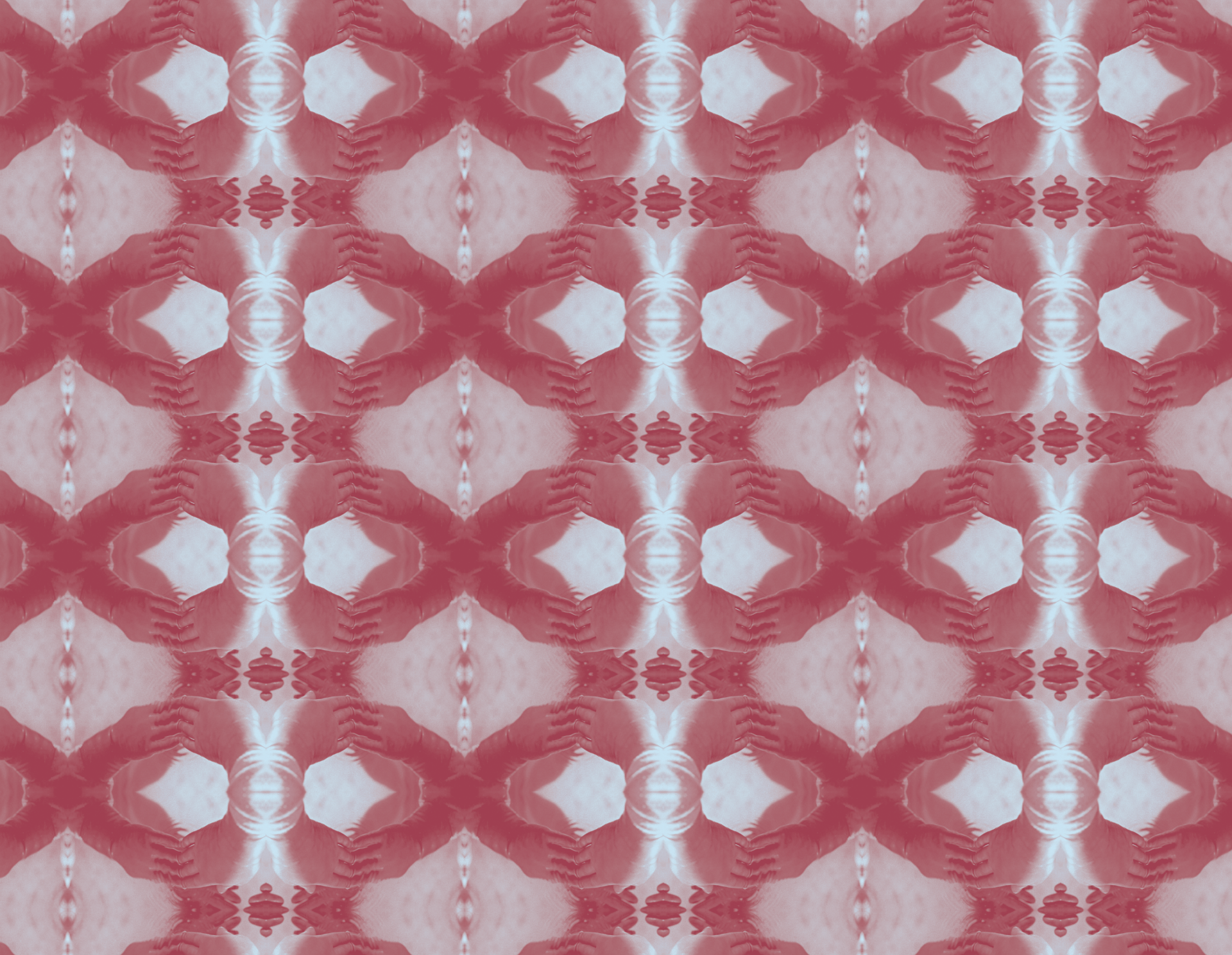




**OBJECTS  
IN MIRROR**

**TASMAN RICHARDSON**





# OBJECTS IN MIRROR

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**OBJECTS IN MIRROR**

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In alphabetical order: Jubal Brown, Elenore Chesnutt, Eldon Garnet, Kristel Jax, Siobhan Neville, Naben Ruthnum  
*Many thanks for being my mirror*

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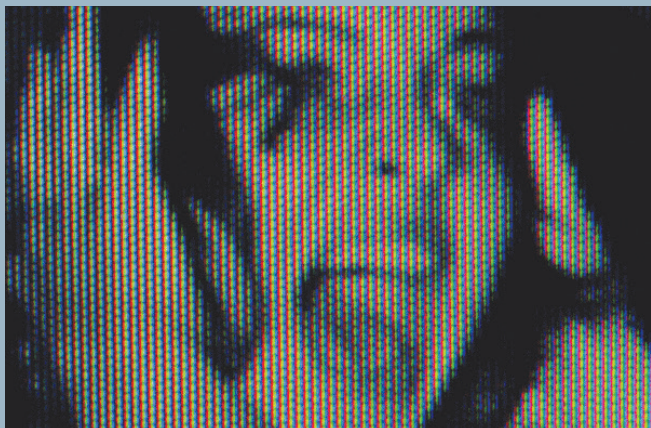
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## AVATARS OF TELE-VISION

How far can you remember? I'm crawling on the parquet, the dawn peers between living room curtains. Kneeling at the base of the wood cabinet tv, my silhouette reflects in the curved glass. Below two stacked dials, my fingers pull a textured peg. A low pluck hum, like a stand up bass. A slip of shark gray light springs open, brighter and brighter, making me squint until my eyes adjust to the scenery.

The images constantly rearrange, scale, swap. Wide vista, magnified detail, faces screaming, crying, laughing. Music paired with each, nearly continuous. Startling interruptions louder and brighter at regular intervals. Before my mouth could form words, my eyes were reading the syntax of the screen. My first language was video.

Once I was familiar with the people on tv, I noticed that people in real life sounded like television. Growing up I heard the catchphrases of characters parroted by adults. Ralph Kramden, Fred Flintstone, Archie Bunker... a lineage of copycats spanning decades. Their distant offspring form a chain linked by every "doh".



McLuhan said, “we become what we behold.” It’s hard to tell what mix of influence directs our thoughts: ideas within us or examples from without. In that sense, we’re all collage, consciousness is a cut-up collected from “what we behold”, what we recall, and how it all stitches together. A lot of what we behold is on screen.

As primates we share the behaviour of “monkey see, monkey do”. Mimicry though, not duplication. Imperfectly, we reflect each other’s body language, inflection, expressions. This broken telephone game of relay responses avoids too much sameness and introduces a little diversity. When the company you keep is a recording, the reflection is cast broadly and identically. If streaming or broadcasting live, many people see the same content at the same time. It’s omnipresent, everywhere with everyone, and yet intimate because it’s in our home, our lap, or even our palm. Traveling from source to screen to us, without interruption or mutation.

Before downloading, viewing was a unified experience for everyone because everyone was at the mercy of broadcast. No pause, rewind, or fast forward. Television measures day and night in blocks of time called “programs”. In the morning, light local news, cooking shows, childish



entertainment. In the evening, adult drama, entertainment, talk shows. The whole day, marked by news breaks, like an hourly chime. This structured programming was developed by structured organizations. Government television like the CBC got its model from the BBC, which in turn borrowed from Deutscher Fernseh-Rundfunk, or German Television Broadcasting.

Prior to World War II, the Nazis were heavily focused on radio for propaganda. Television wasn't available in everyone's homes, so it was a less appealing instrument of control. Instead of living rooms, a few public spaces were equipped with television. Patrons could gather to watch at regular intervals throughout the day, and the programs they watched paired with the tone of the hour. Content to shape the behaviour of a nation. Daytime for housewives, nighttime for working men. If the war hadn't interrupted, Germany would have seen every public space populated with screens, all broadcasting a totalitarian lifestyle. Monkey see, monkey do.

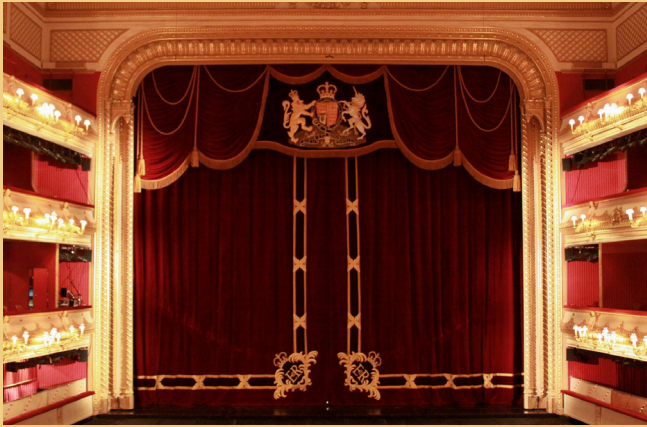
In America, 1950s dramas were sometimes acted out live in real-time and transmitted to people's living rooms—everyone's screen a stage. Like a Super Bowl or Oscar event, the performance was watched as it unfolded.



Cameras cutting between different points of view. A director in a control room, overseeing and conducting crews to frame it for the audience. At home, every viewer simultaneously occupies the best seat.

Before *Twilight Zone*, Rod Serling wrote for the short-lived medium of television plays or “teleplays”. Live teleplays were transmitted directly into people’s homes, so what the audience saw was better than anything recorded for the archives. Unfortunately, the early recording method, Kinescope, was the low-resolution, low-contrast result of pointing a film camera at a cathode-ray tube (CRT). Filming or rescanning the screen output was primitive alchemy to convert the electric display into a chemical imprint. To play a rerun of a live performance, a kinescope copy was needed. Stations would play the same reel over and over, and then pass it on to an affiliate station in a different location. By the end, the reels were degraded, peppered with dust and scratches. A curtain of noise between viewer and content.

New, ultrafast digital transmissions have revived interest in live viewing. The Metropolitan Opera, a luxuriously priced entertainment, began expanding performances from in-house to in-cinema. The massive screen of the movie house transmits the spectacle of the stage better than a



computer screen. *Live at the Met* offers real-time attendance without getting a ticket to New York. In some ways, it's more dynamic than attending in person, since camera angles change to offer multiple vantage points and close ups bring you on the stage, eye level with actors. The fragmented views feel cinematic, but live transmissions retain an element of risk which gives the images a semi-tangible presence. The uncertainty of execution becomes the focus.

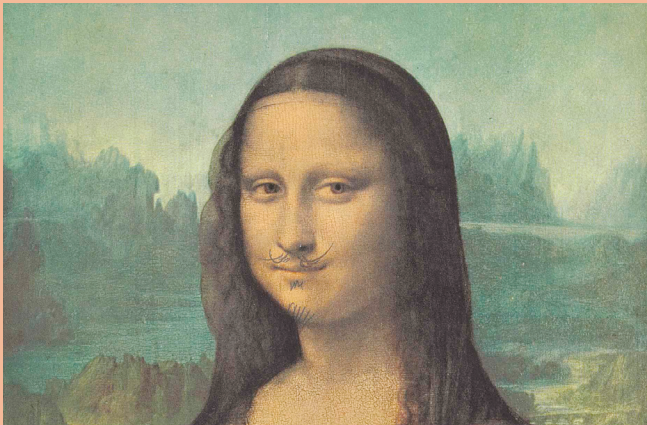
I attended a Kabuki performance that was broadcast to a theatre in Toronto. The line outside had the energy of a concert; cultured, elevated excitement. I remember people in formal wear. Suits, kimonos. Respectful attire for the avatars of artists. Gasps and applause were enthusiastic, loud, as though the cameras were pointed at us instead of the other way around.



## TIME BANDITS

Collage conjures images of paper and scissors. Our first thoughts are old magazines and newspaper texts glued together, crafty. Not the studio camera, digital files, tapes, or transmitters. Bryon Gysin, a British-Canadian painter, writer, sound poet, performance artist, and inventor of experimental devices, modified collage with his own system, the “cut-up”. He’s not mentioned much, even though he invented it. The cut-up method gained popularity due to William S. Burroughs, who applied the technique to generate entire novels. A cut-up takes a page from a book, divides it into quarters and rearranges the segments. The new alignments of broken language are stitched together, retyped as they appear. The method can be repeated over and over until one theme or concept rises up, distilled. The process breaks grammar and scrambles phrases, but the source content is all there, just shuffled, which accounts for the recurring impression or essence emerging.

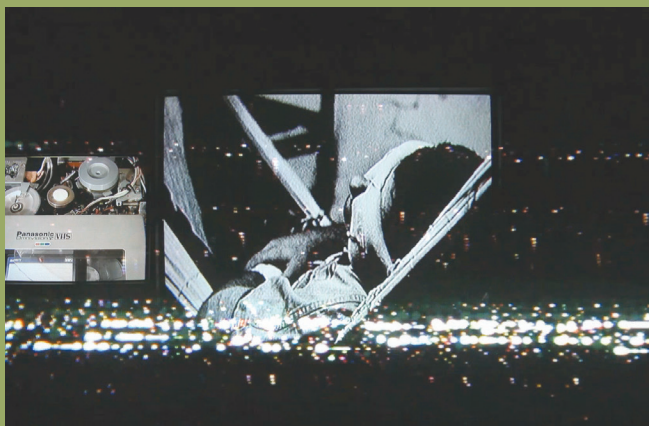
Video cut-ups have a different effect from literature because they’re “hot media”, as in they do a lot of work for us—providing the visuals and sounds, delivering dialogue, establishing a sense of time and space. They serve up the entire simulation instead of letting our imagination take



part. In myth, a vampire cannot enter a home without being invited by the rightful owner first. Video is invasive, the emotions and memories forcibly occupy the mind. I resent that my memory palace is overrun by squatters living and dead. Celebrity scandals, pop song lyrics, reality tv stars, Michael Bay trailers.

