

## Three Linked Cubes Dan Graham

### The Art of the Interface

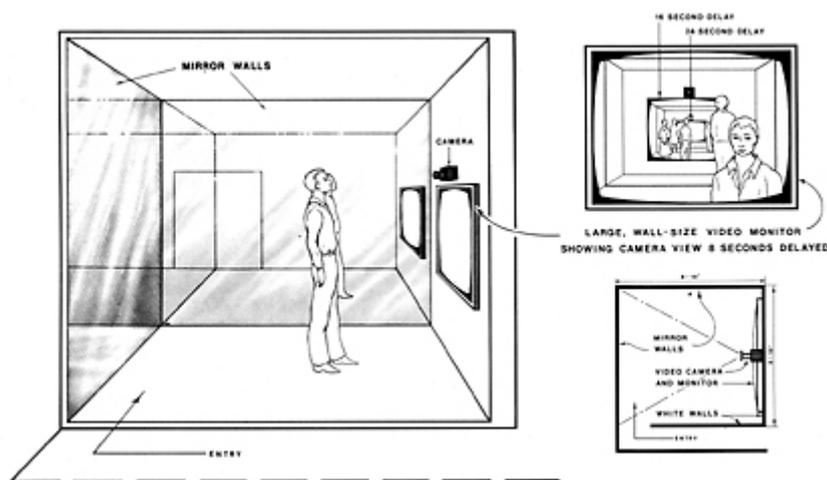
,"You have to learn to be playing one minute semi translucent the glass and the next the mirror."  
(Thierry de Duve)

This quotation with which Thierry de Duve refers to Dan Graham's project "Cinema" (1981) does not only apply to his works that range between architecture and sculpture like "Alteration to a Suburban House" (1978) or the pavilions of the recent years but also to his earlier performances and his space-mirror video installations.

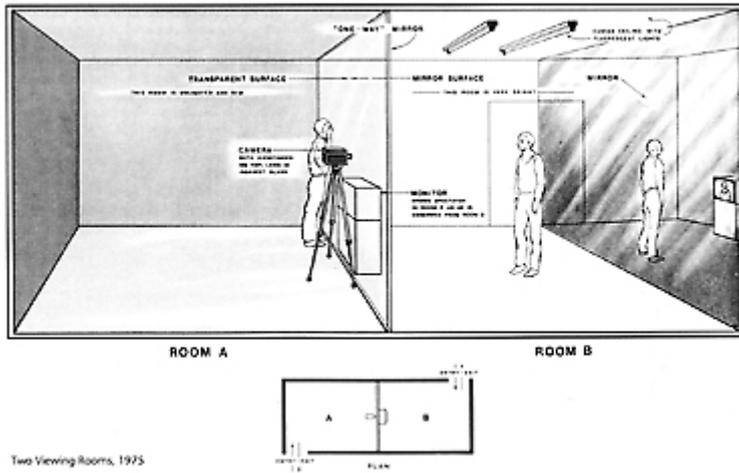
The political dimension of Dan Graham's work has always been recognizable and has always been one of his essential concerns as shown in transformations like the media-orientated work "Schema": This work consists of a list of guidelines on how to compose poems, made up of magazine ads by the editor of the respective media. Here the outward appearance varies greatly from edition to edition and consequently the way the spectator sees the identical work vary likewise; and the pavilions by Dan Graham with their glass panes, semi-translucent and reflecting panes play with the relation of observer and object in the same way. The particular position of the observer does not only determine his present viewpoint but at the same time alters the work of art by his / her presence.

The role of the observer becomes so to speak the role of a performer who has yet to create the object of his contemplation. The fact that it has existed already before is thus being questioned, as the thing that has been here before, is something else.

Here those questions crop up which are raised by endophysics with its declamation "The World from Within": What sort of image of the world have we created to see it the way we see it — or: where do we find that interface to which we have to move or which we would have to become ourselves to be able to cast so to speak an exogenous glance at a world.



Present Continuous Past(s), 1974



Two Viewing Room, 1975



Video View of Suburbia in an Urban Atrium, 1979



Interior Space for Showing Video Tapes, 1986



Rooftop Project, DIA Center for the Arts, NYC 1991

In his way Dan Graham did this already in the seventies with his projects, "Present Continuous Past(s)" (1974), "Two Viewing Rooms" (1975) or "Public Space, Two Audiences" (1976), but above all with his performances "Performer / Audience Sequence" (1974) and "Audience Performer, Mirror" (1977). There is the reaction of the observer that creates what the performer wants to convey (the sort of world he creates), on the other side it is his words that influence the behaviour and the point of view of the observer. In a way each of them reciprocally reflects the other which results in an endless feedback of the picture / result. Like in "Present Continuous Past(s)" the "monitor in the monitor in the monitor does not only take space but also time to its extreme limit and in its vanishing point there is the infinite past" (de Duve). So, this vanishing point -the endless feedback picture / result — is imaginative, too. Here the entropy of time and space is neutralized only by an additional side mirror which enables the spectator to "step out" of his / her "world". At the very spot where and at the very moment when the spectator turns away from the reflected video image, a sort of "interface" comes into existence which combines / separates the interior (=the entropic reflected and time-shifted video image) and the exterior (=the reflection into the side mirror). One could think that the question about a scientific-philosophical explanation for the "World from Within" has been answered for a long time. Anyway, Dan Graham's reflecting semi-translucent pavilions allow the observer to intuitively anticipate the explanation.

