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THE END
OF
ANALOG



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Preface



Eric Fleischauer

Bottled water, candles, blankets, canned food, duct tape, plastic, and handguns. These were some of the items being offered to people on the brink of impending disaster. The Y2K crisis was brought to our attention by computer scientists working in the wake of predecessors failure to anticipate the numerical complexities of a new millennium. If anyone doubted the sweeping digitization of daily life, the widespread panic concerning the influence and power of computers at the cusp of the new millennium surely convinced them otherwise.

One decade later, after emerging relatively unscathed, we find ourselves about to crash into another technological crisis—only this one is intentional and administered by the government. As stated on the Federal Communications Commission’s website; “DTV IS COMING (AND SOONER THAN YOU THINK!) By June 12th, 2009 Federal law requires that all full power television broadcast stations stop broadcasting in analog format and broadcast only in digital format.” *

* <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/digitaltv.html>

Converter boxes and High Definition television sets are the solutions offered to us this time. With either of these items in hand, so we are told, there will be nothing to fear; the shows will go on. However, these items do not address the bigger picture. It is important that we step back and look past the quick fix to consider the larger and more tumultuous issues that are being re-framed by the DTV transition.

While digital technology has been affecting our culture in a piecemeal fashion for decades, the end of analog television broadcasting is unique because of its far reaching and totalizing impact. These transmissions have been an invisible yet omnipresent blanket overhead, insulating and comforting us for over half a century. Regulating the visual opiate of the masses is a difficult feat, even if it is (purported to be) an upgrade. But, because you don't know what you've got 'til its gone, it should come as no surprise that when TV's soothing flicker ceases it will probably provoke public interest in the struggle between analog and digital.

The conclusion of analog television broadcasting in the U.S. can be understood as heralding the arrival of the digital era. *The End of Analog* is an exhibition that

marks this historic transition with an exploration of technology's shifting significance both in our culture, and on individuals. The move from analog to digital opens up a space of uncertainty regarding the status of physical objects and bodies, leading us to ask: What is materiality in the digital age? The artists in this show prefigure the post-analog landscape, creating objects and images that explore this looming question from multiple angles.

George Monteleone and Alexander Stewart collaborate on a video that combines the precarious tuning of television sets with the tradition of early performance-based video art, implicating both domestic and institutional histories. Jon Satrom mines the space between video formats, mixing and merging the new DTV standard's digital error-correction and MPEG2 compression with soon-to-be-rare analog artifacts. The relationship between traditional photography and digital imaging is articulated in two offerings from Todd Simeone's ongoing *Record Cover in a Flash* series. Robert Snowden and Carson Salter present selections from their forthcoming publication *FloorPlan*, for which people were asked to draw the architectural spaces of popular 90's Television sitcoms from memory. Tapping into the rising

waste-stream of discarded objects, Brandon Alvendia suggests we look past today's new technology toward its inevitable obsolescence.

Also included in the exhibition is this publication. Primarily available online as a downloadable and printer-friendly file, a physical copy of the book will be present alongside the work in the gallery. Straddling the divide between web-based approaches and more traditional publishing formats, both the content and form of this text confront questions relating to materiality and physicality in the digital age.

Putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) the contributors to *The End of Analog* draw from their rich and varied experiences to address matters concerning media history, translation, transition, formal shifts, and underlying social and economic implications. These filmmakers, educators, video artists, writers, and curators converge to craft an important document that transcends the spatial and temporal limitations of an exhibition. Accessible online well after the month-long show has concluded, this text functions as a time capsule containing critical reflection on this historic moment in our culture.

As we reflect on the technological paradigm shift marked by the coming of Digital Television, we can take comfort in this publication's underlying stability—formally speaking. It uses one of the oldest analog formats—the written word—to demonstrate the extent to which digital culture has influenced media today. Readers can now turn away from their darkened television screens toward the internet's sprawling wealth of digitized information and download some relevant and timely reading material to cling to during the black-out—or they could just watch more TV online.

FloorPlan: Curator's Statement

—
Carson Salter
&
Robert Snowden

For Floorplan (publication forthcoming), Carson Salter and Robert Snowden collected sitcom floor plans, drawn from memory. The following text was presented alongside a section of their collection for *The End of Analog*, Roots & Culture Gallery, 2009.

*Memories offer emotionally convincing yet untrustworthy evidence of the past. When presented with the blueprint of a home familiar since childhood, how would one reconcile subjective memories with an objective floor plan?**

Watch your television memory, fast forward it, rewind it; render the floor plan of a sitcom from memory. Reconstruct the implausible spaces, refurbish the third wall...the fourth... the fifth. Map the missing corners of television's fabled geographies. Remix histories: yours and theirs, build a make-believe of collapsed space

*Turner, Grady T. "Mark Bennett At The Corcoran", *Art In America*, [Vol. 86, No. 2, February 1998]: 110.