Images that are sleek and well-produced feel luxurious and immoral to repurpose. But these are the images that are forced on us. The dominant culture doesn't just co-exist with us, it subjugates. We can't help but think with these images because a costly and effective effort is made to colonize our imaginations with them. If we speak with them, it's not plagiarism. It's the established vocabulary we collectively soak in. It's moral, taking pre-existing footage instead of spending money, time, and resources just to feed the individual ego and say, this is my vision, these are my images. Creation is controlling, scavenging is liberating.

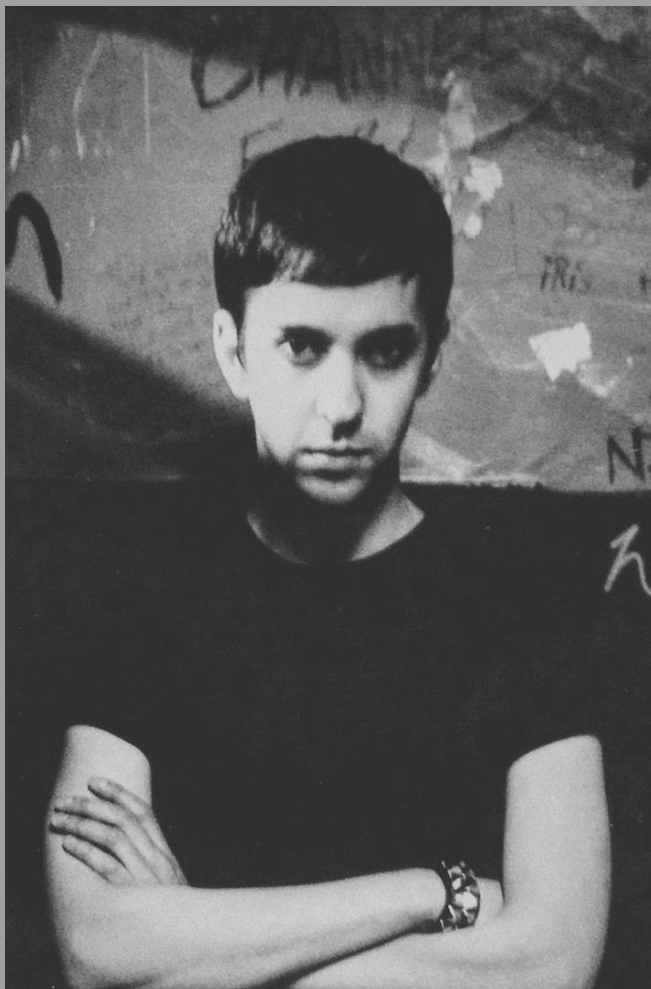
Home video gave the viewer control over time. The power to pause, re-watch, and skip ahead. To catch and hold what was cast also enables pirates. Initially, it didn't seem like piracy was feared by production companies. I remember dual cassette decks for making duplicates and audio mixtapes. The ability to record and share seemed like a



human right. Maybe the copies were too low quality to compete or pose a threat. Later the industry would focus sharply on piracy. Pay Tv channels were scrambled, and videotape signals were embedded with copy-blocking Macrovision to darken and mute attempted tape-to-tape dubbing. In America, they even enlisted the FBI to make comical threats for copyright infringement. Every home video release came with a stern warning of five years in jail and/or a \$250,000 fine.

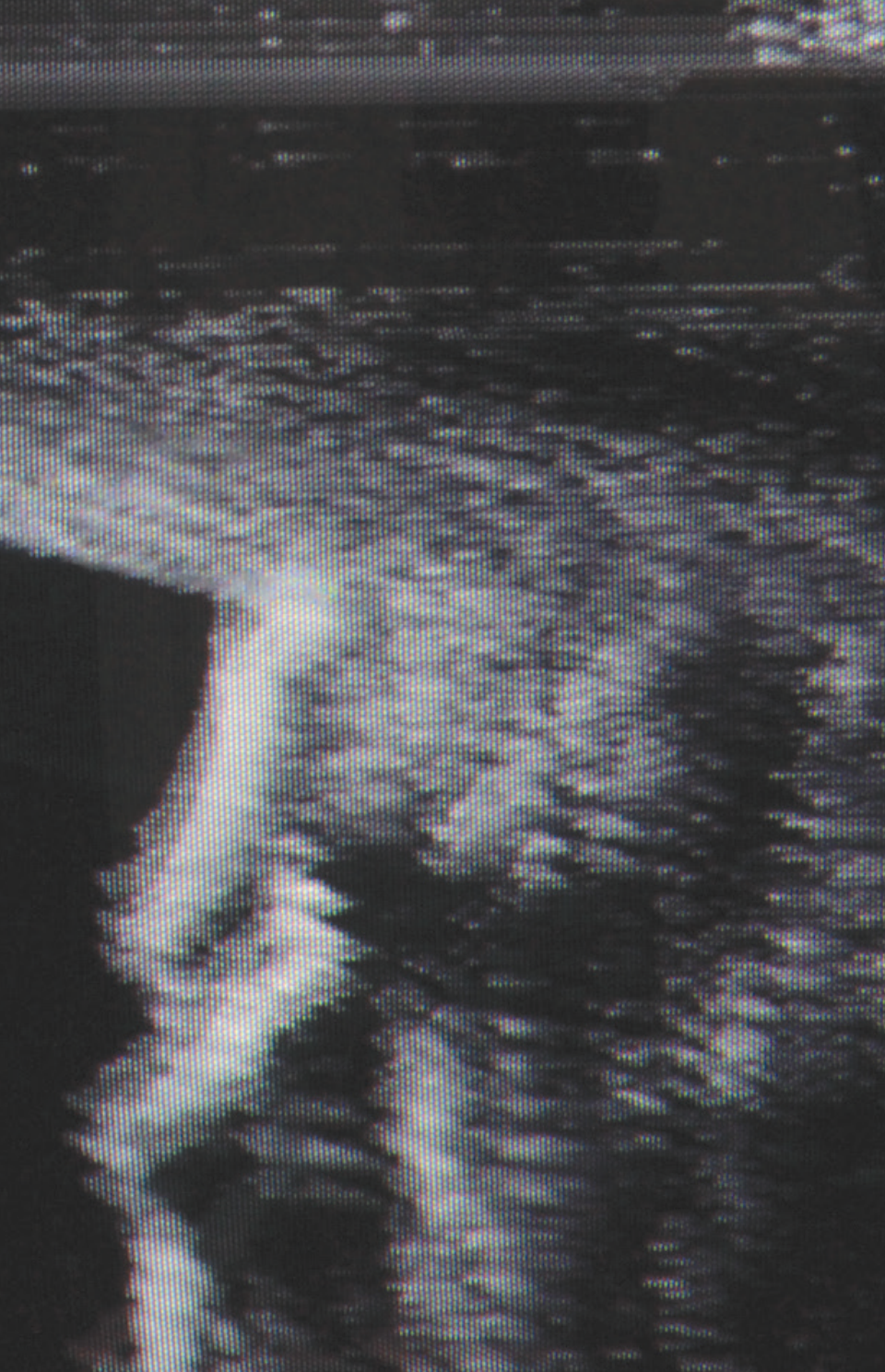
With VHS, the signal is magnetic, encoded onto a ribbon of oxidized powder (rust dust) sandwiched between plastic tape. Home recording quickly degrades. The portraits don't age, but the surfaces crackle, worn from the act of watching itself. When you watch a tape, you can tell which scenes were popular because they're preceded by a short burst of noise in the image quality. This happened a lot before the flash of a breast or spectacular violence. A portion of tape repeatedly scrubbed by the playback head, like stone steps rubbed waxy by a million footsteps.

My own memory has the same flaw. Everytime I recount something, I call it up and look at it dimly in my mind's eye. Recall rewrites the details. A Christmas tree strung with lights or the impression of wrapped gifts are there,



but which exact ornaments or what hour of the morning or night is missing. To be more accurate, it's not missing, it's just not trustworthy. Those facts are improvised and the substitutions are extremely convincing. Worse, the decoys multiply when we recall a distant event repeatedly. I worry that my most sentimental memories, the ones I revisit over and over, will be entirely replaced by fabrication. Maybe they already have been.

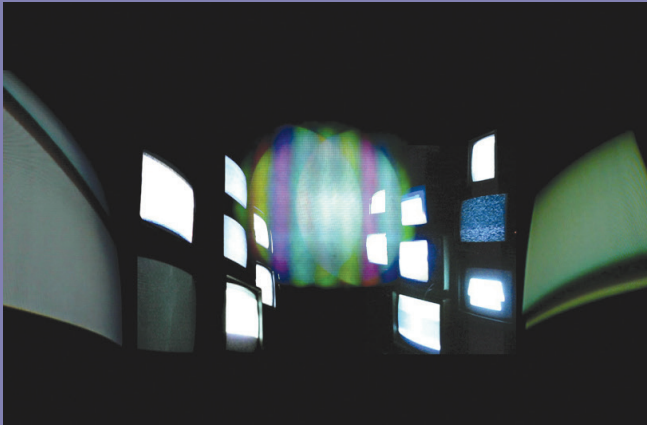
Fisher-Price made a camcorder for children in 1987. I got my own PXL2000 for Christmas. It recorded onto audio cassettes, black and white, low resolution. Like its name, the images were noticeably pixelated. I secretly filmed myself late one night. A message to my future self. I think it was something embarrassing and supportive. "Hang in there, kitty", but with a dramatic goth teen tone. I held onto that cassette for years. I even transferred it to VHS when the PXL2000 became obsolete. Messages to the future need to move from bottle to bottle. About ten years ago I decided to digitize the recording, an even more resilient way to ferry my past to the future. Up until then I never watched it. Like saving dessert, or the season finale of a favourite show. I just kept it. The longer I waited, the more precious it became. Then, in order to digitize it, I finally played it back. Black shadows, flashes of a skinny kid, eyeliner. The



underexposed gray glow of the iron chandelier in my mum's old apartment. A voice, strangely familiar but slightly thin, and pitched higher. Mostly a shirtless silhouette, staring from the other side of the screen. And then, gliding down to cover the image, a rumbled blanket of noise and static. My words from the past are the only portion missing.

With added user controls, VHS became more distinct, even less like film. Marketers tried to describe home video as scaled down cinema with control and convenience, but the real difference was the illusion each manifested. The physical fundamentals of film and tv are inverted. The formats are opposing illusions of time. Film is always still, but appears to be moving. Television images are always moving, even when they appear to be still.

A CRT television uses a beam of light, concentrated particles firing out of an electron gun, which in mid flight are pushed and pulled by magnets. The magnetic halo runs around the periphery of the screen. The beam is drawn across the glass like a radioactive pen. Scribing images takes time and to cover the surface of a screen in the blink of an eye the drawing needs to be double spaced, that is, skipping every other line. Draw an image on every other line, then sprint to the top and draw all the remaining



lines. The light pen has a glow that persists before fading away. The process is called interlacing, or zipping, two drawings together to make a whole image.

Europe's television design was closer to traditional film. Their format mimicked the slower description of time with fewer frames. In return, they gained a higher resolution to describe space, each frame drawn with more lines. America favoured time over space. Separating from cinema, they adopted lower resolution in favour of more detailed time at 30 frames per second. This meant for the first time, audiences felt a sharp immediacy to the movement, less of the dreamy, blended hypnosis.

*Candid Camera*, was one of the earliest forms of reality tv. Although it started as a radio show, *Candid Microphone*, it migrated to television in 1948. I didn't watch it until the 70s, but the entire experience was enhanced by the North American NTSC format. The sensation of immediacy sharpened the show's unscripted reactions to pranks. A gritty sense of urgency affected any content viewed with the interlaced image and rapid frame rate. A feeling which still evokes feelings of 80s newscasts, anticipating uncensored horrors. Surprise suicides, unexpected executions. Tvs transformed into luminous aquariums of candid



catastrophe. The video-centric aesthetic is emulated in cinema and spawned the genre “docu-horror” i.e., *Cloverfield* and *The Blair Witch Project*.

The increase in frames held another potential. 30 frames per second could mean 30 separate image sources witnessed in a second. But, at this stage, the potential hadn’t been reached because editing technology wasn’t as precise as display technology. The evolution from dissecting minutes to dividing seconds needed another technological advancement. Rolling wheels of analog magnetic tape were replaced with spinning hard discs of digital files. Faster hard discs were replaced by solid state, instantaneous digital media. The cut became surgical with perfect consistency, never missing a beat or, technically speaking, dropping a frame.

Seeing 30 moments in one second is faster than human logic. The sensation feels like steady acceleration, an impending collision. We pay attention to things that move unnaturally fast for evolved, self-preserving reasons. When attention tries to take in 30 moments in a second, it’s less considered, more impulsive. An instinctive reaction to a potential threat.



At high speed, edits convert video clips into flashcards. If sampled from familiar cinema, each evokes micro memories. In an instant we might see twins in the hallway of the Overlook Hotel “come and play with us”, a crusader and grim reaper playing chess on the shore in black and white, neon outlines of bodies trapped in a vector video game world. In the time it takes to read a single word, *The Shining*, *The Seventh Seal*, and *Tron* can be conjured, recombined, and reacted to. Time seems dilated when so much is experienced in an instant.

Before sampling was readily available to artists, composers needed to work with real-time sound creation. That is, instruments that vibrate to shape air in some predictable way. Musicians have mimicked the sounds of their surroundings even before instruments were created. The first instrument, human voice, develops through call and response to our environment. Later, percussion, wind, and string instruments mimicked animals and nature. Then, in 1913, Italian Futurist Luigi Russolo published “L’arte dei Rumori”. “The Art of Noises” transformed our modern notions of music-making, and nearly everything to follow is a branch of Russolo’s tree. “We will have fun imagining our orchestration of department stores’ sliding doors, the hubbub of the crowds, the different roars of railroad



stations, iron foundries, textile mills, printing houses, power plants and subways.” Russolo’s words prophesize hip hop, industrial, and nearly all sample-driven future genres. Music that would sample physical surroundings, trading birds and brooks for factories and buses. The concept of reflecting one’s surroundings coiled tighter when the landscape started to include recordings. Surroundings could be radio, films, used vinyl, television, and any other media weather. Composers started recording the recordings. Tape and turntables replaced paper and scissors. Artists could collage time instead of space.

