

7 The Presence of Video

Making the Displaced and Disappeared Self Visible

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Video is a ghost of yourself.¹

This essay extends traditional notions of the photographic by considering how video, and specifically home-video, interfaces with contemporary transnational discourse by proposing the concept of *homing-video*. Through the distinct ways it foregrounds the process of imaging the unstable, shifting, and disappearing realm of “home”, I focus on a video work by Japanese artist Shigeeko Kubota entitled *My Father* (1975), which encapsulates complex aspects of a transnational subject caught between two countries and two spaces of belonging. By examining Kubota’s video work, I also suggest how it overrides traditional, “objective” representational notions of much documentary-based practice towards a more performative mode of engagement through an interrogation of the ontological conventions of the photographic.

Shigeeko Kubota (1937–2015) was born in Japan and moved to New York in 1963 to become a central figure in New York Fluxus events in the 1960s, and an important practitioner of early video art. In keeping with the Fluxus ethos, her work promotes experimentation across mediums often incorporating performance, installation, sculpture, and electronic media. Her *Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase* (1976), which featured video monitors embedded in a plywood staircase, was the first video sculpture acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Kubota and her husband, Nam June Paik, pioneered the development of video art, exploring the aesthetic, technological, emotive, and even organic potential of the medium. Her work has also been influential in feminist art discourse with its critique of patriarchal paradigms in the art world as exemplified by her infamous *Vagina Paintings* (1965), which were a direct commentary against hyper-masculine action paintings. Additionally, Kubota was also influential in her fusion of Western and Eastern dichotomies in her work as a means of critiquing the dominance of Western perspectives. As a transnational artist, Kubota was a pioneer in challenging the status quo of dominant art discourse through an interdisciplinary art practice that explored the influence of technology on personal memory and the emotions, and specifically much of her single-channel video work eulogizes and explores the notion of presence in recorded images. One of these is *My Father*, which is a response to the death of her father and includes home-video footage of them watching television together while he is ill with cancer, as well as footage of herself mourning his death.

Kubota’s *My Father* challenges assumptions about the nature and veracity of the photographic image—here understood to include camera-based recordings, both still

and moving. I focus on video in this discussion because, despite its many similarities to both still photography and film (photo-chemically-based), it also has some important differences that Kubota's work explores, namely, video's ability to engage with notions of presence in a unique way through the concept of simulation through playback. This simulation is best understood as a type of representation through electronic reproduction that is characteristic of video-based media.² Unlike film, which imprints onto a celluloid material that is tactically malleable but requires time between the recording and projection of the recorded image, video's form of electronic recording is more materially ambivalent and abstracted, but also more immediate. Video's "materiality" is composed of encoded electronic pulses which, when played back, (re)create a moving image. Video's ability to convert picture and sound directly into data also allows for the ability to both shoot and view simultaneously, otherwise understood as a process of immediate construction and reconstruction of signals into an image. The simultaneous fusing of production and reproduction of video constitutes what has been described as reflexive,³ which engenders a particular type of simulation of the real in real time. Kubota's video exploits the medium's potential to simultaneously expand and compress time, events, and places through a type of layering of video images that blur the causal linearity of these qualities. The particular ability for video to simulate the real in this way consequently functions to extend and amplify the photographic into the realm of the performative by creating a more complex form of viewership. Here, I refer to the performative not only in relation to the events recorded by the camera in front of the lens, but more broadly to also include the implicit performativity imbedded in the activity of video viewership itself.

To better understand how *My Father* extends ontological notions of the photographic it is useful to retrace how we've come to understand the way in which photography functions. Since its invention in the 1800s, photography and the moving image have progressively evolved to shape our belief in representations of the real and consequently how we see, perceive, understand, and negotiate the world in which we live. Where once we believed that photography was merely a type of one-way "mirror" of the real, today we understand the photographic to be something much more complex and interwoven into our everyday experiences. At the core of the initial ontological trust we once had in the early "naturalist" or "realist" concepts of the photographic, is the idea that the principal cause of any photographic representation is its direct and exclusive relationship with the object or event it represents. This idea—which has since been widely contested and revised—lies in the notion that there is an essential distinction between the pictorial (which is more "subjective" as it is made from the hand of the artist), and the realist, which is more "objective" since it is made through a mechanical and more precise recording device. These early conceptions of the photographic are based on the determination of the causal continuity between what is recorded with the camera, and the image made of it.

Moving from this early ontological conception of the photographic as not "made from the hand" but rather, emerging from Nature and "fixed" by the mechanical photographic apparatus and process, a second ontological shift revisits the relationship of the object with its representation by stressing the *presence* of the object that appears in a photograph, film, or video, rather than the actual materiality of the object itself. This idea is articulated in the writings of Walter Benjamin, André Bazin, and Roland Barthes amongst others, and focuses on that which is living remaining, in some way, in the photographic image even though it does not itself remain living.

