

Navigating the Frame: Videoart, Lines of Flight, Deixis*

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DOI: 10.54103/milanoup.232.c659

Abstract

This chapter approaches the media archaeology of contemporary telepresence arguing that some key aspects of such a configuration shall be found in videoart from the 1970s. To demonstrate this thesis, the text delves in particular into the symptomatic use of spatiality across on- and off-screen dimensions. The concept of deixis and de-/re-/territorialisation prove to be useful lenses to look at the way in which artists use technology and their body to craft an image of presence that represents the antecedent of what we experience today via video-calling, telerobotics and virtual reality in order to respond to distance and displacement.

Keywords: Video Art; Spatiality; Deixis; Media Archaeology

Abstract

Questo capitolo affronta l'archeologia dei media della telepresenza contemporanea, sostenendo che alcuni aspetti chiave di tale configurazione si ritrovano nella videoarte degli anni Settanta. Per dimostrare questa tesi, il testo approfondisce in particolare l'uso sintomatico della spazialità nelle dimensioni dentro e fuori dallo schermo. I concetti di deissi e di de-/ri-/territorializzazione si rivelano lenti utili per osservare il modo in cui gli artisti utilizzano la tecnologia e il loro corpo per creare un'immagine della presenza che rappresenti l'antecedente di ciò che sperimentiamo oggi attraverso videocchiate, telerobotica e realtà virtuale, al fine di rispondere alla distanza e allo spostamento.

Parole chiave: Videoarte; Spazialità; Deissi; Archeologia dei media

* This research was funded under the Project PRIN 2022 PNRR (Code G53D23007070001) awarded by the Ministry of University and Research (MUR). The project is titled *ARTCHAE. Rediscovering video and installation art as an archaeology of telepresence* and is conducted in collaboration with the archive *Le Radici del Nuovo* (MEET | Digital Culture Center, Milan). The research conducted to write this text as part of the *ARTCHAE* project was supported also by a FWO grant (file nr. V508024N) that allowed for on-site archival work at ARGOS – Centre for Audiovisual Art in Brussels. I would like to thank Katia Rossini, Daria Szweczuk and Laurence Alary at ARGOS for the availability and great competence, as well as Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans at VUB and Marie-Aude Baronian for facilitating the process.

1. A Flavor for Space and How to Navigate It

Navigation entails space. That is because in order to traverse or, as the dictionary recalls, “to steer a course through a medium” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), we need indeed a medium to move across and for any subject, under phenomenological circumstances, that medium is an extension of space. In this text I would like to discuss what happens when subjects practice space across two different dimensions determined by the position of a video-camera recording their movements in the environment. Creating an image of that very space, this “gesture of video” (Flusser 2014) multiplies spatiality and manipulates temporality in interesting ways that range from real-time recording and screening to playback: if nowadays such elements are elaborated into a set of systems that overcome distance and delay, producing a feeling of presence while at a remote location, prior to the simultaneous form of visual communication that we term telepresence (Paulsen 2017), in the early days of video, that was not the case. The same very elements were affordances whose potentialities offered stimulating room for experiment to artists and technology pioneers. All in all, they pose questions of expansion and extension, doubling and (creative) interferences between the different spatio-temporal dimensions evoked, implicated, or simply visualised on screen.

This speaks of the long-lasting interest of experimenters and artists in reproducing presence and exploring the nature of spatiality. As a matter of facts, the relationship between space, the subjects situated therein and moving images are at the centre of complex dynamics, which have been thoroughly studied over time both in terms of practice-based research and in theory, yet it raised increased interest in the last twenty years or so: such an interest shall be seen as the synonym of a spatial turn in human and cultural geography (Thrift 2004; Massey 2005) which produced new paradigms of mobility and, in general, new understandings of space (Crilly 1999; Papastergiadis 2010). Moving images do not remain indifferent to this and concur to expressing these novel models. From Miwon Kwon’s inquiry on site-specific art (2002) to Maeve Connolly’s work around those artistic moving images that engage with place and location (2009), art and film theories follow up as a direct consequence, with critical redefinitions of notions such as space, place and location as dynamic concepts inextricably connected to identity and culture.

