Beyond the New Media Frame: The Poetics of Absence in Vera Frenkel's *String Games*

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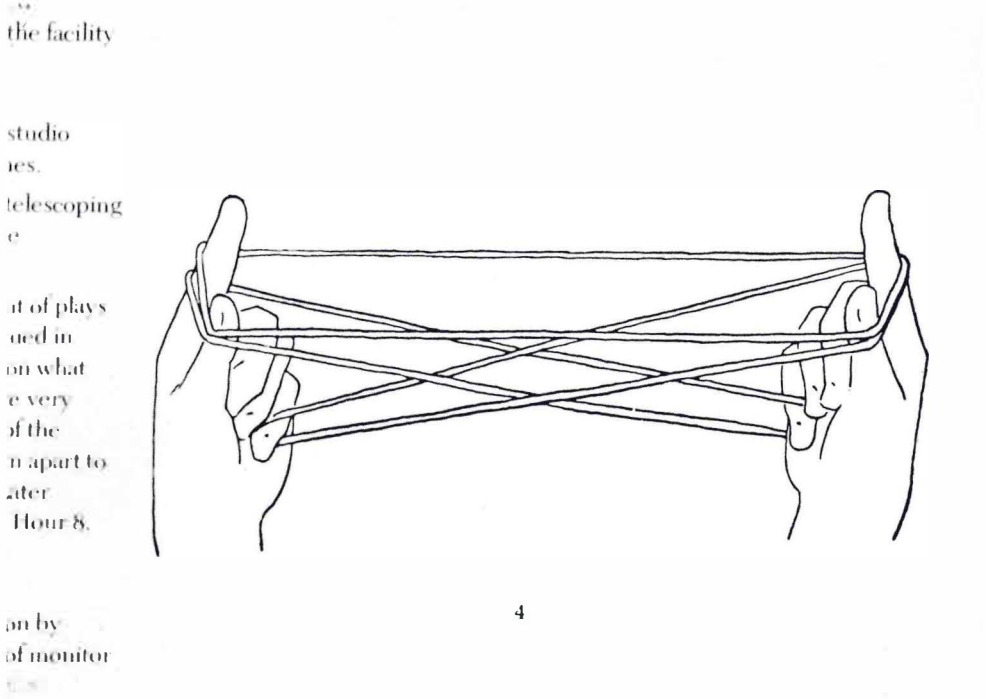
> I must say that the first time I did a project online, which was *Body Missing* (1995), I felt completely at home. And I realized that I had been doing multiple narratives, and multiple exchanges, and open-ended outcomes in all my work. I thought 'they've invented the Internet for me.' I took it very personally. I felt like it was the water I had always swum in. Not altogether true, but that is how it felt; it was reciprocal. The work evolved in ways that the technology made possible, but I also sought out technology as a way to do certain things.
>
> Vera Frenkel [1]

There is a photograph of Vera Frenkel from 1974 that provides a rare glimpse of her directorial role in one of her artworks. She is not in disguise, as was so often the case in the roles she played in her videotapes from the late 1970s and 1980s, or absent from the frame as the behind-the-scenes architect of her multimedia installations and online projects from the 1990s and 2000s. Taken during *String Games: Improvisations for Inter-City Video* (1974)—a nine-hour teleconferencing performance staged in Toronto and Montréal with ten participants whose live-stream gestures were transmitted through the facilities of the Bell Canada Teleconferencing Studios—the photograph is an image still from a transmission of Frenkel removing the glass face of the video monitor in Montréal. At the time, this action was intended to convey the impression to the participants watching her in Toronto "that I was somehow moving into and through the monitor wall in the other city."[2] In retrospect, the photograph appears to document a more pensive gesture, as if by staring intently at the glass face she holds above her head she is contemplating the potential of a yet unrealized digital universe.

As an archival trace of Frenkel's earliest experimentation with new technologies, the image still from *String Games* serves as a portent of the directions her artistic practice would take in the decades that followed. The screen, whether video monitor or computer interface, has been integral to Frenkel's quest to explore how memory is shaped by the transmission and circulation of images in our electronic age.[3] As in *String Games,* her subsequent works critically reflect upon Marshall McLuhan's pronouncement in his 1965 *Understanding Media* that "we have now extended our cen-tral nervous system itself into a global embrace, abolishing time and space as far as our planet is concerned. "[4] By entangling storytelling in staged confrontations with technology's utopian promise of an eternal present, Frenkel's "multiple narratives,

String Games: Improvisations for Inter-City Video (Montréal – Toronto), performance and live transmission,
Vera Frenkel removing the face of the monitor, third transmission, Bell Canada Teleconferencing Studios, Montréal 1974

Cat's Cradle String Game, Figure 4 of 8 from exh. cat. *Lies & Truths,* Vancouver 1978, p. 14



and multiple exchanges, and open-ended outcomes" reveal how the archival impulse to remember history becomes a register of loss.

