

Closed Eye Vision

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This paper was first presented at the *Revelation Perth International Film Festival RevCon Academic Conference*, July 2013.

Proposed to be published in *Senses of Cinema* Film Journal, February 2014.

N.B. Video excerpts screened at the conference are represented here by figures.

If experience is the basis for imagination, what is it *like* to be a bat, asks philosopher Thomas Nagel on consciousness, or the person lining up for the rollercoaster at the fun park?¹ The infinite feedback loop between camera and screen submerges Self in repetition and chaos, and it emerges anew. Expanded Cinema revels in film and video art coming together, where the integrated social dimensions of ‘context collapse’² expose how one message sent is another received. Self becomes the medium, manifesting new psychic mobility.

Back in the day, we watched the box or bought a ticket to sit in the dark- as passive participants in a uni-directional mass cultural loop carrying a heavily masculine, heterosexist, often racially-inscribed charge³: cause lead to effect. The Internet’s instant archive of feedback pirates the sacred altar of film, raising the question of aesthetic banality and leveling a culture of ‘artifact production’, documenting the quotidian.



This hauntological feedback loop presents a paradoxical state of the spectre: neither being nor non-being, the past lives inside the present, basking in indeterminacy and liminality. Communication ‘all ways at once’ sees that the message loses its shape and liquefies, in plays of chaos.



The character attempts to coincide with herself in a collapsed present³. Chaos breeds life when order breeds habit.⁴ Lacan’s vision of the patient in the psychologist’s chair was that she projects her message into the therapeutic space of the void created by the silence of the analyst, in supposedly “the monumental construct of narcissism⁴”. The patient sees her being as an imaginary construct and actively disengages from the ‘statue’ of her reflected self in the feedback, rediscovering real time.

le sang d'un poete, jean cocteau 1930



Filmmaker Jean Rouch who coined *Cinema Verite*, talks about his actors: “At first, there’s a self conscious hamminess. They say to themselves, ‘people are looking at me and I must give a nice impression of myself’. Then they begin to think perhaps for the first time sincerely, about their problems, about who they are, and they begin to express what they have within themselves. They will often deny the authenticity of the film, claiming they were putting it on for the camera, because what has been revealed of them is so personal, a role which normally they would not project to the world. The extraordinary possibility of playing a role which is oneself, but which one can disavow because it is only an image of oneself.”⁵

shadows, john cassavetes 1959



Later in 1999 on the topic of ‘Truth and Fact in documentary cinema’, Herzog was saying “by dint of declaration, the so-called Cinema Verité is *devoid* of verité. It reaches a mere superficial truth, the truth of accountants.” Another declaration on his list was “The moon is dull. Mother Nature doesn’t call, doesn’t speak to you, although a glacier eventually farts.”⁶ I like to think he’s talking about the nature of chaos. What is cinema for if not to expose the myth of history and celebrate the abstruse nature of identity.

three transitions, peter campus 1973

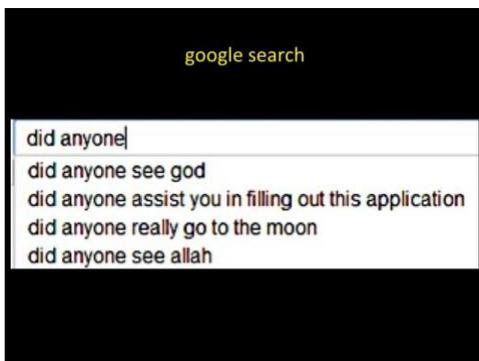


The feedback loop produces fluid electronic images in permanent upheaval, as chaos works itself into the matrix to produce a paradoxical visual order. Extending an active, subjective ontological status to the *camera itself* evokes the third person, shattering notions of self-image, collective perception of time and fixed perspective.



The fragile construction and annihilation of images then becomes metaphor for the tenuous and absurd appropriation of fixed identity. For Deleuze and Guattari, Schizophrenia was the exterior limit of Capitalism: the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but Capitalism only functioned on the condition that it *inhibit* this tendency, or that it push back on this limit⁷. Now, the *tendency* pushes back on the system. Capitalism's machine of surfaces finds us quite comfortable with schizophrenic culture's blurring of self and world. With context collapse, now it's possibly more a case of "physician, heal thyself!"

In Gene Youngblood's seminal *Expanded Cinema* of 1970, he says of Michael Snow's film *Wavelength*, that if a room could talk about itself, this is what it would say⁸.



In the networked cinema, the walls keep talking long after we've left the room.



Meanwhile, the entropy of commercial entertainment is the feedback loop stuck in retrospect: retro without reference, often generating illusions of impending disaster and an overriding sense of paranoia. Attempts to 'exorcise' noise from the feedback loop naturally only cause more disequilibrium in false isolation.