In what follows I would like to posit that the development of new kinds of spatial awareness is something that moving images both represent and favour, and that such awareness serves as a driver for R&D processes which will eventually lead to software and devices able to overcome distance and temporal mismatch in contemporary visual cultures and telepresence practices. The basis on which our current technologies are rooted can be retrieved in artistic moving images of the past. This is immediately apparent if we consider the flourishing

scholarship devoted to study how filmmakers think carefully about the ways to place their work within space, drawing attention to the strong linkage between text and context (Bruno 2018; Butler 2010; Casetti 2015; Fowler 2012; Hagner 2008; Rhodes and Gorfinkel 2011, are just a few key references amongst others). Be it conceived as a represented extension where figures navigate, or rather as a dispositif assembled according to a peculiar design enabling this representation to unfold, spatiality offers notwithstanding a medium *stricto sensu* that moving images have proved to be able to explore with a variety of strategies.

One of them revolves around the construction of the diegetic space in a tight relationship with the extra-diegetic one: this poses the issue of what space is selected to be navigated within the frame, in comparison to what is deliberately left out, off-screen, outside the frame, and how the two remain intertwined along the development of the piece. This is particularly clear in experimental film and artistic moving images, where the narrative quality is not a stringent element and, conversely, the construction of the set becomes more easily and explicitly thematized as part of the artwork. Looking more specifically at video works from the 1970s, it is possible to retrieve a specific interest from the end of artists active during this period in the dynamics of construction of the space to eventually fill the screen. More specifically, these videoart works shall be seen as paradigmatic sites of expressive and disciplinary freedom,¹ where the artistic research on spatiality often results in the articulation of a set proper that does not *re-place* the physical context of the shooting, but rather demands to be arranged and disposed (albeit minimally) around the body and movements of the artist, or again, is evoked and imagined off-screen. These actions are “gestures of making” *à la* Flusser (2014a), in so far as they concretely take place in the area eventually corresponding to a space offered to be navigated by the spectators’ eyes. It is a space made through the action of the artists’ hands—arranging the camera, checking the limits of the framed set, disposing objects, props and—as we shall see—disposing one’s body within it, too. Gestures, then, stand for a hand-mediated (or, by extension, full body-mediated) translation of thought. So Flusser (2014a, 32): “the words we use to describe this movement of our hands—take, grasp, get, hold, handle, bring forth, produce—have become abstract concepts, and we often forget that the meaning of these concepts was abstracted from the concrete movements of our hands. That lets us see to what extent our thinking is shaped by our hands.”

Operating in the space, the movement across space may lead to a multiplication of its planar coordinates as the hands/bodies moving therein add further planes. The result is an extension as well as a stretch of the space features in

1 As all the chapters in this section do in a more or less explicit way, I echo Wanda Strauven’s proposition regarding the role of the media artist in the context of the media archaeological approach, which I am myself applying. See De Rosa and Lazzari’s introduction to section 1 for a thorough articulation of this point.

multiple directions; artists employ movements oriented both inwards, in the direction of a depth enhancement, and outwards, across the threshold of the frame limit. Whilst the former mechanism occurs on-screen, the latter clearly moves off-screen.

It is crucial to reflect upon the way this happens, considering at the same time how artists interrogate the movements performed in front of the camera and showing a trajectory across the on- and off-screen space. In the videoart works that I study, the speculation and inventive solutions that artists come up with as they question spatiality enabled a profound attention for video as a medium, as well as for the “technologies of the self” (Foucault 1988) that it develops. These are “symptomatic” (Elsaesser 2016) elements, which I suggest were entailed, explored and tested then for the first time, and at the same time notably represent marks eventually retrievable in our contemporary video-related practices. In order to illustrate such a founding value of that season of videoart, I selected two case studies that I suggest seeing as important points in the genealogy of current telepresence practices, broadly intended. Embracing a media archaeology method, these videoart pieces recontextualise visual artefacts—namely the mirror—and work as epiphany, turning point or rupture moments (Crary 1990), where artistic poetics merges with technological advancements, so as to crystallise new modes of configuring one’s presence on screen. In effect, the space on screen itself is interrogated and critically explored thanks to a challenging use of the available tools, as well as via an alternative application of image canons. Such experimentations stretch the affordances of video as a medium, and at the same time test the grammar of the electronic image. This is exactly what happens in Joan Jonas’ *Right side, left side* (1972), which I select to explore on-screen movements and to suggest that the navigation engaged by the artist can be considered as a quest for depth able to question the sole planary structure of the image as a two-dimension depiction. Instead, when it comes to the extension and expansion beyond the frame, I look at Lili Dujourie’s mirror-themed works *Spiegel (Mirror)* and *Effen spiegel van een stille stroom (Smooth mirror of a still stream)*, both 1976).

