CHAPTER 2

SPACE, TIME, VIDEO, VIOLA

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Bill Viola belongs to that group of artists whose work seems intended to make us aware 'of our own mortality which defines the nature of human beings'. Since 'human beings, as all living beings, are essentially creatures of time', the medium of video 'is very well suited to expressing these concerns' because of its specific temporality.[1] From the very beginning, the artist has also used the spatial aspects of the medium because he 'started immediately with making installations'.[2] In the following essay, I would like to illustrate some of the ways in which these dimensions contribute to Viola's efforts at 'connecting us back to the fundamental questions of birth, death, existence, and so on'.[3]

Although Viola considers 'art to be a branch of knowledge', he does not regard his works as some sort of theoretical endeavour, but as spiritual exercises. Such exercises contribute both to the experience of what it is to be a human being, and to our understanding of what it is to enquire into that experience. The questions of *condito humana* have almost disappeared from our awareness in the Western world. Since we are able to answer many of the questions that are commonly posed in everyday life, as well as in science, we are inclined, on the one hand, to think that all questions can be answered, and, on the other, to expel from our consciousness those questions which we are unable to answer, in particular the 'big' questions of our existence. Viola emphasizes that those questions have no answers: 'Ancient people call them...the Mysteries. These are not to be answered. There is no answer to birth or death. They are meant to be experienced, they can be approached and studied, but not finally answered.'[4]

The class of questions that are not meant to be answered, but to be experienced, contains, for example, those of the temporality of our existence, the questions of 'why we are born or why we die'. Viola finds it natural to ask: 'Why isn't my mother

6 *Slowly Turning Narrative*, 1992
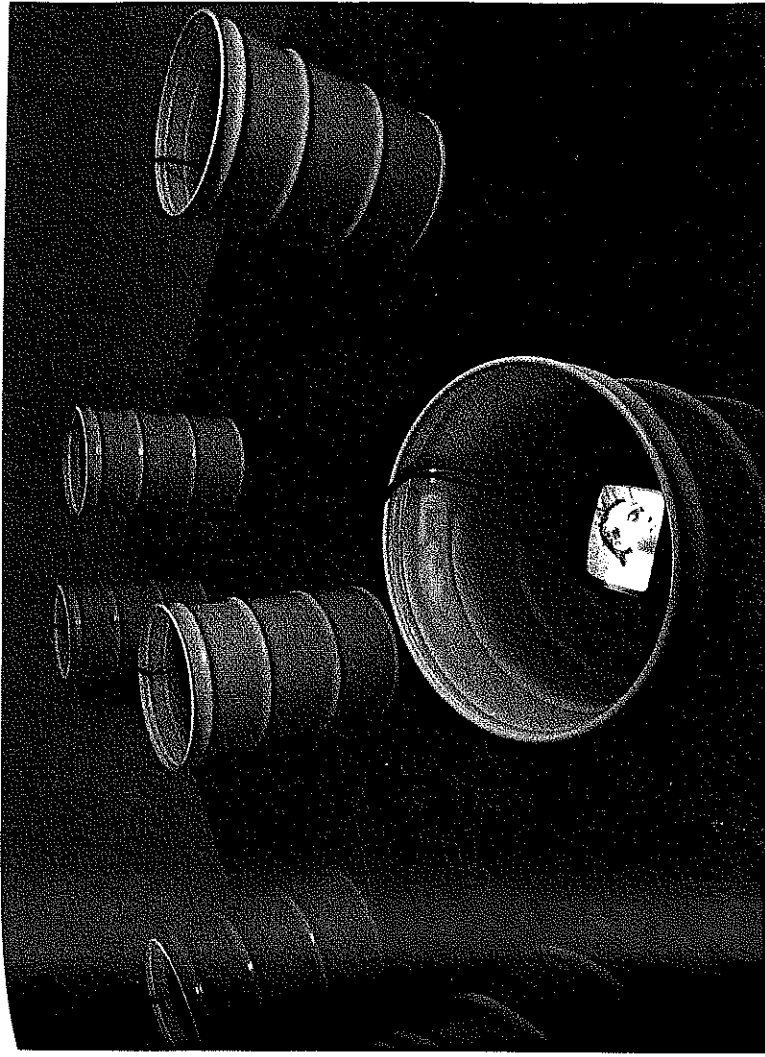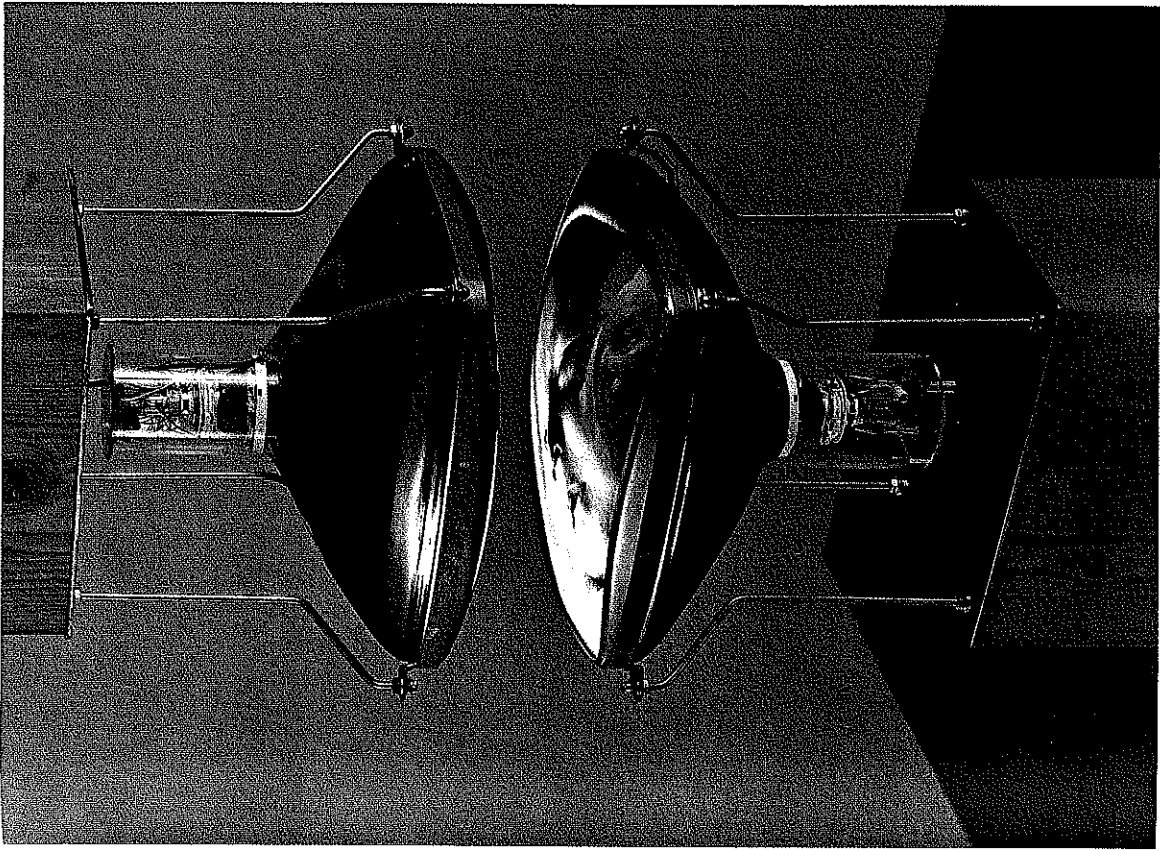
7   *The Sleepers*, 1992

