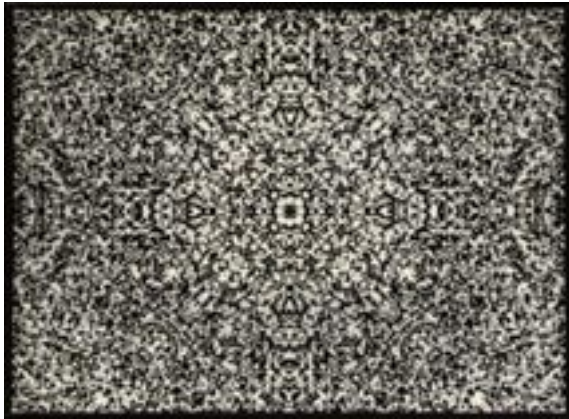


thinking filming thinking filming



there are two forms of creative practice

a) formal perfection which poses itself as the negation of the contradictory nature of the human world

b) formal contradiction which articulates the contradictions of the human world.

Very rarely something attempts both. This is the case with Renoir's *La Règle du jeu*, which

is formally perfect but which, to invert Coleridge's definition, also contains in itself the reason which it should be otherwise rather than so. The *tuché* or blind spot articulating these modes is the shot of the frog croaking in a ditch just before the climactic murder. Like the deliberate inclusion of imperfections in the arabesques adorning certain mosques, this *tuché* is an admission that perfection belongs to an order other than the human - in Renoir's case, to the order of nature, as among the mosque builders to the order of God. But Renoir's *tuché* is only the formal articulation of an imperfection which runs throughout the film. This imperfection is the result of the attempt to give a realist account of an unreal condition: the class structure of the *château*.

Other works aim for perfection in other ways. Paik's *Zen for Film*, for example, asserts the claims of absolute symmetry as a kind of mathematical account of a super- or supra-human perfection, or perhaps an infra-human perfection which is attainable as a conceptual leap. The sole flaw in Paik's design is the duration of the film, which can only be arbitrary, until, that is, as Cage noted, the film begins to demonstrate its age by the scratches and flecks of dust that began to mark its emulsion over the years. At this stage, the film began to take on a necessary temporal dimension, but one

which nonetheless indicates the arbitrary nature of time's evidence of its passing. The truth of Paik's film reveals itself only in its persistence. Without content, it nonetheless accrues materiality as the evidence of its existence in the world. In this instance, too, we find the articulation of the two modes of creativity - the art object as exception and the art object as witness. That the latter, the work of witnessing, was in some sense a chance event is indicative not only of an aesthetic which opened itself up to the contingencies of a temporal existence, but of a change in the nature of being in the world. To us who have lived it, the phenomenality of the lifeworld has been, for the last fifty years or so, a series of accidents, in both the ordinary sense of random occurrences, and the philosophical sense of material events giving no clue as to the substance to which an earlier epoch believed that all accidents referred.

A rather different materiality and accident emerges in Chris Welsby's landscape films, which share with the works of several other filmmakers the use of arbitrary movement of the camera to gather images whose indexical relation to their sources is devalued while their formal properties are asserted. The arbitrary is here not a method for the revelation of inner life (as for example in the splash and drip paintings of Jackson Pollock) but rather a use of contingency to indicate the intricate relationship between the filmmaker and the matter of his films. In this instance, the formality disguises the grounding difficulty on which the films are premised, that is, the difference between the subject (maker or viewer) of the film, and its object, the landscape. In Welsby's work, this relation is not contradictory, though it is painful, even conflicted. The films are acts of submission to the givenness of the division between observer and observed, and so are able to claim their formal perfection at the price of abandoning the political nature of the relations between *physis*, *techné* and *polis*.

A word of explanation. These Greek terms appear as a gesture towards defamiliarising the orders into which we Europeans tend to distinguish the

worldliness of the world. *Physis*, the green world, the physical universe as well as the biological; *techné* the craft and art of machines, which, adapting Marx, I take to be the embodiment of what, in traditional societies, stands as tradition – dead labour, the presence of the ancestors in the contemporary moment; *polis* the human world, but emphasising what thinkers from Aristotle to Lévi-Strauss have asserted, that there is no human thing that is not also always already social. For a media scholar, indeed, the temptation is to replace the word ‘social’ with the word ‘mediated’, indicating this same materialist shift, save only that the distinction between *polis*, *physis* and *techné* makes sense only as a practice of seizing, from the flux of mediation, some moments that have, historically, come to occupy relatively stable and comprehensible naming rights over moments of what I take to be the universal process of communication.