Here, what distinguishes the realist image above all from the pictorial image, is that it attests to what was once really present. As a mechanical witness, the photographic accomplishes a transfer of presence, lifting from time the presence of what no longer is, embalming it, as Bazin would say, preserving it and making it present in time and space as a photographic image.⁴ This notion, which stresses the idea of absence *as* presence, was perhaps historically most poignantly articulated by Barthes in his discussion in *Camera Lucida*, of the Winter Garden photograph of his deceased mother.⁵ This notion has also been a touchstone for much early video art, which often stressed the documentation of fleeting performative events, places, and people.⁶ Interestingly, this also resonates as a key characteristic of many home-films and videos, and something which is a key aspect explored in Kubota's video work as it relates to the concept of *homing-video*.⁷

This focus on presence is further refined by another ontological shift towards the concept of the indexical which asserts that what is real in photography is not what was, but the *imprint* of what was. Here, nothing of the object recorded by the camera is still present in the image, but the image is solely the real index of what was once present. Something real remains in all photographs and filmic/videographic recordings, but it is significantly distanced from its originary object, since one never has access in the photographic except to its *effect*. This notion of the photographic implies that the continuity between the real and the photographic persists barely, not in a material sense, but only as a somewhat less materially tangible effect of the real. With video specifically, this has a particular resonance because of the somewhat less "material" or concrete nature of video's electronic encoding as opposed to the "imprinted" image of celluloid film and analogue photography.⁸ Nevertheless, what is significant about the indexical conception of the photographic is that it identifies a definitive move away from a fundamentally "materialist" relation, towards one that is more abstract.

Tristan Garcia posits that the ever-evolving photographic technologies essentially render an abstraction of the singular presence.⁹ In any kind of photographic recording, be it analogue, electronic, or digital, there is an infrangible aspect of the real. But this real is not material; rather, it is best understood as a relation (or a series of relations). All photographic images have a latent characteristic which withdraws from light the relations between its elements, and which are capable of being transmitted and reproduced. Specifically, with moving images, these relations are directly "activated" through a viewership that is not only dependent on the visual, as with still photography, but also on an engagement with the temporal. In order to better understand this as it relates to video, Garcia likens this latent ability in the photographic to a sound recording. Although "captured" in the past in a recording studio, each time one plays recorded music on a device, it reproduces that music *in the present* in real time from abstracted information gathered at its recording in the past. When we play back the recording of music, it re-forms each time it is represented in the present, and in this way, the recording embodies a performative dimension (in the present), which is integral to its representation. Viewership of this type consequently has an affective and temporal (i.e. "performative") dimension which is a key consideration in distinguishing the difference between the still image from the moving image within photographic discourse.

No recording conserves or reactivates the essential qualities of things, their presence, or their materiality. Rather, a recording—be it as a still image or a moving image—always consist of making an abstraction (i.e. absencing the material presence)

of the qualities specific to the thing recorded, and conserving solely the relation between these things in order to be able to reproduce (or re-present) these relations at a later time. With the moving image, a temporally performative aspect is key to the re-presentation, and this has an impact on the viewership of this type of photographic image. No living being, in being recorded, has ever been torn out of time. To record therefore, is to arrest, by the deployment of a device, one or several events—whether acoustic or luminous—in order to make an object that is not of matter, but of information. This information is abstract in nature, and it is used to re-form, or re-present an image and/or sound through playback. This in turn requires a particular type of viewership, which is able to recognize and engage with the dynamic and performative time-based aspect of this type of re-presentation. This notion is key in considering Kubota's work, which employs multiple re-formations and re-presentations of documented events and people.

Photographs, films, or videos thus objectify real events in the course of their happening, by extracting luminous information from them that is later used to re-present them through playback, and this transformation of events into objects corresponds to a significant and further ontological shift from earlier, solely materially biased notions of the photographic. As a form of recording, the photographic is thus a machine that obliges the gaze to treat an event as an object. A photographic image (still or moving), once it is taken, never totally ceases to be a *potential* event since it embodies a latent event which can be activated through its performative reproduction. With the moving image, this is particularly evident since its viewership depends on a more dynamic temporal engagement with the unfolding of actual, real time in the present through playback.¹⁰ Thus, we can understand this type of photographic representation primarily as “absenting something present (materially),” rather than as the “presentation of something absent.”