here right now? Where did she go? Even though science tells me the reasons why the body stops functioning physically, I still have those questions. The question is the spark, the provocation that exists to push you to discover, to learn.'5

Among Viola's works, *Slowly Turning Narrative*, 1992 (**6**), appears as a spiritual exercise par excellence. From one end-wall of a dark room the image of a man is projected on a 9x12-foot screen rotating around a vertical axis in the middle of the space, while from the other end-wall a fast changing sequence of images is projected on the same screen. These colourful images show a wide variety of life's situations: a wedding, children playing, a fairground, a house burning, a car crashing, a heart and an eye being operated upon. Through different sounds corresponding to these situations, a man's voice emerges giving a litany of countless possibilities of human attitudes and kinds of behaviour, from elementary needs to the most intellectual phenomena, from the noblest motives to thoughts from the dark side of our inner life, all of them embedded in the phrase 'The one who...'.6 This, and the fact that the viewers see themselves again and again on the other side of the turning screen, which is a mirror, obliges them to experience all those situations as parts of their own lives in all their diversity and contradictoriness. *Slowly Turning Narrative* also illustrates a particular way in which space can function in video art: it shifts the experience of art away from the TV screen to the space of the experience instead.
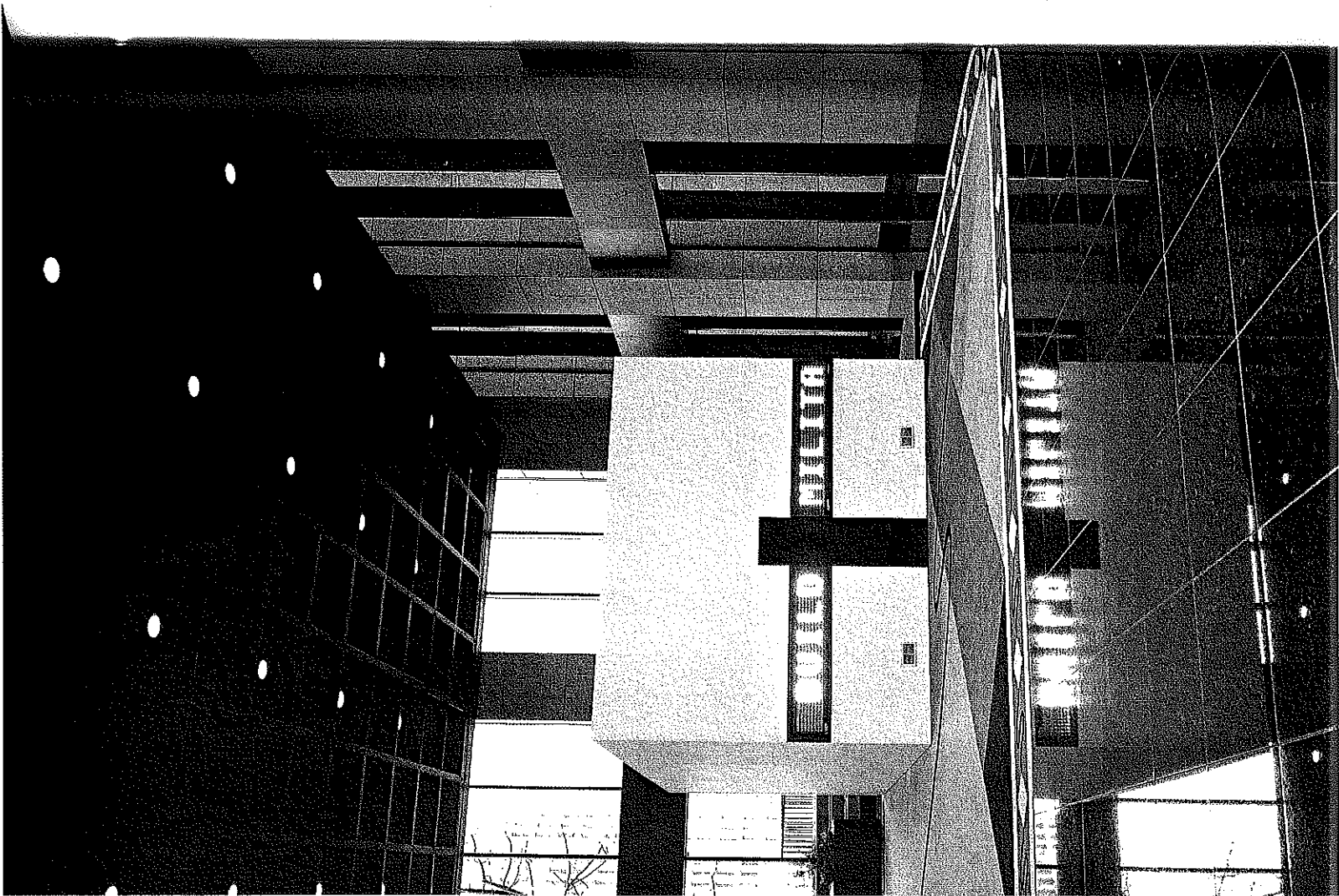
Like several other contemporary video artists, Viola increasingly renounces the use of the classical means of representation in the medium, namely the TV monitor, and instead creates spaces – even in those works where he still makes use of monitors. And, even in these cases, they are often employed by Viola in unusual ways. In *The Sleepers*, 1992 (**7**), for instance, the sleeping people are shown on black-and-white monitors lying at the bottom of seven white tin barrels, filled to the brim with water. In *Heaven and Earth*, 1992 (**9**), two TV tubes are installed directly into wooden pillars that grow towards each other from the floor and ceiling. At eye level, there is a gap of only a few inches in which to discern the face of an old woman dying, shown on the upper screen, being mirrored in the face of a newborn baby, displayed on the lower screen (and vice versa).

