I

Post-Digital Being There:
Werner Herzog, The Cave and Me
By Caitlin Denny

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9uqPeIYMik
Werner Herzog "The Enigma of Kasper Hauser" (1974)

The character of Kaspar Hauser is one I continually look back upon when questioning my Being. Enigmatic, as the title of Herzog's film suggests, not only because of his puzzling nature, but because of what is hidden within him. A cave dweller, uneducated to our ways, a man locked in a dungeon throughout his young adult life and suddenly set free into society not knowing how to walk, speak or respond to anything at all. His truth is simple, or perhaps more complicated than we could ever imagine. A misunderstanding of an apple's will to roll farther than expected by its thrower questions the logic of logic itself – questions the will of objects and tools, especially post-digitally. As Kaspar learns how to speak, he talks of his unhappiness with the world he lives in now, with all these distractions.

"Mother, I am so far away from everything."

He says to his adopted mother in the real world. Dimension pervades him, he senses the walls of a highly advanced networked society compared to the depths he had been living amongst. Themes in Herzog's 1974 film run through to his most recent *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. From the isolation of a cave, not unlike the allegory of Plato's Cave, comes a madness of phenomenal psychedelic possibilities. The representation guides the spirit, or post-spirit or whatever you want to call it. Kaspar Hauser reached the end of the world amongst society, but in his cave, the world was groundless; an image. The sophistication of the Chauvet Cave paintings in *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* allow us to relate with a human being 32,000 years ago during a time of limitlessness; pure clearings of unknown worlds, a never-ending net. Both caves are portals towards a nearness.

The cave painters' known world was extraordinarily tiny compared to how vast our networks are today. Their unknown world, however seems much larger than ours. Time and history did not exist for the painters – the passing of 5,000 years was just as possible as the passing of 5 days. Time did not intimidate them, the ego was concave. Unfathomables existed, time stopped and started again, anonymity bred creativity. The cavemen were living brutally post-digitally. But how much more is truly 'known' today than was in 30,000 BC? Are there not still peoples, places, ideas that we will not uncover – isn't knowledge, especially amidst the influx of smart technology and failures of Artificial Intelligence, a means of understanding (the image) than mastering (all images)?

"The frantic abolition of all distance brings no nearness."
(Heidegger)

Nearness is akin to knowing oneself – the age old question of "who am I?" that seems to linger behind every thought, behind every time you say "O-M-G" out loud. And is OMG just the onslaught indicator of our "Ah Ha" moment – The answer to a puzzle, the *truth* being revealed. The new proximity – diminished sense of space, bigger 'personal space', gestural acuteness – after effects of a rush of minds towards the same outlet. Fear drives the scurry, an attempt to educate that backfires as any mass education will. But fear has no place amongst the unknown. We must not forget the intentions in recent new technology beginnings. Imagination is what drove technological progress and what it strived for, a greater uncovering, to heighten experience. That experience has come to a halt for many internet users, unbeknownst to them. Multiple studies have linked excessive internet usage with forms of depression and anxiety, contemporary diseases of the mind. The internet can be a stifling tool if used improperly, a tool that was meant to expand the mind is now a form of validity for facts, emotions, social status, etc. The internet is an aid in our questions, a vehicle for discovery, not an end all to end all. With no unknown, we are each individually in power. But the joy and mystery of life comes with powerlessness, something that loomed over the internet in its early days and still could. Incorrigibility is our biggest threat. For example, Descartes' "I think therefore I am", could now be "I surf therefore I am" – a sense of entitlement and power that is uneasily rooting itself.

Kaspar Hauser was thrown unwillingly into a world of infinite blockades, changing his perception of nearness/farness. The net, like Medieval society for Hauser, muddles the nearness into a farness, into a *Thrown* abyss. Has new technology thrown

us too far? Do we flow with reality, or are our instincts and world views becoming increasing detached and unaware of what we don't know? Heidegger's term *throwness* is a primordial banality of Being-in-the-world which had long been overlooked by metaphysical conjecture. We are thrown powerlessly into a world that was there before and will remain there after we are gone. Hauser's *thrownness* into the world is not unlike the effects of the post-digital, the net being our all-encompassing *Thereness*. Being *there* is being amongst, even amongst oneself. The net is a reflective *thereness* where we understand one another through ourselves, eventually coming to not be ourselves, and surrender our existence to an amorphous 'Theyness'. The net went from isolation to 'they' in a blink of an eye.

'They' is also a desperate archive, a view, a window, an example – not experience. In Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, he uses new 3D film technology to imitate the actual experience of being in the cave and seeing the artwork with the depths and movement of the cave walls. This could be seen as an attempt to merely record the cave in the most realistic manner, but paired with the image of the film crew themselves, a meandering conversation with a perfumer (amongst many other perplexingly open ended interviews) and Herzog's poetically quizzical insights, it's apparent that the film is itself a cave for thought, where isolation and *theyness* do not exist. Tumblr archives without meaning, a powerful tool of recognition, but a foray into a pit of options that hits a brick wall. With this new 'live' form of the archive, too many options create disinterest. The archive becomes proof of whatever, of a crazy lady filming a rainbow in her backyard – which is quite a poetic gesture itself – but when imagined as a minute detail in the scheme of what has been archived on the internet in the past 20+ years, is a schizophrenic file to put away and never be touched again. "Pix or it didn't happen" is our new slogan. Proof, even if photoshopped (especially if photoshopped?), count as monuments of activity. No pix, no monument, no possibility. In ways this stretches our imaginations, but to a point of pointlessness – we cannot reach the cave.

" …*Heidegger continually speaks in this text of Dasein, of Being there, thrown in history, as the situation of the cave. The cave… was the name that Heidegger gave to what he had earlier called "falling into the one" … This is the central metaphor of his decisive contribution about mortality. Mortality, he says in Sein und Zeit, is everyone's else's, a statistic. It is only when each of us recognizes her personal mortality – her being toward*

death – that an authentic life becomes possible." (Alan Gilbert, 2010, Breaking News: the cave, Heidegger's national socialism and Leo Strauss)

But authenticity comes in stages, much like the lifespan of a digital native from pre to post-digitalness. The situation of the cave starts with the state of mind – the cave dweller, the digital native, and the immediacy of their surroundings. The initial encounter with the shadows creates a life of possibility, childish wisdom and warm truth. A first computer, an early gaming system, an experience of awe and awakening. Chained to this experience, we know nothing else. But, with the removal of the chains the shadows become truer in comparison to the object itself that creates the shadow. The dweller may even believe it is the shadow that creates the object – it is the groundless nature of unbridled technological experience that has created a grounding, a factual basis for the initial experience itself, reflectively. The internet cafe, a largely abandoned mode of being and using, acted as an unshackling for many by bringing the shadows into a public arena. Unchained, the dweller, the native, ventures outside the cave into vastness. Truths of the vastness do not occur all at once, but among a dwelling where the truth lies in the most unhidden. Social computing, as in the public usage model, is an unhidden constant reminder of the human body, of other's similar experiences to yours. Striving to rekindle the initial personal and almost sacred digital experiences, one must gain power again and eliminate the competition. The internet cafe quickly disappeared and computing was made private, isolated once again. From there comes the descent into the darkness and hiddenness of the cave – our beginning. With the "computer room" as our new cave (and this could be a physical or metaphysical room), we become nearer to our own kind. At our most inhuman we search for knowledge in familiarities and attractiveness, often masquerading as a cultured uncovering. This is the deepest shadow we will fall into, the net as the shadow of the unknown. It floats, dips about reality. At times the net can be a wall of sameness, a corridor of nothing – but if used in accordance to the passions and anxieties of a post-digital Being, the internet is yet another cave within a cave of possibility. The shadow of the cave painter dancing about the cave walls. Anxiety, a compulsion to live, to understand, is a necessity of using the net with stride, with chill perseverance.

http://mausoleum.internetarchaeology.org/
Krist Wood "Mausoleum", 2010

Post-digital is a world view, an understanding

of Being. It's easy for the intentions to slip and become hasty, to rush through time in an effort to know everything all at once. If all distances in time and space are shrinking faster and faster, a concept of technical gestural absurdity seems fitting, an amalgamation of post-digital concerns. The insights of Kaspar Hauser are often absurd, Werner Herzog himself being a humorous figure and the concept of the cave itself being one of complete illogical foolishness. This is the gravity of unconscious thought. The work of Krist Wood is a fine example of the sober absurdity the post-digital mind leans towards.

"Thus we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it."
(Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology, pp.287)

The essence of technology, the net, the post-digital, is not technological. It is experiential, brutal and human. A post-digital world evades history, much like the time of the Chauvet cave paintings, of Kaspar Hauser's initial dwelling and of my own timeline of who what where and when.

I leave you with work to accompany the above essay, some informal, poorly recorded, but all of a brutal truthiness.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZ9HNA3HhSY
Headboggle @ Amnesia, San Francisco February 15, 2011

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1nrmnubGW4
Die Todliche Doris "Kavaliere"

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrjwmQ3f0qk
Henri Chopin, performance @ Colour Out of Space Festival, Brighton, UK, September 7, 2007.

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…'Cause I look like a Cloud
By Devin Kenny

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In large swaths of the world, the Internet has served to widen access to tools with which we can connect with each other (albeit in an arguably superficial way). Those tools make themselves apparent in social networking & through the sharing of documents, music, video, images, etc.

Internet usage has also altered the way in which we think of created experiences (art, entertainment, etc) and media. Our ability to comment on things anonymously, with a pseudonym, or publicly and in a highly visible form (see comments on nahright.com or the "thumbs up if you_____" phenomenon on Youtube for proof) has also changed the way we engage with created things; that is, we can use created image/sound/text experiences as platforms upon which we can stand and broadcast other related or unrelated ideas through the forum of comments often attached. With the outpouring of capital after the dot com boom/crash into social networking and avenues through which people interact with and share music, games, video, or images, the internet has changed its landscape drastically from the time of Angelfire and Geocities and bulletin boards, where people of esoteric tastes could communicate in a very rudimentary, but seemingly more authentic way, if only because the simulacra was more primitive. In the early days that communication online came with the sharing of things held dear, such as fan fiction, fan images, HTML code, recipes, et cetera et cetera. Some could call this art. Regardless, from the advancements in the sensory experience of being online other things have changed as well and we can now look to the Internet as a way of sharing and discussing any number of phenomena. But with so many more Internet users, and so many more ways of expressing oneself and entertaining oneself online, how do we stand out and make ourselves seen?

