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Curation of the Video Art Exhibition in the Museum

A Thesis by

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Chapman University

Orange, CA

Dodge College of Film and Media Arts

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Film Studies

May 2021

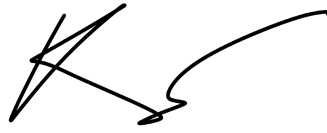
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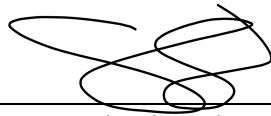
Dr. Jamie Larkin

The thesis of Kamla Lucia Thurtle is approved



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Dr. Stephanie Takaragawa



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Dr. Jamie Larkin

April 2021

Curation of the Video Art Exhibition in the Museum

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by Kamla Lucia Thurtle

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For my mother and father and all the countless souls that have touched my own.

I would not be where I am nor who I am without the immense love of the universe.

## ABSTRACT

### Curation of the Video Art Exhibition in the Museum

by Kamla Lucia Thurtle

The goal of this thesis is to illustrate the importance of video art through a spatial and aesthetic phenomenological framework, revealing the critical nature of aesthetic experiences for forming meaning between art-objects and viewers facilitated through acts of curation. Video art, emerging in the 1960s and heavily intertwined with the museum, marks a unique, novel, and profound disruption of the representative regime of aesthetic experiences and objects through its nature to question cultural systems of the world as a radical medium. By evolving from anti-art movements in tandem with technological innovations, video was distant from art history, discourse, and tradition, allowing for women and people of color to work liberated from fine art limitations and set a new precedent for the art and museum community. Video art allows us to shape the future of the museum, curatorial practices, and aesthetic experiences as well as set a greater model for inclusion of voices often lost in the traditional art institution.

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Rilke wrote: ‘These trees are magnificent, but even more magnificent is the sublime and moving space between them, as though with their growth it too increased.’<sup>1</sup>

- Gaston Bachelard

## Introduction

Emerging in conjunction with and as an intermeshing of novel technologies and new ways of thinking about art as objects and institutions, video art emerged in the 1960s as a radical medium profoundly disrupting the representative regime of aesthetic experiences. Evolving from prior anti-art, music, and collage movements seeking to question cultural systems, video art was removed from established histories and was uniquely situated to problematize curation and museums as spatial practices, both philosophically and physically. Despite creating dialogues between different mediums and genres, ultimately establishing video as discursive and debunking art as institutions, video and its exhibitions have always been heavily intertwined with the museum as a spatial practice demanding shifts in curation. Video art presented a multitude of ontological and practical hurdles to curators in museums from orienting exhibitions to allowing video into the museum and qualifying the medium as art. Although, the inclusion of video as art into the museum-space also led to a wider acceptance of technology-based arts amongst the public and into the broadening notion of what is permissible as art.

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<sup>1</sup> Bachelard, Danielewski, and Kearney, *The Poetics of Space*. 201.

Once historically situated, video art, curation, museums and their triangulation will be analyzed through a phenomenological framework. Museums, as practiced and inhabited spaces, are guided and facilitated by curatorial practices to orient the viewer towards the exhibition, allowing each to imbue meaning between each other and illustrate the importance of aesthetic experiences on the Self. Video becomes an ideal example of the importance of aesthetic experiences in museums to viewers due to the unique situation of video art as an innovative technology seeking to interrogate the world and creating new aesthetic experiences within and enabled by the aesthetic regime. Video art probes the relationships between art-objects and viewers and the role that the museum and curation play in sensuous perception and aesthetic experiences. Curation of video art in museums illustrates the co-creation and co-dependence of subjects, aesthetic objects, and spatial experiences.

Finally, video art allows curators, museums, and the public to look towards the future of the museum as a lived and spatial experience. Video art highlights the role that the public plays in museums and how the curator is necessary for mediating the two. The medium, historically as well as looking forward, sets a precedent for inclusion of women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ artists, and those with counter-culturalist agendas. Video also allows for glimpses into the digital marketplace and the relationship that each must negotiate with the other in museum contexts. Video demonstrates the importance of curation to orienting the museum as a practiced space, the exhibition, and the Self due to its physically and philosophically innovative nature that could help situate and understand museums, exhibition, and inclusion in the arts going forward.

## I. Intermeshings: Video Art, Curation, and The Museum

Achieved through *mimētic* fracture, video art was able to disrupt the representative regime of aesthetic experiences through its discursive nature and disposition to question systems of the world, especially cultural institutions. For the philosopher Jacques Rancière, *mimēsis* within the arts came to a close in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when abstracted views of art were taken up into criticism and theory.<sup>2</sup> With this, the further distanced from mimicry the arts became, the more forms of expression and experience were taken up into the canon of art as a practice, slowly the arts began incorporating dance and music into its canon, picking up and integrating more mediums over time. As Rancière theorized the end of *mimēsis*, Plato, on the other hand, was one of the first to theorize it, especially in regard to art as practice and object. *Mimēsis*, with its etymology being philosophical by nature and often used specifically in reference to Aristotle and Plato, can be generally defined as “the representation or imitation of the real world in (a work of) art, literature, etc.”<sup>3</sup> Plato reflected upon broad concepts of art, beauty, and aesthetics and postulated early notions of art as simply mimicry; art imitates life which further imitates transcendent structures. Art is a copy of a copy of a Form and because art is, therefore, twice removed from truth, he determined it to have the potential of being dangerous, a lie and at fault if not done correctly, especially bearing the ability to unbind politics. Particularly critical of the visual arts, Plato writes of Socrates in dialogue with Adeimantus and Glaucon, “The imitative art is an inferior who marries an inferior, and has inferior offspring.”<sup>4</sup> While Plato presents to us a

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<sup>2</sup> Rancière and Engelmann, *Politics and Aesthetics*. 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> “*Mimēsis*” <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/view/Entry/118640?redirectedFrom=mimesis#eid>

<sup>4</sup> Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*. 39

pessimistic view of the arts, especially the arts confined to sight through his paradigm of painting, his theories led us to this notion of *mimēsis* persisting through time and for some, to this day.<sup>5</sup>

Rancière puts *mimēsis* in the arts to rest with the advent of the aesthetic regime, stating in an interview with Peter Engelmann, “As long as one is operating within a representative legislation, one can decide what isn’t art. In the aesthetic regime, however, though art suddenly exists as a sphere of experience, there is now no longer a criterion for acceptance, one could say. Gradually one arrives at the situation we know today: anything can be taken up into art.”<sup>6</sup> The idea of art, as genre and practice, can be anything, which is where the contemporary notion and experience of art occurs. Rancière continues, “[...] [O]ne arrived at the point where people complained that one could find all manner of things in the museum – buckets of glue, heaps of coal, cans of soup, whatever!”<sup>7</sup> As artists were taking up more and more into the idea of ‘art’ (in the aesthetic regime located in the 20<sup>th</sup> century according to Rancière), viewers and museum-goers were faced with the ontology of art-objects, which, as glue or coal or soup, was often rejected, questioned, or criticized. If art, ontologically, can now be any object rooted in sensorial experience, then the further we have gone into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the museum has begun taking up varieties of mediums, technologies, and objects into its collections and exhibitions.

When surrealists like Marcel Duchamp emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, artists were directly challenging what is conventionally considered permissible as art. Duchamp,

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<sup>5</sup> Plato fails in recognizing a distinction between art and politics. Plato theorized an Image’s simulacra with no recognition of allowing the Image to make and know politics. He claims that the simulacra destabilizes politics, placing art under politics as opposed to acknowledging an equal relationship between the two. Later, Aristotle calls upon Plato’s notion of *mimēsis*, although allowing art a degree of sovereignty. Tanke, *Jacques Ranciere*. 78-79.

