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**THE CURATOR!AL  
!NCUBATOR, V.5  
WHAT'S UP DOC?  
V!DEO AND  
AN!MAT!ON**



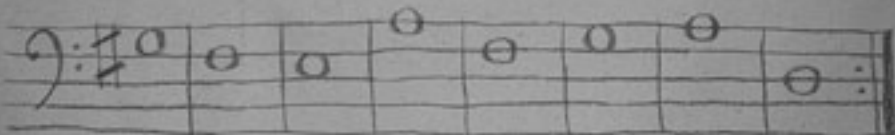
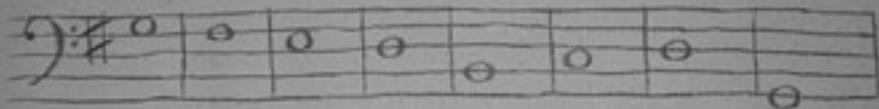
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**THE CURATOR!AL  
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WHAT'S UP DOC?  
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**Jacob Korczynski  
Jean Paul Kelly  
Robin Armstrong  
Gabrielle Moser  
Brett Kashmere**





## Introduction

# Video in the Age of the Re-Animator



In Middle English, *Anima* = “life” and to animate was to instill with life, giving the act an almost god-like power. From the early days of the magic lantern shows to the noirish world of contemporary Japanese anime, the ability to make the inanimate move - animation - has a long history of popular appeal. In his classic 1922 short story *Herbert West: Reanimator*, H.P. Lovecraft evoked the dark attraction present in the urge to bring the dead to life, citing: “...the wonder and diabolism of his (Herbert West’s) experiments fascinated me utterly”. This year’s version of *The Curatorial Incubator v.5: What’s Up Doc? Video and Animation* speaks – albeit in softer, gentler terms – to this same urge. Let’s face it: animation is hot - and deadly serious.

The way in which the curators in this year’s *Incubator* programme approached their choices speaks volumes about the current scholarship and international dialogue engendered by a consideration of animation at this point in the first decade of the 21st century. Jacob Korczynski examined the role of narrative in the development of the medium. Robin Armstrong considered the interplay between animation and gaming. Jean Paul Kelly examined how “the real” is increasingly deformed in the process of applying documentary techniques to animation. Gabrielle Moser concentrated her research into artists who physically interact with their animations. And Brett Kashmere’s interest in questions of the archive and appropriation led him to focus on “the original copy”.

As part of this unique apprenticeship, Vtape provides the emerging curators with workshops – this year offered by Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke, co-editors of the ground-breaking anthology *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema*, published by YYY Books, Ottawa International Animation Festival and Images Festival (Toronto: 2005). Chris Gehman is an independent filmmaker, critic and curator who recently completed his MFA in film at York University. Steve Reinke is an artist, writer and videomaker, an Associate Professor of Art Theory & Practice at Northwestern University (Chicago). Reinke was awarded the Bell Canada Award for Excellence in Video Art in 2005. Finally, each of the incubatees received the benefit of editorial input on their essays. This year’s editors included Peggy Gale (independent curator), Ben Portis (curator at Art Gallery of Ontario), Janine Marchessault (artist, writer and professor at York University) and Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke. We consider that the addition of senior editors – all professionals in the field of curating and exhibiting media arts – adds an unprecedented level of skill development to the Curatorial Incubator.

## **Lisa Steele**

*Creative Director, Vtape*

Top: Jenny Perlin, *Box Office*. 2007. Courtesy the artist, Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Galerie M+R Fricke, Berlin.

Bottom: Jonathan Culp, *Death Mask*. 2004

# Search and Deploy

## Jacob Korczynski



“You have helped me, you have kept a record of what I was, you have shown me myself.”

These words emerge from the dense collage of *Hell* (1984), exemplifying video's historical role as a mirror held up to the actions and the image of the artist. Her tape presents the viewer with what she identifies as a modern hell, one where animation negotiates an excess of information storage and retrieval, a conception of hell that has proved remarkably prescient: twenty years later artists have continued to employ animation as a discontinuous intervention into the moving image, an interface with which to reflect upon video's dissolution of boundaries between public and private and the ensuing fragmented status of the self. *Hell's* digital effects animate a fluid image archive of both found-footage gleaned primarily from television sources, as well as documentation of performances directed and executed by Lister. The contemporary tapes of *Search and Deploy* (by Robert Hamilton, Andrew James Paterson and Jowita Kepa) circulate in the aftermath of the era introduced in the pioneering animation experiment of *Hell*, an era marked by video's increasing malleability and its insertion into private and public realms through the introduction of the video camcorder and VCR into the home, which began to dissolve the previous boundaries between the roles of film and video. “The VCR was developed to continue television's mission to distribute cinema into the home. Video became synonymous with home movie consumption. Portapak evolved into camcorders, personal video instruments for recording everyday life and shaping behaviour through feedback.”<sup>1</sup>

In “Essay on Video, Architecture and Television,” Dan Graham makes an important distinction between the moving images of film and video. He asserts that video, with its ability to be a document of continuous duration, is able to function as a present time medium. Film, in contrast, is a medium that presents the past in a constructed form of disjunctions.<sup>2</sup> In early video, artists (including Graham) examined the possibilities of real-time in contrast to the narrative montage of film. In its transition from film to video, animation retains the characteristics of the older medium, foregrounding a temporally mediated and process-based model. “Animation, unruliest of art forms, currently eludes description and classification boundaries, thanks to digital imagery's blurring the distinctions between film and animation. During its century-plus history, animation — now an inescapable part of nearly every communication mode — has continually absorbed, hybridized, mutated, and melded...”<sup>3</sup>

Andrew James Paterson, *Damned and Forgiven*. 2007



Ardele Lister, *Hell*. 1984



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The tapes in *Search and Deploy* use animation to navigate the ambiguous intersections of private and public that video blurs. The temporal disjunctions of animation cut across distinctions between film and video, and its constructed form opens entire archives to be accessed and put into action, rendering all source material, whether found or fabricated, malleable. With the exception of video's real-time experiments and other performative strategies, animation is essentially a two-step process, marked by the time-delay between the artist's identification and accumulation of source material, and their activation of it. The artists in *Search and Deploy* explore the discontinuity of animation in order to assert multiple presences of a self and that self's image now fragmented between private and public image realms. Starting with Lister's use of television's early industrial effects, the elasticity of the video's digital image is extended by Hamilton to the still photograph, by Paterson to the personal computer, and by Kepa to the material manifestations of the tape itself. To identify and engage the multiple applications of the digital video image is to search; to order such images via animation is to deploy.

The transitional conditions of the moving image and the shifting role of video in relation to film during the era of *Hell* are foregrounded at the outset of Lister's tape. Following the opening sequence that features a series of hand-held shots which captures the passengers traveling in an unidentified New York City subway line, Lister exits the subterranean depths as the camera continues to accumulate its footage. The artist emerges to capture the sidewalk traffic underneath the bright lights of cinema marquees of a 42nd Street then in decline, suggesting the dominant position occupied by video from this era onward. At the midpoint of *Hell* Lister reveals a critical self-reflexivity in one of the work's key sequences, foregrounding the apparatus of her image making. A man who has appeared earlier in the tape directly addressing the camera sits before an early television effects console, the kind the artist accessed through commercial broadcasters in order to animate the images of *Hell*. Where elsewhere Lister superimposes text upon empty frames or abstract images to provide a counterpoint to the voiceover narration that guides the viewer, here the word V-I-O-L-E-N-C-E is spelled across the frame covering the image of the man at the console. While the presence of the word at this junction in *Hell* anticipates the appropriated news footage that unpacks the tragic tale of a murdered family about to unfold in Lister's collage of found footage, the viewer cannot help but consider the dominance of the text upon the image as the artist's reflection upon animation as an active attack upon the autonomy of the image. As the anchor of *Search and Deploy*, *Hell* introduces animation as the struggle with, and between, images whose final form is far from inevitable.

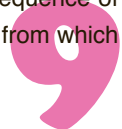


In contrast to a restless revision of the moving image in *Hell*, Robert Hamilton's *Fiets (Bicycles)* (2004) foregrounds the serialized discontinuity of the discrete frame. A series of still photographs produced by the artist are assembled into a continuous visual document of time, place and memory, and accompanied by an audio montage appropriated from narrative films. *Fiets (Bicycles)* extends Hamilton's earlier animation and time-lapse experiments, which include the limited range of still images generated by Nintendo Game Boy cameras and Web Cams. Primarily documenting the travel of both cyclists and pedestrians on a street during a single afternoon in Amsterdam, Hamilton maintains the graphic continuity of linear movement: the image mutates across the frame, and the human forms passing through the frame are retained through the compiled presence of multiple figures. Extending animation's negotiation between past and present, the found sound in *Fiets (Bicycles)* suggests the condition of being situated between two sites simultaneously, while ultimately occupying neither. The tension of audio and visual discontinuity emerges as the first images of Hamilton's tape accumulate. As the geography of Amsterdam is established through images of the city's empty cobblestone streets and famous canals, a voice amongst the drifting audio collage assembled from feature films explains that, "Over here is ranch house, and right over here is the corral..." while another voice responds that "Texas must be a wonderful place...". As *Fiets (Bicycles)* continues the sound of marching drums begin to build a beat of battle, culminating in the dense cacophony of warfare as the inhabitants of the frame are assembled to their greatest density. Suddenly, the people disappear, the street empties and the fragile voice of Clint Eastwood whispers, "...death will come haunting...". Suggesting the international parasitic military presence of the United States through the narratives of violence manifest in the moving image, Hamilton extends the discontinuity of animation to the fractured visual experience of war, inviting the viewer to contemplate the ongoing occupation of Iraq only cognizable through the incomplete pictures assembled, indeed, animated from outside the immediate boundaries of the conflict.