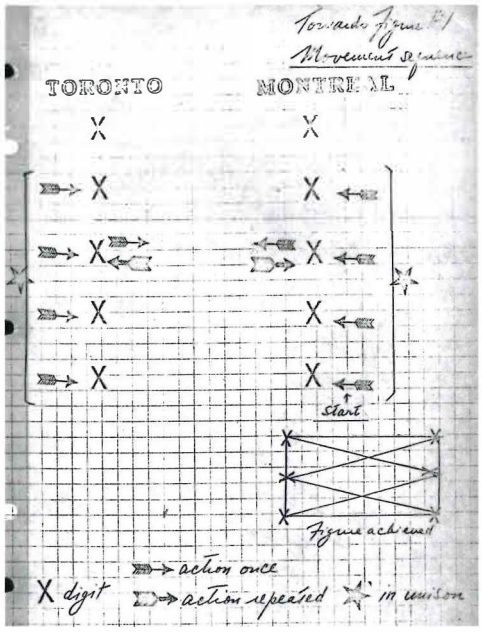
In 1974, how *String Games* would manifest this register of loss as intrinsic to a digital universe lay in an inconceivable future. Portapak video technology, which enabled instantaneous signal feedback, was just beginning to be used by artists, and particularly women artists, to assert the presence of the body inside an image simu-lacrum. The teleconferencing equipment used by Frenkel in *String Games* was still in the prototype stage. The static configuration of the studios, with five fixed chairs located behind a semi-circular console facing stationary cameras, and the crudeness of the black-and-white transmissions rendered her collaborators phantom-like ciphers of being virtually connected. To animate the gap that lay between the impoverished technology and the seamless imaginary of networked communication, Frenkel de-vised a series of exchanges adapted from Cat's Cradle—a game played with a loop of string passed back and forth between two hands according to predetermined configu-rations such as "Soldier's Bed," "Candles," "The Manger," "Diamonds," and "Cat's Eye"—that utilized the predetermined configuration of Bell Canada's teleconferencing facilities. In Toronto and Montréal, the ten participants occupying the five fixed chairs in each of the studios became the fingers of two hands whose performative actions passed an imaginary loop of string between them.

In the 1978 catalogue for *Lies & Truths. Mixed-Format Installations,* an exhibition organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery that featured an installation version of *String Games* on four monitors, each playing three hours of footage edited from the live

transmissions, Frenkel describes in detail her process of adapting Cat's Cradle to a new media context:

> I asked each player to choose nine components: a number, a letter, a word, a name, a sentence, a fragment of a poem, a visual image, a gesture and a sound. These elements were to be chosen or invented so as to suggest what was important to the player; they would be his or her personal contribution to the whole.
>
> The figures were mapped, and the order of movements quickly became familiar, e.g., we learned at what point the thumbs moved, or the middle fingers, or the index fingers and so on, in each figure. Rehearsals were few and simple; enough to develop the mastery of the string figures and the use of the personal components, but not so much as to fix any particular sequence in mind. I was interested in exploring a set of possibilities, not in a routine. We were preparing to improvise, using these formats and components, with video as our link.
>
> The figures were learned with the hands first, then out in the street in front of Fifteen Dance Laboratorium in Toronto, using a large rope. Each player became a finger, and moved from position to position bodily to achieve each pattern. Later we replaced physical movements with words, names, gestures, sounds, etc. and [at] that point we could begin to play.[5]

Also included in the catalogue were Frenkel's descriptions of the teleconferencing facilities, which in addition to the stationary cameras included a wall of monitors that simultaneously displayed what was being transmitted and received in each city; the structure of the piece, which was performed during three separate transmissions; the modes of play—Plan, Movement, and Real Space—that determined the impro-vised sequencing of the participants' actions; and guest games. In writing on the guest games, Frenkel notes that she intervened in the live transmissions by making draw-ings on camera and removing the monitor face, which occurred during the third and final transmission when both "hands" were brought together in Toronto and Frenkel remained in Montréal.[6]



String Games, movement diagram 1, showing moves from one string pattern to the next, 1974

For new media art historian Caroline Seck Langill, it is the dimension of play in *String Games* that makes Frenkel's staging of a teleconferencing performance so significant as a pioneering technological work. Langill argues that Frenkel's decision to orchestrate a game with a set of protocols and indeterminate outcomes "catapulted this work out of a 1970s video/performance mode into the new media realm."[7] *String Games,* Langill posits, was prophetic for its time, predicting "all the elements that would eventually compose future new media projects—rules, emergence, interactivity, and, of course, the ever-present phantasmagoric screen, with which for some reason we cannot bear to part."[8] Yet, despite its prescient nature, *String Games* did not

achieve critical recognition as a seminal new media artwork until decades later. After being lauded in Montréal's *La Presse* when it was first performed as "the center of the video world"[9] and remounted as an installation at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1978, the work languished unseen for almost thirty years.[10] It would not be until 2005, when Frenkel digitally edited and remastered a two-channel, one-hour DVD version from archival footage for an exhibition at InterAccess, a Toronto artist-run center, that its historical significance and contemporary relevance began to be acknowledged.