<sup>6</sup> Rancière and Engelmann, *Politics and Aesthetics*. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Rancière and Engelmann, *Politics and Aesthetics*. 42.

once a painter, also saw the fall of *mimēsis* within his own work when he turned towards Dadaism. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Rancière sees the aesthetic regime as replacing *mimēsis*, art was freed from needing to represent and mimic the tangible world, and autonomy of the work itself emerged. For Rancière according to Joseph Tanke,

The aesthetic regime of the arts is thus, at the most fundamental level, the abolition of the representative regime's normativity. *Poiēsis* and *aisthēsis* remain linked in the sense that interventions and arrangements continue to produce effects in viewers; however, they are no longer guaranteed by the principles of *mimēsis*.<sup>8</sup>

The creation and making of art-objects oriented towards sensual perception by subjects continues, but now, without the need for mimicry and recreation. Equal experiences and impacts on the viewer persisted, even without notions of *mimēsis* in the arts, and began to mark the arts in novel ways. Much of this occurred in tandem with the advent of new technologies and goals of expression, video art being especially notable.



Figure 1: Nam June Paik, *Exposition of Music-Electronic Television*, 1963

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<sup>8</sup> Tanke, *Jacques Ranciere*. 81

One of the first forms of video works, Nam June Paik's first solo exhibit, the 1963 *Exposition of Music-Electronic Television* (Fig. 1) demonstrates a critical and resistant approach to commercial television and mass media that was flourishing at the time. He wanted to challenge the passivity of the act of viewing television and reverse it through active participation.<sup>9</sup> This inflammatory work was an exhibit that ran for a week in a private location, showcasing scatterings of auditory and visual objects, including television sets all tuned to the same frequency and with the same station technologically manipulated and distorted on each set. The purpose of video art was not to simply make images and arbitrarily organize objects and sounds, but to critique and subvert lived and societally unchallenged constructs and experiences. Video art, emerging in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century rather than the wake of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Rancière theorized *mimēsis* breaking away from *aisthēsis* and *poiēsis*, has come to be one of the modes of artistic expression that has epitomized the shift in challenging classifications of Art beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A distinct aspect of video art that breaks away from aesthetic mimicry is not only the medium but also the newfound purpose of art itself. Video art laid out a conceptual agenda seeking to disrupt not only the monolithic form of art as a genre and practice but also disrupt the traditional experience of art. Paik and Wolf Vostell, a Fluxus painter who adopted video at its beginnings, utilized multimedia collage techniques that created dialogues between different mediums and genres, ultimately seeking to establish video as discursive and debunking art as institution.<sup>10</sup> The conceptual agenda that video art seeks and achieves transforms how one

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<sup>9</sup> Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*. 10-11.

experiences and sensuously perceives it. As Mikel Dufrenne theorizes, art as object precedes perception and is a product of making meaning, which as Plato would understand as *technē*.<sup>11</sup> Yet, when art-object is met with perception, sensorial experience, or the grasping of results of *technē*, is when art-object is transformed into aesthetic object.<sup>12</sup> No longer is art about the creation of a painting for the sake of the painting but rather a way of making meaning and understanding the world or a “veritable system of documentation, information, and construction of the visibility and conceivability of the world.”<sup>13</sup> Video art deals directly with this notion, especially as a mode of interrogation and questioning the tangible world, its evolution, culture, and products.

Video art further epitomizes the aesthetic fracture from *mimēsis* through the framework of Rancière’s idea of medium specificity, innovations in art forms, techniques, and purposes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The debut of the video camera – notably the Sony Portapak in 1965 – was the debut of an entirely new technology that differed from film greatly despite its seeming visual closeness as moving images. When Paik emerged with ‘Exposition of Music-Electronic Television’ the video work was invented, although the movement of video as an artistic medium itself only came to fruition in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Video art was birthed from many artistic movements from the early 1950s, specifically the anti-art approach of the Fluxus movement, various collage techniques, music theory, and performance art. Fluxus, drawing from Dada, was particularly critical to video art as an anti-art institution movement that thrived from

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<sup>11</sup> “*Technē*” An art, skill, or craft; a technique, principle, or method by which something is achieved or created. Also: a product of this, a work of art. <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/view/Entry/273538?redirectedFrom=techne#eid>

<sup>12</sup> Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. 237.

<sup>13</sup> Rancière and Engelmann, *Politics and Aesthetics*. 106

the 1950s-1970s.<sup>14</sup> It was an international group of artists that demonstrated subversive and critical approaches to materialism, consumerism, and establishment, further influencing conceptual art and other medium intermeshings. Drawing from Fluxus and displaying a merging of mediums with the novel video camera can be uniquely seen in Joan Jonas's 1972 piece, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll* (Fig. 2) that was later performed around the world as a combination of live video of her rehearsed actions, prerecorded videos, scattering of objects, as well as auditory tapes and music.



Figure 2: Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, 1972, Performance at Galleria Toselli, Milan, 1973

Video art is unique not only because it was an entirely new medium and technology but also because it is a *live* medium, ephemeral and temporal but also not bound to these qualities at the same time. Film must be seen in individual frames and had to be developed and then run through a projector while video could record what was happening in that exact moment for

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<sup>14</sup> Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*. 10.



instant viewing or playback and whose information occurs as electronic signals. Barbara London, the founder of video collection at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, states, “Consumer video editing was crude and often left glitches, but the benefit was that recorded tape could be rewound and replayed or rerecorded immediately.”<sup>15</sup> Electronic artistic works date back to the 1950s although video art, as a new technology merged with pre-existing mediums, is where art and technology met and came into dialogue with each other in profound ways to be taken up into the museum.

As video art was a new technology growing from former artistic practices, it could, by default, determine its own evolution. Video was distant from art histories, discourse, tradition, and, therefore, restrictions. It is rooted in its medium and not only was the medium a liberated one from the canon of art, but it also liberated women-artists, people of color, and those interested in counter-cultural agendas who were able to grow, create, and work free of the oppression existing in the realm of fine arts limitations and institutions at the time.<sup>16</sup> Video, emerging as a new technology under the backdrop of the 1960s, became politicized through its historical situation. With the civil rights movement, second wave feminism, and confrontations like Stonewall, video art emerged in highly a contentious and radical time allowing Other artists to create and present works that reflected their subjectivities and creativity as part of the aesthetic regime open to new aesthetic experiences, exploration, and critique of worldly systems.

As the museum and video works had intersected, grown, and intertwined, curators became evermore confounded and anxious to not only define this artistic movement, but also how to present this wildly new technology as a mode of exhibition within an environment that

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<sup>15</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 12

<sup>16</sup> Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*. 9.

had never had to consider this medium at all.<sup>17</sup> Audio conflicting with other exhibitions had to be considered, space was required for multichannel sculptures, the installation and constant renovating of technology was necessary, and preservation was complex. Despite this, the actual production of video was inexpensive, open to the public, and distribution was easy, especially in comparison to large paintings which had to be carefully packaged and shipped. One could put their \$7 tape in an envelope and mail it to the MoMA but this also posed its own problem for curators, it meant that the actual process of sitting and watching a mass amount of tapes from the public to be considered took ample time.<sup>18</sup> Video art presented a multitude of hurdles to the museum and their curators and required a foreboding leap into the artistic unknowns.