Katharina Gsöllpointner

### **The Endogenous View. Contemporary Video Art in Dan Graham's "Three-Linked-Cubes" Pavillion**

"We shouldn't come so far, shouldn't go so far that we presume a certain peculiarity in everything, and everyone and behind everything and everyone; something puzzling, significant. Everything is what it is and nothing else". (Thomas Bernhard "Korrektur", 1975).

In "We", Shelly Silver quotes one Thomas Bernhard, clearly influenced by Wittgenstein's "Tractatus" ("1. The world is everything; that is what counts"<sup>1</sup>) as a horizontally running text which mid-axially cross-connects two contrasting pictures. A close-up of the penis of a masturbating man and a hectic street scene as parallel images only serve to show "what counts". Everything else, every meaning, presumption, association is interpretation and is arbitrarily interchangeable as such. "Everything we see, could be different. Everything that we can at all describe could also be different".<sup>2</sup> We contemplate Shelly Silver's video in the plate glass of Graham's pavillion and find that the two pictures have been interchanged -the penis instead of the street scene and vice-versa. Of course, the significance moves with the pictures, too. The banal is still banal and the pornographic is still pornographic. Our "inner monitor", a

priori-matrix of acquired values and symbols makes us see the pictures as we see them: as representatives of a certain semantic system, reflections of "former ages". We describe the world every day as a real thing and in doing so create just that. We ourselves are our world and consequently all the pictures of the world are ours. "The world and life are one. 5.63 I am my world. (The Microcosmos)".<sup>3</sup>

The architect Buckminster Fuller describes a visually handicapped child's perception of the outside world in a text which Irit Batsry analyses and visually reconstructs in several alternatives in "A Simple Case of Vision". "Until the age of 4 I was only able to recognize large patterns and structures. Houses, trees, outlines of people in blurred shades of colour. I saw two dark spots in faces, but I could not recognize eyes, tears or one single hair until I was 4 years old. After that my sight was fully corrected with glasses. Despite my new ability to perceive details I retained my childhood inner dependency on large patterns". If one perceives the world as a shadow world from birth (see Plato's cave image) this becomes reality and not the "actual" world producing the shadows. The inner conception of reality, our imagination creates the images of our culture. The endogenous view forms the outside world. This is how Buckminster Fuller introduces a new style into architecture: materialized defective sight. Irit Batsry first of all processes Fuller's text into an amorphous mass and then has it run in positive and negative forms- both interchanged — across the monitor display. "I was born crosseyed ..."

While Shelly Silver contrasts images from a private and public world as different representatives of meaning, Kathleen Rogers works in "The Art of Losing Memory" with the analogy computer memory / personal memory. In black / white images Rogers shows a woman doing handwork, a seamstress engrossed in her work and following a certain pattern until it finally becomes a textile product of the memory. The images are atmospheric, the movements of the performer are graceful: everything is somewhat poetic, undecided. In contrast to this, the computer asks simple questions, gives possibilities for decision: "Your choice. Yes / No." Rogers distrusts the simplicity of the binary 1 / 0 system. The coded matrix is a "veil of delusion". The computer has no memory. Its capacity is limited to the duplication of data, it lacks the complexity of memory experience, "The Computer Has No Memory. I See My Eyes Open". Walt Disney's "Tron" celebrated the entry of people into the virtual reality of a computer, at a relatively early age. Metamorphosis of the natural organisms in mathematical data. Re-organized as an individual in artificial space. "Superanimism" by Jason White and Richard Wright commences with such a zoom into the micro-world of a machine until a sudden loss of picture interrupts the journey into this inner world. The following images leave the observer uncertain as to whether this is an artificial or organic world. It appears as if both have fused together. New tissue structures and unknown substances emerge and transform again into other forms. The last image in "Superanimism" is a rigid, stony facial relief which is called to "life" by the lighting up of two shining eyes or rather, image sensors. The Medusa look as reversal, as a metaphor for the resurrection of dead material.

Gerald Harringer

SHELLY SILVER, "We", USA 1990, 4.00 min.

JASON WHITE / RICHARD WRIGHT, "Superanimism", GB 1990, 3.00 min.

IRIT BATSRY, "A Simple Case Of Vision", YU 1991, 11.30 min.

KATHLEEN ROGERS, "The Art Of Losing Memory", GB 1991, 8.30 min.

DAN GRAHAM / DARA BIRNBAUM: "Rock My Religion", USA