In 1996 I tried to build on this, but focused on video, the combination of sight with sound. I kept the source visuals that accompanied the audio intact. Inspired by hip hop and industrial producers, I tried to critique my surroundings, which for me were television and movies—entirely found footage. Initially, like everyone else in art school, I started by punching in and out points into an editor with magnetic tape. But when I saw my first non-linear editing system, I knew I’d finally be able to make the work I’d been fantasizing about.



## MAGICKAL MYSTERY TOUR

Non-linear editing is the only way anyone thinks about making video today. But its characteristics, a visible timeline with easy to manipulate clips like adjustable rectangles that can stack and rearrange, didn't exist yet. The forerunner I used in 1996 was called "Perception". Its software interface was as elementary as Notepad. A white window with black text. Command lines, row after row, like a grocery list.

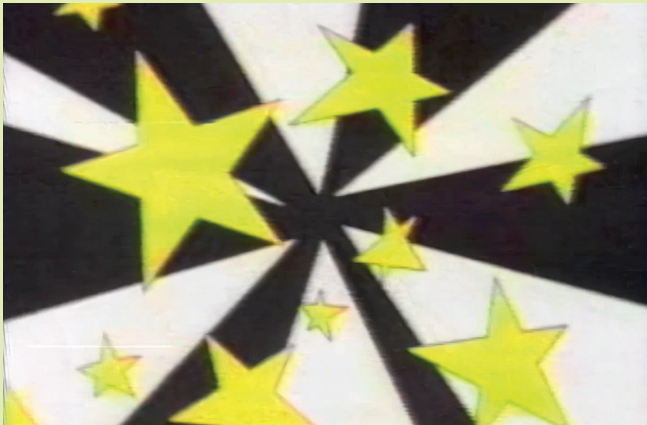
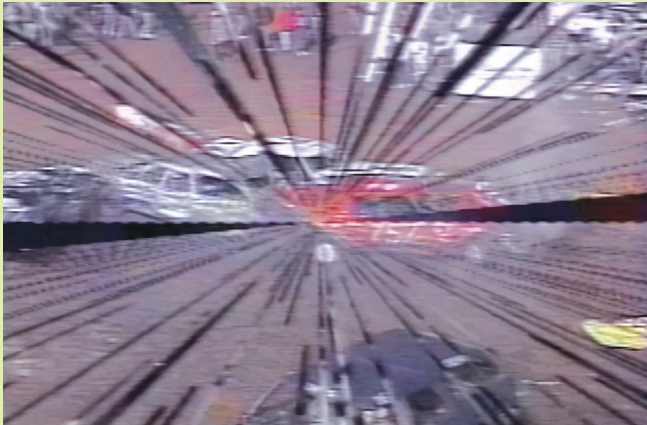
It was so dramatically different from anything anyone had been taught that when I asked for instruction, I was told none of the teachers knew how to operate it. I waited, but there was no sign it would be part of the curriculum. My student debt growing while my education stagnated, I started to feel desperate. I stopped going to class and instead spent my time in the little room that housed the DPS Perception System PC. Sometimes, when the school was closing, I would hide behind the small couch in the editing room. The door was closed and the alarm in the larger video lab activated, but in my Perception closet, I could work undisturbed.



The accuracy was revolutionary. I could enter impossible in and out markers, reducing time to a single frame of sound and image. Entering lines felt measured, rhythmic like a tracker, or sequencer. The edit commands could be copy-pasted rapidly. I could hold and sustain a moment, both to see and hear the extended “now”.

When sounds are repeated rhythmically without missing a beat, our heart tunes in: slowing or speeding in an attempt to keep pace with what’s heard. In the case of video though, the images are made of light, whether projected or displayed on a monitor or tv. Because our nervous system reacts to flashing light, we react to flashing images the same way, slowing or speeding up to match what’s seen.

New Year’s Eve in Paris. I was married at the time. Ellie and I made DIY costumes out of tape, cardboard, and fabric. We went as Star Trek crew members. The good Trek, *The Next Generation*. The party was at my friend Bruno’s. There were all kinds of people there, unsurprisingly speaking French. I’m terrible with languages, so I couldn’t communicate much unless someone spoke English. I also get nervous in groups of more than four people, so I had a few glasses of wine to take the edge off. Back then, I used to take off a lot of edges.



I'm not sure when, but I do remember stepping out. On the narrow balcony overlooking the street, I steadied myself on a corner of brick and hoped the night air would sober me. It didn't. I paused to consider that I might not be balanced enough to be out there, so I stepped inside to find a chair. On my way to the living room, I was stopped by an enthusiastic recommendation to try some punch. Immediately after, Bruno stood behind the headrest of the armchair I was sinking into. He shook it and laughed. Shook it again. At first I laughed. I shut my eyes. Then I said, "yeah, enough." Glancing up at him, eyes closing again. Finally, "For fuck's sake, stop Bruno!" The room was shaking, bright, a stranger's face, a woman staring and close to me looked concerned and offended. I was wearing a seat belt, on a plane, in mid-flight. I didn't know how I got there. I didn't know where it was going. My costume was gone, a change of clothes. Night swapped for day. I said before, consciousness is a cut-up.

The combination of a sudden, simultaneous change in sound and image is a jump cut. An attention magnet, jump cuts demand focus for the same reason that unnaturally fast movements demand our attention. Advertising is filled with them. So is children's television.



Looking back, Sesame Street was a parody of this formula. Brought to you by the letter W and the number 12. By contrast, the glacial pace and calm of Mr. Rogers couldn't hold my attention. I was free to choose what I watched for nearly my entire childhood. I didn't sleep much, and pay tv ran 24 hours. I binge watched films before I was ten. *Alien*, *Terminator*, *Videodrome*, *Poltergeist*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Heavy Metal*, *Road Warrior*, *Death Race 2000*, *2001*, *Blade Runner*, *Scanners*, *The Tenant*, *The Hunger*, *The Fog*, *The Thing*, *The Blob*, *Lifeforce*, *Catpeople*, *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things*, and *Ilsa, the Tigress of Siberia*. Hundreds of films fast forwarded my education. I saw them as myths, preparing me for an adult world. I was still watching a big cabinet tv, but sleeping on a mattress right in front of it. My campfire and my cave wall.

Those early memories of watching *Videodrome* alone on my mattress imbued VHS with a lethal aura. I saw video making as something that could be weaponized. I would pack tapes with edits, like filling drug capsules, and then wander the city with Jubal, my friend and co-conspirator, trying to give them out like narcotics. I remember carrying a box of tapes, the sides tagged with paint markers, "jawa". It was a nickname for the dogmatic editing method I'd pioneered. We revised our pitch depending on who we were dealing



to. On transit or street corners, we were direct “want some video art?” Door-to-door in Rosedale, a different tactic. Mansion after mansion looking self assured, straight faced, completely sincere. Like cultural ambassadors, or vacuum salesmen, “Would you support emerging media artwork?”

I remember a middle-aged man telling us, “I only buy Indian art” and abruptly shutting the door in our faces. I was so mad. I’m mixed, but obviously brown, since my mum is half East Indian. But video wasn’t his kind of Indian art. I kept thinking of him in his giant house surrounded by room after room of sameness. He might as well have said “I only buy art that reminds me of myself”. Maybe that’s what most art collectors do? I pause now to look around my apartment at the objects I’ve collected. The art displayed in the place I call home. They don’t remind me of myself as much as they change the way I see everything, which includes myself. Maybe I’m doing it wrong. I bet that wealthy, insular man jerks off in his king size canopy bed looking up at a mirrored ceiling.

Because video is both sound and image, it can be overwhelming. In some cases, there’s a placebo effect. We did an experiment at an anarchist hippie rave in an old church. We arranged a tiny side-room with a comfy armchair, a



large tv, and no other source of light. Above the tv in the darkness was a lightbox sign filled with bulbs waiting to go off if the seated viewer took notice of a small button on the arm of the chair. The video was a nauseating combination of porn and snuff rescanned, that is, shot directly off a screen.

Because it was cut entirely in-camera, meaning the Record button was pressed on and off to cut between scenes, the result was an imperfect warbling flutter of orgasms and agonized wailing. A young man, seated and looking pained, squinted and said to me, “If I had the strength, I could watch this and feel nothing.” I told him that if he felt nothing, how would he know what strength was? He flinched and pressed the button. The sign lit up the room with the phrase MAKE A WISH. He got up to leave and in the doorway, my friend and I kissed his cheek from both sides and whispered, “Your wish is granted.” The exhibit was closed before the end of the night. People complained the room smelled of vomit and blood, none of it true.

Jubal and I once lived in an old factory building. No real furniture except for a tv and a mattress or two. This was during the peak of his own Po Po experiments, equal parts survival research laboratory and poetic terrorism. An



inspirational cult of continuously living art. I was really honoured to take part in those projects for a short time. There was a lot of fire and blood, romantic epic urgency, and passionate Dionysian energy, shared by his steadily growing audience. Secret locations, break ins, occupations, happenings, vandalism, subversive actions, temporary autonomous zones, and the occasional injury. Playful, but dangerous. The whole of it, infused with a sincere desire for beauty. It was and is the greatest art I've ever known, without galleries, without definitions, and in terms of events, without limits. Then, in October 1999, came *Fight Club*. You can imagine the disappointment of seeing it all parroted on screen. The rebellious spirit of the Cult of Po-Po was made irrelevant in 2h 19m.

I was editing rapid cuts with musicality long before movie trailers co-opted the style and turned it into a cliché. It's an awful feeling, seeing your youthful attempts at rebellion pantomimed into a toothless spectacle. Situationist visionary Guy Debord prophesied, "The syntax of the spectacle cannot be used to attack the spectacle." Yelling in a screaming mob increases the volume of the mob and masks your voice at the same time.



But screaming feels good. Breaking things feels nearly as good as building them. Being on the outside of the dominant culture demands breaking in to have a say. Television was still a gated community and although sacred screen time had started to wane, the internet hadn't yet launched YouTube's "broadcast yourself" platform. Scavenging was still my primary means of protest.

I was born in 1974. My friends and I were basement loners emerging from latchkey independence. 80s single parent homes meant unsupervised and unlimited screen time. From childhood to adolescence our games evolved from 8-bit to 32-bit. Our access to films transmuted from ethereal pay tv to tangible VHS rentals. Spanning time in sunless subterranean rec rooms. Play, die, repeat to get to the next level. Play, pause, rewind to relive the moment.

Our appetite for footage climbing through stages of distraction, amusement, sensational, pornographic, horrific. Always graduating to a new level of "unimaginable" and with each successful assimilation, expanding the limits of our imagination. Trading our collections of cereal commercials, pet tricks, natural disasters, bondage dungeons, highway safety crash tests, uncensored cockpit gun cams.



When the body's neglected, the mind reaches for "spectacular optical". Feeling through your eyes.

I screened a softer version of this in the Drake Underground. My collection of videos called "Basement Boy Hardcore" was filled with micro edits of Black Sabbath, Godzilla, kung fu, Darth Vader, and other obsessions from my antisocial adolescence. I was really pleased with the turnout, the room was packed and *Vice* had sent over a reporter to film the event. People were doing that restrained Toronto head nod that says, "I'm impressed, but too sophisticated to show it more than this."

In the middle of the room, very near to the screen, a silhouette began to undress. This young guy stripped down completely and started to dance and writhe. The crowd carefully made a distinct gap around him, an unspoken border between civilization and his lawless bubble. When security came he moved quickly, placing his hand between his ass cheeks, and then reaching out at them. Three guards subdued him. Later they told me he had sincerely apologized. He really didn't mean to act out and had no intention of causing any trouble. He wasn't on any substances. He'd just had a very sudden impulse come over him.



I rented in bulk from Suspect Video. A small video store crammed with cramped, chaotic shelves. While rummaging I came across an unmarked VHS tape. Mysterious, black, plastic, I slipped it into my bag. I hold onto old tech, so my VCR was ready to receive when I got home.

No titles, no intro, just short visceral vignettes. A jagged circle of light on black, red frothing water, combing hair, a burning bush, finger tip pressed on a nail tip struggling and then pushing through, dense cover of writhing maggots. Scene after scene of wordless video incantation that ended as abruptly as it started. A wrinkle of static in the tape. What followed was a black screen with text (and a tiny email address) explaining that this tape was cursed and anyone who viewed it would die in seven days.

I was absolutely thrilled. For years prior to this moment, Jubal and I had worked on our own experiments in video invocation. A kind of ceremonial editing merging elements of Gysin's cut-up, Crowley's sorcery, and my own jawa video method. One of these was called *LAO*, as in Isis, Apophis, Osiris or Creation, Destruction, Resurrection. We were hungry, antisocial young fanatics in a fantastical world. I remember believing with total sincerity, video is magick, video can change reality. That's not a typo. Magick with a



k was a distinction the mystic Aleister Crowley introduced to avoid being mistaken for a vaudeville performer. My preteen years were Catholic though I wasn't baptised, and after a short stint of atheism at 14 I opted for a more self-directed faith. Video is magick. I still believe it a little. The way my mum holds out for a sign from Jesus, even though she's stopped believing in the church.

Flash forward and I'm looking at an anonymous curse on VHS. My manic enthusiasm takes it as confirmation. Rewind pause, rewind pause, and then jotting down the email I started to fill out my response. "Congratulations! You've achieved something my colleague and I have been working towards for years! I'd be happy to share our methods and trade techniques. Please tell me more about how these images kill, how we might improve on this, and if you'd have any interest in joining us in our pursuit of video invocation and weaponization. Many thanks and best wishes, your peers and comrades." I'm paraphrasing. The response came the next day and again I'm paraphrasing, but something like "Universal Studios is pleased you enjoyed our promotional campaign video for *The Ring*, starring Naomi Watts. Universal Studios does not condone any form of violence. The content of the short reel is intended for entertainment purposes only. This is a work of fiction."