At first tepid, many of those within the art world eventually *did* want to validate the medium of video works as art, especially budding curators like London.<sup>19</sup> She says, “By 1974 a group of prominent art critics, museum directors, and public TV producers were hopping onto video’s bandwagon.”<sup>20</sup> This required not only a shift in physical technology but also a conceptual shift that wasn’t widely accepted until the 1990s. Curators had to turn to independent intellectual ideas and movements of the time, such as Post-Colonial studies, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and much more, to accommodate ever evolving and growing lens-based media. Turning towards these areas of study was critical to addressing video art as a radical and interdisciplinary medium influenced by such theories and bodies of thought.<sup>21</sup> Video art called for curators and those in the art world to reassess the rules by which art was confined to as well as how to approach art as a growing and evolving practice. As Dufrenne states, “[...] [W]ithin a

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<sup>17</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 18

<sup>18</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 31.

<sup>19</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 31.

<sup>20</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*. 131

given culture certain rules are imposed on every art, and they are all the more authoritative insofar as they take into account the possibilities inherent in each individual art and constitute the schemata of the genre.”<sup>22</sup> Video art broke away from and revolutionized the paradigm of art, museum, and curation, not only through emerging technologies and discourses but also inclusion of those excluded from the fine arts canon: women, people of color, LGBTQIA+ communities, and counter-culturalists.

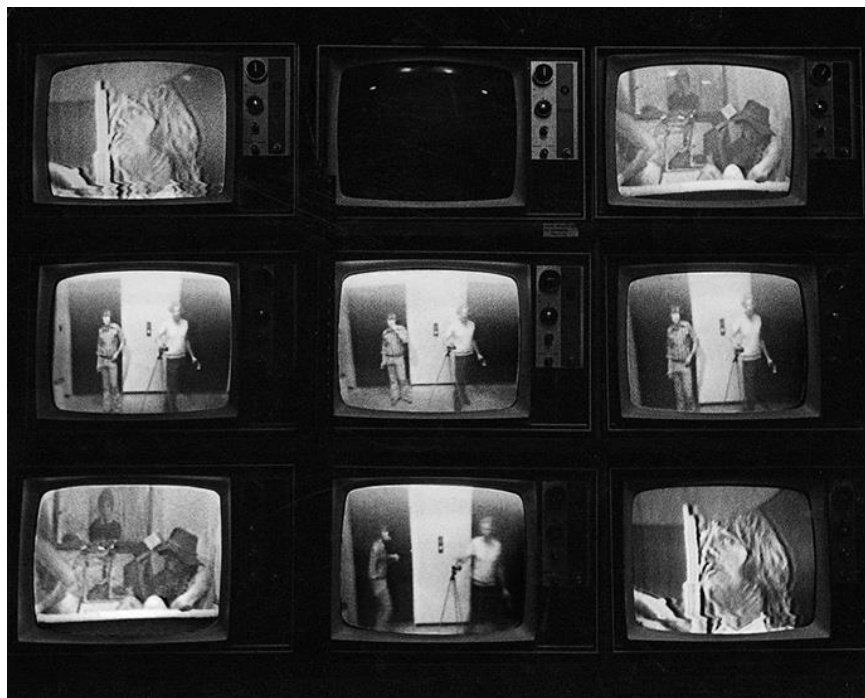


Figure 3: Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, *Wipe Cycle*, 1969, Six-channel video and audio installation

While technology and art had been melding and exhibited through the 1960s, the first pieces of video to intersect with the museum or gallery and become ‘art’ began in 1969. One of the most notable examples is Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider’s installation, *Wipe Cycle* (Fig. 3)

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<sup>22</sup> Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. 240

which debuted at an art dealer's, Frank Wise's, gallery. This show, *TV as a Creative Medium*, displayed twelve different artists' work, connecting art and technology as well as debuting video as a validated artistic medium. *Wipe Cycle* is a six-channel video installation with nine monitors and one camera that incorporated live video, audio, and prerecorded footage.<sup>23</sup> At the 1960s and 1970s, even with film being a widely developed and theorized medium, museums more often than not rejected temporal arts and considered them 'too experimental.' Video art altered the museum formula and blazed the trail for a wider acceptance of later technology-based arts, computer based and digital arts would most likely not be taken up into 'art' without the emergence of video or the museum's eventual willingness to incorporate the medium into its collections and exhibitions. This meant that very traditional institutions were asked to re-evaluate the notion of 'art' and deal with their phobias towards technology. Yet, museums have always had a complex, sensitive, and difficult history predating video art and the rise of experimental mediums and technology, this process of reevaluating the museum has occurred over and over again, it was not a new process that the museum underwent.

The public museum, a way of allowing the distribution of the imaginable and the visible, has been marked and constantly (re)birthed by acts of artistic revolutions and aspiration, for better or worse. Museums, as we know them today, saw their roots in Europe, bearing the insidious history of acts of colonization, evidence of reaches of empires through the procuring of material objects. One can easily look to the inception of the Louvre Museum in Paris, coinciding with the Enlightenment and French Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>24</sup> which was pushed to public displays of art, acquisitions, and artifacts from French empires around the world coinciding with

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<sup>23</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Tanke, *Jacques Rancière*. 83.

cultural and artistic upheavals. Mike Pepi states, “The ‘museum,’ however, seems to wrestle out of most attempts at definition. Museums are, at their most imperious, physical storehouses that make a world through framing objects and structuring possible narratives.”<sup>25</sup> Museums structure narratives and shape ways of seeing the world through their presence as sites of education that organize a public around displays of knowledge and power.<sup>26</sup> These forms of organization in relation to the museum’s colonial roots created stories of the development of Western civilization and greater global relations through this lens, providing a constructed ideological backdrop to the public’s notions of social order and truths.<sup>27</sup>

Due to these colonialist activities and revolving around order and education, there was a necessity for curatorship – guided by hegemony – crafting the meanings, aesthetics, and narratives of such objects.<sup>28</sup> Despite how intertwined the museum and act of curation are today, curation preceded the museum. While there is no agreed upon definite definition for ‘curator’ in practice, the term ‘curator’, originally from the Latin *curare*, defined the idea of ‘taking care of,’ evoking the sense and feeling of *cura*, or care and attention and in some applications, one who cures souls.<sup>29</sup> At the 18<sup>th</sup> century curators has the role of taking care of and maintaining museum collections and by the 20<sup>th</sup> century the term ‘curator’ had evolved entirely, becoming synonymous with the museum-oriented exhibition maker.<sup>30</sup> One of the earliest instances of

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<sup>25</sup> Borasi et al., *The Museum Is Not Enough*. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in Alcoff et al., *Culture / Power / History*, 129.

<sup>27</sup> Museums are distinct from galleries primarily in their situation as a public institution storing artefacts that reflect history and seek to educate a broader public while galleries often focus on exhibiting artists’ work at a private and commercial level.

