Film as Event

Exhibit A

The film is not exhibitionist. I watch it, but it doesn’t watch me, watching it. Nevertheless, it knows that I am watching it. But it doesn’t want to know.¹

Christian Metz

On taking my place in the movie auditorium I enter into a curious scenario of disavowal. A strange game of hide-and-seek ensues. What is this charade that I willingly succumb to in classical cinema?² To paraphrase Christian Metz, our self-delusion assumes the following form: “I’m here and I’m present. I watch and assist at the birth of the film. Only in my gaze does the film exist, it lives within me.” In other words, the story of the movie does not simply happen of its own accord, it does not narrate itself; it is I who assume the empty place of the narrator. I become, as it were, the apparatus of exhibition. That is why the filmed scene might be caught unaware – it remains oblivious to my presence, because I appropriate the function of mediation for myself. I do the showing without showing myself. And that is also why I rest comfortable in the perceptual loop of exhibitionism, because I am removed from its tautological structure. The exhibitionist knows that the voyeur looks, derives pleasure from this look, and thus, at the same time, identifies with the other’s look. But in the cinema I do all the looking while remaining impervious to the look of the other. It is not just the actor who never acknowledges my stare; it is the projective apparatus itself that is never caught in the act, which never shows up.

Exhibit B

A camera’s identity, in relation to the spectator’s perception, may be part of the performer […], or not part of him (a separate mechanical object) […]. Its image may be read as inside the performer or outside of him, or can be seen as both inside and outside of the performer, appearing as simultaneously subject and object.³

The confidence of the spectator of classical cinema – “I’m here and I’m present” – crumbles on entering the filmic theater of Graham. There is no story anywhere in sight, only the filmic event itself which keeps repeating itself. Graham does not erase the actual traces of the filmic performance, either at the level of production or projection, and therefore the spectator is revealed in the glare of the projector’s light to be a performer who is not substantially different from the performers on screen. The discursive structure of this filmic event has not disappeared behind the object of exhibition, it has been put on display as well. That is to say, the subject of this cinema is simply revealed in its anonymity or, better still, its multiplicity: I am no longer incarnated in the camera/projector for it is not one. Accordingly, I am led in a dizzying dance across the mirrored stage of Graham’s cinema. We might be inclined to say that he returns to the “frenzy of the visible” that convulsed an earlier epoch of capitalism.⁴ But he returns with a difference. If he can be said to restage such a historical moment then it is exactly not to retrieve it as an imaginary scene or as curiosity worth saving, like the laterna magica, zoogroscope, stereoscopes, and other optical inventions of the nineteenth century that are placed on view in film museums the world over.⁵ On the contrary, the past returns in these films only in order to convulse the present, to disrupt the endlessness of its horizon. If this dance of film celebrates anything, it is the commemoration of such a critical task. This history, then, is also a politics and, most specifically, a practical politics of the present. Defining this filmic mediation of the past in the present will form our topic.


² The term classical cinema refers to movies that are narrative in form and based upon an industrial mode of production. Metz’s discussion relies, as mine will as well, on Jean-Louis Baudry’s celebrated critique of classical cinema, namely Ideological Effects of the Basic
The Film Series

While rarely mentioned, Graham has produced a small but distinctive group of films between 1969 and 1973, alongside his other activities in the area of performance, video, and writing. Listed in chronological sequence the films are: Sunset to Sunrise (1969), Binocular Zoom (1969-70), Two Correlated Rotations (1969), Roll (1970), Body Press (1970-72), and Helix/Spiral (1973). After 1973 Graham did not return to the actual practice of making films, but the cinematic mode of experience that was first developed in these films would remain a reference point throughout the later pavilion projects and his writing. My discussion shall not take us beyond the point of 1973, however its relevance to the later work shall be evident by the time of its conclusion.

Before I continue, I need to insert a note on the quality of the cinematic experience projected by Graham's work. First of all, this experience, as mediated by the filmic apparatus, needs to be defined both in terms of the phenomenological situation of the observer versus the work of art and the historical condition of this relationship. The exhibition of this perceptual situation alongside its socio-economic conditions constitutes the actual 'subject matter' of Graham's films, which implies that the experience they have to offer is not aimed to please the self-identical spectator of classical cinema. In fact, to speak of 'an' experience at all is somewhat misleading, for Graham's films do not present a coherent, symbolic message to the spectator, not to mention the absence of any central point of view. His films unravel the perspectival field of vision that narrative cinema projects. Their space of projection is differentiated between the mobile, overlapping planes of observer, performer and apparatus. Therefore, I shall prefer to speak of these films less in terms of a specific experience than in terms of their exhibition of a performative event. I shall clarify this contention in due course, but let me stress right away that this filmic function entails a certain indeterminacy of the image itself. While narrative cinema basks its spectators in the glow of its radiant scene, there is an aspect to Graham's films that always exceeds the symbolic framework of representation. These films, in a manner of speaking, are unknowable, not only in a descriptive but also in an existen­tial sense, for there is literally no 'single one' who has the experience, but only a multitude.

I do not wish to get too far ahead of my argument, but let me provide a brief glimpse of what lies in store. We might describe Graham's films as operating in the bipolar region between what Foucault identified as a physics and phylum of social identity. Physics refers to the historical regularity that underpins a social order, the phylum, which appears to its natives as a natural habitat, a cultural organization of genetic inheritance. Yet this physics of society is not a static structure, it concerns a relational and multiple power that is perpetually in motion. It consists of a technology that is not localizable, but mobilized as a disciplinary force within the social economy. The phylum might be called the imaginary horizon of totality aimed at by this physics. The former, namely, cannot form more than an ideological compromise as long as the latter remains at grips with the primary inertia of matter. To be sure, the mechanisms of power have a material field of application, but this field is not immediately apprehensible. The regularity of the social order must be extracted from a "region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations." The combinations and identities that are established within this homogenous order will therefore also include many gaps and discontinuities. Graham's films can be understood to show this physics of technology at work. They depict the spectacle of a body poised between a

5 These devices are mentioned by Graham in the essay Photographs of Motion, End Moments (New York: Artist publication, 1969).
6 The adjective 'cinematic' crops up frequently in Graham's phenomenological descriptions of the multiple surfaces of the pavilions which alter their aspect under the changing conditions of atmosphere, light and the position of the viewer.
7 A clear link between the films and the pavilions is established by the Cinema project. I consider Cinema to be one of Graham's most brilliant, and sadly unrealized, designs. The present text is concerned with locating the films in their historical context; a main oversight in the existing literature on the artist. My story will, therefore, end around 1973. Were I to include Cinema then I would need to give careful attention to the gap between 1973 and 1961 in which Graham develops his mirrored video installations and pavilion structures, which is not possible in the current space of my text. I hope to return to this 'post-history' of the films in the near future.
state of lucidity and dispersal. The films do not replicate this physics but neither do they simply negate it. What the films do achieve is a momentary suspension of the ‘natural’ progress of this disciplinary force. And in this interim, they indicate the historical threshold of its first appearance.

To return to the six films, what is immediately apparent is the rarity of this series. They manifest a stringent economy of structure and means. Graham has observed that there was no reason to continue beyond this limited group because the logical possibilities on which the set was based had been exhausted. The six films constituted a permutational series that ran its full course. From the beginning, then, it is clear that Graham was not in the business of stocking the image banks of film history. He has not invested in the medium of film as such, for reasons that we shall yet come to explore.

Perhaps I seem to have contradicted myself. First I emphasized the differential state of these films, while I now propose that they constitute a closed series. But this contradiction is only apparent. The regularity of Graham’s permutational series concerns the spatial and temporal deployment of their variables: camera, screen, performer, observer, etc. However, this regularity is not plotted according to the same code of a monocural space that governs narrative cinema. While these films might demarcate the boundaries of a logical space, it is not one that is geared to the position of an ideal spectator. Space is composed and decomposed before our eyes as we watch these films. To track these filmic interruptions of continuity is what deserves our close attention.

What are the empirical facts in so far as they can be established?

According to Graham’s own notes, the first film, *Sunset to Sunrise*, was shot according to the following procedure:

The film is made by continuously moving a 16 mm movie camera from a position oriented toward the sun on the horizon line at the moment of sunset, and proceeding in a slow spiral with gradual upward inclination toward the top of the sky [...] The next morning at sunrise [...] a reverse spiral downward in opposite right-to-left rotation is filmed, ending on the sun rising above the horizon.  

Leaving a discussion of the temporal hiatus within this movie aside for the moment, the fundamental gesture of *Sunset to Sunrise* is to instate a spiraling motion of the camera within the visual field. The film traces the outline of the viewer’s visual hemisphere from the horizon to the zenith and back, and this rotating pattern will appear in all films but the following, namely *Binocular Zoom*.

*Binocular Zoom*, like *Sunset to Sunrise*, is shot directly against the light of the sun that in this case remains partially obscured by clouds rather than sunken behind the rim of the horizon. Yet the film applies another method than *Sunset to Sunrise* in order to map the interstitial space between the perceiver and the perceived object. Instead of the spiraling motion of the camera, *Binocular Zoom* traverses the distance between the sun and the eye by zooming outwards. The sun, thus, appears to move further away from the viewer. It diminishes in size to a ‘distance,’ as Graham puts it. But there is an even more striking difference between *Sunset to Sunrise* and *Binocular Zoom*. The latter, namely, requires the simultaneous use of two cameras, as will be the case with all subsequent films made by Graham. In fact, *Sunset to Sunrise* was shot with a 16 mm camera, while *Binocular Zoom* uses lightweight Super 8 cameras which are placed flush to the eye. The manipulative quality of these cameras, which had only recently made it onto the market, forms a technical condition of Graham’s film performances. The use of two cameras in *Binocular Zoom* necessitates also the synchronized projection of the two
films. To this purpose, Graham has stipulated that Binocular Zoom be shown on a split screen.

