A close-up, artistic photograph of a woman's face. She has light-colored hair and striking blue eyes. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features. A white rectangular label is overlaid in the upper right corner of the image.

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SPAN

“WHAT...?”

tenderly . . .

Jessica Bronson GO GO-DARD 1997

*... space breaks continuity
without a stop.*

— Georges Bataille ¹

“Have trouble staying seated?” An Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) website offers the gift of pathology to the person who cannot sit still, the one who experiences a nervous fidgeting, the one who finds normal things “boring.” ADD – “a disorder as diverse as life itself” in which one time span asphyxiates another by way of a clinical interdiction: the psychiatrist tells you how long you should be looking at something. But all the digressions isolated by this hyperactive interlude represent a will to escape, a desire to see the world from a different angle,



Jessica



Bronson



your



pleasure...

the choice to exit the theatre or drop the novel – the civil right to reject boring art.

In the new multiplexes, one sits down to be transported, is ushered through moving sequences while the body itself stays relatively inert, attacked by comfort until it cannot be comfortable, cannot stand, cannot concentrate, needs to piss, or has other troubles remaining in situ. To get out of these dark, carpeted mazes in an emergency – mid-movie – is more difficult than it should be. One fidgets at the expense of total humiliation. As the crowd's gaze regroups, the temptation to divert attention is rounded off into the physiognomy of "slump," a defeated posture which prohibits fidgeting but which doesn't permit attention either.

ADD is only interesting because it posits a scale of inattention without defining attention. What is the perfectly understood work of art? Optimum attention, perfect comprehension and the entirely coherent art work are unimaginable. Attentions on all sides are divided – split – between objects. This is why conventional narrative situations, such as the classroom or the 90 minute feature film format, are so disciplinarian in their defence of chronology. They deal out stingy dosages of so-called information in apportioned, segmented packages of time engineered for the reception of an "average" viewer, all the time knowing full well that most of what they dish out will go in one ear and out the other.

Span is about these fluctuations in attention, in as much as they may be thought to register changes in the ways artworks in general, and videos in particular, are made and experienced. This is an exhibition about moving images, in a period in which it's impossible to delineate such a thing as a "still image". In this vital world – where video and film have proven themselves

to be the most greedy in their appropriation of the term "moving image" – what eventually defines all images is their contextual variation and journey through space.

These video works by Jessica Bronson, Mariko Mori and Diana Thater create moebius strips in which loops, cycles and artificial infinities build time warps: they stretch out across rooms rather than occupying timeslots. Without beginnings or ends, the works are like certain books which encourage the reader to open them at any page.

These videos operate within what we more modestly call "space", that is "architecture" – you walk past them through them and around them. Anticipating you and your schizy attention span, they don't plan to hold you down for a fixed duration. They tend to bend out and modulate the very idea of the viewer by presenting an art which either hyper-compacts or completely disperses linear narrative, creating a viewing experience which is more like passing through a revolving door.

With these walk-through videos, *Span* shows how those hilariously conceived "disorders" of looking and thinking have been superseded by a combination of affects – what Jessica Bronson, in theorising "A Poetics of the Video Effect," has called "spacing in."² It also shows how elaborate attempts to capture attention are losing battles – space will always win because, as Bataille put it, space is a "lout."³

Everything, these works assume, is moving, including the audience. Everything – the walls, the backs of the monitors and the electrical cables – are transmitting or have something to utter. This synthesis of kinetic forces adds up to something more baroque than the structuralist trope of "exposing the apparatus" of film. Here, computer-generated and filmed images are so decelerated as to become mesmerising, or sped

← left: Jessica Bronson GO GO-DARD 1997

← right: Jessica Bronson Jessica Bronson and Dick Slessig Combo Present
For Your Pleasure 1996



up to the pitch of delirium. Both wonder and boredom are produced – effects paradoxically close to those produced in viewing unmediated natural phenomena.

“Have you often wondered why in recent years there seems to be an increase in the number of children and adults with Attention Deficit Disorder, learning disabilities, anxiety, anger and rage?”, the website continues. “Technology” – and specifically television – carries its fair share of the blame. One writer argues that television, “by manipulating the way the brain responds to changes in perception, can wreak havoc on the ability to concentrate... and thinking rarely intervenes.”⁴ This is to say that there are certain types of movement which turn knowledge into an insensible blur. Media stand accused of defeating one another’s atmospheric nuances and ethical values: television, it is said, destroyed the novel only to be itself contaminated by the commercials which sponsor its duration but cripple its integrity. Cinema will be outrun by on-line, electronic transmissions and home entertainment systems, which promote the campaign of destroying the outdoors once and for all.