## DEGREES OF MAGNIFICATION

A cut in time requires scaling down to consider each fraction of a second. Zooming into the mortar between the bricks and crawling inside. The act of cut and paste in sub seconds can feel like slow motion, repetitive meditation, a rosary of instants. While editing in this hyper-focused state, the results are only imagined, they haven't yet been witnessed in real time. It's only after, when an editor zooms out and up to reality, that the work can be reviewed. There's an element of surprise, when rewinding and viewing the results for the first time. The maker becomes a spectator.

Audiences aren't always aware of this effort. They haven't visited subspace or experienced subtime; which is fine. You don't need to know how it was made to appreciate a painting. Like a good magic trick, complexities are masked; the execution seems simple, the result is spectacular. The spectacle has a presence, demands attention, and can shepherd a crowd's focus. The source has shifted from priest to rock star to the image itself. Performers whose bodies are equal in size to the audience require venues that exaggerate their presence. Cathedrals, arenas, IMAX screens. With the advent of video came the power to enlarge the face,



amplify the voice, and scale the footprint. A performer takes up more space and more time. At a concert, you can see the show larger than life on a screen, surrogate for the tiny occupants on stage. The signal is the star.

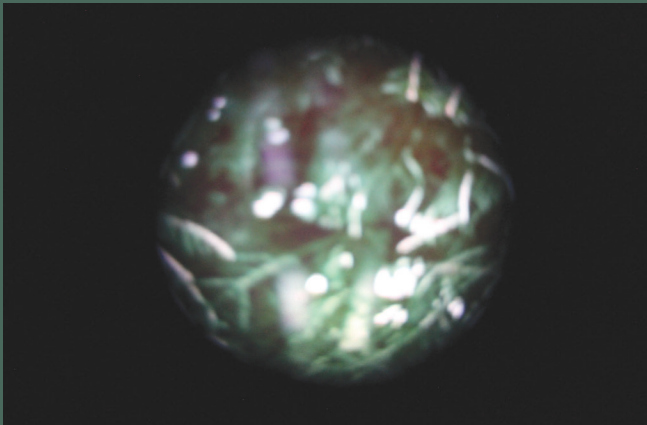
Anywhere that television is ubiquitous, video vision is normalized. Without question, we follow juxtapositions, zoom ins, pans, and wipes. A friend told me about a story he'd heard from a professor. He was taking a media studies course at York. This was an anecdote about using video in isolated communities. Health education outreach, warning about the dangers of mosquitoes and malaria. A tv screen showed a mosquito close up. This enlarged the bug to a size that was massive compared to anything encountered in real life. For an audience accustomed to seeing with their eyes instead of seeing through cameras, the images were ridiculous. There are no gigantic mosquitoes. I tried to track down the details about where this might have happened, who the people were, or even the video itself. It's just a story of a story, but I want to believe it. I want to believe there are people living outside the all-encompassing environment of surrogate sight. The word video is Latin for 'to see'. But seeing and knowing are often interchangeably used. I see what you mean. I understand what you mean.



I can barely recall a time when understanding wasn't influenced by seeing, and seeing wasn't influenced by video.

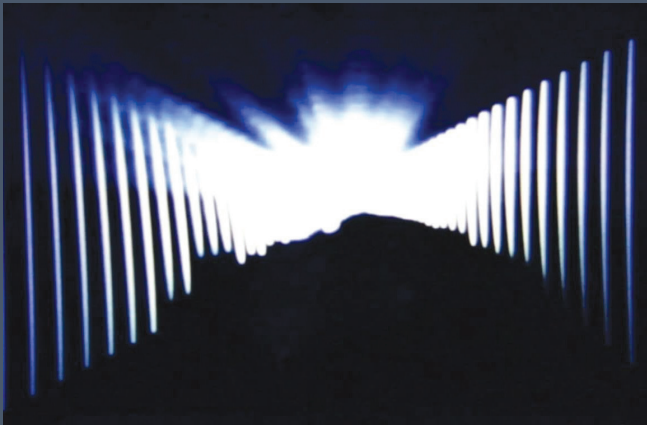
When I dream, I'm the world and the audience. I once dreamt I was in a comedy club and Arnold Schwarzenegger was doing stand up. I thought, this is my dream, so those are my jokes. I knew I was the source, but I didn't know what would happen next. The punchlines were funny, unexpected. Dreams feel like they're being crafted elsewhere, a control room apart from us, the protagonists. Elsewhere, the narrator, a fragment of ourselves operates outside the frame.

You can feel the director struggling to maintain the deception. Take your eyes off that body wrapped in white bandages, and when you look again it's a pillar of rice. The simulation has limits. Just enough resources to maintain the illusion wherever our focus follows. The same method is used in generating hi resolution VR. The file size for loading an entire world is enormous. To compensate, only the areas that are being looked at in a given moment are maintained. An abyss over my shoulder, behind my head. Is the world there when I close my eyes? If a tree falls in the metaverse...

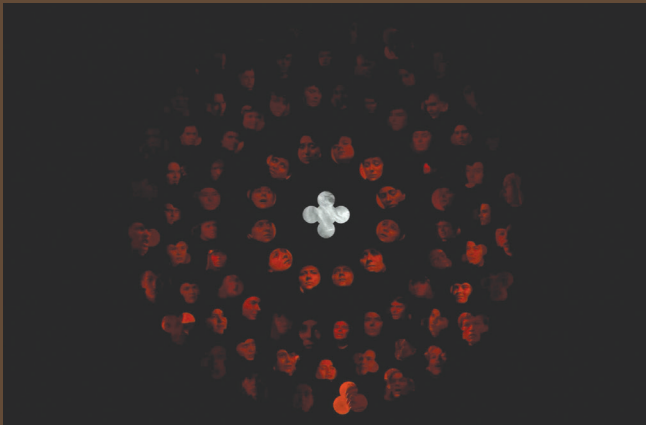


I clearly remember a common belief when I was growing up that said people dream in black and white. I remember nearly every adult I knew claiming this. It never occurred to me that nearly all of them were watching black and white tv for most of their lives. I'm nearly certain if you asked the average person today they would overwhelmingly say they dream in colour. How did we dream before we had screens? Did Neolithic hunters dream of cave paintings? Self awareness is limited by the fidelity of our reflections. Platforms like TikTok are entirely in portrait mode. It's all foreground, close and cropped both in space and time. Gen Z dreaming nearsighted in wide-gamut HDR.

The screens get smaller all the time, but the size of my memory remains the same. I only remember seeing films in the theatre when I'm not watching the screen. I remember the arm rest, the creak of my seat. Concentric circles of metal air vents high above me. The dim light of a wall sconce on acoustic cloth panels. All my memories of watching in the theatre are of the theatre itself. The movie on the screen occupies a separate space. It fills my whole focus, my attention shuts out the space like the iris contracting around the essential details in a silent film. I test this by comparing all the screens I've looked at. I'm watching a multimillion dollar film on the back of a headrest at 30,000



feet. When I'm distracted, it's the food cart, the pinch of hard plastic earbuds, announcements about turbulence. All of this, a temporary break in the continuity of video time. While I'm focused, everything falls away and the emotion seeps back. Maybe the altitude accentuates empathy. I've read about people crying a lot while watching movies in the air. After, when I recall them, the vignettes, voices, and actions don't have a scale. The screen, the device itself, is remembered as small, only during the interruptions. Video memories have feathered edges.



## SOUL WITHOUT A BODY

On our screens, the company we keep is digitally embalmed. There's a jarring shift in reality when an elderly celebrity is rolled into the spotlight. Our memories feed on plastic fruit. We've come to expect unnaturally familiar faces. When we're flashed with fleshy entropy it's a cut-up for our consciousness, hyper jumping us decades in an instant. It's hard not to feel self-conscious when digital companions are eternal.

Working with video is like contemporary necromancy. It's reaching into the ether and summoning a spirit to command. Ghosts are predictable, trapped in a timeline they can't deviate from. Their actions and reactions repeat with identical emphasis, never losing momentum, never ageing. The medium (television) and the medium (spiritualist) are both bodies for the disembodied signal.

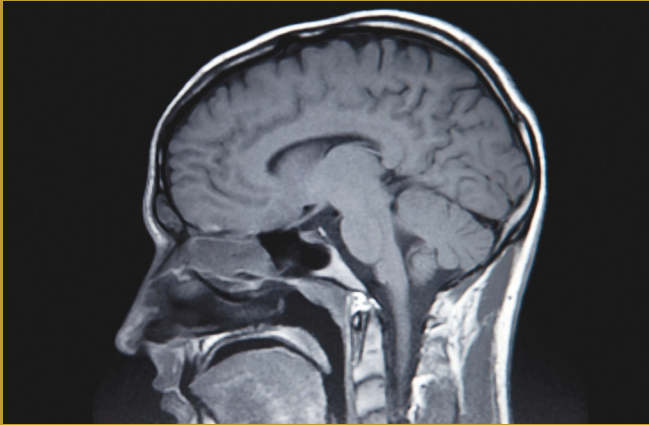
Nam June Paik, grandfather of video art, said, "I use technology in order to hate it more properly." I have trust issues, so I'm not an early adopter. I like to experiment with things after everyone else has moved on. There's always something lost with each tool we gain. Socrates said, "They will cease to exercise memory because



they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks.” I’m reminded of every dinner conversation interrupted by someone pulling out their phone to fact check.

Video is a format that carries a recording, but isn’t the same as the recording it carries. This is unique compared to other mediums. Paintings are made of paint, films are made of film, but video has never been reduced to the material that contains it. Waves travelling through air from control towers to rooftops, “metal fingers beckoning to the invisible”, but antennas and televisions aren’t video. Videotape says it in the name, but the signal and the container are still distinct. From tape to disc to streaming, video has jumped from host to host but forever remained independent, a transport medium or a soul without a body. Though the internet offered the promise of leaving our body behind, video started the process by example.

Daguerreotype was a cheaper way of making photos. Portraits had been priced for the aristocracy, but became available to the middle class. People started to photograph the dead, granting their semblance independence



from their decaying bodies. When we post images of ourselves, they travel, duplicate and transform with autonomy while we sit still.

Sometimes the images come from within us. Our sight was extended with X-rays, MRIs, and CT scans. The mysteries of our flesh revealed. Imagine a medieval peasant looking at an engraving of the grim reaper. How often would they see a human skull exposed, aside from an actual rotting body? I can see a skull at any hour of any day. A bottomless pit of skulls. A phone full.

Preservation of the image has expanded beyond the physical memento into the memories of others. To be seen takes up space, occupies the mind of your audience. This extension of self is measured by likes or followers. The digital memento can go viral and secure posthumous popularity or *memento vitae*, ‘remember life’.

If video is a kind of necromancy, Hollywood studios are the chief sorcerers. Studying the past, they’re able to deduce what might be popular in the present. If trends revive the late 60s, then a remake of *Planet of The Apes* will pair well. If studio predictions are right, we’ll be reliving the late



80s in a few years. The *Dirty Dancing* remake is already scheduled for 2026.

This steady regurgitation depends heavily on the naivety of a newer, younger audience. Originality is risky, easier to follow historical complementary trends. In his novel *1984* Orwell had a two-part declaration that begins, “who controls the past controls the future.” The studio system controls the copyrights and the archives for most of the storytelling in the world. A quick search of IMDB reveals endless franchising, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, Marvel scheduled until doomsday.

Streaming online offers an illusion of greater access and choice, instead granting companies significant control over our options and more importantly our memories. I miss browsing shelves of tangible media. The chance to stumble across a theatrical release of *Apocalypse Now*, perfectly paced and free of surfboard hijinks and French plantations. A *Star Wars* as it was, of its time complete with hand crafted models, instead of crammed with Lucas’ CGI after thoughts.

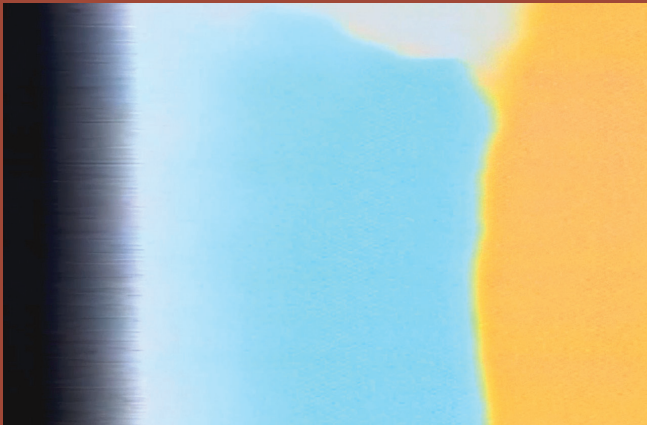
The Disney musical *Song of the South* is cringey, racist, and systematically hidden. Disney+ has published nearly every



classic in their catalogue with the exception of this one film. It was widely released in 1946 and still lives in my own memory, thanks to a theatrical re-release in the 80s, even if every effort has been made to manufacture cultural amnesia. The second half of Orwell's declaration concludes, "who controls the present controls the past."

I wonder how many households held onto their encyclopedias. Offline printed tomes (or tombs?) of knowledge. Facts beyond reach or revision. Online is fluid. I'm reminded of elaborate mandala patterns made with coloured sand, painstakingly constructed and then without hesitation, swept away. I remember searching for CIA black ops locations on Google maps and not finding them, since the satellite footage had been photoshopped to eliminate any trace. A smudged out portion of satellite map feeds my conspiratorial distrust. On the Amnesty International site, a link to their post titled "Map of secret detention facilities" displays the icon for "broken image", a link to nowhere.