Binocular Zoom is followed by Two Correlated Rotations and Roll. These films return to the concentric movement described by Sunset to Sunrise, but the rotation is now executed by two cameras in tandem. In the case of Roll, one camera is placed on the ground facing the performer who rolls slowly toward the right of the framing edge of the camera’s view. The other camera is attached to the performer’s eye while he rolls in an attempt to keep it centered on the stationary camera opposite from him. The film is not destined for a split screen viewing as in the case of Binocular Zoom, but is projected on distant opposite, parallel walls. The exhibition of the film, therefore, reflects the spatial situation of the film performance. Two Correlated Rotations introduces a further duplication of a filmic ‘unit’: besides two cameras, this film also requires two performers. Graham describes the shooting procedure of Two Correlated Rotations in the following manner:

The two cameramen each hold cameras so that their viewfinders are extensions of their eyes and visual fields. They begin facing each other one foot away. They walk in counter spirals, the outside performer moving gradually outward while the inside performer walks inward approaching the center.12

The installation of the film is again different from the preceding cases: Two Correlated Rotations is projected into the corner with each reel screened onto a separate, yet adjacent wall.

Two more films remain to be described, namely Helix/Spiral and Body Press. In these works, Graham adds yet another factor to the cinematic equation — the camera is not only treated as a ‘viewfinder,’ it also acquires tactile properties. In Helix/Spiral, for instance, the spiraling choreography of the camera harks back to the camera movement in Sunset to Sunrise, but it maps the outer surface of the body rather than tracing the inner surface of the celestial dome. Helix/Spiral calls for a stationary performer who slides the back end of the camera downward across his body, describing a gradually descending helix in space. A second performer places the camera’s viewfinder before the eye and spirals inward towards the center axis occupied by the first performer. The second performer attempts to keep his camera centered on the first performer’s camera while remaining within the field of vision of the latter’s camera. The resultant films are to be projected simultaneously on opposite walls, as in the case of Roll.

The performative structure of Body Press is similar to Helix/Spiral except for the fact that neither camera is permanently attached to the eye or even the body of one performer. Furthermore, placing the performers inside a mirrorized cylinder doubles the reflective relationship between one performer and the other (and between one camera and the other). Let me draw once more on Graham’s own lapidary style of description:

Two filmic Topology
332

12 Films 1977: 15.
The films are projected as loops on two opposite walls that stand close to each other. The tight compartment in which the original performers stood is therefore replicated in the compact space of projection. As a result, the loop projectors assume the nature of a physical barrier, acting like proxies of the original performers. The spectator must navigate these mechanical objects while straining to follow the orbital path of the cameras, which cross in virtual space from one bodily horizon to another, while remaining literally attached to one screen in the gallery space.

The preceding description has established in sufficient detail the permutational logic of Graham's artist-film. I have demonstrated the different combinations and series based upon the variables of camera and body, place and movement, recorded and reflected image, which are gathered together within the framework of a 'binocular' schema of film. Within this structural scheme, the artist subjects filmic space to a constant principle of temporal inversion between the inner and outer horizon of subjective perception. There is a truism of classical cinema that Graham likes to repeat, namely that the spectator tends to identify with the camera's viewpoint: "A movie camera's viewfinder is placed on the performer's eye to identify the image seen on the screen by the spectator with the performer's perception of the world at the moment of performance." Yet this perceptual process of identification is simultaneously disrupted in Graham's films by foregrounding the alterity of the camera as an object. He radicalizes the 'freedom' of the camera, so often celebrated in avant-garde cinema, to such an extent that it no longer will submit to the authority of an ideal eye. The result of this procedure is to split asunder the visual field, literally, through the use of a double screen, but also in a phenomenological sense, for the spectator is dissociated from the 'objective' world projected on screen. To summarize, the effect of Graham's serial method is not to institute the continuity of a medium. Not, that is, to establish the continuity of the Modernist series wherein every instance manifests a complete idea of the medium as such. To the contrary, Graham's films release a surfeit of differential energy within the economy of perception that cannot be contained. These films stage, as it were, the downfall of the idealist subject of Modernism. To be at all times and everywhere, they seem to state, is to be at no time and nowhere.

There is another context, though, that might seem more relevant to Graham than Modernism, namely Minimalism. Indeed continuity exists between the films and Minimalism, however there is also an important difference. To consider the films as a 'cinematized' version of the Minimalist series would be a mistake. I will arrive at a discussion of Graham's reception of Minimalism by way of his earlier work in publishing. Although this might seem a circuitous root to take, my reasons for this approach shall become clear in due course. The period in question begins around 1966 and leads up to 1969 and is usually considered as Graham's 'conceptual' phase but I shall apply this term in a circumspect manner. The discursive procedure that Graham unfolds in these writings, advertisements and data grids will directly inform the filmic work. And this discursive field is itself informed by the topos of Minimalism. What shall emerge from my analysis of the publications is their fundamental principle of bivalency; a principle put to critical advantage by the artist.

A similar hybridity courses through the film notes that I have extensively quoted from – a fact that I have deliberately avoided up to this point. Less than a varying style of writing, this hybridity concerns a variance of enunciative positions which range from the descriptive and the instructional, to the interpretive and annotative. On the one hand,
these texts formalize a kind of experimental method, provide it with a script of sorts, while, on the other hand, they propose a quasi-scientific mode of analysis. In a later section, I shall expand on this imitation of scientific procedures in Graham's writing and films. For now, what is significant about this shifting range of enunciative registers is that it points to the evasion of the filmic experience which happens, precisely, somewhere in between. The films, we might suggest, are experiments that happen to us.

Again, these considerations raise the problem of the mode of spatiality that is portrayed by Graham's films. Since I shall briefly retreat from the territory of the films to the earlier period of the publications, let me summarize the differences between the space of classical cinema and Graham's film in so far as they have appeared thus far. It will be helpful to bear this difference in mind while looking at the field of publications because a similar opposition will appear there as well. This opposition will be phrased in terms of a distinction between topographical and topological space.

The basic topography of the apparatus of classical cinema is quickly sketched: the projector beam originates from behind the immobile viewer and is directed at a screen rimmed in blackness. The phenomenological effect of cinema is to transform these limiting conditions of the apparatus into a spectacle of empowerment. The captive moviegoers, shackled to their seats in the dark of the auditorium, believe themselves nonetheless in total control through their primary identification with the apparatus of restriction. They experience the projected image to be more intense than reality itself because the world seems to exhibit itself, without reserve, on the screen. And this screen is not placed at an external distance, but seems to exist within some virtual depth; the viewer has internalized its physical limitations. There is no one who challenges the spectator's fusion with this projection, no other who threatens to divest this horizon of its subjective meaning: "Limited by the framing, lined up, put at the proper distance, the world offers up an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the 'subject' which sights it." Such is the viewer's pleasure of self-confirmation in the space of narrative cinema.

This topography does not survive in Graham's cinema. By distributing the viewer's attention across the room and catching this subject in the crossbeams of projected light, Graham disrupts the central perspective of classical cinema. Through this logic of duplication, he cancels out the viewer's illusion of supremacy. The screen does not repress its properties as a physical object but stands in a very real relationship to us, denying the transcendental operation of the frame in classical cinema. Moreover, Graham institutes a dynamic within the visual field, a mobility of reversible surfaces or 'switching termini' as he calls them. He uncovers a screen, that is, that has more than one side — "topologically, an optical 'skin,' both reflective and transparent inside and outside." To define this topological skin as it first appears in the magazine pieces of Graham will form our next assignment.

A Topology of the Page

The message is united with the schema (the schema being) used being its own definition so that the structure, in effect, structures itself (in place) as the language, in-forming an intermediate object between concept and material; the process consists in uniting both while simultaneously decomposing them.

Graham initiates his filmic practice in 1969, around the same time that he discontinues the 'conceptual' strategy of the magazine pieces. I am not referring to the artist's
writing in general – Graham would continue to be prolific in this area – but to such works as the ‘data grids,’ the drawings and ‘poems,’ and other hybrid adaptations of the ‘typophoto’ essay and the magazine advertisement. Without question the hybrid character of these pieces is key. Graham has suggested this typology of the data-grid, poem, etc., but never insisted on the absolute status of these categories. Quite the opposite, in fact. The magazine works do not comfortably fit within the conventional genres of mass publication. These works are designed to transgress the spatial ‘architecture’ of the magazine: the authorial perspective and the editorial and typographical framework that supports it. ‘There is no composition,’ as the artist observes. A data grid, like Schema, or a poem, like I–They, “subverts value” rather than expressing an artistic or authorial insight.

This principle of de-composition forms at least one similarity between the magazine pieces and the films. They share a definite lack of conformity to established categories of the ‘work.’ Furthermore, the magazine pieces deny the authenticity of the art object that henceforth exists by sheer grace of exhibition alone. The ‘object’ exists, that is, by virtue of its publicity and not despite of it, as Modernism was prone to argue. This object, i.e. the publication, assumes a discrete existence but only in the disposable form of printed matter. Hence, the magazine pieces acknowledge the basic modality of the art work, its exhibition value, which had been a constant subject of disavowal under Modernism. Graham’s procedure does not so much show the gallery in its naked state as it reveals that the exhibition is always already ‘covered’ elsewhere. The procedure of de-composition enters into Graham’s critical strategy, as it were, to exhibit the exhibition. To materialize this socio-economic condition of the art work, to sight its mediated structure, is the prime point of overlap between the magazine and the film works.

How, then, is this moral of de-composition applied in the magazine pieces? First of all, it is achieved through a spatial inversion of the self-reflective principle of Modernism. The subject matter of Schema (March 1966–67), for instance, consists of the statistical information created in the course of its own typesetting. The typographical event records itself in a potentially endless loop. Structuring itself in place, Schema “defines the limits and contingencies of placement.” It takes its own measure as place. But to structure itself does not mean to create a self-enclosed, autonomous object. To the contrary, Schema is contingent upon placement and therefore will exhibit the material conditions of enunciation that underpin this place. By which I mean to say that there is no individual subject of speech – any editor can fulfill the role – and there is no subjective message being relayed. Schema suspends all criteria concerning the legitimacy of who speaks and the validity of what is said, for it lacks a Modernist seriousness. Accordingly we might say that Graham puts his status as ‘amateur’ and ‘autodidact’ to good use here.