That such communication does not, however, happen, is a matter of historical observation. We ascribe to our ancestors a mode of being in which tool and technique, physical laws and biological properties, language and signification were indistinguishable. In processes that escape our knowledge and certainly the parameters of this presentation, that wholeness was divided, contained, delayed, detoured. In Welsby’s films, the promise of sheer perceptual unity with the world and the actual impossibility of its realisation occur together, but in a mode in which the formal statement of the problem achieves such exquisite actualisation that the internal contradictions of which it is the expression are overcome in a moment of sheer expertise. To reverse Charles Harrison’s judgement on Ernst, he gets his art right and his history wrong.

There is another order of formal perfection that has become available in the synthetic imaging that emerged with Jordan Belson, Stan van der Beek and the Whitneys, and which we see frequently among our students, a “cinema of synthesis”, as the French would say, a *cinéma de synthèse*, a mathematical art, like Paik frequently anchored in symmetry, often referring to significantly elegant theses of contemporary mathematics such as emergence, attractors and recursivity. Some of William Latham’s videos of his virtual sculptures fall into this domain.

Perfection is then an attainable goal. It is by its nature formal, because perfection is always a question of form, even when, as in the phrase “a perfect description”, it seems to be about the tenor rather than the vehicle. In that case, the perfection resides exclusively in the isomorphism between the description and the described, a formal relation, like that of Dürer’s *Large Turf*. Formally perfect descriptions of the world, however, immediately take on a formally imperfect nature when the phenomena they describe occupy a different temporal dimension to the medium employed in describing them: here Dürer’s pen and watercolour on paper outlast by centuries the tranche of the world which once existed to be described, so that our assessment of its perfection is resolvable only as a description of a type, rather than the specific instance of the type, this clump of grass. Dürer’s (and Welsby’s to this extent) formal perfections rest then on a kind of innocence. I think here of Adorno’s comment early in the *Negative Dialectics*:

The matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with tradition, expressed his disinterest. They are nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity – things which ever since Plato used to be dismissed as transitory and insignificant . . . A matter of urgency to the concept would be what it fails to cover, what its abstractionist mechanism eliminates, what is not already a case of the concept (Adorno 1973: 8)

Such is the challenge to representation, and answered in some respect by a turn away from the nonconceptual towards the purely conceptual, that is the synthetic, in the sense of the French phrase: the mathematical real-



ity which supervenes under, beyond, through and very occasionally within the perception of the real. The mathematics of perfection become visible in works which challenge the presumptive clarity of representation (in which is disguised the subsumption of the perceived under the rule of the concept), notably in many structural materialist films and a certain number of films influenced by them. Kurt Kren's *48 Heads from the Szondi Test* and Chris Garrett's *Romantic Italy* both employ found materials cut to rhythms applied from without, whose lack of congruence with the ostensible subject matter of the footage is no longer a formal contradiction, nor a 'cut-up' of the Brion Gyson variety designed to deconstruct in order to reveal hidden truths. Rather the banality of the footage simply underwrites the fascination of the rhythms to which they are subjected. To describe this as 'violence' done to the world would be absurd, and not only because the source footage is not the world or even a world. Rather the editing rhythms act like Pythagorean number magic to apply a theory of perfection to the elements composing the physical universe – in this case, found frames – in order to demonstrate the distance between perfection and the given.

Given the time of its provenance, it's unsurprising that video art seemed at one time a privileged space for postmodernism. In the work of Pipilotti Rist for example, it seemed to permit ironically schizophrenic pastiches in



a timeless, history-free and unreal space populated by the cast-off skins of indifferently high and low cultural icons. At its best, works of the 1980s like Bill Viola's *I Do Not Know What It Is That I Am Like* abandoned a putatively 'modernist' aesthetic of negation by perfection in favour of inhabiting a contradictory world of spiritual yearning and resiliently material presence,

in such a way that the very fact of longing for a disembodied beyond gave the embodiment of the camera and microphone a special and vibrant

presence that Heidegger might have approved.