The usual way of engaging with the monitor is undermined to an even greater

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8 *Threshold*, 1992 (left)
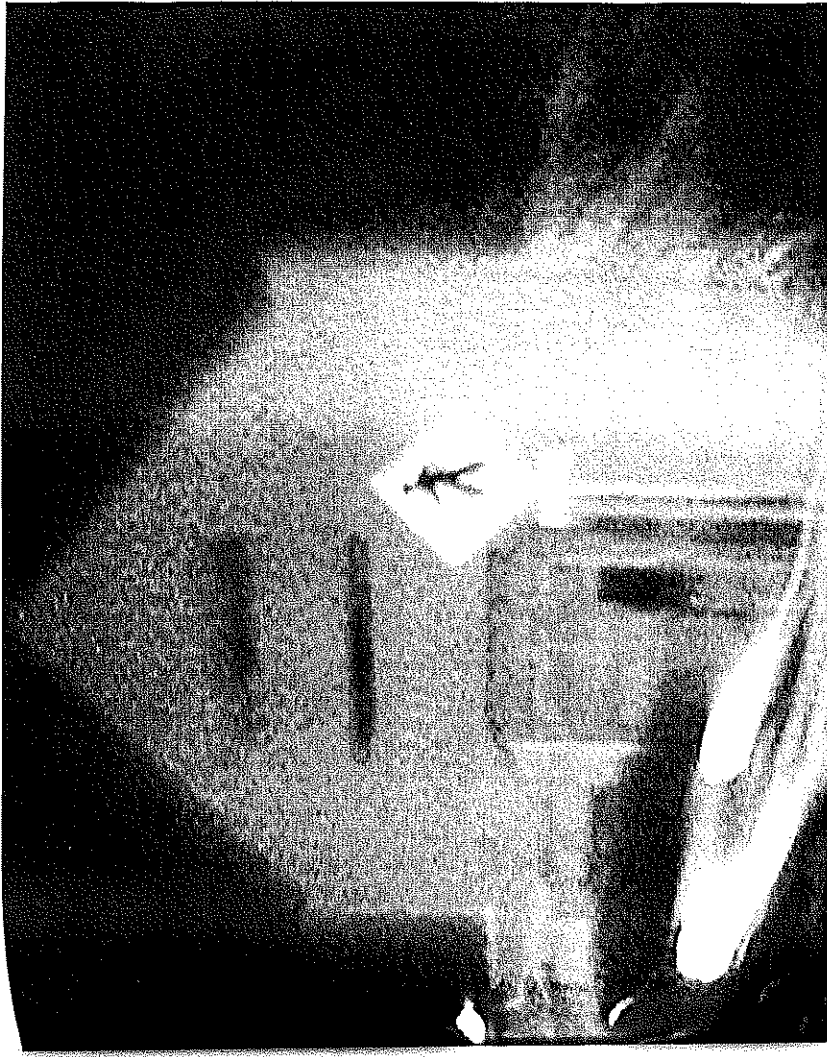
9 *Heaven and Earth*, 1992 (right)

10 *Pneuma*, 1994

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extent when the images become part of the architecture itself, sometimes filling the walls of a room, as in *Threshold*, 1992 (**8**), *Tiny Deaths*, 1993, *Pneuma*, 1994 (**10**), or *Interval*, 1995.[7] *Tiny Deaths* reveals human figures projected on three walls of a dark room. At first extremely shadowy, the images are suddenly exposed to a charge of high-intensity light so that, for a fraction of a second, they can clearly be recognized before 'burning out'. At irregular intervals, a figure, gradually emerging from darkness, is shown on one or another wall. This process begins in extreme slow motion, the intensity of the light on the individuals' bodies increasing only gradually. A dramatic acceleration causes the figure to be consumed by a burst of saturated, blinding white light that washes out the projections on the other two walls. The room then returns abruptly to darkness until one of the images on the other walls undergoes the same transformation. Although each cycle lasts only about thirty minutes, the relationship between the three projections is constantly renewed because the films all differ slightly in length. As a result, it is only after several hours that the figures light up on the walls in the very same sequence. More significantly, we can scarcely foresee when and where in the room the 'blossoming' and 'burning out' of a person will next occur.

In almost all of Viola's works, the images become part of the architecture; they exist in space and as space. In some instances, Viola combines images with objects, using the space to provide a context for meaning. In *Science of the Heart*, 1983, a brass bed, with red-and-white covers and a white pillow, stands in front of a wall in a dark room. On a screen on this wall we see a human heart laid open during an operation, beating slower and slower until it stops. Commenting on this work, Viola found that:

> The object becomes more like an image and the image becomes more like an object. The image becomes very physical, the heart beating, and then the bed becomes an image symbol referring to many things. So, there is a kind of dialogue between the material object and the immaterial image.