2. Looking for Depth: Joan Jonas Right Side, Left Side

Dismantling the face is the same as breaking through the wall of the signifier and getting out of the black hole of subjectivity. Here, the program, the slogan, of schizoanalysis is: find your black holes and white walls, know them, know your faces; it is the only way you will be able to dismantle them and draw your lines of flight.
(Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2005, 188)

Left Side Right Side, is a single channel work belonging to Jonas' early period. It dates back to 1972: it is a moment of experimentation where the language of video and that of performance initially intermingle for documenting purposes but artists, Jonas not being an exception, soon realise that this technology can bring interesting affordances into the realm of possibility to explore both image and body in new ways.² Real time broadcasting initiates CCTV and video-surveillance but prior to that, playback technology offers more simply a double of oneself that proves to be perfectly suited to create dialogues, as well as counter-image effects. That is the case of this work, resulting from a capture of simple gestures performed by the artist for the camera, and constructed with the aid of a mirror. If the latter creates a split screen effect and at the same time a synchronic double of the artist's face, this is in turn further doubled up on screen thanks to the introduction of a monitor located in the bottom section of the frame, showing the live recording of the performance in real-time. On-screen, then, we see both Jonas' half face, its mirrored half, and the recomposed halves live-streamed on the afore-mentioned monitor, characterised by the obvious inversion of right and left caused by the capture itself.



Figure 1–2. Mirror and monitor compose the dispositif in *Left Side Right Side* (Joan Jonas, 1972). Stills from video.

This basic dispositif, assembled with a fixed camera filming a close-up of the artist's face, then slightly zooming out enough to include a blackboard backdrop and the monitor positioned in the left side corner, illustrate Jonas' explorative attitude towards on-screen space and videotape. It reminds in fact of Flusser's reflection regarding this medium as a tool: "video, as a tool, fascinates us. It permits us to discover potentialities unknown either to those who invented it or to those who paid for its production. And it permits us to steer its development in other directions." (Flusser 2014b, 145). That's probably what Jonas had in mind

2 For a review of these new ways, please see Lorenzo Lazzari's contribution to this volume, *At the Thresholds of the Medium: CCTV, Playback, and Feedback Breaking the Possibilities of Video*.

when in an interview commenting on her early video pieces she remarked—“I thought of the monitor as a box into which I could crawl” (MoMA, n.d.).

This very crawling, albeit not literal, stands for a form of navigation and exploration that moves from the presence of the artist’s body, as well as of her actions and *‘mise-in-abyme’* video image within the piece itself. Jonas indicates her right and left eyes, initially on her own body, secondly on the image of it, finally on both at once. In this gesture, she uses her body as the medium traversing the on-screen space and “explores the ambiguities caused by her attempt to identify correctly the spatial orientation of images simultaneously played back by a monitor and reflected in a mirror. This is confusing because, contrary to what one might expect, the monitor image gives back a ‘true’ reading of the space while the mirror reverses it” (Ross 1983, 131). Throughout the tape, the image switches back and forth between the “actual” artist’s face and its double appearing on mirror and monitor.

The laterality of the image that is at the core of this work, its problematization and perhaps ultimate ironic treatment by the artist, shows the necessity to overcome the planary dimension of the frame and, consequently, the search for its deepening. Switching right and left or back and forth between video image and video-in-the-video image, highlights an intuition that many figurative artists had in the past, albeit addressed with different tools. As Andrea Pinotti observes in a reflection devoted to the “reverse of the image” in art via its left and right sides, “the right-left opposition does not exhaust the fundamental coordinates of an image: equally decisive are the top-bottom axis and (especially in images constructed in perspective or in any case with a sense of depth) the front-back axis” (Pinotti 2010, 16, my translation). Whilst he mainly has in mind graphics and painting, applying such a consideration to an art that implies the presence of a camera determining a front/on-screen and a back/off-screen dimensions seems particularly apt. We are not entirely sure whether Jonas had in mind the countless examples Pinotti mentions and the reflections that art historians such as Heinrich Wölfflin or Julius von Schlosser—also included in Pinotti’s work—proposed on this topic, what is very clear, however, is that she has the potentiality of laterality and the space of the image as a field of tensions and as dynamic vectors very clear in mind. What she crafts is therefore a visual synthesis between image and its discourse.³ Calling for one or the other side of the image, Jonas