Turner posed this question in response to Mark Bennett's "TV Sets and The Suburban Dream". For the exhibition, Bennett labored as an architectural detective, fast-forwarding and rewinding taped episodes to render the floor plans of sitcoms as accurately as he could. We cast off from Bennett and launched our own investigation of fictional architecture. Where Bennett watched and re watched, we never watched, and instead invited others to shake loose the past and stoke their television recollections.

between the real and unreal, the remaining and the vanished, the always-will-be and the never was.

Through these curious investigations of imagined and fictive physical spaces, we might clarify how sitcoms, through set construction and architecture, do more than build walls for characters to hang their minutiae upon; they construct a politics of architecture and standards of habitation. How do these spaces encode a social order? How do they determine what a character needs to be real, trustworthy, and acceptable (acceptably black, middle class, Jewish, familial, and urban)?

The drawings roam from the earnest and literal to the absurd, mischievous and spot on, and through them we hope to discover what is ubiquitous, what is a given, and what is at home.

In Out of the Reign



Jonathan Miller

ANALOG IS DEAD.

Digital imaging, recording and presentation have largely replaced older analog forms. This will hardly come as startling news.

We know that digital information differs from analog information: in general, smooth continuities characterize analog media versus the discrete steps of the digital. Think of how the continuous sweep of analog clock hands compares to the instantaneous changing numbers of a digital clock. Still, the difference doesn't prevent us from keeping track of the time — and neither instrument excels at putting us in contact with the ineffable complexity of time. In other words, both are ultimately approximations.

Analog is dead. Long live Analog!

The old analog is dead, and a new analog takes its place. As we pass from one realm to another it should be noted: the royal family of the image remains enthroned.

We have always been subject to the analog; in the

sense that the image is comparable to what passes in front of our eyes. Arguably, analog and digital signals provide only an analogy, defined as a comparison based on a resemblance between things. In whatever fashion they materialize, images will remain like the things they depict.

How much importance should we attach to the distinctions between materials composing the image? Should we favor earth pigment on rock or electron on phosphor-coated glass? Shall our eyes feast on liquid crystal pixels or clumps of silver halide?

A JPEG is not a Polaroid is not a Daguerrotype, but, for practical purposes, all are photography. Purists, Resolutionists, Old-School Techno-Romanticists, your days are numbered and your numbers are few: the cell-phone snapshot brigades are legion. The vast majority of us accept this: push the button, we do the rest — or download and print in one easy step.

Yet, if there is a difference, it's a difference that makes a difference: it's the matter that's the matter. Consider the lines that you read right now. Then think of a clay tablet covered with cuneiform writing from ancient Sumer. In the survival of the latter, the matter matters. Our works have an ephemeral, will-o'-the-wisp

substance, not the earthy enduring stuff of prior millennia. This endows us with the capacity to manipulate them with tremendous facility. With unprecedented rapidity we can cut, paste, layer—and lose everything.

Every technology is born with a twin—its accident. This is the founding notion of Paul Virilio's Accident Museum. Not all accidents take place instantaneously (a recognition found in the vernacular phrase “slow-motion trainwreck”, viz. global economic collapse...). Some take place over spans of time, the measure of which we have difficulty grasping, e.g., Chernobyl. The digital accident might be a subtle and protracted one. Digital media may even be its own disastrous doppelgänger: everything encoded, invisible to the eye, non-iconic, easily corruptible, push-button erasable.

Analog too can subside into states beyond recovery. It breaks, burns, scratches, melts, molds, rots...and the list goes on. Yet it has also proven its durability. There is obvious risk in committing the bulk of our cultural production to digital media. Are we fools to trust the inscriptions of our thoughts and feelings to electronic traces? Is it safe to store them in equivalences of ones and zeros, inscribed on opaque plastic disks, formatted for machines subject to rapid obsolescence and hence potential inaccessibility or illegibility?

These questions have already been asked and answered. Yes, it's risky, and we have proven our capacity for foolishness in the name of progress. So, a chastening reminder from Johan Huizenga is in order:

the expectation that every new discovery or refinement of existing means must contain the promise of higher values or greater happiness is an extremely naïve thought... It is not in the least paradoxical to say that a culture may founder on real and tangible progress.

In the name of progress, media are allotted increasingly short life spans. We grow inured to witnessing their birth, growth, and demise. Just as long spans of history take their name from the predominant materials employed by humans—stone age, bronze age, iron age—so short spans of personal history can now be related to obsolete media—typewriter, LP, cassette, super-8, Kodachrome, Polaroid....

Beyond personal history, this history of dead media intersects with the history of art. Our museums brim with things made in ways “they just don't make ‘em anymore.” Old movies, sounds recorded with breathing room, layers of paint: they're easy to love.

