

THE VISUAL STUDIES WORKSHOP



Reports

REPLAY REMIX
Perry Bard

Video Vortex
Split, Croatia
May 22–23, 2009

Video Vortex (VV) Split was the fourth in an ongoing series of conferences examining the potential of online video as a form of personal media on the internet. The Split version that focused on the moving image on the web was organized by Dan Oki of the Academy of Arts University of Split and Platforma 9.81 in collaboration with the Institute of Network Cultures Amsterdam, which initiated the concept. A first Video Vortex Reader (2008), edited by Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer, is available on the VV website (www.networkcultures.org).

The Split sessions examined research strategies, the database, web aesthetics, online video theory and narrative, the politics of the moving image, and social cinema to theorize the explosion of online video since 1995 when YouTube was launched. Two threads emerged: the relation of web videos to narrative and imagemaking in the cinematic tradition and the affordances or new possibilities offered by the database.

Andreas Treske, documentary filmmaker and organizer of VV Ankara proposed that the frame within a frame (e.g., recording through a rear-view window) familiar to cinema is translated to the web on YouTube where a page with one large window contains a number of small windows within it. Does this sum of windows create meaning, and how does it position the viewer? In *Mass Ornament* (2009) Natalie Bookchin (Los Angeles) downloaded videos of individuals dancing alone from YouTube. Using multiple windows she choreographed a single-channel video in which the repetition of similar gestures turns the webcam performances into a synchronized routine à la Busby Berkeley. The chain response reflects the YouTube paradigm—one upload stimulating reframing, clipping, countless copies and variations. For Gabriel Menotti (Sao Paulo/London) this regime of distribution is the actual format of internet videos: the works are intended to be viewed, transformed, and progressively re-signified.

The immediacy and amateur quality of YouTube videos, partially due to the compression required to upload video, led Vito Campanelli (Naples) to ask if an aesthetic shift is occurring. Is the lo-res amateur look the new truth? He noted a rhetoric of imperfection the advertising industry is quick to adopt, citing a BMW spot as an example. Jan Simons (Amsterdam) contrasted YouTube's web 2.0 ethos with the post-produced movies of the pocket film fest circuit. Closer to cinematic tradition, these films follow a set of rules established by the makers, have titles, and rarely show up on YouTube.

Vera Tollman (Berlin) identifies YouTube as a pool for found footage, archives, and an experimental public space. She noted the difficulty of finding artists' videos there and screened Petra Cortright's webcam video *VVEBCAM 2007* (2007) and John Michael Boling's *RGB Chord 2007* (2007), which are not on the Broadcast Yourself channel. Sarah Késsene (Gent, Belgium) discussed remembrance and memory in relation to net culture, underlining a new viewing position in looking at strangers' pictures while Valentina Rao (Pisa) also identified a shift in the position of the spectator, observing that on YouTube the "actor" addresses the spectator (i.e., the work is considered in a social context).

The database offers possibilities that are also affecting how narratives unfold. Yasmina Kallay (Dublin) suggested that interactivity changes screenwriting rules. She used the online drama *Sofia's Diary* as an example of where viewers have the weekly option to vote on the plot's direction. David Clark (www.88constellations.net) and Linda Wallace (www.machinehunger.com.au) create narratives that allow the user to choose their trajectory by shuffling the order of events. Oki used the database to make public his private archives in *The Last Super 8 MM Film* (1986–2005).

A number of initiatives addressing diverse audiences from different perspectives were presented. Maarten Brinkerink (Amsterdam) collects archive images from around the world to make cultural heritage available for creative remixing (www.openimages.eu). Kuros Yalpani (Munich) has set up an alternative for political videosharing at www.politube.org and Evelin Stermitz (Villach/Ljubljana) has started <http://artfem.tv>, a nonprofit artist portal about Art and Feminism.

David Teh (Bangkok) painted a dismal picture of new media progress in Southeast Asia, noting language limitations and problems of access and of knowledge while Alejo (Alejandro) Duque (Medellin/ Zurich) is actively working on streaming solutions to enhance connectivity. Geert Lovink (Amsterdam) suggested a stay-at-home conference in the near future.