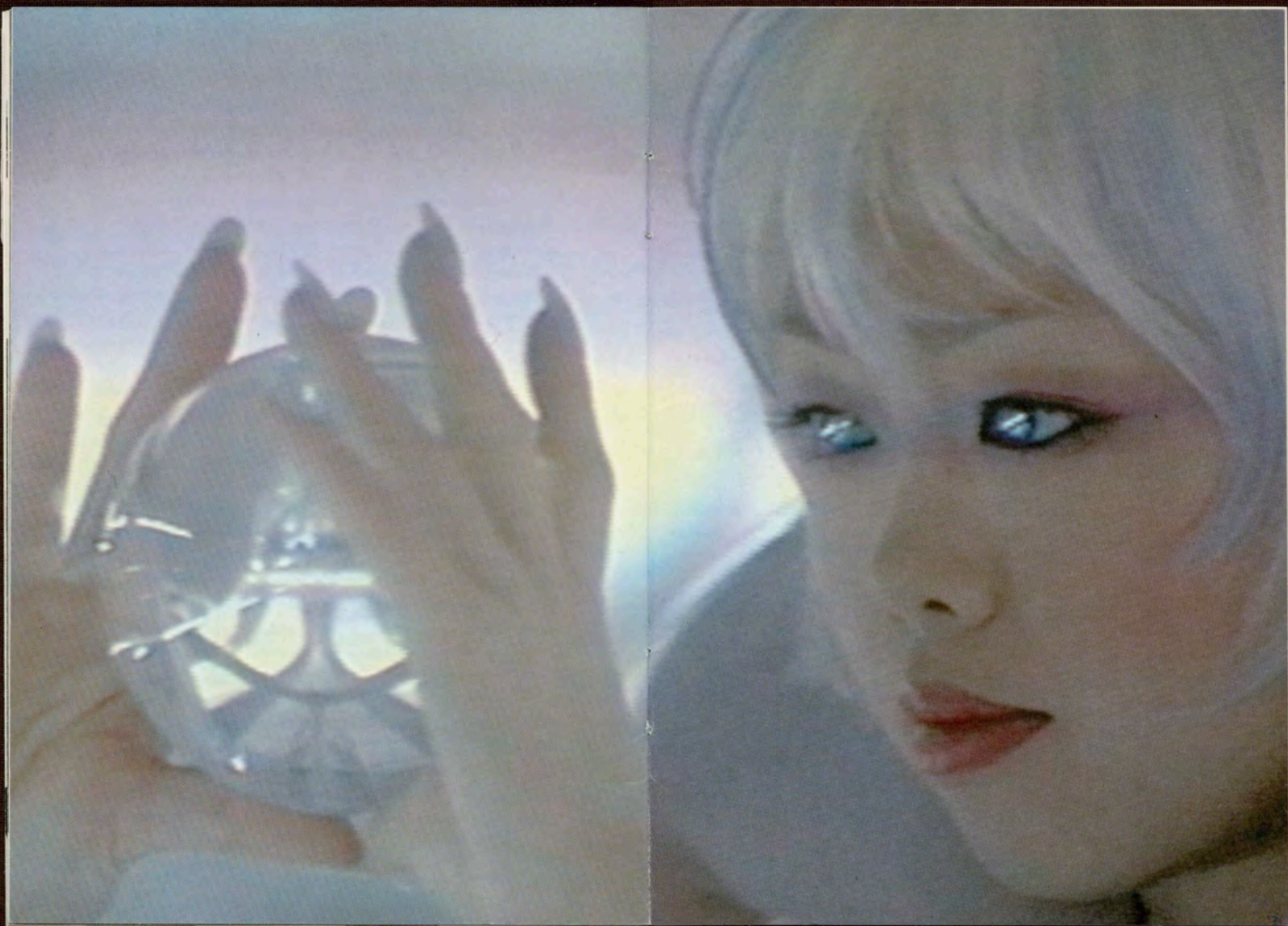
“Video” (video art) can’t compete in this diabolical contest of media. Being related to, but utterly distinct from, cinema and television, it wanders through biological, mineral and technological time, transmitting its flat reverberating picture. There’s nothing particularly blessed about it when it’s lined up against every other culprit in mediated space, no special privileges or compensations. Why is video different to film, or to the other things which stir? Mariko Mori’s crystal ball, a monitor within a monitor, is the dead centre of the otherwise quick world of the airport in which it was recorded – her calm is out of the ordinary.

Video transmits a kind of movement all its own, an electric movement out of synch with that of the human body, but one which draws that body toward it. It presents sequences from past time that have been horribly dismantled and delicately put back together again and, in the end, the passage of images appears to be more or less smooth. But even the perception of movement is an optical illusion. The 19th century scientist Etienne-Jules Marey revealed that physiological movement is in fact quite the opposite to how it appears to the human eye – or, for that matter, how it may appear to the video camera. Movement is all shakes and shudders – little violences which are subsequently rounded off. Movement and attention span are alike in that they are idealised as continuous but are actually fractured, rough and crazy.