The InterAccess exhibition, entitled *This Must Be The Place,* was a celebratory gathering of seminal new media works by locally-based artists, who in addition to Frenkel included David Rokeby, Nell Tenhaaf, and Norman White.[11] For the installation of her newly-minted DVD version of *String Games,* Frenkel also produced ten digital print panels culled and enlarged from the pages of a hand-bound catalogue of the 1974 live-transmission performance. A year later, in conjunction with her Koerner residency at Queen's University, Frenkel donated the installation to the permanent collection of the university's art gallery, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre.[12] In 2010, Langill published the first monograph essay on the live-transmission performance, "Vera Frenkel's *String Games* and the Germination of New Media Art in Canada," and the DVD installation was featured in *Vera Frenkel: Cartographie d'une pratique/ Mapping a Practice,* an exhibition curated by Sylvie Lacerte that addressed the archival dimensions of Frenkel's oeuvre.[13] In 2011, the DVD installation was included in a major traveling exhibition, *Traffic. Conceptual Art in Canada 1965–1980,* and chosen by Jan Allen, Chief Curator of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, to launch a series of exhibitions featuring key works in the permanent collection.[14] Most recently, it was mounted along with documentation from the 1974 live-transmission performance for the exhibition *Archi-féministes!: Performer l'archive* held at OPTICA in Montréal.[15] With these initiatives, the importance of *String Games* for Frenkel's trajectory as an artist and as a groundbreaking experiment in new media was established, at least in Canada. There is still no mention of either *String Games* or Frenkel's later *Body Missing* and *The Institute™* websites in major texts on the history of new media art written by scholars in the field such as Oliver Grau, Christine Paul, Michael Rush and Edward Shanken.[16]

In Langill's research on *String Games,* which comprises part of a larger study on the institutional exclusion of new media art in Canada from 1970 to 1990, she notes that in 1977 the National Gallery of Canada mounted an exhibition on the emerging use of technology by prominent artists such as Michael Snow and Norman White.[17] Expressing surprise that *String Games* was not included, Langill attributes its absence to several factors. First, the work was a departure from Frenkel's practice as a printmaker that had established her artistic reputation.[18] Second, as a live-transmission performance all that remained of *String Games* was ephemeral evidence.[19]

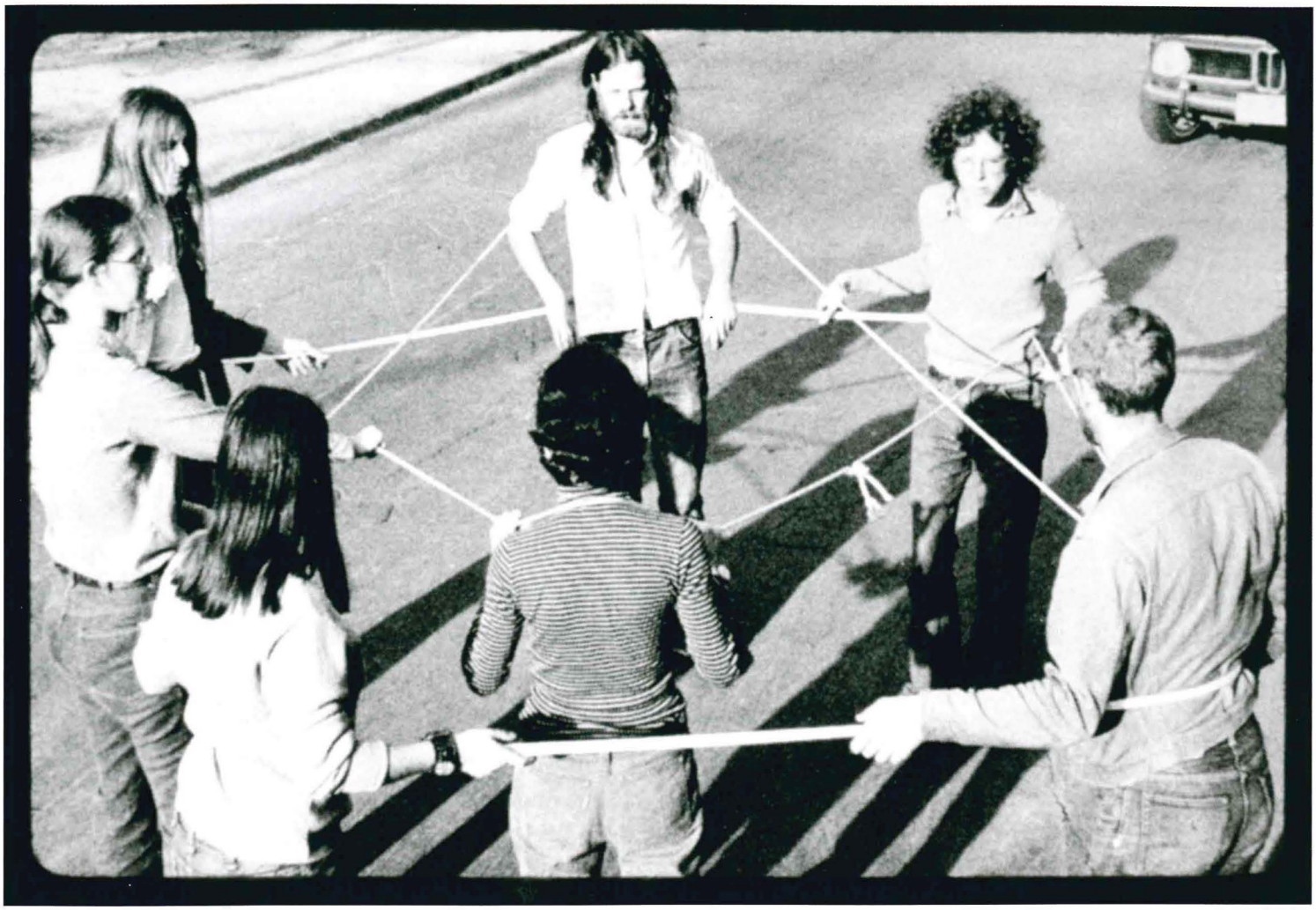
Third, Frenkel was a woman artist working with prototype technologies that were a male domain of engineers and scientists.[20] While these factors certainly had their part to play in the marginalization of *String Games* in 1977, its continued exclusion from the international canon of new media history—the recent efforts of Canadian curators and theorists notwithstanding—is more puzzling. What this exclusion suggests is that there is something about *String Games* that eludes new media's defining elements of rules, emergence, and interactivity. Beyond the indeterminacy of play, there is a pathos—a metaphorical loss of presence—embedded in the substitution of a number, a letter, a word, a name, a sentence, a fragment of a poem, a visual image, a gesture and a sound for fingers and string that catapults the work from a new media realm to a poetics of absence.