<sup>28</sup> The British Museum, *Collecting Histories*. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/collecting-histories>

<sup>29</sup> “Curator,” <https://www-oed-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/view/Entry/45960?redirectedFrom=curator#eid>

<sup>30</sup> Obrist, *Ways of Curating*. 35.

curation in association with material objects and culture, that was also a precursor for the museum, is the *Wunderkammer*, the Cabinet of Curiosities. Arising in 1500s Germany, the Cabinet of Curiosities was a way for curators to tend to, archive, collect, and present all types of material culture, ranging from ethnography to natural history.<sup>31</sup>

These ‘Cabinets’ and its defining concepts are not bound to the distant past but exist today, even having an exhibit in 2008 at the MoMA, called *Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities*, “[...] [B]ringing together a diverse selection of works by twentieth- and twenty-first-century artists who have likewise felt the pull of unusual and extraordinary objects and phenomena.”<sup>32</sup> As this earlier practice saw itself evolving into the public museum (early instances being The Ashmolean Museum, The British Museum, and The Louvre) in accordance with emergences in various forms of technology, discoveries, and modes of artworks, curation saw many shifts over time. Curation at a basic level is defined by Johannes Cladders, the former director of the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, saying:

I have always believed that it is the artist who creates a work, but a society that turns it into a work of art, an idea that is already in [Marcel] Duchamp and a lot of other places. In most cases, museums have failed to see the consequences of this notion. I have always considered myself to be a ‘co-producer’ of art [...] in the sense of participating as a museum – as a mediating institution – in the process that transforms a work into a work of art.<sup>33</sup>

It is the curator’s job to facilitate the transformation of a material or cultural object into a work of art accessible to the general public. The curator operates as a bridge, in a way, bringing the

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/272>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/272>

<sup>33</sup> Johannes Cladders in Hopps et al., *A Brief History of Curating*. 57

public to the work, negotiating the subject with the object which is what happened when the video *work* became video *art*. In the aesthetic regime that left *mimēsis* behind, curation becomes evermore critical as art began creating not only new ontologies for objects but also new aesthetic experiences requiring the facilitation that curation provides.

Video art, like other works of art, then falls within the realm of the aesthetic object, defined by Dufrenne as, “[...] [T]he aesthetic object is nothing else but the work of art perceived for its own sake.”<sup>34</sup> The art, once established and distinguished from a ‘work,’ comprehended and perceived sensorially by the subject, can then be transformed into an aesthetic object. In a way, one of the museum’s primary roles that guides its other elements is to facilitate the transformation of objects into art and aesthetic objects by guiding perceptive and sensorial experiences and curators are the ones that select and arrange what is to be perceived and how. Curators brought video to the museum, took up the medium and movement into the canon of arts, allowing video installations to be sensuously perceived, and created aesthetic objects.

This exchange between video art and the public is, ultimately, guided and mediated by the curator within the space of the museum. The curator becomes a conduit between the aesthetic object and subject, infusing meaning into both parties by organizing exhibitions and installations in space, making the object, subject, and museum possible through the triangulated relationship that occurs in the aesthetic regime. What is the museum without the public or its objects? What is art without perception? And most importantly, who are we without aesthetic experiences?

In order to explore these notions and questions, this thesis employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from curators and phenomenological theory to articulate curation of video art as a uniquely aesthetic spatial practice in the museum, allowing for internal growth and

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<sup>34</sup> Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. 16

becoming of both the object and subject. Revolving around Dufrenne's concepts of the aesthetic object and the sensuous, Gaston Bachelard's analysis of space through poetry and Rancière's politics in relation to aesthetics will all be placed in conversation together. These three scholars are critical French philosophers engaging with phenomenology at various levels, from art to politics to epistemology and science. A greater understanding of the sensuous experience of video art in museums, guided through curation, and the importance of such experiences on the Self is demonstrated by placing these scholars into conversation with one another. Bachelard, Dufrenne, and Rancière will be aided in spatial theory and orientation by Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Sara Ahmed, all dealing with space and orientation (applied to curatorial practices, museums, and video exhibition) in various and novel ways to supplement the former scholars. Immanuel Kant will also be incorporated for the explication of imagination and internal growth through beauty and art in relation to Dufrenne and Bachelard. Other curators such as London and Maura Reilly will allow for glimpses into the role that video art can play for the potential and profound future of museums and curation.

## II. Spatial Orientation Towards Exhibition

The museum is a spatial endeavor dependent on curatorial activity shaping the museum experience three-fold: the physicality and ontology of the museum, video exhibitions, and growth of the Self. These three elements inherently rely upon spatial orientation to guide the museum-goer's personal experience with the art-object, the geography and ontology of the museum, and the arrangement of video art as an exhibition. This reveals specifically how curators make the museum-space possible and navigable for subject-object relations and growth



rooted in aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experiences, especially those relative to the museum, are enabled by the inherent qualities of space as a realm of connection and relationships between bodies creating novel relationships. Synthesizing Rancière, Tanke says,

The aesthetic cancels the logic binding bodies to specific places and times, and it is through these operations that new capacities can be discovered or invented. What the aesthetic form of art thus entails is a way of making and doing that cannot but question the relationships between different objects, subjects, forms of presentation, as well as the estimations placed upon people and things.<sup>35</sup>

Museums operate as ‘spaces,’ once transformed from ‘places,’ that are lived and practiced, bringing together art-objects with subjects, uniting them through the senses in arranged space, which is notably done through curatorial practices. Curators make space realizable through the infinite relationships created between each individual with each aesthetic object, each individual with each other, each aesthetic object with the next, and so on, imbuing meaning between these bodies. The curator achieves this, as Cladder notes, by using space as a means of building bridges between disciplines, objects, and subjects.<sup>36</sup> The museum, as lived and inhabited space, is constantly producing connections and meanings through the experiences and (not always conscious) sensual perceptions of its inhabitants. This orientation of space in the museum, that the curator provides, ontologically shifts the nature of the museum from a ‘place’ to a ‘space.’

According to de Certeau, space is, by definition, occupied, which is what separates it from being a place. Space may be practiced through a multitude of ‘bodies,’ as long as these bodies indicate temporality and direction, able to situate and align. This may extend to the

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<sup>35</sup> Tanke, *Jacques Ranciere*. 85.

<sup>36</sup> Hopps et al., *A Brief History of Curating*. 71.

aesthetic object or the subject, the video art or the viewer. To further this, the body (subject or object) has a symbiotic relationship with space, the body is produced in space and space is produced by the body, as one emerges, so must the other. As space is perceived it is created and the body becomes created through the space that it occupies. As spaces become experienced and inhabited by bodies, these bodies become fastened and create an abundance of unique relationships, imbue meaning from one to the other, and will existence through perception. 'Places' and 'spaces' are fluid, shifting from one to the other based on how each is conceived, interpreted, or experienced. They operate on the same plane, neither bifurcating nor existing as separate poles, rather oscillating between the two notions and transforming as one becomes individually lived and experienced. A place transforms into a space as it becomes practiced, as it becomes actualized. Places exist as *a priori*, concrete and preceding experience, while spaces shift into a realm of *a posteriori*, relative and experienced.

A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities.<sup>37</sup>

For the museum application, for instance, the 'place' is the written, visual map or guide on a tri-fold piece of paper of the entire museum that one receives at the beginning of their visit. Once the viewer looks up from the map and finds oneself inhabiting the exhibition hall, room, or floor, the map is transcended and becomes practiced and lived through the active orientation (whether

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<sup>37</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 117

in time, velocity, direction, etc.) of the place, transferring its essence into a spatial experience. Places carry the power to transition seamlessly into space, entirely dependent on how a place becomes occupied and moved through by a perceiving and active subject. While places exercise a degree of objectivity and autonomy from the perceiver, space implicates existence and seeks perception.

By placing de Certeau's theories of 'place' and 'space' in conversation with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notions of space as intentional and inhabited, the power of perceived space as a container becomes evident,

Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the positing of things becomes possible. This means that instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float, or conceiving it abstractly as a characteristic that they have in common, we must think of it as a universal power enabling them to be connected.<sup>38</sup>

When 'places' become exercised and lived, turning into 'spaces,' all the bodies contained in space undergo connectivity. The bodies are not simply arranged nor exist abstractly in space but rather become interwoven and capable of creating meaning through their connections. Through de Certeau and Merleau-Ponty on connectivity of bodies in space, the notion and purpose of curation is furthered: curatorial praxis facilitates the connection between bodies that makes the museum as 'place' realizable as an experienced and united 'space.'

