and digital technologies, has experienced an intermedial mixture of sorts, one whose integration can be viewed as "partial" or "total intermediality" (Wolf 38). Films discussed in this chapter can be placed in either one of these categories, and may take advantage of the various

modes of representation associated with immediacy and/or hypermediacy, as video technologies play an increasingly important role in not only the production of feature films and their impression of "realism", but also their reception, political implications, and generic categorizations.

Numerous fiction films made in the eighties have participated in this "partial intermediality" by incorporating video diegetically as their subject and/or content, in order to examine its potential in the process of representing reality, as well as video's role in society vis-à-vis pornography, sexuality, memory and surveillance. In fact, some of Canada's most influential directors, such as David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan, were at the forefront of this movement. Fiction filmmakers worldwide in the 1990s have steadily begun incorporating video extra-diegetically into the formalistic aspects of their work, as seen in the output of numerous independent filmmakers, as well as the Dogme 95 group and its self-promoting, recycled and sardonic manifesto. Fiction feature films are, for the first time, participating in a complete and "total intermediality" by being shot entirely on digital video, and the technology that was previously perceived as inferior, even a cancer to cinema, is now embraced by prominent filmmakers as the medium and aesthetic of choice. The previously mentioned godfather of digital cinema is using the medium to facilitate his forte in special effects, and has tested and declared that the cutting edge technologies in digital video are currently close to indistinguishable from the high resolution and image quality of film. Lucas's theory that digital video will soon "beget" features that look normal and will be increasingly cheaper and compliant to special effects (Quart 49) demonstrates a somewhat self-serving attitude, and a limited appreciation for the medium's nuances. It is the purpose of this chapter to concentrate on filmmakers who, unlike Lucas, embrace video and acknowledge its singularity and peculiar characteristics. There is no doubt that digital video technology will one day equal, even exceed the image quality of film. However, the two media will never be the same. The ontology of video -- its very essence -- will always be unique in its ability to capture, if not, create a sense of "present-tense immediacy," unlike film and photography that "render a frozen present tense" and

bring the moment "back at a later time" (Timberg 275). Even when appropriated by the big screen, video maintains an idiosyncratic image quality that has to do with the fact that the medium does "not rely on the same recording principle as the cinematographic" image (Spielfmann 134).³ These differences will be further developed in the next section, as will the influence of TV and video on the way in which films are viewed.

i. From the Gaze to the Glance: Ways of Seeing in the Age of TV and Video

At this point, I again feel the need to parenthetically revisit and elaborate upon the differences between the film and video image, as well as the connotations they propagate among the viewing audience. "The different 'looks' of film and video have, over the years, resulted in a kind of codification through which each 'look' has come to have a different value. This value is, in part, a consequence not only of the different ways in which each medium produces the illusion of movement but also of the different ways each has been used. The video 'look' has come to signify greater realism, immediacy, and presence" (Belton 67). Steven Ascher and Edward Pincus, in their latest version of The Filmmaker's Handbook, do a succinct and superb job in describing the point I attempted to make in the first chapter:

Some of our responses to image quality have to do with past associations. Today, news is shot exclusively on video; news footage tends to be brightly and flatly lit and shot with the crisp video look. This look makes news and sports feel "real." The same crisp video look can make TV dramas seem 'fake' -- that is, instead of allowing the audience to enter into the dramatic world the show is trying to create, the video image makes us aware of the "reality" of a bunch of actors walking around on sets. Many high-budget TV dramas and sitcoms are shot on film in order to capture a richer, softer look that allows viewers to 'suspend disbelief' and enter into the movie (33).

Video equipment often "compensates" in order to capture a sharp image, and by doing so it adds "an artificially hard edge around people and objects" (Ascher 33). This compensation results in the video image looking "enhanced, and makes the objects appear too "crisp" and causes them to "pop off the screen," rendering film to look "softer" by comparison (Ascher 33). It is incidental to note that the image quality, shaky camera movements and sound associated with video creates a subconscious index in the mind of the viewers. Although these associations have a strong

influence over the way that video and film images are "read" and perceived by a mass audience, it is important to remember that these indicants are not at all static, and instead display variable and malleable qualities. The correlation of "fakeness" that has previously been associated with the use of video in TV dramas and feature films, has, in the past decade alone, shifted to denote greater "realness" and immediacy. Numerous illustrations of this will be provided in the following sections, which will furnish abundant examples of feature films shot partially or entirely on video.

The degree to which video in fiction film can be associated with "fakeness," while film with a greater "sense" of cinematic realism, can be best illustrated by a specific example. Abel Ferrara's Dangerous Game, has certainly been overlooked by critics and academics alike, for its innovative and original use of video. Dangerous Game was released in 1993, *before* the widespread proliferation of digital video equipment that ensued only a few years later. In it, the video footage is proportionately intercut with the film footage, and serves both a diegetic and non-diegetic function. The film is a self-reflexive piece about Eddie Israel (Harvey Keitel), a film director who is making The Mother of Mirrors, a film about the breakdown of an abusive marriage. In order to get realistic performances out of his leading couple, Sarah Jennings and Francis Burns (Madonna and James Russo), he resorts to various provocations, and goes as far as emotionally abusing his leading lady to achieve the desired dramatic effect, and condoning violent physical and emotional conflicts between the co-stars that spill over into the "real" lives of all those involved. The significance of the video camera in the film is that it is initially used diegetically within the fictional narrative of the film. Shaky video footage of L.A. rehearsals, and supposed "video assist" footage of breaks in between the filming of the scenes of The Mother of Mirrors, are incorporated into Ferrara's film in order to give a "behind-the-scenes" look at the production process of Eddie's film. This is diametrically opposed and edited with footage of scenes from the film-within-the-film (Eddie's film), as it would look once the film stock was developed and edited. These scenes are impeccably lit, the camera movements are

smooth and unobtrusive, and the footage resembles the flawless and "invisible" shooting style of most classical Hollywood films that provides one with a sense of immediacy.

When viewed side by side, the differences between the two media are remarkably discernible, as are the contrasts in shooting modes that are associated with the primary purposes of the amateur video camcorder and professional film camera. It also makes one realize that constructed seamlessness is less intrusive and thus more "realistic". The shaky, and comparatively uglier video footage, which is diegetically incorporated, especially when the characters acknowledge the camcorder's presence, makes the viewer much more aware of the camera's existence and engages in modes of representation associated with hypermediacy, which serves as a constant reminder of the mediation involved. This gives the footage a sense of "fakeness" in that one becomes much more aware of the "reality" of a group of actors on set, a point made earlier by Ascher and Pincus. However, Ferrara's film becomes further complicated by the fact that he, too, uses film stock and the classical mode of shooting in the principle photography of his own movie. Thus, the distinction between the diegetic and non-diegetic film cameras becomes increasingly blurred, as do the events and characters portrayed. This provides the film with a textual complexity that can be compared to a never ending conundrum; confusion and skepticism over what is the reality of the film one is watching, or the fictional 'creation' of the film within the film, provides for multiple readings of the text(s) and images presented. This is especially obvious at the end of the film, as the increasingly volatile relationship between Sarah and Francis is reflected by the married couple they play, and a final desperate act remains shrouded in ambiguity, as the viewer is unsure whether it was actually committed by Francis, or the character he was hired to enact. This ending conforms to the structure of a *mise-en-abyme*, an endless mirrored-maze, where mirror reflections are indiscernible from their original sources. This enigma accumulates yet another self-reflexive layer from the fact that the part of Madelyn Israel, Eddie's wife, is played by Nancy Ferrara, Abel's wife, making one wonder how much of Ferrara's personal life resembles his art.

On a larger scale, beyond the aesthetic connotation of video, it is important to examine the ways in which the paradigm of the mass viewing experience has shifted since the advent of television and video technologies. Siegfried Zielinski does a succinct job in describing the ways in which the two media have shifted the traditional cinematic viewing experiences. Surely, the biggest shift is a spatial one, where the major shift occurs from the public space of the movie theater to the private space of the home. However, Zielinski views the traditional film going experience as one where in "the 'anonymous, indifferent cube of darkness' of the movie theatre, one undergoes 'hypnosis' (246). He goes on to quote Barthes who "defines the 'darkness in the cinema' as 'the very essence of reverie', as 'the color of a very diffuse eroticism', which he sees as the 'modern eroticism ...of a large city'" (246). Zielinski shares Barthes's vision and views the cinema as a "place of being unattached," with its "'anonymous, crowded darkness' and 'lack of ceremony' it is here that 'the body's freedom luxuriates' which is so important for the quality of the erotic experience" (246). Inside the "opaque cube," known as the cinema, "a visible and yet unnoticed" beam of light, a "dancing cone" is seen drilling "through the darkness of the theater like a laser beam" (Zielinski 246). The viewers "glue" their noses to the screen that resembles a mirror, an imaginary "other" with which they identify themselves "narcissistically." This is at least the basic condensation of Barthes's essay "Upon Leaving the Movie Theatre" ("En sortant du cinéma"), which outlines the basic argument that the traditional cinematic exhibition and viewing space consists of a basic setting for "hypnosis, dream experience.... eroticism, mirror, identification, and narcissistic imagination," elements that are all part of the traditional "psycho-structuralist analysis" (246) of cinema.

