

SCREEN IS THE PLACE: “Fluid Identity and the Moving Image Feedback Loop”

(N.B. Highlighted headings denote the presentation of videos or slides)

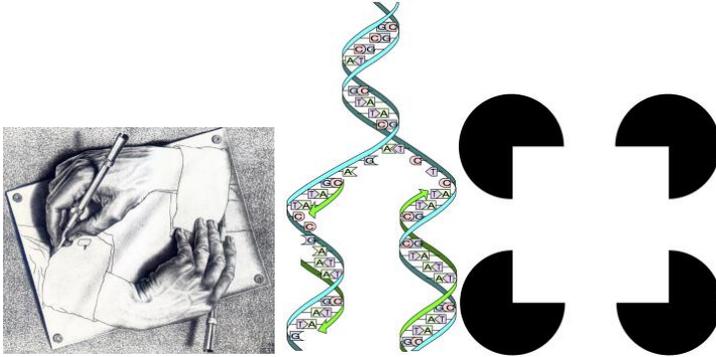
An increasingly immersive, shared video culture invites an exploration of Self as a fluid, non-fixed entity, placing the subject of experience in an infinite feedback loop between camera and screen. This “feedback loop” illustrates Self (and social) Identity as in perpetual production via analogy, through networked consciousness.

REAL FRACTAL FEEDBACK

A literal video feedback loop produces a fluid, electronic image in permanent upheaval, as chaos works itself into the matrix to produce a paradoxical visual order - a dynamic flow of imagery- an open system. Video artist Gary Hill states that “video’s *intrinsic principle* is feedback: it’s not linear time, but a movement that is bound up in thinking- a topology of time that is accessible.”

PETER CAMPUS TRANSITIONS

My research and practice are informed by the tradition of *Expanded Cinema*, coined in the mid-1960s by filmmaker Stan Vanderbeek, with its origins in the experiments of early 20th century avant-garde filmmaking, media-technologies and performance art. “Expanded Cinema is a film and video practice which activates the live context of watching, transforming cinema's historical and cultural ‘architectures of reception’ into sites of cinematic experience that are heterogeneous, performative and non-determined.”

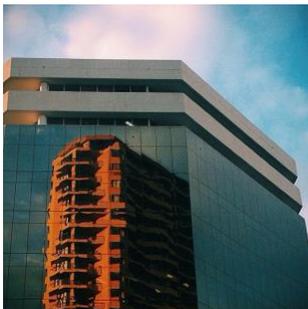


In his mind-blowing work *I Am A Strange Loop*, Cognitive Scientist Douglas Hofstadter explains that “*we are self-perceiving, self-inventing, locked-in mirages that are little miracles of self-reference.*” Hofstadter argues that the psychological self arises out of a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop. We are not born with an ‘I’- the ego emerges only gradually, as experience shapes our dense web of active symbols into a tapestry rich and complex enough to begin twisting back upon itself. The consequence is that a perspective (a mind) is a culmination of a unique pattern of symbolic activity in our nervous systems, which suggests that the pattern of symbolic activity that makes identity, that constitutes subjectivity, can be replicated within the brains of others, and perhaps even in artificial brains.[2]

To explore in a concrete fashion the idea of two strange loops coexisting in one head, Douglas Hofstadter describes a video experiment which I am hoping to conduct myself: two video cameras and two tv’s are set up so that camera A feeds screen A and far away from it, camera B feeds screen B; they are separate, disjointed feedback loops or identities. However, when systems A and B are gradually brought close enough together to begin interacting, camera A will see not only screen A but also screen B, so that loop B will enter into the content of loop A (and vice versa), creating a second “infinite corridor” in addition to the original- each system identity involves the other, in its

own definition. So the same goes for individual 'selves': each has their personal identity (or strange loop), yet that identity is dependent upon others. Hofstadter explains that brain cells are not the bearers of its consciousness, the bearers of consciousness are in fact "patterns of organisation".