We are prone to romanticize the deceased. But rather than lament the innocent victims of the juggernaut of progress, lest we cast them in an idealizing cosmetic light, there may be another way. For anyone who wishes to mitigate the tendency to fetishize the substance of expression, there are directions (long and a bit complex) from Felix Guattari:

I simply want to stress that the aesthetic paradigm — the creation and composition of mutant percepts and affects — has become the paradigm for every possible form of liberation, expropriating the old scientific paradigms to which, for example, historical materialism or Freudianism were referred. The contemporary world — tied up in its ecological, demographic and urban impasses — is incapable of absorbing, in a way that is compatible with the interests of humanity, the extraordinary techno-scientific mutations which shake it. It is locked in a vertiginous race towards ruin or radical renewal. All the bearings — economic, social, political, moral, traditional — break down one after the other. It has become imperative to recast the axes of values, the fundamental finalities of human relations and productive activity: An ecology of the virtual is thus just as pressing as ecologies of the visible world. And in this regard, poetry, music, the plastic arts, the cinema — particularly in their performance or performative

*modalities – have an important role to play; with their specific contribution and as a paradigm of reference in new social and analytic practices (psychoanalytic in the broadest senses). Beyond the relations of actualised forces, virtual ecology will not simply attempt to preserve the endangered species of cultural life but equally to engender conditions for the creation and development of unprecedented formations of subjectivity that have never been seen and never felt. This is to say that generalized ecology – or ecosophy – will work as a science of ecosystems, as a bid for political regeneration, and as an ethical, aesthetic and analytic engagement. It will tend to create new systems of valorization, a new taste for life, a new gentleness between the sexes, generations, ethnic groups, races.... **

Analog is dead. Long live the endangered species of cultural life! May they hold sway over the creation and development of unprecedented formations of subjectivity!

*Chaosmosis, p. 91-92

Personal/Political:
Other Broadcasts/Other Screens



T. Foley

I'm so *old* that I remember when, at the end of an evening, television would go off the air. The National Anthem would be broadcast and then the screen would turn into white, black, and grey snow with a crinkly sssshhhhh noise accompanying that visual friction.

The end of analogue television signals to me that the time is ripe for teaching and learning more about the history and development of motion pictures. Today's overabundance of video content on YouTube (my own video *National Anthem 2004* of young Jack Thornton making music with his armpit among them*) are in some ways similar to the first moving picture "docu-

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiDbm5mTYAU>

ments” known as actualities. These pioneering short movies made and screened by the Lumière Brothers, the Edison Company, and others, simply re-presented actual things happening (of workers leaving a factory, dancers dancing or folks kissing in front of a camera). In some ways my video does what these early filmmakers did: framed a subject, turned a camera on to record something in motion, and then turned the camera off. Much ground has been covered in the last century, cinematically speaking. However, I noticed something interesting when thinking about the Lumière brother’s camera, called the Cinematograph, which could record, process and project film. Compare this beautifully crude wooden box with it’s mod sister the cell phone, also able to capture, playback, and distribute a talking picture. Both devices capture moving pictures, only the cell phone can be carried in a pocket. We may even forget that phones have video capability, until an actuality like Saddam Hussein’s execution by hanging surfaces on the World Wide Web. Such personalized documents of events evade mass communication protocols and intrude upon the media status quo. These other (unsanctioned) broadcasts change and shape the distribution of content, and what we’re accustomed

to—our expectations about how subjects appear inside a motion picture frame.

YouTube's motto is "Broadcast Yourself". And it wasn't until 2006 that I embraced this slogan when things technologically "clicked" for me as a computer user and video maker. That year I had a fast enough computer with the requisite software to ready my videos for web distribution. YouTube made it easy for me to post and share my work on its site, and suddenly I was part of a video-sharing participatory culture. Because *National Anthem 2004* on YouTube is tagged, it has the chance of finding a very specific audience that might be searching for it—of being viewed by folks who are fans of armpit music or who dig hearing myriad versions of the our National Anthem being performed. When I was a kid, during the days when television went off the air at night, there weren't many channels to choose from. But when I was in middle school (circa 1977), I stayed overnight at Kathy Agusta's house and caught my first glimpse of cable television. We watched the movie *Jaws* on HBO (without commercial interruption!). Her family's cable subscription meant we had access to content difficult for tweens to access. Late that night, we watched an Italian soft-core porn (I think it was called *The Erotic*

Nurse). The movie left us feeling awkwardly bewildered, but it certainly helped to advance my vocabulary in relation to formal film language. I immediately learned what overdubbing was, and to this day I prefer to read subtitles when watching foreign films. In my adult life, living on a non-profit employee salary, I've never prioritized cable television as a monthly expense. While I don't have a television set in my house, I do have access to other screens (via my sturdy Macintosh with high speed internet) that allow me to belatedly, but happily, summon up shows I want to see. Television (the object) is no longer necessary to me, and I'm no longer at the mercy of the network's programmed time slot (unless I want to watch something live, like the Steelers winning the Super Bowl or the Presidential Inauguration, because viewing live broadcasts online can be terribly dicey).