Video tape rolls and so do its philosophical tenets and avowed principles – they all fall down and are replaced. Assume that “video” itself – already burdened with any number of proposed critical destinies – is unable to pay attention to its delegated tasks and has erred, wandered off. Forgetting to listen to the frantic orders of directors, it has become delirious, inattentive and miscreant, producing its own disorders and bubbles in space and time – for it seems that, in some cases at least, “video” is exhibiting strange symptoms.

Where did it go?

When video acquires ADD, it does not mean the medium falls apart – it simply adopts new characteristics which weren’t there to begin with, creating more foreign languages within the foreign language of video. It is not just the audience which can’t sit still – the medium can’t sit still. It misbehaves and reverberates with unnatural poise, like Diana Thater’s animal actors who, like ideal viewers, are trained into behaviour but



will revert to other activities given half the chance.

Here, perhaps, are some explanations for the appearance of an art which runs continuously, seemingly without beginning or end, capturing the viewer's attention for split-seconds and indeterminate durations.

— Giovanni Intra

1. Georges Bataille "Space" *Encyclopedia Acephalia* (trans. Iain White, eds. Robert Lebel and Isabelle Waldberg) Atlas Press, London, 1995. p75.
2. "Spacing out" is a phrase I have often applied to this state of affectivity, yet this terminology commonly implies a complete loss of affectiveness. While a person may appear to be outwardly inattentive, he or she may still remain attentive to an interiorised state. Perhaps, then, 'spacing in' more aptly describes this inward shift in attentiveness." Jessica Bronson *A Poetics of the Video Effect* Masters thesis, Art Center of Design, Pasadena. p2.
3. "Unfortunately [for philosophy] space remains a lout, and it is difficult to enumerate what it engenders." Georges Bataille "Space" op cit. p75.
4. Danielle C Lapp (*Nearly Total Recall: A Guide to Better Memory at Any Age* Stanford University Press, Stanford. p77.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

JESSICA BRONSON

Approach... a shot to the green 1998
laser disk

GO GO-DARD 1997
laser disk

*Jessica Bronson and Dick Slessig Combo Present
For Your Pleasure* 1996
laser disk

MARIKO MORI

Mikono Inori 1996
laser disk
Courtesy Gallery Koyanagi, Tokyo

DIANA THATER

The Object as a Medium 1996
five channel laser disk installation
Private collection, New York
Courtesy David Zwirner, New York

CONTRIBUTORS

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JESSICA BRONSON graduated from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, in 1994. Solo shows include Kunstlerhaus Bethanien (Berlin, 1996), CRG Art (New York, 1998) and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles, 1998). Bronson's work has been included in *Sunshine and Noir: Art From L.A. 1960-1997* (Louisiana Museum, Humbleback, 1997), *Places That Are Elsewhere* (David Zwirner, New York, 1997), *Seamless* (Stichting De Appel, Amsterdam, 1998) and *Zone Franche; Global Tekno* (La Grand Hall de la Villette, Paris, 1998). She lives in Los Angeles.

MARIKO MORI graduated from Chelsea College of Art, London, in 1992, before moving to New York to participate in the Whitney Independent Study Program. She has had solo shows at Art and Public (Geneva, 1993), Shiseido Gallery (Tokyo, 1995), American Fine Arts (New York, 1995) and the Centre National d'Art Contemporain (Grenoble, 1996). Last year her work featured in the *47th Biennale of Venice*. She lives in New York.


DIANA THATER graduated with an MFA from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, in 1990. Her solo shows include Witte de With (Rotterdam, 1994), the Renaissance Society (Chicago, 1995), Le Creux de L'Enfer (Thiers, 1995), Kunsthalle Basel (1996), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis, 1997) and the Museum of Modern Art (New York, 1998). Recent group exhibitions include *Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, the 1996 Biennale of Sydney; the *1997 Whitney Biennial*; *Sunshine and Noir: Art From L.A. 1960-1997* (Louisiana Museum, Humbleback, 1997) and *Skulptur Projekte: Munster* (1997). She lives in Los Angeles.

cover: Mariko Mori Mikono Inori 1996

Span

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ARTSPACE RECEIVES MAJOR FUNDING FROM CREATIVE NEW ZEALAND.

A close-up, artistic photograph of a young girl's face. She has short, light-colored hair and striking blue eyes. The lighting is soft and directional, coming from the left, which creates a bright, yellowish glow behind her hair and on her forehead. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

ARTSPACE

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