Lev Manovich (San Diego), in his keynote address "From Meaning To Pattern, or: Data Dandy Meets Data Mining (Split Version)" noted the rise worldwide of cultural producers and the massive amounts of files that are accumulating. To evaluate this data and place it in a broader context he is using the tools of cultural production—computers and software—for research. As an example he showed visual patterns comparing the peaks in brightness in Betty Boop cartoons to those in music videos where the peaks, post-Final Cut Pro software, are nowhere near as random.

The tightly scheduled forty-eight hours also included an exhibition of related moving image works, performance events, and screenings. It was interesting in this context that Emile Zile's (Amsterdam) Post-it Kino (2009) was a simple projection of handwritten notes with a DVD logo swirling in the background while Stefan Heidenreich (Berlin) looked at forms of distribution from the Lumière Brothers to YouTube, and also projected doodles rather than data. Has nostalgia already set in?

Perry Bard is an artist living in New York whose work *Man With A Movie Camera: The Global Remake* was presented at Video Vortex.

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Portrait

WITNESSES TO HUNGER

Makia Harper

The lines between science and art are distinctively separated by theories, statistics, perspective, and aesthetics. Rarely have these disciplines intersected. But for professor and anthropologist Mariana Chilton of Drexel University's School of Public Health, they easily form a T-shaped socio-political "eureka moment."

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Features

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY:

World and image interactions in John Perivolaris's "Left Luggage"

The deceptive simplicity of "Left Luggage," an ongoing project started in 2008, belies a wealth of fascinating interpretive possibilities. Having travelled the world in the ownership of the photographer's grandfather, a sea captain in the Greek merchant navy, the suitcase bears traces of its previous journeys and handlers within its scuffed leather exterior and neatly monogrammed initials, "J.D.P." The luggage handed over by Perivolaris to his collaborators therefore carries a particular psychic weight, bringing to mind a strange lateral association with the mysterious briefcase in *Pulp Fiction* (1994, directed by Quentin Tarantino). To describe such an elegant, worldly object using a pop cultural reference sounds weak—contrary even, given that Perivolaris's suitcase is clearly much more than a MacGuffin—yet the narrative and conceptual spaces this particular item of luggage open up/seemingly invite the projection of personal associations and idiosyncratic quotations.

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REAL TIME LIVE:

Cinema as Performance

In March 2009, DreamWorks Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Katzenberg announced that in conjunction with the release of the animated feature film *Monsters Vs. Aliens* (2009, directed by Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon), all of his company's subsequent film projects would be produced and exhibited in 3D. The gambit allows the studio to delineate clearly between the cinematic experience as it is enjoyed in the theater and the DVD screening in the home—or airplane, desktop, mobile device, and so on. The immersive film event could, in addition, prompt higher ticket prices and hinder piracy. Despite the wonders of 3D, this attempt to revitalize Hollywood's increasingly marginal role in moving-image entertainment remains merely one of the many examples of a broad-based dismantling and reconfiguration of cinema at the turn of the century as a once relatively stable form splinters into dozens of image/sound practices, ones that not only reference the generally elided history of avant-garde experiments of the last century, but also respond to new forms of networked, digital life that invite artful reconfigurations of time, space, and social interaction.

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TRANSLOCATION:

The Move From External Unity to the Multiple Self

In *La clameur de l'Être* (1997), Alain Badiou launched an attack on Gilles Deleuze's ontology, criticizing his category of "univocity" as reinstalling transcendence.¹ Two years later, Mogens Laerke situated the Deleuzian ontology between being as the multiplicity of actual events, and being as a unitary virtual structure, namely, the One.² Univocity, argued Laerke, is not a principle but an affirmation of the multiplicity of reproduction and the production of sense. Badiou rejected all concepts of unity while insisting on multiplicity as such, being as multiple pur, the disordered and discontinuous ensemble of actual events. This debate outlines a crucial moment in both the thought and production of images as reflective of the constitution of self as an aggregated machine.