To clarify the discursive structure of Schema a slight detour will be in order. What I propose is that this work functions as a kind of performative event or speech act that in its anonymity bears comparison to Michel Foucault’s notion of the statement (enoncé) that is expounded in The Archaeology of Knowledge. Obviously, I do not hold that Graham explicitly followed this theoretical model. Only that it offers a tactical advantage in the present context.

Foucault’s archaeological method disinters speech acts of a special kind. Foucault is not concerned with those everyday utterances that are pronounced within a local, pragmatic context and form the ordinary object of speech act theory. He is exclusively interested in those ‘serious’ speech acts that can reveal the historical regularity of an epis-
temic formation. These utterances do not constitute a kind of topographical atlas of this discursive field, but indicate its structural rules of operation. The discursive rules are not the mental property of individuals, but organize a discursive space as an "uniform anonymity." It follows that within such a linguistic domain of performance only certain utterances will 'make sense.' In fact, serious speech acts are exceedingly rare, as Foucault maintains (a fact already ascertained in relation to the filmic 'statement' of Graham). On the other hand, the regularity of the discursive formation does not exclude the appearance of contradiction and conflict. The statement, namely, functions in the logical space of a permutational series that allows the potential "of arousing opposed strategies, of giving way to irreconcilable interests, of making it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games." To get at this performative function of the statement one must therefore suspend belief in the seriousness of individual utterances because it is grounded at the relational level of meaningfulness as such. And this foundation of intelligibility is not ontological but fully historical in nature.

Where does this slight digression leave us in relation to Schema? I contend that Graham's piece exhibits, exactly, the performative function of the statement. It constitutes a statement, that is, of the exhibition as such. Schema does not locate us within the truth game of Modernist art. Schema does not assume the same seriousness of tone, demand the same kind of aesthetic conviction. Rather it manifests and subverts the rules of the game as it was played during the sixties. This means, furthermore, that Schema does not take the tautological form of a proposition. A proposition has an apodictic character that remains ignorant of its historical field of use. Joseph Kosuth's 'art as idea as idea' forms a contemporary example of such a proposition. A statement like Schema, on the other hand, depends on a specific, material set of conditions for its realization. Accordingly, there is no ideal version of Schema: "a specific variant, in a sense, does not actually exist, but under certain conditions can be made to appear." Indeed, Graham seized any opportunity that emerged to publish Schema in order to make its contingent value apparent.

I would like to add one more comment regarding the performative structure of the magazine pieces before taking up a discussion of Homes for America, which in due course shall lead us back to the films. Graham was quick to realize that he was not just dealing with the anonymous rules of a discursive field, but also with the question of power. Foucault makes an important remark that resonates strongly in the context of Graham's work. His remark concerns the truth claims of scientific language. Science desires to speak a context-free truth, but to speak truth in a void is impossible, Foucault observes, as long as one wants to be heard and understood. To speak, in short, is to invite a 'policing' of speech. Graham's earliest work suffered from this fact. They were not accepted in magazines because they seemed to lack sense in the combined game of art and publishing. He decided, therefore, to mimic the language of publicity more closely by designing advertisements. An additional advantage was that he could play off the direct mode of address employed by advertising. The basic statement of the advertisement, as Graham explains, takes the discursive form of tautological speech: 'You like it. It likes you.' His tactic is to decompose this play of mirrors. By emptying the enunciative place of the subject, he throws the discursive axis of speech into a kind of tailspin that incessantly alternates between private and public, inner and outer space: "There is a relation of a public figure's private piece to public exposure or the reverse." This reversibility of intent was programmed to sidestep the
rather than the editorial content acting upon the reader, Graham sought to activate the reader and offer him new possibilities of use. Through means of this discursive feedback, an alternative network or collectivity might take shape. To that end, he would place the same ad in different magazines irrespective of their editorial identity (e.g. news, sports, fashion, science, and art). Furthermore, the advertisement would allow a multiplicity of messages: "it's art and it's science and it's the sociology of art (no history) or none of these definitions." With the ads he remains poised, then, between an utopian moment of communality and a counter-moment of individual dispersion. He develops, that is, a kind of dialectic in suspension, which informs the films as well and to which we shall return.

The discursive function of Graham's magazine pieces is now sufficiently established in order to consider his *Homes for America*. This essay first appeared in the December 1966-January 1967 issue of *Arts Magazine* and has since received an almost canonical status. I do not presume to add to this rich field of historical interpretation, however it deserves our attention since it is the hinge on which his later films will turn. The referential content of the page is not our primary concern – it is there to be read and not insignificant as such. Instead, I want to scan the temporal surface of this discursive event. What *Homes for America* presents is, as it were, a switchboard of information:

This was the first published appearance of art ('Minimal' in this case) as place conceived, however, solely in terms of information to be construed by the reader in a mass-readable-then-disposable context-document in place of the fact (neither before the fact as a Judd or after the fact as in current 'Concept' art). Place in my article is decomposed into multiple and overlapping points of reference – mapped 'points of interest' – in a two-dimensional point to point 'grid'. There is a 'shell' present placed between the external 'empty' material of place and the interior 'empty' material of language; a complex, interlocking network of systems whose variants take place as information present (and) as (like) the medium – information – (in) itself.

Leaving the question of Minimalism aside for now, it is Graham's concept of 'place' that deserves elaboration. Graham resists thinking about space in topographic terms or what he likes to call an 'architecture' of information. A proposition supposes exactly such a neutral support of communication, but Graham prefers the more confounding notion of a 'shell.' (Which even registers in the parenthetic style of the quote above). In doing so, he disrupts the binary logic of container and contained, inside and outside, figure and ground. This space is not the Cartesian extension but a malleable, shifting surface; a surface that is susceptible to the transformative processes of bending, stretching, and twisting (but not, and that is essential, of cutting). In other words, Graham projects a mode of spatiality that is described by that branch of mathematics popularly known as 'rubber-sheet geometry' or topology. And I am merely following the cue of Graham in suggesting this spatial figure as a basic model in his early work.

*Homes for America* demonstrates how such a topological space might be conceived in print. This shell binds the surface of things to that of language but not to make the one transparent to the other. If anything, *Homes for America* parodies an idealist model of language which considers the sign as standing in a motivated relation to its referent. *Homes for America* forces the arbitrary structure of the sign into the foreground; it is entered into a permutational series. Hence, the several lists of names which just as easily could have been substituted by others or could have been chosen to designate some-
thing else, such as the series of housing developments (e.g. Belleplain, Brooklawn, Colonia, etc.), the standard house plans (e.g. The Sonata, The Concerto, The Overture, etc.), or the pre-programmed color schemes (Moonstone Grey, Lawn Green, Coral Pink, etc.).

Most importantly, this dispersion of the sign entails a dispersion of subject positions. *Homes for America* does not establish a single point of view, but juxtaposes an array of intersecting perspectives. It does not present so much a static tabulation of information as places in motion a series of discursive transformations and combinations. If this photo-essay recycles the figure of the grid *ad nauseam* then, it is not to survey a static, unified ‘architecture’ of place. He dismantles the totality into its variable units, releasing them to a performative function of distribution: “Thus the art’s in-formational structure upholds the breakdown (collapse, decomposed parts, deposition) of its ‘architecture’ in terms of the base constituents of place.”34 This ruinous topology of *Homes for America* forms a far cry from the ambient space of Modernism, which knew no distinction between occupied space and space at large. For the Modernist viewer was offered a transcendental framework onto this transparent continuum, while the subject of *Homes for America* threatens to dissolve into an atopic space where each point might exist anywhere and everywhere at the same time.

The subject threatens to dissolve, but does not completely do so. We should not be too hasty to conjecture that *Homes for America* collapses all difference into a simulacral realm of equivalence. Certainly, its recipient is placed within a rhythm of repetition, but there is always a factual difference that reappears from one moment to the next. What *Homes for America* literalizes is the enunciative function of the topological screen. If only in the process of reading, for this differential surface can never be completely grasped in isolation. We do not survey the total discursive field of “coordination and coexistence,” but embody certain stations within its “space of use and repetition.”35 Space is thus constituted as a reversible ‘shell,’ but there is no perfect symmetry of interior to exterior. Placed within this medium of ‘in-formation’ the subject will be both the subject and object of performance.

This same paradox is contained, for instance, in the objective procedures of the social sciences, which would take its own background practice for granted.36 The problem is compounded by the fact that its skills, e.g. the use of statistics, are internal to the disciplinary field to a degree that laboratory skills are not. Hence, the systematic grid of socio-economic categories employed by political science threatens to replicate the very reified, calculable order of late capitalism that forms its object of study. This was the problem of Max Weber who attempted to give an objective account of the administrative regulation of everyday life, while he realized that his own theorizing could not escape from this dominant mode of self-realization. This is also the political question of Foucault (and Jean-Luc Godard who Graham greatly admired) who argues that to render society visible, to analyze its distributions and series, is also to police it.37 Such is the contradiction that is so brilliantly exhibited in *Homes for America*.

