

Hito Steyerl
The Wretched of the Screen

SternbergPress *

In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective

Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground.

Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness.¹ We cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths. At best, we are faced with temporary, contingent, and partial attempts at grounding. But if there is no stable ground available for our social lives and philosophical aspirations, the consequence must be a permanent, or at least intermittent state of free fall for subjects and objects alike. But why don't we notice?

Paradoxically, while you are falling, you will probably feel as if you are floating—or not even moving at all. Falling is relational—if there is nothing to fall toward, you may not even be aware that you're falling. If there is no ground, gravity might be low and you'll feel weightless. Objects will stay suspended if you let go of them. Whole societies around you may be falling just as you are. And it may actually feel like perfect stasis—as if history and time have ended and you can't even remember that time ever moved forward.

As you are falling, your sense of orientation may start to play additional tricks on you. The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries. Pilots have even reported that free fall can trigger a feeling of confusion between the self and the aircraft. While falling, people may sense themselves as being things, while things may sense that they are people. Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise.

This disorientation is partly due to the loss of a stable horizon. And with the loss of horizon also comes the departure of a stable paradigm of orientation, which has situated concepts of subject and object, of time and space, throughout modernity. In falling, the lines of the horizon shatter, swirl around, and superimpose.

A Brief History of the Horizon

Our sense of spatial and temporal orientation has changed dramatically in recent years, prompted by new technologies of surveillance, tracking, and targeting. One of the symptoms of this transformation is the growing importance of aerial views: overviews, Google Map views, satellite views. We are growing increasingly accustomed to what used to be called a God's-eye view. On the other hand, we also notice the decreasing importance of a paradigm of visibility that long dominated our vision: linear perspective. Its stable and single point of view is being supplemented (and often replaced) by multiple perspectives, overlapping windows, distorted flight lines, and divergent vanishing points. How could these changes be related to the phenomena of groundlessness and permanent fall?

First, let's take a step back and consider the crucial role of the horizon in all of this. Our traditional sense of orientation—and, with it, modern concepts of time and space—are based on a stable line: the horizon line. Its stability hinges on the stability of an observer, who is thought to be located on a ground of sorts, a shoreline, a boat—a ground that can be imagined as stable, even if in fact it is not. The horizon line was an extremely important element in navigation. It defined the limits of communication and understanding. Beyond the horizon, there was only muteness and silence. Within it,

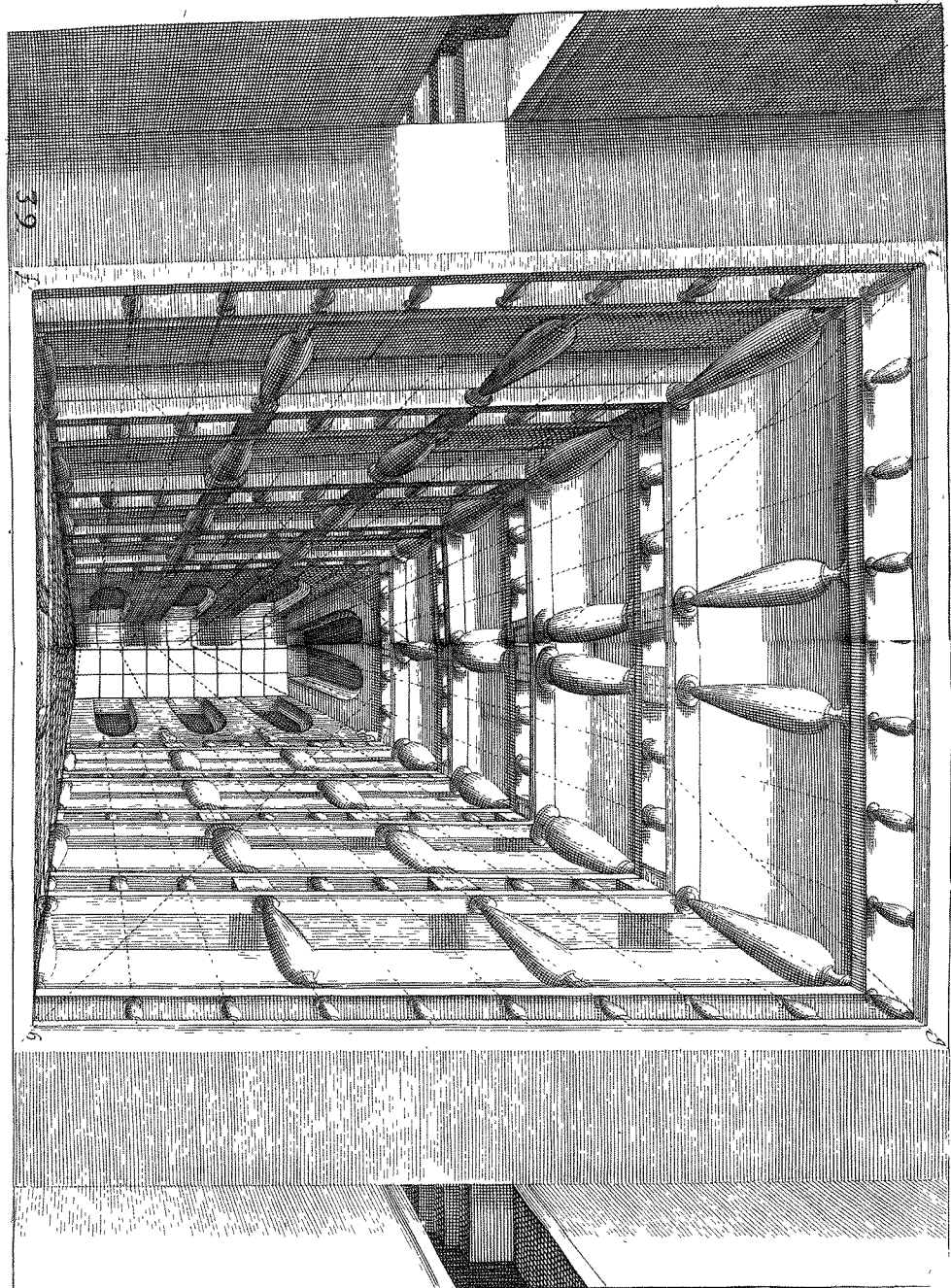
things could be made visible. But it could also be used for determining one's own location and relation to one's surroundings, destinations, or ambitions.

Early navigation consisted of gestures and bodily poses relating to the horizon. "In early days, [Arab navigators] used one or two fingers width, a thumb and little finger on an outstretched arm, or an arrow held at arm's length to sight the horizon at the lower end and Polaris at the upper."² The angle between the horizon and the Pole star gave information about the altitude of one's position. This measurement method was known as *sighting* the object, *shooting* the object, or *taking a sight*. In this way, one's own location could be at least roughly determined.

Instruments like the astrolabe, quadrant, and sextant refined this way of gaining orientation by using the horizon and the stars. One of the main obstacles with this technology was the fact that the ground on which sailors stood was never stable in the first place. The stable horizon mostly remained a projection, until artificial horizons were eventually invented in order to create the illusion of stability. The use of the horizon to calculate position gave seafarers a sense of orientation, thus also enabling colonialism and the spread of a capitalist global market, but also became an important tool for the construction of the optical paradigms that came to define modernity, the most important paradigm being that of so-called linear perspective.

As early as 1028, Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (965–1040), also known as Alhazen, wrote a book of visual theory, *Kitab al-Manazir*. After 1200, it became available in Europe and spawned numerous experiments in visual production between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, which culminated in the development of linear perspective.

Hans Vredeman De Vries, Perspective 39, 1605, copperplate engraving.



In Duccio's *Last Supper* (1308–11), several vanishing points are still evident. The perspectives in this space do not coalesce into a horizon line, nor do they all intersect in one single vanishing point. But in *Miracle of the Desecrated Host (Scene I)* (1465–69), painted by Paolo Uccello, who was one of the most ardent experimenters in the development of linear perspective, the perspective is aligned to culminate in one single vanishing point, located on a virtual horizon defined by the eye line.

Linear perspective is based on several decisive negations. First, the curvature of the earth is typically disregarded. The horizon is conceived as an abstract flat line upon which the points on any horizontal plane converge. Additionally, as Erwin Panofsky argued, the construction of linear perspective declares the view of a one-eyed and immobile spectator as a norm—and this view is itself assumed to be natural, scientific, and objective. Thus, linear perspective is based on an abstraction, and does not correspond to any subjective perception.³ Instead, it computes a mathematical, flattened, infinite, continuous, and homogenous space, and declares it to be reality. Linear perspective creates the illusion of a quasi-natural view to the “outside,” as if the image plane was a window opening onto the “real” world. This is also the literal meaning of the Latin *perspectiva*: to see through.

This space defined by linear perspective is calculable, navigable, and predictable. It allows the calculation of future risk, which can be anticipated, and, therefore, managed. As a consequence, linear perspective not only transforms space, but also introduces the notion of a linear time, which allows mathematical prediction and, with it, linear progress. This is the second, temporal meaning of perspective: a view onto a calculable future. As

Walter Benjamin argued, time can become just as homogenous and empty as space.⁴ And for all these calculations to operate, we must necessarily assume an observer standing on a stable ground looking out toward a vanishing point on a flat, and actually quite artificial, horizon.

But linear perspective also performs an ambivalent operation concerning the viewer. As the whole paradigm converges in one of the viewer's eyes, the viewer becomes central to the worldview established by it. The viewer is mirrored in the vanishing point, and thus constructed by it. The vanishing point gives the observer a body and a position. But on the other hand, the spectator's importance is also undermined by the assumption that vision follows scientific laws. While empowering the subject by placing it at the center of vision, linear perspective also undermines the viewer's individuality by subjecting it to supposedly objective laws of representation.