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VISIONARY VIDEO:

The Archive and the National Center for Experiments in Television

In "Outside the Archive: The World in Fragments," Lucy Reynolds demonstrates how in the found footage work of Bruce Conner, Morgan Fisher, Peter Tscherkassky, and others, the film frame becomes, in essence, an archive: "a manifestation not only of [the history of] cinema, but of the fractured rhythms of the industry and the incoherent images of history itself."² Similarly, Hal Foster, in his illuminating study of contemporary archival art, sees the archival artist as someone who "seek[s] to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present." The archival artist, Foster goes on to say, "not only draws on ... archives but produces them as well, and does so in a

way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.”³ However, as this essay seeks to reveal, artists do not necessarily have to use recycled materials in order for their work to acquire rich, archival meaning. For instance, Brice Howard, one of the first theoreticians of the videographic image and the director of the National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET), conceptualized the video art produced under NCET’s auspices between 1967 and 1975 as live (most NCET video was unedited and produced in real-time) processes of archiving. The work produced at NCET—a San-Francisco-based creative community in which artists from a wide variety of disciplines (electronic music, poetry, and dance, just to name a few) collaborated in order to explore the artistic potential of video—demonstrated and documented shifting methods of video practice for the sake of formal elaboration and social edification. (Public television was NCET’s most reliable exhibition site).⁴ Warner Jepson, an electronic musician who participated in the NCET project, reminisced: “[NCET] was a space for experimenting with new video technology to see what video cameras and monitors could do.

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Exhibition Reviews

POSTMODERNISM UNDONE Jill Conner

The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York City
April 21–August 2, 2009

Although Andy Warhol and the Pop Art movement effectively replaced Abstract Expressionism as the primary genre that defined American contemporary art, a war of images gradually emerged as artists continued to reappropriate cartoon strips, news clips, photojournalism, and print advertisements into their work. “The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art suggests that Postmodernism was not as much of an aesthetic wash as it had initially seemed. By returning to the shadows of the Vietnam War and the deception of the Nixon era, curator Douglas Eklund identifies the four-artist “Pictures” show at Artists Space in 1977 as the defining moment of a growing multi-media, photo-based movement that ran the course of ten years. “The Pictures Generation” not only takes American photography away from its documentary past, but examines and deconstructs the massproduced image in an attempt to question the divide that has long existed between photography and fine art.

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VIDEO RHETORIC Colette Copeland

Art of Limina: Gary Hill
Slought Foundation
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
March 21–May 1, 2009

S. Brent Plate’s essay “Between Cinema and a Hard Place: Gary Hill’s Video Art Between Words and Images” begins by questioning the nature of video art and its relationship to the contemporary art world. For a critical essay written in 2003, this seems irrelevant. One only has to look at the large number of video installations in New York City’s Chelsea district on any given month, any major Biennale or art fair, or the many international film and video festivals, to see that video has an established place in the commercial art market and has for over a decade. The comparison to cinema is also an outdated and somewhat superficial argument, since video has evolved with its own syntax and structure over the past thirty years.

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DELAYED OBJECTS Harriet Riches, PhD

The Photographic Object
The Photographers’ Gallery
London
April 24–June 14, 2009

The Object of Photography
The Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery
University of Leeds
Leeds, U.K.

April 7–June 19, 2009

As our experience of viewing photography becomes ever more immaterial and the encounter with the traditional print is replaced by digital imagery on screen, we seem to have lost touch with photography. But just as there seem to be few opportunities for a tactile engagement with the increasingly disembodied medium, a desire for a return to a more physical relationship is emerging.

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ACCESS & DISTRIBUTION

Colette Copeland

Artists' Books as (Sub)Culture
The Center for Book Arts
New York City
January 14–March 28, 2009

Organized by curator Natalie Campbell, the exhibition "Artists' Books as (Sub)Culture" examined the history of the past thirty years of printed material from eleven artist groups including collectives, workshops, and alternative spaces. Featuring artists' books, documentation, and assorted ephemera, the exhibition highlighted projects from the organizations Dexter Sinister (New York), General Idea (New York), Group Material (New York), LTTR (New York), Primary Information (New York), Temporary Services (Chicago), Visible Language Workshop (MIT at Cambridge), The Women's Building (Los Angeles), The Women's Studio Workshop (WSW, Rosendale, New York), Visual Studies Workshop (VSW, Rochester, New York), and the hosting site, The Center for Book Arts (CBA, New York).