There is perhaps one alternative to the self-objectifying approach of the human sciences. Namely, the observer who adopts the actor’s point of view within the social game and considers what these background practices *mean* to him, rather than silently imposing the objective grid of rationality. For the generalizing methods of social science could not foresee or explain the emergence of countercultural practices during the sixties. The Hippies, for instance, were to contest the contractual relationship of individuals in capitalist society by establishing other forms of collective existence. But if these social actors

---

34 *End Moments* 1969: 45.
35 *Foucault* 1978: 106.
37 In conversation with the author, Graham has often compared *Homes for America* to the essayistic film method of Godard.
Photographs of Motion

One way to fight the dogmatism was to take a completely empty area that was undefined and then to give it definition in terms of itself, but looking at it from a very peripheral point of view, like photography. I always liked it because the work was sort of art but it wasn't art; it had pretensions of being art but it was really very empty, it was really a technological thing.\(^{38}\)

The foregoing raises a host of questions, but I shall stick to only one. What I am essentially getting at is the coupling of visuality and technology in Graham's work. In *Homes for America* the material apparatus, i.e. the grid of the printed page, is what both implements and manifests the shifting topology of 'multiple and overlapping points of reference.' While a full explication of this discursive logic would benefit from a further consideration of the printed medium, a task already initiated by Graham's *Information* essay, I prefer to switch my approach at this moment. Actually, we have been shunted on to a sidetrack by a retroactive act of history. I introduced *Homes for America* in its printed format since that is how it is primarily known today. However, this was not the first version of the work. Graham first conceived of the piece as a slide projection. He started shooting the slides of the New Jersey housing developments in 1965, after the demise of the John Daniels Gallery he had worked for. They received their first public presentation during the 'Projected Art' exhibition at the Finch College Museum of Art in 1966.\(^{39}\) The Finch College projection thus initiated a trajectory that would lead Graham from the serialized space of Minimalism via the rotating mechanism of the slide projector to the spiraling loops of film.

The slide projection was intended to adopt the basic technical procedures of Minimalism, namely mechanical production and serial logic, without the need of fabricating objects. The 35 mm slide literalized the spatial structure of Minimalism, what Graham called its "transparent 'flat,' serialized space."\(^{40}\) The artist suggests, in other words, an isomorphism between the translucent, colored surface of the slide and the semi-transparent, planar constructions of Minimalism. One might think, as Graham obviously did, of the Donald Judd box of 1965 that was assembled from sheets of pink Plexiglas so that that the inner suspension wires that held the structure together were revealed on the outside.\(^{41}\) In this manner, Graham marks a topological series from the Plexiglas planes of Judd, to the 'shells' of tract housing, to the celluloid support of the slide. A planar series that can easily be added to or subtracted from as he writes of the structure of the housing developments.

In December 1966, during the 'Projected' Art exhibition, Graham conceived of a second piece for a slide projector that introduced a more direct form of self-mediation than the slides of housing developments allowed. A structure structuring itself in terms of place, to adopt Graham's terminology, this work superimposes the function of decomposition onto the material apparatus of the slide projector and projects it into the gallery space. As a result, the viewer is situated *within* the time and place of production. What

---

\(^{38}\) Dan Graham, 'An Interview with Simon Field,' *Art and Artists* 7, no. 10 (January 1973): 19.

\(^{39}\) The piece was listed as *Project Transparencies* in the brochure that accompanied the exhibition. The 'Projected Art' show ran from December 8, 1966 to January 8, 1967.

\(^{40}\) *End Moments* 1969: 34.

\(^{41}\) Rhea Anastas has brought it to my attention that Judd's work was exhibited during the 'Plastics' show (March 16 – April 3, 1965) at the John Daniels Gallery where Graham was director.
this procedure emphasizes, above all, is the inability of the viewer to fully identify with the projective apparatus. The rotary movement of the carousel (and the camera) occurs, namely, outside the representational frame of the static slides.

Graham's instructions for the construction of the piece, as always, are exceedingly precise:

A structure is built utilizing 4 rectangular panes of glass joined to form a box with 4 sides. The top is open and the base is a mirror. A 35 mm camera takes a shot on a parallel plane, directed dead on focused on that plane and including nothing more than that plane in its periphery. Shot #2 is made similarly but of the next side of the box rotating clockwise and the lens focused further back - on a point inside the box. Shot #3 is focused still nearer the center of the box and an equal distance from the first to the second one as the camera is aimed at the third side. #4 follows the same scheme, the focused point now at dead center of the box's interior. Next, 4 new planes are added to form a box within a box, building up a mirroring perspective within a perspective.42

And so forth, until twenty shots have been taken. The slides are copied four times and then inserted into the carousel first in proper sequence, then flipped over and placed in reverse sequence; this disposition is then repeated with the remaining forty slides.

We might now comprehend how this work implants the architectural theme of Homes for America within the medium itself and its physical context of exhibition. The work constructs and deconstructs itself in time, while the superimposed planes of glass endlessly shift on the screen from a state of transparency to opacity and back again. In doing so, Graham pushes a specific Modernist logic of ambient space to a point of breakdown. Ambient space refers to a crossing of sculpture and architecture in what Greenberg called the 'new construction-sculpture.' He located its properties in an appearance of openness and weightlessness and notes the use of translucent, industrial materials, such as glass, plastics, and celluloid that are handled as architectural units to be assembled and arranged.43 The new sculpture, he holds forth, is characterized by its preoccupation with 'surface as skin' alone. While this skin metaphor might echo the discursive terms of Graham, the comparison clearly does not hold at a structural level. For Greenberg assumes the existence of a projective self who can provide a transcendental frame of reference for this optical space which dissolves thinghood into a modality of light. Graham, on the other hand, materializes the dispersed modality of the viewer who can never fully meet up with the projective apparatus, just as the intervals of 'negative space' are made absurdly palpable by focusing the camera on an empty point in space.44 In the process, Graham addresses Modernism's disavowal of the functionalist strategy of Russian Constructivism, without necessarily subscribing to its utopian figure of the glass house.45

It would take too long to recapitulate the full series of transformations that this historical figure of the glass house underwent, from Expressionism through Constructivism to the modern office building (and Minimalism), although its relevance to the later pavilions of Graham is abundantly clear. What I want to draw attention to in the slide projection is the making and unmaking of this narrative series before our very eyes. This discontinuity of the narrative axis, i.e. the projected slides, is offset by the emphatic presence of the discursive axis, i.e. the projector, in the gallery space.46 The obsessive repetition of its clicking mechanism patiently constructs the flat, serialized space like a stack of cards, only to dismantle it again and again. What this exhibition underscores is an insurmountable difference between the narrative and discursive axis, the two never quite aligning...
themselves with the position of the spectator, as in cinema, or falling together, as in the absorptive space of Modernist opticality. And to get at this difference, we are in need of another historical figure. One that is placed between the static photograph and the mobile image; a figure, moreover, that was introduced by Minimalism.

On more than one occasion, Sol LeWitt has advised us that his serial method of production was prefigured by a specific technological device, to wit cinematography. The artist, in fact, has likened the systemic logic that drives his artistic practice to the narrative structure of cinema. However this parallel is not drawn so much in the present but in relation to the prehistory of cinema:

A man running in Muybridge was the inspiration for making all the transformations of a cube within a cube, a square within a square, cube within a square, etc [...] it led to the motion picture that was the great narrative idea of our time. I thought that narration was a means of getting away from formalism: to get away from the idea of form as an end and rather to use form as a means.47

Such is the curious twist that LeWitt gives to the primitivist legacy of Modernism. Not only does he stake out a difference from the recent past of ‘formalism’ through his embrace of the present of serial production and industrial materials, such as baked enamel and steel. The artist registers this difference, as well, in an archaic trace of nineteenth-century technology. Graham will repeat this archaeological discovery, with the help of LeWitt, but we shall see that Graham arrives at another conclusion. By which I mean to say more than the simple fact that LeWitt did not make films.

LeWitt’s interest in Muybridge is made explicit in such early works as RUN I-IV (1962) and Muybridge II (1964). One might easily observe how the example of his sequential photographs enabled LeWitt to break with the self-contained logic of Modernist painting. These two works even introduce a rare imagery into his work, Muybridge II being the most cinematic in its use of photography and blinking lights. Consisting of a rectangular box with ten separate compartments, the viewer must draw near in order to view a photographic sequence of a seated, female nude shown at an increasing closer range of focus. LeWitt thus shifted Muybridge’s vector of movement from the viewed body to the camera and from the lateral, or narrative axis, into the perpendicular, or discursive axis (if still requiring a lateral shift of the spectator’s body).48 This displacement in depth is literally mirrored in the contemporary Wall Structures that project physical shapes beyond the frontal plane of the painting. But this shift of the visual axis does something more than just change direction in an otherwise neutral and objective space. There is a phenomenological difference in that the work now points directly at the viewer. It addresses itself towards the viewer and physically engages him. In other words, we are dealing with a performance of sorts, which is staged for the viewer’s body in relation to a kind of proto-cinematic apparatus. We will need to sort out this spatial disposition of the seen versus the seeing body and the body versus the viewing apparatus itself, in order to define Graham’s own overlap and discontinuity with Minimalism.

Narrative, as we know, suppresses the enunciative conditions of speech. ‘No one speaks here,’ linguistics explains. The narrated events seem to happen by themselves. Which is how one might be tempted to describe the appearance of Muybridge’s photographs, as Graham in fact does. The empty spatial continuum that Muybridge’s series portray forms an exact precondition for the thematic development of narrative. Yet these photographs are also performed, which is to say, there is an observed performer — the running man — and there is the discursive performance of the camera. The ‘no one’ who

---

is here is the camera. To identify with this empty place clears a narrative horizon of plenitude before the subject by suppressing the physical conditions, the irruptive force of the discursive event itself. LeWitt, of course, did not actually propose a narrative art since that would invoke the authorial presence of the artist. Nonetheless, one might argue that his modular series provide the support for a more abstract mode of narrative, not biographic but ontogenetic. A narrative, that is, of the formation of subjectivity itself.