The television set and the VCR, on the other hand, provide for a viewing experience that is completely opposite, as the previously noted darkness dissipates, "the anonymity repressed, the space is familiar, organised (by furniture and familiar objects), tamed" (qtd. in Zielinski 246). TV is said to condemn "us to the Family, whose household utensil it has become just as the hearth once was" (246). "Voyeuristic identification" is mostly ruled out of television viewing since the medium is seen as being "fragmentary, dispersive" and "variable" (247). The

relationship between the viewer and the screen is always "interfered with and modified by the familial context" (247). According to Zielinski this is due to the competition between "the communication-objects of desire" and "other objects in the domestic environment" (247). Zielinski wittily concludes his comparison of the two media and accentuates the dichotomies of both television and cinema viewing experiences by classifying the movie theater as "[t]he aurified art-space of cinema," while the television set becomes 'the audiovisual sprinkler in the living room' (247). Despite this, he does insightfully note that this very dichotomy of experience is itself a construct created to make both "structures of experience" much "more accessible to (psycho)analysis" (247). Thus it is safe to assume that video not only "expropriates the formal properties" of previous media, but also shifts the viewer's relationship to these various media (Cubitt: 1991 88).

There is no doubt that this set of assumptions may have once been applied to the two seemingly diametrically opposed media. However, Zielinski himself acknowledges that this theoretical train of thought is fast becoming defunct and superannuated, and does not acknowledge the latest social and technological developments. The emergence of DVDs and flat screen HDTV (high-definition television) sets with integrated stereo surround-sound has vastly improved the home entertainment system. The idealized "firmly structured family context" constituted by television, has "increasingly become a fiction" (Zielinski 247). The 1970s and 1980s have witnessed a decline in "the classic family household," especially in "advanced industrial societies." The same decades have witnessed an erosion of the earlier discussed cinematic mystique. The movie palaces with their enormous screens have been divided into numerous small ones, and Barthes's metaphor of the "cube" has been "capitulated to that of a peep-show with a collective booth" (Zielinski 248). Not only are the theatre screens smaller, but the idealized cinematic experience has dissipated in face of the multiplexes, whose concern for the bottom line has resulted in a decline in the quality of service rendered. These economic concerns not only result in smaller screens, but also in "[b]adly trained temporary assistants" who often have to operate several projectors simultaneously, and this results in various technical

glitches, such as asynchronous sound, loss of image, scrambled reels, loss of focus and film breaks (Zielinski 248). All these elements contribute to the disintegration of the "aurified" and idealized viewing space, as well as the imaginary audience identification.

It is important to note that video has played a large role in "re-aurifying" the cinematic and theatrical space. If one were to agree with Walter Benjamin's assumption that "in the age of mechanical reproduction," the very process of making "copies" of the original work of art strips it of its "aura" -- the essence of its "unique existence" (Benjamin 30) -- then the whole notion of an original work that exist "at a unique place in time and space" in the context of cinema becomes "moot" (Belton 68), unless, of course, one considers the negative version of the film's original fine cut as the unique prototype (Belton 69). However, video's role in transmitting, distributing and exhibiting cinematic works in a domestic context, reinvests cinematic viewings of film *on* film with an unique aura and viewing experience that disintegrates as soon as a film is transferred to and viewed from a videotape. Even when projected in a theatrical space from a video projector, a film that was originally shot and exhibited on celluloid loses its visual nuances and so-called aura. Thus, one can confidently point out that video, by providing cheap and accessible "copies," has made the movie theatre an aurified space that, some would argue, provides the viewer with a one-of-a-kind experience that cannot be reproduced at home.

More recent theoretical investigations into film signification and subject positioning have substantially altered our traditional understanding of the relationship between the viewer and moving images. The most pertinent one to the discussion of video has been developed by Laura Marks in her book The Skin of The Film. Marks challenges the limits of traditional theories of representation that narrowly bind the process of meaning production to the level of signs. Instead, she opens these superannuated theories to the possibility of meaning creation within the entire body, not just the mind (2000 xvii). The title of her book provides a metaphor for the way that "film signifies through its materiality," and suggests a shift in the relationship between the perceiver and the object represented (2000 xi). She also suggests that vision is "tactile," and that the eyes have the ability to "touch" the images on screen by involving the other senses in the

process of perception. Marks calls this concept "haptic visuality" (2000 xi). Video plays a central role in these assumptions, in that the medium becomes a central source of haptic visuality, through its textured surface appearance that emerges from the medium's unique qualities and properties. These range from lower contrast ratios and poorer resolution, to capacity for electronic and digital manipulation and "video decay" (Marks: 2000 175). All these characteristics add to the multiple layers and textures of the image and its "skin," and engage the viewer on a multi-sensory level. Due to the fact that "haptic visuality" draws upon senses other than sight, "the viewer's body is more obviously involved in the process of seeing than is the case with *optic* visuality" (Marks: 1999 332).⁴ Marks's set of assumptions is a refreshing change from canonical theories that for decades have postulated that from the gaze -- the desire to look -- narcissistic identification is achieved and visual pleasure is solely derived. Her concept of the "[h]aptic cinema does not invite identification with a figure so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between the viewer and the video image" (1999: 332). The notion of the gaze has been previously investigated and reconsidered by critics such as Timothy Corrigan, who examines the shift of viewing experiences and practices vis-à-vis the emergence of the television medium.

The influence of emerging and ever-evolving media and technologies has not only shaped the viewing spaces and experiences, but also the viewing practices of the audience. Timothy Corrigan, in his book *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam*, identifies television watching as "visual grazing" and "domestic cocooning" (27), while he associates the viewing of TV with sporadic attention, rather than a sustained gaze, due to distractions within the home (28). He elaborates this point further by examining the unprecedented power and influence of the VCR, a device that has made television and film watching a more selective experience, as the spectator has the power to stop the tape, replay certain portions, or fast forward entire sections, while appropriating the movie text, instead of relinquishing him or herself to it (28). Viewers are said to watch and control their images in a much more extreme fashion than ever before, "as the narcissistic subject of their own active desire, distraction, and

domestic conditions," and can be seen in these experiences as possessing a "fragmented subjectivity" and a mobile identity that lacks a "stable position." The pleasure resulting from this so-called "visual grazing" seems to be derived from dispersing one's attention rather than focusing it, and the viewer subjectivity seems to be constructed by a "plethora of image-fragments" (Corrigan 28-29).

Corrigan goes on to trace the history of the movie-going practices throughout the last century. According to him, during the 1930s and 1940s, the majority of viewers would "go *out* to the movies,"⁵ as cinema was seen as a primary social institution. During the 1960s and 1970s, the movie-going audience went "out to see a movie" in a pursuit of a singular film experience. Meanwhile today's audience "go out" for the "sake of the outing" (29). These days cinema seems to have become a "backdrop" for the individual's departure from the private and domestic space. Individuals do not go to the movies "because the film has pulled them out of their homes; they go because they want to go out and the film has enough clout to channel this leisure demand in its direction" (Corrigan 30). Perhaps because of this increase in an "irregular audience," the majority of the films made no longer address "that audience as part of a shared public ritual," instead the audience members are using films as "a backdrop for their own social activities" (Corrigan 31). Thus it is easy to conclude that the emerging media, such as television and video, encourage viewing practices that advocate and reproduce "a version of the glance aesthetic" that is performed at home, and that the movies screened and produced become "the necessary attraction for a fragmented glance," through which the viewers are able to "vacate and reform a continually mobile identity" while "remembering and forgetting themselves in a multitude of images" (Corrigan 31-33).