At the same time, the leap into electronic media promoted a dalliance with information and systems theory which would not reach fruition for another decade, when digital tools became affordable and widespread among the creative community. At this juncture, which I am going to indicate through the work of Gina Czarnecki, questions of formal perfection and worldly contradiction become so fundamental to the means of expression that something wonderful happened.



The something wonderful had happened before. In Peter Osborne's analysis, when philosophy took its turn to language at the beginning of the 20th century, art took on many of the tasks abandoned by philosophy, notably the work of phenomenology, epistemology and ontology. In the dying years of the century, and more so since its demise, art too has turned, this time towards a neo-conceptual analysis of its own borders and conditions of existence. The tasks of analysing and still more of synthesising what it means to occupy the human position in the world has passed to media.

Out of sheer politeness and recognition of the financial centrality of its institutions, I continue to use the word 'art', or the phrase 'media art', but what has been announced all too often has come to pass. If by art we mean the pursuit and communication of what is most thoroughly human, then art is dead. Either it ekes out a popular afterlife parasitising the practices on its borders – popular culture, political activism, technological innovation. Or it has honed its concerns to the fine point of a metaphysical scalpel to examine its own entrails and in them the entrails of the commodity form, modernity, the self and whatever else characterises the inner life of the 21st century. Whatever judgement we care to make of it, contemporary art – by which I

mean the biennial art, the stuff of *Parkett* – can no longer address the material conditions of life because of the degrees of abstraction and specialisation it has attained. Nor can it in any honesty pursue beauty, either in form or as emotional or sensuous articulation of the sensation of being alive.

The fact that media – these disprised tools – should have taken up such an elite role shouldn't be a surprise. In their way, they have occupied the position of earlier claimants to the task when, as popular environments for remembering, fantasising and utopianism, they proliferated technologies and techniques for increasingly sophisticated and complex messages. At the same time, the pitch of Hollywood films to teenagers has led to increasingly bizarre movements: of arthouse psychodramas like *Angels in America* to television; of audiences in their twenties and thirties to video games and to the Cantonese action cinema, while, in the absence of scholarly interest, music video has flourished at the hands of artists like Chris Cunningham. The loss of the band members as obligatory components of music video in electronica has likewise produced the kind of mutual interruptions of commercial and fine art in moving image media that onedotzero have been pursuing for the last five years.

This undoubtedly brings us to a kind of crunch point. For Adorno, the defining instance of art (as opposed to 'discursive' thinking, the thought of philosopher and social theorists for example) was the necessity art experiences of passing through the focus of the subject on the road to expression. That subjectivity is socially constructed is in this instance the necessary means by which the social enters into the artwork, as the fingerprints of a unique biography which alone guarantees its autonomy. In cases where the artist submits to an external directive, as was the case with Stalinist artists like Gorky, the result was not an escape from subjection but submission to heteronomy on behalf of a work which could no longer claim to be art because it no longer owned its own freedom. The case of commercial art is just as clear in Adorno's aesthetic. There is no autonomy because the self is either not in play or is subordinated to an extrinsic function. The question is whether similarly extrinsic functions operate when work is undertaken under the heading of a programme – manifesto or working method – aimed at overcoming the centrality of the self. Such is, it can easily be argued, the case when artists of

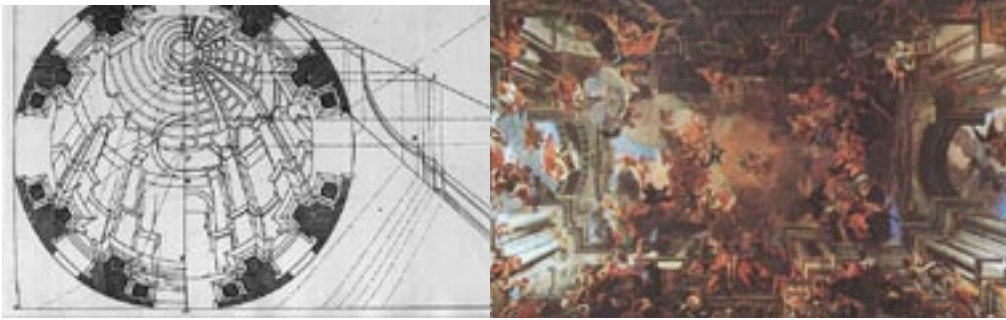
the eras immediately after Adorno's immense work on aesthetics began to explore fundamental research in methods that would allow the art to work autonomously of its human agents, artists like Lewitt at one extreme, or Sherrie Levine at another.