As space is illustrated in the museum through curation, the museum possesses an ability to connect the subject with the aesthetic object, subjects with other subjects, as well as unite aesthetic objects throughout, creating a subjective, sensuous, and limitless spatial experience

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<sup>38</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. 243

producing relations and dialogues between bodies. Through the multitude of bodies inhabiting the museum and its operation as a phenomenological mode of containing art-objects and subjects, arrangement is demanded to guide the way space becomes organized and experienced, occurring through curation. The magazine *The Museum is Not Enough*, created by the Canadian Centre for Architecture, tells the museum, exhibition, and curation experience from the phenomenological perspective of the museum itself, verging on a degree of panpsychism. In article No. 3, “I seek content in display,” the museum says to us,

Exhibitions are one tool for working through grey areas. Exhibitions allow me to give material and spatial form to my concerns, and to unfold them for an audience (you). To make an exhibition, I build an argument through a selection of objects that I arrange in space – that I provide with a context. The context inflects the objects and demands other spatial organizations and other objects. Creating this context is often the most intense and enjoyable work of any museum.<sup>39</sup>

The arrangement and organization that is necessary to order the museum-space as well as order the subject’s interior self is the spatial form and context provided through exhibition and structured by the curator. This becomes the curator’s role: to create and arrange space in a way that allows both the museum, the art-object, and the subject to grow in their own unique ways. Through the curator’s arrangement of space in the museum, the art-object, when met by the subject, becomes an aesthetic object and the subject will internally blossom. Foremost, in order for symbiotic growth to occur, especially of the subject, arrangement of exhibition is critical to the becoming of object and subject, and the video exhibition is especially unique.

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<sup>39</sup> Borasi et al., *The Museum Is Not Enough*. 44



Figure 4: Judith Barry in collaboration with Brad Miskell, *Hardcell*, 1994, sculpture/installation

Video art exhibitions uniquely employ space through the arrangement of monitors, lights, projections, physical objects, sounds, and cameras, creating a unified narrative. This is a spatial narrative and story that unfolds as the video art installation or exhibition unfolds in front of and within the perceiving subject. The organized and thoughtful space of the museum becomes a cohesive, active, perceived, and sensual spatial story for the museum-goer, the museum transforms from ‘place’ to ‘space’. These various arrangements create an orientation. Lefebvre states, “I speak of an *orientation* advisedly. We are concerned with nothing more and nothing less than that. We are concerned with what might be called a ‘sense’: an organ that perceives, a direction that may be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon.”<sup>40</sup> Through sensuous experiences of navigating museums, orientation emerges and carries the subject towards a phenomenological end of perception that goes on infinitely.

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<sup>40</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. 423

Instances of spatial video art installations are Judith Barry in collaboration with Brad Miskell, *Ha@dcell*, 1994 (Fig. 4) and Bill Viola, *Slowly Turning Narrative* 1992 (Fig. 5) which illustrate the dynamic uses of space extending in and out of video that can be involved in creating a spatial story and, therefore, direction to the aesthetic object as well as movement between, around, and through its elements that orients the subject both physically but more importantly, sensorially.



Figure 5: Bill Viola, *Slowly Turning Narrative*, 1992, video and sound installation

Viola's *Slowly Turning Narrative* has two rotating mirrored and matte panels with two video projectors, each complemented by their own audio. As the panels rotate, the projector images warp and reflect onto various surfaces of the exhibition space, allowing the museum-goers to walk around and between the panels and projectors. Viola states,

*Slowly Turning Narrative* is concerned with the enclosing nature of the self-image and potentially infinite (and therefore unattainable) states of being, all revolving around the still center of the self. [...] The entire space becomes an interior for the revelations of a constantly turning mind absorbed with itself. The confluences and

conflicts of image, content, emotion, and intent perpetually change as the screen slowly turns.<sup>41</sup>

Here, Viola demonstrates the spatial dynamism of his installation in both the exteriority of the museum-space as well as the interiority of the viewer further explaining the close link between the exterior and interior.

As the video exhibition draws the exterior and interior of the Self closer, growth of the Self via spatial orientation becomes more apparent; ‘places’ become ‘spaces’ when a subject navigates it. Once navigated, Dufrenne states, “It is by means of space that appearances appear and that seeing becomes possible.”<sup>42</sup> This newfound ‘space’ possesses the ability to make aesthetic objects through the joining of various animate and inanimate bodies, specifically subjects sensuously perceiving art-objects, and, therefore, aesthetic experiences possible. Through sensuous aesthetic experiences rooted in spatial organization the subject can and will (not always consciously) grow, although, much of this growth is dependent on the curator and how bodies in museum-spaces are organized. Cladders states on the critical role of curation in museums, “Whoever gets lost in a jungle remembers every single orchid that leads him back home because he says to himself ‘I’ve already seen this before.’”<sup>43</sup> If spatial organization through curatorial practices of aesthetic objects and bodies is absent, in a sense lacking the bridge or container between subjects and objects, then the aesthetic experience is lost and the subject also becomes lost with no way “back home” as Cladders describes.

Curation becomes critical to the navigating of the Self because the nature of being lost in un-oriented space is not necessarily being lost in the geography of the museum, but rather, lost in

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<sup>41</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 166-167.

<sup>42</sup> Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. 347

<sup>43</sup> Johannes Cladders in Hopps et al., *A Brief History of Curating*. 64.

the interiority of the Self. Through sensuous perception of art-objects via spatial orientation, curatorial strategies, and praxis in museums a stronger reflective potentiality emerges for the museum-goer. If curation, or orientation, is absent then the museum-goer will lack velocity or direction. Bachelard states, “We do not have to be long in the woods to experience the always rather anxious impression of ‘going deeper and deeper’ into a limitless world. Soon, if we do not know where we are going, we no longer know where we are.”<sup>44</sup> The act of curating a museum and its art-objects allows the museum-goer to not only navigate the geography of the museum-space but also navigate their internal worlds when art-object becomes aesthetic object. As Viola demonstrates with *Slowly Turning Narrative*, navigating the internal space is what informs the art-object with meaning, creating an aesthetic experience, the internal and external are meshed together more than is often realized. The further the museum and the aesthetic object takes us into our most intimate, infinite (according to Lefebvre), and inner selves, orientation becomes necessary to guide the experience of turning inwards and growing through external, sensuous perception. The exteriority of the museum means nothing without the interiority of the perceiver and each carries the power to enlarge the other although guidance through the orientation of bodies in the museum-space is necessary for external and, notably, internal enlargement to occur.

As orientation within the museum allows the subject to find their way back home, a critical factor is *how* the subject is oriented. Sara Ahmed employs phenomenology practically, using orientation to illustrate notions of sexuality and gender in her concepts; how individuals find their ways in the world through their occupation and direction in space and how one resides sexually and directs desire. Although centered around queer studies, her command and interpretation of the essence of what it is to be oriented can also extend into aesthetic spatial

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<sup>44</sup> Bachelard, Danielewski, and Kearney, *The Poetics of Space*. 185



orientation used here. She states, “The work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar, such that it is still possible for the world to create new impressions, depending on which way we turn, which affects what is within reach.”<sup>45</sup> This turning that affects what we can reach, in relation to Bachelard, is guiding us through our internal forests, our intimate experience of the aesthetic object, and enabling it to leave impressions upon us. The curator provides not only where, why, and what is within the museum-space but, most importantly, *how* meaning is imbued through these elements and infused into the subject forever. Curating the exterior allows us to orient the interior, guiding not only where the viewer physically turns towards the art, but, ultimately, how the viewer reaches inwards because of the art.