Though we may watch some versions of television online, we're still captive audiences being delivered to advertisers over the innerwebs. I attend local art-house cinemas and make gallery visits to get my non-commercial media fix. But I like that I can get that fix on the internet, too. What's lost in resolution and scale can be made up partially, for me, by the quick ability

to share new work, or the convenient access I have to a tremendous variety of work. I can see and share videos as interesting as Courtney Egan's *The Chaos Hags*,* her skillfully re-purposed video featuring moving-picture parts of women, from silver screen starlets to actor-nobodies featured in body lotion commercials. If I'm interested in the artist's developing body of work, I can subscribe to her channel and receive an email notification when she uploads new work. In days of yore, I'd try and contact the artist hoping they had DVDs of new work available, then buy one and wait for the work to arrive via snail mail. I like that I can easily reference an enormous motion picture library. All the institutions and organizations I work with still purchase copies of commercial and non-commercial motion picture work to share with students on big screens. However, as a media literacy specialist and artist who teaches production and analysis workshops I remain optimistic about the expanded access to content. My hope is that broadened exposure to various types and approaches to making motion pictures will advance the art form by helping nascent video users become more interesting makers.

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6-3kiCLoCM>

On these other screens, we're no longer mere consumers of content—we now efficiently and expediently distribute self-produced content, or user generated content. These days, I can't think about the core principles of media literacy (which I define as the ability to access, analyze, and produce media for oneself) without thinking of *The Colbert Report*. The show simultaneously integrates and exploits, with great irony, the language of motion picture arts and user generated content for economic and audience development purposes. Most of the audience probably didn't know that when Colbert was talking to Lawrence Lessig* about how copyright laws are outdated, that Lessig was not just the author of a new book, but is also the founder of Creative Commons. Or how about when Colbert told his audience not to remix content from his conversation with Lessig? The television show host asked for and got new user-generated content in the form of mash-up videos—known in the formal vernacular as “working with found footage.”** Colbert (and many other media

*<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/215454/january-08-2009/lawrence-lessig>

**<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/216595/january-21-2009/stephen-s-remix-challenge>

producers) know that contemporary audiences enjoy and expect interaction, that they are made up of potential creative contributors who work cheap, accepting flashes of fame, or exposure to new audiences as payment for their work. The ways in which viewers enjoy being user-consumers has even affected radio broadcasting. Last fall, I began to notice National Public Radio fishing for user-generated content daily, if not hourly. And in December of 2008, NPR cut 7 percent of its workforce. “Email or call us,” its reporters often say, “with your personal stories about the economic downturn, or listener plans for traveling to Washington, D.C. for the inauguration of our first African-American president.”

My experience with and perception of mass media has changed because the tools for making and distributing media have changed. Watching the CNN broadcast of Obama’s inauguration, I found myself becoming annoyed. I wanted to see all the pomp and circumstance surrounding the newly elected president within a neatly arranged frame, without any visual interference. I suppose I want the media to become more democratized, but I also want it to aesthetically stay the same. Yet I know it’s the public’s familiarity with

(and accessibility to) the tools for making media and its access to these other screens/other broadcasts that helped get this president elected. This recent broadcast, for me, was a pertinent vignette of the times, for it contained the very personal acts alongside a political event. As a nation that day, watching television, we saw another frame of history unfold. Inside that frame, another man became president of the United States while many people in closest proximity to the historical event, in that moment, in that space, chose not to watch, but to record images.

The Most Significant Bit



Jennifer Montgomery

Unlike broadcasting delivery systems, language resists regulation. There is no cut-off point for the cessation of a word's usage. No word has ever been officially decommissioned, but through a process involving long, brutal farewells and occasional reunions, which often resemble bad break-ups, words disappear and reappear on an unpredictable basis. Those of us who are interested in the transition from analog to digital media are fond of citing how many terms used to describe digital technology are actually vestigial traces of the previous century's analog technology. Ascribing a collective will to language is a dangerous business, so referring to our insistent use of outmoded terminology as nostalgic is not enough: we now must understand its position within digital syntax.

Writing is defined by arbitrary limits and rules, that's what makes it beautiful. So we can adapt templates from an infinite number of other systems and apply them to language, and from there see to what degree language remains intelligible when subjected to these rules. This we sometimes call poetry. Toward that end, I propose to apply a digital system to a text, which will take effect immediately, but must be imagined as accompanying the televisual shift which is now due to take place on June 12th, 2009.

New rules apply: You will not need an Analog-to-Digital Converter (besides which, you will have to get in line behind me, and my approximate wait-time is over a year). The following paragraph describes words that have become outmoded but are still in use. It is ruled by sampling settings, based on MPEG encoding's definition of a Group of Pictures, or GOP, but will here be referred to as a Group of Words (GOW):

a) I (intra-coded) word:

reference word, which represents a fixed image and is independent of other word types.

b) P (predictive coded) word:

contains motion compensated difference information from the preceding I-word.