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FRAMES OF FEAR

Jill Conner

Permanent State of Emergency
Eyebeam Art + Technology Center
New York City
April 7–28, 2009

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, American citizens have lived on edge with a heightened sense of awareness of their immediate surroundings along with the unfair scrutiny of the racial "other." Much like the Cold War era, the current culture of fear grew and evolved into various anti-war movements and most recently in reaction to the global economic fallout. Although the culture of fear has quite an extensive record in American history, the most recent chain of events appears peculiar since one has quickly succeeded the other, leaving no time for a sense of recovery. "Permanent State of Emergency" consists of nineteen video vignettes that served as the inaugural display inside Eyebeam's new Window Gallery. Curated by Sherry Millner and Ernest Larsen, this collage of videos collectively examines the notions of "America" and "democracy" as part of a larger protest against the socio-political strain that has saturated our society for nearly a decade.

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INVESTIGATIONS OF THE SUBURBAN

Julia Friday

Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes
Heinz Architectural Center, Carnegie Museum of Art
Pittsburgh
October 4, 2008–January 18, 2009

Yale Architecture Gallery
New Haven, Connecticut
March 2–May 10, 2009

In an exhibition entitled “Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes,” curators Andrew Blauvelt, Design Director and Curator of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and Tracy Myers, Curator of Architecture and Design at the Heinz Architectural Center, Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, set out to explore the notion of the suburban. Thus, the works of the more than thirty artists and architects included in the exhibition share a common conceptual anchor: the contemporary American suburb as fundamentally constitutive of our subjectivity. The relationship between the suburb and the city has over time become less distinct; as a result, the suburbs have evolved from stereotypical mundane sites of architectural sameness and demographic conformity to sites of class, racial, and cultural heterogeneity and architectural experimentation. In the preface to the exhibition catalog,

Blauvelt writes: The American suburb represents something of a paradox, since its very definition hinges on both its physical proximity to as well as its cultural distance from the city. The mutually dependent relationship between city and suburb is the product of both historical origins and contemporary necessity. City dwellers and suburbanites need each other to reinforce their own sense of place and identity despite ample evidence that what we once thought were different places and lifestyles are increasingly intertwined and much less distinct

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BANAL MODERNITY

J. Lynn Fraser

Passage to the Future: Art from a New Generation
in Japan
The Japan Foundation
Toronto
March 10–June 9, 2009

The films, paintings, sculptures, and photographs of “Passage to the Future: Art from a New Generation in Japan” exhibited at the Japan Foundation in Toronto, presented an indictment of the banality that characterizes modern life. Slick, pretty, and traditional surfaces were presented, inviting the viewer to look through their superficiality and into their cultural analysis.

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BORROWED AND REBORN

Julia Bradshaw

Mediated
California Museum of Photography, University of
California
Riverside, California
January 31–April 4, 2009

“Mediated” at the California Museum of Photography was a blend of single-channel videos and installations by seven artists who drew their inspiration or materials from our mediated culture: movies, TV, internet, and video games. These artists borrowed, re-mixed, and retold scenes from our collective knowledge of moving images, nudging up against definitions of fair use and challenging the cultural context of the original source. Like most appropriation artists, these artists benefited from our familiarity with much of the source material and thus, the approachability of the artworks.

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AMERICAN BEAUTY

Martin Patrick

Dan Graham: Beyond
Museum of Contemporary Art
Los Angeles
February 15–May 25, 2009

Dan Graham is one of the artists in the United States that, until comparatively recently, has been least lionized on his home turf, instead serving as a kind of intellectual gadfly/public artist-inexile, representing American art abroad without being either wellintegrated into its canon or at ease with many of its stylistic premises. Graham’s long

career and variegated output is thus both paradoxical and problematic. A prolific writer of some of the most fascinating essays by any twentieth-century artist, his texts are characterized by their eclectic and hybrid sensibility, turning from punk rock to European gardens, political unrest to the phenomenology of perception. While this synthetic approach with its hyperkinetic curiosity could easily be considered utterly American, the most recent large retrospectives of Graham's work have been mounted in locations like Barcelona, Paris, and Vienna—not in the good old U.S. of A.