### III. Symbiotic Growth Through Aesthetic Experiences

Curatorial praxis facilitates the aesthetic experience of the museum as a practiced space, phenomenologically connecting art-object with subject, allowing the subject to turn inwards and transforming both. The transformation that happens is rooted in the imagination and becoming ‘immense,’ occurring through the impressions that the external and internal leave on each other. Beginning with and once oriented towards and guided through the interior of the Self based on the alignment of the exterior and bodies in space, every time an aesthetic object comes in contact via the sensual with a subject, a new relationship is created. This relationship is determined through the blurring of the internal with the external. Each subject will have a unique and special relationship with each aesthetic object. One could even say that when the same aesthetic object

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<sup>45</sup> Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*. 7-8

meets the same subject for a second or third time and so on, a new relationship is created between the subject and object each time, continuously building, impressing, and flourishing together. For example, when the subject returns to a permanent collection or exhibit time and time again, a new connection is created, and the object and subject will grow infinitely with the other, infusing and entangling. Tanke states, “The aesthetic regime thus creates the terrain wherein art is reinvigorated by being brought into contact with life, while life, it is thought, can be re-formed under the influence of aesthetic values.”<sup>46</sup> The tangling of and between art-object and subject is what has altered the ontology of the art-object and marked the emergence of aesthetic experiences, where, according to Rancière, anything can now be taken up into the notion of Art and, therefore, the museum as a collection of such objects.

The curator facilitates a dual relationship re-forming both subject and art-object that is created through aesthetic experiences, occurring when one comes into contact with the other and is oriented in a way that enables mutual growth. Not only can aesthetic objects not exist without being perceived but we, as subjects, are also stunted in internal expansion without the presence of aesthetic objects and, in turn, experiences in our lives. Curatorship and curators take on the role of making artefacts accessible and to organize history and narratives around those artefacts and exhibitions. Paolo Cherchi states, “The curator is a messenger who has the authority and the obligation to ensure that the message itself will foster memory and creativity at the same time.”<sup>47</sup> Essentially, the curator acts as a conduit between art and viewer and allows the imagination to grow and enlarges senses of Self through sensuous perception in space.

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<sup>46</sup> Tanke, *Jacques Rancière*. 84.

<sup>47</sup> Usai et al., *Film Curatorship*. 146.

This dual relationship between subject and aesthetic object that is created and facilitated by acts of curation in order to orient the subject inwards leads to Bachelard's concept of 'immensity' placed in conversation with Dufrenne and Immanuel Kant. Inner immensity marks an experience guided by imagination so special that the internal self becomes infinite. It is the phenomena of the imagination stabilizing images; inner immensity infuses art, allowing art to expand horizons. Bachelard states, "In analyzing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination. It then becomes clear that works of art are *by-products* of this existentialism of the imagining being. In this direction of daydreams of immensity, the real *product* is consciousness of enlargement."<sup>48</sup> This is what gives video art purpose in the aesthetic regime, video art is created and infused by the artists for the purpose of interrogating the world and its accepted systems in order to impact and enlarge the viewer. Both Bachelard and Dufrenne agree, at a preliminary level,<sup>49</sup> that imagination is inherent to the human condition and that, as perceiving subjects, the imagination is what unites interiority with exteriority. Although, Bachelard uniquely believes our being, at its purest, is pure imagination and immensity is the phenomenology of the imagining conscious. This then becomes the purest mode of phenomenology, phenomenology existing without phenomena. On the other hand, Dufrenne believes that imagination allows one to situate their existence and corporealize the mental. He states,

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<sup>48</sup> Bachelard, Danielewski, and Kearney, *The Poetics of Space*. 184

<sup>49</sup> Bachelard and Dufrenne come to disagreement later with Dufrenne prioritizing feeling (the third stage of aesthetic experience) as the most profound implication of the aesthetic experience over imagination (the second phase) due to the danger of ambiguity and fallacious tendencies of imagination. Dufrenne believes that feeling is what ultimately links subject with art as well as delineates two forms of imagination, transcendental and empirical, whose distinctions are irrelevant to Bachelard's analysis of imagination.

[...] [T]he imagination, as a faculty of synthesis, can be seen as the beneficiary of the body, and thus that the transcendental is, by the same token, corporeal. Hence imagination is both nature and mind, bearing within it the characteristic antinomy of the human condition. As nature, it brings us into accord with nature; as mind, it allows us to survey and think nature. But we can sever our connection with nature only on the condition that we continue to recall it and remain faithful to it. Only as *naturata* are we *naturans*, and we are just as much constrained to make ourselves into objects in presence as objects are constrained to become mental in representation.<sup>50</sup>

Common to both Bachelard's and Dufrenne's approach to imagination, beyond being bound to the human condition, is that the potential result is the actualization of tangible object as art.

These two scholars demonstrate and reaffirm Rancière's aesthetic regime due to the understanding of the root of art, as practice and object, being ontologically linked to the conceivability and understanding of the Self and the world, transcending *mimēsis*. According to Dufrenne, specifically, imagination creates and then opens the object "to a look or a judgement"<sup>51</sup> to feeling and perception which is what creates the art-object as aesthetic object.

Kant had formerly articulated the relationship between art and imagination in the "First Part–Critique of the Aesthetical Judgement" in *Critique of Judgement*,

In order to distinguish whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer to the representation, not by the Understanding to the Object for cognition, but by the imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or pain. The judgement of taste is therefore not a judgement of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetic, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be *no other than subjective*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. 353.

<sup>51</sup> Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. 351.

<sup>52</sup> Immanuel Kant in Hofstadter and Kuhns, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*. 280-281.

Kant claims that the art-object is produced by the artist for the purpose of presenting it to the subjective determination of aesthetic judgment, he demonstrates that imagination is critical to the becoming of the art as object (according to Bachelard and Dufrenne) through subject-object relations. Through this lens, in conversation with Bachelard and Dufrenne, imagination is the vertex that births both art-object and subject into dialogue with each other, resulting in aesthetic object as well as to the internal becoming of the subject.

Bachelard continues, “However paradoxical this may seem, it is often this *inner immensity* that gives their real meaning to certain expressions concerning the visible world.”<sup>53</sup> The tangible and visible world is inherently bound to the internal world and he argues that internal space and external space blur as they impress on each other. We possess the power to add consciousness and life to the co-existence of various bodies in space and horizons of ‘immensity’ appear with every object that is met by the subject and the subject becomes one with space. Bachelard argues for the ability of poetry to expand the intimate space although the aesthetic object can achieve the same through the mutual need for subject and object, internal and external, to create meaning from the other. Jean Tardieu states in his poem of “Les Témoins invisibles”, “*Mais au-dedans, plus de frontières!*” (But within, no more boundaries!)<sup>54</sup> poetically elucidating the need to allow the fallacious walls we hold up between internal and external to crumble and allow the art-object inside and inner immensity out.