In his book, Corrigan also attempts to describe a crisis of contemporary viewing, which he ultimately views as a crisis of legibility (51). Corrigan rejects the normative academic and popular uses of textual reading strategies that constantly involve the viewers in some type of hermeneutical operations of deriving meaning and/or pleasure from all cinematic texts (52). Instead, he claims that the circuit of reading has been disrupted by the increasingly distracted

relationship of the viewer with the image, which he attributes to an increase in media saturation, and a flourishing trend in narrative cinema to structure images in a way which increasingly renders certain films as illegible texts without secrets (51-53). Corrigan expands his attempt to destabilize this "passion for legibility and interpretation" by illustrating that the medium of film has always resisted such literary postures, and cinema, throughout the course of its history, has never had the "linguistic or iconographic stability" to bear "the weight of a legible interpretation" (54). This may be due to the fact that textual reading is founded on a set of binary relations and/or oppositions. Any and all attempts to codify even the most traditional narrative films "invariably run up against textual ruptures, opacities, or 'third meanings' that can make a reading of the film something of a struggle" (54-55). Instead he identifies with the theories of post-structuralists who often suggest that the "true value of a particular movie lies in some kind of textual residue that contradictorily refuses to be recuperated in a reading" (55). As demonstrated by a brief examination of Ferrara's film, and as will be illustrated by most of the films that will be discussed later in this chapter, the use of video often contributes to these narrative ruptures and third meanings, as various "transgressions of medial boundaries" and numerous disregards for the conventions of "traditional storytelling" reveal a "philosophical scepticism [sic]" rudimentary to the stories (re)presented (Wolf 238) and complicate the process of deriving meaning.

ii. Analogue Memories

The status of the video image is much less "secure," and much more fragile than that of the film, since, very much like memory, it does not emanate from a material object (Marks 175). Although the primary source of the memory may originate in physical reality, its reminiscence does not originate from a physical source. The Japanese filmmaker, Kore-eda Hirokazu⁶, demonstrates his concern for the "fragility of human recollection in his 1998, After Life. His inspiration for the film finds its source in a childhood recollection:

My grandfather became senile when I was six. The word Alzheimer's did not yet exist and no one in my family or in our community understood what had happened to

him....As a child, I comprehended little of what I saw, but I remember thinking that people forgot everything when they died. I now understand how critical memories are to our identity, to a sense of self (Kore-eda).

After Life depicts a week in the lives of a number of "celestial caseworkers," whose job it is "to re-create the memories of the newly dead" (Hoberman: 1999 121). In Kore-eda's rendering of the afterlife, it is up to the caseworkers to "process" the newly dead who are asked to choose their most cherished memories. After the selections are made, the deceased, with the help of a production crew, direct cinematic recreations of these precious memories. Following the completion of these films, the novice directors view it on the big screen, and pass on to the final stage of the afterlife, for infinity accompanied only by the recreated recollection of their individual memories.

As the film progresses, what becomes more evident about the central concept of the film, is that once the process of fictionalizing their pasts is put into motion, the boundary between the "truthful" memories and the "fictional" recreations becomes fluid and blurred. This is enhanced by the fact that the film is shot with a handheld camera, in a "documentary-style," and often makes use of "direct address" (Hoberman: 1999 121). In addition, Kore-eda, a "veteran TV documentarian," began the pre-production of this film by interviewing and videotaping a range of individuals, and incorporating the material into the feature. In fact, ten of the twenty-two subjects who are "processed over the course of the week," are played by these very nonactors (Hoberman: 1999 121). In order to meet the week's deadlines, this bureaucratic purgatory follows a tight schedule. However, there is a small number of those who cannot and/or refuse to make up their minds; they are, for various reasons, unable to forgo the reign over all their memories. They are encouraged and aided by analogue videocassettes, which depict "actual" footage of their former lives. Yet, some never make up their minds, and are forever relegated to become part of the work force in this limbo setting, while maintaining a tenuous grasp on their previous incarnations. Although there is no logical explanation for how the video footage was recorded, the symbolism of video is clear: video has become increasingly interrelated with and influential on the way people remember the individual and communal events of their lives.

Despite the fact that After Life was made only a few years ago, its unusual premise is endemic to the discussion of fiction films made in the 1980s that creatively began incorporating analogue video, especially in relation to the act of remembering.

As the title of this section suggests, early examples of diegetic uses of analogue video, especially in fiction feature films, magnify the paradoxical nature of the medium, especially when it is measured up against the processes of individual and community recollections. Numerous critical discourses surrounding video have compared the medium to memory. Like human memory, the "playback" of electronic memory can be instant. It can be fast-forwarded, rewound and erased. It can worsen and decay with time, as all videocassettes do. The video signal is malleable to special effects, tracking problems and demagnetization, and, like memory, it is prone to manipulation, transformation and damage. The concept of "taping" or using the video camera as a "recorder," reinforces the presumption that video is linked to human memory. "The recorder is rooted in the idea of *bringing back to mind*" (Burnett 177). Consequently, the VCR acts as a sort of "minstrel"; the individual whose synthetic function is to retell stories and reiterate memories (Burnett 177). Numerous fiction films have incorporated these themes into their narratives. As previously mentioned, Canadian filmmakers have been forerunners of this movement. David Cronenberg's 1982 film, Videodrome, is certainly an example of this. Chronologically, the year of the film's release marks a midpoint of sorts in the developments of various commercial and technological spin-offs. It came on the heels of the emergence of the VCR, and just a few years before the emergence of the Betamovie camcorder.⁷ Although, by the time of the film's release, the medium had been in existence for almost three decades, its widespread and significant influence upon the individual and collective memory processes of its users had just begun to be acknowledged.

Cronenberg, who is known for his forte in the body horror genre, certainly acknowledges the presence and effects of television and video on its audience. Videodrome's plot revolves around Max (James Woods), a Canadian cable television programmer in search of new and exciting programming for his ailing station. He accidentally comes across a pirated satellite

signal, which displays a young woman being brutally tortured. Since Max's station already specializes in soft-core pornography and he views the genre as a harmless outlet, he jumps at the chance to spice up his entertainment line-up with a video that is very likely portraying real torture and death. Unsure whether the "snuff" footage is authentic, he becomes increasingly obsessed with its content and source, which ironically originates from somewhere within the United States. His repeated viewings of the footage lead to series of hallucinations that, in turn, induce the growth of a tumor inside of his head. Max ultimately becomes the victim of "Videodrome," a cancer-inducing signal that affects anyone who gazes directly at its electronic image. Inside the macabre world of David Cronenberg's diegesis, the television screen becomes part of the structure of the brain, and, consequently, whatever appears on the television screen emerges as raw experience for those who view it. In fact, the film's bizarre urban setting contains a Cathode Ray Mission, a center that provides the homeless not with food or shelter, but with television viewing booths, as if the medium was not just a source of information and entertainment, but a necessity for their physical well-being and survival. Ultimately, the media of video and television, not only influence, but *become* Max's reality. The images they exhibit are transformed into "uncontrollable flesh," and as man and machine become one, Max's body is transfigured into a grotesque videocassette player -- "the new flesh" -- a hybrid medium that can be programmed and "played" like a tape recorder.

Videodrome is a film that operates on several levels. On one level, it demonstrates the ways in which the viewing audience is encouraged to hallucinate (Porton 13). The term "hallucinate" can refer to the way in which the recollections, even dreams of individuals are formed, and often reflect images seen on television. As a society that is inundated with a constant flow of images, the way in which personal and media events are encoded into memory, has certainly shifted. This is perhaps best illustrated by Thomas Elsaesser, whose work often examines the formations of memory and history. He acknowledges that the importance of memory has been elevated in value "as a subject of public interest and interpretation," while

history has come to be looked at with suspicion and to signify the "inauthentic." He poignantly elucidates the relationship between the media, history and memory:

With the audio-visual media effortlessly re-present-ing that site, however, the line where memory passes into history has become uncertain, and the label "postmodern" is used to designate the fact that the divide is being crossed and recrossed in either direction. For how authentic is memory even when events are still attached to a subject? "When I say 'I remember my fifth birthday', what I mean is: 'I remember that last time I told about remembering my fifth birthday'." Or what of the memory of events which live in the culture because of the images they have left, etched on our retinas, too painful to recall, too disturbing not to remember? "Do you remember the day Kennedy was shot?" really means "Do you remember the day you watched Kennedy being shot all day on television?" No longer is storytelling the culture's meaning-making response; an activity closer to therapeutic practice has taken over, with acts of re-telling, re-mem-bering, and repeating all pointing in the direction of obsession, fantasy, trauma (Elsaesser 145-146).