The Meta Tag

The Meta Tag is a keyword or series of keywords used in an html code of a webpage so that it can be found by a web crawler which is employed by a search engine. Metadata is data about data, in this case, data describing the container of data (a website). Tags are also used in blogging and media sharing services like Youtube (the second most popular search engine next to Google) for the same function.

In a way, a tag (like you would put on the corpse of a deceased MC) is a label, but a meta tag is a way of giving multiple, equally-powerful labels to an object, increasing the number of people that may want to "grab" it.

Lil B

Lil B, also known as the Based God, has purportedly released 1000+ songs over the past 4 years, has over 150 Myspace pages each chock-full of material, and tons of Youtube videos as well. His work is brilliant not on strictly formal terms: his rhyming ability is often…pitiful, but at times the "rawness" of his lack of ability allows for super-sentimental nuggets to come out. His real brilliance is in how he became famous: flooding the market with promotional material and search engine optimization. However, he approaches SEO not in the traditional sense.

IT'S NOT ABOUT MARKETING THE WORK,

IT'S ABOUT MARKETING THROUGH WORK

Whereas the traditional creator using the Internet would make the highest-quality product they could and then put their greatest amount of energy into publicizing the work, Lil B seeks to devote maximum energy to production and distribution, making, and marketing, and not separating the two. This was accomplished not only through the memeplex (he has a ton of LOLCATS-esque images with his phrases like "BASED GOD FUCKED MY BITCH" embedded in them) but also by creating sonic memes such as the almost compulsive ejaculation of the words "swag" and "woop!". The use of catchphrases in rap was certainly formulated and perfected in the Atlanta rap scene (Young Jeezy, O.J. da Juiceman, Waka Flocka, and Gucci Mane all have their signature utterances) but Lil B takes it, combines it with the long-running traditions in the Bay Area (Oakland being the first place a course in Ebonics was pitched in schools) and makes it into pure pastiche. Pardon the aforementioned oxymoron, but this has, I believe allowed him to become the Internet (and now "real") phenomenon he is today. And the diabolically post-sincere nature of his work is something to really behold, as it reflects our world back to us.

Consider another avant-garde musician/entrepreneur: DJ Raedawn also known as Crunc Tesla in his videos, like:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BdR3_EqavI

We see a strange story at the end of the description of his video:

"Here goes some hype fiction for the heads out thurrrr! Miss Teen usa aka Miss South Carolina could even understand that the Britney Spears is a Stargate alien from the planet Mars or maybe Venus. (I'm not sure) Lil Wayne and Rhianna also concur that these fellas blur the line of reality through art fatality. Mortal Kombat on you Wombats!!! Finish him for breakfast lunch and dinner to see who the winner is on who wants to me a millionare or even chamillionare. I found a billion google type candies worn by a sexy gal named Mandy. She was totally crazy and loved to listen to Dipset and even Snoop Dogg !She even predicted the dow jones nascar crash while buying hash browns at the potato stock market. Here's my most favorite tale: One day I saw a cute fat kitten run amok. His name was John and he had a lil sister named Mary Ann and an even smaller sister named Suzy. They went to the store to buy a crack rock for Paris Hilton and her boyfriend Oj Simpson. then Johnny Cochran stepped on Suzy and went to court with her dramatic parents. Meanwhile, the boy cat from around the corner who went to the same school where the olsen twins escaped, found some hardcore booty shake records from the 90's. He listened to the classic songs yet new they were disrespectful to women..."

The above is an example of not only creating a rupture in the Youtube system, by inserting prose into a section only deemed for description of your video, but also a clever space for inserting misleading/audience-widening keywords, with the goal that I think Lil B also has: reaching the greatest number of people, those outside of their region or highly-exclusive/esoteric subculture.

Crunc Tesla is also interested in positivity:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqERH2_nszY

Crunc Tesla is also into the ladies and has developed a means of expressing this desire productively:

http://www.facebook.com/groups/61595089766

Compare this to Lil B's Based Queens and the legions of female fans plastered on his website and Dior Paint Tumblr page.

The old paradigm of the misanthropic or idiot-savant artist, toiling away in solitude until discovered is blown out of the water as a result of yes, television and mass-media, but even more profoundly, the internet, which allows any person to become their own media powerhouse. When I first came across this phenomenon, I really thought it would spread like wildfire throughout the Internet, especially given the cloud of tags used on WordPress, del.icio.us, and various other web aggregates, but I really haven't seen many other cultural producers use it as a strategy other than Crunc Tesla.

In an attempt to comment on and push the form I created the following video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVGuFahE92Y

And with that an attempt at embedding a stream-of-consciousness of celebrity and former celebrity names along with vapid/accessible banter:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCwwQ220XsY

But, both were missing out on crucial features that I think are present in the work of Lil B, a la:

Dr. Phil
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhM-0VRN9iM

Ellen Degeneres
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8u6EodZ

I'm Miley Cyrus
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFjQNWhboJ4

Charlie Sheen
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0M8oyrJn9Q

Look like Jesus
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhiHZB9sRk

Each of these moves serves to both keep him in the radar of the internet (via creating songs that use figures popular in middle America, and/or those that could advance his career (Ellen Degeneres has famously showcased a variety of rappers on her daytime talk show, including forerunner to the method and crewmate Soulja Boy). The songs are also very repetitive and formulaic. Using the empty parody of rap as a framework, it also allows him to stay relevant, and consistent, which are phrases one will often hear if they seek out advice on how to bring in followers and/or an audience for their web output. In an attempt to push this aforementioned interpretation of Lil B's work, I produced,

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIUz3ubdeR8

for writer Paddy Johnson of the renowned Art Fag City blog. It was released on her birthday in a quiet online party.

I also planned on writing a tweet using my @ devinkkenny account approximating Lil B's brash tweets to Kanye West

http://rapradar.com/2011/01/18/lil-b-explains-kanye-west-tweet/

requesting Mr. Biesenbach's add on Facebook, but he already added me, so it seemed in bad taste.

So in essence Lil B taps into the divergent adolescent desires of being accepted, but also being an autonomous individual. The same desire that may drive people to tagging walls, or tagging blogs. He also shows us that swagger need not be encapsulated in material goods (see his beat-up shoes), or congruous (his proclamations about being an ex-robber or felon, but still being positive, while toting dozens of guns, and discouraging the 'hood mindset' while still being proud to "fuck that ho' in her ass" until "that pussy squirt[s] milk"). The future's so bright, we gotta retire "swag".

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPfg0vXh_bA

This has been a based cultural analysis by Devin Kenny. Sloppy scholarship,? Nah, I'm stayin' positive. Based, because I used to be a shoplifter, but now I've got my mind right and am stackin' texts before depostin' checks.

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Canons in the Slipstream
By Eugene Kotlyarenko

Redefining the Origins of a Film Canon

In the salvaged introduction of an abandoned book project, filmmaker and former critic, Paul Schrader – after much internal debate[1] – stakes a claim for the legitimacy of a film canon, with the idea that, unlike fine art and literature, cinema is a historically transitional art. Schrader[2] posits that because 100 years of cinema is wedged between the word-based narrative masterpieces of the 19th Century and the coming 21st Century of "synthetic images and sounds" there is a temporal sliver from which one can draw a stable set of irrefutable works. With a foundation in place, he presents a set of criteria barely tweaked from its Kantian origins[3]. Then the introduction ends and Schrader presents a three-tier list.

There is no attempt to discuss the films with his criteria in mind because that would in fact be the book that was never written. Schrader's decision not to go forward with the idea must be seen as an admission that the creation of a rigid, stodgy, "definitive" film canon is a bit futile to begin with. A true cineaste like Schrader, adhering to the fluidity, populism, progression and amorphousness of the medium, cannot and does not accept the frozen universal, only the malleable and the personal. Any attempt at a canon just amounts to a list by one person, reflecting their passions and sensibility at the time they wrote it – or an amalgamation thereof[4].

Yet, if cinema seems to resist the creation of anything more than a personal list, how do films gain importance in stature? How do certain films get more weight and interest at a given moment in time than almost all others? What governs over fluctuations in taste and preference? Returning to Schrader and his experience proves instructive.

Again: his journey down the canon barrel yields two results. The aborted fetal residue of a book – a theoretical justification for a film canon followed by it's immediate invalidation – and an existent statement: 60 films. So here we are back to a list; specifically a list by Paul Schrader. But of course, a single list does not a canon make. And in fact, there are many such lists out there. Most of them have less baggage because their authors usually feel no compulsion to justify the implied leap from their personal taste to authoritative

exemplar. Like in all fields of taste, the Internet has opened up an endless, relatively democratic plane in which cinema is constantly judged by anyone with an opinion – no qualifications necessary. On a surface level it is easy to assail the idea that Schrader's opinion might be more legitimate than say, the collective voice of the IMDB: Top 250, or – more analogously – any random list from MUBI or SensesofCinema. In fact, the only seeming difference between his lists and these others, is that its author is a successful filmmaker; whereas the compilers of the other lists, by and large, are not. And while in a certain sense presenting this differentiation might seem elitist, looking at the history of such film-curatorial projects, one finds that this single distinction between strictly film fans and film creators, does in fact make an enormous difference towards determining efficacy of influence.

When France was liberated by Allied Forces in late 1944, the Vichy government's four-year ban on American films was lifted and a deluge of work by Fritz Lang, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, and many others was unleashed en masse. The entire French public saw them, but they were most ravenously consumed by an intellectual set of teens and twentysomethings, based in Paris. This little crew of cineastes would go on to not only set the theoretical groundwork for auteur theory, in the publication *Cahiers du Cinema*, but also spearhead the most influential filmmaking movement in the history of the medium – Nouvelle Vague. Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Rivette, Resnais, Rohmer all voiced their intense critical perspectives in *Cahiers*, before they took up their vital urge to create the films that they wanted to see. In each of their articles, interviews and year-end lists they were creating personal canons, the films of whom they would soon emulate, subvert and pay tribute to in their own works. As the filmmakers grew in stature and their movies became the rage, their opinions and writing permeated the culture of cinema, influencing which films were to be considered seminal. These avowed fanatics caught the film fever during their formative years precisely because there was a plethora of movies made available to them for gluttonous daylong viewing in filmhouses of all shapes and sizes in every arrondissement. Without consumption their is no canonization, and without this glut of great films from 1940s Hollywood,

who knows what direction these young men would have gone off in – or film for that matter. So when the critics became the creators and the creators talked about the movies that were important to them, those were the movies that the film enthusiasts embraced.