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PARADIGM SHIFT

J. Lynn Fraser

Housepaint, Phase 2: Shelter
Royal Ontario Museum
Toronto
December 13, 2008–July 5, 2009

Homelessness is a cacophony of extreme emotions, financial disrepair, and physical instability. Museums, by their very nature, are the staid solid citizens of any city: placid, enduring, and tradition-bound. At the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), a unique partnership is taking place between street artists and the museum to bring attention to the issues surrounding homelessness. "Housepaint, Phase 2: Shelter" recontextualizes street art as a recognizable art form. It also provides a venue for the ROM to reframe itself as a socially relevant institution that can speak to contemporary issues.

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Book Reviews

ARTIST AS ARCHIVIST

Travis Nygard & Alec Sonstebj

The Big Archive: Art from
Bureaucracy
By Sven Spieker
MIT Press, 2008
228 pp./\$24.95 (hb)

In *The Big Archive*, Sven Spieker explores connections between information science and art-making. Many contemporary artists interrogate how ideas are produced, stored, retrieved, and become accepted as true. This was a major theme of Documenta 11, the biennale held in Kassel, Germany, in 2002, curated by Okwui Enwezor. The theme was explored more fully by Enwezor in *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (2008), as well as Charles Merewether's *The Archive* (2006). The fact that an earlier generation of artists were also interested in these ideas, however, is less well known, and Spieker attempts to rectify this. In his own words: "I contend that the use of archives in late-twentieth-century art reacts in a variety of ways to the assault by the early-twentieth-century avant-gardes on the nineteenth-century objectification (and fetishization) of linear time and historical process" (1). *The Big Archive* is thus, fundamentally, an attempt to find historical precedents for the art-making of today.

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CALL FOR POPULIST PUBLIC ART

Nogin Chung

Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism
By Cher Krause Knight
Blackwell Publishing, 2008
187 pp./\$32.95 (sb)

From Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981) to Jeff Koons's *Train* (scheduled for 2011), from Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1981) to *The Gates* (2005) by Christo and Jean-Claude, public art has ignited heated discussions sometimes resulting in its removal from the site, its modification, or other arrangements to appease. The answer to the question of why we have incessant controversies over these publicly displayed artworks can be found in the pages of Cher Krause Knight's *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism*. Here Knight refutes the narrow definition of public art as physically located in public space, geographically bound to a site, and open to the public for free. Instead, she endorses populism as a key factor that would make a public artwork more engaging and successful. Negating the derogatory implication of populism, she grants it values

and significance based on her understanding of it as “increasing viewer’s agency through proactive choices” (131), and calls for populist, public art. If public art has been under scrutiny mainly because it garners better exposure to non-museum goers or “homogenous philistines” (61), then that very fact offers a new direction and a more inclusive definition of public art. Her implication is that what sparks uproar over public art is its lack of accessibility and community involvement rather than its inappropriate use of public space or funding.

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ENOUGHISM
Romy Hosford

Running the Numbers: an
American self-portrait
By Chris Jordan
Prestel, 2009
111 pp./\$39.95 (hb)

Containing two bodies of work by Chris Jordan, “Intolerable Beauty: Portraits of American Mass Consumption” and “Running the Numbers: an American self-portrait,” this book, bearing the name of the latter series, provides a compelling illustration of our ever-growing disposable society. In 2003, after resigning from a career as a corporate litigation lawyer, Jordan began “Intolerable Beauty,” a series of documentary photographs taken in shipping ports and industrial yards. He was looking for mass collections of the evidence of consumption and waste. The contrast of the compositional strategies of full-frame crops that create a wall of waste, and more wide vistas of the discarded objects in their landscape, leave viewers both overwhelmed and with some perspective. We are able to see the enormity of the collections and are also intrigued and attracted to the oddity of their placement against the vast landscape.

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