In the context of the historical moment in which *String Games* was made, how this poetics of absence was integral to Frenkel's use of technology can be understood by considering the resonances that arise between her performative strategies and those deployed by Lygia Clark and Allan Kaprow in artworks made several years prior to *String Games*. Clark, a Brazilian artist whose conceptual practice sought to manifest the multi-sensory and psychodynamic dimensions of participatory art, focused on the binding properties of string in her 1969 *Mandela*. One in a series of performance works known as *Collective Body, Mandela* was staged by attaching long elastic bands to the ankles or wrists of seven to ten participants, whose push and pull of their bodies formed and reformed a sculptural web to heighten the interdependence of their movements.[21] That same year, American art historian Kaprow collaborated with the Boston television station WGBH to harness the collective body to new technologies. Entitled *Hello,* his new media artwork utilized five stationary television cameras in remote locations that transmitted live-feed image transmissions of friends and colleagues to twenty-seven monitors in the TV studio control room.[22] Where Clark was concerned with the material apprehension of the participants' interdependence, Kaprow was interested in how networked communication could facilitate the virtual apprehension of "oneself in connection with someone else."[23] Orchestrating the image transmissions of the remote cameras from the studio control room, he produced an electronic "happening" of friends and colleagues who waved and greeted each other with the words, "Hello, I see you."

What is immediately striking in the comparison of these artworks with *String Games* is the way in which Frenkel realized a space in between conceptual and technological affirmations of presence. By substituting the predetermined figures of Cat's Cradle with the live-stream transmission of improvised sequences, Frenkel dematerialized the binding properties of string. Although the players' movements were interdependent, what mattered were the narrative ellipses produced by the exchange of gestures between them. In turn, these narrative ellipses altered the dynamics of

telepresence by deflecting the immediacy of being virtually connected. Although the players could see each other frontally on studio monitors via fixed cameras, what mattered was how they responded to each other's improvisations. Frenkel notes in her 1978 catalogue that the performers could play "each figure in two ways; according to where the fingers are when a figure is achieved [Plan] or according to what they do while transforming one figure into another [Movement]"[24] The third mode of play, "Real Space," addressed the disparity between virtual and located presence by placing an "X" on the studio wall to map the position of the participants and visitors in real space for those watching the transmissions. When the players were called upon to move towards the "X," they appeared in the other city to be turning away from the camera.[25] Just as something is always lost in translation, so something was lost in the transmissions of these improvisations. As the performers enacted their transmutations of fingers and figures in relation to real and virtual space, the phantasmagorical screen became a conceptual border that demarcated the absence of the material thread being passed between them.

Looking back at *String Games* three decades later, the poetics of absence that was integral to Frenkel's initial experimentation with new media takes on additional meaning. What was a canny conjoining of performative gestures and networked communication in 1974 becomes in retrospect an uncanny disjuncture of bodies and screens, one that foreshadows Frenkel's summoning of missing bodies and traumatic histories to mark remembrance as a register of loss. In her narrative videotapes of the 1970s and 1980s, this loss was metaphorically introduced through the missing body of Sample Art Broom in *No Solution: A Suspense Thriller, No. 2, Introduction to Some of the Players* (1976) and *No Solution: A Suspense Thriller No. 5: Signs of a Plot: A Text, True Story & Work of Art* (1978). In a series of works made in 1979–80 concerning Cornelia Lumsden, a little known Canadian novelist who lived in Paris between the World Wars and then mysteriously disappeared, loss was historically located and fictionally reenacted through Frenkel's weaving of narratives of truths and lies told about the missing author.[26] By the 1990s, the poetics of absence embedded in *String Games* had become inextricable from testimonies of displacement and exile embedded in Frenkel's multimedia installation *". . . from the Transit Bar"*. A functioning piano bar built inside a gallery or museum that was first exhibited at *DOCUMENTA* IX in Kassel in 1992, *". . . from the Transit Bar"* positioned viewers as intimate witnesses to stories told by Canadian immigrants about their experiences of dislocation and estrangement from their homelands that played on video monitors placed on the bar, the piano, the tables, and lodged in the walls. The substitution of Yiddish and Polish voice-overs (with subtitles alternating in French, German, and English) for their spoken words added another layer of loss: that of one's mother tongue.[27]