As I mentioned, LeWitt's 'narrative idea' of seriality does not inscribe an authorial position within itself. The number systems function as anonymous rules along the lines of a Foucauldian statement. They simply serve a logic of spatial distribution. Not a proposition, therefore, the idea bears no claim to seriousness and does not illustrate a mathematical or philosophical truth. Indeed, in this respect we might adopt the motto of Graham's Schema, namely that a specific variant does not exist, but can be made to appear. LeWitt's idea can take various discursive and material forms: 'scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations.' But, as the statement of a certain series of permutational possibilities, all are equally acceptable – even without the fabrication of an actual object, as the artist asserts. Hereby, LeWitt opened the door to a conceptual strategy of art, as the 1967 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' confidently let us know. But this essay did not condone a theoretical method, which was to read the reader out of the text, as Graham came to deplore in some contemporary examples of Conceptualism.

Still, Minimalism never completely bracketed the seriousness of art that was its Modernist legacy. At least, not to the extent of Schema or Homes for America. Let us not confuse, by the way, Graham's suspension of seriousness with a lack of criticality. What the magazine pieces refuse is a referential order of the sign, while Minimalism retained a lodestone in the authentic experience of the lived body. Which is to say, such is the phenomenological reading of Minimalism which, by now, has become well established. According to this perceptual model, the embodied existence of the viewer, in the organic wholeness of its image, provides the world with an inner horizon of meaningfulness. This anterior depth of the body, as Merleau-Ponty writes, is "the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background of somnolence or reserve of vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out." In sum, if there is a narrative in Minimalism, then it is formed by the gradual exploration of this inner threshold as it is projected outwards, opening an intentional clearing within the world.

Graham's take on Minimalism, however, is slightly different. And this difference is highly pertinent to our discussion. The artist distinguishes two separate moments in the perception of a Minimalist work. The first moment is static in nature. In this immobile space, the passive observer receives the Minimalist 'idea' as a mere representation of itself. As a result, the viewer is distanced from the work of art: "the artist and the viewer are read out of the picture," while Graham adds, "both concepts (first definitions) and objects are either before the fact – as in fact is the viewer in relation to viewing the art object – or after the fact (re-presentations), thus defining an a priori (static) 'architecture' between what is sent and what is received." However, once the spectator is placed in movement, this conceptual edifice crumbles before our eyes:

As the viewer moves from point to point about the art object, the physical continuity of the walk is translated into illusive, self-representing depth: the visual complication of representations 'develops' a discrete, non-progressive space and time. There is no distinction between subject and object.
And with a sudden leap we have entered the domain of performativity. This leap occurs 'in depth' – like Muybridge II – for it involves the discursive axis of enunciation, but the subject does not determine this situation, he is also modified by it. In other words, the discursive axis has been placed in alternation: subject and object, self and other become interchangeable: "object and subject are not dialectical oppositions, but one self-contained identity: reversible interior and exterior termini."\(^{54}\) In this topological space, there is no center to occupy, no interior perspective, only an infinite regress of self-reflectivity. Here, we are not in the presence of seriousness, i.e. the intentional 'depth' of a Minimalist phenomenology, but face the sophistry of an artist who revels in the antinomies of reason spun by Epidemes the Cretan who stated that "all Cretans are liars."\(^{55}\)

The slide piece of 1966 was not fully successful in entering this reversibility into the visual field, although we saw how it already caused a visual disparity between the narrative and discursive axis (which repeats the transition from the static to the dynamic moment in his reading of Minimalism). A further doubling of the mechanism was required, which was achieved by the introduction of a binocular structure in another slide projection piece from 1967. Graham provides the following instructions for the piece:

The device to be used is a square fence constructed with rectangular slats spaced at regular intervals coming to neck height…. There is a walker (me) with a camera at dead center inside the enclosure and a second walker with a camera at one of the corners outside the device and maybe 3 feet away from its sides. The exact distance is determined by having both performers aim their respective cameras at each other so as to locate the top of the slats with the top of each other's headlines… They walk when the piece commences counter-directionally to each other, spiraling…. They walk at the same speed, aiming the camera at each other.\(^{56}\)

Graham has made it clear that the idea for this work derived from an optical device of the nineteenth-century, namely the stereoscope. The stereoscope is an apparatus that employs two separate eyepieces or lenses to impart a three-dimensional effect to two photographs of the same scene that are taken at slightly different angles. The work also makes a reference to Peter Mark Roget's accidental discovery of the stroboscopic principle of apparent motion. The British physician and compiler of the *Thesaurus* happened to notice that the spokes of the wheel on a passing cart seemed to stand still while he looked through the bars of a slatted fence. This experience lead Roget to the realization that the periodic movement can be decomposed into static units and then recomposed again, a realization that would greatly contribute to the invention of cinema.

The motives behind Graham's archaeology of technique will be examined in the next section, but there is another historical figure which has already been alluded to, namely the photographic series or 'chronophotography' of Muybridge, which can further clarify the structure of the slide installations. It will also illuminate why he could afford to eliminate the 'discontinuous aspect' of the slide projects at the formal level of their narrative axis. An elimination which was the result of his taking up a Super 8 camera.\(^{57}\) He discovered, namely, a more fundamental principle of disruption at the technical level of the discursive event.

Graham is the first to admit that the figure of chronophotography provides a genealogical link between his films and Minimalism:

Ironically it wasn't the new medium of cinema which devolved from Edison's invention, but the steps along its path – the analysis of motion – which first 'moved' artists. Marey's work is
What Graham admired in serial photography was the disjunctive appearance of its spatiality which subjects the body to a process of multiplication – the one repeated as many. ‘Each image is always in the present,’ Graham explains, ‘No moment is created: things – moments – are sufficient unto themselves.’ What presents itself is a spatial juxtaposition of moments where ‘things don’t happen; they merely replace themselves relative to the framing edge and to each other.’ It follows that the series of Marey lack a transcendent subject for there is no single, fixed point of view. All changes from one frame to the next are strictly positional, he remarks, and “only involve the motion of the reader’s eye (not the artist’s ‘I’).” The eye is moved by the rhythm of photographic device, rather than intending a visual depth of field. There is no perspectival presence of the world to the viewer, but only a succession of locomotive phases against a flat, black ground. Before this lateral shift of planes, the viewer becomes disassociated from its object.

The chronophotograph does nothing so well as picture the spatialized time of commodified experience. No moment is created, each moment is sufficient unto itself: that is a perfect definition of the commodity image. Seemingly always lodged in the present, nothing ever truly ‘happens’ to the subject placed before this screen of perpetual return. Faced by this spectacle of shifting planes, the subject is transformed into the Baudelairean figure of a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, but for one major difference: the chronophotograph does not completely conceal the structural underpinnings of its display. Likewise, to use the camera not as an available tool but to disclose its material conditions of performance is the difficulty posed by Graham’s ‘subject matter.’ To do otherwise, is to condemn oneself to the losing game of phenomenology.

How is this game of phenomenology played? A two-fold tactic is required. First, to render the contingency of the body into a condition of transcendence, as in the ‘vague power’ of Merleau-Ponty. Secondly, this inversion must be accompanied by the identification of the body as a projective apparatus. The techniques of the body, therefore, are given a more metaphorical than literal sense. The lived body incorporates depth through its tools, it settles within the complex of instrumental practices as within a house. The alternative would be to face an ‘unsettling’ dispersion of the body. And this alternative of a metonymic contiguity between body and machine has been presented by Merleau-Ponty’s former student, Michel Foucault, in his genealogy of the corporeal techniques of disciplinary power. Somewhere in the interstice between the two, resides a marvelous movie by Buster Keaton called the Electric House (1922) in which an engineer-impostor becomes increasingly controlled by the malfunctioning contraptions of modern comfort. Homes for America presents a less acrobatic but not less humorous version of the house as machine: an architecture not of place but of decomposition.

We might now comprehend the motive behind LeWitt’s shift into depth with Muybridge ii. We can, that is, provide a phenomenological rationale for this shift. The lateral series of Muybridge presents a model of subjectivity that exists within time, precipitating the need for another observer at the back of consciousness to string along this succession for the first, and then a third to do the same for the second, etc. To pre-empt such a scattering of the self, Merleau-Ponty insists, we must understand time as the subject and the sub-

---

58 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh was the first to identify the importance of this passage in his essay ‘Process Sculpture and Film in Richard Serra’s Work,’ in Richard Serra: Arbeiten 66-77 (Tübingen: Kunsthalte, 1978).

ject as time. In other words, subjectivity must fall together with the apparatus of projection. At this moment, the inward collapse of consciousness halts and reverses itself. And subjectivity itself becomes the producer of a difference: a temporality that temporalizes itself. Rather than the decomposition of the bird’s flight into static instants, we have the “grayish power of flight [...] this flurry of plumage still here, which is already there in a kind of ubiquity, like the comet with its tail.”61 Better still, we have the phenomenon of a ‘pure transition’ in which the temporal dimensions of past, present and future perpetually overlap, each destined and implied by the other, ‘aimed at as something other than itself.’ Aimed at, that is, by the gaze of the subject who stands at the center of time.62

Muybridge II suggests but does not fully implement this ‘pure transition’ of time. However, a filmic analogy exists of such a projective self that was well known to Graham. I am referring, of course, to Michael Snow’s Wavelength.63 This movie consists of a continuous zoom across a loft interior, yet the backwash of past moments lap against the stern of the camera as it continues to plow a passage through depth. Within the span of its attentive gesture, Wavelength presents the temporal pulsation of a lived present through a superimposition of frames. The film objectifies, so to speak, the intentionality of a gaze that “holds a past and a present within its thickness.”64 And the directionality of this gaze becomes a head-long, ‘ecstatic’ rush into the future, a kind of ingestion of space, which makes even the event of death that momentarily intrudes before the camera seem irrelevant.

And, then, there is Graham’s Binocular Zoom...