In *Damned and Forgiven* (2007) Andrew James Paterson extends the investigation of sound and image found in Hamilton's tape. Here, an audio track accompanied from the video documentation of one of the artist's infamous monologue performances establishes the temporal continuity. Additionally, Paterson alternatively superimposes images from two different sources upon the performance documentation: a series of his colour-field compositions and a sequence of still images including his own snapshots, as well as found popular and pornographic images pulled from a personal archive that he has opened to the viewer.

Using his performance and persona as source material, the artist initiates a dialogic encounter with his ongoing interdisciplinary practice, revealing an uneasy and uncertain negotiation of the private and public. The colour-field compositions and found images initially appear to suppress the images of Paterson's performance due to their continuous, slow cycle of superimposition, but as the tape progresses, the tempo of the images increases until their split-second presence culminates in a flicker. Formally an extension of a broader archival impulse that animation initiates, in *Damned and Forgiven* Paterson situates flicker as a sub-genre of animation, historically tied to film, where each component frame is emphasized as a discrete unit. Absorbed by the inclusive image field of contemporary video, flicker sheds its medium-specificity, but retains its essential role, revealing the material and technological source of the media in which it is produced. And, here, animation is asserted when the fractured flow of images channels rapidly through the electronic signal of video, revealing a self intentionally divided by the artist.

Jowita Kepa closes *Search and Deploy* by revisiting the representational ambiguity of archival images, a strategy introduced by Ardele Lister in *Hell*. Breaking through a burst of static, an image of a young woman cuts across the empty, imageless field. Prominently centred in the frame, she is unidentified and alone, drifting through the anonymity of a crowd. Alongside the image that moves from distortion to decipherability, the melancholy audio opening of *[/]* (2003) evokes the transfer of history and loss that is present throughout the other tapes in the programme. From a song slowed to the point of complete obscurity the viewer can discern "I don't trust myself, anymore...", before Kepa jars the viewer with the repetition of a frozen frame and accelerates through an oblique narrative of passion and murder. The actions of both Kepa and her possible screen surrogate position the viewer within an instant that is activated as quickly as it ends. With *[/]*, Kepa unpacks the tension between the found and the fabricated, reanimating oblique images that may or may not have been transferred from the now archival cinema absorbed by video. Narrative causality is disjointed through ellipses and repetition, facilitated by the artist's instant access to the image via digital video, which is able to supersede temporal linearity. Kepa renders the source of her material unknowable, and it is not only the self that appears fractured, but also the context and origin of the images that remains unsettled, not trusted anymore. The phonetic title of the tape foregrounds the searing violence that the artist presents via content (forceful and frenzied moments) and form (cutting through the tape and its linear sequence of images), eliciting a connection to the operation to search and destroy from which the project title is derived.



However, the title of this final tape also denotes a middle ground, or a porous site, indicative of the hybrid space that animation negotiates encompassing film/video, public/private, past/present. To probe and bring into action, to locate and animate, to search and deploy.

#### EndNotes

1 Tom Sherman, "Three Texts on Video," *Canadian Art*, Spring 2005, 58.

2 Dan Graham, "Essay on Video, Architecture and Television" in *Video-Architecture-Television: Writings on Video and Video Works, 1970-1978*, edited by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1979), 62.

3 John Canemaker, "Plus Ça Change ..." in *Animations*, edited by Klaus Biesenbach (Berlin: KW – Institute for Contemporary Art; New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), 20.

## PROGRAMME

**Ardele Lister**, *Hell* (1984), 17:00

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the hell of today, the hell of information storage and retrieval.” From this introduction, Lister proceeds to enumerate the sins of our modern technological world. *Hell*, one of the first art works created in digital media, features a computerized nether world, replete with souls stored on disk and tortured with digital effects. It represented the U.S. in video at the Biannual International in Medellin in 1988.

**Robert Hamilton**, *Fiets (Bicycles)* (2004), 3:28

*Fiets* is an animated short composed of hundreds of individual photos of people riding bicycles and walking along a street in Amsterdam. The accompanying soundtrack includes audio from various movies; one in particular is *The Beguiling* starring Clint Eastwood. *Fiets* reflects on the diverse range of people who momentarily existed on a specific bike lane in Amsterdam June 15th, 2003, between 1 and 5 pm.

**Andrew James Paterson**, *Damned and Forgiven* (2007), 4:00

*Damned and Forgiven* is both an adaptation and an abstraction of a performative fragment. The basic layer of this four minute videotape consists of a documented performance made in 2006. The two layers of images superimposed onto the performative base are composed of both original and unoriginal images - frequently abstract but sometimes concrete and even pornographic. The still images layered on top of the performance are initially roughly one second in duration but eventually increase their tempo into a single-frame editing mode. *Damned and Forgiven* references classic “flicker films”, and more than flirts with animation.

**Jowita Kepa**, *[/]* (2003), 1:00

*[/]* is sixty seconds of anxious noise ripping and slashing through the frame, as an irreparable mental state reaches a destructive pitch. The eruptive speed of the image finally exhausts and culminates in a nullified, vacant tone.



Drawn in from  
Without  
**Jean-Paul Kelly**



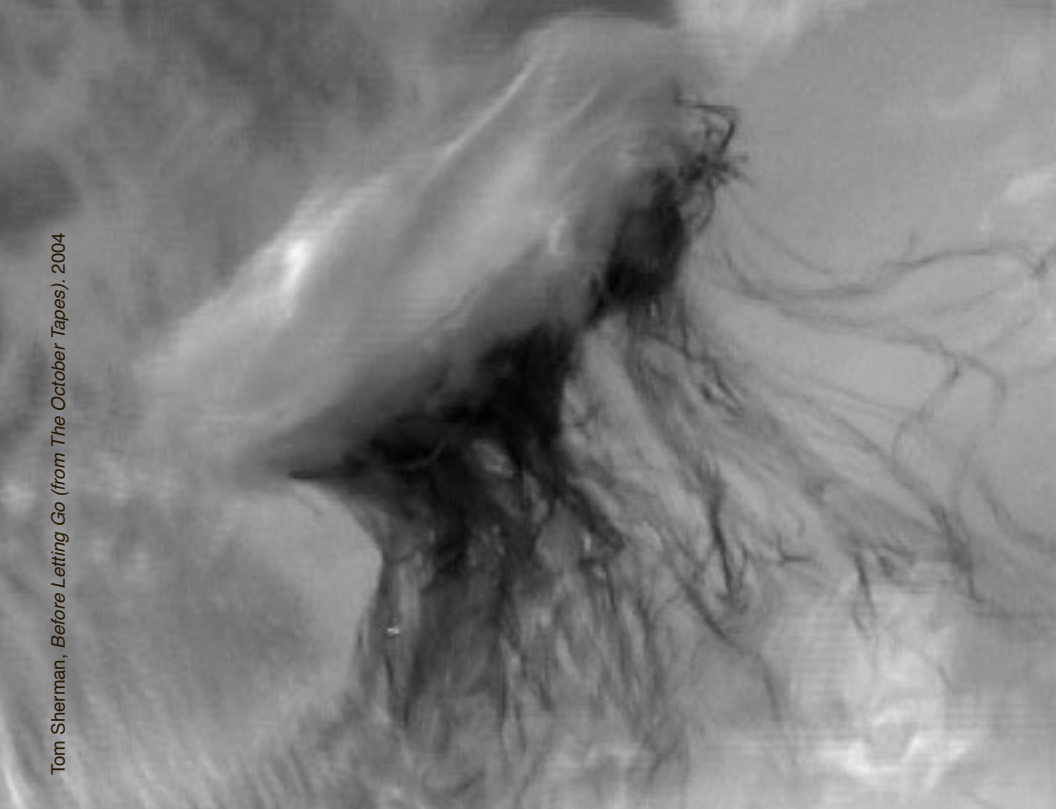
Max Fleischer's rotoscoping of Cab Calloway's movements in *Minnie the Moocher* (1932), tracing the performer's signature dance gestures into an animation, could be seen as a persistent extension of the modernist fascination with automatons. Rotoscoping, the frame-by-frame tracing of pre-recorded, live-action material, along with other traditional forms of animation that produce the illusion of movement in materials that do not move or that do not move in a certain way, initiates a direct (visual) connection between manually produced images and documents of physical, durational movement – between the inanimate and the animate. And, though such serial, hand drawings as Fleischer's may lack the uncanny punctuation of a three-dimensional surrogate (such as a moving, mechanized doll or figure), the effect of this tracing process on image production – an important process in current computer-based image manipulation – can be thought to foretell the ambiguous anxiety of reading digital images.