String Games, street rehearsal for video transmission, first figure completed, 1974

With the launch of Frenkel's *Body Missing* website (www.yorku.ca/BodyMissing/) in 1995, the full import of *String Games* as a performative blueprint for her oeuvre became evident.[28] The *Body Missing* website, which incorporates elements from an installation of the same name first mounted at the Offenes Kulturhaus in Linz, Austria, in 1994, and the conceptual premise of *". . . from the Transit Bar"* as a way station for viewers, complicates what is lost in the transmission of images by weaving a thread of stories about and archival evidence of stolen artworks. At the core of the installation version of *Body Missing* is a six-part video played on discrete monitors positioned throughout the exhibition space, accompanied by photo-transparencies of stills from the video and archival materials. For the 1994 exhibition in Linz, the photo-transparencies were placed in the windows of the three-storey Offenes Kulturhaus; in subsequent exhibitions, they were housed in rectangular light boxes that resemble packing crates. The six video segments are narrative collages that piece together archival lists, trial transcripts, old photographs, architectural blueprints and conversations overheard in a café, all of which allude to artworks stolen by Hitler and now missing that were stored in salt mines at Alt Aussee near Linz during World War

II and destined for his personal Führermuseum, which was to be built in his boyhood town of Linz once the Third Reich had triumphed. At the core of the website version of *Body Missing* is the café where conversations about the missing artworks are overheard. On the hand-drawn site map, it is identified as the Transit Bar and fictively located on the ground level of the original 1930s floor plan of the Offenes Kulturhaus. The virtual bar contains hypertext links to stories told to the bartender about the artworks missing from the salt mines, excerpts of the immigrant testimonials recorded for *". . . from the Transit Bar"* and archival materials from the *Body Missing* video. Other areas identified as part of the Offenes Kulturhaus 1930s floor plan—such as the loading dock, the Great Hall, the garage and the metal shop—provide links to web pages designed by artists who were invited by Frenkel to mount their own inquiries concerning the missing artworks.

Whereas in *String Games* Frenkel's collaborators had produced improvisations based on the predetermined figures of Cat's Cradle, for the *Body Missing* website they were asked to reflect on the indeterminacy of historical memory. In the former, the archival traces of the participants passing back and forth a virtual thread embody a poetics of absence; in the latter, a hypertext thread of stories about and archival evidence of missing artworks evokes a poetics of mourning by alluding to the collective trauma of the Holocaust. While nominally about the provenance and whereabouts of stolen artworks, both the installation and the website versions of *Body Missing* call forth a series of sinister associations. In Hitler's compulsion to collect art for preservation also lay a compulsion to collect bodies for extermination. His master plan for the Führermuseum shadowed the master plan for the annihilation of Jewish culture. The conversations overheard in the café about numbered trucks packed with artworks pulling into the salt mines stir the imaginary of crowded trains reaching the final destination of the camps. Unlike the missing artworks, however, the bodies of those who perished in the camps cannot be recovered. There are no graves to visit or death certificates to archive. All that remains is ephemeral evidence: the testimonies of camp survivors, the memories of friends and relatives who hid or escaped from the Nazis, photographs and letters hidden before the deportations, trial records of war criminals, sites where synagogues once stood and cemeteries where ancestors were buried.

While the making of *String Games* and the *Body Missing* website lie two decades apart and address seemingly unrelated premises—the former, in Frenkel's words, "located at the nexus between two formats: a very old universal one, the string game, [which] was reenacted and transformed via a newly developed one; video transmission,"[29] and the latter addressing a specific historical event, the sequestering of stolen artworks in the salt mines at Linz during World War II, they share a pioneering use of technology. In this context, *String Games* has been analyzed almost exclusively

String Games, detail with artist, InterAccess, Toronto 2005

in relation to a new media framework of play and interactivity, while the significance of the *Body Missing* website being made one year after the launch of the World Wide Web as a hypertext platform for the excavation of historical memory is rarely mentioned. Yet, it is only by juxtaposing these two works that Frenkel's use of technology "as a way to do certain things" emerges as one that probes the liminality of the image in warding off oblivion. By displacing the reification of virtual presence in *String Games* and the reification of the virtual archive in the *Body Missing* website, Frenkel alerts us to the function of the ever-present phantasmagoric screen as an agent of disappearance. What the narrative ellipses and fragmentary evidence in her work reveal is how the screen serves to shield us from the recognition that memory resides in the space in between presence and absence, past and future.

