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EXCERPTS FROM THE FERTILE NEXUS

The moving image has evolved. What was once contained by the auditorium has since undergone transitions in its location, mobility and materiality. The following text consists of three excerpts from a study that traces the migration of the contained image from cinema screen out into the constructed environment, through television, CCTV, electronic billboards and streaming on portable devices. It is an investigation into the redefinition of a now fluid, mobile digital image as a hypothetical new medium, part material and part abstraction.

Each excerpt begins with a quote from Hollywood sound and film editor Walter Murch's text *In The Blink of an Eye*. At the core of Murch's hypothesis is the idea that a blink denotes the end of a thought and the start of another, forming a steady stream of punctuation in our stream of conscious, operating in a similar way to a cut between images in a filmic sequence. Using Murch's film editing methodology as an analogy, the quotes provide a basis for an underlying thread: that navigating through the contemporary constructed environment is a constant process of post-production between images, objects, temporalities and subjects.

The increased presence of digital video embedded within architecture, combined with the near omnipresence of the camera, forms a hybridised environment and, in turn, a hybridised subject

that inhabits it. Moving image has become naturalised allowing it to evolve beyond the confines of the living room and cinema. Not just a means of capturing or recording its surroundings, it has entered a symbiotic and participatory relationship with its audience. It takes on its own identity, its own form. The viewfinder and the screen are now combined, allowing the immediate to become image and the image to become immediate.

In the actual editing of a scene, I will keep on working until I can no longer “see myself” in the material. (Murch 2001: 49)

Our image is born before us¹. The ultrasound scan precedes the body's physical presence in the visible world. From that point on we develop in parallel with an image version of ourselves. It creates a sequence of static reference points for the physical degradation of time upon the body. It splits the self both spatially and temporally. An intermittent reflection, the digital image highlights the ephemerality of the body through its own potential permanence.

The process of capturing an image turns the body inside out. It externalises the internal view of the camera operator². What was once a one-way flow of visual information into the brain becomes an open dialogue between producer and viewer.

An eye cannot turn on itself. It can never see the back of the head or the internal organs of its connecting body. An image of an eye is captured from a point of view that is impossible for it to inhabit. The image creates a position in which the subject it depicts can never be placed. Therefore, the image of the self is each individual's unique separation, their personal demon. It creates a presence with a point of view that is contingent on the removal from its physical counterpart (the subject's body) and vice versa. The vision of the digitised self supersedes its physical counterpart

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through medical imaging methods such as CAT, MRI and ultrasound scans. The image's domain surpasses the actual. It allows the components of the body to become visible, to be realised in the digital domain, a process which would otherwise only be possible through the disassembly and therefore subsequent death of the subject. Internal imagery dematerialises the subject by transcending its own cognitive capabilities. Its subject's formal material properties are disregarded. Skin, flesh and bone become transparent, the imaging apparatus cuts through the body as if it were not there, as if it were somewhere between the two states. It redefines the edges of the body while dissolving it into its surroundings. We live in a constant state of exchange, negotiating with the images that surround us and the image that we are becoming.

We must render visual reality discontinuous, otherwise perceived reality would resemble an almost incomprehensible string of letters without word separation or punctuation.
(Murch 2001: 63)

The locations in which we receive moving images have diversified beyond cinema and television screens. Passing through a cityscape is a constant negotiation between images, objects and subjects. Billboards, shopfronts and portable screens present the viewer with alternative times and spaces and aspirational scenarios. The digital constantly disrupts the actual and the actual disrupts the digital. Visual information that reaches the retina is always, albeit minutely, in the past. We are held in a state of perpetual catch-up while processing our immediate surroundings. The act of looking has always been a process of post-production, every individual forming their unique linear sequence of visual experience³. The eyelid acts as the splicer⁴, separating our

thought processes within the single timeline we construct from the overwhelming volume of visible stimuli that surrounds us. Every generation born into an economically developed society since the mass distribution of television is almost instantaneously introduced to the moving image. For many, it has become naturalised alongside most other aspects of the manmade environments they encounter every day. The transition between viewing a depiction of an object and encountering a physical object does not require a great deal, if any, psychological preparation. The image has been accepted as an everyday object.

The boundaries between recorded and direct experience are becoming increasingly blurred. Experience can be traded for video if the subject chooses to look through the viewfinder, opposed to directly at their surroundings. If the current trend of technological development of augmented reality continues, soon there will be no distinction between these subjectivities, image and reality will be played in unison.

We now all work in our own cutting room, deciding which images to view, in which order and for how long. We now all live in the interface⁵, in a shared intermediate habitat. The image has become as much embedded in the mind as it has into the environment. In the exchange between subject, image and context, a new space is created in which they can all interact.