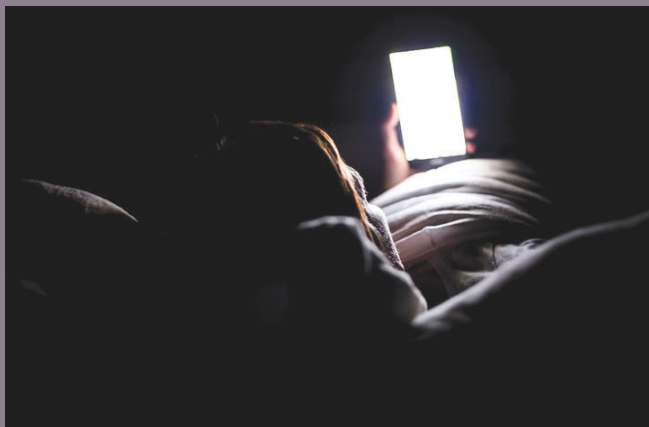
Unlike carefully composed portraits of the dead, the spontaneity of digital posts is nearly immediate, an impulse. Injury, intimacy, and slander are captured, shared, and become permanent records. *Memento defectum*, remember failure. In some countries you can ask Google to take



down links to humiliating details. It's legally known as the right to be forgotten.

Facebook won't let me forget. It interrupts me with memories of my past, formatted like advertisements. Seeing the faces of people that passed or relationships that fell apart always prompts me to do a radical cleansing of my historical posts. I prune anything sentimental. I'm hesitant to take pictures of anything I care deeply about. For the longest time my Instagram account was private, but with the growing need for online presence I've felt pressure to open up. With increased traffic through my intimate timeline, the need to self censor is greater than ever.

Nineteen years ago, the Naval Security Agency ran a program called "Dishfire". It duplicated and stored any photo taken on a smartphone or sent from a computer. The vast database of personal content was justified with the promise of protecting Americans from terrorist threats. Edward Snowden made Dishfire public knowledge, but I live in Canada so I can't say how many deleted vacations, romantic dinners, or drunken birthdays my government keeps a back up of.



Surveillance is a part of life now. There was a generational shift in the importance of privacy. What was once an assumed human right became a naive fantasy for old people to cling to. Nearly everyone younger than me considers privacy impossible, and they accept its loss without much concern.

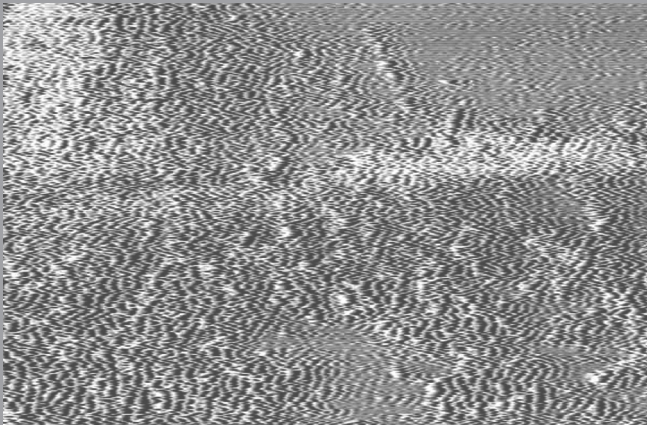
I met a bartender in Copenhagen who posted naked selfies online because it gave her a sense of power over her own image. I wondered about the anonymous audience watching and whether they felt powerful or powerless while looking through her pics. I'm a very private person, so her posts were extreme to me but I can appreciate her feeling in control, uninhibited. On social media, everyone showing is a producer and everyone seeing is a consumer. We exhibit to a vast audience most of whom we never meet, can't see, and aren't even sure if and when they're watching. Other times, we're observers, taking in the posts, scrolling and switching from one account to another, platform to platform, skimming everything, catching a glimpse.

It's the electronic equivalent of the panopticon. A circular prison design, with cells around the outside and a guard tower in the middle. The arrangement provides a solution to the uneven ratio of many prisoners and only a few



guards. Cells in the circle are well lit and easy to see, while the guard tower in the centre is shadowed, unobservable. Because the guards are in darkness, it's impossible to know if they're watching or not, so even though they can't possibly guard everyone at once, the prisoners perform under the assumption that they might be seen. Social media lets us be prisoners and guards simultaneously.

EarthCam Network is a commercial venture that provides weatherproofed resilient continuous surveillance. The cameras are used to showcase a hotel property or tourist attraction. Cameras are numerous and widespread globally, located in nearly every U.S. state and over 30 countries. They net the surface of the earth with a constant live stream. If viewed in multiple browser windows, they can be placed side by side to create an omnipresent perspective. A view that peels the globe like an apple, laying the skin flat to be surveyed all at once. A thunderstorm is seen gathering on one window, drifting over to rain in another, before thinning out into clear sky in the subsequent box. The sun bobs in a perpetual arch from screen to screen. Shadows grow sideways and ink out the screen. Black boxes chase daylight.



Recordings of recordings degrade, less so with digital but the term “generation loss” used to refer to a duplicate that was a lower quality copy. When we see ourselves in a recording, the first copy is near while later generations begin to feel distant. The distance comes from abstraction, a softening of the details. Like our memories, the specifics of the recording are lost while the overall gestures and actions are retained.

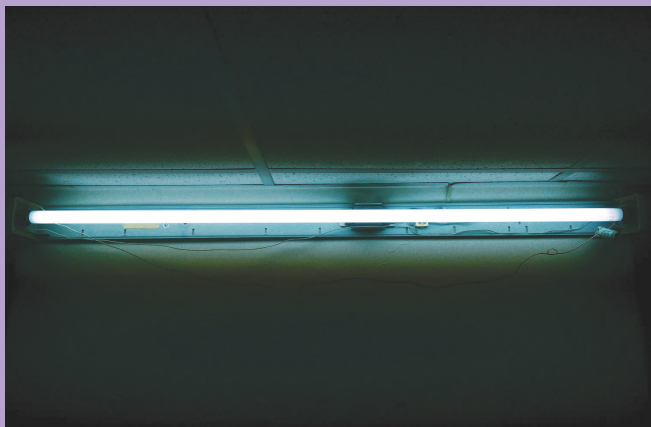
When someone is filming on the sidewalk, I cross the street. But when I’m alone, I like experimenting with seeing myself mediated through mirrors, lenses, analog, and digital relays. In my late teens, I was changing my hairstyle and beginning to develop an awareness of how I saw myself compared to how other people saw me. I remember parting my hair on the right when I looked in the mirror. Then I’d see myself on a camcorder and it seemed completely wrong. I realized for the first time that my reflection wasn’t what other people saw. After that, I’d get ready in my room in front of a small tv with my camcorder balanced on top. I started to train my part on the left. I use a mirror now, but I don’t consider my reflection “real”.



## A RISING TIDE FLOATS ALL BOATS

Porn is defined as sexually explicit imagery but *sexual* and *explicit* are terms more subjective and varied than people imagine. I was in Tokyo, traveling with Josh Avery, a co-member of the art collective FameFame. We were exploring an area called Akihabara (aka Electric Town). The buildings are tall and often have collectables (comics, games, cameras) contained in their own building. Different genres appear with each rising floor.

We noticed a trend where the contents of floors started out mainstream, and then began to get more specialized as we climbed higher. A ground floor with Playstation games had a vintage arcade above it. Above that, a floor of competitive fighting games. Above that, an entire floor of cockpit simulations with teams divided in two, engaging on a simulated mechbot battlefield. In the middle, two teens with headsets watching multiple screens, like generals commanding dueling forces. We were stunned. We had to know what the top floor was. The steps carried us away from the glittering chaotic din and into a stark harshly lit space which resembled a classroom. Desks spread evenly through the room facing a massive screen with a soccer match in progress. It took a while to realize it wasn't real.



Scattered at a few tables, far apart from one another, haggard sweaty boys were hunched and bleary eyed. One was completely face down, sleeping or passed out. It smelt like a locker room. I didn't understand it at all. We'd levelled up, beyond our cultural comprehension.

Like pressing reset, we began on the ground floor of another building. Rows of magazine racks, Japanese illustrations (aka manga). The images were sort of bordering on erotic, but it was subtle. Curious, we took the elevator up and found the same pattern as before. Genre specialization and a noticeable increase in explicitness. Another floor, another genre and even more explicit. I'm extremely shy about getting turned on in public, so it was starting to get uncomfortable but my need to see was greater than my fear of being seen. Manga mingled with photography. Control and shame became recurring themes combined with every kind of bodily function. Sensorial dial at eleven, thick bunched panties filled with shit, deep throat induced showers of vomit. I thought, I've hit my limit. I can't imagine what's next. Josh raced ahead. The elevator ended and a staircase bridged to the top floor. I followed him, equal parts dread and fascination. With each floor, the number of customers had dwindled a bit. When we reached the top, it was a vast, open concept space, with only a few



fluorescent tube lamps lit leaving most of it very dark. In unlit rows, statue-still clientele, five or six in all, stood far apart from each other with open magazines for faces. It was absolutely quiet, save for a few heavy breathers. I picked up one of the magazines and braced. Inside, glossy, high-quality photoshoots of perfectly staged and lit vintage appliances. A moss green fridge. Brown washing machine. Boxy pastel blue oven with wood panel dials and clock over coil stove-top elements. *Sexual* and *explicit* are terms more subjective and varied than people imagine.

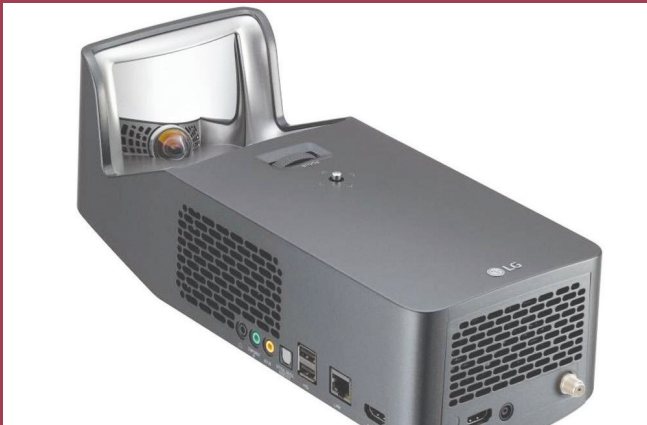
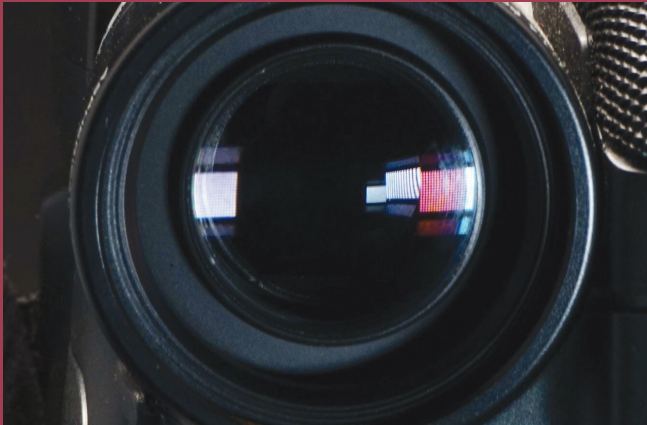
With amateur porn, people turn the camera on themselves. I remember coming across a lot of it when I was sorting through footage my friend Michael Lane took off people's home computers. It was an era of low security, and people frequently shared folders online unintentionally. Cameras that could shoot small video files also had a specific format, a sequence of letters that came before the numbering of the file. He told me it narrowed the search and made discovering these home movies easier. He shared his collection with me. All of the sources were American, but I was surprised that nearly every video fell into one of five categories: amateur porn, cars smoking their tires, children singing alone to the camera, shooting guns, and air shows. This was long before any kind of sophisticated



social platform existed online. I didn't know it then, but the internet of our present was gestating in those keepsakes. It's interesting to see what people choose to record for themselves, without an audience. I felt like Michael's collection was the portrait of a nation, a contemporary candid camera. America's funniest death rattle.

Amateur porn isn't amateur anymore. Just the appearance of real people, staged imperfection, relatable mundane settings. Porn, while functional and affecting, has always made me repress a feeling of guilt. I'm empathizing with method actors. I know it's not real, but I can't tell how much comradery or hostility is beneath the surface. It's why smiles in pornography turn me off. It reminds me of retail, marketers, and politicians. I thought about making my own porn, but very differently. I didn't want to see myself or my partner explicitly together. I needed a step of abstraction, mediation. I've done a lot of experiments with video feedback which led me to this idea. I cleared out the furniture and moved my mattress into the living room.

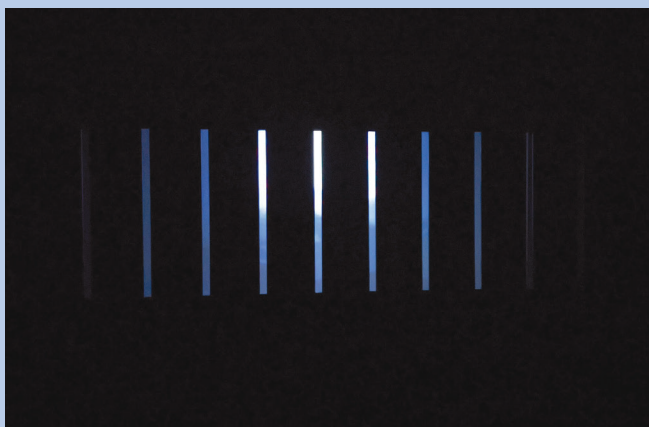
I placed a very compact projector, the size of a tissue box, near the wall. It's called an ultra-short throw. It projects a full size image on the wall from only a foot or two away. This was important because I didn't want to cast a shadow



on the image, which is exactly what you get if you stand between the projected light and the wall. Next, I set up the mattress very close to the projector, which meant it was only a few feet from the wall/screen. Finally, I put a camcorder on a tripod, far enough back that it could see the mattress and the wall projection, all in one wide shot. One more technical detail was that the camcorder was old and took a full size VHS tape to record on. The projector, though new, was connected to an old VCR. Without a tape to play, the VCR sent a solid blue signal to the projector. It covered the wall in a huge ultramarine rectangle. It was the only light source, which meant anything, or anyone on the mattress was a silhouette. The camera was loaded, the recording began, and a timer counted down to make sure each take would be of equal length.