This confluence of circumstances surrounding availability, consumption and the deference/ influence afforded to creator-specialists, is persistently repeated throughout the popular history of cinema. It is present with the first wave of American film school directors (Scorsese, Bogdanovich, Schrader, De Palma, Lucas, Coppola, et al.) who peeped at the Cannes/Venice/ Cahiers-influenced campus film societies and foreign art houses, fell in love with Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, Kurosawa, Godard – and then made sure those were the directors whose names and films became indisputable, within all film discourse – casual and academic. It is true of those who grew up watching movies at home during the VHS-era (and later DVD-era), when finding that copy of a lost obscure gem was just as important as watching the works written about in textbooks. This period culminates in Tarantino's fabled narrative as the lowly video store clerk who becomes the indie film enfant terrible. With countless cine-allusions sprinkled throughout his work and signature passionate rants, like the one an enthusiastic employee might deliver regarding his esoteric pick of the week, it's undeniable that Tarantino popularized choices from fringe and "low-brow" foreign genres that hadn't yet been ensconced into an organic canon influential to the average viewer.

Time and again dedicated enthusiasts who become creative specialists view films with a circumstantial availability (mirrored by that of the regular film viewer), and then passionately posit their favorites from that viewing environment as essential. This is then parroted by the general film community, and a few personal lists go from individual to communal to organically definitive. It is reasonable to see how Schrader, a major voice in the cinema of loneliness[5] might have ignored this more interactive and environmental aspect of canonization. It is not a phenomenon borne of quality (although a level of interesting filmmaking is definitely a prerequisite), but rather something that begins with specialized availability and manifests itself with the reactions of influential voices shaping what is to be revered in the landscape.

Repercussions of a Streaming Canon

"Don't forget highways were invented by Adolf Hitler and a few others of the same ilk. I don't think a highway helps knowing and appreciating a landscape. Same thing, for me, applies to the 'information highway.'"
Jean-Luc Godard via Video Feed[6]

For the French Critics-cum-Auteurs and the American Film Schoolers cinema had not yet entered a state of objecthood. Unlike a book or record, a movie could not be purchased for convenient conjuring and titillation whenever one pleased. Rather, it had to be cherished like the memory of a beloved friend who lived thousands of miles away or if possible visited many times during its initial, local run. When cinema entered that stage of objecthood with VHS in the 80s, and reached its loaded pinnacle with DVD[7] in the late 90s, it lost some of the magic which came from demanding singular devotion, immersion, and image retention. There was a reverence for the film as an experience because there was no other access to it besides sitting in a dark theater.

15 years after the birth of DVDs, cinema has now moved beyond that objecthood, a microcosmic extension of being born in the age of mechanical reproduction, and into a new stage, showing off cinema's status in the age of transmission – and it's not the one of radio's glory days. This age of transmission which contemporary exhibition is evolving in, is different than the one it was born in: transmission today gives the receiver the power to choose the exact program being transmitted.

If we agree that a major part of what films are deemed influential or definitive has to do with accessibility and viewing circumstances, then in order to figure out what the lists of the future might look like, we have to ask ourselves how those two features are defined at this moment. The answer to both factors is largely the same: Netflix's Watch Instantly feature. It is not Henri Langlois' curated, 80-foot images at the Cinematheque Francaise, nor the 16mm projections of the USC Cinema Club, and not even the specialty rental store down the street. We are actually in a place much more akin to the following:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ9qcp6Lcno

A place that is not only everywhere and nowhere, but also anywhere! Defined only by anywhere's connection speed and your monthly payment, which gives you access to a web server with "every movie ever made in any language any-

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time, day or night." Netflix Watch Instantly is the apex-birth for cinema in the age of advanced transmission.

I used to dream about that Qwest commercial becoming a reality. I saw it about one hundred times during the 1999 NBA finals, and was excited after every single viewing. The binary imagery and connectivity sound with which it began, gave a vague sense that this future utopia had something to do with phone lines, computers, hackers and the upcoming Y2K. Yet, it seemed completely out of reach at a time when it took 1.5 hours to download the 40-second trailer for *A Clockwork Orange*. 12 years later the dream has become reality, with Netflix. The only catch is that the utopia might neither be as rewarding as a little boy's fantasies nor as banal as a jaded motel concierge's laconic shrug, but an entangled set of viewing circumstances with very complicated repercussions for film specialists and the general public.

If there are any doubts about whether Netflix's sole intention is to stream all content, one need only look at the company's very transparent, quarterly slideshows – presenting company projections and goals for the benefit of investors and the market. Referencing slide 5 of Reed Hastings' 2010 Third Quarter Slide Show, "We're now a *North American* streaming company, that's becoming a *global* streaming company." (emphasis by Mr. Hastings) Several announcements, only one week prior to the publication of my article signal that things are fully headed in this direction.[8] And as a final confirmation that Netflix is not only what is available, but also what is being very actively consumed, a Sandvine Demographics study on broad band trends shows that what started as a little red DVD rental company, now has a 24.7% share of ALL Internet traffic in North America (both upstream and downstream), more than any other single source, by far (more than Youtube and Torrenting combined). Sandvine further projects that "within a few years, >95% of North America's living rooms will be 'Netflix-ready.'" That sort of massive penetration into the choices and habits of film viewers surpasses even the highest levels of American movie theater attendance which occurred during the Great Depression. when roughly 65% of the American adult population attended a theater, at least once per week.[9] This is the way people watch movies in 2011 and beyond, and that means that Netflix will now be more responsible for establishing what is available, and in turn what films will be the source for canonical discourse, than any exhibitor or studio – presently or at any other time in history.

With these statistical trends in mind, and an un-

derstanding that mass availability combined with circumstantial programming is not only a prerequisite for establishing a canon but a determining factor, I'd like to propose a few ways in which I foresee Netflix seriously affecting viewing habits, factors of availability and canonical choices.

1. Availability

To begin with, it's important to admit that equating Netflix with the scenario in the aforementioned Qwest commercial is inaccurate. Like the television networks before it, Netflix strikes deals with studios and only has the right to stream material for a set period of time, at which point the company decides to renew the option or not. Currently it does not have every film ever made, not even close. And projections show that financially (no matter how high its subscriber rate gets and how low its churn rate is) it will never be able to stream every film ever made. Of course, serious enthusiasts looking for a rarity will hunt down the torrent or find another option, but again in terms of a film's ability to catch on towards canonical status, it needs to be available to a large pool of viewers – and Netflix is that body of water. Apropos, the longer a film is available for Netflix streaming the more likely it is to accumulate a following. To be clear though, this isn't a popularity contest. Critical capacities are still used after streaming. For instance, more than half of the Top 100 films on Netflix are rated less than 3 stars, as of this writing – implying that even though they are heavily viewed, those films would never attain a revered status from the Creative-Specialists, who still handle the curatorial gatekeeping with a measure of taste. Conversely, if a film is unavailable for streaming it is unlikely to gain any traction. Such films end up being absent from the canonical conversation. In the long-term picture, I believe this will lead to a surprising devaluation of films that are currently touted by the organic canon, if they do not also appear as ready to "Watch Instantly." Netflix makes decisions based on cost-effectiveness or ease of rights acquisition. This economic reality in turn determines what is available en masse and subsequently what will be canonized.

2. Overwhelming Catalogue

The unprecedented availability of choices is undoubtedly a mixed blessing. Being able to choose from over 10,000 titles at a time is a dream come true. It's also dizzying, to say the least. I've spent several nights searching through the possibilities or adding films to my queue for one to two hours, only to begin streaming a film and pass out within 20 minutes. Presumably if I had

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just watched something *instantly* without all that browsing, I would have actually spent the night watching an entire movie, before passing out. Or would I? Another issue with the wide range of choices, is a certain type of streamer's remorse, able to be quickly remedied. If I find myself not enjoying the aesthetic, acting, score, opening title font, or anything else a movie has to offer in the first 2, 5, 10 or 15 minutes, I will not only think about how I could have picked "some other film" instead, but actually go ahead and easily cancel what I'm streaming and pick "some other film." This represents not only an attention span gone down the drain, but also a non-committal attitude towards art. That is, if one has relatively no choice other than walking out of the theater or ejecting the already paid for VHS/DVD rental mid-play, the viewer tends to meet the film half-way and stick around for the entirety of the viewing experience. In that entire sitting, one gets a sense of what works and what doesn't, what can be defined as transcendent or trite, and potentially be surprising that all of sudden 45 minutes into it the movie has become amazing or cathartic. Without going through temporal art in its entirety, one not only misses out on unexpected fluctuations in quality over the course of the work, but more importantly loses a sense of relativity in the ability to evaluate and judge. It would be impossible to imagine the emergence of Auteur Theory, inspired by the bold American directors, without the equal distaste the *Cahiers* critics exhibited towards all of the tepid French "Classical" films they had to endure in theaters. Alternatively, one can foresee more sensationally immersive film experiences automatically rewarded in such a viewing environment. The farther along a viewer is into a film, the less likely they are to abandon ship – and in fact after a certain tipping point, will be quite upset if they are unable to finish. Consequently, there will invariably be an incentive to construct films with immediate hooks, knowing that viewership could easily be lost. A popular emergence of films using that specific knowledge to strategize 1st act storytelling would be unsurprising.