Bachelard builds upon his dialectic of inside and outside through the idea of “Doors.” He considers the internal-external relationship to be one determined by the opening of doors that

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<sup>53</sup> Bachelard, Danielewski, and Kearney, *The Poetics of Space*. 185

<sup>54</sup> Bachelard, Danielewski, and Kearney, *The Poetics of Space*. 214.

allows images to go back and forth, in and out, influencing imagination and inner immensity. He claims that all of life is built upon recollections of doors opening, the structure of the being itself is a result of doors. Bachelard states, “[...] [T]he two spaces of inside and outside exchange their dizziness”<sup>55</sup> which results in mutual and joint growth, the door opens between subject and object and swaps essence, embedding each other in meaning. Curation enables this door, in Bachelard’s term, to open and create dialogue with interiority and exteriority through the mode of the museum. Maria Lind, a Swedish art critic, understands this through the German word *Vermittlung*, she says, “*Vermittlung* – ‘mediation’ in German – signifies a transfer from one party to another, the pragmatic transmissions of a message.”<sup>56</sup> The purpose of curation within museums, and for contemporary art specifically, is to mediate or provide a door for the internal and the external, the art-object with the subject to allow for growth into the aesthetic object and the enlargement of the subject.

Bachelard also confirms Rancière’s idea that the arts without, or independent from, *mimēsis* is a means of transformative aesthetic experience, rather than art for the sake of art; the artist taps into something more powerful in themselves and in the world than the abstract concept of ‘art’ as object being the primary end-goal. Tanke states, “[The aesthetic revolution] aims, as Rancière explains, not simply at a change of political regimes, but to change the meaning of life.”<sup>57</sup> Further, commenting on the downfalls of Plato’s theorizations of lack of distinction between politics and art, ignoring how art possesses the power to know, influence, and make politics and the world around us. He then says, “In order for art to be art, it must be more than

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<sup>55</sup> Bachelard, Danielewski, and Kearney, *The Poetics of Space*. 221.

<sup>56</sup> Borasi et al., *The Museum Is Not Enough*. 135.

<sup>57</sup> Tanke, *Jacques Rancière*. 83.

art, that is, carry this promise of impacting life.”<sup>58</sup> With the rise of the aesthetic regime, art took on new meanings and experiences: art becomes a way to interrogate oneself and the world.

#### IV. Video Art as the Future of the Museum

Video art, as a medium past *mimēsis* but still joined in *poiēsis* and *aisthēsis*, becomes a mode of interrogating the world around us, which means it has taken on a responsibility, in a sense, a responsibility to the plausible and imaginable world. As we go further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this drive for critique, exploration, and questioning brings with it a greater urgency for ethics and expansion at a multitude of tangible levels and while many individuals involved in museum practices may be held accountable, the curator is especially responsible. One of the areas of growth going further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century that curators must address is, as Maura Reilly states,

Curators must be encouraged to build on the historiography of the activist exhibitions from the 1970s to the present [...]. They should also make every attempt to ensure that the work of non-white, non-male, non-heterosexual artists is accessible and readily available to those scholars, gallerists, and curators who construct history and influence the marketplace. There is simply no excuse not to include Other artists in group shows.<sup>59</sup>

Two other areas of growth for the curator and museum are the digital marketplace and the nature of the museum as a continuously evolving space. These three elements all build on the ever-transforming connection between the public and the museum.

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<sup>58</sup> Tanke, *Jacques Rancière*. 84.

<sup>59</sup> Reilly and Lippard, *Curatorial Activism*. 216.

Foremost, the public and the museum have a symbiotic relationship that is mediated by the curator. The physical museum cannot exist as a practiced space without its multitude of bodies, orientation, and perception and the public also has the power of infusing life into the aesthetic object as well, in turn giving the museum purpose.<sup>60</sup> This cyclical relationship has always existed and will persist until the collapse of the museum as we know it and the curator both bears and wields the ability to foster the advancement of the interconnection of museum and public as necessary or needed. The dependence of the public on the curator can be seen in an interview with the late Swedish museum director, Pontus Hultén: “A museum director’s first task is to create a public – not just to do great shows, but to create an audience that trusts the institution. People don’t come just because it’s Robert Rauschenberg, but because what’s in the museum is usually interesting.”<sup>61</sup> The curator sustains the museum and public in tandem, staying one step ahead of what the public desires, or what the public does not know they desire. The public will visit grand institutions dedicated to aesthetic objects in order to discover and bask in, sometimes what is known, but also what is longed to be experienced and unearthed, often both. Because the public places faith in these institutions to unite them with the aesthetic objects to achieve sensual impressions and experiences, the curator must maintain this faith, otherwise museum as space and public as perceiving subject of aesthetic objects slip away from each other and, therefore, meaning, value, and purpose.

Once the trust between the public and museum is created and maintained via the curator, the public then has their own intrinsic quality: to instill meaning into the aesthetic object and reshape it as ‘art.’ Dufrenne states, “But the work has value only as long as it has being, and the

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<sup>60</sup> This notion of practiced space is applied to the physical museum with awareness that digital museums exist.

<sup>61</sup> Hopps et al., *A Brief History of Curating*. 37



primary task of the public is to fulfill this being. What the work expects of the public is, first of all, its completion. It is for the sake of this completion that the artist needs the spectator's collaboration [...]."<sup>62</sup> Subject, aesthetic object, and spatial experience of the museum are co-dependent and co-creating, one cannot exist without the other and the curator operates as a point of negotiation to enable this co-creation. This symbiotic relationship between public and museum determines the future of curation in plentiful ways and can even be seen as the focal point for growth, adaptation, and reinvention, all of which are demanded at this exact moment in time.

What curators have always grappled with but is now coming to a forefront due to public demand and criticism is equality and representation within artistic institutions. The canon of fine arts has historically been defined as white, heteronormative, Western-centric, and male and curation (for the most part) has allowed for often "dismal representation of women and non-white artists in museums."<sup>63</sup> There are many curators doing groundbreaking work such as the late Nigerian curator, Okwui Enwezor, who curated *Documenta 11* in 2002 at the Fridericianum Museum in Germany that featured Steve McQueen's *Western Deep* (2002) three projection, color, and sound video. *Documenta 11* was organized around themes of post coloniality and Enwezor remains the first and last non-European *Documenta* curator.<sup>64</sup> Despite the hard work of many to dismantle curatorial resistance to change of museum paradigms, prior curatorial practices have created a narrative not only perpetuating exclusion but defining artistic value through the narrow lens of hetero-white-masculinity. Even as women and people of color have had exhibitions in recent years, they often left a sour taste in the mouth as it operated from a

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<sup>62</sup> Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. 47

<sup>63</sup> Reilly and Lippard, *Curatorial Activism*. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Reilly and Lippard, *Curatorial Activism*. 140.

place of tokenization as opposed to genuine inclusion and reassessment of who is allowed to be an artist in the institution and, therefore, in a sense, the world.<sup>65</sup> But this is also why video art is so special, because from the very start it included those neglected from the fine arts, shaking the curatorial world and the museum, setting a new precedent for inclusion as a medium and as a group of artists. Video art seriously forced curators and museums to take steps in inclusion that no medium had done before.



Figure 6: Marlon Riggs, *Tongues Untied*, 1989, video, color, sound, 55 min

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<sup>65</sup> Reilly and Lippard, *Curatorial Activism*. 11.