The aesthetics of perfection and contradiction were confounded historically by the invention in the 17th century of inner life. Prior to Descartes' *dark night of the soul*, the prospect of an inner life had scarcely opened at all – just perhaps in the bizarre spectacle of silent reading noted by St Augustine, but even then as an articulation of some other tongue in one's own inner ear.

As the Cartesian revolution spread through the imperial bourgeoisie of the 18th century, so the inner life became the absolute token of belonging to the emergent class. A mark of election to the chosen, it was doomed to democratisation in the industrial revolution, when it was simultaneously devalued and universalised, from the Romantic poets to the mass manufacture of fantasies. At the same time, as Merleau-Ponty pointed out half a century ago, 'There is no way of living with others which takes away the burden of being myself, which allows me not to have an opinion; there is no "inner life" which is not a first attempt to relate to another person. In this ambiguous position . . . we can never know complete rest' (*The World of Perception*, 85). Subjectivity is an imposition, but it is one that we can neither wish away nor establish as foundational.

The Cartesian cogito has been traced into the labyrinth of optical illusion, in part through the cogito itself, in part through Descartes' other great contribution to Western thought, the coordinate system. In Panofsky's groundbreaking work, perspective rests upon vanishing points, one inside the picture space, one in the monocular vision of a perfected optical receiver. The entry of this perspectival system into film theory through the work of *Cahiers du Cinéma* is well known, as is its introduction to the Anglo-Saxon Screen theorists by Stephen Heath, and its brief flowering as a core problematic, articulating the critique of ideology as interpellation and subjectivity as



subjection.

The perennial return to Bazin which marks film theory, however, offers another interpretation. Bazin of course commends deep focus, not because it centres, but for quite the opposite reason: because it offers the viewer's gaze the freedom to rove over the spaces of the image. The father of phenomenological film criticism (albeit in a Catholic Existentialist mode), Bazin's implicit defense of perspective as a mode of freedom is hugely suggestive, in the sense that it too, like apparatus theory, is hugely generative of new film ideas. Deep focus and the long take then offer themselves as media for the re-establishment of a freedom which Panofsky's apparatus-theory followers has pronounced lost. Somewhere in this conflict lies a question concerning freedom, and specifically the modality of a freedom as conflict between the necessity of subjection and the equally inevitable outward reach and reference of the constituted subject. This is one of the contradictions so richly explored in the work of Godard, especially since the end of the Dziga-Vertov Group period. To explore it fully, however, we need to trace a further turn in the development of late 20th century aesthetics, the emergence of a new critique of the object, stepping beyond Adorno's anti-Hegelian stance, brought about by the concatenation of new imaging technologies and new conceptualisations.

Digital production of illusory space differs in one core aspect from either painterly or filmic production, both of them operating on the metaphor of the frame of a window which allows us to peer into an alternate space (Friedberg, forthcoming). Digital three-dimensional objects have an actuality other than the view we have of them. In the production process, the 3D

object exists as a phenomenon in the computer's programming. Almost all true 3D objects are produced using object-oriented programming, in which a cluster of code is treated as a single object on which operations can be undertaken. Thus the code for a sphere produces a sphere as a mathematical object, on which subsequent transformations can then be undertaken, without having to re-analyse the sphere into "prior" elements such as pixels, as happens in bitmap imaging and in other modes of programming.