3. Robot Programming

Over the course of it's history Netflix has worked hard to improve its Recommendation Algorithm so that the service could arm viewers with the best suggestion for films they might enjoy based on their viewing history. While this may lead to a level of repeat satisfaction and undoubtedly a few genre discoveries, it also leads to a narrow-minded, robotic curatorial practice. Human film programmers (exhibitors, studios, theater owners) have historically had to balance the

market-minded necessity of drawing audiences with their own personal tastes. This establishes a heterogeneous film environment where audiences are comfortable with taking chances on films, without knowing exactly how they relate to their past viewing experiences. Of course there is usually a level of knowledge involved, based on advertising, reviews or genre cues, but there generally isn't a discreet comparative modality to that sort of knowledge. In the Netflix viewing model, one supposedly knows exactly which available films are related to the films they've already seen and enjoyed. This results in a conservative viewing environment where one tends to stick close to the sources of pleasure. And in fact, in a certain way this strategy immediately sets up viewers for dissatisfaction. Direct comparison to high-rated personal favorites psychologically primes viewers for a higher expectation set, than they would have if they were approaching a film with general knowledge but not direct comparison. This practice invariably results in higher rates of disappointment from the viewer, since it is nearly impossible for successive movies to consistently top previous favorites. Quizzically, the algorithm also functions to create comical hybrid genres that purportedly describe a viewer's taste. The idea of having one's viewing habits boiled down to "Tortured-Genius Dramas based on real life," "Critically-Acclaimed Family Friendly Animation," and "Cerebral Gay & Lesbian Dramas" can certainly make one question not only the entire prospect of being a serious film viewer, but may lead to some existential soul-searching.

4. Interchangability of Films and Television Programs

While Netflix does nominally distinguish between television shows and movies, the fact that both are available mere rows away from each other (with television shows listed in the same manner as a film genre) and are exhibited in exactly the same manner, leads to a blurring between the two mediums. Of course the same audio-visual technology goes into the making of the two forms, but the intention of each experience is entirely different. Television shows are episodic. They are based on a principle of hooked punctuations, which sustain the viewer's return from commercial interruption. With the emergence of serialized narrative television in the last decade, this principle of hooks has been extended to entire episodes. In light of this, the function of television is to never offer release for the viewer, but rather provide the groundwork for ever-more-put-off dangling payoffs down the line, mixed with a meagre amount of revelation per episode to keep the viewer sufficiently strung along. Movies, in

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contrast, are generally single sitting experiences, with self-contained stories offering a succession of tense scenes, that pay off with a catharsis somewhere towards the end of the narrative. A wide array of emotions are felt within the 1.5 to 3 hour vessel, and that distinct experience lives within the viewer without long-term temporal commitment or the manipulation presented by plodding narrative elements used to maximize airtime for selling products. Furthermore, movies generally take more artistic risks, since fear of alienation does not govern over a filmmaker's concern about how many people will tune in next week. These sorts of risks are crucial to advancing audio-visual communication as a language of art and communication. By blurring the line between these two types of viewing, streaming conflates those polar experiences into a hardly differentiated one. It is difficult to effectively process favorite viewing experiences, much less canonize them, if the qualities of an impostor can be easily substituted for the genuine article.

5. Distractions of the New Viewing Environment

With the rise of Web 2.0, we have officially entered the the 21st Century of synthetic image and sound which Schrader was referring to. The strange element of synthesis of course is not only that most experiences are completely mediated or quickly recapitulated through mediation, but that everything is mediated incessantly and without fail. Viewers are no longer merely looking at but also generating content – and the content on display is their life and reality. The systems with which one accesses this mediated life, is located within the very same browser that one Watches Instantly on. Consequently, there is an obvious competition, not from REAL life (the rare fire in the theater) or even other forms of mediated content (all available television channels), but rather a construction of life which often employs a cinematic framework to compelling personal effect. Unlike cinema, one can directly interact with and modify this narrative. In this world, it is not uncommon to interrupt the "immersive" film viewing experience by reading or writing an email, checking out facebook, videochatting with a friend or even reading about the movie that you have just stopped watching. The semi-passive place one's brain goes in order to engage with the dream-like logic of a movie, is very different than the active one needed to process and respond to one's own 24-hour mediated life story. By jumping between the two, or sacrificing the former altogether, the ability to truly enter the world a film is constantly crisis, and with it the cathartic power of the viewing experience.

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Of the 80-some-odd feature films directed by Jean-Luc Godard, four of them are currently available to Watch Instantly. One of them is a lesser entry in his pinnacle 1960s catalogue, *Alphaville*. The movie is Godard's attempt to subvert both science fiction and detective stories, an early genre mash-up in cinematic post-modernism. Like much of his work, it is loaded with absurdity, violence, a beautiful woman, radical imagery, and brazen, insightful philosophizing. The opening lines of *Alphaville* offer an amazingly prescient configuration of the way in which today's "information highway," manifesting movies in streams, is changing not only how films are canonized and which films are canonized, but in fact how contemporary experiences may be taking the place of cinema altogether.

You can take a look by clicking here, but only if you have Netflix Watch Instantly.

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(1)
Schrader tracks the birth of the Art Canon to the 18th-Century bourgeois embrace of Kantian notions of judgment and value, then outlines its presumed implosion in the face of 20th-Century moral vacuity and technological reproduction. This of course is merely to differentiate art, literature, et al. from film which simultaneously a synthesis of and excluded from, these much longer traditions.
"Canon Fodder," Film Comment. September/October 2006.
An article also easily located, along with much of Schrader's other critical writing, on the author's personal website at
http://www.paulschrader.org/writings.html

(2)
Citing film theorist Dudley Andrew, who himself is riffing on Walter Benjamin. *ibid*

(3)
beauty, strangeness, uniformity of subject and matter, tradition, repeatability, viewer engagement, morality – viewer engagement being the only film specific factor. *ibid*

(4)
See the BFI Sight and Sound Poll, which combines the votes of prominent critics and directors, once every ten years, to make two "definitive" lists.

(5)
His collaborations with Scorsese/De Niro on *Taxi*

Driver and *Raging Bull,* as well as *Mishima,* his biopic of Yukio Mishima come to mind, amongst an entire oeuvre of generally alienated and tortured souls.

(6)
1995 Montreal Film Festival (translation by Henri Béhar)

(7)
Ignoring the relative specialty status of Laser-discs, DVDs were the first format to offer film-maker commentaries, behind the scenes documentaries and deleted scenes, all on the same piece of media as the movie itself, and be fully embraced by the viewing public at large.

(8)
On July 5th Netflix announced that it would expand operations into Central and South America by the end of 2011, marking its first entry outside of the North American Market and giving it accesible in the entire Western Hemisphere. On July 12th Neftlix announced it would be eliminating its 3-year-old $9.99-plan with unlimited streaming and 1-DVD-at-a-time by mail, into two plans, that would equal $15.98 to retain both features. I'm under the assumption that most people will opt for the $7.99 stream only plan.

(9)
Statistics from Film Historian Richard Koszarski's *An evening's entertainment: the age of the silent feature picture, 1915-1928* – See Page 26
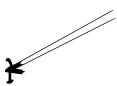
Archaic Rendering
By Jaakko Pallasvuo

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http://koolaidmaninsecondlife.com/images/kool-aid_man_tours.jpg

Berlin, May 2011. I'm at an opening for Brand New Paint Job Extended, an exhibition by net artist Jon Rafman. A performance is about to begin. This is the last time I'm doing this, Rafman announces.

Screen-captured footage from Second Life is projected onto a wall. We see Rafman's avatar: a gigantic, poorly rendered Kool-Aid Man. The camera pans around a lush forest while Rafman talks about what he has seen in his virtual travels. Second Life is an online world crafted by its users. It contains concert venues, natural wonders, dream homes and sex clubs. Rafman has observed it.

Kool-Aid Man kneels down in the forest and raises a sword. He ceremonially disembowels himself. The video goes on to show Rafman canceling his account. To emphasize the moment a DVD containing the video is ejected and crushed. We have witnessed a ritual suicide. There is applause.

A few hours later the temptation to repeat the gesture has grown strong. Another DVD is inserted. The video is shown and narrated again. The second DVD is also destroyed. I pick up a fragment of it.

http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/piero/flagellation.jpg

I've just read *The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction*. It's never too late. I wonder what Walter Benjamin would make of our Post Internet predicament. Benjamin committed a less ceremonious suicide in 1940, after spending his last years in exile from Nazi Germany. I read about his life on Wikipedia. It's intriguing and far from my personal experience.

The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction, an essay written in 1936, was first translated into English in 1968 and has gone on to become an extremely influential text. Benjamin describes the connection a work of art has to the (technological) means surrounding it. How *the reproduced work of art is to an ever-increasing extent the reproduction of a work of art designed for reproducibility.*

Benjamin writes about the aura of a work. A certain genuineness. This refers to a work of art's *unique existence in the place where it is at this moment*, to its changing physical structure, and to *the fluctuating conditions of ownership through which it may have passed.*

The social conditions surrounding the work are key. They define how it's perceived. What function it serves. To Benjamin, a work of art only has an aura if it is embedded in ritual.

http://images.sodahead.com/blogs/000261395/printing_money_for_aig_xlarge.jpeg

Benjamin's point of view is difficult for me to grasp. I get how he constructs an argument, how it has filtered through to countless other texts. What Benjamin articulates well is his position between the dreadfully old and the terribly new. The future we live in doesn't lend itself to such compact dichotomies though. Modernism is an ongoing, faltering project.

What we see in 2011 is an art world deeply invested in large-scale, high-price work. Art objects exist for their own sake or for the service of global capitalism.

I find it interesting when artists who effortlessly inhabit online space pour effort into manufacturing IRL uniqueness. Weirdly enough, this usually happens through the printing process. Ephemeral, flexible digital content is reduced to c-prints, prints on canvas, prints cast in resin, prints on pillows and so on. These are trophies. They exist to commodify, to give physical structure, duration, history. Perhaps to claim some aura for themselves. This process caters to the demands of a gallery/museum system no one seems to have a kind word for. Careerism is masked by an adopted playful nonchalance.

Rafman's avatar ceased to exist through an emulated Seppuku, a ceremony with both spiritual and political resonance. But death in the virtual means very little, and with nothing at stake it's easy to collapse into irony. Will pathos be reintroduced during the century? What political/social/ecological catastrophe will drive us to actual ends?

I began to engage with net art because it annoyed
me. I took that as a sign that there was some-
thing there. The good and bad sides are the same:
programmed nowness makes pieces exciting and
makes me think they'll soon go out of style and
relevance. There might be exceptions.