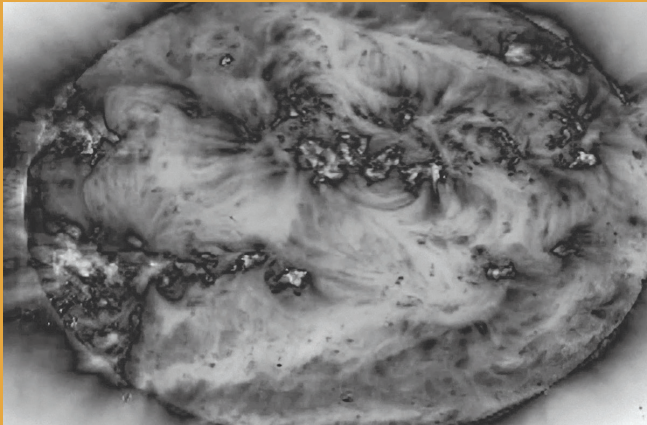
The plan was to capture the whole cycle of intimacy, but backwards. The vignettes would start intensely physical, and then with each recording become more tender. Finally, there was distance, anticipation and glances without touching. This whole arrangement was about playing our past as the backdrop, illuminating the room with our recent history.

When we finished the first take, I took the tape from the camera, loaded the VCR connected to the projector and



rewound the footage. I loaded a new tape into the camera, and now, quickly, started four things in quick succession. Play the projection on the wall, hit record on the camera, start the timer, and perform. The whole time, we could see ourselves on the wall beside us. It was difficult, too close. The proximity to the image physically in space and the nearness to a recent event.

The clarity of the first recording makes the silhouettes unmistakably recognizable. The second iteration, the image of us seeing the image of us. The technique was repeated over and over, until the scene on the wall had depth. A tunnel of time, picture within picture, moment behind moment. Each generation, the rectangles of recordings became lighter, softer, more remote from the present. With each iteration, our performance became calmer. We shifted to caressing, then laying still together, and finally looking across the distance of the empty mattress. A white light formed, an opening in the mouth of a cave. The shifting glimmer of accumulated past would cast a ripple of light that affected the room in the future, echoing up through layers to the present. We watched our unrecognizable reflections. Free to objectify ourselves as spectators instead of narcissists.



## ELECTRIC BEANS

Unshared is unseen. That used to mean something else to me. It meant that if I was alone and saw a sunset, it wasn't worth remembering. It just felt less meaningful to me without someone there to comment and confirm. I needed my Nico when she sang for *The Velvet Underground*, "I'll be your mirror, reflect what you are in case you don't know."

Learning from a screen, some people can mimic movements and translate them into physical action. Julius Yego (aka Mr. YouTube), became a javelin athlete that learned to throw by watching YouTube videos. Julius won a gold medal in the 2015 world championships and a silver at the 2016 summer olympics. He had started to get more advanced in 2009, and was even invited to a tournament in Poland but didn't have enough money to go. In his own words, "...I didn't have a coach. Nobody was there for me to see if I was doing well or not, so I went to the cybercafe."

I worked in a cybercafe in the mid 90s. It was really expensive for people to get high-speed internet at home. The cafe was also more private—no parents, no spouses. Aside from a handful of adult regulars, I remember a dedicated



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#what.cd-interview4 (What-Network, Steerwiththerear) [39] [+inst]: What.CD Invite Interview Room #4 | Questions must be answered quickly | Those getting interview...
#groxine> ? . Have you ever participated in invite trading, buying, or selling? Admit to it now and your actions will be excused.
  long it and get found later and you will be permanently banned.
#groxine> 4. Favorite genre of music or artist?
#groxine> 9. Are you a member of other private trackers? List all of them (rutracker, demonid and other semi-private trackers count).
#groxine> Please copy roxy, when you have completed this section.
#groxine> *****
Steerwiththerear> 1. No
Steerwiththerear> 2. No
Steerwiththerear> 3. Hamburg, NY and Yes
Steerwiththerear> 4. Yes
Steerwiththerear> 5. Steerwiththerear@micloud.com
Steerwiththerear> 6. A friend from yours.
Steerwiththerear> 7. No
Steerwiththerear> 8. Classical and Classic Rock.
Steerwiththerear> 9. No
Steerwiththerear> roxy
#groxine> *****
#groxine> 10. Screenshots (http://www.Lake-a-screenshot.org/)
#groxine> *****
#groxine> You have 10 minutes to complete this section.
#groxine> I need you to take screenshots of all of your private tracker profiles, upload them to www.imgur.com and send me the link.
#groxine> If you do not have access to a private tracker, send me a screenshot of your torrent client.
#groxine> There are rules to follow for each screenshot.
#groxine> 1. Your full profile page, not just upload/download/ratio stats.
#groxine> 2. This IRC chat (put your tab's side to side)
#groxine> 3. The entire screen, including taskbar/dock (must be visible, not hidden. No cropping, no resizing of images)
#groxine> 3.1 Windows users please make all icons in system tray visible (click the little triangle)
#groxine> 4. One screenshot per tracker.
#groxine> 5. Visible password/passkeys can be blurred, but this is the only editing allowed.
#groxine> When you finish this, paste links here and type my name: roxy to get my attention.
#groxine> *****
Steerwiththerear> roxy, this IRC is the only thing I have so far, no torrent client yet.
#groxine> okay, well send a screenshot of that please.
#groxine> and please be mindful of the time limits for the section.
Steerwiththerear> roxy, which page should I be screenshotting?
#groxine> Your IRC client.
Steerwiththerear> I guess what I'm asking is which page? I'm new to these and only got one yesterday for this test specifically. Is there a profile page?
Steerwiththerear> roxy
#groxine> What IRC client are you using?
Steerwiththerear> mirc
Steerwiththerear> roxy
#groxine> just send me a screenshot of this chat

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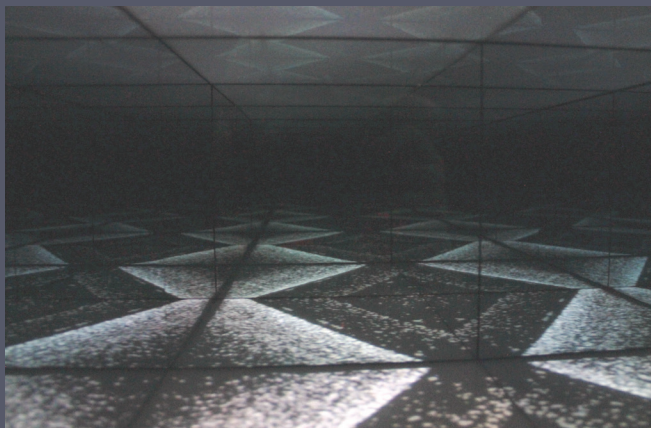
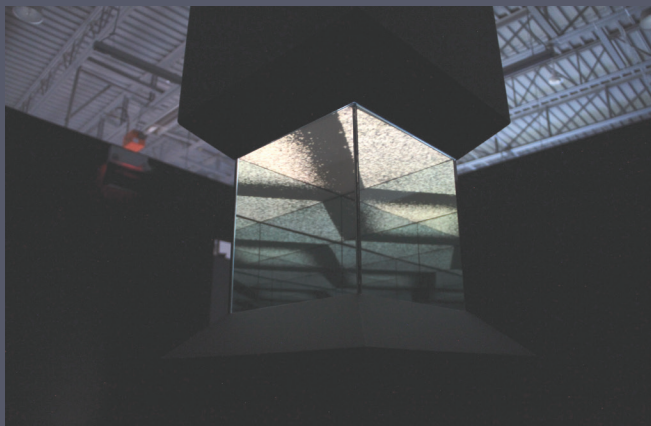
group of adolescent boys sitting hunched, playing *Quake* for hours. Playing without stopping to eat or go to the bathroom. I remember standing off to the side, waiting to serve customers when the pungent odour of teenage junk food excrement wafted my way. I had to investigate. On the floor, halfway between two players, was a fresh human turd. Impossible to attribute to anyone with absolute certainty. Consider the equal parts daring, dexterity, and screen-focussed obsession required.

At an identical island pod directly across from the gamers was a group of adolescent girls. Instead of spreading out to use all the desktops, they were huddled around one screen. They called me over to help them. They'd been engaged in an online chat that was just getting interesting and the connection had stopped, or possibly they'd been kicked out? I started to help them and noticed the room they were trying to get back into was called "cum eaters". Looking at the two pods from a distance, they were parallel worlds separated by a chasm of maturity.

People did a lot of searching too. There were two types: public and private. First, tell me what I need to fit in with society. Then, show me what I need to feel like myself. The web was still a bit primordial. A disorganized soup



of content. *Pornhub* wouldn't emerge to collect (or steal) content into one database until 2007. Currently I work in a marketing company. One of the things you learn about research is that what people say and do don't align. There's a measurable gap between attitudes and behaviours. Seth Stephens-Davidowitz combed through people's search data and found gaps. A world of missed encounters. Young men searching for porn of older women. Older women searching for porn of younger men. Both of them, restricting themselves to isolated fantasy, because of stigma. "Porn featuring overweight women is surprisingly common among men. But the data from dating sites tells us that just about all men try to date skinny women. Many people don't try to date the people they're most attracted to. They try to date the people they think would impress their friends."

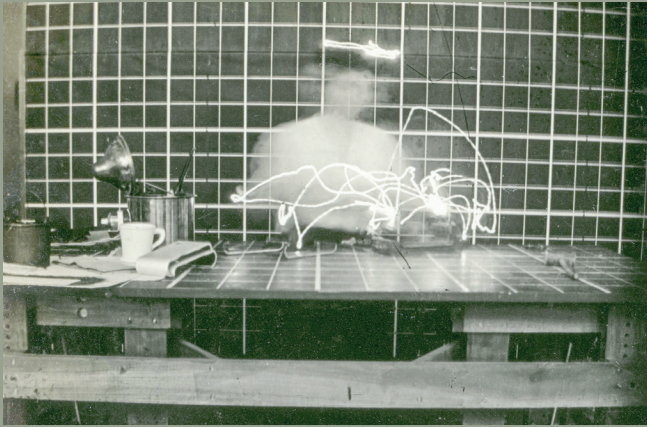


## CAMERA OBSCURA

When a mirror sees a mirror it creates parallel reflections. The depth of each looking glass is as large as the real world. Past the edge, the image would continue if we could press close and look around the corner. A perfect arrangement would be two mirrors pressed face to face. Unable to peer in, we'd have to imagine the world of symmetry and counterpoints. If the glass were surveillance glass, a two-way mirror, we could see what the mirrors see while redacting our reflection. Spectators of a world without us.

I try to separate from the reflections. Regretting the past, fearing the future, is living inside the mirrors instead of between them.

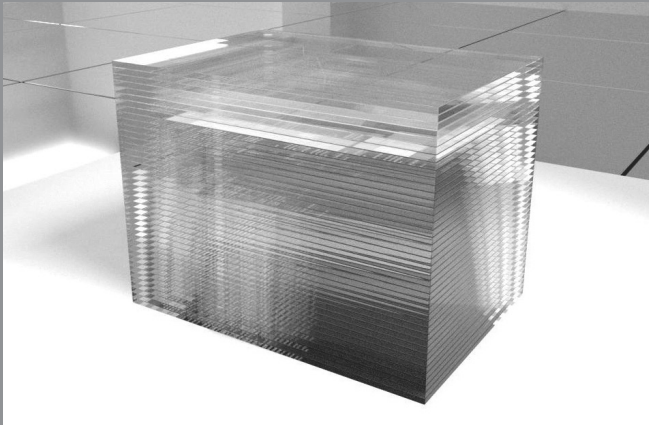
Our senses are surrogates of the highest fidelity. Warm sunlight is relayed to us, situated in a bone container, windowless, soundless, without feeling. Senses collect the world and awareness scribbles our attention over the surface. The aperture of focus isn't wide enough to take it in whole. If we're really aware, we can detect the transient sensations passing the peephole.



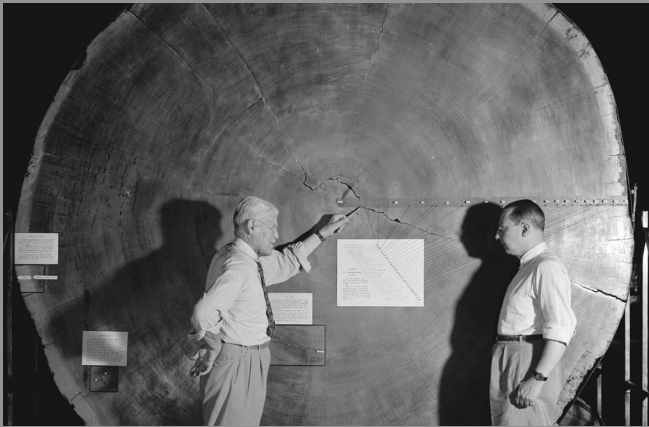
I listen to the sounds of my apartment droning in unison. Laundry machine, dishwasher, refrigerator, electrical outlets. I believe I hear them at once, but when I listen for details I discern a zipper clinking as it's tossed in circles, the swish of water spraying ceramic, various hums. I'm cutting rapidly between sources. If a scar on my side burns, I pinch the flesh between my thumb and index finger and, for a moment, the scar is edited out.

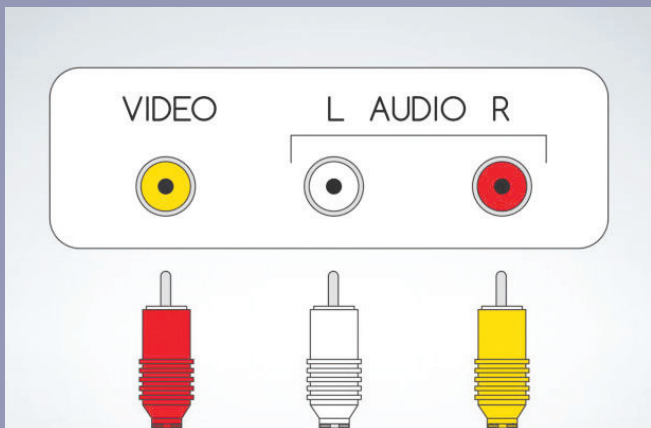
This isn't limited to reality. Even in a daydream, which has no physical restrictions, the world is imagined in sensorial terms. That's all we know. The components are seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling. Each exists while considered, vanishes when our focus shifts.