- c) B (bidirectionally predictive coded) word:
contains difference information from
the preceding and following I- or P- words.

- d) D (directed coded) word serves the fast advance.

- e) A GOW always begins with an I-word.
Afterwards several P-words follow, in each case
with some word's distance. In the remaining
gaps are B-words. Some codecs allow for more
than one I-word in a GOW.

- f) The Most Significant Bit (MSB):
here the Most Significant Word (MSW, no
relation to the software), is the word in
a multiple-word sentence with the largest
value. As with MSBs, the MSW is
normally the word farthest to the left,
or the word transmitted first in a sequence.
When the MSW in a sentence is farthest
to the left (or first), the least significant
word (LSW) is usually the one farthest to
the right (or last). In this case, the sen-
tence is said to be Big-Endian.

Now, let's see if you can understand what is printed below. (Transcoded from the text cited.*)

Terms Unmoored Etymology Becomes Memory

Broken record sounding went literal meaning
dodo years ago.
Clock-wise, counter-clockwise will be,
aren't there yet.
Broadcasting names tossing seeds names widely
more places.
Going off half-cocked few single-action revolvers,
fewer flintlock pistols era.
Bite the bullet morphine age.
Taping a concert or movie: burn DVD still taped.
Retronyms: new word or old object phrase
no longer unique. Acoustic guitar
example guitar was.
Television now black-and-white television.
Restaurant differentiate sit-down
fast-food take-out now.
Upper case lower case letters were printers' handset
type drawers arranged by type days.
"Pencil in" appointment silly feel age, substitute
"commit provisionally finally not to."
Journal means forget slacking: weekly. "Daily"
French. Journal redundant out there.
Phones out of date dial not. Not in use.
Phones hung on a hook hang up that's off the hook
earpiece we get.

Ubiquitous sometimes said four corners
spread to earth is.
Roll down window remember last time. Can't I?
Cordless screwdriver my opposed favorite to what?
Devil's advocate no longer Papal beatification. Devil
role not literally sainthood process.
"Opposing council" argues against sainthood process
apparent to that one.
Sky tuned dead channel. Supposed gray color televi-
sion static, blue today, just be. William Gibson:
cyberpunk, book first sentence. Blew it.

* "Terms That Have Become Unmoored From Their Etymology
in Our Memory"

The Volvkhov Conspiracy <http://volokh.com/posts/1119884267.shtml>

The End of Analog



Steve Reinke

This is what I'm most looking forward to in digital television: the buffering and preload delay. Digital televisions need time before their highly compressed material (full of quantization noise, incorrect color, blockiness and a blurred shimmering haze) loads. Channel surfing — the annoying click click click — will be a thing of the past. Now it will be more like channel sauntering, as it takes seconds — long seconds— for each digital channel to come forth. Our blood pressure will go down, and we will begin to think more clearly. We will have to make decisions based on some kind of planning or research (looking into the guide). The future will be subjected to a greater degree of individual agency and autonomy: it will become, finally, our future, if only for those hours we spend sat in front of our sets. We will immediately become calmer and more satisfied. Broadcast television will be more genteel, all rowdiness consigned to the internet. The change from analog to digital is analogous to the

change from nomadic hunter gatherer to sedentary agrarian societies, and I, for one, am tired of all the roaming and clicking.

This is what I will miss about analog television: the snow and ghosting of a weak signal. Oh, there'll still be poor reception and signal loss in digital broadcast, but those systems have cliffs: when there is poor signal or a bit of interference, the screen will just go blank. I've read the specs: if you live close to the tower, a high frequency signal will not make it through a bit of mist. It's all or nothing in the new digital world: data streams and pixels strangled by maximum compression schemes are not very forgiving. We will no longer be blessed by snowy television images (except as a kind of nostalgic digital effect, a third party After Effects filter that is not quite convincing). And no ghosts. No ghosts and no ghost images. But there will be lovely echoes as televisions in adjacent rooms will have slightly differing preload times. Not other voices, other rooms but the same voices, other rooms warped and layered and softened in an endless, soothing round.

In Canada the digital conversion does not happen for a few more years, so those lucky enough to live near the border may be able to get some analog from up there. Canadian television is, of course, superior to

American television as it contains more or less all of American television, plus some British shows. After the Canadian conversion (2012, scheduled to coincide with Ancient Mayan Doomsday) pirate analog broadcasting will come into existence. We are all looking forward to contributing to this new medium, whatever it may be. Whatever it will be, it will have no flesh. It will be resolutely anti-corporeal. (After all, Cronenberg has betrayed us: he is writing a novel. Long live his old flesh! He'll be even more dead soon.) No medium and no message. Apart from one program completely devoted to Diet Pepsi/Mentos explosions, it will be nothing like YouTube.