Deleuze's notion that 'the brain is the screen' explains how the mind produces the film, at the same time as it is produced *by it*. The diegesis, the spatio-temporal 'world' of a film, is a figment of the protagonist's imagination. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener discuss the 'Cinema as Brain' film theory as "referring to the contemporary interest in identity, memory and looped temporal structures, calling into question the linear logic of classical cinema. Quoting pioneer Soviet Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, "the basic sign of the shot can be taken to be the final sum total of its effect on the cortex of the brain as a whole, irrespective of the ways in which the accumulating stimulants have come together". H. Munsterberg, founder of "psychotechnology" concludes that "film replays to its viewers their own processes of perception, and this with a precision achievable only via experiment".



The phenomenon of Context Collapse is further explained as "people from different contexts becoming part of a singular group of message recipients": there is strictly speaking, no communication between a sender and a receiver: rather, this culture of

message creates a “sender turned receiver, a receiver turned sender and a floating theme, which, for its part, sends and receives”. In relation to digital video culture, an infinite number of contexts collapse upon one another in a single moment of recording. As Mike Wesch describes, “the little glass lens becomes the gateway to a blackhole sucking all of time and space- virtually all possible contexts- in upon itself.” Content produced and consumed through social media and within networked publics is persistent, replicable, scalable, and searchable. With these affordances, actors within a networked public negotiate invisible audiences and the blurring of private and public, creating a culture more accepting of fluid identity.

Developing cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead’s argument that “the self is the internalization of the viewpoint of others”, Michel Foucault in *Of Other Spaces* writes, “the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space: of simultaneity, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, side-by-side, of the dispersed. Our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.”

My creative component work will explore the limits of fiction and of documentary as an absurdist ‘minimalist drama’, adopting a somewhat conceptualist approach through a series of around 10 loosely scripted scenarios: part studio-shoot, part exterior ‘performance art’ sequences. This structure relates loosely to Architect, Systems Theorist, Futurist, Buckminster Fuller’s ‘Scenario Universe’ principle: “a scenario of non-simultaneous and only partially overlapping transformative events”.

One actor plays a myriad of characters who are various facets of the one Self: Frank, Franky, Franco, Francesca- titled as such to challenge the way naming conventions lock in the comfortable notion that we- our selves- are cleanly separated entities. These characters then interact with the camera, director, the general public, and projections of themselves. In this way, I am interested in Deleuze's definition of repetition as "difference without a concept", inherently transgressive, identifying humor and irony in league with repetition because they create distance from laws and norms even while re-enacting them. "Being then becomes univocal: a single voice raises the clamor of being".

The protagonist plays "the poet, who speaks in the name of a creative power, capable of overturning representations, in order to affirm difference in the state of permanent revolution. His/her speech varies in accent and often repeats, as do his/her actions, and in this way, I hope to evoke the symbolic event of "empty time", broken free from repetition, whereby "an actor effaces herself as such, and joins the abstract realm of eternal return".

UBU ROI, BECKETT

One facet of the protagonist, Franky, is the quintessential mythological trickster. Inspired by the Futurist, Dada and Fluxus Art Schools, Franky is the absurd, 'idiot-savante' Ubu Roi, Buster Keaton, Beckett 'flaneur clown' who is often the butt of her own pranks, but light of Lewis Hyde's *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*, while the trickster may at first appear shallow, she often instigates change by challenging taboos, resulting in an elevated status for this mysterious figure. The protagonist is an inhabitant of Youngblood's world of 'Synthesthetic Cinema': "a cinema designed for process-oriented experiences, involving the act of flanerier in the future city:

an overall 'pattern event' that is in the film itself, as well as the subject of the experience.”



Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* distinguishes between the public and the 'civil' urban space, where people share a public persona without being pressed to take off their masks and 'let themselves go' or 'express themselves'. This site “discourages the thought of 'settling in', encouraging action, not interaction. In this way, the character of Franky visiting Sydney's Martin Place, inviting conversation with passersby, interrupting the uniform flow of the place.