Even if isolated from outside media influences, memories are not fixed or static. Instead they are fluid, dynamic, and in constant flux. The act of remembering, looking back at the past and re-telling it in the present, demonstrates the human ability to change and evolve. Elsaesser's last point is most striking, in that it acknowledges the media's influence on the ability to re-member historical events, by reconstructing or creating a memory based on mediated images and information. It is also important to recognize that such mediated images can influence those who have little or no connection to the event being transmitted. It is no accident that despite Videodrome's Toronto setting, the pirated signal that causes Max to have his hallucinations originated just south of the 49th parallel. One can assume that this minute detail in the film's plot illustrates Cronenberg's awareness of the power and far-reaching effects of foreign (in this case American) images that are, more often than not, intimately absorbed and processed, and transformed into personal and collective (Canadian) recollections. No doubt, the images of JFK's assassination have affected and moved not just Americans, but have vicariously traumatized a considerable sector of the worldwide population. Atom Egoyan expresses this sentiment in a *Cineaste* interview, when he claims that Canadian culture and identity are "overwhelmed by our access to American identity through technology" (Porton 12). He attributes this partly to the close physical proximity of Canada to the United States:

All our major cities are no more than 200 miles from the border. From a very young age, we have all been bombarded with images of a culture that's not ours but seems to mirror certain aspects of our upbringing. But we're fundamentally different in many ways, in order to understand ourselves, we've had to understand our own relationship to these images which have completely crept into our cultural and social makeup (Porton 12).

This "ambivalence toward technology," an attitude that neither condemns or praises the role of video in society, is displayed in films such as Videodrome, and in the works of media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan (Porton 12). This position can be viewed as "typically Canadian" (Porton 12), due to the physical and cultural proximity of Canada to its southern neighbor. This skepticism toward new technologies and their implications certainly relates to the concept of collective identity and recollection. This is best expressed by the Canadian critic Geoff Pevere who claims that "identity becomes as erasable as videotape and as ephemeral as battery power" (qtd. in Porton 8). This metaphor can be applied to memory, as well.

The preoccupations that Atom Egoyan so eloquently expresses in the *Cineaste* interview are just as fluently demonstrated in his impressive body of cinematic work. It is safe to assume that video plays a particularly significant role in almost all of his feature films. The leitmotif of video helps accentuate Egoyan's major themes and preoccupations that include "the erosion of ethnic identity in the face of modernity, the relationship between technology and alienated sexuality, and the black humor that can be derived from the travails of irrevocably dysfunctional families" (Porton 8). These concerns are best illustrated by, what I consider two of Egoyan's gems, Family Viewing (1987) and Speaking Parts (1989). While Cronenberg's Videodrome reflects a time in video's technical genealogy when VCRs were the only non-professional spin-offs widely available on the commercial market, Egoyan's two films, along with American productions such as Steven Soderbergh's sex, lies and videotape (1989), reflect the emergence and proliferation of the video camcorder. They also reflect a deviation from the normative uses of the camcorder, which was originally intended for capturing wholesome and happy "home" movies. Instead, the films mentioned depict a shift in the cultural significance of the medium's latest non-professional format, a shift that moves video towards the realm of sex and sexuality. Despite this, at the center of his two films, one can still discern Egoyan's continuous engrossment

by the connection between video and memory. According to the director, "[v]ideo images are suggestive of the images that go on inside people's heads" (qtd. in Taubin 28). Egoyan further elaborates this observation:

[T]here's a profound difference in attitude toward the two mediums [sic] video and film. In terms of home movies, everyone using film knows in the back of their minds that they are going to have to pay for the development of the roll. That means no matter how obsessive they are about recording, they have to chose [sic]. With video, the process can be indiscriminate. You can record an entire day in real time without any form of selection. This experience of time is extremely dangerous. Some people never look at what they record but by recording something, they make it a possession. It has an effect on the process of memory in that we give away responsibility for memory to a piece of technology (qtd. in Taubin 28).

Egoyan seems to precisely outline one of the many paradoxes of video. The human quest for mastering events and images is demonstrated by our indiscriminate video shooting habits.

However, it is the ease with which these images can be captured that causes a rupture in the way one remembers the recorded events. The supposedly "objective" video proof supercedes one's ability to recall things mentally, and makes one increasingly dependent on the technology.

Therefore, one faces the danger of transforming video from a once useful tool to a debilitating crutch.

Family Viewing incorporates analogue video diegetically and nondiegetically. It also contains excellent examples of video's paradoxical nature, which can help *and* hinder the process of reclaiming one's memories. The film revolves around the Oedipal struggle between Stan (David Hembley), a video equipment salesman, and his son, Van (Aidan Tierney). Having driven Van's mother away, Stan proceeds to systematically tape over precious home movies. He replaces picturesque footage of a young and carefree Van and his mother, with "clinically-depicted" sexual encounters between himself and his new live-in girlfriend, Sandra (Gabrielle Rose) (Taubin 28). Stan's video diary of his bedroom antics, as well as the footage of Van's carefree childhood, were both recorded on a consumer VHS. The rest of the feature was shot on film, except for the scenes inside the dysfunctional family's living room. These were recorded TV sitcom-style, with three television studio cameras linked by a switcher, and were made to

look "intentionally ugly, " while providing the viewer with a relentless sense of claustrophobia (Taubin 28) and entrapment that metaphorically reflected Van's state of mind. Transferred to film, the decaying video images function expressively, and are strikingly different from the footage shot on film (Taubin 28). The scenes shot on film usually depict Van venturing outside of his father's oppressive household, free from the video equipment Stan deals in and consequently controls. As the movie progresses, it begins to clearly display an ambiguity about the role of video technology. Video is the means by which the father controls his girlfriend, and regulates Van's access to his childhood and his mother. However, the domestic technology is also the way in which Van recovers knowledge of his past (Porton 12), as he increasingly regains control of the video equipment from his father.

In light of these ambiguities, it would be very easy to take a moralistic position and condemn these technologies (Porton 12). However, Egoyan seems to accept the fact that these technologies have infiltrated the domestic space permanently, and are becoming increasingly prevalent in various other aspects of personal and cultural life. This is well illustrated by yet another one of Egoyan's films, Speaking Parts. This film seems a bit ahead of its time, since it features devices, such as video mausoleums and videophones, that had not yet been widely available at the time of the film's production and release. The film's leading lady is Lisa (Arsinée Khanjian), a hotel chambermaid who is in love with Lance (Michael McManus), her co-worker and an aspiring actor who hardly acknowledges her existence. Lisa religiously rents and watches videos of movies featuring Lance in minor roles. All of them are, ironically, non-speaking parts. Clara (Gabrielle Rose) is a screenwriter and a guest at the hotel, who is obsessed with her brother who died after donating his lung to her. Clara, much like Lisa, regularly worships her brother on a video mausoleum. The rituals of the two women seem parallel, as Lisa worships her would-be lover and Clara exalts her long-dead brother. Both take part in the deification of video images of men who are physically absent from their lives. Besides employing video gadgets in the diegesis of the feature, Egoyan incorporates video into the non-diegetic or formalistic aspects of the film. Often he uses "video in terms of a surrealistic device" and has admitted to utilizing video as a

springboard for suggesting "a dream state, memory" and "hallucination" (Egoyan 42). This is exemplified by video surveillance footage that Lisa appears to be viewing, but actually imagines. It portrays Lance participating in the murder of a hotel patron. Consequently, one can easily conclude that Egoyan employs video in his films in literal and non-literal ways, usually in order to illustrate medium's role as a sort of representational prosthesis, an extension of human mental capacities to master and represent their realities, both within and without.

iii. Digital Dogmas

The mid-1990s marked a significant development in the technological evolution of video. Camcorders and other professional video equipment began going "digital". The archaic and troublesome "pickup tube" of analogue camcorders, which often suffered from visual defects and poor resolutions, was replaced by the CCDs, a series of chips that are much more stable and reliable than its archaic predecessor (Ascher 186). Along with this technological development came a manifesto and a vow of chastity. In 1995, a group of Danish filmmakers, calling themselves Dogme 95, formulated "a back-to-basics filmmaking" recipe, galvanized by the financial and aesthetic opportunities offered by the new economies of shooting on digital video (Combs 28). Film history is littered with obvious precedents to this film movement, where an equal part formula of "technological innovation" and "economic necessity" (Combs 28) has inspired a new aesthetic of realism. However, movements such as the French New Wave and Italian neorealism will historically prove to be more resilient and creatively productive than the Dogme group can ever hope to be. Six years after its birth, the group has accepted over twenty films into its self-promoting clique. Out of those, perhaps three are worth mentioning, two directed by the group's founders, Thomas Vinterberg's The Celebration (1998) and Lars von Trier's The Idiots (1998). The third is Julien-Donkey Boy (1999), added sixth to the list, but "honored" as the first American addition to the group's catalogue, and a sophomore attempt by the independent wunderkind, Harmony Korine. The rest, in my opinion, are damned to the limbo of too nice tries, cheap shots and pale redundancies.