Time feels like a series of segments. From moment to moment, I'm stepping out of one frame, into another. I try to visualize my life from outside the frames. I've heard of spatial dimensions described with this visual. First I consider a dot, alone in a void. I introduce a mirror, reflections of the dot form, all the dots forming a line. The line reflected, repeats line next to line, collecting to form a square. The square, a thin slice, is reflected and duplicates stack up to form a cube. But the mirrors can't show the whole picture. Outside surfaces, the cube



is moving through time. Moment to moment, leaving a trail of decaying cubes. Snaking like dominos, becoming, sustaining, eroding. I try to turn it over in my mind like a frozen pile of yarn or a 3D scan to examine it. All it was and ever will be.





## SECOND CHANCES

Technology is designed with a purpose. Use as directed. Use it up and throw it on the heap. Artists know how to misuse things so completely, they can resurrect scraps. In that second life, the true function emerges.

If you swap RCA cables, yellow with red, red with yellow, you're swapping video with audio. Then you're seeing the sound signal and hearing the visual signal. Artist Kentaro Taki demonstrated this very elegantly with his camera, a black marker and a piece of paper. The video camera was set to black and white. White was seen as a positive signal, while black was an absence of signal. As he drew a line across the page, the camera seeing it, created a signal with three bars: light, dark, and light. As he added more lines, the bars in the signal matched. Because the wires were crossed, you could hear the light and dark converting into tone. Thick vs thin, few vs many, the tone could be manipulated to pitch up and down or resonate with different textures. Kentaro repurposed his camera as a synthesizer.

I had a large collection of televisions stacked in my apartment. I was fussing around to make a video wall. When I finished, I turned each tv off. The screens collapsed with



a distinct pop. Each has a unique, electrified fingerprint. The size of the screen helped shape the sound. Like the difference between a violin and cello. Because CRT televisions fire a stream of electrons at the screen, the sound is a faint crackle and doesn't vibrate the air much to reach our ears. The charged particles are loud and clear if heard through an antenna. I taped a wire to the screen, clipped it to an electric guitar cord and patched it into a speaker for a nuanced account of every fluttering collapse. With the recordings collected, I was able to repurpose the CRTs as percussion instruments.



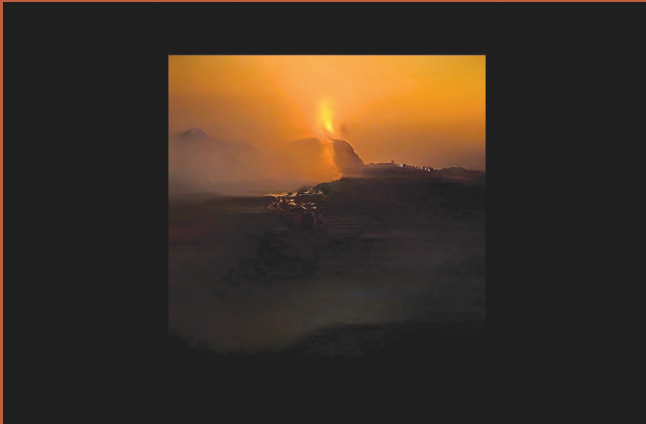
Edison invented the wax cylinder. An elaborate voice recorder. Just people talking into a horn and the sound waves etched into the wax. He designed it for business men to record memos. It was 22 years before anyone thought of recording a musician. Even then, early phonograph recordings were so thin and weak that only thumping blaring sounds could be captured. Like feathers in a fossil record, delicate notes were lost.

People's tastes were shaped by what they could hear, which was suddenly decided by what could be captured instead of what could be performed. They could attend a classical concert, but couldn't listen to a decent recording of it



yet. Jazz music, with its trumpets and drums, was easier to capture and, before long, jazz overtook classical in popularity. In addition to hearing new sounds, recordings could transport listeners to places they wouldn't normally travel to. A lot of white listeners enjoyed jazz at home, but probably wouldn't have gone to a jazz club in an era of segregation.

Algorithms are the gatekeepers now. Quality of content and the ability to capture it are trumped by exposure. The audience is more vast, the trend more sudden. Tiktok has the power to push across millions of user feeds until an unknown goth band in Belarus achieves global popularity overnight.



## BACKROOMS OF THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWN

Liminal space meant a place on the threshold of becoming. Something new, but not yet realized. The internet redefined the term into photographs of abandoned locations. Not urban ruins with the signs of decay, but clean and contemporary haunts. Spaces that appear to be functional, but empty. Shopping malls, office towers, indoor swimming pools, and endless corridors. All without people.

The lockdown put the whole world into an intermediate space for a while. I could bike in the middle of the road, right through the downtown core. The epicentre of finance looming over me, sometimes lights on. Lights on but nobody's home. Discarded ant hills.

Until I was five, I lived in an apartment with a doorway to my own space between spaces. My friends and I nicknamed it "the dead hall". The building was made of stacked two-story units. Every second floor had a locked metal door at the top of the stairs. On the other side, a hallway stripped bare. Concrete floor, uniform beige walls thickly coated in cheap oil paint. Burnt out bulbs in stucco ceilings.



Exit signs over stairwells cast red oval islands between stretches of dark.

At 48 I filmed the deadhall. It's still there. With spherical vision, like a dragonfly, 360-degree cameras make it easy to capture everything. Instead of pointing the lens, you just hold up the camera since there's nothing it isn't pointed at. Later, you can frame a portion of the sphere, deciding what to focus on, when, and for how long. Tracking the shot after the fact produces an ultrasmooth viewing experience. My steps and bobbing are corrected by an internal gyroscope. Like a drone, the visuals glide along flawless. It's so smooth that when the camera swivels to change direction, it's startling. The only other time I've seen this is in a first-person shooter videogame. It converts reality into a contest of stalking and being stalked.

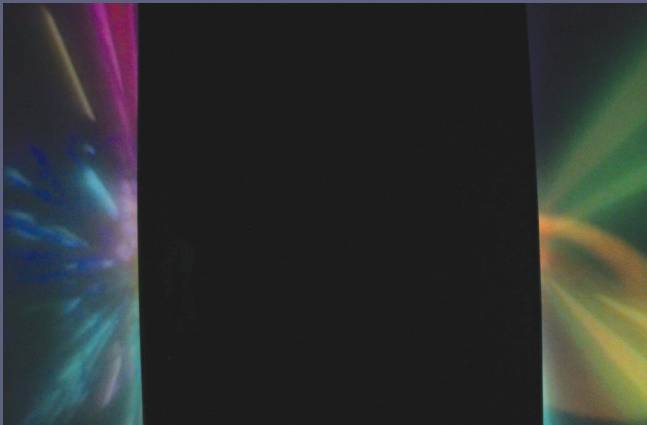
First-person shooters were popular in the early 90s. They started out solitary, software installed locally, perfect for loners. Shortly after they moved to LAN, which stands for local area network, a cluster of computers connected in a room. A handful of outcasts cohabiting a fantasy space, hidden behind their individual screens.



The 90s feel like the incubator for mass school shootings. “Correlation is not causation” but there were a lot of loners stalking hallways on their desktops. I was 25 when Columbine happened, two years after I graduated from art college. But a decade before, in high school, I wore a black trench coat inspired by Christian Slater in *Heathers*. So did other loners. It wasn’t planned, yet we all adopted it like a uniform.

I spent every lunch hour with the same small group, sitting in the mall food court in our black trench coats. We fantasized and said adolescent things to shock each other. Maybe to shock ourselves too. Testing our limits of bad taste. How many jocks could you kill before they reach the exit? What kind of weapon would you use? Would you risk capture or take your life? When I recollect, it feels like it all happened in the same year, but those ideas came long before Columbine. The film provided the wardrobe and tone in 1988. Our homicidal day dreaming was in 1991. The actual high school shooting didn’t occur for another eight years.

First-person perspective was something Gasper Noé used in his film *Enter the Void*. I loved the way he included the eyes blinking. You’re in your head in the dark theatre, and



the theatre itself is in the head of the character on the screen. I'm told some people would uncontrollably blink when the screen flicked into darkness as simulated eyelids closed over the projection. Another portion of the film follows the character from behind. A *Grand Theft Auto* style third-person view.

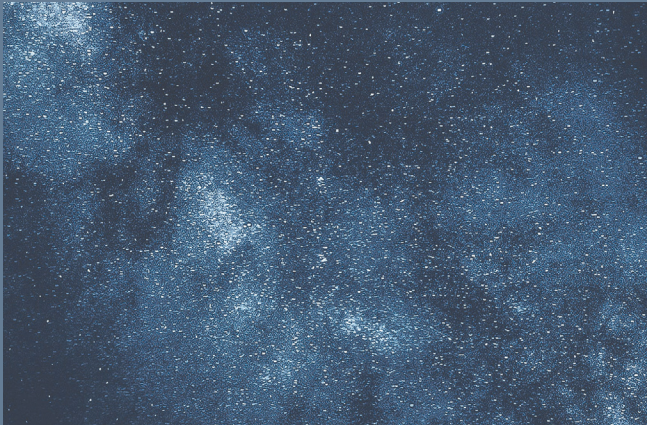
Gasper Noé's *Enter the Void* completes a trinity of films for me. All three attempt to describe the indescribable. *Enter the Void* drops us into a simulated DMT hallucination and then shoves the consciousness we're borrowing into the afterlife. *Altered States* shows us endless regression, reversing evolution back to a primordial shrieking atomic soup. In *2001*, an astronaut's mind struggles and bends under a wave of telepathic alien data—spectacular blasts of structured but indecipherable patterns. These films test the limits of visual articulation. They're exercises in cinematic cosmic horror.

H.P. Lovecraft, the pioneer of cosmic horror, described it as, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."



Black holes feel like a cosmic horror. We know they're super massive, but so dense they bend spacetime like a bowling ball falling on a mattress. You may have heard of an event horizon. This is a point of no return that makes the person falling in seem to freeze before vanishing, while the person falling sees the universe accelerate. Followed by an extreme fisheye bend which would begin displaying the view behind them, in front of them. I've read that any attempt to accelerate away at this point would be useless and would actually increase the speed of approaching the centre. I'm reminded of quicksand. A substance I learned about entirely from horror movies and novels. In quicksand, as in black holes, struggling only draws you in quicker. We know black holes are black because the light going in can't come out, but all around us, the universe's periphery is undergoing a similar effect.

Our universe is expanding because space is expanding. Everything is moving apart because everything between everything is scaling up faster and faster. As things accelerate and expand, the light from those things can't reach us. Imagine a clear night sky crowded with stars, steadily fading to black. By midday, our blue sky with sparse clouds begins to darken. First the blue inks out. Then the clouds are swallowed like boats sinking in a smooth lake. A veil



of Vantablack, vast as the stratosphere. In the distance, the city centre, the collapsing edges envelop banks, condos, townhouses. In every direction you're at the centre of a shrinking nothing. Your patch of reality continues to dip into the void at its edges, forever. Maybe you're standing with a friend. They see it too. You stand closer, bracing as the telephone poles across the street black out. It crosses to the parked cars. The universe is a small circle of concrete you and your friend stand on. It tightens, they vanish. Your eyes are the centre. Your friend is seeing the same from their own centre perspective. Your legs, torso, head and, finally, eyes are swallowed. Everyone, relatively speaking, sees themselves from the centre of the universe.

After first-person came third-person games. They weren't always shooters. Sometimes they were playful platform explorations. First-person is a frantic pan and scan because the field of vision is too narrow. You're anxiously swivelling to check your blind spot. In third-person, your avatar is a body navigating a scene. You see your character whole, inhabiting a world. As you guide their movements, the landscape gently adjusts, rotating. They, and by proxy you, are the axle of the wheel, the centre of a universe.



The artist Mark Bland recreated this as a wearable device titled *The Self-Viewing Backpack* (2005). You put on a visor and a lightweight harness. A suspended camera juts out, behind and above you. You see yourself, the back of your head, from the outside. You can feel your body and the ground, but they're unreal. Your sense of self is replaced by a marionette, controlled by your thoughts, remotely.

Where is “I” located? In Roman Polanski's *The Tenant*, Trelkovsky says “If you cut off my head, what would I say... Me and my head, or me and my body? What right has my head to call itself me?” When you're observing yourself from behind, your thoughts are relocated. The centre of self feels disembodied. You can feel you're being watched, but it's your own gaze. Unlike a mirror, the back of your head offers no social cues for your primate brain. When I'm forced to think from outside of myself, I realize my mind isn't restricted. Even after returning to regular vision, the dislocation persists.

I prefer this kind of art, which I'll call “augmented perspective”. I hesitate to call it “augmented reality” because most AR art places props in the world and forces us to view them through a phone screen. Both of these qualities are less appealing to me. The first because they're intangible



fantasies, and the second because it's a disappointingly limited interface. In *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie wrote about a romantic courtship taking place through a seven-inch hole in a sheet. The majority of AR art feels like a Kinder Surprise viewed through a six-inch mail slot.

My ideal AP art would be 1:1 scale with reality—extend my awareness of the actual surroundings. The world is so overlooked and expansive, I don't need a substitute. Show me what I missed instead of distracting me with disposable simulation. Bland did this with space. I'm trying to do this with time. Augmented perspective doesn't clutter reality, it examines it.

Time is hard to feel as it happens. We know it's there, but we don't witness erosion at a speed that registers. I can't watch my nails grow. Even time lapse film, while extending my awareness, is restricted to the screen, boxed in and flat.

