

**Carole Ann Klonarides:  
An Interview**

Herman Rapaport

An interview with Carole Ann Klonarides explores the videographer's manipulation of space, time and visual texture which often results in an altered sense of history. Her goal to create believable sequences together with her desire to move beyond the stereotypical uses and formats of contemporary television show the conflict in her work. She discusses *Cascade: Vertical Landscapes* as an example of these ideas.

**Television is a flow, of course. A continuum. It doesn't stop. But what matters is how you enter the flow.**

Carole Ann Klonarides

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**HR: Given the number of temporalities which video can articulate, I wonder about the question of presence in video versus film. It seems to me that the film image appears to be much more present or there, whereas the video image better reflects different registers of temporality, their non-simultaneity, for example. We notice that with respect to how black and white can be manipulated in relation to color. Or the way in which one can seamlessly insert anachronistic events, images, voices, etc. Because of how video can be edited there is a historicization or temporal layering of the image one doesn't often see in film.**

**So what we're talking about is a succession of disparate temporal signifiers out of which a new temporality of the image can be constituted?**

**Well, it's going to make you forget the real historical and existential conjunctions.**

CAK: I think it's all about layers of believability. With video you can create different kinds of reality. It's like going beyond the notion of something that's a wish, that comes over you, that you succumb to, that video can become something much more than that. And that is travelling through the layers of different kinds of realities. You begin to think about digital storage, you know, actually putting something in a microscopic space and building upon that to create a reality that's completely impossible in real time. There's just no way you can have Gorbachev and Bush in the Amazon jungle and Marilyn Monroe singing to them. But with video technology you could easily create that in a seamless way so that one would have to assume it could be believed. I feel that television is a surreal medium.

Yes. If done successfully you can transport the viewer into reality that has nothing to do with any kind of time or place that one has ever experienced before. Now some people may say this is dangerous: I've never been able to quite understand why this should make us numb or fall into some sort of pit.

But what "really" exists? And are books any less fabricated? I mean, history is already falsified. There's always questioning, and it's just a question of how you want to enter into experience. Do you want to go into it saying "it's going to take me over completely and I'm going to believe everything I see?" There are some people who would do that with everything. But you can enter into it and say "it's a different interpretation; it's a different way of simulating information, images, experiences." Anyway, history is a souvenir, isn't it? It's a security. It's about believing that something happened that had meaning and worth and that will affect us. As a woman, I'm always wondering what really happened in history with all these women that just didn't exist, and I'm sure minority people feel the same way. It's not a subject I really want to discuss, but media has totally altered

**Along the lines of different temporalizations, we could question how television accompanies other things that people do. For example, television can accompany a performance someone does. Whereas film is itself the work, video may be merely a document or recording of what happened. Whereas time in film is present to itself as the authentic temporality of the work, in video the temporality of the work itself isn't necessarily fully disclosed.**

our sense of history, for example, in terms of how events are collectively experienced on broadcast television. Now Nancy Burson deals with some interesting temporal concepts in video. She's the one who uses computers to age people; for example, she used this technology to try to find a missing child through the reordering of time.

For a long time I wasn't interested in the idea of video as another way of experiencing television. I didn't like the notion of presenting it in galleries. I didn't like the idea of video installations, you know, making it into sculpture. And then I began to see that video was becoming more involved in architecture and in our daily environment: in bars, malls, supermarkets. I'm not thinking about demonstrations, but about the way people have consciously or unconsciously started to use the media within the environment. So I'm beginning to realize there might be interesting ways you can interface into the architecture and the viewer can interface into the video. As far as video relates to performance, I think it can be an enhancement. It can also be a sidebar. It really depends on how you use it. I just did an interview with Raoul Ruiz, the film maker, and he just made his first video installation. He says that there's this moment when you're doing a film in the night and you have to set up the lights in a very particular way and they're testing them when all of a sudden the wrong light comes on and there's this magical light that bathes the darkness and it creates a moment that's only experienced when you're on a film set. Some photographers have tried to achieve that by using flashes in the night. In theater this moment might happen in rehearsing when something just happens and it's like a complete catharsis of the entire play. Ruiz said these two moments can be achieved in a video installation; that is, you can actually stage and set it up, and the viewer can enter into that space. You could never do that in film or theater.

**Television can also function as radio, of course. It's a medium that brings other media into relationship.**

Well, a lot of television is still radio. Television started out as radio with pictures. And the emphasis was really still on the audio. Ernie Kovacs was the first one to try manipulating the image. Television, today, is still very dependent on music, text and audio in general. The following example is telling: I used to work in a rock club and there would be a big switchboard and I'd be in a box and put out video and audio separately. Occasionally I'd push the wrong button and maybe there would be only pictures or only audio out on the floor. Nobody ever objected when there was no picture, but they always objected when there was no audio. So I think audio is still a crucial element, because it's like a presence. It's like a known. There are a lot of people who just turn the tube on all day, while they're doing their chores. They like having the voice there. For those of us who are trying to get beyond the familiar image of television, one must try to get beyond the audio, and therefore lots of artists have experimented with it — turning it on and off. Today VCRs and home television cameras still marry image and sound, but the new technologies will allow everyone to experiment with the desynchronization of sound and image.