3 Drawing a comparison to Pinotti’s reflection again, I suggest Jonas deals with the “delicate relationship between image and discourse since, in verbally accounting for the sides of the image and its orientation in an ekphrastic description, complex dynamics of identity and point of view between producer, spectator and subject of the image itself come into play, dynamics that are decisive for a polarity, such as that of right-left, which is established in relation to a specific body and often takes on a deictic function” (2010, 56, my translation). I wish to thank the author for pointing me to this very useful reference, which seems to reinforce the argument I am sketching out.

tricks the spectator's eye intervening on the way in which videotape rolls—an aspect that she is clearly exploring at the time, as 1972 is also the year of *Vertical Roll* which is specifically devoted to this—and, in so doing, sets up the spatial and temporal coordinates of the piece as an altered double of reality. In effect, “with videotape playback and scene overlap. It, too, involves tricking the eye, but the tricks have other possibilities for manipulation that lie closer to the threshold of the scene's reality” (Flusser 2014b, 143). With these words, Flusser provides indeed a pretty accurate description of what's at stake in this work: the navigation across the frame operated by Jonas, both via her body and via its images played back by the monitor captured in turn, produces uncertainty between reality and representation, as well as a sense of displacement; watching the piece, our coordinates and orientation are in other words lost,⁴ and the artist's gestures act as “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 55) deterritorializing and reterritorializing the on-screen space into a new configuration.

When Deleuze and Guattari propose the concept of lines of flight, which punctuates various sections of their *Mille Plateaux*, they mostly refer to territorialities, which they suggest feature “the presence within them of movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization.” Precisely these movements favour communication and exchange “at the intersection of the milieus” to the extent that space “would be nothing without these movements that deposit them” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 55).⁵ Relating this to Jonas' piece, as right becomes left and vice versa, the swapping of sides in the artist's body speaks of multiplicity, and thus of the presence on-screen of swapping, reconfiguring movements that re-design the territory framed by the camera: Jonas forces what the philosophers would call a “single plane of consistency”, that is, a consistent image inherent in itself and self-sufficient, able to introduce a trajectory that questions the “reality of a finite number of dimensions” and pushes the limits of her body and of its depiction. If we read this trajectory as a line of flight, as I am suggesting, then, this is endowed with an ability of “deterritorialization according to which [territories] change in nature and connect with other multiplicities” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 10). When right becomes left and vice versa, then, the lines of flight crisscrossing the screen produce the swapping of sides in the artist's body that we are discussing. Such a displacement illustrates rather neatly the multiplicity Deleuze and Guattari mention: Jonas' body appears in several places at once, inhabiting the on-screen space in a room of

4 Vilem Flusser goes farther and significantly couples the video image and image reflected on the mirror: “videotape is a dialogical memory. At first glance, the monitor seems to be a mirror, but many differences can be established between it and a ‘classical’ mirror [...]. For in its sound, angle of reflection, light, it reverses all our traditional concepts of a reflected, speculative reality. It puts the person watching the monitor in a space for which there are no coordinates, he loses orientation” (2014b, 144).

5 All the above quotations are from Deleuze and Guattari (2005, 55).

performance, but also in the monitor placed in the left-hand side of the screen, which adds an element of both strong fictionality to the ensemble and of depth to the image.

The relationship between their concept and depth is something explicitly addressed in *Mille Plateaus* when the authors critically engage with painting and perspective: “Lines of flight as perspective lines, far from being made to represent depth, themselves invent the possibility of such a representation, which occupies them only for an instant, at a given moment. Perspective, and even depth, are the reterritorialization of lines of flight, which alone created painting by carrying it farther. What is called central perspective in particular plunged the multiplicity of escapes and the dynamism of lines into a punctual black hole” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 298).