In the video *My Father*, we encounter a crying woman (Kubota) kneeling in front of a large video monitor which fills the entire frame, and on which an image of a reclining old man appears (Figure 7.1). The man who appears on the monitor is watching television and, as the video progresses, we understand that he is Kubota's father who has just passed away (Figure 7.2). The video footage of Kubota's father on the screen had been recorded in Japan the year earlier by Kubota (who was by then living in New York) on a visit back home to Japan where her sickly father and she were watching a singing competition on Japanese television.

We also note that the sound of Kubota crying, as she watches the footage of her father, is heard over the sound of a melancholic song sung by a sister-duo on the television program her father is watching in the Japanese home-video. In essence, we have two video footages occurring simultaneously (i.e. footage of Kubota and her father in Japan watching TV, and footage of Kubota crying as she watches the footage of her and her father.) As the video progresses, we learn that Kubota, immediately after being informed of her father's death, is unable to return to Japan for his funeral due to circumstances beyond her control, which gives further context to her watching the footage of her now deceased father and crying in her studio in New York. In *My Father*, Kubota is caught in a type of betweenness, in a quasi-liminal space between two geographical locations, two homes, and places of belonging, and consequently, between the past and the present. Alone in New York with only a (home-)video recording of her father, Kubota engages the video image of her father as a means of mourning his death.



Figure 7.1 Shigeko Kubota, *My Father*, (1975) 14:51. Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (www.vdb.org).



Figure 7.2 Shigeko Kubota, *My Father*, (1975) 14:51 Image copyright of the artist, courtesy of Video Data Bank at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (www.vdb.org).

The singular, originary presence of Kubota's father, encoded as an image, is played back in *My Father*, serving as a type of catalyst for her memory and mourning, and does so through a form of presence which the medium of video affords. Video's ability to simulate time simultaneously from various sources suggests that one of these (i.e. Kubota's father) can have a causal effect on another (i.e. Kubota crying), and this may in turn illicit further and multiple causal effects through its layered recording for a future viewer. This "circuit" of simultaneous playback, which I consider to be a particular type of simulation unique to video, marks a further ontological shift in notions of the photographic by extending ideas about the photographic as a series of relations. Video here occupies several "spaces" including, but not limited to, those of memory and the past, and of mourning and commemoration in the present. These may in turn also create further "spaces" where viewers may engage with the photographic image, and in the context of a transnational subject, this may constitute a "homing space." In *My Father*, the ghostly spectre of the video apparatus of electronic pulses activates the screen(s) as sites—and spaces—of interface where time and place fold in on each other (i.e. the deceased father's bedroom in Japan, Kubota's studio in New York, etc.) in a simultaneous and simulated way. These "layers" of video imagery converge in Kubota's work to create new, complex yet fluid and open spaces and interpersonal relations through an interplay of photographic relations. In *My Father*, this "homing space" is contingent on a form of simulation of real persons either living and/or deceased, that are coalesced into one visual and temporal field and that leave potential for further "interfacing" through future playback.

In *My Father*, the perceived relation between Kubota and her deceased father is represented as a type of superimposed image where the recorded image of Kubota's father is resituated into Kubota's present moment of mourning *as presence*. Through this type of simulation, the video apparatus collapses and blurs the distance between the living and the dead (the present and the past) to an extent where experientially for the viewer, it becomes fluid and ambiguous, and potentially able to open up a new space of engagement. This fluid and reflexive opening up of a space of direct engagement between Kubota and her father also, by extension, changes the parameters of viewership for the audience watching *My Father* whose video image here becomes visible under conditions of simulation. As Yvonne Spielmann states, the "reflection in the medium is ultimately only simulated: recording, with the video camera in the place of the mirror, does not return an image, it broadcasts rather a presence, where its immediacy is further reinforced by the duration of the ... videotape."¹¹ Video's form of simulation is based on its inherent ability to engage with a form of presence in a self-reflexive manner, literally and conceptually. Because Kubota combines the reflexion of her own image and that of her father's recorded video image, "the self-reflexion presented is ambivalent and contains the constitution and construction of imagery *as reflection* (broadcast image on the monitor) in contrast to the image function of the window and of the permeable projected image/photo frame of film."¹² Consequently, this ability to temporally interface with the video image "self-reflexively" in this way creates the potential for that image to embody not only those recorded onto video, but also those who may not be.