The result is that the sphere has an existence of a sort, an existence which is discrete and definite, although of course only realised as code and performed on a computer. One manifestation of the sphere, but only one, is a still image of it taken from a specific vantage. Unlike paintings then, the 3D object is independent of the view taken of it. I would argue that the same is true in a slightly different register of the distinction between 3D digital graphics and photographs. Imperfect description, in the terms we applied to Dürer's realism, a photo has to be taken from a specific viewpoint, and the objects it records are independent of the view. They change, dissolve, die, erode, fall into the sea . . . Likewise, a 3D digital object persists as a data file until its medium corrodes. Yet the mathematics of which it is an expression is indefinitely replicable, and in that sense independent of the view. In this case, not only is the object independent of the view, but the view attains its autonomy from the object, to which it no longer has the responsibility of being sole witness. and thence the burden of subordinating itself to the service of a memory which it can neither seize nor release. The impermanence of the world stands over against the replicability of the digital object, which does not suffer from unicity or continuity in either space or time. No cinematographer may take an indefinite number of views of a single event in a single moment in time, but a digital creator can make as many images of an object as she has minutes in her life. Unlike the world, the object stands unchanging or repeatable, providing the digital artist with a certain irresponsibility which the world can never provide. The lack of commitment to the object (the 'content' in an older descriptive terminology) opens up the grounds for a new mode of responsibility: to the interlocutor whose imagined or real form lies on the further side of the image-making process, or even within it as co-maker of the work, interactor, prosumer, producer, player.

This independence of the view leads me to a thought about technical aspects of film and filming which develop rather than simply deny the achievement of apparatus theory. For apparatus theory, the problem of perspective was the vanishing. In the perspective relationship, the viewer has to stand at the vanishing point of the image, a position at which the illusion either works or fails. If it fails, no-one is anyway the wiser or the worse. If it succeeds, however, the viewer is subjected. This subjection, I want to argue, is anchored in the responsibility for maintaining the illusion. Apparatus theory only asserts the subjection, but I believe it is in the spirit of its theses to argue that responsibility for maintaining the diegetic universe falls upon the one person who cannot intervene in it, and in so doing strips the viewer of their sense of agency even while it demands that the viewer is the sole and unique vantage point from which the diegesis makes sense. The viewing produces a subject supposed to take responsibility for the illusion, but in so doing, a subject who sacrifices their freedom for what in that action becomes the authority of the image. This is the tragic and unhappy consciousness of the individuated subject of ideology in that bizarrely asocial space, the cinema auditorium.



3D digital objects, however, operate differently. They are indifferent to the existence or otherwise of a viewer. I do not mean therefore that they are magically outside of ideology: clearly they are as readily de-

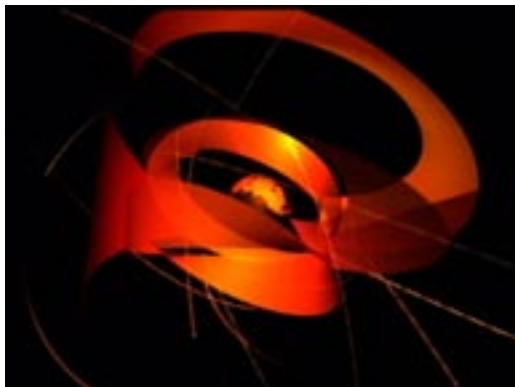
ployed by Disney, Pixar, Dreamworks and the rest as any star image or product placement. Rather, the 3D image is a record of a state of affairs that persists apart from its image, so that the image is no longer the record of an event but of a view. This may be clearer if we consider the work of 3D animators in complex environments. Clearly a digital battlefield isn't made of mud, scrub or open grasslands. Instead, animators apply virtual gravity to some areas of the plane, while at others characters encounter slopes invisible to the observer but effective in forcing them to bend forwards, as if walking into the wind. The particles on which such elements as flame, smoke, clothing, flags and in certain cases distant armies are based can be given complex

characteristics which may include multiple ways of interacting with neighbouring particles, effectively the rules of a local micro-ecology. Digital models can be constructed as 'agents' with fight-or-flight, nurturing, herding and other behaviours built in, and 'emotional' states (calibrated for example as the likelihood of running towards or away from danger) provide them with behaviours which cannot always be foreseen (famously an early iteration of Massive, used to produce the Orc armies of *The Lord of the Rings*, had all the goblins running away from the battle).

