

# 312 an alternative exhibition space for video art

May 11 - Jul. 31, 2006 No. 13

## SILENCE PART ONE (A SURFACE EXCAVATION)

Recently, I watched a BBC presentation of John Cage's *4'33"*. The conductor took his place, raised his baton and waited. The musicians remained quiet while television cameras cut back and forth—here a violinist staring ahead, there a timer counting down the seconds. The composition was presented in three movements to allow everyone to make noise. Despite this, a few errant coughs broke through during the performance. Cage would have been pleased, being the man who wrote, "Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death." (*Silence*, Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961. See: <http://www.cis.vt.edu/modernworld/d/Cage.html>). What, then, is silence when it is not the absence of sound? Alina Kwiatkowska describes silence as a figure-ground relationship: "A visual figure tends to be more complete and coherent, better-defined than the ground against which it is seen, which is perceived as less distinct, is less attended to and more easily forgotten. ... It stands out from its ground—which we usually call silence" ("Silence across modalities," *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Adam Jaworski. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997). I have found both

Carola Cintrón-Moscoso, *Un minuto de Silencio (A Minute of Silence)*



Cage and Kwiatkowska helpful in exploring silence in the videos presented in this series.

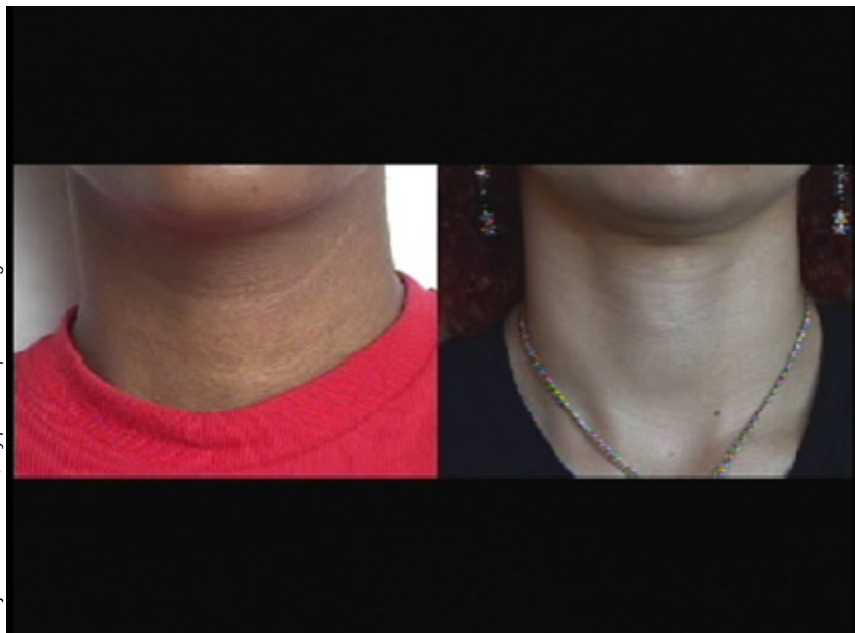
In Carola Cintrón-Moscoso's *Un minuto de Silencio (A Minute of Silence)*, individuals of all ages are presented, each holding a personal minute of silence for someone no longer living. A minute of silence suggests reflection, but for the observer it can only be inferred by the participant's quiet restraint. Life goes on unaware in Kwiatkowska's 'ground' with cars passing, people walking and talking—but for the internal world of the participant, there is silence. Some participants appear lost in reflection—a middle-aged woman clasps her hands firmly, appearing strong and resilient despite her quiet tears; another woman holds her palms to-

gether in prayer beneath her chin, gazing thoughtfully at the ground. Other participants seem less reflective, smiling unsurely, as for an impromptu portrait, or fidgeting about nervously. The silence in *Un minuto de Silencio (A Minute of Silence)* is personal, consisting of a decision to limit socializing noise. Some participants extend this to include stillness of the body, kinetic silence, but for most it is a respite from sound in recognition of someone no longer speaking.

Alejandro Quinteros's *My political opinion during the time of American abundance* focuses on a different silence—one of complicity. In Quinteros's video, the necks of young people are shown close-up, two at a time. Each neck is onscreen just long enough for the

viewer to see the person swallow. By lacking sound, the video makes me intensely aware of my own swallowing, an internal crackling that usually snaps in my ears unnoticed and unheard, a part of my mundane 'ground.' By focusing on swallowing, Quinteros wants to highlight the unnerving and tacit complicity of remaining silent when abundance could allow change. Quinteros implies that the decision is to *not* break the silence—the reluctance to act by 'swallowing' the tongue. He describes the video as a critique of the political apathy of young Americans, of their silence during war in the face of great material wealth. As in Cintrón-Moscoso's video, silence is linked to a decision.

Alejandro Quinteros. My political opinion during the time of American abundance



312 INTERVIEW  
Aubrey Reeves

*What role does video play in your artistic output?*

Video is sort of the core medium of most of my very multi-disciplinary artistic endeavors for the past couple years. First of all, I'm the Programming Director at Trinity Square Video [in Toronto] so I spend most of my working-life curating, writing about, and discussing video in its many forms: documentary, drama, experimental, installation, and even interactive, as well as helping other people with their videos. But when it comes to my own output lately, I've been focusing quite a bit on video and drawing, which sounds like a weird combination. But, I've been starting to see how these media can inform each other and even cross over in the same piece. For instance, my video that you showed on 312 [Online, February 1 - March 15, 2006], "Two Knots, One Not," grew out of "knot drawings" I'd been doing for a couple years. I started when I was

crewing a schooner in the Bay of Fundy in 2002 and was learning how to tie some essential knots for sailing. Each day, I learned a new one; I'd go home and draw a little diagram of it, so that I'd remember. Later, these became more refined drawings that are kind-of like schematics of how to draw different knots, in step-by-step sequences, but a bit more abstracted as lines intersecting in different patterns. While these drawing are graphically quite beautiful, they are static. I also wanted to convey the movement and flow of the lines as one ties a knot, as well as the conceptual simplicity, which I could only do in a time-based medium.