Needless to say, this reinvention of the subject, time, and space was an additional tool kit for enabling Western dominance, and the dominance of its concepts—as well as for redefining standards of representation, time, and space. All of these components are evident in Uccello's six-panel painting, *Miracle of the Desecrated Host*. In the first panel, a woman sells a Host to a Jewish merchant, who in the second panel tries to “desecrate” it. For this, the Jewish merchant ends up at the stakes. Along with his wife and two small children, he is tied to a pillar on which parallels converge as if it were a target mark. The date of these panels shortly prefigures the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain in 1492, also the year of Christopher Columbus's expedition to the West Indies.⁵ In these paintings, linear perspective becomes a matrix for racial and religious

propaganda, and related atrocities. This so-called scientific worldview helped set standards for marking people as other, thus legitimizing their conquest or the domination over them.

On the other hand, linear perspective also carries the seeds of its own downfall. Its scientific allure and objectivist attitude established a universal claim for representation, a link to veracity that undermined particularistic worldviews, even if halfheartedly and belatedly. It thus became a hostage to the truth it had so confidently proclaimed. And a deep suspicion was planted alongside its claims for veracity from its inception.

The Downfall of Linear Perspective

But the situation now is somewhat different. We seem to be in a state of transition toward one or several other visual paradigms. Linear perspective has been supplemented by other types of vision to the point where we may have to conclude that its status as the dominant visual paradigm is changing.

This transition was already apparent in the nineteenth century in the field of painting. One work in particular expresses the circumstances of this transformation: *The Slave Ship* (1840), by J. M. W. Turner. The scene in the painting represents a real incident: when the captain of a slave ship discovered that his insurance only covered slaves lost at sea, and not those dying or ill on board, he ordered all dying and sick slaves to be thrown overboard. Turner's painting captures the moment where the slaves are beginning to go under.

In this painting, the horizon line, if distinguishable at all, is tilted, curved, and troubled. The observer has lost his stable position. There are no parallels that could converge at a single vanishing point. The sun, which is at the center of

the composition, is multiplied in reflections. The observer is upset, displaced, beside himself at the sight of the slaves, who are not only sinking but have also had their bodies reduced to fragments—their limbs devoured by sharks, mere shapes below the water's surface. At the sight of the effects of colonialism and slavery, linear perspective—the central viewpoint, the position of mastery, control, and subjecthood—is abandoned and starts tumbling and tilting, taking with it the idea of space and time as systematic constructions. The idea of a calculable and predictable future shows a murderous side through an insurance that prevents economic loss by inspiring cold-blooded murder. Space dissolves into mayhem on the unstable and treacherous surface of an unpredictable sea.

Turner experimented with moving perspectives early on. Legend has it that he had himself tied to the mast of a ship crossing from Dover to Calais, explicitly to watch the horizon change. In 1843 or 1844, he stuck his head out of the window of a moving train for exactly nine minutes, the result of which was a painting called *Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844). In it, linear perspective dissolves into the background. There is no resolution, no vanishing point, and no clear view to any past or future. Again, more interesting is the perspective of the spectator himself, who seems to be dangling in the air on the outer side of the rails of a railroad bridge. There is no clear ground under his assumed position. He might be suspended in the mist, floating over an absent ground.

In both of Turner's paintings, the horizon is blurred, tilted, and yet not necessarily denied. The paintings do not negate its existence altogether, but render it inaccessible to the viewer's perception. The question of horizon starts to float, so to speak.

Perspectives assume mobile points of view and communication is disabled even within one common horizon. One could say that the downward motion of the sinking slaves affects the point of view of the painter, who tears it away from a position of certitude, and subjects it to gravity and motion and the pull of a bottomless sea.

Acceleration

With the twentieth century, the further dismantling of linear perspective in a variety of areas began to take hold. Cinema supplements photography with the articulation of different temporal perspectives. Montage becomes a perfect device for destabilizing the observer's perspective and breaking down linear time. Painting abandons representation to a large extent and demolishes linear perspective in cubism, collage, and different types of abstraction. Time and space are reimagined through quantum physics and the theory of relativity, while perception is reorganized by warfare, advertisement, and the conveyor belt. With the invention of aviation, opportunities for falling, nose-diving, and crashing increase. With it—and especially with the conquest of outer space—comes the development of new perspectives and techniques of orientation, found especially in an increasing number of aerial views of all kinds. While all these developments can be described as typical characteristics of modernity, the past few years has seen visual culture saturated by military and entertainment images' views from above.

Hito Steyerl

Aircraft expand the horizon of communication and act as aerial cameras providing backgrounds for aerial map views. Drones survey, track, and kill. But the entertainment industry is busy as well. Especially in 3-D cinema, the new characteristics of

aerial views are fully exploited by staging vertiginous flights into abysses. One could almost say that 3-D and the construction of imaginary vertical worlds (prefigured in the logic of computer games) are essential to each other. 3-D also intensifies hierarchies of material required to access this new visuality. As Thomas Elsaesser has argued, a hardware environment integrating military, surveillance, and entertainment applications produces new markets for hardware and software.⁶

In a fascinating text, Eyal Weizman analyzes verticality in political architecture, describing the spatial turn of sovereignty and surveillance in terms of a vertical 3-D sovereignty.⁷ He argues that geopolitical power was once distributed on a planar map-like surface on which boundaries were drawn and defended. But at present, the distribution of power—he cites the Israeli occupation in Palestine as his example, but there could be many others—has increasingly come to occupy a vertical dimension. Vertical sovereignty splits space into stacked horizontal layers, separating not only airspace from ground, but also splitting ground from underground, and airspace into various layers. Different strata of community are divided from each other on a y-axis, multiplying sites of conflict and violence. As Achille Mbembe contends,

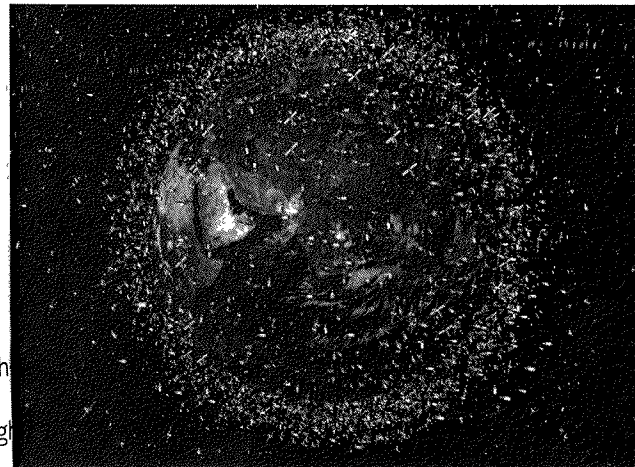
Occupation of the skies therefore acquires a critical importance, since most of the policing is done from the air. Various other technologies are mobilized to this effect: sensors aboard unmanned air vehicles (UAVs), aerial reconnaissance jets, early warning Hawkeye planes, assault helicopters, an Earth-observation satellite, techniques of "hologrammatization."⁸

Free Fall

But how to link this obsessive policing, division, and representation of ground to the philosophical assumption that in contemporary societies there is no ground to speak of? How do these aerial representations—in which grounding effectively constitutes a privileged subject—link to the hypothesis that we currently inhabit a condition of free fall?

The answer is simple: many of the aerial views, 3-D nose-dives, Google Maps, and surveillance panoramas do not actually portray a stable ground. Instead, they create a supposition that it exists in the first place. Retroactively, this virtual ground creates a perspective of overview and surveillance for a distanced, superior spectator safely floating up in the air. Just as linear perspective established an imaginary stable observer and horizon, so does the perspective from above establish an imaginary floating observer and an imaginary stable ground.

This establishes a new visual normality—a new subjectivity safely folded into surveillance technology and screen-based distraction.⁹ One might conclude that this is in fact a radicalization—though not an overcoming—of the paradigm of linear perspective. In it, the former distinction between object and subject is exacerbated and turned into the one-way gaze of superiors onto inferiors, a looking down from high to low. Additionally, the displacement of perspective creates a disembodied and remote-controlled gaze, outsourced to machines and other objects.¹⁰ Gazes already became decisively mobile and mechanized with the invention of photography, but new technologies have enabled the detached observant gaze to become ever more inclusive and all-knowing to the point of becoming massively intrusive—as militaristic as it is pornographic, as intense as extensive, both micro- and macroscopic.



Space debris or junk (such as rocket stages, defunct satellites, and explosion and collision fragments) orbiting the earth.

The Politics of Verticality

The view from above is a perfect metonymy for a more general verticalization of class relations in the context of an intensified class war from above—seen through the lenses and on the screens of military, entertainment, and information industries.¹² It is a proxy perspective that projects delusions of stability, safety, and extreme mastery onto a backdrop of expanded 3-D sovereignty. But if the new views from above recreate societies as free-falling urban abysses and splintered terrains of occupation, surveilled aerially and policed biopolitically, they may also—as linear perspective did—carry the seeds of their own demise within them.

As linear perspective began to tumble down with the sinking bodies of slaves thrown into the ocean, for many people today the simulated ground of aerial imagery provide an illusionary tool of orientation in a condition in which the horizons have, in fact, been shattered. Time is out of joint and we no longer know whether we are objects or subjects as we spiral down in an imperceptible free fall.¹³

But if we accept the multiplication and de-linearization of horizons and perspectives, the new tools of vision may also serve to express, and even alter, the contemporary conditions of disruption and disorientation. Recent 3-D animation technologies incorporate multiple perspectives, which are deliberately manipulated to create multifocal and non-linear imagery.¹⁴ Cinematic space is twisted in any way imaginable, organized around heterogeneous, curved, and collaged perspectives. The tyranny of the photographic lens, cursed by the promise of its indexical relation to reality, has given way to hyper-real representations—not of space as it is, but of space as we can make it—for better or worse. There is no need for expensive renderings; a simple green-

screen collage yields impossible cubist perspectives and implausible concatenations of times and spaces alike.