But It's Attachment to Grasping



Anthony Elms

Wanting to write something more proactive. Hoping in the switch to digital that analog will be taken over by artists. Possibly the freeform expression planned for decades ago in public access television and undertaken by numerous video artists and film collectives might finally be realized. Really. Exhale. Breathe.

Wanting to write something more militant. Hoping in the switch to digital that analog will be taken over by—or left to—the margins. Possibly the airwaves become a wooly environment for bands of pirates and their booty of unregulated content and unverified commentary. Don't hold your breath.

Pessimism feeds confusion. As we should all know, the transfer to digital is not due to technological necessity, nor of market demand, it is because the FCC feels the transfer will be beneficial and open up “scarce and valuable” airwaves for emergency and wireless service. Recently Congress passed the DTV Delay Act extending the deadline for Full-Broadcast stations to complete the digital transition until summer. Moreover, for now, Low-Power and Class A television stations are exempt from the digital transition mandate. Huh? *We are experiencing technical difficulties, please stand by.*

Confusion causes poor reception. This is not the death of analog. Digital and analog have co-existed for centuries. J.G. Ballard may have put it most succinctly: “Money: The original digital clock.” We are only talking about analog television transmissions (sometimes referred to as Terrestrial Broadcasting, which of course makes me wonder if digital transmissions are correspondingly Extraterrestrial Broadcasting?). Many analog systems, like LPs for example, continue to thrive. Beta is still considered the archival medium for video work by museums collecting new media. Any thoroughly modern home is a mix of analog and digital.

Poor reception breeds time wasting. “Time wasting” is the accepted *nom de plume* of YouTube. For me, YouTube requires a quick check of Chris Marker’s postings (not that I can figure out what to make of them) and boogaludo’s postings (thank you for La Lupe’s rendition of “Fever”*) and cparamo’s postings (the video for “Hallogallo”** by Neu! is one of YouTube’s best). Both boogaludo and cparamo post videos of turntables playing records (they are not alone), one song per video. The resolution question. Complicated by the compression to the YouTube format, which is so bad you can’t

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmAz75pgJKc>

** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbAWBELA6dA>

ethically refer to it under the industry-preferred term of a “standard.” Videos often pause in playback, skitter, are terribly bitmapped, have faded colors, sound and image out of sync, and the tonal range easily maxes out on the computers speakers. Back in 1996, Dike Blair wrote an essay, “Meanderings on The Age of *BLUR* and blah, blah, blah.” (Confession: the essay is in a collection of Blair’s writings I helped publish.) The essay takes issue with the proliferation of blurred text and imagery in mid-90s graphic design. He wonders why of all the treatments offered in the Adobe Photoshop application *blur* was the effect to proliferate. Blair writes: “[*Blah, blah, blah*] suggests that we’ve reached the saturation point of what can be done with words—just as blur is about having reached the saturation point of images.” Later he continues: “Speaking of speaking, blur is related to slur. The slur of booze—the slur of dialectic English. You slur and blur when you’re drunk and tired. We’ve been through almost a century of New Years—how could we not be exhausted?”

Blair’s essay is great even if he may have been late to the party, or late getting home. I suspect it was four years earlier than “Meanderings on The Age of *BLUR* and *blah, blah, blah*”, in 1992, when the future officially collapsed, even if *Omni* magazine did take until 1995 to completely check out. “Don’t stop thinking about

tomorrow” was Bill Clinton’s presidential campaign slogan, lifting the chorus of a Fleetwood Mac song from 1977. Once elected, Clinton and some of his advisers referred to the merits of Alvin Toffler’s prescriptive social-technical argument, the 1980 book *The Third Wave*. To Toffler’s credit he did get some things correct about both the advance of the computer and the social blending between private and public institutions over the last 29 years, in a Nostradamus kind of way. Why in 1992 was tomorrow, for some self-described future thinkers, somewhere between twelve-and fifteen-years-old?

Lately, art critics and theorists, art journals and magazines, even artists, have been speculating on “referentialism.” In other words, practices that rely on, recuperate, relive, reuse or reflect on histories, be they aesthetic, social, political or psychological. This is not the same as appropriation—stealing another’s image or mode of representation. Works point to what we may not have seen, ask to rework what we thought finished, or ask us to see that which is familiar with a new frame. This process has advanced slowly over several decades. It is tempting to say that all art made today works through references, only some art does so more explicitly, if such a statement wasn’t so grandiose. Liking this work, and I do like some work with a referentialist bent, leaves me feeling conflicted, so preoccupied with

what is past that looking forward is forgotten.