The insight that the juxtaposition of *String Games* and the *Body Missing* website affords concerning the function of the screen is eerily foreshadowed by another image still taken in 1974 during the live transmissions of *String Games,* one which documents the participants in one of the studios facing the camera with each of their bodies marked by a large X while playing Cat's Cradle. When I first wrote about the work in 1997, I sensed an underlying pathos in this archival trace of the participants passing an imaginary loop of string between cities.[30] It is only now, in the context of today's globally connected and social-networked media environment, that the X becomes identifiable as the source of this pathos. In hindsight, I realize that the X stands in for the register of loss in an as yet inconceivable future, signifying the screen's erasure of the participants' presence at the same time as their gestures were being recorded. This realization adds another layer of resonance to the third mode of play, "Real Space," devised by Frenkel for *String Games.* For it was only by reaching out to the "hand" in the other city rather than moving towards the X on the studio wall that the participants' apprehension of being virtually connected materialized. As that which marks the disjuncture between the lived experience of this apprehension and its archival traces, the placement of the X in real space and on real bodies transforms the participants from phantom-like ciphers of being virtually connected to agents of remembrance, who by reaching out to each other across time and space guard against their own disappearance from the screen, and in so doing stand guard against oblivion.

In a recent essay Frenkel wrote on the archival dimensions of her work, she observes:

> Years ago, drawn to the ambiguity of the letter X, the sign that indicates cancellation while at the same time marking the spot, I centred a body of work—drawings, collages, performances, and texts—on its contradictory meanings. Now decades later, thinking about what I find compelling about archives, I see that I'm

> drawn again to that same oscillating duality and to the notion that a letter, a poem, a photograph, a sketch, can remain evocative while at the same time be relegated to the past and deemed "over," since the archive, generally understood, cancels as it asserts.[31]

In a recent lecture that art historian Griselda Pollock presented on aesthetic witnessing and post-traumatic culture, she observed that, "the past only arrives when the future has been built to contain it."[32] In Frenkel's case, her use of technology "as a way to do certain things" built containers for the future before the past had arrived to fill them. Animating the residues of the archive in order to register this lack, she gives form to a rhizome ebb and flow of a past that cannot be objectively known but only subjectively and critically apprehended. Reaching beyond the new media frame to encompass a poetics of absence, she gives new meanings and resonance to its central elements of "rules, emergence, interactivity, and, of course, the ever-present phantasmagoric screen." The importance of her artistic practice for the history of new media art, like her open-ended outcomes, is central to a critical reinterpretation of the field as one that encompasses the complexity of memory in the digital realm and questions our investment in the phantasmagoric screen as the archival repository of an eternal present rather than recognizing it as a cipher for what losses haunt our historical consciousness.

1 Interview with the artist conducted by Caroline Seck Langill in 2006. Cited in Langill, "Vera Frenkel's *String Games* and the Germination of New Media Art in Canada," in *Esthétique des Arts Médiatiques: Ensemble ailleurs/Together Elsewhere*, eds. Louise Poissant and Pierre Tremblay (Québec, 2010), p. 380.

2 E-mail correspondence with the author, March 26, 2012.

3 References to the screen were also present in Frenkel's performance and print works of the 1970s. *Masks/Barriers* (1974) featured a large stretched paper screen smashed open by performers leaping through it. The screen was the central element in *Big X Window* (1975), a suite of large lithographs, and *The Big Book: Between Intentions & Executions* (1976), a thirty "page" sequence of collaged drawings with embedded text. For a discussion of Frenkel's 1970s performance works, see my essay "Vera Frenkel: The Secret Life of a Performance Artist," in *Caught in the Act*. eds. Tanya Mars and Johanna Householder (Toronto, 2004).

4 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Toronto, 1965), p. 3.

5 *Vera Frenkel, Lies & Truths: Mixed-Format Installations* (Vancouver, 1978), p. 13.

6 The first transmission, *Rehearsal*, held on October 30, 1974, was a test run of the facilities. During the second transmission, *Enactment*, held on November 6, free play of Cat's Cradle took place. The final transmission, *Review*, was held on November 13. The VAG catalogue also included line drawings of the Cat's Cradle figures on which the sequencing of the participants' actions was based and photo documentation of the inter-city event as it was being performed.

7 Langill 2010 (see note 1), p. 382.

8 Ibid., p. 376.

9 E-mail correspondence, March 26, 2012. A digital copy of the review from the Montréal French-language newspaper, *La Presse*, is available on the Daniel Langlois Foundation website, http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=2244 (accessed April, 2012). The review in *La Presse* may explain in part the delayed recognition of *String Games* as an iconic new media work. By describing *String Games* as "the center of the video world," the review identifies the work with the emergent artistic practice of video rather than electronic art, the latter viewed by most new media critics and historians as the legitimate precursor to contemporary new media art practices.

10 Another factor that contributed to the work's long hiatus from the public realm was the deletion of the master tape for the installation at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1978 by the video curator following the exhibition. Frenkel recalls that ". . . after spending three weeks in a Vancouver hotel room editing down the thirty-six hours of raw footage [from the live transmissions and video documentation of the event], the destruction of the master was so discouraging that I didn't look at the work again until 2005." E-mail correspondence, March 26, 2012.