FRANKY GOES TO MARTIN PLACE

In reference to Deleuze, Franky attacks good and common sense, satirising Richard Sennett's notion of “wearing a mask as the essence of civility, the shielding of others from being burdened with oneself”.

TRAVEL WINDOW

Following, the world of the video will investigate anthropologist Marc Augé's 'non-place'- the opposite of a utopia, a space of transit. Imagery of highways, airports, and the like will illustrate the character's contract with abstract, unmediated commerce: 'a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral'. The

work will explore the idea of travel versus the construct of tourism, in relation to moving through spaces geographic, psychological, intellectual, and physical.

COOKING IN VENICE

In response to the recent global media obsession, I have planned one scene where the character of Frank hosts a cooking show, in which he also appears as a contestant, cameraman, director, and judge. I am interested the way all these participants come together in the 'show', quite removed from the act of cooking itself. Deleuze states that "the more our daily life appears standardised, stereotyped, and subject to an accelerated reproduction of objects of consumption, the more art must be injected into it in order to extract from it that little difference which plays simultaneously between other levels of repetition, and even in order to make the two extremes resonate."

ROBERT WHITMAN PRUNE FLAT

My research is interested in 'the double toward infinity', where the double signifies the fragmentation of unity: the sign of repetition, reproduction, and renewal. Working with live projection- the protagonist interacting with another form of herself, will allow for an exploration of character in "real time", evoking the third person, illustrating the inherently paradoxical, tautological situation of co-existing with one's own self-image.

The character will often 'break the fourth wall' to expose "the macguffin" of a fixed notion of self. Citing the 'Relational Aesthetics' Art Theory coined in 1996, the work takes the audience "as material", where the viewer enters as an active and critical participant.

Deleuze argues that "when the image on the screen 'knows' that it is being perceived, there exists a space of "virtuality": the cinema has a mind "outside" or in excess of the

narration, characters, auteur or spectator, which eludes any fixed positionality. This challenges the idea of a unified, self-identical and rationally motivated individual, producing an 'identity crisis' (or celebration if you will) of sorts, which resolves itself only in a kind of loop, neither cancelling out nor laying to rest the possibilities of the un-seen and in-visible within the visibly seen”.

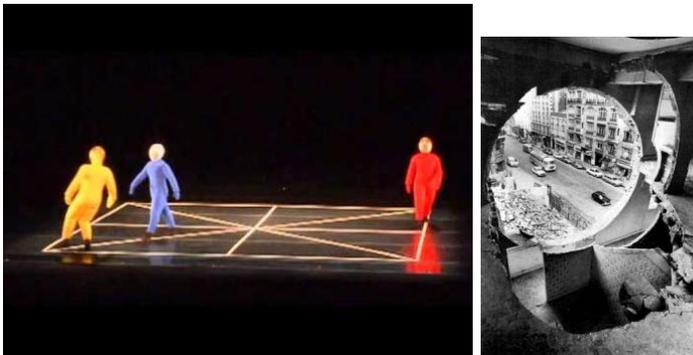


A key image the video work contends with is a variation of the “white cube” gallery, which presents as an archetypal, sacramental space in relation to 20th century art. In the online world though, the difference between artworks and their documentation is collapsing, and in fact the internet has become the primary exhibition space over the gallery. In a peculiar reversal, it is the object introduced into the gallery that frames the *gallery* and its laws. This context-less image evokes film critic Annette Michelson’s description of the “zero-gravity process” of contemporary cinema as a “re-orientation of the traditional picture plane as a 2D surface giving access to a 3D view”, inspiring the difference between things seen and felt. As representative of ‘the screen as gallery’, this ‘floating white cube’ can reflect on how as modernism gets older, context becomes content.