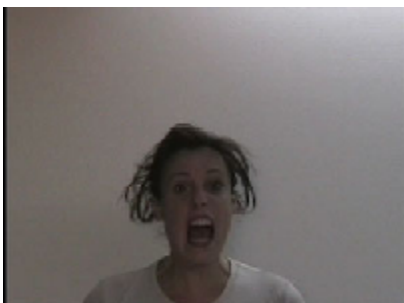
*In the "Two Knots, One Not" piece you mentioned, performance and process both played a role in completing the video. How much does a performance and/or process-based approach influence your video work?*

My approach to video has definitely been informed by performance art. I was first introduced to

312's two-part series on silence will continue August 1, 2006 with Alla Girik & Oksana Shatalova.

**Mark Prier.**

Emily Lutzker, *Things I've Shouted*



video in undergrad by one of my instructors, Tanya Mars, a phenomenal performance artist who has also worked in video. She showed us a lot of early video from the 70s (which sadly, I don't think a lot of students get to see) where the artist setup the camera in his/her studio and performs alone for it. You are right about it being process based, since that approach often involves just trying different experiments until something works. I love the simplicity of it and the tradition of the artist working alone in the studio, which goes back even further to a painting and drawing tradition. Perhaps it's romanticized but I like the concept of the artist physically labouring on ideas. So, my first instinct is to just set-up the camera and get in front of it. I haven't studied conventional film techniques or drama, so actors, sets and scripts are still a bit intimidating to me. I'm just learning how to plan out shots! But I've recently done a much bigger project where I actually worked with a dancer. The story I was trying to tell was about a man who was political prisoner, so for the first time, I had to think about casting and then directing someone else. It was quite a learning experience, but very positive. His improvisational ability really took the video to a place that I couldn't have gone to by myself.

*How has being involved in a media centre like Trinity Square Video influenced the way you make art, if at all?*

Working at TSV has certainly increased my technical proficiency. I've been able to take some workshops to brush up my editing skills,

I've been able to try out all of TSV's different cameras, and I've learned a lot about the technical possibilities and limitations of the medium of video. It's also given me a chance to meet so many artists, including some who have become collaborators on projects. Through my position at TSV, I'm often working with film and video festivals, community organizations and other galleries. As a result I feel I've become involved in the broader media arts community here in Toronto, not just in one organization. But despite all that I don't think working at TSV has really changed the way I make art. It's more of a case of inspiring me to continue at it, despite the challenges. Having access to equipment and being a part of such a supportive community really gives me no excuses.

*You mentioned that Tanya Mars introduced you to video in your undergraduate studies. How did that pivotal moment change your focus? I'm assuming that you didn't start your studies intending to work in video art...*

When I started university, I had no idea what video art was. I'd never been interested in making movies so I didn't ever consider studying film. As a young child I always wanted to be an artist, but not uncommonly, I pretty much assumed that meant being a painter or a sculptor. When I was in high school I mostly did a lot of drawing and thought that painting was the medium I was in training for. But in university I suddenly discovered that not only were painting and drawing two very different things, but I wasn't a very good painter. In fact, I hated

it. The history of it overwhelmed me and I had little aptitude with a brush. The pivotal moment was more a discovery that art was broader than painting. I was attracted to the directness of media like video, performance art and installation; but also the fact that, as newer media, they lack the same weight of tradition. They seemed very open to possibilities so I didn't feel intimidated to experiment. Despite that failure at painting, I have always continued to draw. It has continued to be an instinctive urge and a simple way to start on ideas.

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Kym Greeley, *Landing*



CURRENT 312 OFFLINE  
EXHIBITION

**May 11 - July 31, 2006**

Silence Part One (A Surface Excavation): Carola Cintrón-Moscoso's *Un minuto de Silencio (A Minute of Silence)* and Alejandro Quinteros's *My political opinion during the time of American abundance*.

CURRENT 312 ONLINE  
EXHIBITION

**May 11 - Jun. 30, 2006**

Kym Greeley's *landing* and Emily Lutzker's *Things I've Shouted*.

UPCOMING 312 OFFLINE  
EXHIBITIONS

**Aug. 1 - Oct. 31, 2006**

Silence Part Two (A Surface Excavation): Alla Girik & Oksana Shatalova's *Memory is Immobility*.

UPCOMING 312 ONLINE  
EXHIBITIONS

**Jul. 1 - Jul. 31, 2006**

Elisabeth Smolarz's *You and Me*.

ABOUT 312

312 is an alternative video exhibition space housed in the small foyer of an apartment. Showcasing one channel video work on a television, 312 Offline offers the visitor an intimate experience—a relaxing chair, a set of headphones (or a pair of speakers) and video art. It's homey, it's small, and it's for video.

Other programs that 312 runs are: 312 Online (videos in the comfort of your home at [www.312.ca](http://www.312.ca)) and 312 Library (look at the list, pick a video, and watch it at our place).

The 312 Offline space itself



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**312**

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[www.312.ca](http://www.312.ca)  
*call to book a personal appointment*