This key affective and experiential aspect of Kubota's folds in the conditions by which one views the video, with the video image itself. Video's simulation confronts the viewer to observe Kubota's sorrow—embodied somewhere between the screen that depicts her father, and the screen that the viewer stands before—and experience it as a

more than what it represents. One of the ways this is evident is with the melancholic audio of a singing duet (from the Japanese song contest that is part of the footage of Kubota's father), which provides a further aural space into which Kubota sobs, and in which the video footage runs in multiple "real" time(s), further shifting and collapsing time frames. Here, Kubota engages the viewer in a type of multiple, or simultaneous positioning: observing her as the subject of her own grief as she occupies her position as observer of her deceased father's recorded image being re-presented for her in her studio, and akin to a type of simultaneous visual infinite regress. In this infinite regress, played back temporally, other spaces are potentially opened up too for the past to engage with the present. Although no longer alive, her father is nevertheless present, suspended in time, but also somehow "disappeared" somewhere between his (video) image, Kubota's mourning, and the present moment of viewing. This simultaneous expansion and compression of time, event, people, and place blurs and challenges any clear, simple, or purely *causal* linearity of events and circumstances, and this can be considered as a key characteristic of an evermore complex viewership that *My Father* creates. It is this aspect of Kubota's video that engenders a video viewership that also engages a dimension of active reception and engagement in the present as opposed to representation which does not necessarily imply such a form of engagement (i.e. it can be merely "passive" in its viewership.) Video's "simultaneity" has the potential, when deployed as Kubota has, to extend beyond traditional notions of representational conventions through this understanding of simultaneity and simulation as presence in the present.

The nature of viewing Kubota crying in front of a recorded image of her father is more akin therefore to an act of witnessing rather than "passive" viewership, where a type of self-reflexivity implicit in the video medium *and* in its multiple performative aspects can be considered a motivating factor that might transform a mere viewer into a more engaged and more complicit observer. As mentioned earlier, the photographic has been thought of as a type of mechanical witness that has the potential to accomplish a transfer of presence. With video, this is due partially to the unique ontological nature of it as a photographic medium that re-forms and re-presents temporally and performatively each time it is played back. Here, the divide between various "screenal spaces and times" is linked, albeit it impermanently, tentatively, and fleetingly, and in an open-ended and incomplete manner in the present. Thus, Kubota's act of crying, sandwiched between different time signatures, between video screens and spaces, creates a particular context that modulates presence through the visual and the aural that is not solely "mimetic." Consequently, there is also the potential for an element of the transformative that begins to emerge out of this viewership, since viewers engage with the video by becoming folded into it so to speak, becoming part of the fluid screenal and performative representations of Kubota's father, herself, and her act of mourning. Viewers become aware of the emerging consciousness and complicity of their position not merely as "objective" or "passive" observers but as something more engaged, perhaps as witnesses connected to Kubota through a viewership of simulation that is itself predicated on the layering and enmeshing of time *as* presence. As the father was present for the video camera recording him in 1973, and Kubota was present in 1974 in front of a video image of her recently deceased father who nevertheless is still "present" in a recorded video space, the viewer too today engages with an embodied form of presence in the present in front of these two activated video recorded representations as they play themselves out in playback.

Gilles Deleuze developed the concept of *becoming* to describe the continual production of difference immanent within the constitution of events, whether physical or otherwise.¹³ *Becoming* is the pure movement evident in changes between particular events. *Becoming* does not represent a phase between two stages, or a range of terms or states through which something might pass on its journey to another state. Rather than a product, final or interim, *becoming* is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state, being neither merely an attribute of, nor an intermediary between events, but rather, a characteristic of the very production of events in the present. It is not that the time of change exists between one event and another, but that every event is but a unique instant of production in a continual flow of changes evident in the cosmos and manifest continually in the everyday. The only thing “shared” by events is their having become different in the course of their perpetual production. This notion of dynamism that Deleuze identifies is at play in the way Kubota constructs viewership through video’s ability to collapse heterogeneous images, spaces, sounds, and events to create a new, open, and somewhat ambiguous space of engagement through the way it treats the concept of presence. Through its multiple spaces and modes of playback, *My Father* has no exclusive or strictly defined causality of events. Like Deleuze’s notion of continual production, it engages more in the movement between screenal and temporal spaces and signatures rather than in a resolved, integrated, or definitive photographic representation. Kubota’s video is less interested in representing a progression from one image to another, and more interested in re-presenting images simultaneously so they resonate “between,” rather than define, people and events. In discussing Jean-Luc Godard’s video work (as opposed to his films), Philippe Dubois makes a similar observation when he states that Godard’s video work simultaneously embodies “a form of looking and thinking that functions continuously and as if live with regard to everything.”¹⁴ Dubois likens this to video’s inherent ability to engage with a form of direct address that is characterized by forms of interaction and interconnection, observations that resonate, as we’ve seen, with how Kubota deploys a “dynamism of change” between simultaneous layers of recorded images.