Finally, cinema has caught up with the representational freedoms of painting and structural and experimental film. As it merges with graphic-design practices, drawing, and collage, cinema has gained independence from the prescribed focal dimensions that have normalized and limited the realm of its vision. While it could be argued that montage was the first step toward a liberation from cinematic linear perspective—and was for this reason ambivalent for most of its existence—only now can new and different sorts of spatial vision be created. Similar things can be said about multiscreen projections, which create a dynamic viewing space, dispersing perspective and possible points of view. The viewer is no longer unified by such a gaze, but is rather dissociated and overwhelmed, drafted into the production of content. None of these projection spaces suppose a single unified horizon. Rather, many call for a multiple spectator, who must be created and recreated by ever-new articulations of the crowd.¹⁵

In many of these new visualities, what seemed like a helpless tumble into an abyss actually turns out to be a new representational freedom. And perhaps this helps us get over the last assumption implicit in this thought experiment: the idea that we need a ground in the first place. In his discussion of the vertiginous, Theodor W. Adorno scoffs at philosophy's obsession with earth and origin, with a philosophy of belonging that obviously comes packaged within the most violent fear of the groundless and bottomless. For him, the vertiginous is not about the panicked loss of a ground imagined to be a safe haven of being:

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So just
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A cognition that is to bear fruit will throw itself to the objects *à fond perdu* [without hope]. The vertigo which this causes is an *index veri*; the shock of inclusiveness, the negative as which it cannot help appearing in the frame-covered, never-changing realm, is true for untruth only.¹⁶

A fall toward objects without reservation, embracing a world of forces and matter, which lacks any original stability and sparks the sudden shock of the open: a freedom that is terrifying, utterly deterritorializing, and always already unknown. Falling means ruin and demise as well as love and abandon passion and surrender, decline and catastrophe. Falling is corruption as well as liberation, a condition that turns people into things and vice versa.¹⁷ It takes place in an opening we could endure or enjoy, embrace or suffer, or simply accept as reality.

Finally, the perspective of free fall teaches us to consider a social and political dreamscape of radicalized class war from above, one that throws jaw-dropping social inequalities into sharp focus. But falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place. Grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backward onto an agonizing present, we may realize that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable. It promises no community, but a shifting formation.

¹ Examples of so-called anti- and post-foundational philosophy are given in the preface to Oliver Marchart's introductory volume *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 1–10. Briefly speaking, such thought, as proffered by the philosophers under discussion, rejects the idea of a given and stable metaphysical ground and revolves around Heideggerian metaphors of abyss and ground, as well as the absence of ground. Ernesto Laclau describes the experience of contingency and groundlessness as a possible experience of freedom.

² Peter Ifland, "The History of the Sextant" (lecture, University of Coimbra, October 3, 2000); see <http://www.mat.uc.pt/~helios/Mestre/Novemb00/H61iflan.htm>.

³ See Erwin Panofsky, "Die Perspektive als symbolische Form," in *Erwin Panofsky: Deutschsprachige Aufsätze II*, ed. Wolfgang Kemp et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 364–758.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 261. See <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>.

⁵ See Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁶ The following quote by Elsaesser can be seen as blueprint for this paper, whose inspiration derives from an informal conversation with the author: This means that stereoscopic images and the 3-D movie are part of the new paradigm, which is turning our information society into a control society and our visual culture into a surveillance

culture. The movie industry, civil society, and the military sector are all united in this surveillance paradigm, which, as part of a historic process, seeks to replace 'monocular vision,' the way of seeing that has defined Western thought and action for the last 500 years. It is this means of seeing that gave rise to a wide range of innovations like panel painting, colonial seafaring, and Cartesian philosophy, as well as the whole concept of projecting ideas, risks, chances, and courses of action into the future. Flight simulators and other types of military technology are part of a new effort to introduce 3-D as the standard means of perception—but the development goes even further to include surveillance. This encompasses an entire catalog of movements and behaviors, all of which are intrinsically connected to the monitoring, steering, and observation of ongoing processes, and which delegate or outsource what was once referred to as introspection, self-awareness, and personal responsibility." Thomas Elsaesser, "The Dimension of Depth and Objects Rushing Towards Us. Or: The Tail that Wags the Dog. A Discourse on Digital 3-D Cinema," <http://www.filmfestival.com/en/magazine/ausgabe-12010/the-dimension-of-depth/the-dimension-of-depth-and-objects-rushing-towards-us.html>.

⁷ See Eyal Weizman, "The Politics of Verticality," http://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politics/verticality/article_801.jsp.

⁸ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 29, <http://www.jhcf.duke.edu/jcuss/pdfs/Mbembe.pdf>.

⁹ Dieter Roelstraete and Jennifer Allen both describe this new normality from different perspectives in very good texts. See Dieter Roelstraete, "(Jena Revisited) Ten Tentative Tenets," *e-flux journal*, no. 16 (May 2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/137>; and Jennifer Allen, "That Eye, The Sky," *frieze*, no. 132 (June–August 2010), http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/that_eye_the_sky/.

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See Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

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In fact, the perspective of the floating camera belongs to a dead man. Most recently, a dehumanization (or post-humanization) of the gaze is perhaps nowhere as literally allegorized as in the film *Enter the Void* (2010), where, for most of the film, a disembodied point of view endlessly drifts over Tokyo. This gaze penetrates any space, moving without constraint and with unrestricted mobility, looking for a body in which to biologically reproduce itself and reincarnate. The point of view in *Enter the Void* is reminiscent of the gaze of a drone. But instead of bringing death, it is looking to recreate its own life. To this end, the protagonist basically wants to hijack a fetus. But the film is also very picky about this procedure: mixed race fetuses get aborted in favor of white ones. There are more issues that link the movie to reactionary breeding ideologies. Floating and biopolitical policing are mixed into a computer-animated obsession with superior bodies, remote control, and digital aerial vision. The floating gaze of the dead man thus literally echoes Achille Mbembe's powerful description of necropower: necropower regulates life through the perspective of death. Could these tropes allegorized in a single (and frankly, god-awful) movie be expanded into a more general analysis of disembodied hovering point of views? Do the aerial views, drone perspectives, and 3-D dives into abysses stand in for the gazes of "dead white males," a worldview that lost its vitality, yet persists as an undead but powerful tool to police the world and control its own reproduction?

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Paraphrasing Elsaesser's notion of the "military-surveillance-entertainment complex." See <http://www.edit-frankfurt.de/en/magazine/ausgabe-12010/the-dimension-of-depth/the-dimension-of-depth-and-objects-rushing-towards-us.html>.

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Assuming there is no ground, even those on the bottom of hierarchies keep falling.

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These techniques are described in Maneesh Agrawala, Denis Zorin, and Tamara Munzner, "Artistic Multi-projection Rendering," in *Rendering Techniques 2000: Proceedings of the Eurographics*, eds. Bernard Péroche and Holly E. Rushmaier (Vienna: Springer, 2000), 125–36; Patrick Coleman and Karan Singh, "Ryan: Rendering Your Animation Nonlinearly Projected," in *NPAR '04: Proceedings of the 3rd International Symposium on Non-Photorealistic Animation and Rendering* (New York: ACM Press, 2004), 129–56; Andrew Glassner, "Digital Cubism, part 2," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 25, no. 4 (July 2004): 84–95; Karan Singh, "A Fresh Perspective," in Péroche et al., *Rendering Techniques 2000*, 17–24; Nisha Sudarsanam, Cindy Grimm, and Karan Singh, "Interactive Manipulation of Projections with a Curved Perspective," *Computer Graphics Forum* 24 (2005): 105–8; and Yonggao Yang, Jim X. Chen, and Mohsen Beheshti, "Nonlinear Perspective Projections and Magic Lenses: 3-D View Deformation," *IEEE Computer Graphics Applications* 25, no. 1 (January/February 2005): 76–84.

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See Hito Steyerl, "Is a Museum a Factory?" *e-flux journal*, no. 7 (June 2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/71>; and on page 60 in this book.

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Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1972), 43.

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Taking the cue from Gil Leung's reflection, "After before now: Notes on In Free Fall," August 8, 2010, <http://www.picture-this.org.uk/library/essays/1/2010/after-before-now-notes-on-in-free-fall>.

In Defense of the Poor Image

- Degraded image - Marshall's 'Lost Reels'

32

In Defense of the Poor Image

Hito Steyerl

The poor image is a copy in motion. Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard. As it accelerates, it deteriorates. It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.

The poor image is a rag or a rip; an AVI or a JPEG, a lumpen proletariat in the class society of appearances, ranked and valued according to its resolution. The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation into distraction. The image is liberated from the vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance. The poor image tends toward abstraction: it is a visual idea in its very becoming.

The poor image is an illicit fifth-generation bastard of an original image. Its genealogy is dubious. Its file names are deliberately misspelled. It often defies patrimony, national culture, or indeed copyright. It is passed on as a lure, a decoy, an index or as a reminder of its former visual self. It mocks the promises of digital technology. Not only is it often degraded to the point of being just a hurried blur, one even doubts whether it could be called an image at all. Only digital technology could produce such a dilapidated image in the first place.

Poor images are the contemporary Wretched of the Screen, the debris of audiovisual production, the trash that washes up on the digital economies' shores. They testify to the violent dislocation, transferences, and displacement of images—their acceleration and circulation within the vicious cycles of

audiovisual capitalism. Poor images are dragged around the globe as commodities or their effigies, as gifts or as bounty. They spread pleasure or death threats, conspiracy theories or bootlegs, resistance or stultification. Poor images show the rare, the obvious, and the unbelievable—that is, if we can still manage to decipher it.