3D digital images are then generated in spaces inhabited by multiple, motivated and interacting objects (barring the limit case where we have a single object in space, usually restricted to software demos). Each object has a certain autonomy: they have to be generated discretely or at best in serial production software like Massive. Significantly for the perspectival element of apparatus theory, each object is produced according to an algorithm which defines it from a distinct point of origin. Let me explain. The majority of 3D software runs not on Cartesian coordinates but on polar coordinates, where the mathematical expression of a shape is defined by its angle and distance from a point of origin: the sphere, for example, is expressed as a curved surface occupying space of such a distance from its centre. Clearly digital objects are routinely organised to correspond to the perspectival spaces so richly critiqued by apparatus theory. But no single object is determined by that system of coordinates. Instead, each expresses a relation to a discrete point of origin. In addition, the space into which it is placed not only need not share the same vanishing point; it does not have to have the same coordinate system as any of the objects it differentiates. Dataspace, like real space, is socially constructed, but the agents of this society are not exclusively human, and the terms of construction include altering the rules determining latitude, longitude and gravity among other factors. Critically for today's argument I want to labour the point that perspective is generated within dataspace, not imposed from without, and that it may be generated from multiple centres, not from a single, monocular and to that extent controlling spot.

I want to argue that contemporary film, the act and art of thinking in film, of filming thinking, of thinking about film, of conceptualising film as

a medium of thinking or a thinking entity, is implicated in this distinction. Please note that I avoid the term 'thought' here, because the idea of dead thought seems to me to be anathema to the kind of filmic practice I have in mind. These are not records, documents or archeologies of a thought already concluded: that is the hallmark of the script-driven movie, where the budget drives production on the basis of the script as the blueprint for filming. Script, in short, acts like the quantity surveyor of project-management in the construction industry. What interests me is work that works, in the present tense. I have to say here that the alphanumeric geometries of some structural-materialist films seem to me to function in much the same way: as blueprints orchestrating before the event the kind of event that can occur in film. I understand the desire to escape the prisonhouse of subjectivity and the obligation to expression. I admire and even love many works in this vein, but I want to signal, in another echo of Bazin, that a technique that is fetishised ceases to function. Deep focus is no longer the privileged zone of realism – it is the characteristic of every special effects bonanza, as is the long take. What I believe is most impressive, for me, in the best of the avant garde that uses such prescriptive architectonics, is the contradiction that arises between the planned and the artefactual. Repetition, for example, rarely generates the same thought twice.

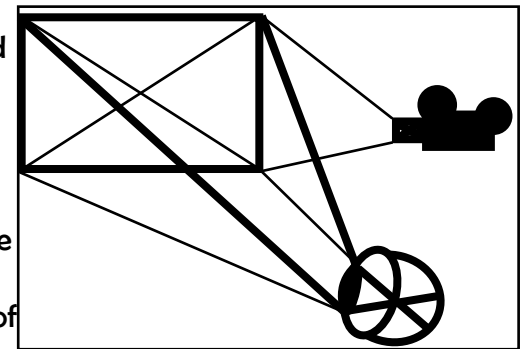


More specifically I am interested today in the generation of space. For much of the formal avant-garde, illusion was the hallmark of an unwanted and unhappy seizure of consciousness by an alien force. But it also to me represents a quizzing of authority, where authority is grounded in the transfer of responsibility for the illusion to the viewer. But why would a viewer allow that loss of

freedom? And why, in so doing, would they take on the task of disavowing the freedom of the object that they view? I find myself unwontedly in agreement with Kierkegaard: freedom's perpetual obverse is anxiety (dread, the fear and trembling). With freedom comes the abyss of choice, and especially

of moral choice, in contemporary society grounded in individual responsibility (for example in legal discourse) but stripped of the foundations on which a moral choice has historically been made. A brief look around proves there is no progress in moral ideas, and that those who assume they know the results of their actions are in general the most disastrous of leaders and the most tyrannical of governors. The vanishing point is indeed an engine of deceit, but quite specifically of the lie that you are responsible (and therefore free) but incapable of acting on a script which unfolds despite you (and therefore without anxiety). Perspective resolves, perhaps only temporarily, the dread we feel over the choices we must make. It is on this basis that it can then act as the vehicle for a moral code which otherwise we might never accept: one of the key functions of ideology. Yet even this encoding is internally contradictory, as when the individualist legal code is overridden, as it is today when moral force overrides legal structures, as superheroes obey the call of right, not of shared, argued, and legislated systems, just as the USA is absolved from the International Court of Human Justice because it answers a higher call than law. The conflict of moral duty and legal obligation does not require a change to the individuating role of perspectival space, but it begins to refract through changes to the techniques of multi-centred and discontinuous spaces produced in digital graphics.