11 The exhibition was held to mark InterAccess's twenty-fifth anniversary and ran from September 16 to November 7, 2005.

12 The Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, Ontario, under the curatorial direction of Jan Allen has been active in supporting Vera Frenkel's work. In addition to *String Games*, the gallery holds in its permanent collection Frenkel's 1979 installation, *Her Room in Paris (The Secret Life of Cornelia Lumsden: A Remarkable Story. Part 1)*, purchased in 2003. Frenkel has also donated her *fonds* (the documents of her creative process) to the Queen's University Archives. The process of selecting and transferring her *fonds* has been undertaken by archivist Heather Home over the last several years in collaboration with the artist and is still ongoing. Amy Furness's doctoral dissertation, "Toward a Definition of Visual Artists' Archives: Vera Frenkel's Archives as a Case Study" (Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto, 2012), provides an extended discussion of the archival dimensions of Frenkel's artistic practice.

13 *Vera Frenkel. Cartographie d'une pratique/Mapping a Practice* was presented at SBC galerie d'art contemporaine / Gallery of Contemporary Art in Montréal, Québec from October 2 to December 4, 2010. The catalogue for the exhibition is published on the Daniel Langlois Foundation website at http://www.fondationlanglois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=2230 (accessed April 2012). The Foundation's website also features a conversation with Frenkel and curator Sylvie Lacerte and Langill's 2006 interview with the artist.

14 *Traffic. Conceptual Art in Canada c. 1965–1980* is an historical survey of regional conceptual art practices that includes the works of over a hundred artists. It was first mounted at the Justina Barnicke Gallery in Toronto from November 2011, before traveling to Halifax, Calgary, Montréal and Karlsruhe, Germany. The *Keyworks* exhibition at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, July 30 to December 11, 2011, was accompanied by a modest catalogue with texts by Jan Allen and Earl Miller.

15 The OPTICA exhibition ran from January 21 to February 25, 2012. The DVD version of *String Games* was concurrently on view at Concordia University's Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery in *Traffic: Conceptual Art in Canada.*

16 See Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art. From Illusion to Immersion*, translated by Gloria Custance (Cambridge Mass., 2003); Christine Paul, *Digital Art*, revised edition (London, 2008); Michael Rush, *New Media in Art*, revised edition (London, 2005); and Edward A. Shanken, *Art and Electronic Media* (London, 2009).

17 Langill 2010 (see note 1), p. 377. Langill's larger study on new media art in Canada, "Shifting Polarities: Shifting Polarities. Electronic Media Art and Institutional Space, 1970–1990," was undertaken as a doctoral dissertation at Trent University, Canada.

18 As a printmaker in the early 1970s, Frenkel was represented by the Gallery Pascal, considered the leading venue at the time for works on paper. During that period, Frenkel's print-based works represented Canada at the 1972 Mostra Grafica of the Venice Biennale, toured in twin solo exhibitions, *Métagravure* and *Printmaking Plus*, organized by the National Gallery of Canada, and were acquired by museums, public galleries, and private collectors. In light of her success as a printmaker, Frenkel observes that "when I made *String Games* and began the subsequent series of performance works, I was perceived at the time to have abandoned my 'career' and my senses." E-mail correspondence, March 26, 2012.

19 Langill 2010 (see note 1), p. 377. It should be noted that while ephemeral, this evidence included thirty-six hours of live transmission and video documentation of the event, edited by Frenkel the following year for the Vancouver Art Gallery exhibition.

20 Ibid.

21 For documentation of *Mandela,* see Guy Brett, "A Radical Leap" in Dawn Ades, *Art in Latin America* (New Haven and London, 1989), p. 282. For an overview of Clark's artistic practice see her official website, http://www.lygiaclark.org.br/defaultpt.asp.

22 Kaprow's work is described in Kristine Stiles and Edward A. Shanken, "Missing in Action. Agency and Meaning in Interactive Art," *Context Providers. Context and Meaning in Digital Art*, eds. Margot Lovejoy, Christiane Paul, and Victoria Vesna (Wisconsin, 2000), pp. 88–89.

23 Ibid., p. 89.

24 Frenkel, *Lies & Truths: Mixed-Format Installations*, p. 13.

25 Ibid.

26 *The Secret Life of Cornelia Lumsden: A Remarkable Story, Part 1: Her Room in Paris* (1979) and *The Secret Life of Cornelia Lumsden: A Remarkable Story, Part 11: ... And Now, the Truth (A Parenthesis)* (1980).

27 See my essay, "Worlds Between: The Thematics of Exile and Memory in the Work of Vera Frenkel," in *Vera Frenkel. Raincoats, Suitcases, Palms* (Toronto, 1993).

28 The *Body Missing* website was produced through the curatorial initiative of Michael Century as a Special Projects Commission for the ISEA 1995 conference held in Montréal. ISEA International (formerly Inter-Society for the Electronic Arts) describes its mandate as fostering "interdisciplinary academic discourse and exchange among culturally diverse organizations and individuals working with art, science and technology." See http://www.isea-web.org.