The sudden identification of referentialism may mark the transfer of blur to compression as the dominant misapplied technical tool. In analog, variance is structurally defining and a carrier of integral information, distortion being a distinct effect that happens when input or information overloads the system. Digital is simply on/off. Digital has no distortion per se, one either sets the compression so heavy that data is lost or flattened, or uses a tool, ala Photoshop, to manipulate the output of data from the file. If the transformation doesn't work, click "undo", making sure to keep a master version of the file at higher resolution. There is clarity or purposefulness or technique in how the information is filtered. This is not an overload of information or input but a determined desire to dial down the resolution and crispness of data. Eight years of the 00s filtering tools have undoubtedly degraded us, we all seem a little bit mapped. Distortion still exists; you won't find it on YouTube.

Writing on Robert Frank's film *Pull My Daisy for Parkett*, poet Eileen Myles mused: "...all of which made me think about the last decade or so, the epidemic of pictures in the paper of people holding pictures of people who are lost. So that in our time the 'picture of the

picture' has become the international symbol of loss..." Let us imagine works in a referentialist manner as trafficking in crappy resolutions of the past. The YouTube videos posted by boogaludo could be like pictures of people holding photos of missing people. With a distinct difference, in the videos we know we are looking at lost technologies and techniques still surrounding us every day, the undead that can never be killed. We know there is better resolution somewhere. Most of us, not just boogaludo and cparamo, on a daily basis hoist forward desperately clutched pictures from yesterday for compression, the bitmapped details evidence of the future's failure to come back home.

Good reception is unnecessary for watching YouTube channels. Accepting a digital transmission that is low resolution by digital standards and capabilities, of an analog technology that is obviously distorted—you can hear the scratches and pops in the vinyl. Before YouTube who would have thought we'd both get used to and actively seek crappy video length and resolution with compromised sound? YouTube isn't the only poor vehicle for content in my home, YouTube reminds me quite a bit of the 7inch single, an old compressed analog format that has been on a radically rapid resurgence over the last five years. Those 7inch singles complete me.

Hands Raised and Heads Smashed
In Defense of the Ineffable

Ben Russell

A quick read of John Perkins' regrettably unsurprising *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, coupled with a Google search for the words "digital TV conversion economics" (which bring up, among other things, such one-liner articles as "Digital TV Conversion Could Make Holiday Sales Bright" and such catch phrases as "Digital Rights Management" and "\$990 million Congressional package" and "\$650 million more sought"), reanimate the omnipresent specter of special interest groups and public-interest mandates making for loving bedfellows. In spite of our government's pronouncements to the contrary, it is ridiculous, of course, to believe that a directive that has been gathering steam since the introduction of digital signals at the tail end of the 1990s was made with the best interests of a broader American populace at heart (as opposed to a much more specific American populace); but the ridiculousness of belief on the whole has become equally difficult to contest.

And so, and in defense of the ineffable: beyond capital (used on new technologies), landfill space (filled with old technologies), the hand-wringing of PBS directors, and the government-sponsored temporary upsurge of WalMart and Best Buy revenues, what will be lost in this nation's transfer of the analog signal to the digital is the truest manifestation of the Chaos of Everything that our timid eyes could ever slide our souls into. In its short history of televisual existence, what is commonly referred to as noise, as static, as snow, as Myrekrig (by the Danes) is in fact the sum total of all signals at all times in all places everywhere. Save the temporary absence of the one signal that makes the marching ants of psycho-telelectric communication possible, tele-static can be and should be understood as the silent voice of history itself, a composite of thermal self-noise, electromagnetic fields of the everyday, and echoes of the cosmic radiation from the birth of us all—the Big Bang.

By way of example, and while you still have time (the switch-over won't happen for a few months yet): turn your late night television dial to the antenna stream of channel 69 or so, and peel your eyes open wide like Odysseus guarding the Winds of Fate. From a comfortable position on your bedroom carpet and via the flutter and shadow of an hour to midnight, you will find the poor stepchild of the grade-school titled Skinemax

(nés Cinemax) channel, a signal spitting out flesh and curve between the lightning chaos of static, naked bodies resolving for frames of time into actual ivory and ebony-skinned fornicators. For your slackened jaw and quickened pulse: this is conceptual pornography, all the more titillating for the sense that where singular identities spring up, millions more lay scattered and scattering, thrashing about on the surface of your television set in some magical late-night orgiastic incantation that includes all of us, everywhere.

For further proof of this transcendent chaos, we need only think of its ecstatically phenomenal/ogical deployment by musician and filmmaker Tony Conrad in his 16mm film *The Eye of Count Flickerstein* (1975), a close-up examination of “the sustained dead gaze of black-and-white TV ‘snow’, captured in 1965 and twisted sideways, which draws the viewer hypnotically into an abstract visual jungle.” This catalog description prefigures the more descendant (to Hell) sort of transcendence that is to follow, arrived again via the vehicle of cinema. Be it through the hands of Carol Anne in the 1982 Steven Spielberg-penned *Poltergeist*^{*}, hands pressed up against the soft mad glass of the family TV

^{*}<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXv8CPPPG7g>

set to receive the communications of the Spirit World; or through the somnambulant head of Jennifer Caulfield in Wes Craven's 1987 *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*, a head brutally smashed through that selfsame glass by the dream-murderer Freddy Krueger's* television arms; static is revisioned time and time again to show exactly what sort of a portal its screen really is: the crackling scream of the Afterworld, the Netherworld, the Underworld, of all the worlds that rotate concurrently with our own.