He goes on to describe a similar effect in his 1987 piece, *Passage*:

> There is a big screen built into a small room that shows a child's birthday

party for seven hours. It's playing back in extreme slow motion, and all there is is a room where one whole wall is an image. It is one of the first works I did where the image became a part of the architecture itself.[8]

Many of Viola's works are essentially rooms, and it is vital to understand them as such. While many of them share a kind of structural simplicity that gives them a mystical quality, other rooms are more elaborate. In *Slowly Turning Narrative*, the complexity is not so much provided by the spatial dimensions of the room as by the rotating screen and the secondary projection of images onto the walls. *Room for St. John of the Cross*, 1983, exhibits a different kind of complex structure. The room of the title is, strictly speaking, a room within a room; a physically inaccessible chamber, like a 'room of one's own' that must be respected by others if a person is to flourish. The dark, outer room – which is accessible to us – is filled with the sounds of a ferocious wind or white noise, relating to a large image of the snowy, cloud-covered Mount Whitney. By contrast, the small inner room is filled with light and silence, from which a voice emerges, reading texts of the Spanish mystic.

'Buried Secrets' owes its structural complexity mainly to the integration of five different installation rooms into one work, forming a cycle. When the work was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1995, the wings of the pavilion were connected by a roof that invited visitors leaving the last sub-installation, *The Greeting*, to return to the other side of the building and begin the viewing process again with *Hall of Whispers*. Here, for the first time, Viola integrated several installation rooms into one 'meta-work', into a cyclical unity in terms of form and content.[9] This cycle of rooms perfectly illustrates the concept of temporal cycles that plays such a central role in the artist's work.

Furthermore, Viola uses space as a means to stimulate us into seeing things from an unfamiliar perspective. This is a particularly striking feature of *Pneuma*. In this work, flickering black-and-white images are projected into the corners of a dark, square room. Initially, these images give the impression of TV 'snow'. It is only after some time that you get a vague impression of figures appearing on the walls; that you recognize defamiliarized, dreamlike images of clouds, trees, water-lilies, fountains, buildings, deserted rooms, and bodies and faces, mostly of children. The

swarms of images appear as the grainy, grey, visual counterpart to the acoustic white noise also filling the room. But what is most striking to our senses is that our attention is drawn to the corners of the room. We enter the room at one of its corners, and the images are projected into the other corners, not into the middle of the walls where we conventionally hang and view pictures. This contributes to their distortion, but it also gives rise to the suspicion that it is essential to change our point of view, to abandon our well-loved habits, beliefs and prejudices if we want to see, and to understand ourselves and each other. We necessarily displace our gaze from what seems self-evident to look into the corners of our experience where the various lines of sight come together, cross each other or simply end. We have to illuminate the 'corners', the depths of the soul. It is no coincidence that the title of this work borrows the Greek term for a certain aspect of soul. Pneuma refers not so much to the emotional or intellectual sides of our inner life, but rather to the 'breath' or 'breeze' of life; to something that underlies and penetrates all living things, but remains as transitory as a breeze, and as hard to grasp.

Hence, the spatial and visual form of *Pneuma* encourages the viewers to face what they are usually not aware of, either because it's too deep for them to grasp or because they expel it from consciousness through fear. Only when we expose ourselves to our *conditio humana* do we find that the more we attempt to understand it, the more we have to acknowledge that we are finally unable to know anything about it. There is always a cloud of unknowing between us and the foundation of our existence.[10] This motif is further developed in *The Veiling*, 1995, where the cloud is transformed into a veil of unknowing. More precisely, this work confronts us with several layers of such veils, since images of approaching and departing people; of landscapes, trees and water, are projected from two opposite sides of the dark room onto nine large veils, hung one after another, among which the viewers can wander. But from wherever they are viewed, the images can barely be seen because of their transparent nature.

By creating images that exist as structural elements of a space it is also possible for Viola to connect outer and inner spaces. This is true, firstly, in the purely physical sense. For instance, *To Pray Without Ceasing*, 1992 (11), takes on a different life

when viewed from outside the exhibition space. In this work, sequences of images – depicting light and fire; darkness, water, nature, birth and decay; individual and social existence – are projected onto a window. These images can only be seen clearly during the day; during the night, only a pale, vague idea of them lingers: however, we can still hear a voice, both inside and outside the space – reading passages from Whitman's *Song of Myself.*

There is an even stronger connection between outer and inner spaces in the psychological sense, if we consider that the space within which we experience art represents our inner spaces. A number of Viola's works refer to this inner space of experience to which we are rarely given access, to something that 'sleeps' at the bottom of our souls and makes our lives what they are. Nonetheless, the extent to which Viola allows us to approach this space varies greatly. *The Sleepers* can only be watched from a distance and only through water: we are denied any closer contact with what is within. In other works, viewers are embraced by the (outer and inner) spaces of the installation. The first barrier we cross in *Threshold* is an electronic text line scrolling across the wall, bringing the latest news from the wire service. We must then pass through a narrow black doorway to a dark room, where we will gradually come to perceive the shadowy images and breathing of sleepers projected onto three walls. In *Pneuma*, we are embraced by inner events in a deeper sense. Here, Viola does not so much gesture from the outside towards that which we barely suspect, but rather opens a window onto our inner life and confronts us with images that, in their vagueness, strangeness and transience, remind us of dreamlike apparitions.