There has been, arguably, a perceived distance between animation and the documentation of 'reality'. In cinematic documentary, especially *cinéma-vérité*, 'truth' "was presumed to be located... on the human body... the human consciousness would reveal itself in bodily behavior that slipped out, behavior that could be recorded by hidden or unacknowledged technologies."<sup>1</sup> This division between a subject's physical presence and the 'invisible' means of mechanically interpreted representation does not obfuscate the alterations made by the presence of those mechanisms. The technological innovation of consumer hand-held film cameras in the 1960s permitted filmmakers to interact with this perceived 'truth' more readily.<sup>2</sup> Jean Rouch and other early *cinéma-vérité* documentary makers used this new, closer corporeal proximity to reveal undercurrents in the process of documentary (things that were once hidden in or by the subject and things that were once hidden in or by in the process) by physically participating with the camera:

Yes, the camera deforms, but not from the moment that it becomes an accomplice. At that point it has the possibility of doing something I couldn't do if the camera wasn't there: it becomes a kind of psychoanalytic stimulant which lets people do things they wouldn't otherwise do.<sup>3</sup>

Early video technologies provided even more accessibility to the 'truth' of the physical subject. In its infancy, video began to further deform documentary 'truth' through accessibility by allowing artists to experiment easily at home with performance, process, duration and (limited, 'in-camera') editing. The Port-a-Pak was cumbersome device, but you could engage with it without the need for a

Tom Sherman, *Before Letting Go* (from *The October Tapes*), 2004



Steve Reinke, *Regarding in Pain of Susan Sontag*, 2006



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production studio. Subsequently, with smaller VHS, Beta, and Hi-8 formats, video became even closer to the body and everyday life allowing artists more immediate response, critique, and revision to what they had just taped. This short epoch may roughly correspond with the last two of Bill Nichols' six modes of documentary production: The Reflexive Mode, a more self-aware, self-conscious form than previous documentaries, and The Performative Mode, a form that introduces elements of performance and autobiography.<sup>4</sup>

But digital video has done something even more radical than its analogue predecessors. With video now attached to our bodies through increasingly smaller camcorders, video-phones, video-capable still cameras, and cameras imbedded directly into laptops capable of editing recorded materials, there exists a nearly simultaneous capture and edit process. And, with the proliferation of these technologies into everyday living, subjects are increasingly aware that their image and actions are vulnerable to manipulation, and that with the technologies available to them they too can interact in the deformation of that image. Even when recorded and edited by someone else, digital video is susceptible to the subject's knowledge of the inner-workings of the medium. While Nichols had identified *cinéma-vérité* and Rouch's work as part of a Participatory Mode of documentary – where the director actively engages with his or her subjects – this participation is mediated by the filmmaker's directorial cues and not necessarily the subjects'. Digital Video's deformation could illustrate an 'Interactive Mode' where the divisions between producer and subject – when they are not the same person – are altered to include the subject's authorial voice (or actions).

Now, this deformation does occur in "post," where artists alter a finite substance on their PCs and laptops, editing, adding transitions, and using effects, such as rotoscoping, with previously recorded material, *but* the relative ease, the almost simultaneous access to alteration, and the non-degenerating seriality of DV makes whatever is being recorded *always already* suspect. Nichols' postmodern Participatory, Reflexive, and Performative modes of documentary recognize the symbolic illusion implicit to the form, and DV supplements this acknowledgement of misrecognized 'truth': digital video's physical difference from previous video formats, the shift from analogue highs and lows to altering numeric digits, provides an almost exact reproduction every time, effectively producing the loss of a distinct original.<sup>5</sup> Digital video is *always already* a fiction.

Digital manipulation and digital production practices loop back to the moment of image capture causing a crisis of the index. As Laura Mulvey writes, while



re-visiting Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* in a recent analysis of the place of the photographic index within contemporary cinematic material, the "process of inscription, the physical link between the object and its image, is, in semiotic terms, an index. The index is the source of the image's place in time, its relation to the past that gives it...its characteristic 'there-and-then-ness.'"<sup>6</sup> This dry, concrete proof that such and such an event happened at such and such a time under these set specific circumstances, here and now represented within this inscribed image, is the collocutor of evidence to what, when in front of a camera, people might say or do that they "wouldn't otherwise do." The photograph and raw cinematic material have this "in common."<sup>7</sup> Mulvey acknowledges the ubiquity of digitized, manual construction and its implications:

While the photographic machine may reflect and inflect the image as human imagination constructs or desires, it still remains indifferent, a recording mechanism detached from the human eye. In the 1990s digital technology brought back the human element and man-made illusions. The story of mechanical, photographic, reproduction of reality came to an end. The conversion of recorded information into a numerical system broke the material connection between object and image that had defined the earlier history.<sup>8</sup>

And though her discussion focuses primarily on still images, Mulvey cites Lev Manovich's assertion that use of compositing and manipulation propels an indexical skepticism where cinema "can no longer be distinguished from animation. It is no longer an indexical media technology..."<sup>9</sup>

This indexical doubt destabilizes any of the Rouchian, "stimulant" *vérité* relationship between a digital video camera and its subjects. A Participatory, Reflexive, or Performative video or filmmaker working in an analogue medium may, through post-production practices, isolate important, symptomatic moments of a subject's speech or actions making these otherwise unconscious events aware to the subject, often at the point of capture, and to the viewer, during the reception of an image and its analysis. But in self-conscious and autobiographical work made by digital producers, this cinematographic return of the repressed, even when it appears unedited, is tempered by the pervasive illusion of digital manipulation. The content of these works, as personal as it may be, is, in large part, already written in from without.

This does not make any such cinematic works any less a documentary. Though they may be animated, composited, and reconfigured, these works are documents of the process of their creation and must include, even highlight, their manipulations. With the vulnerability of the mechanically produced index, the “human element” – represented by manually layering images and effects atop or beneath what was previously inscribed, animating what was previously inanimate – becomes a surrogate evidentiary substance:

Every film is a documentary. Even the most whimsical of fictions gives evidence of the culture that produced it and reproduces the likenesses of the people who perform within it. In fact, we could say that there are two kinds of film:

(1) documentaries of wish-fulfillment and (2) documentaries of social representation. Each type tells a story, but the stories, or narratives, are of different sorts.

Documentaries of wish-fulfillment are what we would normally call fictions. These films give tangible expression to our wishes and dreams, our nightmares and dreads. They make the stuff of the imagination concrete—visible and audible. They give a sense of what we wish, or fear, reality itself might be or become. Such films convey truths if we decide they do. [...]

Documentaries of social representation are what we typically call non-fiction. These films give tangible representation to aspects of the world we already inhabit and share. They make the stuff of social reality visible and audible in a distinctive way, according to the acts of selection and arrangement carried out by a filmmaker. They give a sense of what we understand reality itself to have been, of what it is now, or what it may become. These films also convey truths if we decide they do.<sup>10</sup>

Even further, the digital rupture to indexical, analogue photographic or cinematic time, that is “evidence of the [digital] culture that produce[s]” images today, may make the “stuff of social reality,” more apparent, allowing people to do the stuff that they “wouldn’t otherwise do,” through new avenues of “selection and arrangement”:

Throughout the history of cinema, the stilled image has been contained within the creative preserve of the film-maker, always accessible on the editing table and always transferable into a freeze frame on the screen. It was video... that first extended the power to manipulate the existing speed of cinema. ...[T]he present context has further heightened the significance of this new interactive spectatorship.

A dialectical relationship between old and new media can be summoned into existence, creating an aesthetic of delay. In the first instance, the image itself is frozen or subjected to repetition or return. But as the new stillness is enhanced by the weight that the cinema's past has acquired with passing time, its significance goes beyond the image itself towards the problem of time, its passing, and how it is represented or preserved. At a time when new technologies seem to hurry ideas and their representations at full tilt towards the future, to stop and to reflect on cinema and its history also offers the opportunity to think about how time might be understood within wider, contested, patterns of history and mythology. Out of this pause, a delayed cinema gains a political dimension, potentially able to challenge patterns of time that are neatly ordered around the end of an era, its 'before' and its 'after'.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps this kind of reflective "delay" Mulvey identifies in digital cinema's break from its "material connections" has an even more dramatic challenge to our previous "neatly ordered" sense of cinematic time, one in which digital augmentation *simultaneously* "stimulates" both recorded subjects at the time of their capture *and* the artists working on those recordings in post-production. Perhaps cinema has reached a point at which "every film is a documentary" that "can no longer be distinguished from animation."

The works in this programme are, in part, responses to the ontological crisis in the state of the photo-based index brought about by digital technologies. And, though each artist negotiates his or her response in very different ways, each of the works included here incorporates digital materials that, in one way or another, feature self-conscious or autobiographical modes of address mediated through an animation of the inanimate, through uncanny "wish-fulfillment". I propose that these works mark an interesting stage in the development of contemporary visual practices and the temporalities created in them, where indexical cynicism and the inherent "man-made-illusion" of digital technologies are activated within "social representations" as "stimulants" to reveal unconscious latencies, or the "real," in recorded speech and action.

## EndNotes

- 1 Gaines, Jane M. "Lonely Boy and the Verité of Sex", *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol 8, No 1. 111.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Jean Rouch quoted in Levin, G. Roy, *Documentary Explorations: 15 Interviews With Film-Makers*. DoubleDay: New York, 1971. 71.
- 4 Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, 2001. Nichols six modes of documentary include, Poetic, Expository, Observational, Participatory, Reflexive, and Performative.
- 5 For a more detailed discussion of digital degeneration and the effects of video compression, please see Lev Manovich's "The Myth of the Digital," in *The Language of New Media*. MIT Press: Cambridge, 2001. 52-55.
- 6 Mulvey, Laura. "The "Pensive Spectator" Revisited: Time and Its Passing in the Still and Moving Image," *2004 Whitney Biennial Catalogue*. NY: Whitney/Abrams, 2004. 125. Excerpt from the original text of the same title in David Green, ed., *Where is the Photograph?* (Brighton and Kent: Photoforum and Photoworks, 2003), 113-22.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Mulvey, Laura. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. Reaktion: London, 2006. 19.
- 9 Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. MIT Press: Cambridge, 2001. 295, as quoted in Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. Reaktion: London, 2006. 20.
- 10 Nichols, Bill. Ibid. 1.
- 11 Mulvey, Laura. Ibid. 22.
- 12 Sherman, Tom. "Video/Intermedia/Animation," *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema*. Eds., Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke. YZY Books: Toronto, 2005. 195.
- 13 Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2003. 113.
- 14 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections of Photography*. Hill and Wang: New York, 1981. 20.