29 Cited in Langill 2010 (see note 1), p. 375.

30 Dot Tuer, "Threads of Memory and Exile: Examining the Art of Storytelling in the Work of Vera Frenkel," in *Images. Festival of Independent Film and Video, cat.* (Toronto, 1997). Also included in *Of Memory & Displacement. Vera Frenkel Collected Works,*" DVD boxed set, 2005, and reprinted as "Threads of Memory and Exile. Vera Frenkel's Art of Artifice," in *Mining the Media Archive* (Toronto, 2005). In this text, I discuss the interrelationships of Frenkel's oeuvre from the making of *String Games* to the launch of the *Body Missing* website.

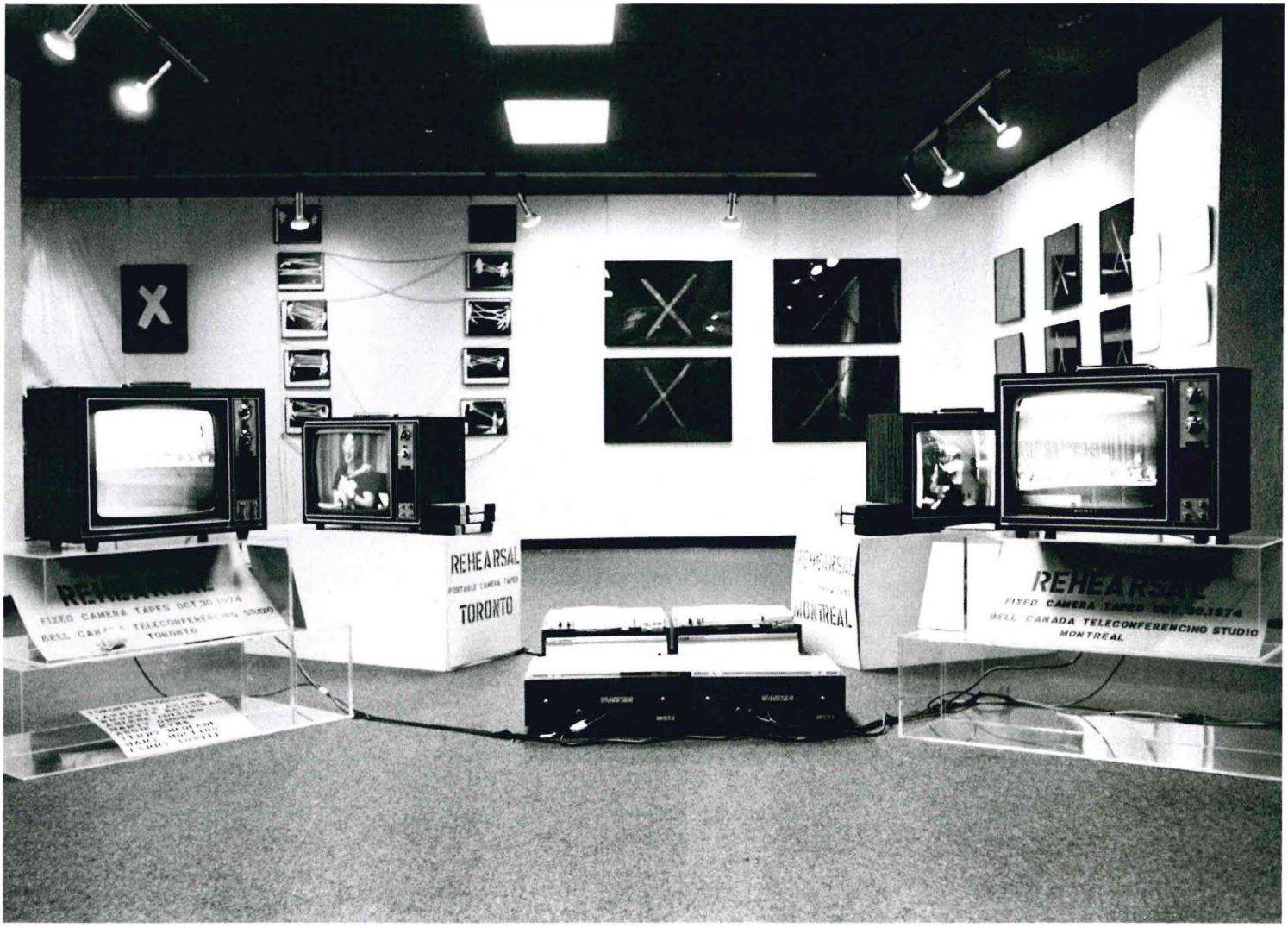
31 Frenkel, "Capture and Loss. Memory, Media, Archive," in *Public* 44 (2011), p. 163.

32 Griselda Pollock, "Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in Post-traumatic Cultures. Pathosformel and Transport Stations of Trauma in Installations by Chantal Akerman and Bracha Ettinger." Lecture presented at OCAD University, Toronto, on January 31, 2012.

String Games, street rehearsals
for video transmission, Toronto 1974

String Games, inside the Bell Canada Teleconferencing Studios, Montréal, during the video-performance 1974

Names of *String Games* participants:
Lawrence Adams
Miriam Adams
Bill Dwyer
Vera Frenkel
Tom Graham
Julia Grant
Linda Kelly
Ellen Maidman
Stephen Schofield
Thomas Stiffler



String Games, first installation, nine-hour four-channel playback, Galerie Espace 5, Montréal 1974