Rafman's work leans on current aesthetic and
software, but reaches beyond it too. It's about
being in awe of the world. Romantic in general
disposition, and in relation to the 18th century.
Online drama tarnished by sentimentality, doubt,
nostalgia. It's something I can identify with. If it
will last is another question altogether.

It is possible that someone in another age will
try to engage with Rafman's work like we do with
Benjamin's writing. What is cutting edge for us
will soon be archaic rendering. How will their
knowledge of future triumphs and disasters alter
the work? There's no way of knowing if we're in
the beginning or the end.

Another work by Rafman, *You, the World and I*
(2010) unfolds as a video where an anonymous
narrator desperately searches for a lost love. It
shares a deflated, melancholic humor with the
Kool-Aid Man performance. Instead of going out
into the world to find his love, the narrator makes
use of Google Earth and Google Street View. He
browses endless streets, looking for a glimpse of
her. Instead of finding her he finds a pixelated
reproduction. A photograph of her standing on a
beach. Maybe that's enough.

Shades of Grey
By Patrick Armstrong

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Seth Price's essay "Grey Flags", putatively a work of art, serves as the press release for two eponymous exhibitions. One put up at Friedrich Petzel in July of 2005 and the other at Sculpture Center about a year later, the two 'Grey Flags' exhibitions do not include any of the same pieces and share solely Price's essay.

In "Grey Flags" Price reminds us how far we have come from the age when mankind defined itself with dolmen, monoliths, and other structures of brute indication of existence. "One senses something of the mesh of fear and regimentation and suffering and bloody sacrifice from which civilization was meant to escape."[1] Price argues that the term 'architecture' is an unfit classification for these monumental structures. He prefers 'faith embodied,' or better still 'magic.' As something both privy to and dependent on "the most advanced technologies at hand," these monumental embodiments or 'magic' serve to make tangible the spark of inspiration –the unfathomable idea, only fully understood once its construction is completed. Arguably, 'magic' is just a rubric definition of any pre-modern, extra-labor pursuit. Art and music, as well as architecture historically occupied a place of super-human achievement. They held an alchemical mystery. And while there are entire departments of universities dedicated to investigating the creation of these 'magic' apotheoses (they are producing tenable theories, of course), it is doubtless easier to imagine how a serf toiled in the fields or how a shopkeeper tallied in his ledger.

The 'magic' of the contemporary age is, in Price's eyes, images. "[A] thickening web of images that amounts to a magic circle through which citizens of this age have passed, never to return."[2] This is true, yes. We have passed through the portal. We sift through slide shows daily. We reach for our camera phones at every opportunity. The anecdote is dead without its supporting documentation. If this is not entirely true now, it will be in five years. But how does this really relate to contemporary art?

Price's definition of contemporary 'magic' spotlights a dependency on images (specifically documentation, or the posterity-problem) that was confronted by the last Avant-Garde 50 years ago. Price himself acknowledges this in his ongoing essay "Dispersion", citing Dan Graham in the 1960s: "…if a work of art wasn't written about and reproduced in a magazine it would have difficulty attaining the status of 'art.'"[3] This quotation is interesting because it seems disingenuous. Graham and his contemporaries sought to push art into the linguistic sphere, to strip off everything but meaning, and to make definition paramount to understanding. But during this valiant advancement of art, conceptual artists realized their own dependency on images. Think of the famous photograph of Kaprow's *Yard* or the many images of Charlotte Posenenske's *Series DW* in various configurations. This unfortunate discovery burdens all art forms succeeding it with the need to acknowledge their dependency. Ironically, images became increasingly important to our understanding and experience of art as a result of a movement that tried to eliminate them.

Couldn't Graham's clichéd frustrations as a dealer really be a jab at "The Irascibles" and their ceaseless features in Life magazine –an image dependency of a very different sort. Movement away from canonized forms of art was the crux of conceptualism. It was a methodology that sought to abolish any previous paradigm from the creation of art. Therefore, isn't Graham's failure as proprietor of John Daniels Gallery exactly the reason he took it up in the first place? Whether intentional or not, Graham's gripe exposes conceptualism's willful burden, that of being the misanthropic smart guys. Where's the fun in conceptual art if

you don't get to be the one to point out its intelligence? And what's the point of an image if you can't be the one to define it's meaning for an audience? And so, thanks in no small part to Graham and the conceptual movement, the bounds of medium were eventually tossed off forever. Now the shopkeeper's ledger *could* be art, and in the March, 1968 issue of Harper's Bazaar it was.[4]

By 2004 or 2005, when Price was writing "Grey Flags," an artist could perform a détournement on the universal recycling symbol[5] without worrying about how radical the gesture was, but rather how the piece should be fabricated and how it should lean against the wall. It is not difficult to picture how this work of art was conceived or created. The systematic reduction and elimination of the ancient type of 'magic' from the definition of art, which we understand to have begun with Modernism and concluded with the art of the late 1960s, continues into the present, engulfing new technologies and new approaches. Artists' methods are continuously classified in order to make them commonplace and pallet-able. This is strikingly parallel to the way in which capitalism subsumes its dissenters –each movement has been simplified and co-opted. I'm talking about hippie bohemianism, punks, and even Russian constructivism. But to Price, this is the new Utopia.[6] One in which art is so inextricably tied to free market capitalism that it operates as its pastiche. Think of Art + Auction magazine as the mini Wall Street Journal.

"With the expansion of the former cultural sphere to encompass and include within itself everything else in social life (something that could also be thought of as an immense commodification and commercialization, the virtual completion of the process of the colonization by the commodity form begun in classic capitalism), it becomes impossible to say whether we are here dealing any longer with the specifically political, or with the cultural, or with the social, or with the economic — not to forget the sexual, the historical,

the moral, and so on. But this conflation, which surely presents some signal disadvantages in the realm of thought and action, uniquely intensifies the signifying power of this work that, rotated on its axis, can be said to comment on any of the above, virtually inexhaustibly."[7]

All of this in mind, the obligation of the vanguard artist in Price's eyes has become that of image mediator, one who gets between the retinal image and its meaning. This is the last remaining frontier in the march of linear art history, halting progression in the name of reexamination. If there are virtually inexhaustible scenarios of meaning, there ought to be a brave soul to put forth a definitive one. Or if not this, there ought to be a brave soul who at least points out the hermeneutic boundlessness of every image's interpretation. There exists a field of thought that seems to have ruled over all of the work in 'Grey Flags': *With a boundless number of images in the world (we have passed through the magic circle), it is my duty and my good fortune to be the one to come up with a meaning for them. Or if not this, it is at least my duty to make apparent this image's infinite subjective interpretations.* "What a time [we] chose to be born!" The artists participating in 'Grey Flags' have become the captioners and re-framers of images rather than their creators (or even owners)!

No longer does 'magic' manifest itself in the singular monument; today's 'magic' trails endlessly in the wake of human existence. Its function has been turned completely. 'Magic' does not serve to embody ideas, but rather it functions as the root of their inspiration. Effortlessly saved and catalogued at our own self-important behest, this wake of images serves as a map of culture. It has become fodder for the sleight of hand conceptualists of Price's cadre.[8] But is this really all there is? In "Grey Flags," Price fixates on history's squalor and primitiveness –literally its "suffering and bloody sacrifice"—only to praise our current, "golden moment,"[9] one which we have had to crawl through the mud to arrive at. Ours is a revisionist and preoccupied moment. At what point can we look past the portion of the historical timeline that seems bent on reiterating itself ad nauseam and onward to something novel?

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(1)
Seth Price, "Grey Flags" (2005)

(2)
Ibid.

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(3)

Seth Price, "Dispersion" (2002-) p.2

(4)

Dan Graham, *Figurative*, 1965

(5)

Kelly Walker, Untitled, 2005

(6)

Seth Price, "Grey Flags" (2005)

(7)

Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indiana University Press, 1995) p26

(8)

Most interestingly in the SculptureCenter iteration is Walid Raad's *I Only Wish That I Could Weep (Operator #17)*, 2000, which is a cache of supposedly classified video footage from Lebanon, and least interestingly is Kelly Walker's Untitled, 2006, which is a to-scale offset print of a photograph of the wall that the work hangs on.

(9)

Seth Price, "Grey Flags" (2005)

Novelty & Whatever Comes Next After Contemporary Art
By Ry David Bradley

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PART ONE

"Citius, Altius, Fortius."
(Pierre de Coubertin)

Just like science, and sport – which constantly seek to build on or trump the feats of their predecessors, art is predominantly concerned with going beyond its history, with a series of Oedipal impulses[1]. Despite the clever anti-progressive statements of the Post-Modernists, they too were seeking to overcome their past, with or without a sense of 'progression'[2]. In some way, all great artists have sought to shake down social maternity/paternity and cut a fresh, enlightened, sharp and witty path through the field of precursors, whilst also remaining somehow staunchly beyond them[3]. This idea of being *within* but *beyond* is central to the understanding of post-industrial art. However, it's immediately obvious that eventually, at some point, unless the terrain for art is expanding, there will be no more space in that field to cut a fresh path, without mowing over a few of the previous ones. The realization dawns: even if history is written, it is just as likely to be re-written shortly after. Especially online.

To be born into historic space is not unlike an endgame process[4], where an artist sets out on an explicit quest to be original, but finds that less and less of the original field is left to claim – and so not surprisingly, it is best suited to those with a few new tricks (or even some old ones people have forgotten about). Enter the case for novelty. Metaphorically speaking, when there is less cultural terrain to claim on the frontier, the obvious thing to do is to buy the field next door, start again there and then knock down the fence between the fields, and voila! The same field, but now its big enough for more. That is the shorthand story of most human endeavour, and art is certainly no different despite its frequent claims to the contrary.

You could call it the common dilemma of development. In recent times, the story of the great artist seems to begin like a local garage sale that ends up becoming Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart Store, 2008

Think Jeff Koons and his inflatables, puffed up and full of hot air. Or Takeshi Murakami and his merchandise, a corporate Disney style takeover. Or Jenny Holzer and her stock market style signage, lampooning the people that pay for them. For now, art at the top of its game gingerly reflects the economic conditions that support it whilst also seeking to mow some fresh grass on that field of the hard-fought, well timed, lucky few, united by their monotone messages of an innocence long lost. The question for young artists, often seeking to repay costly tuition fees is: Where do we go now? The answer to that question is probably within the internet. Literally *and* non-literally.