## PROGRAMME

**Miranda July**, *Haysha Royko* (2003), 4:00

Erratic, translucent, traveling matte shapes of different colours are key-framed to the movements of three people videotaped waiting at Portland International Airport. July's video brings to mind both the 'aura' photographs produced in the wake of Nikola Tesla's electromagnetic experiments and early composited 'spirit' photography.

**Tom Sherman**, *Before Letting Go (from The October Tapes)* (2004) 6:40

An unidentifiable man and woman fuck in front of a webcam with their dog at the foot of the bed. As the stilted, pixilated image stream of their bodies is transmitted Sherman captures it. Edit to, what could be, outside of its context, a travel or vacation video documenting a jellyfish in the sea. Edit, with no transitional grammar, no smooth fade or wipe, to an image of flowers in the dark visible only by flashlight. No studio lighting here. Sherman tells us that he is in his garage. The fleshiness of the flowers – extracted organs or drooping genitals – is made more apparent by the video's domesticity. Here, it seems that video's domesticity, as a ubiquitous substance – cell-phone camera, webcam, camcorder – attached as it is to the home and to bodies, may make every digital shot, all content, more fleshy and vulnerable. "Family histories are comprised of boxes of letters, photographs, slides, 8 mm, and super-8 films, videocassettes, and computer disks. Today we love video because it records and displays memory in real time. In a way it is a full-motion, literal form of animation." (Tom Sherman)

**George Barber**, *Withdrawal* (1997), 5:00

In a home-movie a family walks toward the camera in a grassy field. The scene is set to loop while elements are removed in each cycle. Family members are gradually erased and the landscape shrinks from view. Slippages in the early computer compositing process or residue of elements that Barber has successfully removed from the video become palimpsests in the repeated tableau. These looping, digital parapaxes divulge the construction and manipulation of the home-movie and eventually, both the 'full' opening shot and 'empty' final scene are revealed as nothing.

**Steve Reinke**, *Regarding in Pain of Susan Sontag (Notes on Camp)* (2006), 4:00  
“It is intolerable to have one’s own suffering twinned with anybody else’s.”

Reinke revisits a video sequence that he had used in his previous video *Ask the Insects* (2005). Using the same images he again traces the path that he would take to walk to school from his childhood home. The work is a meta-narrative on the act of writing and image-making where memory and empathy are both revisionary: “if all appears here to you simultaneously, seamlessly, timelessly, well, it’s all done in ‘post,’ it’s all done too late, ‘post,’ ‘post,’ ‘post.’”

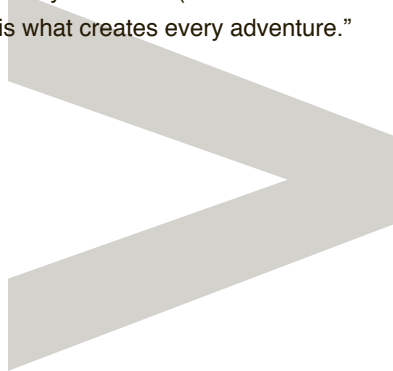
**Jonathan Culp**, *Death Mask* (2004), 5:18

Culp recounts 100 years of his family history using collected photos and rapid editing. This tape examines the process of inscription (much like Reinke provides in the previous work). There is the indexical death mask that is made from Culp’s father’s face, there are the photographs documenting the making of the mask, and there is the video index (I may argue, a five-minute singular, digital “index”) of 100 years of Culp’s and Carmans, Donalds and Russells and Sues.

**Katy Shepherd**, *Film* (2001), 3:25

*Film* consists of animated images made with family photographs and created shortly after Shepherd’s father’s death in 2001. On her website, which contains similar animated images of her late mother, Shepherd quotes from Roland Barthes’ seminal text on the photographic index, *Camera Lucida*:

“In this glum desert, suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; and I animate it. So that is how I must name the attraction that makes it exist: an *animation*. The photograph itself is in no way animated (I do not believe in lifelike photographs), but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure.”



Recode

**Robin Armstrong**



Embedded in the act of play in video games is an implied set of desires and expectations. These are what entice a player to want to play the game in the first place. The “non-ordinary” and often spectacular world of the game, which invites the participation of a player, defines itself in opposition to the ordinary world of the everyday. The events and situations that make up the action of a game are typically non-ordinary ones, but the distinction between an ordinary and a non-ordinary event is not rigid, and can shift within the context of the game. Take for example a criminal activity such as carjacking, not an ordinary practice for most people in the real world. However, as Timothy Welsh explains, this is not the case in *Grand Theft Auto*, where “[carjacking] becomes the most banal, regular and everyday activity of the game, and thus it goes almost completely unnoticed.”<sup>1</sup>

This shift can go the other way too. In Jim Munroe’s *My Trip to Liberty City* the ordinary background elements of the game are repositioned as non-ordinary. Whereas *Grand Theft Auto* maintains a status quo of aggressive confrontation that “...immerses the player in a world that provokes her into using violence to survive and thrive,”<sup>2</sup> *My Trip* engages the game satirically by transforming the main character from a thief to a Canadian tourist. In this way, the ordinary game activity of walking through the city becomes, from the perspective of the tourist, the spectacle. Subversion of game play runs deep here, as all the basic objectives of the game are abandoned. The tourist’s moral compass swings in a very different direction from the one the game foists on players, leading him to pursue activities that seem naively innocent by contrast. Aesthetic enjoyment of the city is the primary goal of his urban explorations, as he admires the view of the city from a rooftop, enjoys the lack of public advertising, makes a trip to the park, and takes pictures of the sights. Deliberately ignoring the principles of the game that would conflict with the behaviour of his tourist character, Munroe has his tourist puzzle over the behaviour of the Liberty City taxis, which immediately drive off without letting him in. To the ordinary player, this would come as no surprise, since it is a basic game rule that the only way to enter an occupied car is to steal it and kick the driver out.

If Munroe achieves a blinkered view of the game through controlled play, Cory Arcangel achieves it by reprogramming the game itself. In *Japanese Driving Game*, Arcangel modifies the program code, selectively removing or isolating game elements. This reduces the game to an interminable drive down a straight road, confounding player expectations. Arcangel has taken an unspectacular moment in *F1 Racer* (where the player may only briefly find himself driving down a straight stretch of road without any opponents in sight) and turned that moment into the whole game. This intervention removes the *race* from *F1 Racer*, so that it might better be described as “F1 passenger on a drive through the countryside.”



Cory Archangel, *Japanese Driving Game*, 2005



Claude Lelouch, *C'était un Rendezvous*, 1976



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Even as *Japanese Driving Game* moves far afield of the game player's expectations, it maintains the visual language of the original, and a consistency of symbolic order. The game player takes for granted that he will be presented with a legible visual language, an assumption that is defeated in Tasman Richardson's *Apollo Shrapnel I*. A visual and auditory barrage assembled from glitches, *Shrapnel* takes these moments of inscrutability and recomposes them with a new agenda. That Richardson's allusions to the Greek god and American space missions in the video's title have no apparent thematic connection to the original games that produced the glitches demonstrates his interest in using the glitches purely as raw visual material, signs emptied of meaning.

Claude Lelouch's *C'était un rendezvous* (1976) may appear an odd choice for a program about video games, but part of its relevance owes to the visual language it employs. The camera perspective from the front of a moving car bears a striking resemblance to that of first-person perspective racing games. (The first such game to use that perspective – *Night Driver* – was produced in the same year as *Rendezvous*.) The driver in *Rendezvous* navigates the city with a reckless abandon that also parallels the fearlessness with which video game drivers navigate virtual circuits. In this respect the film is both seductive and frightening; unlike a video game or fictional film, the danger presented in *Rendezvous* is real.

This point about the frightening aspect of *Rendezvous* brings me to the boundary between the two lines of inquiry I have developed for the works in my program. The first, which is addressed above, is about the ways in which desire and expectation in games are challenged. The second raises a question: to what extent do these video and film works constitute the playing of a game from the standpoint of game theory?

The idea of navigating a city by car and treating it as a game is not something exclusive to video games. For his book *The Image of the City* (1960), Kevin Lynch interviewed Los Angeles citizens about their experience of the urban environment. Respondents described driving in traffic and on freeways as similar to "shooting rapids in a boat, with the same excitement and tension, the same constant effort to 'keep one's head'. ... There were frequent references to the overpasses, the fun of the big interchanges, the kinesthetic sensations of dropping, turning, climbing. For some persons, driving was a challenging, high speed game."<sup>3</sup>

There are certainly a number of aspects of *Rendezvous* that would qualify it as a game. It has a definable goal (to arrive at the rendezvous), with regulating rules (the trip must finish before the 9-minute film reel does), and the player/driver is

able to influence the outcome by exerting effort in some way (Lelouch can drive like a maniac to get there faster). On the other hand, a game must exist apart from the real world in some way: as sociologist Johann Huizinga points out, spaces of game play "...are forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart."<sup>4</sup> The position of *Rendezvous'* game outside of everyday reality is less clear. It is part of the everyday world in the sense that the driving is unstaged, using a real car in the real Paris. However, for Lelouch at least, the event does exist at a remove – this isn't how he drives every day, and his filming of the event places it very much in the realm of the non-ordinary. The same cannot be said for the other drivers and pedestrians on the road, who are unknowingly subjected to Lelouch's reckless endangerment of their safety, and thus not willful players in his game. To them, Lelouch's car is no different from any other on the road, and will have the same dire consequences if it collides with them. So here is where *Rendezvous* falls apart as a game, for if it cannot have negotiable consequences where the illusion of danger is buffered by the knowledge that the activity is ultimately safe, game theorists such as Steven Poole and Jesper Juul would argue it is no longer a game. <sup>5,6</sup>

Munroe's activities in *My Trip* seem completely at odds with the goals of the game and it is hard to see how his interaction with Grand Theft Auto constitutes playing a game at all. Most game theory insists that a game must have rules and goals that the player adheres to.<sup>7</sup> Bernard Suits' game theory is in agreement with this (he would call this a "closed game"), but he also accounts for the type of play that Munroe is engaging in, calling it an "open game."<sup>8</sup> In this type of game play, goal-governed activities are replaced with role-governed ones – for example, children playing cops and robbers. The "competitive conflict" of a closed game becomes a "dramatic conflict" in the open game. Munroe's dramatic conflict is to maintain the persona and ideology of the Canadian tourist in a game that assumes he is a criminal.