Low Resolutions

In one of Woody Allen's films the main character is out of focus.¹ It's not a technical problem but some sort of disease that has befallen him: his image is consistently blurred. Since Allen's character is an actor, this becomes a major problem: he is unable to find work. His lack of definition turns into a material problem. Focus is identified as a class position, a position of ease and privilege, while being out of focus lowers one's value as an image. The contemporary hierarchy of images, however, is not only based on sharpness, but also and primarily on resolution. Just look at any electronics store and this system, described by Harun Farocki in a notable 2007 interview, becomes immediately apparent.² In the class society of images, cinema takes on the role of a flagship store. In flagship stores high-end products are marketed in an upscale environment. More affordable derivatives of the same images circulate as DVDs, on broadcast television, or online, as poor images.

Obviously, a high-resolution image looks more brilliant and impressive, more mimetic and magic, more scary and seductive than a poor one. It is more rich, so to speak. Now, even consumer formats are increasingly adapting to the tastes of cineastes and aesthetes, who insisted on 35 mm film as a guarantee of pristine visuality. The insistence upon analog film as the sole medium of visual importance resounded

33



Public ceremony organized by the mayor of Puebla, Mexico, to destroy pirated DVD in circulation.

throughout discourses on cinema, almost regardless of their ideological inflection. It never mattered that these high-end economies of film production were (and still are) firmly anchored in systems of national culture, capitalist studio production, the cult of mostly male genius, and the original version, and thus are often conservative in their very structure. Resolution was fetishized as if its lack amounted to castration of the author. The cult of film gauge dominated even independent film production. The rich image established its own set of hierarchies, with new technologies offering more and more possibilities to creatively degrade it.

Resurrection (as Poor Images)

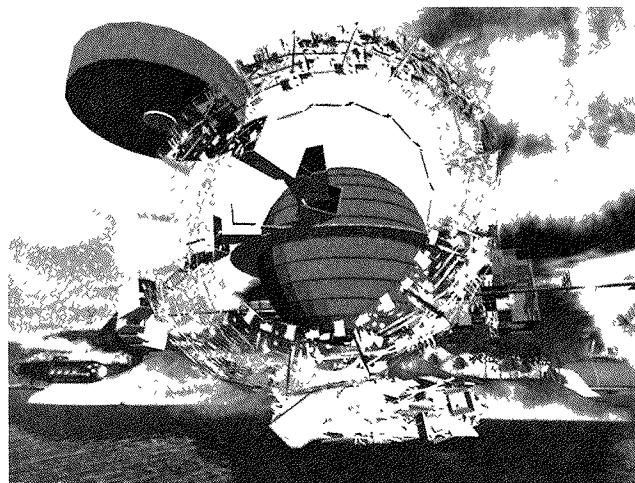
But insisting on rich images also had more serious consequences. A speaker at a recent conference on the film essay refused to show clips from a piece by Humphrey Jennings because no proper film projection was available. Although there was at the speaker's disposal a perfectly standard DVD player and video projector, the audience was left to imagine what those images might have looked like.

In this case the invisibility of the image was more or less voluntary and based on aesthetic premises. But it has a much more general equivalent based on the consequences of neoliberal policies. Twenty or even thirty years ago, the neoliberal restructuring of media production began slowly obscuring noncommercial imagery, to the point where experimental and essayistic cinema became almost invisible. As it became prohibitively expensive to keep these works circulating in cinemas, so were they also deemed too marginal to be broadcast on television. Thus they slowly disappeared not just from cinemas, but from the public sphere as well. Video essays and experimental

films remained for the most part unseen save for some rare screenings in metropolitan film museums or film clubs, projected in their original resolution before disappearing again into the darkness of the archive.

This development was of course connected to the neoliberal radicalization of the concept of culture as commodity, to the commercialization of cinema, its dispersion into multiplexes, and the marginalization of independent filmmaking. It was also connected to the restructuring of global media industries and the establishment of monopolies over the audiovisual in certain countries or territories. In this way, resistant or nonconformist visual matter disappeared from the surface into an underground of alternative archives and collections, kept alive only by a network of committed organizations and individuals, who would circulate bootlegged VHS copies among themselves. Sources for these were extremely rare—tapes moved from hand to hand, depending on word of mouth, within circles of friends and colleagues. With the possibility to stream video online, this condition started to dramatically change. An increasing number of rare materials reappeared on publicly accessible platforms, some of them carefully curated (UbuWeb) and some just a pile of stuff (YouTube).

At present, there are at least twenty torrents of Chris Marker's film essays available online. If you want a retrospective, you can have it. But the economy of poor images is about more than just downloads: you can keep the files, watch them again, even reedit or improve them if you think it necessary. And the results circulate. Blurred AVI files of half-forgotten masterpieces are exchanged on semi-secret P2P platforms. Clandestine cellphone videos smuggled out of museums are broadcast on YouTube. DVDs of



Chris Marker's virtual home as found in Second Life, May 29, 2009.

artists' viewing copies are bartered.³ Many works of avant-garde, essayistic, and noncommercial cinema have been resurrected as poor images. Whether they like it or not.

Privatization and Piracy

That rare prints of militant, experimental, and classical works of cinema as well as video art reappear as poor images is significant on another level. Their situation reveals much more than the content or appearance of the images themselves: it also reveals the conditions of their marginalization, the constellation of social forces leading to their online circulation as poor images.⁴ Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images—their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement.⁵

Obviously, this condition is not only connected to the neoliberal restructuring of media production and digital technology; it also has to do with the post-socialist and postcolonial restructuring of nation-states, their cultures, and their archives. While some nation-states are dismantled or fall apart, new cultures and traditions are invented and new histories created. This obviously also affects film archives—in many cases, a whole heritage of film prints is left without its supporting framework of national culture. As I once observed in the case of a film museum in Sarajevo, the national archive can find its next life in the form of a video-rental store.⁶ Pirate copies seep out of such archives through disorganized privatization. On the other hand, even the British Library sells off its contents online at astronomical prices.

As Kodwo Eshun has noted, poor images circulate partly in the void left by state cinema

organizations who find it too difficult to operate as a 16/35 mm archive or to maintain any kind of distribution infrastructure in the contemporary era.⁷ From this perspective, the poor image reveals the decline and degradation of the film essay, or indeed any experimental and noncommercial cinema, which in many places was made possible because the production of culture was considered a task of the state. Privatization of media production gradually grew more important than state-controlled/sponsored media production. But, on the other hand, the rampant privatization of intellectual content, along with online marketing and commodification, also enables piracy and appropriation; it gives rise to the circulation of poor images.

Imperfect Cinema

The emergence of poor images reminds one of a classic Third Cinema manifesto, "For an Imperfect Cinema," by Juan García Espinosa, written in Cuba in the late 1960s.⁸ Espinosa argues for an imperfect cinema because, in his words, "perfect cinema—technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema." The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society. It merges art with life and science, blurring the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author. It insists upon its own imperfection, is popular but not consumerist, committed without becoming bureaucratic.

In his manifesto, Espinosa also reflects on the promises of new media. He clearly predicts that the development of video technology will jeopardize the elitist position of traditional filmmakers and enable some sort of mass film production: an art of the people. Like the economy of poor images,

imperfect cinema diminishes the distinctions between author and audience and merges life and art. Most of all, its visuality is resolutely compromised: blurred, amateurish, and full of artifacts.

In some way, the economy of poor images corresponds to the description of imperfect cinema, while the description of perfect cinema represents rather the concept of cinema as a flagship store. But the real and contemporary imperfect cinema is also much more ambivalent and affective than Espinosa had anticipated. On the one hand, the economy of poor images, with its immediate possibility of worldwide distribution and its ethics of remix and appropriation, enables the participation of a much larger group of producers than ever before. But this does not mean that these opportunities are only used for progressive ends. Hate speech, spam, and other rubbish make their way through digital connections as well. Digital communication has also become one of the most contested markets—a zone that has long been subjected to an ongoing original accumulation and to massive (and, to a certain extent, successful) attempts at privatization.

The networks in which poor images circulate thus constitute both a platform for a fragile new common interest and a battleground for commercial and national agendas. They contain experimental and artistic material, but also incredible amounts of porn and paranoia. While the territory of poor images allows access to excluded imagery, it is also permeated by the most advanced modification techniques. While it enables the users' active participation in the creation and distribution of content, it also drafts them into production. Users become the editors, critics, translators, and (co)authors of poor images.

Poor images are thus popular images—images that can be made and seen by the many. They express all the contradictions of the contemporary crowd: its opportunism, narcissism, desire for autonomy and creation, its inability to focus or make up its mind, its constant readiness for transgression and simultaneous submission.⁹ Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them.

In this light, perhaps one has to redefine the value of the image, or, more precisely, to create a new perspective for it. Apart from resolution and exchange value, one might imagine another form of value defined by velocity, intensity, and spread. Poor images are poor because they are heavily compressed and travel quickly. They lose matter and gain speed. But they also express a condition of dematerialization, shared not only with the legacy of Conceptual art but above all with contemporary modes of semiotic production.¹⁰ Capital's semiotic turn, as described by Félix Guattari,¹¹ plays in favor of the creation and dissemination of compressed and flexible data packages that can be integrated into ever-newer combinations and sequences.¹²

This flattening-out of visual content—the concept-in-becoming of the images—positions them within a general informational turn, within economies of knowledge that tear images and their captions out of context into the swirl of permanent capitalist deterritorialization.¹³ The history of Conceptual art describes this dematerialization

of the art object first as a resistant move against the fetish value of visibility. Then, however, the dematerialized art object turns out to be perfectly adapted to the semioticization of capital, and thus to the conceptual turn of capitalism.¹⁴ In a way, the poor image is subject to a similar tension. On the one hand, it operates against the fetish value of high resolution. On the other hand, this is precisely why it also ends up being perfectly integrated into an information capitalism thriving on compressed attention spans, on impression rather than immersion, on intensity rather than contemplation, on previews rather than screenings.

Comrade, what is your visual bond today?

But, simultaneously, a paradoxical reversal happens. The circulation of poor images creates a circuit, which fulfills the original ambitions of militant and (some) essayistic and experimental cinema—to create an alternative economy of images, an imperfect cinema existing inside as well as beyond and under commercial media streams. In the age of file sharing, even marginalized content circulates again and reconnects dispersed worldwide audiences.