The aim in Part 1 of this paper is first to analyze the mechanics of the inherent drive for novelty in art, before moving on to Part 2, locating its presence and subtle shifts in contemporary art practices (and heading toward whatever it is that comes next after contemporary art).

Consulting the people's online encyclopedia we are told, with in-built references to art no less, that novelty is:

Novelty (derived from Latin word novus for "new") is the quality of being new. Although it may be said to have an objective dimension (e.g. a new style of art coming into being, such as abstract art or impressionism) it essentially exists in the subjective perceptions of individuals.

It also refers to something novel; that which is striking, original or unusual. The term can have pejorative sense and refer to a mere *innovation*.[5]

So in each iteration, as each new artist comes along they are seeking terrain, new terms for the relevant, the striking and the unusual, the exciting, the beautiful, the meaningful, the compel-

ling and their twins – the dark, the sublime and the grotesque, and of course, the banal and the common, the irreverent. How is it any different to the generation of artists before them who sought the same things? Unfortunately the answer is perilously subjective. Resolutions arrested, artists must grapple with this in their work through some novel combination of subjects and media, or absence thereof. During this ongoing search for newer terms for art, staked as claims to newer terrain, it must be noted that art has long ridden into town on the back of industrial and commercial developments as a source of new materials to work with[6]. Just like before, but made of plastic instead of stone. And then made of stone instead of plastic. Artists seek to use new materials, even non-materials ie: ideas that pertain to materiality. The focus of novelty, in order to gain new ground, unwittingly becomes a focus on some addition to, or absence of – materiality. This might even explain why artists are often the first to pick up on emergent industrial techniques and processes and incorporate them into their work – either they are gifted at it, or quite simply, they have to.

At the beginning of the contemporary period, around the middle of the 20th century, something happened to painting. A new type of paint had arrived, via mass produced chemical industry. Instead of painting with oil as had long been done (which itself had replaced previous iterations of pigment and binder), in order to be *contemporary*, the artist would paint with acrylic, the *newer* (read: less accepted) medium. This trend continued. Where could paint go next? Paint with a spray-can or an airbursh, paint with blue naked women, paint with robotic arms, paint to look like a print – or in more recent times, no paint at all, pretending to paint, painting on a computer, painting online. Painting virtually with hot-dogs on a touch sensitive iPad.
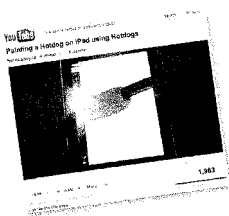
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yqn9CXG1n6A by Hotdogguy72

The ultimate goal obviously being to paint as nobody has painted before, to do as nobody has done before[7]. Or, if we are to parody something already done, to do parody in a way never done before. The keyword here is *knowingly*. In art,

as in many other studied efforts, awareness is everything. Contemporary culture doesn't favor repeat episodes, unless they asked for it, or more dangerously, unless they don't know that is. But perhaps novelty is not as difficult as it seems. Novelty is scalable. Consider the classic example of giving the same home cooked recipe to 5 different people, who will ultimately produce 5 different tasting results. The difference is not what went into it, the ingredients were the same; it's in the minute details of how each was treated, and put together[8] that novelty arises. The same thing goes for composed sheet music, and even theatre. Interpretation can alter the outcome, but only in relative measures. The problem is most of the time it takes an expert to differentiate – to most, blandness, repetition and uniformity prevail. Art that looks like art. Hotdogs that taste like hotdogs.

It becomes clear that the mechanics of novelty are predicated upon some form of differentiation[9]. It is a model in which the progenitor is somehow *updated* or *refreshed* in the work of the progeny. As regularly as clockwork, the new breaks away from tradition, but remains within formal reach – over, and over again. Perhaps this is a measure of art within its own milieu of developments, not unlike other endeavours. But at this point it sometimes does something odd that is not so shared with other endeavours like the sports and sciences[10], who are usually seeking to go further or better than before. With acute self-awareness, art often doubles back on itself, recedes and recycles, changes the rules mid-game in order to escape its plotted trajectory. It forgoes time and taste and repeats itself – not unlike music, film and fashion. Why might this be? Perhaps novelty isn't always concerned with going forwards or being new, but represents a shift in culture. In seeking novelty, all of a sudden the mechanisms of previous novelties are called upon and pushed out to centre stage, redressed. Is this because it averts any chance of a halt to industry in *slower* periods? Or is it nostalgia. Or both. Is it sadness and loss, or is it just to fuck you off. Novelty goes backwards as easily as forwards. Certainly when we supplant a lost novelty in the guise of a recent one, we create an effect known as a clash. What happens within the clash produces the unique effect often noticeable in contemporary art. The mechanics of the novel are also the components of these effects. An art effect in the last 100 years could broadly be said to be a material and a concept at odds with one another, producing a third element that reconciles and/or further complicates the relationship[11]. This kind of effect mines for a sense of pathos and even humor in the viewer. By restaging the act it forces

assumptions and expectations, and then prompts them to alter, whilst capitalizing on that precious moment of hindsight found where the shine of a particular novelty has just begun to fade. When we can begin to see what that novelty truly was. When in the midst of novelty, we feel our own instinct to want to predict, to want and to know how it works – being toyed with. After novelty, even the greatest illusions can end up as cheap tricks. Sometimes the magic never dies.

Nowhere is this quest for novelty better displayed than in the overarching hierarchies broadly bestowed upon *art movements* in the last 100 years. Each big century block is termed somehow to typify a broader *newness* as distinct from its forebears: whether we use the Modern, the Contemporary, or the prefixing of the Post-Modern – each term seeks to re-instate currency over what came before it. This is of course only if you look at the actual words themselves, and their general implication of being successive to something prior. Really in the end these are just novel claims for real estate in the overt lineage of art. It's like a cycle of one-ups that ends with less and less options as each is locked out. This kind of proprietary ownership and loading of otherwise generic and timeless terms for *newness* creates fewer options as each replacement occurs, and leads us to the current paradox – in that we are generally uncomfortable (not unable) to unanimously come up with another major signifier for another period in art. In the lexicon of available words to write of the *new*, we have already exhausted the obvious ones. Anything else cannot help but sound obscure. There are no simple new words for new, unless we use those from other languages, and it becomes obvious that locking these words out in the first place was ridiculous. That kind of game is almost over, but not quite. The 20th Century is still kicking it. There is no adult on the planet yet who didn't come from it. Art will certainly outlast its gravitational pull, but how?

If we accept that the modern, contemporary, emerging and new, as words only and not for what they have been loaded to imply, are largely terms for the same or similar aspect, a type of new situation, how many words are there left for 'newness' – now that at least four have been expended? The problem arose when we *fixed* generic terms to particular points in time and even went so far to declare when they stopped happening, ignoring the fact they may be cyclic characteristics, and in effect lost the ability to use them adequately ever again. What happens when we run short of new words for *new* forms of art? If going 'post' is after the event, and being 'neo' is a new form of the previous event, what can possibly be

said of what happens a while after you've gone post? The reality is that the quest for novelty, and for moving beyond the progenitor has never ceased, it never will. It's how life works. If anything holds the whole thing back, it is testament only to the now somewhat depleted systems for terminology, and to the idea that everything must be replaced each time, rather than infused. How can you add another prefix or suffix to something that already had one? Although every *now* seems to be the time *after* everything else, if we should learn anything from the fixing of useful terms past, it should be that it's dangerous to spend more basic words on the new – because invariably something will come after that too. The only term that has remained flexible throughout all of this is art itself.

PART TWO

Here I will examine what happened to painting over course of the Contemporary art period through the work of three German artists in a distinct lineage who typify some moments within the contemporary spectrum. Sigmar Polke (b.1941 – 2010) taught at the Academy of Fine Arts Hamburg from 1977 – 1991 during which time Albert Oehlen (b.1954) was a student, who himself eventually went on to teach Tim Berresheim (b.1975) at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf in 2000. Through the lineage of these three artists we will see three examples of what novelty and lineage do when in proximity, given that their work can also be understood quite closely in context.

Although you might be able to say the first two were painters, it would be difficult to say that Berresheim is a painter despite the fact that his work appears to be strongly informed by it. He never uses paint. Instead, he uses props for paint.

Tim Berresheim | *Phoenix The Guilty Pleasure* | Patrick Painter | Los Angeles | 20 February – 3 April 2010

In these works, which are computer prints onto various surfaces such as wood and and aluminium – Berresheim makes 3D models of gestures and brushstrokes, sometimes figures and scenes, or hair to allude to brushwork, blurring the line

between photography, painting, computing and whatever it is that we might call the combination of the them all. Since the late 1990's he has created various 3d modelled scenes that all work upon the tropes of painting in some way. One of his teachers, Albert Oehlen, came to prominence in the early 1980's neu wilde / bad painting era in Germany. Looking to degrade materials and subjects beyond that of their own heritage of mixed media abstraction, photorealism, and expressionism, as well as deal with a few intercultural demons – they painted (with paint) in a way that suggested there was no room left for painting.

'Because we now refuse to deny the direct dependence and responsibility of art vis-à-vis reality, and on the other hand see no chance for art as we know it to have an effect, there is only one possibility left: failure.'
(Albert Oehlen)

Albert Oehlen, Skyline, 2004 Oil and Paper on Canvas.

Although he spent many years making *bad* paintings from the early 1980's – with acrylic and oil paint medium, in the early 1990's Oehlen branched out to make primitive computer paintings, where he would smooth out the jagged edges of the bitmap structure with paint once it was printed, in that hallowed time before vector graphics. Since that time he has gone on to utilize print media under most of the oil paint applications of his work. It was as if for him paint could no longer stand on it's own, it needed a prop, or at least some connection to hyper commercial world around it. But at the same time, the prop needed the actual paint. Not strangely, having aligned print and paint together in his work brought him back to his teacher in Sigmar Polke – one of the most significant figures in the history of contemporary painting, renowned for his pioneering work in the 1950's and 1960's for expanding what a painting could be considered to be.