*Japanese Driving Game* and *Shrapnel*, on the other hand, fall outside the category of games altogether. *Japanese Driving Game*, though it exists physically as a Nintendo game cartridge, does not allow for user interaction, and Richardson's process of manipulating and sequencing glitches in *Shrapnel* is not guided by any rules or objectives (save for his sense of composition). Though they do not constitute games in themselves, the types of moments represented in these two videos do fit within a typology of video game actions, described by new media theorist Alexander Galloway.

Galloway breaks down game actions into four groups: any game moment can be thought of in terms of being a machine act or operator act, and belonging to the diegetic or non-diegetic world of the game.<sup>9</sup> An operator act involves the game player, a machine act involves just the game, the diegesis describes the narrative world of the game, and the non-diegetic includes everything outside of the narrative world but still part of the game. Arcangel's modified game plays itself without a human operator, and Galloway would call the game play an "ambience act," a form of diegetic machine action. In some games, play reverts to a state of equilibrium or ambience when left alone by the operator. "... Things continue to change when caught in an ambience act, but nothing changes that is of any importance. No stopwatch runs down. No scores are lost ... It rains, the sun goes down, then it comes up. Trees stir. These acts are a type of perpetual happening, a living tableau. ... the game is still present, but play is absent."<sup>10</sup> *Japanese Driving Game* remains forever locked in this mode, its tableau unfolding through the most restrained economy of signs. Movement is communicated solely by the white line scrolling vertically in one point perspective, while the passage of time is marked by the changing colour palette of the background, as the landscape passes from afternoon to sunset to night to morning and back again. The footage Richardson appropriates for *Shrapnel* also emerges from player-excluded machine acts, but as program malfunctions these glitches are non-diegetic game moments. Galloway calls these "disabling acts," in which "...gamic deficiency that arrives from outside the world of the game ... infringes negatively on the game in some way. They can be fatal or temporary, necessary or unnecessary. ... [for example]: crashes, low polygon counts, bugs, slowdowns, temporary freezes, and network lag. ... these actions have the ability to destroy the game from without, to disable its logic."<sup>11</sup> Richardson forces the games into a state of malfunction so that, freed of their logic, he can reanimate them with his own.

Collectively, these works display an engagement with unconventional play and situate themselves on the border between game and non-game activities. It is through their demonstration of subversive modes of play that they are able to reconfigure the status quo of expectation and desire in game play.

## EndNotes

- 1 Welsh, Timothy. "Everyday Play," *The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto: critical essays*. McFarland & Co.: Jefferson, 2006. 139.
- 2 Higgins, Michael. "Play Fighting," *The Meaning and Culture of Grand Theft Auto: critical essays*. McFarland & Co.: Jefferson, 2006. 78
- 3 Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1960. 42.
- 4 Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Beacon Press: Boston, 1966. 10.
- 5 Poole, Steven. *Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames*. Fourth Estate: London, 2000. 173.
- 6 Juul, Jesper. *Half-Real: Video Games Between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*. MIT Press: Cambridge, 2005. 36.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Suits, Bernard. *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1976. 134-137
- 9 Galloway, Alexander. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2006. 8.
- 10 Ibid. 11.
- 11 Ibid. 31.

## PROGRAMME

**Jim Munroe**, *My Trip to Liberty City* ( 2003), 8:49

Set within the world of Grand Theft Auto, Jim Munroe's machinima is the travelogue of a naïve Canadian tourist's virtual trip. Play undergoes subversion as the conscientious tourist explores the city and obviously dodges the game's attempts to corrupt him.

**Cory Archangel**, *Japanese Driving Game* (2005) , 2:45

Cory Archangel's hacked game is presented here as a video capture from the infinitely looping game playback. His manipulation of the Nintendo Famicom game F1 Racer involves modifications to the code of the program chip. The result in game play is that there is no car to control, on a road with no opponents, no obstacles, no turns, and no end.

**Claude Lelouch**, *C'était un Rendezvous* (1976), 8:26

With a camera mounted to the front of his car, Claude Lelouch races through the streets of Paris in the early morning. Caution is thrown out the window as he drives through 16 red lights, narrowly avoiding pedestrians and other cars enroute to his rendezvous; the act of driving becomes the performance of a game.

**Tasman Richardson**, *Apollo Shrapnel I* (2001), 4:33

Tasman Richardson captured his Atari 2600 in moments of gamic death to create Apollo Shrapnel I. This vivisection involved pulling game cartridges out of the console while it was still turned on, then recording the resulting audio and video feed glitches. These glitches act as indices of moments where play is no longer part of the game - robbed of the possibility for interaction and symbolic legibility, the game becomes raw material to be reanimated. It is, in Richardson's words, "Order, rhythm and uniformity. The lightning bolt, the chariot of fire."

# Animator Statement

## **Gabby Moser**

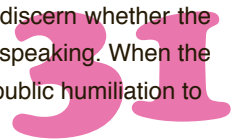


Video animation is traditionally a medium where the artistic process remains unseen. The final product—an artifact of the artist's creative labour and strategic moments of self-censorship—seems to obscure the contradictory forces of the creative process. The end result: a seamless animation that appears removed from the hand and body of the artist. A recent movement in animation opposing this tradition sees artists intentionally including their body and animated representations of themselves in the production and presentation of their animations. In these cases, the artist performs as the animator: a hybrid creator-performer-persona that defines the parameters of the animated world and then inserts their physical body into this new paradigm. These videos make moments of self-censorship transparent, challenging the conventions of seamless animation and making their works decidedly “seamed.”

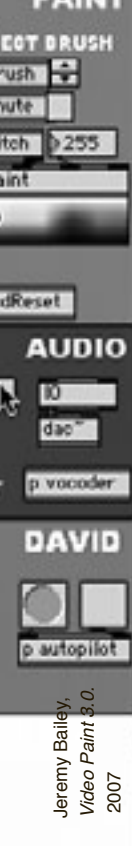
Employing a variety of anachronistic and antiquated methods, the artists in this program emphasize the expressive limitations of video animation and paradoxically use these very limitations to make statements that would not otherwise be made. Just as analog video is an anachronistic but powerful medium that artists continue to use today, the variety of antiquated animation methods explored by the animators in this program display a renewed interest in the way obsolete techniques might offer new opportunities in video animation. Opportunities to come to terms with the strange and disembodied power of the world of animation by physically interacting with it and to use the animated world as a microcosm where issues of creative insecurity, self-censorship and agency can be explored.

The interactions that take place between animators and their animated creations are often fraught with conflict or physical struggle. Often the animator, in a Frankensteinian turn of events, becomes victim to her own animated creation. In Daniel Barrow's *Artist Statement* (2007), the artist—who is best known for re-invigorating another antiquated technology, the overhead projector—uses an obsolete computer system to create and participate in his animated world. The effect is the creation of a strange, parallel universe in which an exaggerated version of the artist (perhaps an ironic take on the hero-worship that sometimes surrounds Barrow's poignant live performances?) seems liberated from the constraints of self-censorship and openly expresses his doubts, insecurities and desires in a way that the 'real' Barrow of the world outside the animation never would.

While Barrow's voice narrates the video, it is often difficult to discern whether the animated persona or the 'real' artist, outside the animation, is speaking. When the narrator remarks, “I always knew that one day I would risk public humiliation to







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Jeremy Bailey,  
*Video Paint 3.0*,  
2007

Tadasu Takamine, *God Bless America*, 2002



say certain things, by being this gratuitously honest,” we cannot distinguish where the animated persona ends and the ‘real’ person begins. The moment of revelation in *Artist Statement* is not the moment of discovering *which* Barrow is speaking, but the moment the viewer realizes that Barrow is, to borrow from Sergei Eisenstein’s description of Mickey Mouse, “identically and simultaneously object and human.”<sup>1</sup> both animated persona and ‘real’ person at the same time. Barrow’s gratuitous honesty is only possible when the apparent distance between creator and creation collapses, laying bare the messy battle between two vital dimensions of the creative process: the aim of sincere expression and the tendency towards self-censorship.

Issues of expression and self-censorship also inform Tadasu Takamine’s *God Bless America* (2002). By using the limitations of stop-motion animation, Takamine establishes parameters for himself that make the *impossible*, possible. He puts a tangible face and voice to the normally insidious forces of dominant American culture while establishing a world where he has agency over this embodied force. In this endurance piece that leaves no room for self-censorship, Takamine’s sculpted associations take on the quality of automatic writing, combining the serious with the ridiculous: a cowboy morphs into a rocket, which becomes a Picasso face, which is transformed into George W. Bush, which shifts into a deranged monkey. In this case, the animation does not speak on behalf of Takamine, but rather stands as a proxy-foe, whom Takamine can impulsively and sometimes violently retaliate against.