We are made anxious by the nature of these images as well as by their spatial situation, the more so since they remind us of the obstacles which limit our experience of this kind of art and its subject. When viewing works like *The Stopping Mind*, 1991, *Threshold, Tiny Deaths, Pneuma, Interval* or *Going Forth By Day*, 2002, we stand inside their respective spaces. As a consequence, we are unable to accommodate everything that is projected into that space. Wherever we look there is always something happening outside of our fields of vision, or even behind our backs. We can't perceive the entire work, only parts of it. We may grasp neither the work as a whole nor its subject. This causes some irritation, which is further intensified by additional

11 *To Pray Without Ceasing,* 1992

properties specific to each work. In *Tiny Deaths*, this is caused by the unforeseeability of existential processes. Similarly, in *Interval*, serene images of a man washing and drying himself are interrupted at ever-shorter intervals by conflicting images of frightening natural powers, which are projected onto the opposite wall. *Pneuma* uses yet another technique to hinder our comprehension. Compelled to stand in a beam of light wherever we are in the room, our shadows are endlessly cast by one of the projectors onto one of the walls. The closer we approach the walls, the larger our shadows become; they not only distort our impression, but are themselves increasingly distorted. The more we wish to bring ourselves into play – the more we attend to ourselves through our shadows on the wall – the less we see of the work itself or transcend the ego-situation which normally hinders our perception.

It is not only the spatial condition of video installations, however, which prevents us from experiencing them in their totality, but also their temporal dimension. Since a work like *To Pray Without Ceasing* is projected day and night onto a translucent screen, with conditions of light changing cyclically, its visual perceptibility (the very feature we primarily expect from the medium of video) is reduced to almost zero for much of the time. (The only possible advantage of this, in terms of traditional apprehension, is that we can focus our attention on Whitman's texts.) Along with several other works, Viola conceived this piece as an endless loop so that its temporal extension is potentially infinite. Thus, it is impossible to grasp such a work of art in its temporal totality because, as a matter of practicality, no one will devote twelve hours to watching an entire projection cycle (let alone a day, much less an entire exhibition, during which the cycles of images and texts are continually repeated).
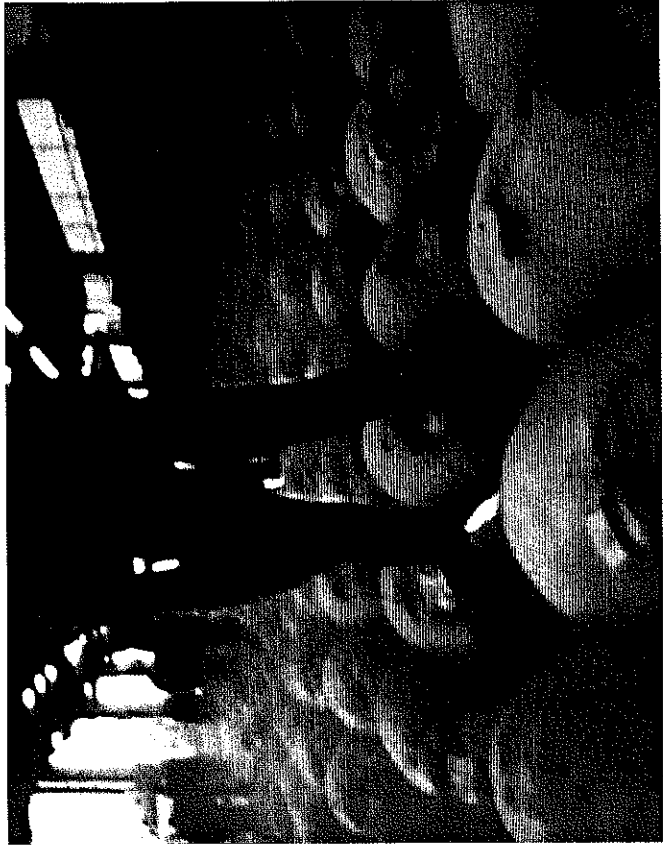
Nevertheless, we should be aware that a work of video art necessarily exists in time in just the way a piece of music or drama does. That is, if we were just to glance at it for a one moment, we could not justifiably claim to have seen the work; it is necessary to watch at least one whole cycle of projection. However, the installation of a video piece in a room, because of its relationship to the exhibition of pictures, induces us to assume that it can be grasped by 'just glancing' at it. This misunderstanding also influences our way of dealing with 'motionless' images.[11] It seems that we are more willing to take into account the temporal dimension of video works if we view them on TV.

In addition to attentiveness, we must be ready to let the work have an effect upon us, or to enter into its world. This takes time; the more so if acquaintance with a work of art is conceived as a kind of spiritual exercise, as in Viola's case. The time required to achieve any depth of understanding extends beyond the duration of a single work. It is necessary to devote oneself to a work more than once and to deal with its relation to other works as well. This is particularly true of Viola's work because, in its entirety, it forms a greater unity, not only with regard to its subjects, motifs and formal properties, but also insofar as it seems to unfold from one 'plan'. Given that such a plan cannot be accomplished within a human lifetime, it is natural to presume that it is the very awareness of the biological limits set to the realization of such a work, or plan, which underlies Viola's emphasis on the unity of nature. This unity, too, can only be grasped fragmentarily in some of its appearances, and the artist's work, which forms one part of it, refers to that fact by its very incompleteness. Thus, strictly speaking, Viola's oeuvre manifests itself in singular 'works', but it is one whole, a work in progress.