A Topology of Skin

The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself a projection of a surface.65

Sigmund Freud

A photograph exists of Graham that could form an illustration to an instructional manual on cinematography, were it not that Graham’s mode of instruction is utterly deviant. The image is quite unassuming in quality, a mere document of the artist at work. Yet, the camera is not handled in accordance with any industrial standard. The photograph in question accompanies Graham’s notes on the film Binocular Zoom of 1969. The illustration is not a still culled from the film, but a mise-en-scène of the film performance, which requires that the cinematographer zoom into the sun with two Super 8 mm cameras placed against the eyes. Looking downwards, the photograph projects the foreshortened contours of the filmmaker’s body against the pebbly ground. Graham’s head strains backward in order to stare into the sun. Or is it the look of the camera he returns? We cannot be sure, because instead of looking into his eyes, we only see the diaphragms of the Super 8 camera boxes. Two black holes rimmed in white like two strangely dilated pupils, which do not acknowledge our look so much as point at us with their wide, blank stare.

In staging this photograph, Graham accomplishes a number of things at once. First of all, he indicates how the filmic experience itself exceeds representation. The two filmstrips are aligned next to his portrait but this procedure does not unite cause and event within the ‘architecture’ of the whole. We do not survey a topographical scene in all its spatio-temporal dimensions at once, because the perspective of Graham, which itself is internally split, never matches up with our own. We strain to locate ourselves within this space wherein we are substituted by the sun ‘behind our heads’ like the projector beam...
in the cinema. The photograph does not illustrate the film. It cannot because the mediation of one gaze by another produces a series of infinite regress, as Graham acutely observed in relation to the serialized space of Minimalism.

And then there is an additional aspect to the photograph that hardly bears representation, namely its humorous quality. Graham handles the Super 8 cameras in an improper fashion, at least when judged against their marketed use. He diverts the instrument towards another end. He re-invents, as it were, the device as a scientific toy.66 What this strategy attests to, first of all, is the utter familiarity of the speech act it transgresses. We might encounter this statement on our daily trips to the store: ‘Please read the instructions. This device might cause you harm if used improperly.’ But the notion of the scientific toy in its welding of pleasure and reason, science and entertainment, is also a figure of the past. What the photographic mise-en-scène of Binocular Zoom seems to recreate most of all is the mythical event of the birth of cinema, which began, precisely, with a blinding of vision. Not 1896, that is, but the summer of 1829 during which Jacques Plateau could be encountered staring into the sun. The Belgian physiologist was studying the temporal effect of the after-images that were burned into his retina. In the course of these observations he was to lay the groundwork for the principle of the persistence of vision. Whether possessing scientific validity or not, this principle was to enable the later nineteenth-century to conceive of a cinematographic synthesis of movement. Plateau lost his eyesight in the end, but not before he helped one phantasm beget another. The Belgian, in fact, constructed his own device to replicate his scientific findings, the phenakistiscope. This device consists of a slotted wheel, which the observer holds close to his eye while standing before a mirror. When turned, an image sequence depicted on the other side of the wheel is transformed into the animated illusion of, for instance, a horse galloping in place. And this scientific invention was also to enjoy a commercial success.

What the case of Plateau exemplifies is the performative nature of the observer in modernity. The observer, that is, in its historical construction as a specific modality of perception. Graham’s portrait superimposes this past on the present. What Graham’s snapshot resembles, therefore, most strongly is Walter Benjamin’s dialectical image of the past that, like “a flash of lightning” suddenly disrupts the empty continuum of the eternal present.67 In this spacing of past and present, in its superimposition of two moments, the myth of progress is shown to be a sham. Indeed, cinema did not simply improve upon the earlier devices such as the phenakistiscope, but submitted this earlier moment to a dialectical process of inversion and concealment. To stop the dialectic in its tracks, to produce an image of the dialectic at a standstill, is to conduct a politics of history demanded by both Benjamin and Graham alike.

But what is it that cinema must conceal? That is what the ‘instructional’ image of Graham truly demonstrates. For the photograph indicates both the archaeology of knowledge and genealogy of power that cinema suppresses. The optical techniques of physiology established the subject’s body as the combined site of the production and consumption of images. And here we approach the true lesson of the past as it figured in the physiological experiment of the nineteenth century and is defined, with superb intelligence, by Jonathan Crary in his Techniques of the Observer: the spectator combines successively the sites of viewing subject, object of observation and optical apparatus.68 And within this institutionalized field of visuality there is no permanent synthesis, only a temporal spacing of subject positions in depth.

---

68 The following discussion will draw extensively on Crary’s study.
What is striking about the optical devices of the 1830's and 1840's, such as the phenakistiscope or the stereoscope, first of all, is the exposure of their structural mechanism. The observer is fully aware of his physical contiguity with an apparatus of vision, which, in its turn, openly displays its material procedure of subjectivication. This lack of mediation between body and technique is of the metonymic order of the machine not the metaphorical order of the available tool. In short, the apparatus both enforces and exhibits the passivity of the observer who is captivated by the spectacle conjured within the coupling of body and machine. Secondly, these devices materialize a temporal differential within the domain of perception. Rather than affirming the presentness of the world to an ideal eye, this transcendent point of view is severed from its moorings. Particularly the stereoscope, as Crary notes, attests to this eradication of an external point of reference in the knowing subject. The perception of depth in stereoscopic vision does not permanently coalesce, as in normal, binocular vision, but appears as a temporal effect of the spatial distanciation between the binary images. Moreover, this material difference irritates within the perceptual field, which assumes an ambiguous, disjunctive quality. Depth is arranged as a visual succession of planes, yet the intermediate space is difficult to comprehend and becomes strangely tangible in quality. In other words, the scenic relationship of the viewer to the world has been disturbed in this coition of flesh and machine. And that, we might say, forms the Copernican reversal of the nineteenth-century, an age that established the body as part of a machinic assemblage.

The physiological gaze reconfigured the body as a skin-like topology of “permeable, overlapping screens of planar space,” but it also reproduced the world in its own image through its optical techniques. But this organization of the body as a mobile and multiple network was not restricted to science, but also operative in the realm of industrial production which implemented its own disciplinary techniques of corporeal inscription, admired by the likes of both Frederick Winslow Taylor and Sergei Eisenstein. Where this technical subjectivication of the body was suppressed, however, was in the institutional domain of cultural production. Nevertheless, the autonomy of the Modernist beholder and the voyeurism of the cinematic spectator are both predicated on such a physiology of vision. From the hallucinatory presence of Greenberg’s optical space, to the phantasmatization of reality in the cinema, we might continue to dream ourselves into the center of the world.

Of course, Modernism and science did not need to be enemies (as Modernism and industry did). After all, they share the same cognitive subject who confirms his/her self-identity by testing the laws of the discipline. But the complicity of the experimentalist in the experiment must not be spoken, for to pronounce this disavowal would cause a rude awakening. And, of course, this is exactly the scandal performed by Graham’s films. If he returns to the prehistory of cinema, then it is precisely to underscore the corrective function of scientific technique that this toy was to repress. ‘Learning exercises,’ he calls his performances, and not totally in jest. In fact, his films might be called experimental, but not in an artistic sense of formal investigation. Graham mimics the procedural approach of scientific research, yet this does not entail that he projects the methodological ground plan of science onto the gallery floor. Although the spectator of his films and performances seems submitted to a kind of psycho-physical training or behavioral test, this does not make the museum into a laboratory. What Graham’s procedure does state is his ambivalence concerning the disciplinary nature of these institutional spaces.

The films also emphasize Graham’s ambivalent response to the productivist strategies of the historical avant-garde. The artist was attracted to the possibilities opened up...
by new technology but not to the point of succumbing to a utopian enthusiasm. For the avant-garde replicated the metaphorical relationship of the body to the available tool. Its favorite figure of the camera-eye returns in an uncanny sense in Graham's films. There is almost something grotesque about the mingling of flesh and camera, which underscores the weight of the historical trauma he exposes.

The suspended dialectic of past and present in Graham's cinema is also a pause between a utopian and lapsarian moment of time. In order to comprehend the nature of this pause, we must realize what it means to perform an archaeology of the cinema in the sixties. Which is not the same thing as performing it today — a fact that often is occluded in the current resurgence of the artist film. The dialectical image of these films appear in a space marked by the passing of Minimalism and Pop art and the emergence of the expanded field of Post-Minimalist practices, such as Conceptual, Process and Performance art. Within this already divided space of the present, the filmic 'shell' of Graham was wedged. And within this series a 'new' possibility was entered, that of the Super 8 camera:

A great thing happened when the Super 8 camera came in, or a particular one which had a fixed focus, which made possible all the film pieces I did really. First that it was very small so I could put it right on my eye, so that it was an extension of my eye... And secondly being fixed focus you could have both the periphery of your body [...] and also the horizon line. Also as you moved you didn't have to change focus. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't have been able to do Two Correlated Rotations or the Roll film [...]71

The introduction of the Super 8 film camera during the mid-sixties made it possible for him to return to the historical figure of the camera-eye, not to simply repeat it but to transform it under the varying circumstances of the current context. The Super 8 camera brought movie making home to a mass audience of producers, the industrial response to the revolutionary hopes of the twenties. But in this expansion of a do-it-yourself spectacle, the former ideal of productivism has been all but extinguished. Everyone a filmmaker did not quite live up to the promise of its original statement.

During the late fifties, experimental filmmakers could take heart in the transfiguration of suburban yards into movie sets. Graham's films do not regress to such a state of naiveté, but neither do they cancel the essence of utopian thought: to disrupt the continuum of time. In the raking light of the twin projectors, endlessly repeated, endlessly decomposed, Graham catches the shadow of another time flitting across the seamless surface of the image: "I was interested in that same surface appearance [...] which is a kind of optical surface somewhere [...] the spectator, the thing itself — the camera, the lens, the mechanism, the time relationship in the mechanism being recorded and then played back [...] the performance."72 This performance is the malfunction of the machine, the differential that interrupts the perpetual present of the spectacle.