A good film that is well-edited seems like an exciting extension and elaboration of the audience's own feelings and thoughts, and they will therefore give themselves to it, as it gives itself to them. (Murch 2001: 72)

We ask the camera lens to travel where our eye cannot. From the depths of the ocean to inside the arteries, the image has allowed us to see further, deeper and closer than our inherent perceptual

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abilities permit. Moving image is a collaborative reaction between the apparatus and the brain, reliant on the eye's deficiency to register the gaps between its sequential still frames. Born into the post-Enlightenment, scientific, modernist culture, moving image arrived too late to become a form of religious iconography⁶. The inner workings of analogue film were not beyond the comprehension of the camera operator or projectionist. A survey of the visible, physical mechanics of analogue equipment could be followed by a relatively straightforward understanding of where the image is stored and how it appeared on the screen. The manifestation of the digital image is more complex. The presence of the physical source of the image is far less apparent, existing in the form of information opposed to tangible matter. Its processes of capturing and presentation are graduated flows, opposed to celluloid's clear translation between a physical material and light. Digital processes are more akin to the reception of images within the brain than the mechanical workings of film. The image is still stored within a physical object (a hard drive) but due to streaming, this object could be situated in a different location. The image is now an immaterial link to something material, somewhere else—a nomadic manifestation⁷.

Cinema was introduced as a means of separation from the rigid, standardised timelines imposed by the workings of modernity. As cinema assisted the viewer to disentangle their self from a linear mechanized society, the evolved fluid digital image may provide an antidote to the constraints of the Cartesian separation from our surroundings.

The naturalised image is now inherent in the psyche and the environment. It allows seemingly disparate phenomena to be linked together, a rewiring of nature and culture.

We are on course for a complete capturing of the landscape that will allow us to view our immediate surroundings afresh. Everything that surrounds us is gaining additional layers in what

are already complex and subjective realities. The potentially infinite nature of this digital landscape results in the perpetual unfolding of intertwining timelines. In this ever expanding environment, it is in the points of connection, the fertile nexus between its actual and digital constituents where the true frontier resides.

There are a number of amateur videos posted on Youtube that proclaim the witnessing of a miracle through pointing a camera directly at the sun. Due to the over-intensity of light, the camera's sensor is unable to register the image, resulting in a black hole within the frame. What the producers of these images aim to point out is the presence of a deity in the form of a black sun or object that appears within the image. However, it is in the absence of image that the dark void displays where its true sense of fascination lies. In finding what neither the eye or camera can comprehend, the boundaries of their collective perception is realised. When the eye and lens align there is a seamless transition between their two worlds, where one can look into the other and the other back into one.

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NOTES

1. The material and discursive dimensions of ultrasonography vary in time and in space. The sonogram does not simply map the terrain of the body; it maps geopolitical, economic, and historical factors, as well. (Barad 2007: 194)
2. Suppose we had footage shot from all those points of view; what would we have? A series of long takes that would reproduce that moment



simultaneously from various viewpoints, as it appeared, that is, to a series of subjectivities. Subjectivity is thus the maximum conceivable limit of any audiovisual technique. It is impossible to perceive reality as it happens if not from a single point of view, and this point of view is always that of a perceiving subject. This subject is always incarnate, because even if, in a fiction film, we choose an ideal and therefore abstract and nonnaturalistic point of view, it becomes realistic and ultimately naturalistic as soon as we place a camera and tape recorder there: the result will be seen and heard as if by a flesh-and-blood subject (that is, one with eyes and ears). (Pasoloni 1980: 3)

3. “To me, the perfect film is as though it were unwinding behind your eyes, and your eyes were projecting it themselves, so that you were seeing what you wished to see. Film is like thought. It’s the closest to thought process of any art” John Huston (Murch 2001: 60)

4. So we entertain the idea, or a linked sequence of ideas, and we blink to separate and punctuate that idea from what follows. Similarly—in film—a shot presents us with an idea, or a sequence of ideas, and the cut is a “blink” that separates and punctuates those ideas. (Murch 2001: 62)

5. The interface is this state of “being on the boundary.” It is that moment where one significant material is understood as distinct

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from another significant material. In other words, an interface is not a thing, an interface is always an effect. It is always a process or a translation. (Galloway 2012: 33)

6. Film has never inhabited a sacred context. From its very inception film proceeded through the murky depths of profane and commercial life, always a bedfellow of cheap mass entertainment. Even the attempts to glorify film undertaken by twentieth-century totalitarian regimes never really succeeded—all that resulted was the short-lived enlistment of film for their various propaganda purposes. The reasons for this are not necessarily to be found in the character of film as a medium: film simply arrived too late. By the time film emerged, culture had already shed its potential for consecration. (Groys 2008: 67)

7. The digital image is a visible copy of the invisible image file, of the invisible data. In this respect the digital image is functioning as a Byzantine icon—as a visible copy of invisible God. Digitalization creates the illusion that there is no longer any difference between original and copy, and that all we have are the copies that multiply and circulate in the information networks. But there can be no copies without an original. The difference between original and copy is obliterated in the case of digitalization only by the fact that the original data are invisible: they exist in the

invisible space behind the image, inside the computer. (Groys 2008: 84)

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