By operating via lines of flight, I don’t think Jonas escapes dynamism at all, she rather embraces it. She is keen on offering a representation of multiplicity, and actually her performance is scripted as though her aim would not quite be depicting the possibilities of her body in and of itself, but making sense of it and of the reality which both envelops it and that it inhabits. This is enhanced by the image of the body topping up its physical original via the use of video. The whole process seems to find an interesting confirmation in Flusser’s predicament regarding the genealogy of video: “Genealogically, [...] video can be traced back to the line water surface-magnifying glass-microscope-telescope. [...] the origin of the tool ‘video’ gives the impression of a whole series of epistemological virtualities that have not yet unfolded” (2014b, 145). To this genealogy starting with water I suggest adding the mirror, which not only we see in use in *Right Side, Left Side* to open up space for a virtual self but is notably connected to it by the myth of Narcissus. Playing with the mirror, Jonas looks for an extra, further space to see herself acting, perhaps, to simply be-in-the-world. In effect, since ancient times, i.e. Greco-Roman culture, the key principle has been to take care of one self and—as Foucault reminds—“knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of [one-]self” (1988, 22); in this frame, only eventually inverted in modern times, the mirror represents the means allowing to “shift the question from ‘What is this self?’ to ‘What is the plateau on which I shall find my identity?’” (Foucault 1988, 25). Such a passage is based on the understanding that “we are dealing with a gesture whose coming can be read as a new way of being-in-the-world” (Flusser 2014b, 146), that is to say, the plateau where we can find Jonas’ identity is her mirror double and her video image. Yet the former is not just a prerogative of the videoart piece we are discussing, because it is mentioned in Foucault’s analysis, too. As a matter of facts, he suggests that “[t]he care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as-substance,” so to take care of the principle of this activity that philosophers indicate being the soul, “[o]ne must know of what the soul consists [and the latter] cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror” (Foucault 1988, 25). Such a reflexive posture is what

Jonas expresses in her artwork, a video piece where the optical device is employed and where the medium is also used as such. Along this line of thought it is impossible not to think of Rosalind Krauss' famous reflection on video as a medium centred on an "aesthetics of narcissism" (1976), circling back and strengthening the consistency of the genealogy we are retracing.⁶

Moving across such a genealogy, the exploration of the self unfolds by means of the navigation of the space both on- and off-screen, interrogating them. The possibility to gain knowledge about how to inhabit this two-fold spatiality becomes a way to achieve a better understanding of oneself via the work of one's image that enables a care-taking gesture. Precisely this image opens the realm of representation and virtuality, going through the depths of the image thanks to the opportunities provided by real time recording and playback. Jonas is not the sole artist exploring these elements: just a few years later, Lili Dujourie picks up the exploration of the mirrored image that we saw in *Right Side, Left Side*, reflecting more thoroughly on her reverberated counter-image and on how this may explode the on-screen space as a surface, in ways that challenge the boundaries of the frame.

3. Forcing the Boundaries of the Frame: Lili Dujourie's Mirrors and the Quest for Space Extension

We must invent our lines of flight, if we are able, and the only way we can invent them is by effectively drawing them, in our lives. Aren't lines of flight the most difficult of all? Certain groups or people have none and never will. Certain groups or people lack a given kind of line, or have lost it.
(Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2005, 202)

6 Many are the studies devoted to the mirror and its role in the construction of identity and the image alike, that are significant to compile this genealogy. Crucially, however, due to length constraints, in this text I will deliberately touch upon the contributions that offer a relevant input for the purpose of this essay. This inevitably leaves out important references feeding a very rich list, including significant studies such as: Anderson, Miranda (ed.). 2007. *He Book of the Mirror: An Interdisciplinary Collection Exploring the Cultural Story of the Mirror*. Cambridge Scholars; De Clercq, Rafael. 2007. "A Note on the Aesthetics of Mirror Reversal." *Philosophical Studies* 132 (3): 553–63.; Eco, Umberto. 1985. *Sugli specchi e altri saggi*. Bompiani; Heyne, Pamela. 1996. *Mirror by Design: Using Reflections to Transform Space*. Wiley; Hornbacher, Sara, ed. 1985. "Video: The Reflexive Medium." *Art Journal*, Fall.; Lacan, Jacques. 1988. *Book 1: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953–1954*. Cambridge University Press; Leuzzi, Laura. 2020. "Self/Portraits: The Mirror, the Self and the Other. Identity and Representation in Early Women's Video Art in Europe." In *EWVA European Women's Video Art in the 70s and 80s*, edited by Laura Leuzzi, Elizabeth Shemilt, and Susan Partridge. John Libbey Publishing; Melchior-Bonnet, Sabine. 2001. *The Mirror: A History*. Routledge; Tagliapietra, Andrea. 2008. *La metafora dello specchio. Lineamenti per una storia simbolica*. Bollati Boringhieri; Valentini, Valentina, ed. 1998. *Allo specchio*. Lithos.