The poor image thus constructs anonymous global networks just as it creates a shared history. It builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates. By losing its visual substance it recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the “original,” but on the transience of the copy. It is no longer anchored within a classical public sphere mediated and supported by the frame of the nation-state or corporation, but floats on the surface of temporary and dubious data pools.¹⁵

By drifting away from the vaults of cinema, it is propelled onto new and ephemeral screens stitched together by the desires of dispersed spectators.

The circulation of poor images thus creates “visual bonds,” as Dziga Vertov once called them.¹⁶ This visual bond was, according to Vertov, supposed to link the workers of the world with each other.¹⁷ He imagined a sort of communist, visual, Adamic language that could not only inform or entertain, but also organize its viewers. In a sense, his dream has come true, if mostly under the rule of a global information capitalism whose audiences are linked almost in a physical sense by mutual excitement, affective attunement, and anxiety.

But there is also the circulation and production of poor images based on cellphone cameras, home computers, and unconventional forms of distribution. Its optical connections—collective editing, file sharing, or grassroots distribution circuits—reveal erratic and coincidental links between producers everywhere, which simultaneously constitute dispersed audiences.

The circulation of poor images feeds into both capitalist media assembly lines and alternative audiovisual economies. In addition to a lot of confusion and stupefaction, it also possibly creates disruptive movements of thought and affect. The circulation of poor images thus initiates another chapter in the historical genealogy of nonconformist information circuits: Vertov’s visual bonds, the internationalist workers’ pedagogies that Peter Weiss described in *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, the circuits of Third Cinema and Tricontinentalism, of nonaligned filmmaking and thinking. The poor image—ambivalent as its status may be—thus takes its place in the genealogy of carbon-copied pamphlets, cine-train agit-prop films, underground

video magazines and other nonconformist materials, which aesthetically often used poor materials. Moreover, it reactualizes many of the historical ideas associated with these circuits, among others Vertov's idea of the visual bond.

Imagine somebody from the past with a beard asking you, "Comrade, what is your visual bond today?"

You might answer: it is this link to the present.

Now!

The poor image embodies the afterlife of many former masterpieces of cinema and video art. It has been expelled from the sheltered paradise that cinema seems to have once been.¹⁸ After being kicked out of the protected and often protectionist arena of national culture, discarded from commercial circulation, these works have become travelers in a digital no-man's-land, constantly shifting their resolution and format, speed and media, sometimes even losing names and credits along the way.

Now many of these works are back—as poor images, I admit. One could of course argue that this is not the real thing, but then—please, anybody—show me this real thing.

The poor image is no longer about the real thing—the originary original. Instead, it is about its own real conditions of existence: about swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities. It is about defiance and appropriation just as it is about conformism and exploitation.

In short: it is about reality.

¹ See Woody Allen, dir., *Deconstructing Harry*, 1997.

² See "Wer Gemälde wirklich sehen will, geht ja schließlich auch ins Museum," conversation between Jarun Farocki and Alexander Horwath, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 14, 2007.

³ Sven Lütticken's excellent text *Viewing Copies: On the Mobility of Moving Images*, *e-flux journal*, no. 8 (May 2009), drew my attention to this aspect of poor images. See <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/75>.

⁴ Thanks to Kodwo Eshun for pointing this out.

⁵ Of course in some cases images with low resolution also appear in mainstream media environments (mainly news), where they are associated with urgency, immediacy, and catastrophe—and are extremely valuable. See Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty," *A Prior* 15 (2007).

⁶ See Hito Steyerl, "Politics of the Archive: Translations in Film," *transversal* (March 2008), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/steyerl/en>.

⁷ From correspondence with the author via e-mail.

⁸ Julio García Espinosa, "For an Perfect Cinema," trans. Julianne Burton, *Jump Cut*, no. 20 (1979): 24–26.

⁹ See Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Rebekka Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles: semiotext(e), 2004).

¹⁰ See Alex Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

¹¹ Félix Guattari, "Capital as the Integral of Power Formations," in *Soft Subversions*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1996), 202.

¹² All these developments are discussed in detail in an excellent text by Simon Sheikh, "Objects of Study or Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research," *Art & Research* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009), <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/sheikh.html>.

¹³ See also Alan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, eds. Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans (London: Routledge 1999), 181–92.

¹⁴ See Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*.

¹⁵ The Pirate Bay even seems to have tried acquiring the extraterritorial oil platform of Sealand in order to install its servers there. See Jan Libbenga, "The Pirate Bay plans to buy Sealand," *The Register*, January 12, 2007, http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/01/12/pirate_bay_buys_island.

¹⁶ Dziga Vertov, "Kinopravda and Radiopravda," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 52.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ At least from the perspective of nostalgic delusion.

The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation

Dense clusters of radio waves leave our planet every second. Our letters and snapshots, intimate and official communications, TV broadcasts and text messages drift away from earth in rings, a tectonic architecture of the desires and fears of our times.¹ In a few hundred thousand years, extraterrestrial forms of intelligence may incredulously sift through our wireless communications. But imagine the perplexity of those creatures when they actually look at the material. Because a huge percentage of the pictures inadvertently sent off into deep space is actually spam. Any archaeologist, forensic, or historian—in this world or another—will look at it as our legacy and our likeness, a true portrait of our times and ourselves. Imagine a human reconstruction somehow made from this digital rubble. Chances are, it would look like image spam.

Image spam is one of the many dark matters of the digital world; spam tries to avoid detection by filters by presenting its message as an image file. An inordinate amount of these images floats around the globe, desperately vying for human attention.² They advertise pharmaceuticals, replica items, body enhancements, penny stocks, and degrees. According to the pictures dispersed via image spam, humanity consists of scantily dressed degree-holders with jolly smiles enhanced by orthodontic braces.

Image spam is our message to the future. Instead of a modernist space capsule showing a woman and man on the outside—a family of “man”—our contemporary dispatch to the universe is image spam showing enhanced advertisement mannequins.³ And this is how the universe will see us; it is perhaps even how it sees us now.

In terms of sheer quantity, image spam outnumbers the human population by far. It's formed



Medical spam image retrieved from corporation Symantec Intelligence's blog.

a silent majority, indeed. But of what? Who are the people portrayed in this type of accelerated advertisement? And what could their images tell potential extraterrestrial recipients about contemporary humanity?

From the perspective of image spam, people are improvable, or, as Hegel put it, perfectible. They are imagined to be potentially "flawless," which in this context means horny, super skinny, armed with recession-proof college degrees, and always on time for their service jobs, courtesy of their replica watches. This is the contemporary family of men and women: a bunch of people on knockoff antidepressants, fitted with enhanced body parts. They are the dream team of hyper-capitalism.

But is this how we really look? Well, no. Image spam might tell us a lot about "ideal" humans, but not by showing actual humans—quite the contrary. The models in image spam are photochopped replicas, too improved to be true. A reserve army of digitally enhanced creatures who resemble the minor demons and angels of mystic speculation, luring, pushing, and blackmailing people into the profane rapture of consumption.

Image spam is addressed to people who do not look like those in the ads: they neither are skinny nor have recession-proof degrees. They are those whose organic substance is far from perfect from a neoliberal point of view. People who might open their in-boxes every day waiting for a miracle, or just a tiny sign, a rainbow at the other end of permanent crisis and hardship. Image spam is addressed to the vast majority of humankind, but it does not show them. It does not represent those who are considered expendable and superfluous—just like spam itself; it speaks to them.



Ed Ruscha, *PRODUCTS – SPAM*, 1961/2003, gelatin silver print, 33.02 x 25.4 cm.

The image of humanity articulated in image spam thus has actually nothing to do with it. On the contrary, it is an accurate portrayal of what humanity is actually not. It is a negative image.

Mimicry and Enchantment

Why is this? There is an obvious reason, which is too well known to elaborate on here: images trigger mimetic desires and make people want to become like the products represented in them. In this view, hegemony infiltrates everyday culture and spreads its values by way of mundane representation.⁴ Image spam is thus interpreted as a tool for the production of bodies, and ultimately ends up creating a culture stretched between bulimia, steroid overdose, and personal bankruptcy. This perspective—one of more traditional Cultural Studies—views image spam as an instrument of coercive persuasion as well as of insidious seduction, and leads to the oblivious pleasures of surrendering to both.⁵

But what if image spam were actually much more than a tool of ideological and affective indoctrination? What if actual people—the imperfect and non-horny ones—were not excluded from spam advertisements because of their assumed deficiencies but had actually chosen to desert this kind of portrayal? What if image spam thus became a record of a widespread refusal, a withdrawal of people from representation?

What do I mean by this? For a certain time already I have noted that many people have started actively avoiding photographic or moving-image representations, surreptitiously taking their distance from the lenses of cameras. Whether it's camera-free zones in gated communities or elitist techno clubs, someone declining interviews, Greek

anarchists smashing cameras, or looters destroying LCD TVs, people have started to actively, and passively, refuse constantly being monitored, recorded, identified, photographed, scanned, and taped. Within a fully immersive media landscape, pictorial representation—which was seen as a prerogative and a political privilege for a long time⁶—feels more like a threat.

There are many reasons for this. The numbing presence of trash talk and game shows has led to a situation in which TV has become a medium inextricably linked to the parading and ridiculing of lower classes. Protagonists are violently made over and subjected to countless invasive ordeals, confessions, inquiries, and assessments. Morning TV is the contemporary equivalent to a torture chamber—including the guilty pleasures of torturers, spectators, and, in many cases, also the tortured themselves.