Art historian Alan Cholodenko argues that animation always involves a kind of violence tied to the uncanny: the experience of simultaneous delight and fright that we feel when “what gave us fright when we were children [returns] to give us fright again when we thought we were over it now that we were adults.”<sup>2</sup> While Takamine’s video exhibits a subdued creative violence towards the animated character, Zeesy Powers’ *The Beast* (2005) takes this violence of the uncanny to a new level. The artist experiences simultaneous delight and fright at seeing her reflection transformed into the ‘monster under the bed’—a monster that subsequently turns on her creator. The beast’s actions are pre-recorded while Powers’ movements are performed live. Each performance is a new and in the end, unrealizable attempt to reconcile the animator with the beast, for Powers cannot escape the demise she has scripted. But what is the point of continuously re-staging this scripted conflict between different versions of oneself? Perhaps, just as the animated Barrow and the ‘real’ Barrow are inseparable and interdependent, the beast and the animator in Powers’ video represent different but vital aspects of the same personality. Aspects that are in constant conflict with one another in all animation: the cautious animator and the violently expressive animated beast.

Finally, just as Barrow has become a master at manipulating obsolete techniques, Jeremy Bailey's *Video Paint 3.0* (2007) employs a computer-generated animation program that is the artistic equivalent of kindergarten finger-painting to examine issues of creative self-censorship and strategic role-playing. The mess of lines and colour that build up on the video screen would be nonsensical without the improvised narration that Bailey provides in the assumed persona of an earnest Bob Ross-inspired painter-inventor. Bailey's persona is pitted against a programmed bomb that periodically threatens to destroy his most recent creation. But, much like the beast, the bomb's behaviour is deliberate and predetermined by the artist. Just as Barrow's narration serves as a self-censoring balance to his gratuitously honest animated counterpart, Bailey's bomb is a form of creative self-sabotage. It is an object that harnesses the strange powers of the animated world to point out the artist's even stranger, ambivalent and sometimes hostile relationship with the creative process. For Bailey, as for the other artists in this program, the power that the world of the animation holds over the animator lies in its ability to draw out our most human traits.

The critic Sean Cubitt argues that "we can no longer speak of the author as the originator of the cartoon: instead we are confronted by the animator, no longer a subject of the social world, but an exile seeking asylum in the machine world from all demands external to the world itself."<sup>3</sup> Although the strange and foreign world of the animation may appear separate from the 'real' social world, offering an alternate space for 'gratuitous honesty,' these videos show that such a distinction is impossible. From Daniel Barrow's frank expressions of desire and self-censorship, to Tadasu Takamine's free association re-shaping of American culture, to Zeesy Powers' battle with her monstrous reflection, to Jeremy Bailey's absurd expression machine, these artists show that the social world of the animator always infiltrates the machine world of the animation: that whenever an animation speaks, it is actually making the animator's statement.

#### Endnotes

1Sergei Eisenstein in Keith Broadfoot and Rex Butler, "The Illusion of Illusion," *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*, Alan Cholodenko, ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 263-298, 274.

2 Alan Cholodenko, "Introduction," *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*, Alan Cholodenko, ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 9-36, 27.

3 Sean Cubitt in Steve Reinke, "The World is a Cartoon: Stray Notes on Animation," *The Sharpest Point: animation at the end of cinema*, Toronto: YYZ Books, 2005, 9-26, 16.

## PROGRAMME

**Daniel Barrow**, *Artist Statement* (2007), 5:20

In this narrated video, Barrow uses a Commodore computer - an 8-bit home computer released in 1982 - to illustrate a version of himself creating a “live animation” in front of an audience with the same computer equipment. The result is an animation-within-an-animation where Barrow says he is “gratuitously honest” and personal about his insecurities and aspirations as an artist.

**Tadasu Takamine**, *God Bless America* (2002), 8:45

Takamine and his lovely assistant shared a room with a huge clay face for eighteen consecutive days. Before the eye of the camera, they ate, slept, read, fucked and made continuous changes to the face, animating it to synchronize with a scratchy, halting recording of that American patriotic classic “God Bless America.”

**Zeesy Powers**, *The Beast* (2005), 4:49

Originally executed as a projected performance piece, a silhouetted Powers meets a replica of herself in an idyllic landscape and then watches as it transforms into a beastly character. The artist and her doppelganger try to co-exist in the landscape together but ultimately face off in a violent struggle resulting in the artist’s death.

**Jeremy Bailey**, *Video Paint 3.0* (2007), 20:38

Video Paint 3.0 is a software program designed by Jeremy Bailey that allows you to paint anywhere, anytime. In this video Bailey follows up on his “hugely successful performance software environment” of Video Paint 2.0 by walking the viewer through several of the new features in the program while telling a captivating story using the software. “The artist would like to note that Video Paint 3.0 is ideally exhibited as a live performance.” (Vtape catalogue)

# That Reminds me of Something...

Obscured Referents, Approximate Indices &  
Counter-Archival Practice

**Brett Kashmere**



“There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory.”

- Jacques Derrida (1995)<sup>1</sup>

The proliferation of images, image supports, and storage systems in today's information-based economy requires a radical reconceptualization of the archive. The active insertion of the author could fundamentally transform the archive's connotative anonymity. This exhibition considers the archive as a site for creative intervention, one that enables new possibilities for preserving and representing individual memory within a larger historical consciousness. In this strange moment of image excess and commercial limitation (due to the increasing privatization of archives by multinational corporations), we are all potential archivists and micro-analysts of our shared social experience. Now is the time to reclaim and reinvent our public memory. The powerful - the government, the mainstream media, the wealthy - have the ability to stamp their own meanings on the past. Equal participation in the constitution and interpretation of the archive is a key to counteracting the unseen hand of authority, and helps to invigorate successful content-sharing applications such as Wikipedia, YouTube, and Creative Commons.

### **ALL SAMPLES CLEARED!**

Anticipating how shifts in technology and privatization would affect media production and access, Sharon Sandusky proposes a new genre: “The Archival Art Film.”<sup>2</sup> This type of film (or video) harnesses elements of the essay, structural, and compilation genres into a hybrid form where the personal, experimental, and historical meet head on and cross-contaminate. Exemplary precursors of this nascent genre include, for Sandusky, Bruce Conner's *Report* (1963-67), Michael Wallin's *Decodings* (1988), Barbara Hammer's *Sanctus* (1990), and Craig Baldwin's *Rocketkitkongokit* (1986), among others. In recent years, more and more contemporary artists, from Tacita Dean to Kota Ezawa to Walid Raad, have been playing with/in the archives, opening up dynamic possibilities for counter-archival practice.<sup>3</sup> In this age of draconian copyright law, the archive is rich with subversive potential.

What's at stake today is who speaks for whom-why, and about what. This is about the authorship of history. However, the uncovering, interpretation, and re-writing of history requires access to evidence that isn't always *legally* (read: affordably) available. Transforming file footage, “found” materials, and audiovisual fragments through formal manipulation is one viable and alternative form of **sample clearing**. “Sampling,” in musical parlance, describes the practice of lifting portions of an existing recording and using this “sample,” usually in a repetitive manner, as a

**We did not find the weapons of mass destruction that we all believed were there, and that's raised questions about whether the sacrifice in Iraq has been worth it.**

Tony Cokes *Evil.5 (Grin & Bear)*, 2006-7

Jacqueline Goss, *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007

**38**



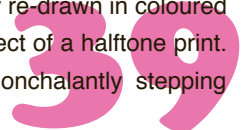
component of a new song. In the process, the original reference often becomes abstracted or obscured. The same strategy can be applied to moving images as well.

Increasingly, videomakers have turned to the techniques of animation as a means to reinvent the image while questioning its representational value. Through experimentation with form-processing, filtering, layering and compositing, degrading and recoding - pre-existing images have become a canvas for greater creative play, a site to begin anew rather than an end in itself. Due to the malleable, recombinant nature of digital media, animation provides an unusually supple instrument for disguise, and, by extension, a means of circumventing the problems of access, ownership, and expense. Drifting between index and fantasy, the animated videos in this program exemplify the idea of *original copy*, a method of appropriation that involves translation, interpretation and transformation; in other words, quoting without quotation marks.

### **THAT REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING...**

“That Reminds Me of Something” gathers videos that draw from and animate (over) primary sources for illustrative and/or discursive purposes, while simultaneously (almost) erasing their indexical value. Animation, used in this context, raises questions about the truth and reliability of the documentary genre, allowing artists to produce *idiosynthetic*, anti-authoritarian re-codings of accepted histories. What unites many of these works is a commitment to creatively reveal elisions of history and memory from a subjective position, thereby expanding the possibility of archival-based artmaking outside the margins. Joel Katz makes an important distinction between the terms “archive” (an institution where public records, documents, etc are kept) and “archival” (anything which contains certain attributes of age, status of preservation, and ascribed importance).<sup>4</sup> Not everything that’s archival can be found in an archive, just as certain disruptive or contradictory images are left out of our collective memory bank.

The act of remembrance becomes complicated when events are too distant or too traumatic to visualize. Such is the case with the ongoing Iraq war, which several videos here attend to, whether by re-contextualizing its rhetoric through the selective animation and juxtaposition of media newspeak, or by exposing its gruesome reality. In Stephen Andrews’ *Quick and the Dead* (2004) a short Internet clip is broken down into component frames and meticulously re-drawn in coloured crayons rubbed over window screening, reproducing the effect of a halftone print. The original footage, which depicts an American soldier nonchalantly stepping





over a dead Iraqi man to extinguish burning wreckage, is thereby transformed into a silent meditation on the inhumanity of war. By softening the sharp edge of video, Andrews imbues the fragment with universal resonance and symbolism.