With a 3D camera, I try to capture time as it exhales on a room of organic material. On a dark dining table, I set up an elaborate bouquet of flowers, colourful and sprawling like a dutch vanitas. Straddling both sides of the bouquet are wax candles. In front of the flower urn, a platter of fruit. Front and centre of it all, a pocket watch. I film day



and night. Translucent walls of white plastic tarp catch the daylight and give off a diffuse chalky glow. The sun sets and, at the first instance of total darkness, I change the camera's white balance and light the candles. They burn through the night, and I sleep in two-hour increments to make sure I don't wake up to a burning apartment. After ten days, I have a record of a wilting, melting, still life.

The camera is the size and shape of a five-pin bowling ball. It sits at the head of the table, at human height. It sees in all directions at once and sees all of it with depth. Because of this, viewed through a headset, the recording is an overlay, like wearing a snorkel mask to view the room. Everything is to scale with reality, but slightly hazy. Like the phrase "through a glass darkly" as written by the Apostle Paul, when he explained that we don't yet see clearly, but eventually will, at the end of time.

The recording begins to play, but in reverse. Drippings and pools gather, defying gravity to form straight sturdy candles. Bruise-flecked yellow skin clears, firms, turns green. The watch hands blur, racing counterclockwise to track the tempo as wilted petals plump, soften, and close like satellite dishes. It's all happening everywhere. I can look around and see the tarp walls flutter. The table is close, reaching,



I touch the edge with my fingers. My hand is invisible, but the surface is firm, exactly where I expect to feel it. Time feels tactile at that moment. The video ends on the fresh scene of ten days earlier. Taking off the headset, the room is reset to the present. Everywhere the signs of decay are pronounced. I consider my hands, my face.



## BODY WITHOUT A SOUL

Even when an android face is lifelike, the eyes are empty. The rubbery gap between cartoon and flesh is an uncanny valley. Growing up, I was afraid of dolls though I couldn't articulate why. When I was four or five, my parents surprised me with a life size doll that was the same height as me, free standing and meeting my gaze. They even dressed it in a similar outfit to one of mine. I had nightmares, dolls conspiring, crowding in on me, plastic fingers grabbing at my neck and armpits. A mixture of forced laughter and terror. Tickling violence and paralysis.

A doctor friend explained that humans are wired to reject uncanny valleys. We see a corpse and an impulse in us drives us away. When I was once again visiting Akihabara in Tokyo, I saw a product promo for improved flesh. A woman politely extended her hand and invited me to pet a cube of skin she held in her palm. At just half an inch square, it was smooth, firm, and supple. Incredibly real, but disembodied. Just a patch, like a skin graft ready for transplant. Without the eyes, it was unthreatening.

Simulations advance so quickly that every preceding model appears an obvious fake. By 2022 standards, achievements



like the film *Avatar* look like Playstation games. Alongside visual realism, the articulation of androids has improved. The first encounter I had with an advanced android was ASIMO. I was in Tokyo again, at the science museum and ASIMO was making an appearance. It moved like a child in a space-suit complete with a tinted astronaut helmet. I thought this was a clever solution to avoid the dead eyes problem. ASIMO could bartend, play soccer, and dance. It was hard not to anthropomorphize. A recent google search reveals the popular question “Is ASIMO still alive?”

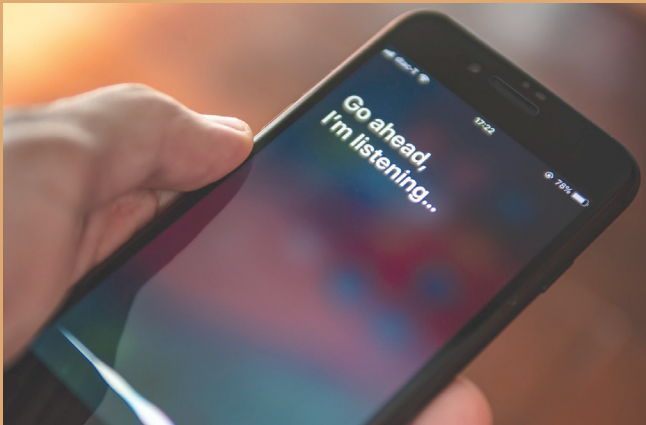
When I saw footage of Spot, the Boston Dynamics android dog, I fell back into the uncanny valley. It wasn't just life-like, it was resilient, relentless, and, even without a face, made me nervous. Two years after Honda's child-sized entertainer, Spot was a rugged, industrial droid. This was *E.T.* versus *Terminator*. Spot's applications include remote inspection of hazardous environments, rescue, and logistics operations. Boston Dynamics have been careful to note, “our robots are not made specifically for any particular government or military purpose.” I'm reminded of the axiom “have technology, must use.” I especially like the language on their homepage: “Safer, more efficient and more predictable operations.”



“Chess robot grabs and breaks finger of seven-year-old opponent”, reads a headline in The Guardian UK. While the software designed for playing the game is extremely sophisticated, the detection of and reaction to tiny hands is not. We are assured by Sergey Smagin, vice president of the Russian Chess Federation, that this is a case of human error. The child moved too quickly; he should have anticipated the robot’s need for time.

Machines are not tools. We use tools, machines use us. A child can swing a hammer intuitively, but in a forklift, a human must learn the controls and accommodate the machine. This recalls simulations we shape that, in turn, shape us. I see androids as a bridge between the ethereal and the tactile, simulations with mass and force.

Feminized voice assistants (Alexa, Siri) are less threatening by design. Faceless, legless, they straddle presence and absence. Always at the ready, attentive and listening, but, until called for, they blend in like a potted plant. UX designers measure success with terms like empathy and seamlessness. Human bias, seeded in the development teams, results in gendered cliché translations like motherly, subservient. They’re getting better though. Assistants have started factoring the context of our questions before they



respond. For example, if I have to deliver bad news, it's instinctive to adopt a sympathetic tone. Voice assistants need to know if an answer, though correctly retrieved, would be bad news or good. "Siri, is the Queen dead?" "I'm so sorry, Charles, I'm afraid so." "Alexa, is Jeff Bezos alive?" "I'm so sorry Elon, I'm afraid so."

Rohit Prasad, senior vice president and head scientist for Alexa, wants to take empathy and affect further. "These attributes have become even more important during the ongoing pandemic when so many of us have lost ones that we love," Prasad said. "While AI can't eliminate that pain of loss, it can definitely make their memories last." And then Prasad unveiled a solution ghoulishly out of touch with humanity. In a demonstration video, a young child asks "Alexa, can Grandma finish reading me the Wizard of Oz?" The synthetic voice consents, and the surprisingly warm, naturalized, voice of an elderly, presumably dead, woman takes over. Amazon's team boasts they can summon the voice of a corpse (or anyone living), with only a single minute of recorded source. I can imagine why someone grieving might want to hear a familiar voice again, but it seems like a psychological health hazard. The realism of this substitute is like taxidermy. Lifelike enough to suspend disbelief or perpetually postpone recovery.



When someone close to me dies I keep a memento, but it's abstract. Significant to me, yet coded. I store all the keepsakes in a picnic basket under my dresser. A collapsible shrine. With only one exception, I refrain from photos. No video, no audio. A nickel wrapped in red paper, a folded obituary notice, a ribbon clipping, a pressed slip of a fortune, another silver coin wrapped and marked, an oval locket, a tooth, and (the exception) a faded double-exposed 35mm portrait. None of it can stand in for the absence. There's no attempt to try. My route to grief is irreversible, straight and steady. In, through, and, most of the time, out.

Ancient Egyptian funerary art isn't abstract or conceptual. It's practical, functional soul storage. The style developed displays bodies in the most recognizable way so the dead can enter and take refuge. An elaborate bird house for the Ka or spirit double. The face and feet, displayed sideways, were believed to be the most recognizable angle. Tens of thousands of paintings and sculptures, crafted mystical tech, and none of it signed. The effort to preserve a pharaoh without credit, the artist's method of enduring.

My friend Shauna is pregnant, and I've asked her and her husband, Anil, for a favour... A commitment to a long-term project. Life long. I want to document an entire



lifespan from start to finish, so I've asked to 3D scan baby x. This would be a scan detailed enough for 3D printing a figurine. Photos from all angles would capture the textures and colours. Every year, baby x will be scanned. With each year, growth, maturing features, clothing and subsequently fashion, will be captured. Improvements in scanning technology will likely be noticeable over time. If x loses a finger, the figurine will too.

We don't see people in four dimensions. We can't see the totality. When you commit to a lifelong portrait, you weigh the odds against your muse reaching the end of their story intact. Miniature replicas of x, displayed in a neat row. The length of a life in the length of a space.

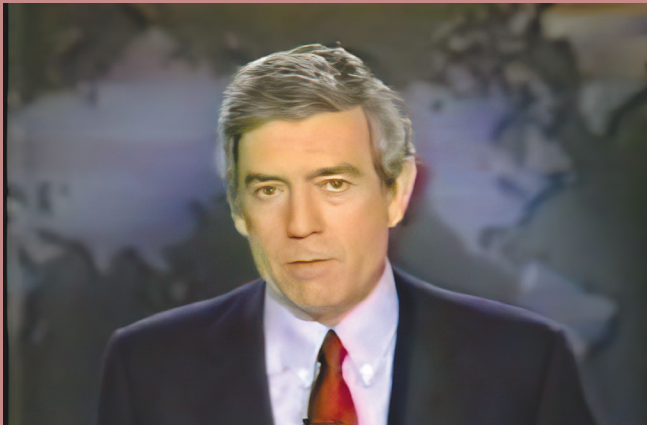


## SECOND SIGHT

Recordings work best when they're vicarious, offering sight and sound of what we can't do. It's the only reason I've been excited about Virtual Reality. To see what it looks like to stand on a launch pad while rocket engines flare and shower the air with sparks. Death is something Buddhists visualize and contemplate. I'd like to visualize death from a first-person perspective. Falling, drowning, burning, crushing. It feels more important to me than VR surfing or skydiving. Maybe this thought is influenced, like most of my thoughts, by movies.

In *Strange Days*, an advanced reality recording device is worn and captures everything experienced. People can play back other people's moments. A person in a wheelchair can run on the beach, an elderly woman can have sex in the body of a youthful man. But the plot twist is the device records fatal accidents too. Immersive snuff recordings are called a Blackjack. This idea of vicarious video captivated me. A Blackjack is a chance to live death, from a safe distance.

I spent a long time obsessed with the lucid dreaming phenomenon. This is a technique for regaining wakeful awareness while sustaining a dream. At first, I found it



hard to focus, but with practice I could conjure fantasies. These began as absurd, childish impulses, then more sexual, and then finality—my own death. I constructed situations, buildings to fall from, trains to stand in front of, even a failed bank robbery ending with a gunshot to the head. Screen tropes borrowed by my semi-conscious sleep.

In dreams, both the day and night variety, the limits of imagination are defined by the media models, the mirrors that reflect us. These reflections stand in for reality and for our own faces. Our eyes can't look at themselves. Where the camera goes, the mind follows.

Children have an instinct for presentation. They gesture and move freely until the recording starts. Then, the action is restricted. Invisible boundaries in the air frame and box them in. They look at the camera and address a future audience, cognizant of a fourth dimension, an abstraction they may not articulate but seem aware of. When untrained adolescents or adults are in front of a camera, they imitate the programming they've seen before. Stand straight, voice of authority, news anchor impressions.

My awareness is entrenched in North America, a region with capture and control roots. I've always heard terms



like capture and control used to describe the technical acts of record and stabilize. In this region, the presenter has permanence, the subject is constantly replaced. This predator and prey duality feels inherent in the medium, difficult to avoid.

Even when the subject is ourselves, it's refined and reframed. The selfie is performance. A filtered face in an idealized setting with real life cropped out. Walking through the woods recently, I took a path by the pond. There were influencers mingled with tourists evenly spaced apart. Gaps dictated by the frame of their phone screen. Looking at themselves, primping and preening, obstructing the view. Aside from the influencers, the tourists viewed the trees, but only on screen. A cold efficient process of aim, shoot, move on. It reminded me of parents filming their baby's first steps, eyes fixed to the screen, missing the whole reality of the moment so they could look at a recording of it later instead. Like going to Niagara Falls to collect a postcard.

I know there must be exceptions to all this: People doing things differently, seeing things directly, living outside the capture-control culture. I just don't know how.



I saw something different once in Mexico. There was a space, like a monastery, that had been repurposed as an art gallery. They organized an exhibit similar to public tv in the 80s. It reminded me of the cable access shows I had grown up with. Just like cable 10 in my childhood, this was an experiment inviting people from around Oaxaca to use video camcorders. They were given some instruction and then told to record whatever they wanted. The results were displayed on televisions and mid-size wall projections throughout the gallery. Plaster and stone alcoves were lit with screens. In place of madonnas and candles, these personal video keepsakes felt almost sacred. There were films of rituals, family gatherings, cooking, working, and various kinds of entertaining. Candid sharing without any added dramatic angles or filters. No attempt to play the role of reporter. I didn't feel a separation between the observer and observed. No wooden performances from the people on camera. Possibly because they weren't trying to be something other than themselves. When I saw it, I wanted to give a camera to anyone who wasn't a media maker. To see what I was missing. I want to see the display without distortion, without the need for it to be pinned and mounted like a butterfly.

cover  
*Orpheus*, Jean Cocteau, 1950

inside cover  
*Orpheus*, Jean Cocteau, 1950

pg 2  
*TV Buddha*, Nam June Paik, 1974

pg 6 bottom  
*Scream*, Tasman Richardson, 2014

pg 8 top  
*Orpheus*, Jean Cocteau, 1950

pg 8 bottom  
*Nine Jackies*, Andy Warhol, 1964

pg 10 top  
*Architecture of Doom*, Tasman Richardson, 2001

pg 10 bottom  
revealing television technology, Germany, 1935

pg 12 top  
NASA mission control during apollo 13

pg 12 bottom  
*The Life of Death*, Tasman Richardson, 2010

pg 16 top  
*Wasteland*, paper collage, Tasman Richardson, 2015

pg 16 bottom  
*Omega Generation*, digital collage, Tasman Richardson, 2010

pg 18 top  
the Kardashians

pg 18 bottom  
*L.H.O.O.Q.*, Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy 1919

pg 14 top  
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