New cinema sees chaos as order on another level, and works with the art of relations, power and control structures. Enacting assault on the communication control system has its predecessors among the Dadaists and Surrealists, intent on routing out the capitalist war machine from within.



The Situationists affirmed the commodifying power of the image and the communicative role of money as a “cybernetic mechanism at the symbolic cultural level”⁹. Force once brought in, subverts the power of money.

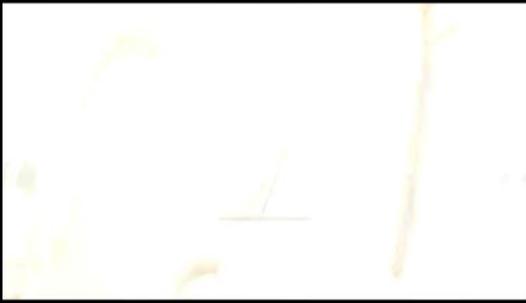


The actual product becomes superfluous: the media itself becomes the final object of consumption¹⁰.



Language is a virus that uses the human body as a host: the most powerful form of control¹¹. The networked environment reaches multiple audiences, creating floating themes which erode and de-territorialise ‘authentic’ identity.

antiviral, brandon cronenberg 2012



Self slayed and self created, the ancient Egyptian Ouroboros is an image of wholeness and potential for infinite¹². For Bataille, the poetry lies in the spiral, periodic exchange between identifiable beings imprisoned within feedback loops of restrictive communicative forms and between minor and major forms of communication themselves, creating festive moments of sacred effusion where boundaries dissolve and beings dance, undifferentiated as in the flow of water or that of electric current¹³.

ouroboros, chrysopoea of cleopatra



Techno-anarchy is always the creation of a new world never seen before, imperceptibly gaining on reality. “Someday you’ll be able to go to a party and be the only one there¹⁴”, said Warhol. Slavoj Zizek asks for ‘*the third pill*’ in cinema: not the one that shows the truth or the illusion: the one that shows the reality *in* the illusion¹⁵.

f blurrd, not anything 2013



hail, amiel courtin-wilson 2011



Driven more by instinct than design, the new screen comes to life where doco and fiction, film and video collide. Expository, dramatic narrative moves towards the personal, sensual, independent: an extension of the filmmakers' central nervous system¹⁶, shared. Where cinema expands and context collapses, self-constitution and transgression go hand in hand. Zones of anarchic hybridization create a void in which the polymorphous eye sees itself seeing.

the fourth dimension, harmony korine 2012

"An attempt at visualizing
the fourth dimension:
take a point,
stretch it into a line,
curl it into a circle,
twist it into a sphere,
and punch through the sphere."

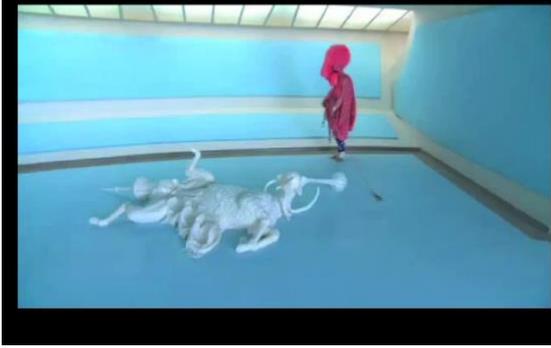
VICE

*the stars are out tonight, david bowie 2013
video, floria sigismondi*



The potential of contemporary creation myth is realised where new cinema fuses subject and object, engaging the psychosocial dimension of organised ritual, competition, exhibitionism and celebrity associated with collective cultural identity.

the cremaster cycle, matthew barney 1994-2002



Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle* adheres to its own rhythm, which it then short-circuits. Barney explains of the process: If this pulsating cycle of desire and discipline repeats itself enough times, something that's really elusive can slip out: a form that *has* form, but isn't overdetermined¹⁷. Defying distinction between art and entertainment reveals a networked image, containing a potential infinity of other images: *image to the power of image*. New art merges the temporal value of consciousness with the stasis of the commodity-fetish, submerging itself inside a speculative market.

spring breakers, harmony korine 2012



The art of Korine's *Spring Breakers*¹⁸ is a commitment to the logic of chaos: subverting normative ideology by mutating nauseating, hyper-saturated music video aesthetics (sexism included), with an explicit use of repetitive, banal dialogue. Casting teen Disney actors, his own wife and a gangster rapper as borderline-sociopathic crims adds to the synaesthetic genre melt, skewing the cultural feedback loop to expose 'the man behind the curtain'¹⁹: the fallacy behind the bourgeois symbolic order based on a sanctity of the absurd.

the clock, christian marclay 2010-13



The avant-garde evacuates conceptual binaries of their historical materiality by relaying them through a thick network of multiple significations²⁰, aestheticising the political and reactivating the conceptual as root knowledge of the social. Where meta-narrative challenges the closed economy, we celebrate the collapsed, continuous present as a constellation of signifiers circulating around an empty center²¹.