The vanishing point is thus not the only way in which we can understand the significant junctures in the life of a moving image where the picture flips, rays cross, virtual images are produced. Traditionally we linger on the two points in the screen and in the eye. There is of course also the previous virtual image formed in the lens of the projector, film or data, and in film other prior virtual images generated in the camera and the optical printer, all of these moments at which which the image vanishes into itself. I will here however concentrate on those moments which digital imaging shares with analog productions.



To describe these moments as vanishing points seems to me to miss their core value, a value pinpointed in the elaborate analogy I have been drawing with 3D imaging. These points are not moments at which the image vanishes. They are very specifically moments at which the image is generated. These are, in dialectical terms, points of origin, just as much as they are vanishing points.

We have to be guarded in claiming origin, of course. There is no possibility for us claiming the emergence of the utterly unforeseen and utterly unexpected. The world is too old and too crowded, and though the world might once in an epoch throw us a blue moon, the human world is too overdetermined to produce that *deus ex machina* of idealist individualism, true and unmitigated originality. In cinema, not even the most patriotic of national cinema movements demands the use of national cameras, national filmstock and national lenses; the bare pretense at national computer industries has been laughed out of court, even out of France. Origin, as in 'national origin', is then a weak thesis, as weak as the premise that an individual originates a statement in language.

The point of origin in multi-space – a space characterised by multiple points of origin rather than a singular vanishing point, and one characterised by discontinuities between zones – functions in this instance like individuals in a society. No one object is entirely self-generating: each develops on the basis of models, and to that extent performs a script written into their coding. But they also obey scripts written over their base coding as objects, scripts which can transform geometrically any aspect of their appearance. Similarly they are bound to obey zonal and global rules for the digital space, rules such as those for digital 'fog' which approximates the chiaroscuro of human vision. And yet they present themselves to viewers as discrete entities in a world whose rules are not universal, as was the case with monocular perspective. This I take to be the case in Stephanie Maxwell's recent works.

This new mode of presentation (as opposed to representation) has learnt a great deal from anti-realist aesthetics. Humanist in the case of Brakhage's impact on North American practice, the structural-materialist avant garde has also shifted the ground in Europe so that the presentation of space in

depth and of illusionistic spectacle is difficult to carry off as anything other than faux-naïf "philistinism", to borrow John Roberts' term of approbation for the yBa artists, whose video practice in particular I find, with the significant exceptions of Isaac Julien and Tacita Dean, largely in hock to a service ethos of popularising Duchampian neo-conceptualism at the expense of an engagement with the medium or its capacities for communication. At the same time work like Czarnecki's, Ings', Randerson's and Maxwell's share with such examples as the BBC News 24 logo a sense that even where a world has been built in order to be presented, it withholds itself from the single view, the single viewer and the single viewing. The multiplication of space produces its own dialectical challenges.

If I am correct in arguing that a key mechanism of the apparatus of perspective is its deferral of responsibility for the maintenance of illusion from the work to the viewer, and that we are now entering a different stage in the development of perspectival spaces, then what happens to that responsibility? I would like to suggest that in this instance, perhaps uniquely, digital media are more powerfully representational than are the traditional analog media. This comes from a passage of responsibility away from the individual towards the arena, the diegetic world, created for them on screen. Freedom does not return to the viewer however. Instead it is again deferred, but this time to the (apparent) agency of the multiple objects where it is dispersed into an aggregate imaginary ecology of interactions, some of which (as in games and interactive installations) may involve humans, but which all, by the nature of their making, engage the agency, not of the apparatus as a whole, but of its contents. Dispersal is characteristic of digital spaces: dispersal of entities, of spaces, of rules, of responsibilities. Yet this dispersal does not produce a dispersed subject in the sense advocated by, for example, some Deleuzian critics.