Certain motifs – the natural elements; particular landscapes, plants and animals; humans, often the artist himself or even members of his family – crop up time and again in Viola's work. Some of these are obviously quotes from other works. One such line of motifs has been running for more than twenty years: at the beginning of *Vegetable Memory*, 1978–80 (**13**), a man plunges into water. Images of divers passing through, or merely suspended in, water recur continually. They are an essential element of both *The Passing*, 1991 (**12**), which is based on the artist's experience of his mother's death, and *The Arc of Ascent*, 1992 (**14**), in which the video of a floating man is slowed down to such an extreme level that he appears to be drawn out of the image by some enormous power. The man returns in the central screen of the *Nantes Triptych*, 1992. He jumps into the water several times and floats there for a while, gently undulating and occasionally interrupted by turbulence, while we can see the birth of a baby on one wing of the triptych, and footage of Viola's comatose mother, a week before her death, on the other. The motif of the diving and floating man is continued in more recent works, such as Viola's film to accompany Edgard Varèse's composition, *Déserts*, 1994. In the complex installations *Stations*, 1994 and *Five Angels for the Millennium*, 2001, the motif is extended to a group of five persons.
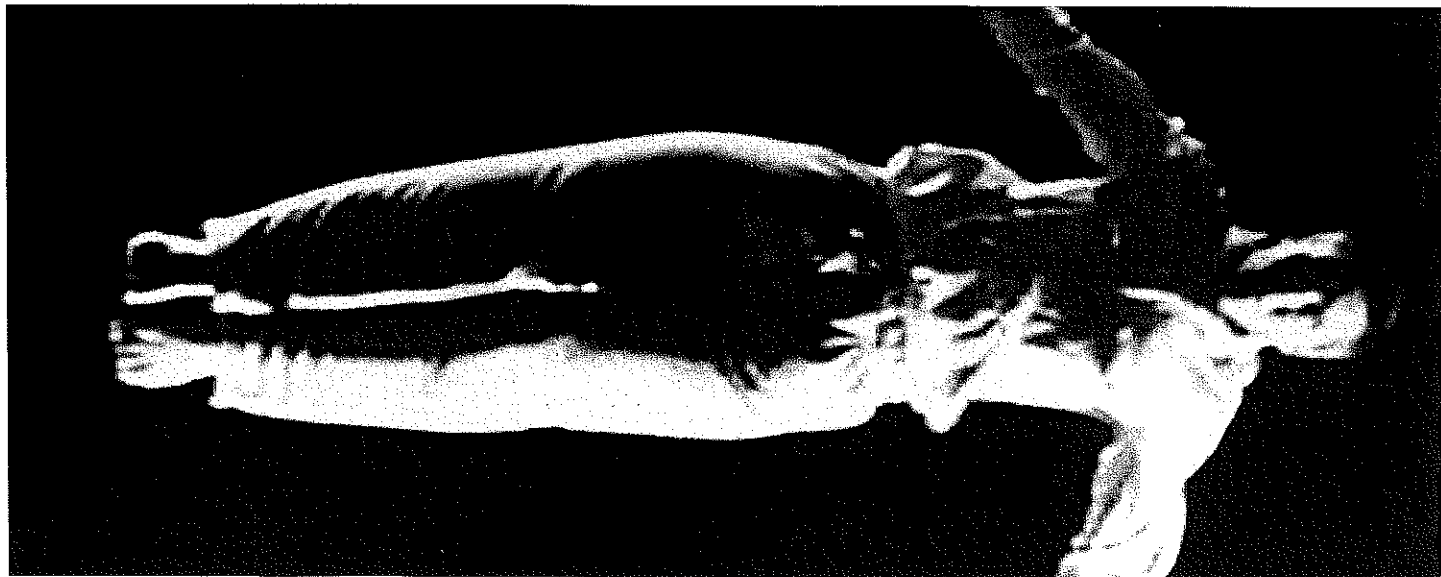
13 Vegetable Memory, 1978-80

12 The Passing, 1991

In the former, women and men, young and old, can be seen on large cloth screens, floating upside down in water, while their image is mirrored (and thus righted) in correspondingly large slabs of polished black granite on the floor.

Once Viola has established a motif, he combines it with others he has previously employed. For example, the dive at the beginning of *Vegetable Memory* is the prelude to images of the 'afterlife' (that is, the processing) of fish. A further development in *Hatsu-Yume* (*First Dream*), 1981, links the 'afterlife of fish' motif with the motif of attraction to light which brings with it death. In *Sweet Light*, 1977, insects are attracted to their deaths by light, whereas in *Hatsu-Yume* it is fish which are attracted by the light of the fishing boats (and the humans by the lights of gambling dens).[12]

We could, of course, attempt to explain the existence and prominence of such 'motif lines' by assuming that Viola's creative work constantly circulates around the same phenomena and that he is looking for various aesthetic realizations of one and the same idea. This suspicion is perhaps not entirely false (and seems to be supported even more by Viola's most recent works); it is, however, somewhat superficial and simplistic. The conceptual or spiritual ground that appears in the works may be identical, but it is not presented in identical ways. The works exhibit, rather, different aspects of it, like the *conditio humana* (which is, in any case, a complex of problems so deep that artists of all times and cultures would never be able to exhaust it). The citations in Viola's work do not function as ends in themselves, but put one work in the context of others and of Viola's creative work in general. They transfer the content of a work (or aspects of its meaning) to other works and thus appear as elements of a language or sign system which we come to understand by becoming acquainted with the totality of Viola's oeuvre.

These 'motif lines' thus seem to be related to the song lines of the Australian aborigines, those paths that cover the whole continent of Australia, but are invisible to our Western eyes. It is along these lines that 'legendary totemic beings...wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path – birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes – and so singing the world into existence'.[13] According to the aborigines, our world is, even today, recreated when those who have inherited certain song lines sing them again. These ideas

14   *The Arc of Ascent*, 1992

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15 *Ancient of Days*, 1979–81

of a 'dreamtime' and of 'song lines' seem to play a role in Viola's work; they are referred to, for example, in the subtitle of *Hatsu-Yume (First Dream)* and in his essay 'History, 10 Years, and the Dreamtime'.[14] These concepts should not be totally unfamiliar to us, however; philosophers such as Baumgarten and Nietzsche have discussed a comparable idea: that art creates a kind of heterokosmos, a specific 'metaphysical reality' which supplements natural reality 'in order to overcome it'.[15] While this is true of Viola's work, like the song lines, he goes further than this, recreating in each piece the whole of his oeuvre as well as parts of the world we experience.