A recent *Film Comment* article has called Dogme 95 "a joke that never ends or the shape of things to come?" Even Hollywood has come knocking on Dogme's door, as exemplified by Steven Spielberg who was spotted seriously discussing the details of the vows with Vinterberg, while John Travolta has declared the movement a "breath of fresh air" (Combs 28). While the manifesto claims to be a "rescue action" from the enemy of the highly-polished, tightly-edited tradition of the classical Hollywood style, it seems that its attempts to "avoid mediocrity" and create "a riot" have been picked up by the establishment, which has ensured its acceptance and inevitable death (Combs 28). Better death, I say, than a life in mediocrity. Of course, the founders of Dogme 95 do not take their vows nearly as seriously as members of the Hollywood elite do. Vinterberg has been quoted as saying that "the very strict and serious manifesto was actually written in only 25 minutes and under bursts of merry laughter" (qtd. in Combs 28). Despite this, the group still maintains that its intentions are earnest. Earnest in their opportunism and hype, the creators can be easily forgiven for their self-serving trespasses. They can also be partly pardoned because their films seem to address the age-old Bazinian link between reality and artifice, where our sense of realism relies upon the constructed nature of artifice. More interesting than what the vow forbids, is what it actually allows. The "maxims" welcome everything from montage, editing and mise-en-scène, to traditional scripts, professional actors, rehearsals, and most importantly multiple digital cameras (Combs 28-29).

Thus, although the looks of the features are reminiscent of styles associated with documentaries and reality television shows, their modes of representation can be strikingly and surprisingly expressionistic. The Celebration deals with an uprising of a group of adult siblings against their father who sexually abused them as children. The setting of the insurrection is at a family reunion, which doubles as the patriarch's birthday celebration, and sets him up for an epic fall. The camera work remains "vigorously mobile" (Maslin), as it finds and reveals the characters, rather than having the actors move to accommodate a choreographed camera movements. The Idiots feels like a two-hour, semi-pornographic episode of *The Real World*, Nordic-style. Its protagonists make up a Copenhagen commune of mischievous, good-looking

young Nordics, dedicated to a pastime of "spassing," which consists of "engaging in wildly regressive, sometimes disgusting behavior" for the sole purpose of shocking "the local bourgeoisie" with "dada guerilla theater" tactics of acting mentally disabled (Hoberman: 2000a 125). Several cameras were used to record this film, and often in the chaos of improvisational camera movements, one catches a glimpse of one of the cinematographers. Last but not least, Julien Donkey-Boy is a visually stunning, but narratively fuzzy portrait of a schizophrenic. Outside of using digital video cameras, Korine had the actors wear tiny surveillance cameras to supply point of view shots and steal "undercover" glimpses of non-actors. A minimal script was followed and later excised from the film, so that dialogue is negligible and the scenes could be shuffled into any order.

If these films achieve nothing else, it is to make their audience squirm and examine their own unexamined attitudes toward incest, developmental disabilities and mental illness. By bearing their production values, the films engage in a discourse that recognizes the necessity of acknowledging mediation and fabrication. Each of the three films mentioned has a unique approach to getting in touch with characters and their truths. It is fair to say that the assumption that "there is some form of pure or purified cinema that will give us special access to reality" is in fact "an ancient naiveté" (Combs 29). Through the strategies of hypermediacy, the three Dogme films "emphasize form and texture" and "enact the death" of "the illusion that the cinema will ever be transparent in this way" (Combs 31). Instead, with their stylistic sloppiness, they shatter the illusion of seamlessness, and instead expose not only the skin of their images, but also the suture of their respective and constructed realities.

The title of this section is an obvious reference to the Dogme 95 group. However, I do feel the need to incorporate one digital feature film that was made and released outside the movement's hyperbolic publicity. The very term dogma brings forth connotations of doctrines, convictions, faiths and tenets. The title, "Digital Dogmas," suggests a creed in a new technology, and a commitment to artistically exploiting it to its fullest limits. All the filmmakers analyzed in this section, regardless of their Dogme 95 status, demonstrate a conviction and belief in the new

digital video medium that extends beyond the concern for the bottom line. Mike Figgis, the director of Timecode (2000), is such a filmmaker. Timecode was made over the period of one day, in four continuous takes, each one achieved by four separate digital cameras that followed four separate sets of characters. The one take that was finally chosen and made it to the big screen contains four frames of simultaneous and interrelated actions. The four cinematographers follow a smitten lesbian lover, Lauren (Jeanne Tripplehorn), as she jealously oversees her girlfriend Rose (Salma Hayek), who is having an affair with Alex (Stellan Skarsgard), a film producer, who is married to Emma (Saffron Burrows), who is seeing her therapist. Meanwhile an important meeting of Alex's production company is going on.

Although hailed by most film critics as highly experimental, Figgis's film pays tribute to a long tradition of avant-garde filmmakers and artists who attempted to achieve similar effects. In 1966, Andy Warhol made Chelsea Girls, a film/installation piece that consisted of 12 reels of unedited takes that recorded 12 separate set pieces. Each actor was set in front of the camera and told to continue "performing" until the reel ended. The resulting sequences have been and can be projected on split or dual screens (P. Smith 156). With the development of video technology, a variety of artists explored the multi-channel potential of the medium. One example of a direct predecessor to Timecode is Keith Sonnier's 1972 Channel Mix, a "new way to watch television" that combines four live broadcasts in split-screen projections (Hoberman 2001: 109). Thus, it is easy to discern a clear pattern and long tradition of video installations and experimental film forms from which Timecode emerged. Figgis's film can be praised for its cutting-edge aesthetic only in the context of narrative feature film production. As far as fiction feature films go, the film certainly works as both a drama and a bold experiment in video technology that would make the Danes proud. However, since the eighth commandment of "The Vow of Chastity" brands genre movies as unacceptable, I feel it is pertinent to devote the next section to a detailed discussion of the influence of digital video on cinematic genres.

iv. Video Replay of Cinematic Genres

It is the purpose of this section to examine two fiction feature films shot primarily on digital video, films that not only accentuate the idiosyncratic and specific attributes of the medium, but also participate in generic and stylistic remediations of previous media and aesthetics. They are Spike Lee's Bamboozled (2000) and Lars von Trier's Dancer in the Dark (2000), were released just last year, and can be loosely categorized as hybrid, self-reflexive musicals, the generic traits and implications of which I will shortly develop. For these critically acclaimed filmmakers, who have worked within and without the commercial mainstream, the implications of the new technologies are very different than those of Lucas. Although commercial and independent filmmakers, alike, agree that the digital process speeds up production and reduces costs (Petit 4), for Lee and von Trier the ramifications of this technology take on the democratizing aspects of experimentation and resistance of studio control, where personal aesthetics and politics can be further explored without great financial risk, or reliance upon commercial support, while the difference between film and video are put in the forefront and critically explored. Bamboozled and Dancer in the Dark represent an ongoing process of a so-called "remediation" of cinema where one medium is said to replace another in a constant pursuit of and obsession with reality and immediacy. In this case, both films are a result of the digital video's infiltration into feature film production, and both were primarily shot on video, then blown up to 35 mm prints in order to be distributed and screened. The two features illustrate a replaying of classical Hollywood genres, as well as the reconfiguration and recycling of the aesthetics and ideologies of liveness that originated in television. These films also exemplify a new cycle of what I would call a "hybrid" digital cinema that critically explores the generic traits it has inherited, and simultaneously revitalizes, questions and inverts its generic predecessors. In short, digital video has facilitated both Lee and von Trier to take part in an oppositional mode of representation, remediation and generic recycling, by parodying and "ironizing" (Hayward 259-272) various media, modes of address, and genres. This is best

exemplified by revisiting previously discussed concepts of remediation and immediacy in a cinematic context.