Tony Cokes' *Evil.5: Grin & Bear (No Responsibility Mix)* (2006-07) weaves together quotes transcribed from television news and print sources to craft a counter-memory of America's war on terrorism. *Evil.5* uses a single, recurring transition, a left-to-right wipe (indicating a Conservative shift?), to shuttle commentary across the screen. The text begins with a series of passages drawn from Condoleezza Rice's marathon presentation before the 9/11 Commission, detailing twenty-five years of terrorist hostility towards the United States, much of it now forgotten. Paradoxically, this data was consciously ignored by her administration at the time of the 9/11 attacks. The video then recounts (via Rice) parallels between America's failure to aggressively pre-empt previous international conflicts, such as World War II, in spite of obvious warnings signs, before cycling through quotations from Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Richard Clarke, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and George W. Bush about the current war. This text is presented in white atop alternating blue and red frames, a clear allusion to the colours of the U.S. flag.

Like much of his previous work, Cokes' video tethers animated text to pop music. On the soundtrack, lyrics from a song by Lali Puna ("You've been told they didn't know / You've been told their hands are tied") occasionally correspond to the onscreen text. At other times the relationship between this catchy, up-tempo electro-pop and the grave commentary is less assured. The result is a disquieting, somewhat ambivalent conjunction of seductive aesthetics and clear-eyed political critique. In a similar gesture, Jenny Perlin's *Box Office* (2007) juxtaposes two unrelated items from the *New York Times*. The first, a statement by the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, compares the current war to the length and experience of watching a movie. The second is a listing of the top grossing films in America. The seeming absurdity of this pairing underlines the Bush administration's cavalier attitude towards a complex and devastating problem.

In each of the above works, the passive consumption of news cedes to more active viewing, where the spectator must work to create meaning. In the case of *Evil.5* and *Box Office* this requires making connections between ostensibly unrelated components. Drawing from a wider range of sources, *Ask the Insects* (2005), by Steve Reinke, and *Stranger Comes to Town* (2007), by Jacqueline Goss, probe the tenuous, unsettled nature of images and identities. During one of the nine "micro-essays" that comprise *Ask the Insects*, a narrator asserts that "This animation is

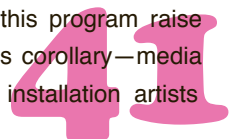
not an animation but live action footage digitally manipulated... even if we cannot reverse the process and ever get back to the original image we can rest assured that the process did occur and the result is before us.” The result, a posterized, pulsating form, demonstrates the potential animation has for transforming the banal into images of greater beauty and interest, and for illustrating abstract concepts. Moving further in that direction, *Stranger Comes to Town* is an animated documentary that explores the identity tracking of immigrants and travellers coming into the United States. The video borrows from Google Earth, the online game *World of Warcraft*, and a US Visit training video traced from the Department of Homeland Security website. Combining interests in science, history, technology and the construction of knowledge, Reinke and Goss generate new forms for the presentation of non-fiction subject matter through whimsy, humour, and revelation.

Although it also culls from the inventory and architecture of video games, *How to Escape from Stress Boxes* (2006), by the artist collective Paper Rad, is something different. Featuring a flat, pixelled pastiche of cartoon detritus, big-haired Troll dolls, lo-fi graphics, new age iconography, and nearly forgotten advertising slogans (“No Fear,” “Just Do It!”) *How to Escape from Stress Boxes* is replete with superfluous elements not fit for a formal repository. Anarchivists of the recent past, Paper Rad present a dark reflection on digital age alienation and media overload. As Paper Rad member Jacob Ciocci writes, “In the ‘70s and ‘80s cartoons and consumer electronics were bigger and trashier than ever and freaked kids out... Now these kids are getting older and are freaking everybody else out by using this same throw-away trash.”<sup>5</sup>

## TOWARDS AN ECOLOGY OF IMAGES

Ciocci’s comment and Paper Rad’s video illustrate that images have become increasingly disposable in today’s meta-media environment. Conversely, we’re living in an era of increased environmental awareness and responsibility. Global warming, greenhouse gases, carbon footprints: these are the daily headliners. So why do we still produce and consume images at an earth shattering pace?

I propose we generate a renewable, and therefore, more sustainable *image ecology*, by re-investing older material with critical, new meanings, just as found footage films by Guy Debord, Arthur Lipsett, Chick Strand, and Craig Baldwin did decades earlier. Eschewing the manufacture of cultural products and passive social relations that define capitalist ideology, the artists in this program raise important questions in the context of media saturation and its corollary—media impoverishment. Today apolitical samplers like sound and installation artists



Christian Marclay and Douglas Gordon, as well as political essayists such as Michael Moore, utilize found record covers, Hollywood cinema, and archival footage to achieve marketable signature styles.

More significantly, as the means of *détournement* become co-opted by the cool scouts of mass media, so does the possibility of critique and of subversive actions take on greater urgency. The artists in this program work with *found* materials to articulate an ethic through creative appropriation. Unlike Richard Prince's epic, re-photographed prints of the Marlboro man, these détourned "archival art" videos aren't produced for the marketplace; rather, they seek to dismantle the politics of truth by revealing obscured aspects of reality, like the hidden consequences of war.

#### EndNotes

1 Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'Archive: Une impression freudienne* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1995); trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

2 Sharon Sandusky, "The Archeology of Redemption: Toward Archival Film," *Millennium Film Journal* 26 (1993): 3-25.

3 In response to this situation, a plethora of international conferences, symposia and exhibitions have recently been staged. See, for example, *Taking a Stand: A Conference on Activism in Canadian Cultural Archives*, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, June 15-16 2007; *Open Archive #1: Trajectories in Audio-Visual Culture*, Argos Centre for Art & Media, Brussels, October 2-November 10, 2007; *Who Makes and Owns Your Work*, a multipart event on sharing, distribution, and intellectual property, Stockholm, November 2007.

4 Joel Katz, "From Archive to Archiveology," *Cinematograph* 4 (1991): 97.

5 Jacob Ciocci, cited in "Paper Rad: Biography," Electronic Arts Intermix website, <http://www.eai.org/eai/biography.jsp?artistID=7440>

## PROGRAMME

**Steve Reinke**, *Ask the Insects* (2005) 8:00

"Micro-essays on animation and death with Pink Floyd, Goethe, Bambi, burning books, useless evolutionary proliferation, and an unstable horizon lead to the school yard being introduced to the graveyard." -- Sundance Film Festival 2007

**Stephen Andrews**, *The Quick and the Dead*, (2004) 1:15

"*The Quick and the Dead* is an animation based on the parable of Cain and Abel. It reinscribes the story using imagery from the current Iraq war." -- Left Forum Film Festival 2007

**Jenny Perlin**, *Box Office*, (2007) 2:25

Perlin writes, "This short, hand-drawn animated film begins with a quote by Ryan C. Crocker, the current U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. In contrast to this quote, a list of the top-ten grossing films at the U.S. box office from the same day presents itself onscreen, along with other animated panels of related drawings that function as an associative commentary." Courtesy the artist, Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam, and Galerie M+R Fricke, Berlin.

**Tony Cokes** *Evil.5 (Grin & Bear)* (2006-7), 8:10

"*Evil.5 (Grin & Bear)* presents quotations from U.S. leaders about 9/11/2001 and the government's responses to it, particularly the invasion of Iraq." -- First Person Cinema Series, University of Colorado at Boulder

**Jacqueline Goss**, *Stranger Comes to Town*, (2007), 28:30

"*Stranger Comes to Town* re-works animations from the Department of Homeland Security -combining them with stories from the border, impressions from the on-line game World of Warcraft, and journeys via Google Earth to tell a tale of bodies moving through lands familiar and strange." -- J.G.

**Paper Rad**, *How to Escape From Stress Boxes*, (2006), 4:10

"Little Dude follows a couple of trolls through a pixellated landscape in search for a way out. There is no way out, or rather just one way out." -- Magic Lantern Film/Video Series, Providence, RI

**Stephen Andrews** was born in 1956 in Sarnia, Ontario. Andrews has exhibited his work in Canada, the U.S., Brazil, Scotland, France and Japan. He is represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, as well as many private collections. His work deals with memory, identity, surveillance and their representations in various media.

**Cory Arcangel** is a Brooklyn based artist and performer who works with early computers, the internet and video game systems. He is a member of Beige, an artist collective that works collaboratively in digital media. Beige has produced videos, Web projects, albums of electronic music, and modified Nintendo video game cartridges.

**Robin Armstrong** is a 27 year old native to the Toronto region and a recent graduate of the University of Toronto where he studied art, architecture and semiotics. His body of artwork consists of solo photo-based, installation, and video work as well as collaborative group installation projects.

A native of Toronto, **Jeremy Bailey** is a visual artist and curator working in electronic media. His work has been featured in numerous exhibitions nationally and internationally. He is co-founder and participating artist in the 640 480 Video Collective, an award winning international collective of sculpture and video artists. Jeremy received his MFA in art video from Syracuse University in 2006.

**George Barber** is a UK-based pioneer of video art, whose films have been shown in festivals and at venues across the world. Barber was a leading figure in the Scratch Video phenomenon of the 80s, which exploited newly available video-editing technologies and their potential for rhythmic-editing and moving-image collage. (LUX Catalogue)

Since 1993 **Daniel Barrow** has used an overhead projector to create a “manual” form of animation by projecting, layering and manipulating drawings on mylar transparencies. Barrow variously refers to this practice as graphic performance, live illustration, or manual animation. His performances, videos and installations have been exhibited widely in venues including The Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles) and The Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver).