**And people are already experimenting at home with what VCRs can do.**

With film and theater, of course, you can't search, rewind or freeze-frame. You have no control over what you see. I enjoy renting films on video because I can go back and replay and deconstruct and reconstruct. One of the great things about the home unit is that people are now making their own videos. People are starting to tape the part of the television program that they want or they interface their own tape with a program.

**Video is like a book; you search through it and skim.**

In Hans Breder's class I was looking at some students' work and upset them when I put the playback machine on search, going back and forth that way. And one of them said, "What are you doing?" You know, they were startled. And I said, "I'm looking at how you made your piece; don't you ever look at your own video work on fast forward?" It's about how you read video.

**What does it mean to read video?**

**But there's this question of asking what we want from film or video when we read it. Let's say we look at a film or video piece and we put it on fast forward. It's like wanting to see it, but not wanting to give ourselves over to the time it takes to watch it. I mean, there are these two desires: to see and not to see.**

**What do you mean "falls through"?**

It's breaking apart and dissecting, deconstructing image and sound — reading is editing.

But the only way you see the whole of the work is to see it very quickly. Because video is about so many parts, so many bits, that you have to scan it and then go back. Only in that way can you see the holes, the places where something falls through.

In *Cascade: Vertical Landscape* the structure is a continuous flow of information that's seamless; it's a vertical read. In television there aren't many vertical reads. There are credits, but not actual reads of an entire piece, of a whole program by means of this vertical movement. People use vertical pans, but they don't build an entire piece on a vertical structure. To make a vertical read work, you can't have any holes, because what happens is that if you're shooting an architectural landscape and you hit a sky, well, we always think of skies as moving, but on video it becomes dead. It stops everything; it's just blue. You're on a blue field without movement. So that would be a hole. You just go bong — and stop. All of a sudden, then, you are faced with having to fill the hole — you have to keep things going. We had to be careful within that structure in terms of speed, color, image and pacing; if any of those things don't work at any time, the whole piece fails. In fact there are two places where it doesn't work, but fortunately, they're so instantaneous that the normal viewer doesn't see it, though I, having looked at it many times, am upset every time I see it, because I know that it doesn't quite work.

**What do you mean by “work”?**

That gets technical. The Marlboro box in *Cascade* would be exemplary. We couldn't afford the technology used in advertising to make an object fall, in slow motion. So we had to fake it. We shot 35mm film and got a strobe lighting system and tried to multiply how many frames we could simulate slow motion with a strobe. Then we put it into video format and multiplied those frames to get the effect of paying three to four thousand dollars an hour for the proper camera and lighting system that would automatically do that. We managed to succeed on several levels, but the box, because it wasn't really moving, just looked dead. You could see the video pushing it, and it bothers me because I can see that it's an artificial movement with minute halts. I can see the video just struggle to push it, to animate it through space, whereas the french fries and the coke bottle work beautifully. Also the lobster is kind of dead. It too is going chug chug chug. But we had to put something in that big blue hole. It was hard; nothing else seemed to work.

**So you're extremely concerned that the tape look absolutely smooth and seamless.**

It had to. It wouldn't be credible otherwise. When seams are shown, we should make it very obvious. The car transition to Radio City was artificial and we wanted to make that artificiality completely visible; it supports the architectural structure in the tape. Plus we wanted to suggest rides within rides. We also tried to pick words which don't read: rendezvous. People don't know how to spell rendezvous and when they see it, they see it as an object. Maybe that's just my impression, but I felt that rendezvous was a word that people didn't actually read, that it's more like a graphic element.

**Architecture as sign...**

Architecture as brochure architecture — architecture as made to be photographed.

**An issue I want to get back to is when you use the word believability, for example, you say the work has to be believable. I might be tempted to say that this is always true for any work of art — that this is really a very traditional idea.**

I meant in terms of experience.

**Okay, then, it has to ring true in terms of experience. We maintain that all the time. We go to museums and see works that have a certain credibility or authenticity for us. Exactly what that means in terms of the work is often difficult to explain. For example, does it mean that everything is balanced, properly synchronized, achieved as a convincing totality, etc.?**

**Is it a suspension of disbelief? Is that what believability is in the arts?**

**The idea of bits relates to questions of texture in video which we've implicitly been talking about.**

For me it's an intuitive timing. When I say believability, it's almost like the believability of the surreal — a whole other kind of experience. It's not about fact. It's about entering into an other sort of experience which has different levels of believability which influences the way we feel comfortable with different types of representation. Why do producers use the same video formats over and over again? Why is *Twin Peaks* getting so much attention? Because Lynch changed time and structure. He's dealing with different kinds of flatness, different kinds of response, different kinds of contrast. People just like that. I mean, they see it in other places, but on broadcast television? It's like . . . something else, causing everyone to re-evaluate things. The more we have of this the better. When Europeans come over here and comment on our news programs, they say, "Your news is fantasy. It's totally unreal. You don't have real news." Then I go over to Europe and I see what "real news" is...it's gore.