In their discussion of remediation, Bolter and Grusin conclude that the medium of "[t]elevision acknowledges its mediation more explicitly and readily than film does" in that "[d]espite its interest in a kind of social and ideological realism, television is not as capable of photorealism as are film" and photography (Bolter 186). However, what the authors have failed to note is the increasingly prevalent use of video technology by feature film directors. In their detailed book on the concept of remediation and new media, they have avoided any discussion of how the technology of video and its various practices have encroached upon and influenced the very way in which films are produced today. Dancer in the Dark and Bamboozled are examples of this increasingly prevalent remediation. The two films make use of immediacy through hypermediacy, a mode of representation that grows out of the acknowledgment of the media used. The two films "enact liveness" (Shepperd 6), by adopting the use of video technology, various documentary styles, as well as televisual aesthetics recycled from news programs, music videos and amateur home movies. It is important to note that cinema has "expropriated previous forms like theatre and photography, and as photography had borrowed its frames from the oil painting so video expropriates the formal properties of the media that went before, including television (Cubitt: 1991 88).

Bamboozled is an ideal candidate for analysis in light of remediation and hypermediacy. The film begins with a distancing device that "breaks the rules of commercial cinema grammar," with the protagonist introducing himself and the themes of satire and irony. The direct address of the audience from his apartment, includes a 360-degree pan of the room, while he praises and condemns the so-called "idiot box's" authority, and himself appears like a host of a morning talk show. The host proves to be Pierre Delacroix (Damon Wayans), an African-American, Harvard-educated television writer who is ultimately pressured by his white boss to create an "impactful" and cutting-edge series. Delacroix takes inspiration from 19th century minstrel shows and classic television programs such as *Amos 'n' Andy* to create *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel*

Show, a variety show "so offensive and racist," that he hopes it will get him fired and prove his point that the network he works for does not want to see Blacks on television unless they're buffoons (Lucia 10). Much to his surprise, the show hits No. 1 and blackface becomes all the rage. The film reflects Lee's criticism of past and present representations and consumption of negative and inflammatory Black stereotypes in the media. Although Lee himself has admitted that "shooting on tape doesn't make a film [more] realistic" (qtd. in Quart 48), for him the film's subject matter logically lent itself to using digital video, since the medium effectively emphasizes the film's television setting (Holden). The "real life" scenes that make up about eighty percent of the film were captured digitally, while the footage of the minstrel show was shot on 16 mm (Quart 48). When edited together, the tonal variations are striking and the subtle differences between the two media are accentuated. The digitally recorded everyday world appears shabbier and cooler, compared to the rich and sumptuous colors of the filmed Minstrel Show. The atrocious images of Black performers in blackface reenacting "coons," "mammies" and "sambos" are aestheticized and accentuated by the use of film stock, and serve as painful reminders of the historical commodity of Black stereotypes, as well as the people they have claimed to represent.

In order to take full advantage of the digital technology's low cost, Lee had anywhere from three to fifteen cameras recording simultaneously, (Quart 48) creating an effect of surveillance and fragmentation. The film also makes use of digital animations, freeze frames and archival footage, all of which contribute to its hypermediacy and adds to its multiple visual layers. This is a film about media-generated Black stereotypes created over a century of film and more than half-century of television. It makes use of multiple media in order to expose not only the stereotypes, but also to foreground the media that has created them and illustrate their profound effect on American culture. At a meeting of the networks, Delacroix, and his assistant, Sloan (Jada Pinkett), are the only Blacks present. The other producers and writers seem at first to be made very uncomfortable by Delacroix's politically incorrect pitch. However, as Delacroix assures them that the show will be a satire that will destroy these stereotypes and send a positive

social message, the group seems to become more at ease and individuals begin recalling their first memories of viewing Blacks on television. The footage of the board meeting is interrupted with the images of their recollections, and includes actual clips from shows such as *The Jeffersons* and *Good Times*. This, of course, illustrates the way in which television has shaped their memories and perceptions of Black culture. As the group becomes more excited with each recollection, Delacroix undercuts their level of comfort by asking them to tap into their anger regarding race in America by asking them to recall how they felt during "the trial". Immediately, a televised image of the O.J. Simpson trial flashes on the screen, showing him barely squeezing his hand into the infamous glove. The mood immediately shifts, as a number of men voice their disapproval at the use of the race card in the acquittal of the former football star. The clips of various archival footage are thrown onto the screen without striving to appear realistic, yet they contribute to visceral reactions of nostalgia and discomfort among the network employees, as well as the viewers of the film. This "Brechtian" (Landau 12) montage of images and ideas thrown onto the screen without any attempt to be realistic (Holden), not only exposes and accentuates the sutures of the films, but also provides a sense of immediacy by replaying images with which most are very familiar.

One could say that *Dancer in the Dark*, despite its own set of distancing techniques, invokes a sense of immediacy much more simply than *Bamboozled* does. The story centers on Selma (Björk), a Czech factory worker who is losing her eyesight. She keeps this a secret and saves all her money for an operation that can save her son from the same fate as her. Her only indulgence is her love of musicals, which she fulfills by participating in rehearsals of an amateur production of *The Sound of Music*, attending screenings of classic Hollywood musicals like 42nd Street (Lloyd Bacon, 1933), and constantly discussing the merits of her beloved genre. The film is shot in a vérité style, with jump cuts, broken pans and improvised dialogue (Hoberman: 2000b 139), and invokes its sense of realism through the constant emphasis on the "coarseness" of its technique (Combs 30). However, the improvised and naturalistic performances and camera work, all conspire to create the aesthetic sense of a home movie. The camera follows the

spontaneous development of conversations and action, and engages the viewer on an intimate level, as if one were a participant in the unfolding of some unrehearsed and serendipitous event. The film, although shot entirely in Europe, is set in America, Washington State to be exact, in 1964. The fact that the film is shot on video, with a technology that would not have been available in a portable format until the late 1960s, gives the film not only a specific texture, but a tonal "dissonance" (G. Smith 22) and places the video format in an anachronistic position. Although the film is "technically state of the art," it opts for a "sketch-like," almost primitive "cinematic articulation" (G. Smith 22), perhaps acknowledging the impossibility of a transparent or "unmediated" cinema (Combs 30), and does not accentuate the film's realism, but perhaps it makes it a little less artificial (G. Smith 25).

The quasi-documentary depictions of the "everyday" are diametrically opposed by Selma's imaginary musical numbers. At times of distress, she dissociates herself from her "reality" and takes part in an imaginary musical, where the ordinary surroundings provide her with the settings, rhythms, props and dance partners needed for a choreographed number. For some of these sequences von Trier used up to 100 stationary video cameras, which recorded the performances simultaneously. The resulting montage, where the transitions were done by cutting between the numerous camera takes filming the same movements, provides for a different sense of time than if the scenes were done in separate takes. Despite the music video feel of the numbers, partly due to Björk's status as an Icelandic pop diva, the fast-paced, quickly edited montages provide a holistic effect, in that they are fragments of a continuous song and dance routine performed in real time. These visual and temporal idiosyncrasies of video that provide a false sense of "liveness" can be traced back to early television practices and are prominently exhibited by Lee's film as well.

The notion of textual racism on television that is perpetuated by the ideology of liveness, outlined by Sasha Torres and discussed in chapter 2, can certainly be seen in Bamboozled. The Mau Maus, "a revolutionary, gun-toting rap collective" that can be compared to a hybrid of the Black Panthers and Public Enemy, declare war on *The New Millenium Minstrel Show* (Holden),

by kidnapping its star, Manray (Savion Glover), and performing his execution live via the internet. However, since most people still do not have access to the World Wide Web, the networks seek a court order to broadcast the execution live on television. The live snuff broadcast is followed by a brutal shootout between the Mau Maus and the police, in which the entire Black collective, with the exception of its single white member, is gunned down. Nevertheless, what is most significant about this scene, is that it imitates the camera angles of helicopter news and police coverage. No doubt, this is done to parody the gaze or point of view of the police that were eliminating the threat posed by the Black collective. However, unlike shows like *L.A. Law* and *COPS*, whose ultimate use of liveness is to reinforce the importance of law and order in keeping the nation unified and safe, Spike Lee uses the aesthetic to police the police and their repeated excessive use of power that continuously damages the moral fabric of America. Lee reverses the "point-of-view aesthetic" of liveness to place the audience in the position witnessing excessive uses of power committed by the state.