SUNSET UPSIDE DOWN

Aesthetic Philosopher R.G. Collingwood describes the ‘videosphere’ as the “noosphere transformed into a perceivable state. It is not the screen that disappears but that the

screen as support is materialized as an object alongside or within another screen ad infinitum.” Expanded Cinema then opens up the apparatus, challenging ideology by breaking through the phantasmification, to make its production obvious, whereby “every demonstration of the technological conditions of its own production is potentially a radical act”. The Bauhaus Art movement defined space as “the unifying element in architecture”, employing the notion of Raumempfindung or “felt volume”: ‘sensation of space’.



In defining “psycho-geography”, Philosopher Henri Lefebvre posits that “new social relations demand a new space and vice versa”. Walls, enclosures and facades serve to define both scene (where something takes place) and an obscene area, to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated”.

KIDS ON WALL

However, the “gallery online” exists in more of “a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory.”

Expanding Foucault’s notion of the ‘heterotopic cinema’: a space ‘capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, sites that are in themselves incompatible’, context collapse in the online gallery *celebrates* compatibility and shared

meaning-making. In Auge's "supermodernity" of excessive information and space, one wonders whether the frontier distinction between the scene and obscene still holds.



Disassociating the video camera from the eye, positioning it instead as an extension of the room, we incite the spectator to be implicit in the work, just as Jean-Louis Baudry's interest in Apparatus Theory lay in the 'psychical' relationship of the audience to the 'image'. More than from sight and the eye, metaphors for the material of *Digital Cinema* are taken from malleable substances like wax and viscous liquids, with its chameleon-like mutations, morphing of shapes, and scaling sizes. Media Theorist Vivian Sobchack comments that "as our physical double, the morph interrogates the dominant philosophies and fantasies that fix our embodied human being and constitute our identities as discrete, and thus remind us of our true instability: our physical flux, our lack of self-coincidence, our subatomic as well as subcutaneous existence that is always in motion and ever changing."



Creating an electronic vocabulary in post-production, the digital video project will

overlay projection, greenscreen, and employ methods such as doubling, superimpositions and other spatial and durational effects to transcend the contract between image and sound, and handle fiction as system, as opposed to substance. I am interested in inspiring some kind of visual and aural dissonance, immersing the viewer in a tangible moment of 'presence' whilst deferring any determinable 'resolution'. In this way, the work will create 'empty spaces', defined by Jerzy Kociatkiewicz and Monika Kostera as "places which are not prohibited, but inaccessible because of their invisibility: our experience of empty spaces does not include sensemaking".



Inspired by the Situationists' "detourned Image"'s indifference towards a forgotten original, and concern with rendering a certain sublimity", the video will play with intertextuality, drawing attention to the meaning of a work as a social construction, and the world as a product of representation. As a work of metafiction, the video will reference a cross-pollination of genres such as performance art, science fiction, film essay, advertising, and documentary, culminating in an 'electrobricollage', or "a networked image, containing a potential infinity of other images: "an image to the power of image", according to digital artist and art theoretician, Edmond Couchot.



Comprised of a succession of windows and folders opening and closing on a cosmic computer screen, Camille Henrot's "encyclopedic" video *Grosse Fatigue* is a sprawling, multi-layered montage that takes on the history and origins of life in the universe. The work (which won the Venice Biennale's Silver Lion this year), is an idiosyncratic mix of popular myth, intellectual pilfering and interface aesthetics, suggesting an endless mise en abyme, playing into a larger dialogue about the nature of artifacts, facsimiles, and worth, inside and outside of the art and museum worlds.

The artist explains: "As soon as you think you have laid out and circumscribed the entirety of your universe within a single, selfsame landscape, isn't the only question of any worth, and which relentlessly nags and torments the mind, inevitably the same as that with which Jonas Cohn ends his *History of the Infinite* (1896): "But what is there beyond the limit?"

Expanded digital cinema is not a window on the world or an interface to reality, but the *very space or face* of it: the "white cube" of it. The fluidity of digital video gives expression to the malleable, liquid configuration of Self in the feedback loop, where collapsing contexts form an open, shared code of experience.

EXHIBITION CONTINUES THIS WAY