Art theorist Chris Kraus writes that the complete ubiquity of video within contemporary art has rendered discussion about it as a medium, obsolete. There is no longer anything singular about video²². Arguably, this is its profundity: access and fluidity make it a void nexus of identity and desire, transgressing a suspended space of shared narcissism. New cinema coerces the viewer into creating along with the film, feeding back more creative potential.



Man is only completely human when he plays²³. The Macguffin²⁴ of Self reveals Society of the Spectacle²⁵ as simply *the spectacle of society*.



In the introduction to *Expanded Cinema*, Buckminster Fuller contributes: In most languages of most cultures throughout history, seeing has been equated with understanding. But we come to see that we don't really see, that 'reality' is more *within* than without²⁶. It was film pioneer Stan Brakhage who talked about *closed eye vision*: a child's untutored eyes before she has been taught to think and see in symbols.²⁷



Like hypnagogic patterns on the inside of eyelids, or the 'life flashing before your eyes' vision that seizure inspires, "When you shut your eyes you will still be able to see"²⁸ metaphorised Hobart's MONA gallery founder, David Walsh of the recent Dark Mofo arts festival, which included an Immersive Audiovisual Environment by Kurt Hentschlagel, called *Zee*.²⁹



As an experience of both sensory deprivation *and* overload, as with the slit eye in *Un Chien Andalou*³⁰ or indeed the kink in the visual feedback loop, the mind images a tabula rasa: blind imagination.

Notes

- ¹ Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83.4. (1974):435.
- ² Michael Wesch, "Context Collapse", *Mediated Cultures: Digital Explorations of our Mediated World led by Cultural Anthropologist Michael Wesch*, 2008, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://mediatedcultures.net/projects/youtube/context-collapse/>.
- ³ Rosalind Kraus, *Video, The Aesthetics of Narcissism* (1976):53, accessed January 7, 2013, <http://people.ucsc.edu/~ilusztig/176/downloads/reading/rosalindkraus.pdf>
- ⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).
- ⁵ Jean Rouch cited in K. Macdonald & M. Cousins (eds), *Imagining reality: the Faber book of documentary*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).
- ⁶ Werner Herzog, 1999, *Minnesota Declaration*, accessed January 20, 2013, <http://www.wernerherzog.com/52.html>.
- ⁷ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983): 246.
- ⁸ Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, (London: E P Dutton, 1970):122.
- ⁹ Pfohl. "The Cybernetic Delirium of Norbert Wiener".
- ¹⁰ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Black & Red 2000).
- ¹¹ William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*, (Paris: Olympia Press, 1962).
- ¹² Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, (Cornell University Press, 1996):179.
- ¹³ Pfohl. "The Cybernetic Delirium of Norbert Wiener".
- ¹⁴ Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 399.
- ¹⁵ Slavoj Zizek, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, Mischief Films, 2006, Video.
- ¹⁶ Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 82.
- ¹⁷ Matthew Barney, cited in *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, Nancy Spector & Neville Wakefield (Guggenheim Museum 2003):7.
- ¹⁸ Harmony Korine, *Spring Breakers*, Muse Productions, 2012, Film.
- ¹⁹ Victor Fleming, *The Wizard of Oz*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939, Film.
- ²⁰ Stephen Tumino, *Cultural Theory After the Contemporary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011):107
- ²¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 23, Le sinthome*, (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

- ²² Chris Kraus, *Indelible Video* (Semiotext(e), 2011), accessed February 10, 2013, <http://semiotexte.com/?p=683>.
- ²³ Friedrich Schiller, cited in Jacques Ranciere, "The Aesthetic Revolution And Its Outcomes", *New Left Review* (2002). Accessed January 3, 2013. <http://newleftreview.org/II/14/jacques-ranciere-the-aesthetic-revolution-and-its-outcomes>.
- ²⁴ "Wikipedia MacGuffin", last modified 8 January 2014, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGuffin>
- ²⁵ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*.
- ²⁶ Buckminster Fuller, Introduction to *Expanded Cinema*, by Gene Youngblood (London: E P Dutton, 1970), 46.
- ²⁷ Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1976).
- ²⁸ David Walsh, cited in Debbie Cuthbertson, "MONA shines light into the darkness", Sydney Morning Herald, June 16, 2013, accessed March 2, 2013, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/mona-shines-light-into-the-darkness-20130616-2ocg7.html>.
- ²⁹ Kurt Hentschlager, *Zee*, 2008, Video.
- ³⁰ Luis Bunuel, *Un Chien Andalou*, Les Grands Films Classiques, 1929, Film.