If we accept that these considerations are sufficiently plausible, we can conclude that Viola's work demonstrates the possibility of conceptions of time other than the one of an objectively measurable, linear sequence of temporal points with which we are familiar from our contemporary scientific episteme. In fact, Viola not only exploits the available electronic media to create a defamiliarized representation of movement (through slow motion and time-lapse, acceleration and deceleration), but the installations he creates in space also serve to depict different images at the same time and the same images at different times. Viola doesn't simply use such techniques for their own sake; he employs them to show the temporal dimensions of the *conditio humana*. This can be demonstrated in greater detail by considering the following examples:

(i) In some works, Viola inverts the direction of time by showing images backwards or in reverse sequence. For instance, *Ancient of Days*, 1979–81 (**15**), starts with a kind of Creation act. This seems to suggest itself, since 'Ancient of Days' is an expression for God in English translations of the Bible. But in this work, that act turns out to be the inversion of a process of destruction. It is more reasonable, therefore, to suggest a reference to cyclical creation myths found in cultures outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Hinduism, for example, Brahma (the Creator of the World), Vishnu (its Preserver) and Shiva (its Destroyer) are ultimately regarded as emanations or appearances of one and the same divine power. Another significant characteristic of *Ancient of Days* is the difference between timeless tranquility and motion in time, between natural daily cycles and measured or conscious time, as well as the interpenetration of these different temporal phenomena. This is mani-

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fested in the final part of the work, in which the regular ticking of a clock contrasts, on the one hand, with a cyclically changing landscape and, on the other, with a bunch of flowers which seemingly stands immutable in a vase.

(ii) The most striking feature of *Tiny Deaths* is the seemingly sudden switch from darkness, to which we are just becoming adjusted, to blinding brightness. This process takes place in an acceleration which, like the curve of evolution, is in turn continually accelerated and thus corresponds to the subjective impression we have of the process of ageing. In *Vegetable Memory*, Viola does just the opposite. The processing of fish is shown ever more slowly; time-lapse images (which correspond to the bustle of human activity) decelerate into extreme slow motion (which gives the impression of time freezing in the same way that the vegetative processes in the bodies of the fish come to an end).

(iii) In several works, Viola contrasts temporality and duration. In one of the long sequences of *Hatsu-Yume*, a rock is filmed at decreasing speed, from extreme time-lapse over normal speed to extreme slow motion. This effect can only be observed, however, by watching the action of clouds and humans; the rock itself appears invariable.[16] In *Interval*, Viola shows temporality and duration from another perspective. As I mentioned above, images of a man washing on one wall are constantly interrupted by frightening illustrations of the power of natural forces (as well as of men who are exposed to them) on the opposite wall. The lengths of successive projections are reduced exponentially (decreasing from one minute to one thirtieth of a second), while the frequency of their alternation increases accordingly. In the end, an interval below the threshold of perception is reached, extinguishing the horrible powers and giving a continuous duration to the images of purification. Nonetheless, we are left with a feeling of the acceleration of our vital processes.

(iv) *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*, 1986, reveals an evolution of the mind as well as our integration into the processes of nature. Images of inorganic matter are followed by those of animals and of the artist reflexively dealing with this very piece. Images of the spiritual practices of Hindu fire dancers on the island of Suva, which occupy a large part of the work, then lead us back into the cycle of nature again in the guise of a fish rotting in a wood. The specific human faculty which
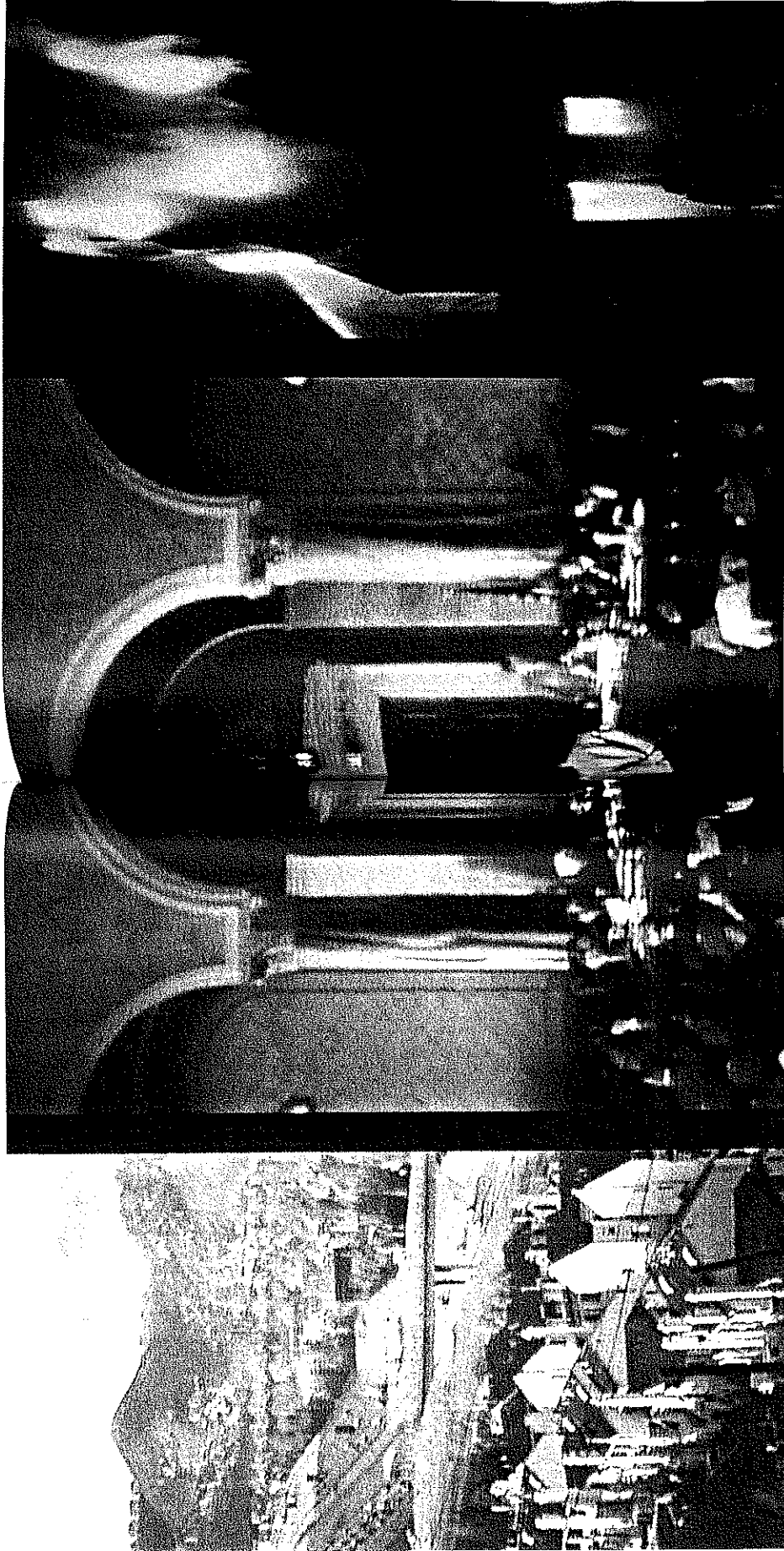
Viola calls 'the ability to extend the self into time with the capacity to anticipate and to recall',[17] plays an essential role in this piece. In the central episode, we watch the artist at work, evaluating and cutting sequences that are shown before or after. In the 'Riddle of the Sacrifice' – the 164th hymn of the first book of the Rig Veda to which the title of this work alludes – the simultaneity of things past, present and future in the human consciousness is expressed in the seemingly arbitrary change of grammatical tenses. With this in mind, it is not surprising that we find the same feature in Viola's text of that title.[18]