For Deleuze, the present is merely the productive moment of *becoming*, the moment correlating to the productive threshold of forces.¹⁵ As such, it represents the *disjunction* between a past in which forces have had some effect, and a future in which new arrangements of forces will constitute new events. This notion is central in how Kubota employs video to create space(s) for the viewer that are by necessity not “passive,” requiring a particular level of attention and engagement. Instead of being about transitions that something initiates or goes through, Deleuze’s theory holds that things and states are products of *becoming*. The concept of *becoming*, in the context of the Kubota’s video—and by extension in an expanded notion of the photographic—allows us to consider *My Father* in terms of transformative and affective mechanisms and experience rather than solely as mimetic imitation, as well as to conceptualize the process of subjectification that video and other time-based arts sustain. *Becoming* points to a dynamic process of change, and, when positioned here in relation to the photographic, we are encouraged to reconfigure the apparent stability of the photographic object as “object” defined in contradistinction to a fully coherent “subject” or an extension of that “subject,” and to reconsider the concept of video’s *becoming* as a process which dynamically engages the artist, viewer, artwork, and milieu. In this sense, Kubota masterfully exploits video’s inherent ability to *become* by being fluid

through a particular type of simulation and performativity. It is in this regard that the photographic, as exemplified through *My Father*, prompts us to consider the production and engagement of an image away from the classical subject/object distinctions that have prevailed in its earlier “realist” or “naturalist” conceptions.

As we’ve seen, the ideas of absence and presence have been central to photographic representation since the invention of the medium. As an electronic medium, video can engage with this in a unique way that extends ontological notions of the photographic partly due to its technical nature as a medium that abstracts what it records into “invisible” electronic pulses whose affectively imbued outcome produce a particular type of simulation. Unlike Jean Baudrillard’s formulation of simulation however, I suggest that video simulation here does not necessarily create a simulacrum, nor does it necessarily mask the absence of a basic reality as he claims.¹⁶ Rather, Kubota acknowledges a basic reality as a form of “non-presence”; as if absence may be invisible but nevertheless “there” and “felt” in some way or form, a concept that is resonant for a transnational whose home may be defined in terms of its “non-presence.”¹⁷ Baudrillard claims that to simulate “is to feign to have what one doesn’t,” one implying presence, while the other implies an absence.¹⁸ But the “form” of this acknowledged absence or “non-presence” is an ontological characteristic of the video medium and is derived from the performative and affective ability of video to re-produce (or simulate) an image from the past temporally as it is being recorded (i.e. simultaneously), and engage with its ability to create other “spaces” of relations in the present. That is our experience of video, and this is one of the fundamental ways that video differs from celluloid-based photography such as film. Although film has a seemingly equivalent means of reproducing temporality, it is thwarted in part by the photo-chemical process that requires time between when an image is recorded and when it can be projected as well as potentially in the parameters it imposes on how the viewer interacts with it.¹⁹ Video’s ability to simultaneously record and reproduce blurs its relation to the real.²⁰ The ability for video to embody simulation and simultaneity as an outcome in the way it does further extends what Garcia has identified as the abstraction of the image into data and, as has already been suggested, this could be considered a further ontological shift of the photographic. As data, the photographic here has the ability to become both simultaneous and simulation, further evolving today through the proliferation of the digital. This defining characteristic of video is further manifest in the type of viewership that it engenders as a photographic medium; one which blurs the real and the recorded in often unforeseen ways. In Kubota’s work, this is articulated in how she formally and conceptually constructs, layers, and collapses (screenal) spaces to create a complex array of photographic moving image that is constituted by recorded material from different locations and times into an integrated yet nevertheless heterogeneous—and not clearly causal—time-based image. The spectral qualities of the video image are here exemplified as not only fluid but also able to potentially generate more “real” and intimate/engaged relations in the “present” time of its multiple viewings. The way Kubota interacts with a moving image of her deceased father (as if he were alive), positions the viewer of Kubota’s video to engage with her own video presence as she herself is also now deceased. This potential for *becoming-ness* can itself open up further spaces for viewer engagement as it is also related to transnational displacement and notions of home. In Kubota’s video, her grief and mourning over her father’s death is underpinned by her displacement from her originary home in Japan, and the video is thus also a commentary and mourning for her lost “home” as well as being a

space for potential reconnection to it. It is precisely this longing for home implicit in the video that also finds its place in *My Father*. In this way, Kubota's video creates a "homing-ness" or "homing space" that I describe as *homing-video*.