The Super 8 camera no longer formed the prop of a 'free' subject in the hands of Graham. Ordinarily, the camera conceals the more disturbing aspects of the earlier optical devices, that is, their materiality and differential effect. The lightweight automatic camera releases us from our passivity while we take snapshots of our tour around the world. Improved shutter speed and sharpness of focus divest the visual field of its more ambiguous qualities. But little is needed to turn this relation around, to materialize the difference it conceals. To show, that is, the neutrality of the instrument as a skin-like 'interface':

A camera on the eye or on the body is the interface between the visual world ('outside') and the body's cylindrical perimeter bounding its own ('interior') 360° space.73
This interface is not a ground against which things stand out for me. It is a constantly shifting, reversible screen of consciousness. When Graham speaks of the phenomenology of his cinema, it is not one in which Merleau-Ponty would recognize himself:

Phenomenologically, the camera, its representations, and the spectator's view are the meeting point between, and can be seen to be any of, the elements of visual consciousness — if consciousness is partly external (situated in the object simulated in what is seen), partly internal (situated in the eye or camera), and partly cybernetic or interpretive (situated in the central nervous system or the process of attention which, with the body's muscle/skeletal systems, achieves orientations in the world).  

These switching termini of Graham's cinema, consciousness as both internal and external, present a kind of phenomenological project in ruins. The camera positioned as an 'interface' does not just sub lend a subjective vector of projection. The camera will take on a material aspect, and it will exist not only as an object for the self but as an object for a possible other as well. It will, in short, manifest an "unpredictable but still very real reverse side."  

To capture this reversibility of the visual axis, Jean-Paul Sartre has spoken of a drain hole in the middle of the world through which being is continually flowing off. Likewise Graham suggests that the body forms nothing but a cylindrical "hole" within the 360° environment of outside space, although a more familiar source of this thought would be a statement of Carl Andre: "A thing is a hole in a thing it is not."  

The phenomenological horizon of meaning has been thoroughly debased by the filmic function of Graham. Sunset to Sunrise of 1969 was the only film that was not shot according to a binocular schema of two cameras. But it also rests on a structural principle of doubling which turns the horizon, as it were, inside out. We believe that we experience one extended pan, mirroring our own continuity in space, but it contains a temporal elision — the gap between sunset and sunrise. But there is a further disturbance of our implantation in space. As Graham remarks, we observe "the inside 'dome' of the sky as if the observer was situated outside the spherical surface; so the earth rotates about itself and about the sun, the viewer rotates in relation to the sky."  

Man is not the center of this filmic universe.

Body Press presents an altogether more complex experience to the spectator. However, I hesitate to call it a culmination of Graham's series (which chronologically it definitely is not). We are not dealing with a perfection of Graham's method, its climactic moment represented by Body Press. The statement of Graham's cinema is contained in the films as a series. Which is to say, not in their discrete identity as objects, but in their temporal dispersion of the structural elements of the camera and the body. The films are to be used and repeated, not to be collected as things. This discursive function is contained as well in Graham's film notes with their combination of descriptive and interpretative, instructional and demonstrative language. The same function, furthermore, is enacted in Graham's alternation between the roles of artist and scientist, performer and observer, self and other.

We are now able to fully appreciate the fact that the actual experience of these films remains beyond representation, as I have suggested before. The projective space of the film is not homogeneous, but an aggregate, visual field split between the two screens, like the two images of the stereoscope, and this field never completely converges in one point. The viewer as a result enters into a chiasmic loop of endless transposition and exchange. The spiraling movement of the camera, its lens never coinciding with the performer's eyes, makes the viewer's identification with the mechanical eye problematic, at times even impossible: 

---

75 "The appearance of the Other, on the contrary, causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect which I did not wish, of which I am not master, and which on principle escapes me since it is for the Other [...]. It is the unpredictable but still very real reverse side." Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992): 355.
76 "But the Other is still an object for me. He belongs to my distances [...] hence the disintegration of my universe is contained within the limits of this same universe: we are not dealing here with a flight of the world toward nothingness or outside itself. Rather it appears that the world has a kind of drain hole in the middle of its being and that it is perpetually flowing off through this hole." Sartre 1992: 343.
78 Sunset to Sunrise was first executed as a photographic sequence.
79 End Moments 1969: 38.
A camera placed on another part of the performer's body or within his field of vision may be part of the performer's body feedback system. A camera's identity, in relation to the spectator's perception, may be part of the performer, one part of him but not another part of him, or not part of him (a separate mechanical object). Its image may be read inside and outside the performer, appearing as simultaneously subject and object.60

No longer the exhibitor of an objective space, the camera becomes a phantasmatic object in its own right. The camera appears to belong both to me and to an other, therefore I am forced to acknowledge that the other knows that I know that the other knows, etc., in an endless falling away of self from self.

Placed in an eccentric orbit in space, the gaze of the camera is continuously turned around and set upon the spectator. Body Press, for instance, submits the viewer to an incessant inversion of active and passive subject positions similar to the nude male and female performers placed in their tight spot of confinement. Furthermore, the visual field alternates between a perspectival clarity and an anamorphic distortion of boundaries, casting the subject, as it were, again and again from its center. This split within the visual field opens and closes again, yielding a brief glimpse of an undistorted reflection of camera and body. Yet, only seconds later, the image flows off along the curved surface of the mirror in a boundless mass of flesh, glass, and metal while the camera continues its helical path, slipping from one horizon to another. Body Press, like Graham's other films, places the phenomenological loop of seeing/seen, touching/touched, in a kind of 'anonymous' space, its axis revolving outside the center of the subject. A constant confusion of tactile and visual cues is the result, an indistinctiveness of subject and object that derives from the physical proximity of the camera to the body.

In sum, Body Press appears as a literal pun on the French pellicule with its double meaning of skin and film. The film's visual structure indeed resembles that of a skin stretched between inner and outer space, both concave and convex, a scroll endlessly twisted inside out.

To the spectator the camera's optical vantage is the skin. (An exception is when the performer's eyes are also seen reflected or when the cameras are seen filming the other.) The performer's musculature is also 'seen' pressing into the surface of the body (pulling inside out). At the same time, kinesetically, the handling of the camera can be 'felt' by the spectator as surface tension — as the hidden side of the camera presses and slides against the skin it covers at a particular moment.61

The filmic topology of Graham projects consciousness as a surface or, as Freud suggested, a 'skin-ego.' An ego, that is, which always remains on the verge of dispersal for it can never fall together in a founding act of self-reflection. We can draw a topographical chart of this skin-ego, as Freud has done on several occasions, however he also warned against the misleading aspect of such diagrams. The psychic economy of differentiation cannot be reduced to the spatial terms of representation; there is no external, atemporal perspective. Similarly, Graham likes to dose his texts with several diagrams, illustrations and demonstrational photographs. Yet, these supplementary figures cannot graph the filmic event as such. Unless, perhaps, it comes in the distorted version of Ernst Mach's drawing which featured on a flyer for a performance at 98 Greene Street in 1971 and again on the cover of the 1977 Films catalog. This image shows a skewed perspective of space seen from one eye, framed by the distinct arch of the brow nose, and moustache on the left and a foreshortened book case on the left that dissolves into the periphery of vision. Jutting into the center of this space, the prone, lower body of the scientist is
shown, resting on a sofa. This body, however, has no spatial connection to the curved facial segment of brow, nose and moustache. And then from the right comes a disjointed hand holding a pencil as a kind of measuring device. This index of scale and distance might analytically draw the contours of this disjunctive field but not project its unity from the beginning.

The self as a projection of a surface – yes, but located on which side of this curving screen? Graham’s films do not draw the lineaments of a place, they do not establish a definite locale that we might inhabit. This self-evidence of location, the very possibility of locating ourselves in space, is called into doubt. This filmic topology could not stand at a greater remove from the topography of Modernist painting. What Modernism states is that the painting ‘faces me, draws my limits, and discovers my scale; it fronts me, with whatever wall at my back, and gives me horizon and gravity.’ In short, it “reasserts that, in whatever locale I find myself, I am to locate myself.” Modernism proposes the presentness of the ‘performance’ of art, a proposition that Graham does not share. But should I seem indiscriminate in my use of the word performance, let me place it in a more specific historical context. By this means, we can establish in what sense the ‘performative’ nature of Graham’s films is not to be confused with performance at large.

Postscript: Performance as Film

They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me. I must play the game, of not seeing I see the game.

R. D. Laing

Film and Performance is the prosaic title that Graham gave to his collection of film notes published in 1976. In light of the foregoing, we might rewrite this title to spell Performance as Film. The performance does not consist of some gesture in space that exists prior to its filmic mediation; it is developed on film in a quite literal sense. Likewise, the screening does not take place after the fact as in the case of a narrative of documentary film. The screening is an exhibition and a performative event. The viewer is enveloped in the folds of its ‘skin.’

But Graham’s reception of contemporary performance art needs further elaboration. As always, Graham was wary of identifying himself completely with a particular medium and, therefore, his role as performer was to take an ambivalent form. He resisted any specialization as a performance artist, just as he refused to obey the preceding division of labor under Modernism. Hence, when Graham states that he organized performances ‘because many other artists then also did,’ this statement should not be interpreted as a self-disparaging comment, but as an indication of the underlying strategy of ‘de-composition’ that provides his work with such remarkable critical strength.

Graham’s interest in performance art was incited after becoming acquainted with the work of Bruce Nauman. In 1969, Graham attended a live performance of Nauman for the first time. It was Bouncing in a Corner that he witnessed at the Whitney Museum during the landmark exhibition ‘Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials.’ As performed at the Whitney, Bouncing in a Corner consisted of three performers with arms held slack to their sides, who repeatedly fell with their backs against the walls of the stage, causing a thumping sound to reverberate throughout the auditorium space. The performance lasted until bodily fatigue set in. In Graham’s crucial essay ‘Subject Matter,’ which
describes his formation as an artist, he provides ample space for the description of *Bouncing in a Corner.* Graham would also have had an earlier opportunity to see Nauman’s work during his one-man exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery in early 1968. In the Castelli exhibition, Nauman used a projection box to show two of his own films, namely *Thighing* and *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk around the Studio.*

The precedent set by Nauman’s films is unmistakable. Particularly the *Studio Film* quartet to which *Playing a Note on the Violin* belongs and that was shot during the winter of 1967-68. Graham has certainly never downplayed the importance of Nauman’s filmic practice to his own work. What the films of Nauman and Graham hold in common is the interrelation of the performer’s body and the camera that produces a doubled surface, or interface, of mutual reflection. But there is also a significant distinction between the two filmic methods, which I can only briefly indicate at present.