In 1976, Belgian artist and filmmaker Lili Dujourie produces two pieces, both revolving around the central presence of a mirror element. *Spiegel* (Mirror), and *Effen spiegel van een stille stroom* (Smooth Mirror of a Still Stream) are set indoor, the presence of the artist catalysing the scene, her subtle movement traversing it as she navigates the diegetic space either through simple gestures or just by filling the frame with her body, still. My argument is that both these pensive movements and simple gestures are a way to navigate the frame but mostly that they trigger a navigation that takes the eyes of the spectators beyond the limits of the frame itself, along a line of flight heading off-screen.



Figure 3–6. *Spiegel* (Lili Dujourie, 1976). Stills from video.
Courtesy Argos – Centre for Audiovisual Art.

In *Spiegel*, the scene is cut by the central position of a mirror, whose surface shows the corner of a fireplace and mantelpiece. The latter soon becomes the backdrop where a naked woman leans: her reflection shows her full body, still, the hair combed, her legs and back in plain sight, her head resting on her arms resulting in a pose reminiscent of classical sculpture. However, suddenly she turns face to the camera, moving towards it (and us watching): her body leaves the statuary pose to walk past the camera and “a close-up of her breasts obliterates the illusion of the idealised image in the mirror. [...] Finally she abandons her formality; she loosens her hair and paces almost aimlessly around the space” (Fisher 2002, 99).



Figure 7–8. *Effen spiegel van een stille stroom* (Lili Dujourie, 1976). Stills from video.
 Courtesy Argos – Centre for Audiovisual Art.

In *Effen spiegel van een stille stroom*, the scene is constructed with a number of similarities—the minimal setup, a fireplace with mantelpiece, the reflecting system—however the mirror is placed across the right edge of the frame and both the composition of the image and the scale of the woman make it unnoticed at first. Only when these elements are processed by us spectators, and in particular when the motion of the woman standing on the right starts, we realise that the dispositif of the piece is created so that the on-screen space is in fact fractured along the vertical axis in correspondence of the mirror threshold, and features a clear contrast created by multiple planes, as well as by the interplay between spaces, depths and surfaces. As the woman exits the frame disappearing from our visual field we become finally aware of this very disposition: the space in front of and behind the camera are swapped and merged on screen thanks to the presence of the mirror that re-presentifies the author via her reflected image, until her ‘real’ body enters the frame from the opposite side and makes more perceptible the distorted perspective we had tried to familiarise up till that moment. At that point, all of this unfolding very seamlessly and quickly, Dujourie’s body fills the screen and stands in front of the camera at a very close distance: as the space before her, the artist’s body also appears in close-ups, cut in pieces by the frame and leaving the parts that are not given us to see only alluded, imagined. “[A]s in *Spiegel*, we only see the whole, ‘idealised’ figure in the mirror; and again, the game of posing formally for the camera is abandoned to informality: sitting, smoking, waiting. [...] The mirror opens up the space to what is behind the camera” (Fisher 2002, 100). The focus, then is shifted from the frame to what transcends it: there is a world at its borders and escaping them, Dujourie expands the surface of the practicable space beyond the image, off-screen. The issue is not quite to see what’s precluded to the eyes of the spectators but rather offering an extension for the possibility of action and experience regardless of their visible representation; in the artist’s words: “I want to indicate the duplicity (visible/invisible, present/absent) in its totality and make it experienceable” (Dujourie cit. in Fisher 2002, 99).

Reflecting upon these terms—visible/invisible, present/absent—Dujourie examines the categories that will eventually be at the centre of contemporary telepresence. Her way of processing them, though, is more expressive than functional and pragmatic. It dwells on the off-screen space, and endows it with a key role, not a void, not the site of absence but that of freedom and, simply, of experience disjointed from display. This very space, far from being negative, is thought of as part of a dispositif that assembles it with the body of the artist and the qualities of video—real time image, instant playback, performativity, a partial image (we only see parts of the artist’s body) that exudes intimacy. This is achieved thanks to the recorded mirror, which concurs to make apparent the action of a line of flight that crosscuts the on-screen space in the direction of the invisible dimension located outside our field of vision.