One of the characteristics that make many contemporary video practices compelling is their ability to seamlessly engage with the immediacy of the quotidian as evidenced in Kubota's use of home-video footage. As Christine Tamblyn states, "everyday life is a notoriously obscure object of academic scrutiny; its ubiquity (paradoxically) renders it invisible."²¹ It is the ubiquity of video too that has made it an ideal tool "to [potentially] create new spaces for cultural intervention" which resists the role of "passive witness and recording events [but] also facilitates intrapsychic communication" and thus, "the multiple interfaces between video and daily life indicates that video has indeed become a primary tool in the production of social space" and relations.²² Because of its immediacy and relative ease of use, video is perhaps the most effective medium in collapsing the divide between the public and the private realms, and thus potentially able to create counter-spaces within the context of a dominant order. These counter-spaces are created out of video's "real time" and "simultaneous" potential for immediacy and spontaneity, as already indicated, making it an ideal vehicle for the close integration of art and life. It is this potential for creating counter-spaces that allow for a consideration of what a *homing-video* might be.

It is with this foundational understanding of the photographic as exemplified specifically by video that I propose the term *homing-video* as a means of describing specific video works that rely on various conventions to document experiences of/in/through/about "home," something exemplified by Kubota's *My Father*. My intention is not to categorize a distinct genre of work, but rather to invent a working term that points to potentially fluid vectors of intersection. In this sense, we might consider *homing-video* aligning itself with Deleuze's notion of *becoming* as well as with expanded notions of the photographic, signalling a resistance to any definitive closure, stressing a continual on-going process of actualisation. In addition to the discussion about the inherent technical qualities of the medium of video, works that are *homing-video* might also be characterized in the distinct ways they foreground the maker's process of investigating their own subjectivity within concepts of belonging at/with/in the home.

We might consider Kubota's video work as *homing-video* because of the way it engages with a process sensitive to its own transformative potential; as the artist unleashes her grief in front of both a spectral image of her deceased father who she mourns, and also in front of an audience (through the camera) she chooses to engage with, with no real prescribed outcome. On Kubota's part, there may originally have been a proposition to engage with mourning in an immediate way through her direct engagement with the video image of her father, but this act can also potentially activate new previously unforeseen organizations to take place through playback in the present; the art here may be in the "becoming of art." It is an art without guarantees because it exists entirely in duration and amidst the play of divergent forces that typifies Deleuze's understanding of *becoming*. With *My Father*, as with many videoworks, there is a unique way in which artistic value is produced "socially" in this way through a particular type of viewership Kubota has engineered, in the present; it is not an abstract value that is imposed outside the creative process itself because it is contingent on an integrated and active performative engagement with the video itself. In this sense, we might potentially consider Kubota's work as both

socially produced and conceived in terms of “social transformation,” one that converges differences in their mutual *becoming*. What this suggests is that Kubota’s work resists a strictly pictorial, optical/representational emphasis that is traditionally understood as governing “objective” documentary practices,²³ aiming rather at producing a type of active encounter or event—or counter space—not in the simplistic sense that it “happened” at a particular moment in time, but insofar as it aspires to bring a variety of elements and forces into relation with one another socially in the present. These forces actively position and reposition themselves into configurations that hone in, in a *homing*.

In her discussion of transnational displacement, Avtar Brah identifies *homing desire* as the desire to feel at home in the context of migration by negotiating physical and symbolic spaces in such a way as to reckon with the idea of home as an originary “mythic place of desire” on the one hand, and on the other hand also with “the lived experience of the [present] locality.”²⁴ The desire for a home that was left behind is one that envisions home as fixed, however this notion of stasis is problematic—and indeed impossible—because it tends to skew narratives of belonging almost exclusively towards the past, providing little room for the “lived experience of the locality” in the present. It is this relation to the present and to “present locality” that *My Father* seeks to address and harness by transposing Kubota’s past(s) into the realm of the viewer’s present through video’s playback.

In her study on queer migration, Anne-Marie Fortier identifies distinct but related notions of the familial home, and notes that one notion of the originary familial home is based on an open idea of belonging that incorporates a multiple and less fixed idea of belonging, characterized as a double-mindedness.²⁵ According to Elspeth Probyn, this notion of double-mindedness requires a double process of recognition and reconnaissance of events and elements of one’s past that are reprocessed and redeployed into narratives of belonging, and in this notion, there exists a space for the recognition of estrangement in the between-ness of belonging.²⁶ Fortier elaborates:

Rather than taking ‘home’ as some point towards which, or away from which, we might unhesitatingly move ... [the challenge is] to experiment with memories of ‘home’ within an ‘empty dimension’, as ‘suspended beginnings’, that is, ‘beginnings that are constantly wiped out, forcing me to begin again and again.’²⁷