The task of the viewer, and thence their mode of subjectification, does indeed alter in this process, but it does not necessarily produce a social or even a schizophrenic subject. The work of viewing is no longer, I have been arguing, that of bearing responsibility, but there remains a responsibility, the responsibility to witness. To some extent, and in distinctive ways and degrees, witnessing is common to such emergent screen media forms as com-

puter games and wireless pxt activities –recall for example the BBC’s invitation to anyone who had captured footage of the July bombings to send it in. I do not want to enter the argument about ubiquitous surveillance here (my belief is that privacy, like the inner life, was a privilege of the privileged classes for a brief period of Western history and need not be mourned). I want instead to argue that they were invited to see on our behalf, to construct from a myriad standpoints the possibility of an event as such. Underlying this is a fear that the unphotographed event is to that extent ahistorical (the contrast between the Twin Towers and the Holocaust is that the former achieved historical power in a matter of hours, whereas the latter can still, however unrighteously, be denied). Our responsibilities then lie first and foremost in the work of witnessing, a fine tuning, and indeed an aestheticisation of Dallas Smythe’s thesis that audiences provide networks with the unpaid labour of their attention as the key element of broadcast (and increasingly networked) economics.

Perfection can thus return to the repertoire of cultural creativity, though it remains moot whether it is proper to refer to this aesthetic activity as ‘art’.

In opening this paper I proposed two practices of aesthetic creation:

- a) formal perfection which poses itself as the negation of the contradictory nature of the human world
- b) formal contradiction which articulates the contradictions of the human world.

In digital presentations I believe it is becoming possible to present the contradictions of the human world as formal perfection. This needless to say articulates with the ideologies of Friedmanite economics, the ‘free’ market and the *Wired* magazine instrumentalisation of emergence as a metaphysics of free enterprise and citizen democracy. It is important not to lose sight of this last, utopian aspect of what otherwise must be seen as a fearful weaponry of triumphant globalisation on the corporate model. This formal perfection occurs in a novel mode, since it does not privilege symmetry, permanence and homeostasis. Instead, it privileges the multiplicity and autonomy of the world from human agency, even as it disestablishes the older perspectival responsibility. Alleviating the renewed viewer from the subjection that made them morally accountable for the illusions imposed on them, now those viewers have a more atomised task: to articulate their understandings and experi-

ences, each distinctive and discrete, with the understandings and experiences of equally distinct and discrete others. The perfection then resides in the code running through these imagined worlds, a perfection which serves Adorno’s criteria of negation of the existing world while at the same time asserting that in back of the phenomenal world are engines of change which propel both the world of news and current affairs and the virtual worlds of digital productions. At the same time, however, the very multiplicity and discontinuity of digital worlds, which removes for example the possibility of foreseeing how they will evolve, even when based on straightforward a-life algorithms, removes the possibility that any one viewer will be able to exhaust a particular experience, either as experience or as meaning.

The possibilities of witnessing as moral act are thus no longer individuated, but socialised. This is a tiny step, but a significant one. Responsibility for observing the whole phenomenon belong not to the individual but to the viewership as a group. It is still true, as Adorno argued, that individuality forms the lens through which art acquires its autonomy, but that lens is passing in these instances from the producer to the audience, and in so doing, produces a mutual dependency between audience members, a dependency whose type might be seen either in MMORPG (massively parallel online role-play games) or in such communal interactive artworks as some of Toshio Iwai’s music installations.

The contradictions of the world are thus migrating from the representation to the twinned points of origin denoted by, on the one hand, discontinuous and multiple spaces of presentation and on the other discrete but weakly individuated (and equally weakly socialised) subjects charged with witnessing the progress of the deigetic universe. To the extent that hybrid digital-analog media forms are now attaining centrality in both popular and artistic uses of the media, they begin to form the grounds for new creative movements. It may be that we are close to the beginnings of an aesthetic no longer forced through the eye of the subject like the camel through the needle. In Czarnecki’s work, but also in the multiplanar use of space in Ings’ *Boy*, I sense a specific tool for the further generation of contradictions: the demand for a fully embodied viewer and a physical participation. But that, I’m afraid, will have to be another paper.