Oh! There is darkness in this televised chaos, that is to be sure. But as the afore-mentioned texts in conspiracy with Mark Romanek's 1986 film *Static* (in which a worker at a crucifix factory in the Bible Belt invents a device he claims can show pictures of Heaven, but which nonbelievers only see as static) will attest to, this sort of noise, be it white on black in North America and black on white in the UK, is tantamount to deliverance of the most bodily sort.

As to the present (at present), the national signal transfer has been waylaid, victim to talk of poor preparations, of converter box coupons unreceived, of

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgR9krQRHeA>

television screens that will turn black in the coming digital silence. When that moment does arrive (and doubtlessly with it a heretofore unimagined set of spectral-communication possibilities, faces of the gods materializing in the Tetris blocks of digital decay), those who are unprepared, who are accustomed to the static-screen of the analog set will find themselves mirrored by the darkest sort of static imaginable—their own flattened selves* trapped in the surface glass of the television screen, staring silently back in the new absence of a cosmic eternal.

Oh, Static! Oh, Snow! Oh, Myrekrig! Oh, Everything and Everywhere, All At Once! How we miss you already! In this decidedly material world of conspiracy and global corporatocracy, the powers-that-be surely know how much those coupons are really worth...

*http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5V-ez-YI_fa



Contributors



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Eric Fleischauer utilizes video, sculpture, and drawing to examine the increasing complexities surrounding technology's expansive influences on both the individual and the cultural level. Based in Chicago, Fleischauer teaches in the department of Film, Video, and New Media at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Recently his work has been exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC, the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, and at the Director's Lounge Series in Berlin.

T. Foley is a video artist and media literacy consultant who shares strategies and techniques for using digital media consumer tools as a means for creative expression and community reflection. She received her BA in English Literature from Duquesne University, and studied filmmaking, video production, and Balinese painting and woodcarving techniques as an independent student. Her motion pictures have screened internationally, and she has received fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and the Pittsburgh Foundation. www.tfoley.info

Jonathan Miller is a Studio Associate Professor in the College of Architecture at Illinois Institute of Technology. Since 1995, he has been a film critic on WBEZ-FM, Chicago's National Public Radio station. His work as a photographer and filmmaker has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; the Chicago Cultural Center; Gallery 400 at UIC; the Chicago History Museum; and at Extension Gallery for Architecture, in Chicago. In January 2008 his collaboration with Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury, the video "Villa Apraxia", was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MUSAC) in Leon, Spain.

Jennifer Montgomery's film titles include *Deliver* (2008), *Notes on the Death of Kodachrome* (2006), *Along the Highway* (2005), *Threads of Belonging* (2004), *Transitional Objects* (2000), *Troika* (1998), *Art For Teachers of Children* (1995), *I, a Lamb* (1992), *Age 12: Love With a Little L* (1990), and *Home Avenue* (1989). These films range from experimental essays to experimental features and have shown at many international festivals, as well as venues such as the Museum of Modern Art (NYC), Film Forum (NYC), the Gene Siskel Film Center (Chicago), the ICA (London), the Walker Arts Center (Minneapolis), and the Whitney Museum (NYC). She lives in Chicago and is an Assistant Professor in the Moving Image area at UIC's School of Art & Design.

Steve Reinke is an artist and writer best known for his videos. A book of his video scripts, "Everybody Loves Nothing," was published in 2004. In 2005 he co-edited (with Chris Gehman) "The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema." More recently, a fictionalized Steve Reinke is the subject of the novel "The Steve Machine" by Mike Hoolboom. He teaches Art Theory & Practice at Northwestern University. Visit his website, www.myrectumisnotagrave.com.

Ben Russell's films and performances have been seen in spaces ranging from 14th Century Belgian monasteries to 17th Century East India Trading Co. buildings, police station basements to outdoor punk squats, Japanese cinematheques to Parisian storefronts, and the Sundance Film Festival to the Museum of Modern Art. A Guggenheim recipient, Ben began the Magic Lantern screening series in 2003 in Providence, Rhode Island, and he is currently employed as an Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago. www.dimeshow.com

Carson Salter and Snowden Snowden collaboratively work on and through Spring Break, a curatorial office dedicated to investigating how exhibitions and publications will function in the not so far off past. For more information please visit www.springbreakpublishing.com