An important consideration in this notion of remembering home, or *homing*, is that it does not consider home as fixed in the past, but rather sees the past as constituted of durational “events” that are less causal and chronologically determined, something resonant with Kubota’s (re)presentation of time and space in *My Father*. This allows for these events to be more fluidly integrateable into the present as they do not carry the causal burden of “explaining” things in the present. As Probyn posits, they are like “suspended beginnings.”²⁸ This notion of durational and suspended moments which can be re-examined and redeployed are articulated in Kubota’s use of video and its ability to assemble elements of the past *as presence* into a narrative of the present. This is illustrated by how Kubota unfixes “durational moments” of home from the past—video footage of her father—redployed after his death and remembered to not merely retrieve memories of “home” but also—and perhaps more importantly—to identify and create new spaces *as home* in the present. We might thus consider Kubota’s mourning as “home” since it embodies her sense of loss (i.e. of her father, of her

homeland, etc.) as *homing*, as the estrangement in the between-ness of belonging. If Brah's concept of homing desire describes the desire to feel at home in the often difficult betweenness of displacement, it also describes in a more general way the longing to belong. This longing has less to do with an actual home and perhaps more to do with reckoning with the disjunctures of the traumas of transnational displacement, similar to those of mourning which Kubota experiences through her video. As Fortier posits, this desire to manifest a narrative of belonging by remembering past "events" of home, combine forces of both movement and attachment that she calls *motions of attachment*. Thus, we might consider Kubota's desires for attachment to her deceased father and by extension to her originary home as:

lived in motions: the motions of journeying between homes, the motion of hailing ghosts from the past, the motion of leaving or staying put, of 'moving on' or 'going back', the motion of cutting or adding, the motion of continual reprocessing of what home is/was/might have been. But home is also re-membered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to make home and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way. Re-membering home, then, is the physical and emotional work of creating 'home', and about the encounter with homing desires already within home ... and not only outside it. Motions of attachment are constitutive 'affective building blocks' ... of 'home.'²⁹

It is from this realm of possibilities that both acknowledges place and yet does not predetermine it as an exclusive domain, and where desire and longing find their place in the video image, that home is best imagined and put into motion. Consequently, *homing-video* requires us to consider the creative nature and potential of (home-) video itself particularly within the discourse of photographic ontologies. Jody Berland suggests that in such instances a definitive description of video art is perhaps an impossibility, and indeed, something undesirable. For Berland, video art is a self-conscious practice that can be understood to be self-reflexive, and so is "a language that is not yet a language" because it is characterized by a sense of perpetual incompleteness. Therefore, inherent in the medium of video is a tension that can be understood as a contradiction, a transition, or a paradox, whose notions of "absence" should be conceived as one of technical or artistic function.³⁰ Coupled with the complexity and fluidity inscribed in transnational notions of belonging, as we have seen, video's own formal and conceptual fluidity lends itself well to what is required to articulate and embody a more nuanced and responsive concept of presence within the context of transnational loss and desire to belong. The *homing* I have described in Kubota's video work *My Father* endeavours to resituate a photographic/documentary-based practice in a place that itself refuses any definitive or permanent temporal or physical situation. Berland's hesitation (and perhaps resistance) in definitively naming such video practices is certainly a strategy of preserving this active potentiality of video to deploy the photographic as a means of making visible the disappeared and displaced self. The paradox of a "language-that-is-not-yet-a-language" that she identifies "works to reaffirm the expressive individual as both source and subject in art" and this is perhaps where the creative tension of the medium resides and resonates particularly well with transnational discourse of longing and belonging. But it is precisely this tension that makes video a chosen platform for the emergence of counter-spaces, such as those of

homing-video, in which subjectivities are released from much of their burden of photographic “representation” to interface, mix, and project forward as radical and even transgressive spaces of engagement that extend beyond the purely visible. By challenging “objective” representational notions and expectation of much photographic and documentary-based practices, *homing-video* posits a means of expanding notions of the photographic and thus interrogates its ontological conventions through its engagement with the performative and fluid process of what I’ve likened to witnessing; a form of viewership that seeks a transfer of presence, lifting from time the presence of what no longer is and making it present in time and space as a photographic image. This notion of witnessing is predicated on deploying video’s inherent ability that allows us to consider, re-present, and experience time *as* presence. To evoke Tamberlyn again, in *My Father*, it is the multiple and distinct interfaces between video, daily life, and displacement which indicates that video—in its myriad forms today—has become a primary tool in the production of social space and relations.