**Tony Cokes** investigates identity and opposition through reframing and repositioning. He questions how race and gender influence the construction of subjectivities, and how they are perceived through “representational regimes of image and sound” as perpetuated by Hollywood, the media and popular culture. His assemblages of archival footage, media images, text commentary, and pop music use sources ranging from Louis Althusser, Malcolm X and Public Enemy. He currently teaches in the Department of Modern Culture and Media at Brown University, Providence, RI.

**Jonathan Culp** is the creator of many collage, documentary, and Super 8 works. As co-founder of the Toronto Video Activist Collective, Culp was an early proponent (and sympathetic critic) of ‘video activism.’ He has promoted independent video via the Satan Macnuggit Video Road Show, and as film and video editor for *Broken Pencil* magazine.

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**Jacqueline Goss** makes videos and web-based works exploring the rules, histories, and tools of language and mapping systems. Her projects take as their source specific acts of writing and cartography that bring about cultural change, technological innovation, or create social narrative ruptures. For the last few years she has used 2D digital animation techniques to work within the genre of the animated documentary. A native of New Hampshire, she attended Brown University and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She teaches in the Film and Electronic Arts Department at Bard College in the Hudson Valley of New York.

**Robert Hamilton** is a multi-media artist whose mediums include video, sound and sculpture. His work in video began in 1983 while studying at the Alberta College of Art. He continued his undergraduate studies at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and received his MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1989. His videos have played in numerous festivals nationally and internationally; they have also been the recipients of many awards.

**Miranda July** is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker, performing artist, and writer. July's work has been presented at the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum and in two Whitney Biennials. Her film, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), won a special jury prize at the Sundance Film Festival and the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

**Brett Kashmere** is a filmmaker, curator and Visiting Assistant Professor at Oberlin College in Ohio. He has presented screenings and organized exhibitions at festivals and venues such as the Seoul Film Festival, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg, the D.U.M.B.O. Arts Festival in Brooklyn, Cinematheque Ontario, New York's Eyebeam Center for Art and Technology, Portland's Cinema Project, Light Cone in Paris, and La Cinematheque québécoise. In 2004 Kashmere organized the touring expanded cinema installation and DVD-format catalog, *Industrie: Oeuvres récentes de Richard Kerr*. He recently curated the retrospective, *Arthur Lipsett: About Time*, which travelled throughout France. Kashmere's writing has appeared in journals and magazines such as *The Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, *ESSE arts et opinions*, *Take One*, *PROTÉE revue internationale de theories et de pratiques semiotiques*, *Senses of Cinema*, *Synoptique*, and *Offscreen*, and anthologies like *The Films of Jack Chambers*, *The Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, and the forthcoming volumes, *Excesses and Extremes in Film and Video* and *Live Cinema: A Contemporary Reader*. After growing up on the Canadian prairies, Kashmere attended the University of Regina and Concordia University in Montréal, where he received a MA in Film Studies and an MFA in Studio Arts.

**Jean-Paul Kelly** is a Toronto-based artist, curator, and writer. He produces video, photo-based work, and drawings that are often constructed using a hybrid vernacular of cinematic reference, home movies, cartoons, digital compositing, and performance. Kelly holds a Masters of Visual Studies degree from the University of Toronto (2005), and in 2006 he received an Ontario Arts Council Media Arts Grant for emerging artists. His work has been exhibited in galleries and festivals in North America, Japan, and Europe, most recently as part of *art-action: rencontres internationales 2006* in Paris, Berlin, and Madrid. Gallery TPW (Toronto) will present a solo exhibition of Kelly's work in the fall of 2008. Jean-Paul Kelly is member of the Pleasure Dome experimental film and video programming collective.

**Jowita Kepa** is a video artist living and working in Berlin. Her work has been shown in Berlin, Hamburg, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Zurich, Chicago, Montréal, Quebec City, Vancouver, Ottawa and Toronto.

**Jacob Korczynski** is an independent curator currently based in Toronto where he is a member of the Pleasure Dome programming collective. He has curated projects for the Art Gallery of York University, the Dunlop Art Gallery and SAW Gallery, while his writing has appeared in *C magazine*, *Border Crossings*, *FUSE magazine* and *The Fillip Review*.

French born, Paris based **Claude Lelouch** has produced a prolific body of feature film work during his filmmaking career. As an active director, screenwriter, producer, actor and cinematographer, Lelouch has worked on over 50 films since 1960. He has won two Academy awards and several Cannes Film Festival awards for his films, and founded Les Films 13 production company.

**Ardele Lister's** works in analog and digital media have been exhibited internationally in festivals, galleries, and museums. Her works are included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam) and the Kunsthalle (Berlin). Currently, she is the Undergraduate Director in the Visual Arts Department at Rutgers University.

**Gabrielle Moser** is a writer and curator living in Toronto and is currently completing her MA in art history and curatorial practice at York University. She has curated exhibitions for the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre and for the Toronto window front gallery Sleepwalker Projects. Her research focuses on innovative curatorial strategies in the presentation of new media art.

**Jim Munroe** lives with his wife and daughter in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood. In addition to producing a collection of short videos about video games, Pleasure Circuit Overload, he has written videogame journalism for Gamasutra.com, *eye weekly*, and theculturalgutter.com. His fifth book is a post-Rapture graphic novel called *Therefore Repent!* He invites you to visit his website at [nomediakings.org](http://nomediakings.org).

**Paper Rad** is a Pittsburgh, PA/Northampton, MA artist collective that makes comics, zines, video art, net art, MIDI files, paintings, installations and music. At once affirmative and critical, the videos of Paper Rad synthesize popular material from television, video games, and advertising, reprogramming these references with an exuberantly neo-primitivist digital aesthetic. The three primary members are Jacob Ciocci, Jessica Ciocci, and Ben Jones. Although they continue to publish their own zines, music, and online content, they are represented by Foxy Production gallery in New York and have shown at several major galleries including Pace Wildenstein, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Deitch Projects.

**Jenny Perlin** is a Brooklyn-based artist and filmmaker. Her practice in 16mm film, video, and drawing works with and against the documentary tradition, incorporating innovative stylistic techniques to emphasize issues of truth, misunderstanding, and personal history. Each aspect of Perlin's practice looks closely at the ways in which social machinations are

reflected in the smallest elements of daily life. Perlin's works have been exhibited at museums and film festivals around the world, including The Museum of Modern Art, P.S.1 and The Whitney Museum of Art in New York City, the Centre pour l'image contemporaine in Geneva, Kunsthalle Exnergasse in Vienna, the Rotterdam Film Festival, Berlin Film Festival, and Toronto's Images Festival, among others.

**Andrew James Paterson** is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist working with video, film, performance, writing and music. His works and performances have been presented locally, nationally, and internationally for nearly thirty years. Recently he has been experimenting with cameraless video and single-frame editing, or "flicker films".

**Zeesy Powers** creates work that pushes boundaries with technology, narrative, personal relationships and her own body. Aside from her video-performance work, which has toured in North America and Europe, Zeesy has gained a reputation for controversial and emotional performances such as *Three Minute Girlfriend* and her *I Will Tell You Exactly What I Think Of You For \$5 service*.

**Steve Reinke** is an artist and writer best known for his monologue-based video essays, which are widely screened, collected and exhibited. He lives in Toronto and Chicago, where he is associate professor of Art Theory & Practice at Northwestern University. In 2006 he was awarded the Bell Canada Prize in Video Art. He has edited a number of books, including, with Chris Gehman, the anthology *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema*. Coach House recently published a book of his scripts, *Everybody Loves Nothing*.

**Tasman Richardson** is a videomaker, electronic composer, designer, and curator currently living in Toronto. His work has shown in Argentina, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Egypt, England, France, Finland, Holland, Iceland, Peru, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and The United States. He has performed and collaborated under the aliases M.O.I., JAWA, Pox, FAMEFAME, theblameshifter, IBM, OHVOV, Anvil, Polygon Noose, and Noise-Op.

**Katy Shepherd** began experimenting with animating old photos via digital manipulation in 1996 following the death of her mother. In 2001, Shepherd was commissioned by the Arts Council and Channel 4 Television to make "film". Her short films and animations have been shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art (London), the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the National Gallery (London).

**Tom Sherman** works in video, radio and live performance, and writes all manner of texts. His interdisciplinary work has been exhibited internationally, including shows at the National Gallery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Musée d'art contemporain, the Museum of Modern Art, and Ars Electronica. He represented Canada at the Venice Biennale in 1980. In 2003 he was awarded the Canada Council's Bell Canada Award in Video Art.

**Tadasu Takamine** was born in Kagoshima, Japan in 1968. He studied at Kyoto City University of Arts & Music and the International Academy of Media-Arts and Sciences, Gifu. He was a member of the artist collective DUMB TYPE and has presented work at numerous venues, including the Images Festival of Independent Film & Video (Toronto), Oberhausen Short Film Festival (Germany), and Tranz<--->Tech International Video Biennale (Toronto).



Published in 2008 by Vtape  
401 Richmond Street West, #452  
Toronto, ON M5V 3A8  
Canada

tel 416 351-1317  
fax 416 351-1509  
email [info@vtape.org](mailto:info@vtape.org)

[www.vtape.org](http://www.vtape.org)

ISBN: 978-0-9734831-4-7

Printed by Print Maximum  
Designed by Linseed Projects

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