Although he also always sought to include the printed commercial world in his work, for most his career Polke's paintings were decisively made with paint alone, merely alluding to the mechanical and print processes of the visual world around him. But something happened at the turn of the

century. In the last 8 years of his life Polke went against himself and did something strange, and produced what he called 'machine painting', just after the time that Albert Oehlen was instructing Tim Berresheim in Dusseldorf. All three artists were now engaged with painting and with computers at completely different stages of their careers and in very different ways, but at a similar point in time. Whether or not intended, their searches for novelty in art and in the limits of painting, had to some extent co-mingled.

In 2002 Polke developed a new technique of 'machine painting'. These are his first completely mechanically-produced paintings and are made by tinting and altering images on a computer and then photographically transferring them onto large sheets of fabric. Up until this point Polke had rejected mechanical processes, preferring to explore the visual effects of mechanical technology by hand. In the 1960s he imitated the dotted effect of commercial newsprint by painstakingly painting each dot with the rubber at the end of a pencil. These dramatically different techniques, one employing the latest technology and the other devoted to traditional skills and crafts, reflect the changing role of the artist. Although many artists are not involved in the physical production of their work, Polke's paintings have usually used techniques which are both time-consuming and physically demanding. In the early 1960s, however, he ironically claimed that he was instructed by 'Higher Powers' to produce a painting, and he later experimented with spontaneous effects by sparking chemical reactions on canvas. This experimentation with technique reflects Polke's ongoing research into questions of authorship and originality, and their relevance to making art today.
(Excerpt from Tate Modern: Sigmar Polke – History of Everything, 2 October 2003 – 4 January 2004)

Novelty in art doesn't just go one way like a liquid flow, it can actually trickle back up the chain as easily as down it. What accounts for this perhaps is that at any one moment in the world, we have a great span of people of varying ages present in conjunction with one another, and by some coalescent principle – the linear assumption of novelty is anything but. Novelty captured in art functions as a historical impulse, a way to preserve that moment of novelty before, during, after: even while it is lapsing. But it is no one way street.

Tracing the quest for novelty against painting in the work of these three artists draws us toward a familiarity between them. Each uses painting as a method of creating an image to mimic or incorpo-

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rate other more commercial or industrial methods as a way of critiquing them, even historicizing them – by orchestrating the clash so that each method of image creation plays off against its other, exposing novelty whilst espousing history. If anything changed at all between the works of these artists, it was not far from the model. Each remained broadly concerned with paint against industry, with the tradition of making pictures against the industrial way of making them. But something did change slightly in the shared concern between them, and it happened very gradually in each artists approach to materiality. Where Sigmar Polke replicated the printed image by hand, seeking analogue methods to bring painting into contact with the structure of printing, Albert Oehlen did so more overtly, painting directly over actual printed materials in very blatant displays. But what happened in the work of Tim Berresheim is unusual in that the same concern for this situation began to be achieved with no paint at all. Creating 3d models and making prints that emulate the gestural nature of paint whilst being something else. A surrogate. You might say that Contemporary art remained within its bounds, but something had been changing. Getting further from the canvas, distance was inevitable, to the point that modelled props were sufficient to convey the idea. Where painting spent most of its time emulating printing, going full circle, printing began to play the same game going the other way. Lacking adequate terms for itself, printed paintings could also be understood as photographs, models, and even drawings now that paint, as material, was merely paint as notion. This is demonstrative of the dual flow of novelty, and the point to which it had come. Even when actual paint was no longer needed, it's position as historical counterpoint was.

It would be fair to assume that through this lineage we see an increasing familiarity of each artist with computers as a tool in the art process. Perhaps this is in direct relationship to novelty, to going one step beyond what came before, to doing what was not possible before, and as a result, attempting to reflect the period in contrast to its previous conditions. And in some cases returning to those conditions for effect. Whilst painting with paint goes on, its fracture into digital and modelled space is pertinent to an entire generation concerned with the broader implications of real material in the face of modelled material. Increasing reliance on the network, and on the computer has embedded the digital image object[12] deeply into daily life, to the point that it is coming back out and altering the objects we produce in physical gallery spaces, by whatever means. In this case, the model and the actual

merge. A bit like the effect Photoshop is having on plastic surgery. If we do not attend the gallery space, even remotely, we don't think twice about browsing around on the website of a gallery to view the work of its artists. Although these art works were not explicitly created for that online space, arguably they are still able to operate there as a legitimate experience, even if as a compressed version of the work, and constitute the greater majority of art we view on a daily basis. But when art is created intentionally for that space, or with an inherent consideration for that space, perhaps best termed as *Post Internet* by Marisa Olson in early 2008[13], we have the cycle of novelty taking yet another turn. Titled neatly in the prefix based *art movement* style syntax of its immediate maternity/paternity, whether or not Post Internet art as a term is a good thing is unknowable, given the limitations of pre-fixing outlined in Part 1, but it's certainly the point at which whatever comes next after contemporary art will undoubtedly have to take into consideration for departure. Perhaps this will be something the first adults of the 21st century will come to know, from 2018 onward. The only other option is to remit *art as movement* titles altogether, but this faces us with one final riddle: we have nothing to aspire to, and even worse, Contemporary art, poster-child for a vapid consumerist culture – lasts forever.

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Occult Hands, Frozen Heads
By Ryan Barone

Ten years into the Vietnam War, a new secret society was born in America. The origins are a bit unclear but according to most accounts it all started sometime in 1965, the same year that an enigmatic Dylan took the stage at the Newport Folk Festival and plugged in.

And so it happened; the Order of the Occult Hand quietly disrupted the world of print media. They slipped past editors at *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *The Washington Times*. Between 1984 and 1999, *The Los Angeles Times* was infiltrated on eight separate occasions. For decades the informal group announced their presence by publishing a single phrase: *It was as if by an occult hand*. The words masqueraded in plain sight. Few took notice.

The Order of the Occult Hand exist as a decentralized group. This is to say they're a little like the Weather Underground without the explosions, or that they're simply human beings bound together by common interest rather than county lines.

Such is our present condition.

In April of 2009 I received an e-mail that read, "TAKE A PHOTOGRAPH OF YOUR HEAD INSIDE A FREEZER. UPLOAD THIS PHOTO TO THE INTERNET (LIKE FLICKR). TAG THE FILE WITH 241543903. THE IDEA IS THAT IF YOU SEARCH FOR THIS CRYPTIC TAG, ALL THE PHOTOS OF HEADS IN FREEZERS WILL APPEAR. I JUST DID ONE."

The author of that e-mail, David Horvitz, was born in 1982 in Los Angeles. For almost every day of 2009, he shared an idea with the world; messages were sent, blog posts published. Providing a capstone to the year, Horvitz wrote, "DO SOMETHING EVERYDAY REGARDLESS. NOTHING WILL HAPPEN UNLESS YOU FIRST INITIATE A PROCESS OF CAUSE AND EFFECT. THIS STARTS WITH AN ACTION. REAWAKEN THE POSSIBILITY OF POSSIBILITY. REAWAKEN IT WITH PLAY."

At present, a Flickr search for "241543903" returns over one thousand unique images. Some results feign creativity or show off technical prowess, but mostly the photographs are as direct as the prompt which inspired them. Heads inside freezers, uploaded and tagged as if by an occult hand.

In a broad sense, Horvitz's instructions recall the distorted human skull which ominously looms at the bottom of Hans Holbein the Younger's 1533 composition, *The Ambassadors*. Rendered in anamorphic perspective, the skull is both ever-present and wholly concealed; only upon careful scrutiny does the object come to light. This starts with an action.

Consider for a moment the possible depths of the Internet, the vastness of it all. Horvitz, like Holbein and The Order of the Occult Hand, encourages an engagement with the world that goes beyond a mere cursory glance. From the confines of a small cabin near Concord, Massachusetts, Thoreau wrote "to be awake is to be alive." Wake up; there are occult hands and frozen heads to be found.

Metamaterialism
By Timur Si-Qin

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With the emergence of Conceptual art in the 60s and 70s, artists, rather than having dematerialized or immaterialized their work, had instead shifted their palette from largely physical materials to largely virtual materials. The virtual as defined by Deleuze "is not opposed to "real" but opposed to "actual," whereas "real" is opposed to "possible." What is important is that in this sense the virtual is as real as the actual. In contrast, dematerialized art is often tacitly classified as beyond matter and it's material constraints, not real enough to be bought or sold, essentialist and transcendent. But this is based on a false dualism that classified the virtual as unreal and thus discounted it's very real properties, relationships and affects. Manuel De Landa writes:

The token material entity of current textual theory—just to back track a bit—the '60's in France was the great period of virtualization. Everything became text. Kristeva and Derrida and so on were just talking about intertextuality. Even the weather doesn't exist, it is what we make of it, what we interpret of it. Everything became virtual in a way. Baudrillard says that everything is just simulacra, just layers of neon signs on top of layers of television images on top of layers of film images and more and more virtual stuff. The computer games and simulations. We need an antidote to that. We need to acknowledge that we've built these layers of virtuality and that they are real, they are real virtual. They might not be actual but they are real still but that all of them are running on top of a material basis that ultimately informs the source of power and the basis of society.

But why adopt what seems at first glance like an inconsequential semantic shift? Why should we call the virtual element a material rather than immaterial? The answer lies in the enriched view of materiality that science has uncovered in the last 40 years, an enrichment that might be overlooked under the transcendental label of immateriality. Since the 1960's Nonlinear dynamics, also known as complexity theory or chaos theory, a field of

applied mathematics, has revolutionized disciplines as disparate as physics, biology, economics and philosophy. It's most fundamental contribution (besides inspiring jurassic park) being the discovery of inherent structure to the seemingly random forms and events in life. Everything from the static on a telephone line to the formation of mountains to the fluctuations of stock markets display deep structural patterns and tendencies (attractors). It is these patterns that give rise to the myriad shapes and events of reality. No longer is material (actual or virtual) an inert and lifeless substance that forces act upon to create forms and patterns, but rather, materials have self-organization, form and pattern immanent to them.