In *Spiegel*, as critic Jean Fisher has observed, when the artist walks past the camera, we realise that what we’ve been viewing up to that moment is a mirrored image, a sort of counter-image differing from the simple capture of Dujourie’s body, a “sudden eruption of the particular [occurs] in a further encroachment of the ‘outside’ of the frame on the ‘inside’” (Id.). In *Effen spiegel* the same permeability of inside/outside dimensions, on-/off-screen, is apparent when the body of the artist longs for and eventually reaches a position behind the camera, thus unveiling “a staging of an imaginary ideal that shatters with the intrusion of a ‘real’ that never coincides with it” (Id., 100). Dujourie follows a line of light that perhaps is evoked by the “still stream” of the title: she flows and flees off-screen, deterritorializing the set-up she constructed as much as a sense of displacement arises the moment she confronts her own reflection in the mirror. To bear that image, more space is needed, new ways of conceiving the image of oneself are needed, a further dimension as compared to the two-dimensionality of the image is needed. So the planes of the image multiply—bare floors and walls leave room to a door that opens over further depths, windows and mirror reflect a room that remains vague and lends itself to design new extensions, allowing for a nearly three-dimensional effect to shape up, and for further space to unfold. It is this complex multilayered space that gives to the artist a chance to freely navigate the world, thereby echoing the space inhabited by the spectators.

The deterritorialization and reterritorialization made possible by such navigation are favored by the nature of the set prepared by the artist: knowingly, this is thought of as the room to foreground a passage between an inside and an outside, it is “articulated by a play of limits, intervals or interfaces, whose thrust is towards the possibility of the [off-frame], towards a kind of blind seeing of what is immanent to yet occluded from the visual field” (Fisher 2002, 101-2) and towards which the body of the artists inevitably heads to. In this sense, Dujourie’s complex spatial dynamics not only emphasize the off-frame dimension, where the lines of flight that she develops are directed, but the

sophisticated topology of implied off-screen space that they produce contribute to create a peculiar deictic quality.

According to Catherine Fowler (2008), the attention paid to the off-frame comes with a stress on the virtual or fictional space implied beyond the frame and directs the viewer's attention to a projective elsewhere. In Alison Butler's view, instead, this process can be described in terms of spatial dislocation and is often chained to temporal disjunction, too; because of this intertwining of spatial and temporal coordinates, the dialectic between visibility/invisibility and presence/absence evoked by Dujourie herself is intensified and according to Butler (2010) this may be analyzed via the notion of 'deixis.' More than from semiotic, where the category was formalized, she mainly refers to its application in theatre theory,

where it is used to specify the effect of presence and its discursive actualisation. Theorists of theatre have defined presence not just in terms of the performance of an actor or the attendance of an audience, but in terms of the "continual present of the stage and its enunciation." [This means that] theatre spectators consciously and unconsciously negotiate shifting and contradictory ways of locating the performance in space and time and continuous modulation of their own presence to and absence from the performance. (Butler 2019, 13-4)

If in performance art deixis is then activated as a strategy to actualise what happens on stage within an actual and situated environment experienced by actors and public alike, in film the disjunction determined by the recorded nature of images introduces a fracture. When moving images are installed in the gallery space and when media such as video elaborate around the threshold between the recorded/diegetic/on-screen dimension of the characters and the live/extradiegetic/off-screen dimension experienced by spectators, however, these two spaces end up implicating each other. The result is a negotiation of the two dimensions, a mutual allusion one to the other and a critical interrogation of the separation between them.

4. On Deixis—Or, Joining On- And Off-Screen Spaces Following the Lines of Flight

To describe the videoart works I am analyzing as "deictic" in the theatrical sense suggested by Butler, means to acknowledge and appreciate the lines of flight crossing the on-screen space in direction of the off-screen space. Linking these two faces of spatiality means to recognise the articulated spatial nature of the diegesis, as well as spectatorship as a situated experience that shall not be thought of in an abstract way, but rather as one rooted in a spatial dimension that may well be inhabited by the viewers precisely thanks to the viewing. A

synthesis between the two may be complex, yet the artistic solutions proposed by authors such as Joan Jonas and Lili Dujourie point at the meaningfulness of their intersection or, at least, their imagined exchanges across representation and life, image and flesh, distance and presence, delay and simultaneity. Deixis serves as a sort of “tuning strategy” between these opposite poles, whose solution will only be produced years after, to respond to practical needs, via telepresence apps and softwares. The videoart works discussed in this text, however, pick up the inheritance of previous figurative art and reinterpret it, offering both initial questions that sparked subsequent research and creative modulations between the binaries listed above. As much as artists have addressed the laterality of images through a set of figurative strategies “expressing the need not to produce disjunctions” (Pinotti 2019, 19, my translation) between left and right, before and behind, so do the works I am discussing, relaunching and rephrasing the questions at stake “making connections” (Lury, Massey 1999) through the language of video.