Nauman’s *Studio Film* series employs a static camera to depict the artist, alone in the studio, while performing a repetitive task. The movements of his body are correlated to a taped square on the floor, which is tightly framed by the camera aperture. But this is not strictly a documentary device. Contrary to common opinion, Nauman did not create a neutral record of the performance, although that might have been the original plan. Nor, should I add, do these films indulge the same mode of self-dramatization that motivated Graham’s colleagues Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim and who shared his interest in Nauman’s work. Nauman revels in the execution of a ‘bad’ performance, both on the level of his motoric skills and technical knowledge of film. A dysfunctional method is structural to the work. Nauman exhibits a deskilled notion of ‘training’ that counters the habituality of the phenomenological self who embodies space by means of his ‘tools.’ What registers most strongly in viewing Nauman’s films is a sense of disassociation; an awareness, that is, of the artist’s losing game of inhabiting the empty studio which is invaded by the camera. And together with this dispossession of the self, who incessantly alternates between private and public space, arrives an impression of physiological fatigue, of a faltering rhythm of the body, that is echoed in a breakdown of the filmic apparatus itself.

In turning the camera on the performer, Nauman and Graham situate the subject in the space of the gaze, rather than placing the subject at its core (as in the case of *Wave Length*). As a result, the subject’s involvement in its projects becomes marked by ambivalence; the connection between the subjects’ possibility and the instrument is objectified. In the gaze of the other, Sartre would say, my possibilities appear alien to me. They appear, that is, as no more than a probability that resides outside of me and ‘the ensemble ‘instrument-possibility’ made up of myself confronting the instrument, appears to me as surpassed and organized into a world by the Other.’” Hence, the wavering concentration of Nauman, the intermittent loss of control and occasional sense of frustration played out before the camera. (Which implants a similar discomfort in the viewer.) But for all the similarities between the films of Nauman and Graham, Nauman’s work does not alter the scenic relationship of the viewer to the projected situation. The camera in the *Studio Films* remains outside the space so that the viewer can master the situation to a degree that Nauman cannot. Nauman will sometimes make a vain gesture of defiance by walking off-screen, but this only succeeds in acknowledging the primacy of the camera’s gaze. Even my possibility of hiding in the dark corner, Sartre writes, is surpassed by the other who always already casts its light there before I can make my move. As a result, the spectator in Nauman’s cinema retains the furtive position of a voyeur (Nauman never looks directly at the camera), unlike the discursive conditions of Graham’s cinema. The

---

89 Graham offered ‘Subject Matter’ to both *Arts Forum* and *Arts Magazine* but both magazines rejected it. He then published it on his own in *End Moments,* which had an edition of circa 150 copies.
90 The pieces Nauman exhibited at Castelli Gallery, such as *Foil Arrangements* and various body casts, manifested several areas of overlap with Graham’s preoccupations. For instance, the use of mechanical media of reproduction, the exploration of serial procedures and metonymic relationships, the literalism of execution, not to mention the undercurrent of humor. The model of space employed by Nauman at this time, however, is still predominantly topographical in kind with some major exceptions, such as the casts of negative space. But even though these objects present a kind of phenomenological paradox, they do not completely remove the gaze from the viewer’s hold. His later video installations would profoundly change the nature of the game.
91 John Perreault mentions the projection box in ‘The Act of Seeing,’ *The Village Voice* 13, no. 17 (February 8, 1968): 19-21. He also identifies what is presumably *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio,* by the title *Playing The Violin Even Though I Don’t Know How To Play.* Thighing performs an interesting play on the (de-) differentiation of Freud’s ‘ego-skin’ by presenting a fragmentary close-up of a thigh which is being pinched by a hand. The soundtrack con-
viewed, as well as the performer, in Graham's work is placed in a literal state of perpetual revolution within the material context of the gallery/film apparatus. In short, the situation escapes the spectator as much as the performer on screen; he is situated in the space of the gaze at a third remove.\(^{96}\)

This voyeuristic quality of Nauman's films prompts a return to Metz's theory of the cinema, for he opposes the voyeuristic gaze of cinema with the look supported by another medium, namely theater. Metz maintains that the theater almost automatically manifests the reversibility of the exhibitionist relationship that is suppressed in classical cinema. There is a different economy of desire (and money) at work in the theater, he claims. In this space the actor and the spectator enter into an active form of mutual complicity. Neither actor nor spectator are isolated, but form the participants in a collective event. The theater retains, that is, an archaic trace of its origin in a Greek ceremony of civic proportions, a public festival during which a whole population "puts itself on display for its own enjoyment."\(^{97}\) The present-day audience of the theater, of course, carries little memory of this celebration of the 'we', of being together. A fact that would lead to the ambivalent appraisal of the theater in Sartre who would both detect a possibility of reprieve from the other's gaze — in the dark we all become co-spectators — and a possibility of its institutionalization — the spectators who offer themselves up as a spectacle during the intermission.\(^{98}\) An ambivalence, of course, already contained in Metz's own words and which speaks closely to the concerns that Graham manifested in his performance work. For he is to become interested in the political possibilities (and probabilities) of collective activity.

There is a lot to be gained from considering this dialectic of theater vs. cinema, because we know its ramifications within the field of the visual arts during the sixties.\(^{99}\) However, this is not the time or the place to develop this argument. I will, therefore, conclude my discussion by merely pointing out how this dialectic might lead beyond film into video. At which point my story will come to an end.

To resume, Graham's model of performance as film clearly combines the antithetical terms of theater and cinema. His films, after all, take place as much on the darkened floor of the gallery as on the reflective screen mounted on the wall. And I say this not only because their installation makes it sheer impossible for the viewer not to step into front of the light. Graham's films combine cinema and theater because they are not concerned with preserving a unique performance within time, as in the case of cinema, or with conducting a perfect performance over time, as in the case of theater.\(^{100}\)

But for all that, these films cannot materialize Metz's 'festivities' of collective performance. The projective structure of cinema and its idealist subject might be subverted by Graham's performance as film. Yet the subject of the filmic apparatus will always remain confined to the epistemic situation of the physiological gaze. Classical cinema attempts to transform this limiting condition of the embodied viewer into the illusion of transcendence, only to exact the further isolation of the viewer from the social body. The question that performance art posed to Graham, however, was less concerned with the socio-economic process of individuation than the emergence of an alternative politics of the group during the sixties.

The rise of performance art, as Graham notes, relied on the organization of alternative art spaces where the rules that governed access to the traditional art world could be ignored. But this institutional shift participated in the broader social phenomenon of countercultural practices represented by, for instance, the antipsychiatry movement of Gregory Bateson and Ronald D. Laing, the foundation of collectives, the popularity of...
meditation exercises, consciousness-raising sessions and encounter groups. Performance, by embedding itself within this context, presented a combination of social therapy and political activity that promised to transform the very structure of the art world. And Graham was to 'quote' freely from these sources. In this respect Performance art offered the opportunity of exploring a more democratic practice of art that could replace the 'hermetic, anonymous information quality' of early conceptualism.

But in quoting, Graham was not completely embracing a countercultural role because he was also very clear about its susceptibility to cooption. We confront here the issue of the mode of self-understanding that is ingrained in the act of cultural resistance. An issue I have raised before. While alternative forms of 'being-together' might have emerged from the shadowy margins of society, they were also being increasingly circulated in the mass media channels, as Graham was quick to grasp. The phenomenon of marginality, the artist suggests, never exists in a pure state. In becoming visible a counterculture is necessarily marked by its relationship to the dominant spectacle, even if this relationship takes a negative form.

And this heteronomy of the group necessarily flows from the perceptual structure of the collective space itself. A collective space is not binocular in the sense of Graham's films, but requires three looks. For two to feel as one, they must be placed under the surveillance of a third. Of course, the films intrinsically prepare for such a triangulation of the visual field in their tri-partite structure of performer, observer, and apparatus, but the performer and observer do not occupy the same physical space. The medium of video, on the other hand, offers just this possibility of co-existence:

Unlike film, where both sound and visual tracks are of necessity in the past and constructed from discontinuous segments, edited and reordered according to the conventional rules of syntax, video is assumed to correspond/be congruent to the real, present-time/space continuum [...] shared by the producers and receivers of the video.101

To exhibit the collective of producers and receivers is to materialize this third look as it penetrates within the real, present-time/space continuum. While resistance to the instrumentality of this other gaze forms the collective's common cause, it also remains outside and in view of a 'televised' end that escapes the 'we.'

To submit this dialectic of the gaze to an entropic pull is again the favored tactic of Graham. An early performance, such as TV Camera/Monitor Performance of 1970, for instance, consists of the artist rolling back-and-forth on a stage while holding a video camera directed at a monitor that is installed at the back of the audience. The monitor transmits the live image from the camera that reflects parts of Graham's body and members of the audience, besides the video camera itself. As a result the audience, performer, and the technical apparatus differentiate themselves out into three separate, yet overlapping surfaces: "the machine to itself, I to my task, and the audience to its bodies in place are all closed feedback systems or 'learning' loops."102 Only in this incessant coming together and falling apart of the collective can the possibility of a future politics reside. To seek a permanent status of the group is to disavow the reifying properties of this panoptic gaze. And, once more, Graham would underscore this double bind by holding the utopian promise of performance art in suspension.

But I am now entering another future that will need another time to be told. A future of the video monitor that already is past. Today it is the video projector that awaits exhibition. And in the background the voice keeps repeating: 'I am at the cinema. I am present.' Are you still there?