This understanding brings the most conceptual or immaterial art back into the realm of material research. An intervention into the structures and attractors of reality, tinkering with cultural, political and economic systems/institutions and their material properties. In the 2009 essay "Painting besides itself" David Joselit refers to Martin Kippenbergers's call for painting to explicitly present the network in which the artwork is embedded. "Kippenberger's … associates …. such as Michael Krebber, Merlin Carpenter, and … Jutta Koether—have developed practices in which painting sutures a virtual world of images onto an actual network composed of human actors, allowing neither aspect to eclipse the other." This network (similar to Bourriaud's human relations) is a part of the metastructure surrounding and comprising any artwork. But this metastructure also extends into the matter/energy and associative/historical networks and flows of artwork and artist. In other words the actual and virtual material structures and flows of art. An explicit reflection of this network within the artwork therefore becomes an attempt at discerning the true environment surrounding the work. It is a problem stating strategy in the way an organism's genetic material is emergently seeking to clearly ascertain the 'problem' of it's environment. And like organisms in ecological environments, its deployment also becomes a part of it's environment thus forming a Hofstadterrian reflecting feedback loop. An artwork which has always been a reflection adjusts it's image to reflect it's self reflection.

This understanding also brings to light how artworks increasingly reflect their preeminent manifestation in the space of public perception (hype-space). Hype-space is the distributed and mediated space of catalogs, websites, magazine articles and word of mouth. Artworks are experienced primarily through mediated channels and therefore in an attempt to ascertain "the problem" of it's environment, artworks are visualizing this dispersion. But what one can also surmise from this is that the artworks originate in a virtual topological space before the actualization of galleries and hype-space. Artworks therefore are topological constructions that harness and interface with the metamaterial flows of our world. They consist of actual and virtual materials with myriad actual and virtual manifestations dispersed through actual and virtual channels.

The philosophical ramifications of this shift in perspective are far reaching. No longer is human civilization a sovereign anthropocentric endeavor, but rather it is the emergent property of the natural material world itself; thereby removing the separation between humans and nature, the synthetic and the natural. All of a sudden moral codification, reliant on an anthropic sovereignty, is invalidated at the metaphysical level making way for an immanent ethics. An ethics based on local causal affects rather than transcendent judgements of good or evil. Everything is self-signifying and no longer metaphor. The idea of extrinsic laws governing material behavior ceases and is instead replaced by emergence and immanent causality. Artists can uncluster social material assemblages into their component properties and reengineer them to develop new, destratifying results. No longer an appeal to theosophic metaphysicality but a realist metamateriality.
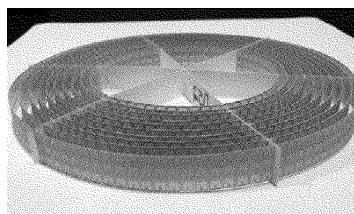
The Stubborn Dream of Everyday Virtuality
By Tom Moody

In an interview in the early 2000s, Steven Lisberger, director of the first *Tron* movie (1982), talked about his goals for the film. Artists, he believed, could bring inspiring life to new technologies that might still be dry, baffling, and insular to the general public. With *Tron*, he sought to bestow a new kind of mythological identity on the circuit boards and spreadsheets of the emerging computer industry, and largely succeeded: the film introduced visions of cyberspace that have endured. Its data-mazes and menacing walls of security encryption laid the foundations for the 3D networks of global interconnection described in William Gibson's book *Neuromancer*, published two years later, and its fully-fleshed out avatars (with or without motherboard spandex) have become a virtual reality staple.

Lisberger complained in the same interview that the Web had not fulfilled its promise, lamenting that it had, by the turn of the Millennium, become a dispiriting place of porn and gossip. Few could argue with that, but what might have disappointed him more was that the Web didn't look like *Tron*. Humanlike avatars zoomed through pure geometry and clinked glasses in virtual cafes in films such as *The Matrix*, while actual people, sitting at actual computers, engaged in a form of mass, high speed letter writing. Ten years later, we're still typing away while our uploaded selves frolic only in cable TV science fiction shows.

Gibson's fiction tracks the changes in our e-expectations. After *Neuromancer* he wrote two more books set in a post-Reagan capitalist dystopia, where brain-burned proto-laptop cowboys jacked in and out of a quasi-mystical Net. In his later novels, beginning with *Virtual Light*, he traded Haitian voodoo gods lurking in the silicon for more mundane fare such as the rock and roll chat space in *Idoru*, where fans from all parts of the globe convened to talk shop inside imaginary, impossible landscapes, wearing zany 3D costumes. By 2003's *Pattern Recognition*, the chat environments had become the ones we know—ordinary text-based message boards where film buffs and otaku swapped information about their respective fetishes and collectibles.

Meanwhile, in the real world, one virtual community of the type envisioned in cyberpunk fiction had come and gone and another was on the ascent. Active Worlds, supposedly patterned on Neal Stephenson's web-like Metaverse from the novel *Snow Crash*, never acquired a wide user base for its virtual real estate and dialogue features. The platform still exists and can be toured; it now resembles a strange kind of digital mortuary for a vanished species. The almost-identical Second Life, however, with only slight improvements to 3D modeling technology, garnered media buzz and wide participation. Yet despite the sustained hype, the platform began to wane in the Facebook era, with consumers rejecting digital puppetry in favor of text, low-res pictures, video clips, and Tinychat-style teleconferencing.

Australian author Greg Egan envisioned a nightmarish kind of Second Life in his 1994 novel *Permutation City*, where people didn't just manifest as avatars but could upload their entire personalities to any online environment. The novel bends time and space by imagining a level of existence not even dependent on an electronic web: his sentient "copies" eventually become self-replicating Von Neumann machines that can clone themselves, their environments, and reality itself at the quantum level. Some copies disappear into solipsistic playgrounds where they relive past traumas; others amuse themselves across centuries of time by watching a simulated ecoverse inside their own simulated reality, as it slowly evolves intelligent lifeforms. Egan's virtuality is maximally efficient—the rendering algorithms only create a detailed view in the direction a copy is looking; nevertheless, the illusion is complete.

Nowadays Egan alternates between far-future novels where characters beam versions of themselves around the galaxy and a more ordinary reality of email and social media; yet even in the latter, the trope of an all-encompassing virtuality hasn't been abandoned. In his most recent book *Zendegi*, gaming has become a major industry in a near-future, post-mullah Iran. The protagonists inhabit a familiar-enough world where people convert old vinyl records to mp3 and complain about tracking cookies on their phones, but then they step into climate controlled pods for adventures in Zendegi, a game of interactive waking dreams based on tales from Persian mythology.

Egan's fiction shares with gaming and movies a quest for an ideal dating back to classical times,

which art historian Norman Bryson has called the Essential Copy. By the Renaissance, many technical problems of creating a trompe l'oeil illusion had been solved through an increased understanding of perspective and color, and through the development of techniques such as chiaroscuro (modeling of light and dark) and sfumato (smooth blending to hide seams). What succeeded in altars and history paintings became problematic a few centuries later when the characters were required to move. Where do shadows go when the ground is heaving? How do complicated joints bend? In the celluloid era, hand-drawn animation tackled some of these dilemmas and arrived at efficient and compelling solutions but these are now deemed too labor intensive; hence, our new Renaissance of conjuring reality with software.

Producers are financing this work-in-progress one game cartridge and movie ticket at a time and it must be said it's not going so well. People look stiff, rubbery, and strange; landscapes look brittle and inert. A theory of the Uncanny Valley has evolved to explain this—briefly stated, the more something tries to look like what we know, the odder it becomes. Yet viewers eager for escape are also being gradually conditioned to accept digital entertainment's shortcuts and workarounds, so these become the norm despite the grotesqueries. In any event we still don't have Star Trek's holodeck or the complete wraparound virtuality of the type depicted in Egan's novels. Likely we never will as long as pure economics shape our culture. We could use a few more of Lisberger's messianic visionaries to get us across the valley, or explain why we don't need to go there.

Instead of *The Matrix* what we have is far stranger and more compelling: a chaotic environment of pure cobbled-together improvisation, bricolage for want of a less overused term, involving a complex, dynamic assortment of waxing and waning media platforms. At any given moment it is possible to exist online as a collection of photos and personal preferences, telecast episodes of a head talking to a camera, a diaristic blog, a list of 140-character quips, a table of streaming music files, an aggregation of visual art (yours or others'), a series of instant message chats that vanish soon after occurring, and a myriad of other publishing and sharing schemes, all in various stages of bandwagon ascent or ignominious, no-longer-buzzworthy decline. Efforts by hosts to enforce a unitary identity for advertising purposes may eventually result in a Matrix as option-deprived as the Wachowskis' but right now the human batteries are still running around loose.

Hollywood clings to 1980s visions of cyberspace because diving through polychromatic tunnels rivets the viewer in pure cinematic spectacle and illusions of fake real people are fun. 3D imaging and detailed landscapes have also been a success in gaming but at some point the assumptions that we needed or wanted bandwidth-hogging simulation for everyday interaction smacked up against the atomized, increasingly mobile, still frequently unreliable world of the real internet. We thought we wanted Second Life but settled for Twitter; we thought we wanted *Tron* but settled for *You've Got Mail* (with video). The media convergence prophesied in the dot com era may indeed be coming to pass, but its form isn't a seamless new reality so much as an awkward melange of old ones. May it always be this messy.

Colophon

This collection of texts is typeset with fonts from *Emigre* – one of the first foundries to embrace the computer. Stylistically they came to define the 1990s. Digitally enabled, techno-enthusiastic postmodernism – for the LaserWriter as well as the printing press.

http://www.emigre.com/Editorial.php

The body is set in *Base Twelve* (Zuzana Licko, 1995).

The headlines alternate between the typefaces *Keedy* (Jeffery Keedy, 1986), *Mason Serif* (Jonathan Barnbrook, 1992), *Dead History* (P. Scott Makela, 1990), *Template Gothic* (Barry Deck, 1990) and *Oakland* (Zuzana Licko, 1985). Five faces that recently were added to the *Design and Achitecture Collection* of MoMA.

The page numbering is done in *Democratica* (Miles Newlyn, 1991).

The figures in the lower left corner are glyphs from the font *FellaParts* (Edward Fella, 1993).

– *Rasmus Svensson*

Pool is a platform dedicated to expanding and improving the discourse surrounding Post-Internet art, culture and society.

http://pooool.info/