It is ironic to note that *Dancer in the Dark*, contains a powerful dramatization of an execution, as well. Selma is driven to kill her kindly but manipulative neighbor, who in an act of desperation, steals her life savings. She is convicted of the murder and is sentenced to death. The final sequence in which she is executed functions as a performance. With onlookers anticipating the inevitable, she performs her final musical number that, unlike the others, does not take her away into a parallel universe of song and dance. Instead, her anguished voice belts out tunes that are abruptly silenced by the noose. A curtain is drawn to cover her hanging corpse, as a symbolic end is reached and captured on video. Some critics have noted that the film "actually works as an anti-capital-punishment" sermon (Hoberman: 2000b 139). This may be so, but perhaps the mode of address that invokes liveness, with which the scene was recorded, both informs and troubles the nation it represents. This is best elaborated by a recent request made by Timothy McVeigh for a "public execution," a petition that reflects his desire for the public scrutiny of government actions, including his own death (Hentoff 31). According to a recent Village Voice article, critics and court judges, alike, agree that the news media should not

be permitted to witness executions because such "telecasts would appeal to the basest instincts of the viewing public, and would inevitably coarsen " American society (qtd. in Hentoff 31). Since then, McVeigh has been indeed executed, his death witnessed directly by a chosen few, and electronically, through closed-circuit video, by family members of victims who insisted on being present. The state-sanctioned act was not recorded and remains an electronic memory, an event turned into a video signal, a shadow that grazed the surface of a TV monitor and that disappeared forever, only to be found in the minds of those who witnessed it directly or through electronic mediation. Both Dancer in the Dark and Bamboozled have reenacted for the American audience what the state has always denied them: public executions. In an age of ubiquitous electronic media that enact the normalizing ideology of "liveness" and unity, these films beckon the question of why shouldn't the American people be permitted to see what actually takes place during an execution, when their government kills under a law that they could very well change (Hentoff 31)? After all, American people have for decades been watching news footage of victims mutilated by wars, often their own. It is important to note that this common ideological thread that illustrates an American paradox and can be found in these two revised musicals, and this thread is accentuated by the use of digital video. One is made by an outsider like von Trier, whose fear of flying has kept him away from the American shores, the other, a rebellious American son, Lee, who has incited controversy and discussion with film after film. With the aid of digital video, both directors have, perhaps inadvertently, been mobilized to reveal the antagonistic impulses and latent preoccupation within American society, while simultaneously criticizing the media that have tried to regulate these contradictions.

This leads to an analogous discussion of genre and its regulating ideology and characteristics. On one hand genre can be said to reflect socio-historical tensions, such as melodrama and its reflection of the discontented female work force during the 1940s, or the sci-fi films of the 1950s and its reflection of the Red Scare. On the other hand, genre has been said to have great power to "recuperate, ritualize and mythologize cultural history (its forms and representations), and has been the key to its stability and security" (Corrigan 138-139). In his

essay, "Reusable Packaging: Generic Products and the Recycling Process," Rick Altman identifies genre with much relevance to today's film criticism and production practices. He claims that genre should *not* be viewed as a "permanent product of a singular origin," but the "temporary byproduct of an ongoing process" (6) in which genres start out as cycles. Yet, not all cycles, for in fact very few endure long enough to evolve into genres (22). Cycles are usually identified as adjectives that are transformed into nouns upon becoming genres. An example of this is the term "musical," which was initially used to describe preexisting genres such as comedies and dramas. Only when the musical displayed its ability to "stand alone as a noun signal," did the term free itself from its former adjective form, and emerged as a new genre with its "own independent status" (4). He attributes this ongoing process to the studio producers' capitalistic need for product differentiation and easily identifiable commodities (17), and points out that it is usually the producers who are actively destroying genres by creating new, more profitable cycles that might eventually evolve into generic categories (25). On the other hand, he places the responsibility for authorizing and maintaining genres in the hands of the critics (25). He writes, "[w]e critics are the ones who have vested interest in reusing generic terminology, which serves to anchor our analyses in universal or culturally sanctioned contexts, thus justifying our all too subjective, tendentious (biased), and self-serving positions" (25).

Altman's concept of cycles and genres most definitely applies to the films under discussion and to some extent resembles the concept of remediation. Dancer in the Dark, alone, has been labeled by critics as everything from a "feel-bad, anti-American parody of Hollywood musicals" (Hoberman: 2000b 139), a hybrid of Warner Bros. Weepies, silent cinema and early cartoons (Lane 100), to a Gothic musical (Arroyo 15) and an English Language Foreign film (G. Smith 24). Despite strong evidence that the film has drawn upon the representational methods of various genres, most critics still place the film in the broad category of the musical. Yet, this category seems only relevant when discussing the past musical incarnations that the film parodies. Dancer in the Dark opens with footage of an amateur rehearsal of The Sound of Music, with Selma in the role of Maria. The singing and choreography are awkward, and the

performance does not in any way resemble the 1965 film version of the theatrical musical starring Julie Andrews. Perhaps this is because the insert at the bottom of the screen informs the viewer that the film is set in 1964, and the cinematic version of the musical had not been released yet. However, the acting troupe acts out an original version of the play, uncorrupted by the filmic rendering. Intertextually, the viewer cannot help but recall the "sweetly sugary" film version of the musical that ultimately promotes marriage (Hayward 241). It is ironic that Selma is a single mother who constantly rejects all of her admirer's advances, and does not "buy" into the strategies of the traditional musical genre that for decades made use of generic strategies that sold marriage, enforced communal stability and promoted the merits of capitalism (Hayward 241). In fact, Selma's sentiment is quite anti-capitalistic, as she expresses her preference for a socialist system that she considers to be much more humane.

Bamboozled, despite and because of its self-reflexivity, could be viewed as an example of "satiric hybrid minstrelsy" (Reid 35), an element of African-American humor that according to Mark Reid and his book, Redefining Black Film, was popularized during the civil rights movement and entertained both whites and Blacks with the same jokes that ridiculed contemporary racial and social inequalities (34). The film can also be viewed as a backstage musical, whose generic predecessors were extremely self-referential and justified their existence by putting on a show (Hayward 241), just as the fictional network CNS, justifies putting on the highly offensive variety minstrel show, in the name of entertainment. Bamboozled inverts both the "satiric hybrid minstrel" film and the backstage musical, in that despite its dazzling musical song and dance numbers, accentuated by the use of a rich film stock, the film does not entertain. Watching the film develop, one realizes that the laughs become far and few between, and that despite the fictional meteoric rise of *The New Millennium Minstrel Show*, the film's actual viewers are made to feel uncomfortable and are forced to explore their own unexamined values regarding race and humor. The film also goes against the classic musical paradigm of providing the spectator with the utopian promise of entertainment. Although the film exposes its satirical intentions from the start and engages the styles of numerous filmic and televisual genres,

Bamboozled effectively eludes a well-defined generic category, which even evades simpler classifications like comedy and drama. Perhaps that is why New Line Cinema had trouble marketing the film, and did not even promote it as a digital film, hoping perhaps that no one would notice.

Despite the generic difficulties produced by films such as Bamboozled and Dancer in the Dark, it is important to view such films as digital hybrids, and to watch out for new and unexpected cycles that the new medium might help develop. In the conclusion of his recent book, Hollywood and Genre, Steve Neale urges critics to go beyond a handful of canonic film and to be more rigorous in their questioning of preexisting generic categories. He writes, "[s]tudies are needed of unrecognized genres like racetrack pics, of semi-recognized genres like drama, of cross-generic cycles and production trends like overland bus and prestige film, and of hybrids and combinations of all kinds" (Neale 254). According to Neale "[s]tudies of well-recognized genres in isolation are unlikely to shed further light on tendencies and trends." Instead, he seems convinced that a cross-generic and multi-cyclic approach, one that pays attention to 'local' and minor genres and trends, will "permit a more inclusive and flexible approach to cinematic output, one which can encompass minor trends, local and non-canonic genres and cyclical contributions (254).

The hybrid nature of these two films certainly illustrates that both Lee and von Trier are well versed in numerous genres. They also reflect the inversion and criticism of their generic predecessors, as well as their permutable nature that allows critics to trace brand new cycles and the emerging social discourses they represent. Laura Marks explains this most succinctly when she writes "[b]y pushing the limits of any genre, hybrid cinema forces each genre to explain itself, to forgo any transparent relationship to the reality it represents, and to make evident the knowledge claims on which it is based" (Marks: 2000 8). On the one hand, the two films discussed seem to reflect and reveal social and historical inadequacies of their generic predecessors. On the other, they maintain the status quo by presenting the strong female characters as martyrs that are driven to murder by the morally and ethically ambiguous leading

males they end up killing; in the case of Dancer in the Dark, it is Selma who murders her neighbor Bill (David Morse), the kindly but cowardly police officer who steals her money and begs her to kill him; in the case of Bamboozled, it is Sloane, the disillusioned assistant, who shoots Delacroix, and as he bleeds to death she leaves him to watch a montage of minstrel images, including the one he unintentionally took part in propagating. Despite the progressive and productive messages encoded in and derived from these two films, it is plain to see that female characters are still simultaneously sanctified and vilified, protected and defiled at the will of the male directors.