Additionally, in mainstream media people are often caught in the act of vanishing, whether it be in life-threatening situations, extreme emergency and peril, warfare and disaster, or in the constant stream of live broadcasts from zones of conflict around the world. If people aren't trapped within natural or man-made disasters, they seem to physically vanish, as anorexic beauty standards imply. People are emaciated or made to shrink or downsize. Dieting is obviously the metonymic equivalent to an economic recession, which has become a permanent reality and caused substantial material losses. This recession is coupled with an intellectual regression, which has become a dogma within all but a very few mainstream media outlets. As intelligence doesn't simply melt away via starvation, derision and rancor largely manage to keep it away from the grounds of mainstream representation.⁷

Thus the zone of corporate representation is largely one of exception, which seems dangerous to enter: you may be derided, tested, stressed, or even starved or killed. Rather than representing people it exemplifies the vanishing of the people: it's gradual disappearance. And why wouldn't the people be vanishing, given the countless acts of aggression and invasion performed against them in mainstream media, but also in reality?⁸ Who could actually withstand such an onslaught without the desire to escape this visual territory of threat and constant exposure?

Additionally, social media and cellphone cameras have created a zone of mutual mass surveillance, which adds to the ubiquitous urban networks of control, such as CCTV, cellphone GPS tracking and face-recognition software. On top of institutional surveillance, people are now also routinely surveilling each other by taking countless pictures and publishing them in almost real time. The social control associated with these practices of horizontal representation has become quite influential. Employers google reputations of job candidates; social media and blogs become halls of shame and malevolent gossip. The top-down cultural hegemony exercised by advertisement and corporate media is supplemented by a down-down regime of (mutual) self-control and visual self-disciplining, which is even harder to dislocate than earlier regimes of representation. This goes along with substantial shifts in modes of self-production. Hegemony is increasingly internalized, along with the pressure to conform and perform, as is the pressure to represent and be represented.

Warhol's prediction that everybody would be world-famous for fifteen minutes had become true long ago. Now many people want the contrary: to

be invisible, if only for fifteen minutes. Even fifteen seconds would be great. We entered an era of mass paparazzi, of the peak-o-sphere and exhibitionist voyeurism. The flare of photographic flashlights turns people into victims, celebrities, or both. As we register at cash tills, ATMs, and other checkpoints—as our cellphones reveal our slightest movements and our snapshots are tagged with GPS coordinates—we end up not exactly amused to death but represented to pieces.⁹

Walkout

This is why many people by now walk away from visual representation. Their instincts (and their intelligence) tell them that photographic or moving images are dangerous devices of capture: of time, affect, productive forces, and subjectivity. They can jail you or shame you forever; they can trap you in hardware monopolies and conversion conundrums, and, moreover, once these images are online they will never be deleted again. Ever been photographed naked? Congratulations—you're immortal. This image will survive you and your offspring, prove more resilient than even the sturdiest of mummies, and is already traveling into deep space, waiting to greet the aliens.

The old magic fear of cameras is thus reincarnated in the world of digital natives. But in this environment, cameras do not take away your soul (digital natives replaced this with iPhones) but drain away your life. They actively make you disappear, shrink, and render you naked, in desperate need of orthodontic surgery. In fact, it is a misunderstanding that cameras are tools of representation; they are at present tools of disappearance.¹⁰ The more people are represented the less is left of them in reality.

To return to the example of image spam I used before—it is a negative image of its constituency, but how? It is not—as a traditional Cultural Studies approach would argue—because ideology tries to impose a forced mimicry on people, thus making them invest in their own oppression and correction in trying to reach unattainable standards of efficiency, attractiveness, and fitness. No. Let's boldly assume that image spam is a negative image of its constituency because people are *also* actively walking away from this kind of representation, leaving behind only enhanced crash-test dummies. Thus image spam becomes an involuntary record of a subtle strike, a walkout of the people from photographic and moving-image representation. It is a document of an almost imperceptible exodus from a field of power relations that are too extreme to be survived without major reduction and downsizing. Rather than a document of domination, image spam is the people's monument of resistance to being represented *like this*. They are leaving the *given* frame of representation.

Political and Cultural Representation

This shatters many dogmas about the relation between political and pictorial representation. For a long time my generation has been trained to think that representation was the primary site of contestation for both politics and aesthetics. The site of culture became a popular field of investigation into the "soft" politics inherent in everyday environments. It was hoped that changes in the field of culture would hark back to the field of politics. A more nuanced realm of representation was seen to lead to more political and economical equality.

But gradually it became clear that both were less linked than originally anticipated, and that the

partition of goods and rights and the partition of the senses were not necessarily running parallel to each other. Ariella Azoulay's concept of photography as a form of civil contract provides a rich background to think through these ideas. If photography was a civil contract between the people who participated in it, then the current withdrawal from representation is the breaking of a social contract, having promised participation but delivered gossip, surveillance, evidence, serial narcissism, as well as occasional uprisings.¹¹

While visual representation shifted into overdrive and was popularized through digital technologies, political representation of the people slipped into a deep crisis and was overshadowed by economic interest. While every possible minority was acknowledged as a potential consumer and visually represented (to a certain extent), people's participation in the political and economic realms became more uneven. The social contract of contemporary visual representation thus somewhat resembles the Ponzi schemes of the early twenty-first century, or, more precisely, participation in a game show with unpredictable consequences.

And if there ever was a link between the two, it has become very unstable in an era in which relations between signs and their referents have been further destabilized by systemic speculation and deregulation.

Both terms do not only apply to financialization and privatization; they also refer to loosened standards of public information. Professional standards of truth production in journalism have been overwhelmed by mass media production, by the cloning of rumor and its amplification on *Wikipedia* discussion boards. Speculation is not only a financial operation but also a process that takes place in

between a sign and its referent, a sudden miraculous enhancement, or spin, that snaps apart any remaining indexical relation.

Visual representation matters, indeed, but not exactly in unison with other forms of representation. There is a serious imbalance between both. On the one hand, there is a huge number of images without referents; on the other, many people without representation. To phrase it more dramatically: a growing number of unmoored and floating images corresponds to a growing number of disenfranchized, invisible, or even disappeared and missing people.¹²

Crisis of Representation

This creates a situation that is very different from how we used to look at images: as more or less accurate representations of something or someone in public. In an age of unrepresentable people and an overpopulation of images, this relation is irrevocably altered.

Image spam is an interesting symptom of the current situation because it is a representation that remains, for the most part, invisible.

Image spam circulates endlessly without ever being seen by a human eye. It is made by machines, sent by bots, and caught by spam filters, which are slowly becoming as potent as anti-immigration walls, barriers, and fences. The plastic people shown in it thus remain, to a large extent, unseen. They are treated like digital scum, and thus paradoxically end up on a similar level to that of the low-res people they appeal to. This is how it is different from any other kind of representational dummies, which inhabit the world of visibility and high-end representation. Creatures of image spam get treated as lumpen data, avatars of the common who are indeed behind their creation. If Jean Genet

were still alive, he would have sung praise to the gorgeous hoodlums, tricksters, prostitutes, and fake dentists of image spam.

They are still not a representation of the people, because, in any case, the people are not a representation. They are an event, which might happen one day, or maybe later, in that sudden blink of an eye that is not covered by anything.

By now, however, people might have learned this, and accepted that any people can only be represented visually in negative form. This negative cannot be developed under any circumstance, since a magical process will ensure that all you are ever going to see in the positive is a bunch of populist substitutes and impostors, enhanced crash-test dummies trying to claim legitimacy. The image of the people as a nation, or culture, is precisely that: a compressed stereotype for ideological gain. Image spam is the true avatar of the people. A negative image with absolutely no pretense to originality? An image of what the people are not as their only possible representation?

And as people are increasingly makers of images—and not their objects or subjects—they are perhaps also increasingly aware that the people might happen by jointly making an image and not by being represented in one. Any image is a shared ground for action and passion, a zone of traffic between things and intensities. As their production has become mass production, images are now increasingly *res publicae*, or public things. Or even public things, as the languages of spam fabulously romance.¹³

This doesn't mean that who or what is being shown in images doesn't matter. This relation is far from being one-dimensional. Image spam's generic cast is not the people, and the better for it.

Rather, the subjects of image spam stand in for the people as negative substitutes and absorb the flak of the limelight on their behalf. On the one hand, they embody all the vices and virtues (or, more precisely, vices-as-virtues) of the present economic paradigm. On the other, they remain more often than not invisible, because hardly anybody actually looks at them.

Who knows what the people in image spam are up to, if nobody is actually looking? Their public appearance may be just a silly face they put on to make sure we continue to not pay attention. They might carry important messages for the aliens in the meantime, about those who we stopped caring for, those excluded from shambolic "social contracts," or any form of participation other than morning TV; that is, the spam of the earth, the stars of CCTV and aerial infrared surveillance. Or they might temporarily share in the realm of the disappeared and invisible, made up of those who, more often than not, inhabit a shameful silence and whose relatives have to lower their eyes to their killers every day.

The image-spam people are double agents. They inhabit both the realms of over- and invisibility. This may be the reason why they are continuously smiling but not saying anything. They know that their frozen poses and vanishing features are actually providing cover for the people to go off the record in the meantime. To perhaps take a break and slowly regroup. "Go off screen," they seem to whisper. "We'll substitute for you. Let them tag and scan us in the meantime. You go off the radar and do what you have to." Whatever this is, they will not give us away, ever. And for this, they deserve our love and admiration.



Rendition of iSee Manhattan, a web-based application charting the locations of CCTV surveillance cameras in urban environments. Users are able to locate routes that avoid being filmed by unregulated security monitors.

1 Douglas Phillips, "Can Desire Go On Without a Body?" in *The Spam Book: On Viruses, Porn, and Other Anomalies from the Dark Side of Digital Culture*, eds. Jussi Parikka and Tony D. Sampson (Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2009), 199–200.

2 The number of spam e-mails sent per day is at roughly 250 billion (as per 2010). The total amount of image spam has varied considerably over the years, but in 2007, image spam accounted for 35 percent of all spam messages and took up 70 percent of bandwidth bulge. "Image spam could bring the internet to a

standstill," *London Evening Standard*, October 1, 2007, see <http://http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/article-23381164-image-spam-could-bring-the-internet-to-a-standstill.do>.