Adopting the lens of deixis to look at the selected case studies, we gain a useful toolkit to interpret Jonas’ and Dujourie’s works but mostly to address—bearing these pieces well in mind—the connection between “*screen space* and *screening space*” (Butler 2019, 14). Contemporary telepresence tries to blur these dimensions, joining them in an attempt to shorten distances, extend and make space more comprehensive so that it can somehow include our presence even when this is phenomenologically impossible. There is however yet a further small conceptual passage dealing with the audiovisual formats videoart is encapsulated in today that I would like to offer for consideration: the discussed artworks not only illustrate quite emblematically the “deictic turn” in moving images theorized by Alison Butler (2010), but on the basis of that, they prefigure today’s practices of moving image installation. Arguably one of the most widespread forms we can encounter moving images today, moving image installations pair with the apparently very far—yet equally familiar—telepresence and short video formats populating our contemporary networks. Both media configurations raise important questions around the relationship between distance and proximity, the blurring boundary between diegetic and extra-diegetic aspects, delayed image of the self and synchronic, real time presence. Considering the spatial element informing and somewhat determining these features, the sensitivity for space may be a key element in addressing our position in the world at a moment when moving images installations permeate a significant part of our environment making it a media-environment. In the same wake, the telepresence systems overcome distance and delay but may not provide all the answers to navigate our relationships with others, to position ourselves in the world, to fill the gap separating from others, to make ourselves feel attuned despite producing the sensation of presence through mediated environments and networked devices (Paulsen 2017).

In effect, the notion of lines of flight that I have employed to build my argument also sits on a predicament of action which closely reminds that gesture of self-reflexive awareness mentioned by Foucault. As he intends the latter in terms of a “concern for self [that] always refers to an active state” (1988, 24), so Deleuze and Guattari describe their notion: “[t]here is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic, about a line of flight. There is nothing more active than a line of flight” (2005, 204). This very activity is propelled to attend to a mechanism born out of desire,⁷ of which the artworks I discussed are a possible crystallization. If we were to retrieve similar mechanisms of desire today, we circle back to moving image installations and short digital video formats, where a certain emphasis to what remains beyond the camera and exceeds the frame, as well as a certain urge to place one’s body in front of the camera, surely represent very recurring tropes.

In a genealogical fashion, as much as video entered the scenario in the Seventies representing a new tool, so today’s moving image installations and short networked video-formats revolving around the body and the presence of the videomaker can be seen as new tools “conceal[ing] unknown virtualities within [themselves] and [...] permit[ting] acts of emancipation” (Flusser 2014b, 143). Precisely the potentiality of a virtuality and the chance for emancipation are perhaps the features that thrust artists, and more in general today’s screen media users, to force the limits of the frame, navigate the on-screen space in a way that disseminates it of lines of flight eventually implicating an off-screen dimension, which shall be reached and constructed through processes of deterritorialization. Via Jonas and Dujourie’s works we may observe that as much as loops, real time and playback have entered the standard vocabulary of a visual grammar proposed to and used by millions of people every day in contemporary audiovisual formats, so the overall fascination once retained by videoart endows its democratized and non-artistic legacy. Such a heritage lively circulates across our networked visual cultures in multiple guises, all providing a strategy to navigating the utterly widespread displacement, with the promise of an individualized virtuality able to trigger processes avoiding disjunction, enhancing a sense presence, closeness and possibly favoring emancipation.

7 So Deleuze and Guattari in this regard: “Our only points of disagreement with Foucault are the following: (1) to us the assemblages seem fundamentally to be *assemblages not of power but of desire* (desire is always assembled), and power seems to be a stratified dimension of the assemblage; (2) the diagram and abstract machine have *lines of flight that are [...] cutting edges of creation and deterritorialization*” (2005, 530–31, italics mine).

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