(v) It should be clear by now that temporal cycles – whether daily, annual or whole life cycles – are a crucial aspect of Viola's works. Viola frequently uses a cyclical structure in his works to express this idea. *Science of the Heart* provides a good example: [We see] a human heart beating slower and slower until it stops. Then it comes to life and starts again. It's a difficult image to watch, but it is not negative or pessimistic. It contains sides of life. A circle is not negative or positive, it's a circulation.[19] By embedding human life into the cycles of nature, Viola does not necessarily promote the idea that there are individual cycles of existence, but that we should experience ourselves as elements of a greater unity. This idea is already contained in the concept of the installation *He Weeps for You*, 1976 (16). Viewers are confronted with their own image, seen through a water drop, which, slowly growing, being stretched more and more, quivering before it falls, disappears, then reappears in another drop. In this process, the viewer forms a unity with the other elements of the system: 'A dynamic interactive system is created where all elements (the water drop, the video image, the sound, the viewer, and the room) function together in a reflexive and unified way as a larger instrument.'[20]

(vi) Viola also uses the possibilities of video technology to represent the temporal structures of life. In the *Nantes Triptych*, for instance, the existential interconnection of birth, life and death is represented simultaneously on three panels. This work illustrates the totality of life as well as the different structures of its elements. There is a correspondence between the installation's symmetrical design, and the temporal and spatial symmetry of the central panel through which the directedness of life towards its poles of birth and death is formally emphasized. The inevitable impact of

the beginning and end of life is underlined by the fact that the outer monitors of the triptych show video films in colour, the centre in black-and-white. While, on the right wing, the dying woman is encircled by the camera in a slow approach, her face filling the entire screen, on the left, the temporal phases of the birth are characterized by pushes, and the child eventually proclaims its existence by crying. Acoustically the laments of the woman in labour are predominant at first, but then the noises of the water (which is the medium for the diving and floating man shown on the central panel) and the calm, but laborious, breathing of the dying woman increasingly come to the viewers' attention. If the spectator is ready to experience at least one entire cycle of the *Nantes Triptych*, then the initial voyeuristic curiosity transforms into an awareness of the temporality of their own existence and the recognition that the cycle of life is a natural fact.

(vii) Like *The City of Man*, 1989 (**17**), or *The Greeting*, the *Nantes Triptych* takes up the tradition of classical panel paintings which so often also have as their subjects birth, death and other elements of the *conditio humana*. But if we are confronted with such phenomena today by viewing painted images, we are inclined, Viola suggests, to see them 'as subjective views, personal interpretations of these events', since they 'have been depicted many times in history'. By comparison, modern media have 'a very high accepted truth factor in our society' and can thus perform the same function as panel paintings in earlier centuries.[21] Perhaps no work reveals this better than *The Greeting*, which evidently has as its model *The Visitation*, 1528-29, by Jacopo Carucci (called Pontormo) for the church of San Michele in Carmignano.[22] This announcement of a birth is not just put into motion, however; it is magnified by an extreme slow motion that adds intense meaning to each gesture and facial expression. Consequently, the work evokes the whole range of human experience from birth to death (which seems to me to be announced by the image of two male figures standing together in the background).[23]

(viii) According to Viola, images gradually became temporally invested objects over the history of art: with the invention of perspective they were 'personified', that is, bound to the persons of artists and viewers. A new aspect of this temporality came into play with the use of movie cameras, since such images are transitory and exist as a whole only in the mind of the viewer:

16 *He Weeps for You*, 1976

17 *The City of Man,* 1989

The viewer sees only one image at a time in the case of film and, more extreme, only the decay trace of a single moving point of light in video. In either case, the whole does not exist (except in a dormant state coiled up in the can or tape box), and therefore can only reside in the mind of the person who has seen it, to be revived periodically through his or her memory.[24]

As Viola emphasizes, the temporal existence of video images is comparable to that of living beings: 'Images are born, they are created, they exist, and, in the flick of a switch, they die.'[25] Yet the sensual appearance of *all* works of art is transitory, therefore the representation of the temporal aspects of the *conditio humana* cannot be restricted only to video art. This is confirmed, at least indirectly, by Viola himself, since he stresses that 'if artists are drawn to these themes in their life and work then, yes, they will find that video is very well suited to expressing these concerns. But these issues go beyond a specific medium and become a reflection of our times.'[26] Nonetheless, it is perhaps a specific merit of video art that it is able to make us aware, not only of the transience of all art, but also of our own transience. More than any other artistic approach, video art is suited to bring to our minds, to reveal the fact, that human existence is determined by time.