The picture of image spam accompanying this text has been borrowed from the invaluable source "Image Spam," by Mathew Nisbet, see <http://www.symantec.com/connect/blogs/image-spam>. To avoid misunderstandings, most image spam shows text, not pictures.

3

This is similar to the golden plaques on the *Pioneer* space capsules launched in 1972 and 1973, which depicted a white woman and a white man, with the woman's genitals omitted. Because of the criticism directed at the relative nudity of the human figures, subsequent plaques showed only the human silhouettes. It will be at least 40,000 years until the capsule could potentially deliver this message.

4

This is a sloppy, fast-forward rehash of a classical Gramscian perspective from early Cultural Studies.

5

Or it may more likely be analyzed as partially self-defeating and contradictory.

6

I have discussed the failed promise of cultural representation in "The Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writings*, eds. Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 486–87.

7

This applies unevenly around the world.

8

In the 1990s, people from former Yugoslavia would say that the former antifascist slogan of the Second World War had been turned upside down: "Death to fascism, freedom to the people" had been transformed by nationalists from all sides into, "Death to the people, freedom to fascism."

9

See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

10

I remember my former teacher Wim Wenders elaborating on the photographing of things that will disappear. It is more likely, though, that things will disappear if (or even because) they are photographed.

11

I cannot expand on this appropriately here. It might be necessary to think through recent Facebook riots from the perspective of breaking intolerable social contracts, and not from entering or sustaining them.

12

The era of the digital revolution corresponds to that of enforced mass disappearance and murder in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Algeria, Iraq, Turkey, and parts of Guatemala, to list just a few. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which saw roughly 2.5 million war casualties between 1998 and 2008, it is agreed on by researchers that demand for raw materials for the IT industries (such as coltane) played a direct role in the country's conflict. The number of migrants who died while trying to reach Europe since 1990 is estimated to be 18,000.

13

This derives from a pirated DVD cover of the movie *In the Line of Fire* (1993), which states, in no uncertain terms, that public performance of the disc is strictly prohibited.

Cut! Reproduction and Recombination

A cut is a cinematic term.¹ It separates two shots. It also joins two shots. It is a device that constructs cinematic space and time and articulates different elements into a new form.

A cut is obviously also an economic term. It refers to a reduction. In the context of the current economic crisis, cuts mostly concern government spending on welfare, culture, pensions, and other social services. It can refer to any reduction in resources or allocations.

How do both of these types of cuts affect bodies? And which bodies? Do they affect the bodies of artificial or natural persons, corpses or corporations? And what can we learn from cinema and its techniques of reproduction that might help us deal with the effects of post-continuity cutting in the economic realm?

Cuts in Economic Discourse

In current economic discourse, cuts are often described using metaphors of the human body. In the language of austerity and debt, states and economies are often compared to individuals, which need to lose (or are losing) body parts. Suggested interventions into the body politic range from dieting (cutting fat) to amputations (to keep so-called contagion from spreading) to trimming down weight, tightening belts, getting lean and fit, and eliminating superfluous parts.

Interestingly enough, a tradition of cutting into the body is at the heart of the creation of the notion of the subject itself, which is strongly connected to the idea of debt. In his new book, Maurizio Lazzarato discusses Nietzsche's description of the making of the subject as a historical form.² In order to remember debt and guilt, people need memory, and both debt and guilt are inscribed into the body very

literally in the form of cuts. Nietzsche mentions a whole range of methods used to enforce debt, memory, and guilt: human sacrifice as well as mutilations such as castration. He brims with enthusiasm as he details a full catalog of torture, pointing out with delight that Germans are especially creative when it comes to the design of cuts into the body: quartering, cutting off pieces of flesh from the breast, cutting off strips of skin, and so on.

The clearest connection between debt and cutting the body is expressed by Roman law. The so-called Twelve Tables mention explicitly that the body of a debtor can rightfully be split among creditors, which means that the latter are entitled to cut off parts of the debtor's body. And whether they cut a little more or less shouldn't really matter, according to this view of law.

Where a party is delivered up to several persons, on account of a debt, after he has been exposed in the Forum on three market days, they shall be permitted to divide their debtor into different parts, if they desire to do so; and if anyone of them should, by the division, obtain more or less than he is entitled to, he shall not be responsible.³

This brings us to the question of whose body we are talking about. There are always several bodies implied in this traffic of metaphors: a literal body, which is really or metaphorically cut, as well as a metaphorical body, which represents a national economy, a country, or indeed a corporation. There is a natural body as well as a body politic involved in the equation, and the body being cut is a node of exchange, or rather an edit in between both kinds of bodies. If we follow the famous definitions by Ernst Kantorowicz, who analyzed the trope of the

body politic and its emergence in the legal sphere, the body politic is immortal and ideal, whereas the body natural is fallible, foolish, and mortal.⁴ And in fact both are undergoing cuts, both literally and metaphorically.

Bodies in Postproduction

While cuts have moved center stage in economic discourse, cutting or editing is also a traditional tool of cinema. While editing is usually understood as a modification in the temporal dimension, cinema also cuts bodies in space by framing them, retaining only what's useful to the narration.⁵ The body is disarticulated and rearticulated in a different form. As Jean-Louis Comolli dramatically states, the frame cuts into the body as "sharp, crisp, and clean as a razor's edge."⁶

While a long or full shot will mostly leave the bodies represented intact, medium shots or close-ups will chop off large parts of the bodies. The most extreme of these incisions is the so-called Italian shot, named after Sergio Leone's Dollar Trilogy, which focuses on vigilante guns-for-hire in an imaginary Wild West.

But the economy of editing is also crucially tied to more general economic narratives: editing was introduced into the world of cinema in 1903 with the film *The Great Train Robbery*, which deals with questions of private property, privatization, appropriation, the frontier, expansion, and other common topics of Western movies. To underscore its message, it introduced cross cutting and narration across several locations.

Other groundbreaking advances in editing equally deploy economic narratives. One of the first films to use parallel montage—D. W. Griffith's *A Corner in Wheat* (1908)—is about futures trading

on the Chicago stock exchange and the ruin of wheat farmers through speculation.⁷ While it widely refrains from using close-ups or medium shots, the film dramatically shows a shot of a single hand—that of a suffocating wheat speculator—to perhaps convey the idea of the invisible hand of the market severed from any actual body.

Partes Secando

Griffiths's form of montage not only deals with advanced and extremely contemporary economic mechanisms, like robbery and speculation. It also derives from economic necessities. Parallel montage—the narration of two strands of the story in parallel—is cheaper and more efficient in terms of production because one doesn't need to shoot chronologically. Tom Gunning has shown it to be an extremely efficient method of adapting cinema to a Fordist system of production.⁸ By 1909 this type of editing became universal.

At this stage, editing or postproduction becomes a crucial device to tell the story, to dismember and rearticulate individual and collective bodies, to separate and rearrange them according to economic efficiency. Even though *A Corner in Wheat* is—on the level of its narration—a romantic and essentialist call to return to subsistence farming, its own form is perfectly consistent with capitalist rationalization and pushes it ahead.⁹

But one can also reverse this logic, specifically by affirming the fragmentation of the subject—but without capitalism. The potential of recombinant bodies is emphasized in a text written by Siegfried Kracauer in 1927 called "The Mass Ornament." He analyzes a group of showgirls named the Tiller Girls. At the beginning of the century they became extremely popular because of their invention of

what was called "precision dance"—a formation dance in which female bodies, or rather body parts, as Kracauer emphasized, moved synchronously and in unison. Kracauer analyzes precision dance as a symptom of a Fordist regime of production, comparing the articulation of the Tiller Girls on stage to the composition of a conveyor belt. Of course, they first had to be disarticulated in order to be rearticulated, and this was done by cutting time and activity into fragments and assigning them to separate elements of the body.

Kracauer doesn't denounce this arrangement, though. He doesn't call for a return to a more natural body, whatever that could mean. He even thinks it's no longer possible to restore the Tiller Girls to human beings. Instead, he faces this constellation in order to see how one could, so to speak, break through to its other side, radicalize fragmentation, to reverse it as one would in a reverse shot. In fact, he even thinks that the cutting of the body—and its reediting—are not radical enough.

The industrial body of the Tiller Girls is abstract, artificial, alienated. Precisely because of this, it breaks with the traditional and, at that time, racially imbued ideologies of origin, belonging, as well as with the idea of a natural, collective body created by genetics, race, or common culture. In the artificial bodies and the artificially articulated body parts of the Tiller Girls, Kracauer saw an anticipation of another body, which would be freed from the burden of race, genealogy, and origin—and we can add, free of memory, guilt, and debt—precisely by being artificial and composite. The recombination of the cut-off parts produces a body without subject or subjection. In fact, this is what has been cut: the individual, as well as its identity and its unalienable rights to guilt and debt bondage. This body fully

affirms its artificial composition while opening itself up to inorganic flows of matter and energy.

But Kracauer's views at the time of debt crisis and economic depression were not shared. On the contrary, a hyperinflation of metaphors of pure national-social and racial bodies set in, which were realized using all possible means of violence. Bodies were cut, exploded, and violated—and their dispersed remains constitute the grounds we walk on today.

Postproduction

This is how editing is historically embedded into an economic context. It came to define an area called cinematic postproduction. And even though the name "postproduction" made it appear to be a supplement to production proper, its logic flipped back to influence and structure production itself.