Video has reshaped the conventional aesthetic strategies of making and watching films, as well as facilitated for faster-evolving categories of genre. The ever-expanding digital and video revolution has also resulted in the production of what I consider to be two of the most important films of last year. Bamboozled and Dancer in the Dark are not just examples of pastiche, or simple imitations of past forms, genres and styles (Hayward 262). Instead, they should be viewed as intellectually rigorous, ethically challenging and self-reflexive pieces, that are thankfully saved from the "limbo of lost films" (Corrigan 16) by home video, the very technology that has been so instrumental in their creation. The desire to abolish all cinematic filters and achieve an "unmediated visual experience" is, of course, impossible. However, an "insatiable desire" for grasping the essence of cinema, for experiencing immediacy, and for "surprising reality at close quarters" (Casetti 35) is reflected in various film movements and technological revolutions, the digital one being the most recent. André Bazin may have once concluded that photography and cinema were discoveries that would satisfy our obsession with realism (Bolter 26). He did not take into account "our culture's desire for immediacy" (Bolter 26), and his premature death robbed him of experiencing technological innovations such as video (Casetti 35). One of the strongest traits of modern cinema seems to be imbedded in the fact that whenever one mode of representation or genre "seems to have convinced viewers of its immediacy" others attempt to appropriate that conviction (Bolter 9). This is well reflected in an ever-evolving aesthetic of cinematic realism and the multiplying genres and media that strive for

authenticity. These attempts at achieving a more convincing "aesthetic of reality" (Bazin: 1972 16) have often been unfairly overshadowed by critical suspicion and "negative connotations" (Gaines 8) of fraudulence. By no means am I trying to suggest that we should ever let our critical guards down; instead, we should view the constant recycling of genres, multiple remediations and many forms of realism, facilitated by the medium of video, as constant "invitation[s] to knowledge" (Gaines 8).

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

¹ Elsaesser 154

² The complete versions of the "Dogme 95 Manifesto" and "The Vow of Chastity" by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg can be found on their official web site, www.dogme95.dk.

³ For a detailed discussion of the fundamental transformation of both film and analogue video by digital media, see Yvonne Spielmann's essay "Expanding film into digital media" in the summer 1999 issue of Screen.

⁴ Emphasis is my own.

⁵ Emphasis is my own.

⁶ Japanese names are listed here in the Japanese form, with surnames first.

⁷ It took five years, from 1974 when VCRs were first freely available until 1979, for the sales and the format's presence, to become noticeable and significant (Winston 126). On the other hand, the Betamovie camcorder, a compact video camera intended for home use, was "released" in 1985 (Winston 138).

CONCLUSION

In a culture that has mislaid the faculty of hope, the video media emerge. No medium comes into existence without struggle, and the terms of the struggle for video media are the terms of a world driven by blind belief in avarice and a culture based on the present to the exclusion of history or the future: a present without change. The world into which video is born is the one which Wittgenstein crushingly defines as 'all that is the case', echoing the deafening unarguable chorus from Aeschylus: 'Things are as they are.' Video's function, working at the micro-level of history, is to bring alteration to this stasis.

-- Sean Cubitt¹

It is interesting to note that both film and television represent media "in transit."² At the heart of these major transitions lies video. Video can be seen as a catalyst for major shifts in the production and viewing practices associated with both these media. According to Gregory Ulmer, television has been traditionally viewed as an "institution" that "manage(s) and distribute(s) the medium of video" (qtd. in Cubitt: 1993 134). That is to say that TV is a dominant "broadcast distribution medium" and has been traditionally viewed as "the pinnacle of an institutional and discursive hierarchy of video practices," which leaves the means of distribution such as festival, classroom, art cinema and video rental screenings visibly "subordinate" (Cubitt: 1993 134). The 1990s have witnessed a fundamental change in this. Video has become increasingly dominant in cinema, and it is safe to assume that the feature film industry is becoming increasingly instrumental in distributing emerging video images and practices, while demonstrating the willingness to invest in an unprecedented conversion. At last, there has been a rupture in the history of video. It has been rescued from the marginal position of a merely useful technology and has gained widespread acceptance and full respect. There is no more need to promote the new medium and it has certainly carved out its niche within various realms of the motion picture and cultural industries.

I have attempted to demonstrate that video, along with television and film, is a medium in constant flux and transit. As a technology, video has been poured into various moulds (Zielinski 239), which have included numerous recording formats and playback devices. As a cultural practice, it has caused significant shifts in the realms of activism, politics and documentation. As

an artistic medium, it has been instrumental in creating a new art form known as video art, and has facilitated a critique of the medium that has generated it. As an extension of television, it has created an indiscernible simulacrum of live transmissions and has significantly changed the methods of gathering and disseminating news. As a commercial product, it has found its way into the hands of millions, some of whom have used the gadgets in non-prescribed ways. As a cinematic instrument, it has become a new means of producing and viewing feature films. As an extension of memory, it has become an indispensable aid and an inevitable crutch to the act of remembering. Over all, video manages to present reality through both a "construction principle" and a "mirror game" (Casetti 42). No longer television and no longer cinema³, video is a medium that both affects change and records it.

On September 11th, 2001, after hours of watching the crash and subsequent collapses of the two towers, a 9-year-old who witnessed a jetliner hitting the second tower of the World Trade Center from his Greenwich Village classroom that morning, exclaimed that "it wasn't nearly as exciting on television as it had been in real life" (Salamon D5). Surely, television and video can be seen as powerful and important forces that unite the world by providing a constant flow of visual information. However, "the gap between virtual communication and physical reality was never as painfully evident as during the chaos of" the assault (Harmon C2). Due to the immediacy and "instantaneity" of video's electronic and digital capabilities, "millions of people were able to watch a hijacked airliner crash into a skyscraper, but were helpless to stop it" (Harmon C2). In an age when seeing is not always believing, millions around the world had the same reaction to the footage; we all said that it looked just like a film. Raised on a heavy dose of action flick and special effect blockbusters, most compared, if not dismissed the images as figments of Hollywood's imagination, constructed by computer generated imagery. This untimely anecdote illustrates video's ability to prolong our experience of the world, at the same time as it demonstrates limitations of any medium to provide the viewer with an unmediated reality. According to Jean Baudrillard, "the electronic media are responsible for the death of reality, replacing the older referential media with an entirely self-replicating code" (Cubitt: 1999

124). This reflects Baudrillard being theoretically "locked into an immiserating structural linguistics, for which, since no representation is ever identical with its referent, no representation is ever adequate" (Cubitt: 1999 124). He instead mourns the "disappearance of truth in signification, which he equates with the loss of reality" (Cubitt: 1999 124). The fact that most associated the footage of the disaster with a filmic representation illustrates the instability of the video image. The concept of reality is itself an ideological construct and, consequently, video becomes highly suspect in a non-fiction context such as this one. Bazin's notion that reality and illusion are irrevocably linked, and that our perception of the former relies solely on the latter, becomes quite evident here. Part of the myth of total video is the fact that the viewer wishes this were not so. Perhaps then, it should be said that video is better adept at revealing multiple truths and realisms in a fictional context, once its limitations are acknowledged. In this way, video is a medium that closely resembles human vision and memory, one that is highly malleable and often inadequate, and that melts into the flux of life and its unexpected occurrences. It is a device that was originally intended to surprise reality at close quarters. Instead, due to its ubiquitous presence in various formats and contexts, it is reality that surprises video. Video can thus be seen as an extension of human experience and perception. Once the myth of total video is dispelled, the process of truth seeking can begin.

NOTES FOR CONCLUSION

¹ Cubitt: 1993 208

²I borrow the description "in transit" from William Boddy and his *Screen* essay entitled, "Television in Transit," a contemplation on the future of electronic media, including television.

³I borrow this description from the last chapter of Siegfried Zielinski's book, Audiovisions: Cinema and television as entr'actes in history, entitled "No Longer Cinema, No Longer Television: The Beginning of a New Historical and Cultural Form of the Audiovisual Discourse" (219).

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