Figure 7: John Akomfrah, *Handsworth Songs*, 1986, Single-channel 16mm film transferred to video, color, sound



Figure 8: Kahlil Joseph, *Until the Quiet Comes*, 2012, Transfer of 35mm film to digital video, color, sound

Although, while video art has enabled many formerly excluded groups to create and brought awareness to political movements such as feminism, LGBTQIA+ communities, and

other marginalized groups as a whole, the medium nonetheless has revolved around Europe and the United States, including various demographics at different paces. In the 1980s, names like Marlon Riggs with *Tongues Untied*, 1989 (Fig. 6) and John Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs*, 1986 (Fig. 7) extending into today with Kahlil Joseph's *Until the Quiet Comes*, 2012 (Fig. 8) emerged, creating spaces for Blackness and queerness within the arts. Later, beginning generally speaking around the 1990s when curators began moving ideologically towards post-coloniality, video artists across Asia, like Shirin Neshat (Fig. 9), Yang Fudong (Fig. 10), and Nalini Malani (Fig. 11), began emerging at a global level. So, even as a radically inclusive platform and medium for the arts from the start, video art posed and broke away from its own degrees of exclusion overtime. Despite this, video art, at the same time, set standards, precedents, and possibilities for who and what the arts, guided by curators, can and should include.



Figure 9: Shirin Neshat, *Turbulent*, 1998, Two-channel video and audio installation, shot in 16mm black-and-white film



Figure 10: Yang Fudong, *East of Que Village*, 2007, Six-channel video installation, filmed with HDV, black and white, sound



Figure 11: Nalini Malani, *Gamepieces*, 2003/2009, Four-channel video/shadow play

A novel challenge posed to curators, especially of video art, is the digital marketplace. For example, the museum archive has moved evermore away from analog and into the digital realm. The digital, until recently non-existent, has evolved from minority and further into majority with many curators and archivists questioning to what degree and quantity they relocate the archive. Mike Pepi states in the chapter “This is Me, Online,”

A few years ago, when it seemed like techno-utopianism was at its height, I collected my thoughts into a text that I titled ‘Is a Museum a Database?’ [...] The question was a response to the feverish prognostications about the emancipatory role that digital technology could play for museums atoning for centuries of exclusion, colonialism, and omission. [...] The museum wasn’t immune [to datafication]. By recasting the institution as a mere collection of information, the museum embarked down a road that threatened to fundamentally reconstitute its identity and mission, [...].<sup>66</sup>

This begs the questions: can the digital augment the museum or our understanding of aesthetic objects? Does the database rectify past failings of the museum? Or does this nullify the museum in its entirety? With the rise of digital and greater public access to it, aesthetic objects, including video, can be distributed and displayed online ubiquitously on platforms like YouTube, Vimeo, the Criterion Channel and so on. Not only are video and other aesthetic objects more available to the public but more of the public has the power to create and put forth into the world for perception. This is, of course, not limited to video; one can view images of Duchamp’s installations digitally, not only as an individual aesthetic object in the ether but also pictured within the curated museum setting itself, sometimes even with other perceiving subjects in the digital image on one’s computer screen. The challenge becomes if aesthetic objects can be preserved, viewed, and distributed digitally by any and all, is the museum as a selective, inhabited, lived, and perceived spatial experience valuable and meaningful enough to the public to maintain.

With the digital marketplace and pushes for more inclusion, the museum must reevaluate itself going forward, the same way it had done in the 1960s-1970s with the emergence of video art. According to Herald Szeeman, a swiss curator of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Well, the curator has to

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<sup>66</sup> Borasi et al., *The Museum Is Not Enough*. 124

be flexible. Sometimes he is the servant, sometimes the assistant, sometimes he gives artists ideas of how to present their work; in group shows he's the coordinator, in thematic shows, the inventor. But the most important thing about curating is to do it with enthusiasm and love – with a little obsessiveness."<sup>67</sup> The curator does many things for the museum and the public, but adaptation is one that few think about yet is always a necessity and crux of the work itself. In order to maintain trust with the public, the curator must meet them one step ahead of where they are and if the curator stays stagnant, so too does the museum, and the public will lose their trust, risking art, institution, and aesthetic experience and impressions.

So, trust must be constantly reexamined and met at different levels and different places overtime by the curator. The museum and the public have a symbiotic relationship needed to create the other and infuse meaning and life in a constant back and forth, but this relationship must evolve as the needs of each participant evolve and change with the world around us. Looking towards the future of the museum, the museum states of its own trajectory,

To be contemporary is somehow to move around the present at its edges, stretching into the past and the near future to reveal our current coordinates and the direction in which we are heading. I'm very attracted to this idea of the edges, perhaps because I feel that when I occupy them, I can be freer from the pressure of norms, and can have a better vantage point to make sense of this rapid flow.<sup>68</sup>

When the museum operates from fringes or the liminality of looking back and then forward at the museum trajectory, looking to where it came from and where it could go, spreading its evolution out in front of itself and attending to what it could become, possibility becomes

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<sup>67</sup> Hopps et al., *A Brief History of Curating*. 100

<sup>68</sup> Borasi et al., *The Museum Is Not Enough*. 146

realized and aesthetic experiences are revolutionized. With public pressures of digital marketplaces and the need for diversity, pulling the nature of the museum into question entirely, the curator must take extra care to the museum's edges and its velocities. What is the museum's direction, though? Where does it have left to go?

Video art could be the saving grace of the museum of the future. Although seeming counterintuitive due to its medium, video art (installations especially) demands analog and lived perception by the public. The video art installation, varying across individual works, provides both visual and auditory perception as well as ephemerality and temporality, and is, most importantly, dynamically arranged in space. Monitors, objects, lights, and even performers are all woven together to create a valuable experience that the subject can only be fully impressed upon if they walk between screens, create shadows, look through and behind and around. This dynamism can be seen in installation works such as Teiji Furuhashi's *Lovers*, 1994 (Fig. 12) where the subject must interact with the video, projectors, and life-size images. London states, "By means of an inconspicuous motion detection device placed above one wall, a subtle occurrence happened when one of the videotape's figures, Furuhashi, stopped and sought out on viewer, and faced this person with his arms outstretched."<sup>69</sup> Furuhashi was a core member of Dumb Type, a politically oriented Kyoto art collective that dealt heavily with the HIV/AIDS crisis which Furuhashi passed away from a year after *Lovers* debuted. *Lovers* was a solo exhibition with Dumb Type that demanded the sharing of space and engagement with the viewer, constructing and demonstrating the beauty and necessity of lived perception. The spatial experience of the museum faces challenges and must confront the future going forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While there are many routes to be taken, curation of video art and installation

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<sup>69</sup> London, *Video/Art*. 177.



reminds us that the museum is an invaluable spatial experience opening us up to varieties of unique impressions and relationships that will last a lifetime and continue pushing the envelope of technology and inclusivity.



Figure 12: Teiji Furuhashi, *Lovers*, 1994, Computer-controlled, five-channel laser disc and sound installation, with five projectors, two sound systems, two slide projectors, and slides (color, sound)

The sanctity of the museum lies with video art, the aesthetic enlightenment of the public lies with video art, and video art will carry us into a more inclusive future lifting the voices of those previously unheard.

## Conclusion

As part of and defined by the aesthetic regime, video art as practice, technology, and purpose plays critical roles in curation, museums, and the Self as well as allows us to look towards the future of all of these things. Phenomenologically established, museums are spatial endeavors at three levels, the physical museum, the video exhibition, and the interiority of the Self. These three elements are oriented and triangulated by acts of curation that allow the bridging of aesthetic object with the viewer. When this sensuous perception and contact occurs the viewer becomes internally immense, grows, and entangles with the aesthetic object, passing meaning between each other. In the past, video art was able to uniquely transform the current landscape of museums and the canon of art by necessitating novel modes of curation to alter museums as spaces and disrupt them as institutions, later paving the way for other modes of technology and art. Most importantly and especially relevant, by looking at video art's past, one can look forward and see the critical potential this medium has to shape museums physically and philosophically, curatorial practices, and ontology of art-objects in a digital world striving for equity and inclusion.

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