With digital technologies, these processes have accelerated substantially. Traditionally, postproduction meant synching, mixing, editing, color correction, and other procedures performed after shooting a movie. But in recent years, postproduction has begun to take over production wholesale. In newer mainstream productions, especially in 3-D or animation, postproduction is more or less equivalent to the production of the film itself. Compositing, animation, and modeling now belong to postproduction. Fewer and fewer components actually need to be shot, because they are partially or wholly created in postproduction. Paradoxically, production increasingly starts to take place within postproduction. Production transforms into an aftereffect.¹⁰

A few years ago, Nicolas Bourriaud pointed to a few aspects of this shift in his essay "Postproduction."¹¹ But now in times of crisis we have to

dramatically revise his fragmentary hints, which were mostly referring to processes of digital reproduction within art and its repercussions for the art object. The impact of postproduction goes way beyond the world of art or media, even far beyond the world of digital technology, to become one of the main capitalist modes of production today.

The things that people used to do after work—for example, the so-called reproduction of their labor power—are now integrated into production. Reproduction concerns both so-called reproductive labor, which includes affective and social activities, and processes of digital and semiotic reproduction.¹² Postproduction in a very literal sense *is* production today.

This also shifts the temporality inherent in the term postproduction. The prefix "post-," which denotes an immobile state past history, is replaced by the prefix "re-," which points at repetition or response. We are not after production. Rather, we are in a state in which production is endlessly recycled, repeated, copied, and multiplied, but potentially also displaced, humbled, and renewed. Production is not only transformed but fundamentally displaced to locations that used to form its outside: to mobile devices, scattered screens, sweatshops and catwalks, nurseries, virtual reality, offshore production lines. It is endlessly edited and recombined.

With the loss of the idea of production goes the loss of the figure of the heroic male worker, replaced by Foxconn employees wearing Spiderman outfits to ward off the temptation to jump out the window. By kids living off the scrap metal of industrialism, scavenging for the bones of imperial or socialist factories. By picture people reproducing themselves via enhancements, anorexia, and digital

exhibitionism. By invisible women who keep the world going. In the age of reproduction, Vertov's famous man with the movie camera has been replaced by a woman at an editing table, baby on her lap, a twenty-four-hour shift ahead of her.

But as production is cut and dismembered, so can it be recombined and renewed within reproduction. Today's reproducers are updates of Kracauer's Tiller Girls, artificially remodeled online, slapped together from resurrected debris, spammed by offers for penny stock, flat rates, and civil warfare, sleepless with fear and yearning.

The Angel of History

We can find an example of a space of reproduction in the image of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) inflated and replicated on a giant balloon inside an artificial entertainment world called Tropical Islands close to Berlin. This structure used to be a factory space for huge zeppelins, when it was still believed that this specific post-socialist region in the former GDR could be economically defillibrated and somehow industrially reanimated. When the enterprise went bust, a Malaysian investor transformed it into a multiexotic spa landscape, complete with replicas of rainforests, jacuzzi look-alikes of Mayan sacrificial pits, as well as giant photo-shopped infinity-horizon wallpapers. It is cut-and-paste territory, jumbled, airbrushed, dragged and dropped in 3-D—quintessential bubble architecture with a stunning number of inflatable elements.

Why does this site embody the basic tensions of the age of reproduction? It literally transformed from a space of industrial production to a space of postproduction, showing the aftereffects of production, so to speak. This space is not produced, but reproduced. There is no final cut but ever-morphing



Reproduction of Paul Klee's etching *Angelus Novus* painting at the Tropical Islands theme park near Berlin. The image found in this artificial paradise setting inadvertently evokes Walter Benjamin's citation of the same painting in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*.

edits, hard cuts, and blurred transitions between different chunks of contained exoticas.

And Klee's *Angelus Novus* is no longer dragged away toward a future horizon as it surveys historical catastrophe. The lateral movement is gone, and with it a movement toward a future. Gone are horizon and linear perspective. Instead, the angel shuttles up and down like an elevator on patrol. It looks down on a paradise without sin and without history, in which the future has been replaced by the promise of temporary upward mobility. The horizon loops. An angel becomes drone; divine violence divested into killing time.

Reverse Shot

But what is the reproduced angel looking at now? What can we edit to its gaze? Who are we, its spectators, and what form will our bodies assume under the angel's gaze?

In a fantastic work from 2009, Natalie Bookchin made a pertinent suggestion. She updated Kracauer's "Mass Ornament" essay as a multichannel video installation. By recombining videos of lonely teenagers dancing in their bedrooms to the gaze of their webcams, Bookchin catapulted precision dance into the age of mediated disconnection. Instead of body parts severed by the stroke of the conveyor belt, atomized bodies relegated to domestic spheres move in unison. Just as the Tiller Girls were equally separated and recombined into mass ornaments by precision dance, so are the teenage protagonists postproduced by the combined forces of social media and enforced occupation synchronized to Lady Gaga soundtracks.

On the one hand, these are the ripped and cut bodies the economy wants to see—isolated in their homes, producing themselves as subjects beset by

mortgages and the perpetual guilt of not being fit and lean enough. But on the other hand, it is equally important that the moves are nevertheless fabulous, because energy and grace cannot be cut, ever.

As Kracauer rightly emphasized, we should not shy away from the ornament of multitude and lament some natural state that never existed. Instead, we should embrace it and firmly break through it. One example of how to do this is given by the fact that the version of the video I am describing here is not necessarily Bookchin's at all.¹³ A user (who may or may not be the author) uploaded it, removed parts of the music because of YouTube copyright concerns, and replaced it with the sound of laptop keys. In fact, this is the only conceivable soundtrack for this piece. Collective postproduction thus generates not only composite bodies but composite works.

And we have a new important tool in order to do so, namely parallel screens. If a part of the body is cut, we can add a substitute for it on the next screen. We can reedit the cut-off parts of the body to create a body that doesn't exist in reality, only in editing, a body composed of limbs cut from other bodies, limbs deemed superfluous and inconvenient or excessive. We can recompose a new body with these cut-off pieces, a body that combines the bones of the dead and the folly of the natural bodies of the living. A form of life that exists in editing and by editing.

We can reedit the parts that were cut—whole countries, populations, even whole parts of the world, of films and videos that have been cut and censored because they do not conform to ideas of economic viability and efficiency. We can edit them into incoherent, artificial, and alternative political bodies.

A Kiss

But there is an alternative interpretation. Let's take a look at a differently postproduced image of cut and censored bodies. In the film *Cinema Paradiso* (1988), a man watches a film roll made from the parts that a projectionist had to censor from fiction films. The result is a reel made of kisses that were too provocative to be shown in public, as they jeopardize ideas of family, property, race, and nation sustained by sexual norms and restrictions.¹⁴

A reel of ousted kisses. Or is it the same kiss passed on from take to take across different protagonists? A kiss that replicates, travels, spreads uncontrollably; a kiss that creates vectors of passion and affect, of labor, and, potentially, violence?¹⁵ A kiss is an event that is shared and consists precisely of sharing, exchanging, and happening in between bodies. It is an edit articulating affect in ever-different combinations. It creates new junctions and forms between and across bodies, a form that is ever shifting and changing. A kiss is a moving surface, a ripple in time-space. Endless reproductions of the same kiss: each one unique.

A kiss is a wager, a territory of risk, a mess. The idea of reproduction condensed into a fleeting moment. Let's think of reproduction as this kiss, which moves across cuts, from shot to shot, from frame to frame: linking and juxtaposing. Across lips and digital devices. It moves by way of editing, exquisitely flipping around the idea of the cut, redistributing affects and desire, creating bodies joined by movement, love, pain.

1

Many of the ideas in this text are based on discussions around a seminar called "Crisis" (given in 2009), on the ideas of Alex Fletcher about cinematic cuts, and on my response to Maija Timonen's PhD presentation, which dealt with the idea of the body cut by austerity. Other ideas in the text derive from discussions around a seminar called "junkspace," especially discussions with Boaz Levin around postproduction. This text is dedicated to Bifo and Helmut Farber.

2

Maurizio Lazzarato, *La fabrique de l'homme endetté: Essai sur la condition néolibérale* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2011).

3

Samuel Parsons Scott, ed., *The Civil Law: Including the Twelve Tables, the Institutes of Gaius, the Rules of Ulpian, the Opinions of Paulus, the Enactments of Justinian, and the Constitutions*, vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 64.

4

Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

5

In French, the word for "frame" is *cadre*. This implies that the body framed is disciplined and managed, as Jean-Louis Comolli has emphasized. Thank you to Charles Heller for mentioning this work to me.

6

"Coupant, tranchant, et net, comme peut l'être le fil d'un rasoir." Jean-Louis Comolli, *Cadre et corps* (Paris: Éditions Verdier, 2012), 538.

7

See Helmut Farber's invaluable analysis, "A Corner in Wheat" von D. W. Griffith 1909: Eine Kritik (Paris: Helmut Farber, 1992).

8

Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

9

This applies more to its editing than its framing.

10

There is also another important component in the relation of cinematic postproduction to production: its relation to reality. While the cinema of production had—even in the case of completely fictional stories—an indexical link to reality by virtue of, for example, being filmed with analog 35 mm film cameras, digital postproduction completely renegotiates that indexical link to the scene in front of the camera. Contemporary post is the area of the making over of images, not the making of. In postproduction, the indexical link to reality is loosened by including composited backgrounds, animated protagonists, and generally modeling reality. Of course, the indexical link was always rather fictional, but newer technologies permit doing away with it to an unprecedented degree, creating perspectives with the liberty of painting.

11

See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2005).

12

For feminist perspectives on reproductive labor, see the works of Silvia Federici, Arlie Hochschild, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, and Precarias a la Deriva.

13

See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAJpUATAWg>.

14

Thank you to Rabih Mroué for mentioning this film to me.

Hito Steyerl

Cut! Reproduction and Recombination

190

15

These ideas refer to the kiss mentioned by Boris Buden in the introduction of his book *Zone des Übergangs—Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*: a kiss received by an anonymous black man from the militia man who abducted and probably killed him in the Bosnian War. A kiss which is still out there, being passed on via rape camps and teenage parties, in children's hospitals and bordellos—with love or condescension, ennui or elation, gentle, duplicitous, incisive.