You know what it is? It's bits. I'm a news junkie and I like having the twenty-four hour news channel on. I like minute-to-minute reports. Similarly: journals, periodicals, newsformat shows, talk shows. One can elaborate on the information. If you rely on it as your only source of information, that's not good. But if you treat it like another form of information to be processed, then it's interesting.

In graduate school I used to watch *Charlie's Angels* because they used to shoot all the outdoor action in video and the interior shots in film. The jump between mediums fascinated me. The way the camera is held and differences in its movement also contribute to textural changes. Sports shows have their own ways of articulating textures, sitcoms and news are different yet again.

**There's also the difference between black and white versus color.**

Today it's almost impossible to find black and white video tape stock. You can find black and white monitors, but it's very hard to find black and white footage tapes. In John Torreano's *Art World Wizard* the texture is the 60's Telstar look versus Andy of Mayberry. The plodding black and white with its paternal guide segues into the colorful technology of artificial synthetic technology. Video makers are becoming more adept at manipulating the difference. You see a lot of black and white and color going in and out, in and out.

**You see that in painting too, for example, David Salle.**

But painters are getting it from commercial photography. I think it's definitely about trying to understand how to signal a response. In the 60's the Italian filmmakers were physically changing the color of the film. Rossolini and Pasolini deal with different textures. This influenced me. I was interested in filmmakers who were informed by television postmodernists like Alan Rudolph and Jonathon Demme who are dealing with fiction and different kinds of what I call video truths. And today with paintbox technology you have such a wide palette that it's overwhelming, a seductive toy, particularly when you come out of a painting background. As far as coding the viewer to a certain response in video, of changing the context, having the color read in a different way, there just hasn't been that much done.

**On broadcast television we're invited to feed or graze on images. The image is not meant to be systematically interpreted within a fairly homogeneous context as in, say, the film of Godard or Duras.**

I think it's like calligraphy. Everyday you make a mark on a piece of paper and you keep making it and making it and you make all these different marks, but there's a certain mark that keeps coming back. I think that people identify with certain images no matter how many images you give them. They're going to pick-up on those images. And those images become their vocabulary and create a uniqueness within the vocabulary of images. So certain images have poignancy and others do not. I think there's a repetition of images because there are certain agendas that have to be addressed at certain times. But I can't really say what it would be like without that, because I was born in the 50's, and since I was a child I had *Life*, *The National Geographic*, television and just about every access to photography.

**This takes us back to *Cascade: Vertical Landscapes* because there's a falling into image, the emphasis on falling into an architectural flow as the discourse of brochure art. What would it mean to enter into the image in this context?**

**Enter at will.**

**That may explain Hans Breder's interest in liminal icons in relation to television since the thresholds are so ambiguous. But that's an important point, that in video you can enter wherever you want to. This is also true with books.**

**It's almost like being in front of a vertical roll; the stuff just comes out like paint from a tube or like a film or paper which stretches seamlessly forever. And one never really enters the space. One is always before the scrim, the electronic wallpaper.**

I would say that in video there are only thresholds. But when I enter in it's not in the same way as with architecture. There's a big show in Japan where they've invited theorists and architects to define the idea of the threshold. What I talked about was that with video you can eliminate the threshold because with digital technology you can change the entry point in every way.

Enter at will. Or redefine the whole idea of entering.

Except there's an important difference. With the book there's a preconceived notion of picking it up and starting at the beginning. With television you change the channel; you're constantly moving it.

*Cascade: Vertical Landscapes* started out as an idea about verticality — recreating a structure for television. But the artist, Dan Graham, began explaining the notion of the corporate atrium and how the viewer is led to the sources of power and thereby manipulated. Then too, there is a notion about how the landscape enters into the structure of the corporate atrium and how the relationship between the two is one of mirroring, of constantly flipping one over and back, putting one behind and in front of.

We vertically superimposed onto the landscape a reading of all the different kinds of corporate logos and signs. We began to think of merging all of these different kinds of urban environmental stimuli into a tape and began to experience it ourselves this way while shooting it. We passed on escalators through a mall surrounded by environmental muzak complete with plants, mirrors, glass elevators and concrete slabs. We found it amusing that at the end of *Cascade* it's like you're entering into a cathedral as you walk into the hotel lobby. It's like going down to the depths of hell . . .