Notes

- 1 Shigeko Kubota, “Interview with Shigeko Kubota” interview by Miwako Tezuka in *Post: Notes on Modern & Contemporary Art Around the Globe* (October 11, 2009), http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/344-interview-with-shigeko-kubota.
- 2 Notions of simulation and presence that I discuss in this essay also apply, by extension, to considerations of electronically recorded audio/sound practices. In the case of Kubota’s *My Father*, the diegetic audio is integral to the discussion of the recorded electronic moving video image.
- 3 Historically, the notion of video as a reflexive medium was first set forth by Rosalind Krauss. See: Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October* 1 (1976): 50–64. More recently, this concept has been revisited and expanded taking into consideration the unique technological and conceptual underpinnings of the medium. See: Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).
- 4 André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What is Cinema?* trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 9.
- 5 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993).
- 6 Examples of artists working with early video technologies who focused primarily on documenting fleeting performative events include Valie Export, Joan Jonas, William Wegman, Bruce Nauman, Linda Benglis, Vito Acconci, and Martha Rosler amongst others. See Kate Horsefield and Lucas Hilderbrand, *Feedback: The Video Data Bank Catalog of Video Art and Artist Interviews* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); and the video compilation series: Christine Hill, *Surveying the First Decade: Video Art and Alternative Media in the U.S. 1968–1980* (Chicago: Video Data Bank, 1995).
- 7 Other videos by Shigeko Kubota that are based on the eulogy include *Korean Grave* (1993) and *Winter in Miami* (2005) about her deceased husband Nam June Paik.
- 8 The specific differences between celluloid-based photographic recording technology and video’s electronic-based recording technology have been discussed extensively. See Roy Armes, *On Video* (London: Routledge, 1988); Gregory Battcock, ed., *New Artists Video* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978); Ina Blom, *The Autobiography of Video: The Life and Times of a Memory Technology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016); Sean Cubitt *Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture* (New York: St. Martins, 1993); Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, eds., *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (New York: Aperture Press, 1991); John Hanhardt, ed., *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation* (Rochester, New York:

- Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986); and Yvonne Spielmann, "Video: From Technology to Medium," *Art Journal* 65, no. 2 (2008): 54–69.
- 9 Tristan Garcia, "Le Réel photographique," *Glass Bead—Research Platform, Site 0* (2016). www.glass-bead.org/research-platform/le-reel-photographique/.
 - 10 It is important to note here that historically many photographers have engaged directly with the moving image as an extension of their photographic practice. These include Robert Frank, László Maholy-Nagy, Allan Sekula, Jeff Wall, and Andy Warhol. Many contemporary artists engage with the histories, vocabularies, and discourse of the moving image and its intersections and overlaps with still photography. These include: Tacita Dean, Stan Douglas, Dominique Gonzales-Forester, Douglas Gordon, Shirin Neshat, Walid Ra'ad, William Yang, and Akram Zaatari, among others.
 - 11 Spielmann makes similar observations of Vito Acconci's video *Theme Song* (1973) in which he addresses the camera as a surrogate viewer. See Yvonne Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 138.
 - 12 Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, 138. Emphasis mine.
 - 13 Cliff Stagoll, "Becoming," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 21.
 - 14 Philippe Dubois, "Video Thinks What Cinema Creates: Notes on Jean-Luc Godard's Work in Video and Television," in *Jean-Luc Godard—Son+Images*, eds. Raymond Bellour with Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 169.
 - 15 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987), 8.
 - 16 Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulation" in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 169
 - 17 These ideas about affect are theorized by Laura U. Marks in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
 - 18 Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, 167.
 - 19 Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan explores ideas of the veracity of video images in his film *Family Viewing* (1987). Of particular relevance is the fluid, ephemeral, and often tentative way that video images circulate within the familial which stand as a counterpoint to the less flexible way filmic images function.
 - 20 As already stated, what I am suggesting here is not simulation in the way that Jean Baudrillard articulates in his discussion of the simulacra (see Jean Baudrillard "Simulacra and Simulation" in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166–84). Rather, I posit that the concept of simulation is more akin to Rosalind Krauss' notion of the reflexive and narcissistic (see Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," (1976): 50–64) where the focus is on video's evocative of the mirror's simultaneity and its ability to respond to, and simulate with precision that which it reflects/records. This formulation of simulation does not entail building a reproduction matrix based on a model that replicates independently from that to which it refers as Baudrillard defines it.
 - 21 Christine Tambyn, "Qualifying the Quotidian: Artist's Video and the Production of Social Space," in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, eds. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 13.
 - 22 Tambyn, *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, 13.
 - 23 This notion of the performative is usually restricted to the subject within documentary discourse, most evident in the "Performative Mode" identified by Bill Nichols. See Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001).
 - 24 Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 192.

- 25 Anne-Marie Fortier, "Making Home: Queer Migrations and Motions of Attachment," in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 2003), 120.
- 26 Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belonging* (London: Routledge, 1996), 110.
- 27 Fortier, *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 123.
- 28 Probyn, *Outside Belonging*, 101.
- 29 Fortier, *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 131.
- 30 Jody Berland, "Video—Language—The Common/Place," in *Video Re/View: The (Best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, eds. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole/V tape, 1996), 129.