Moving Images, Mobile Bodies

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The Poetics and Practice of Corporeality in Visual and Performing Arts

Edited by

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For my parents

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INTRODUCTION

HOREA AVRAM

The intricate encounters and interplay between image and body, between visuality and corporeality, between movement and mobility are at the core of this collection of essays. There are many meanings attached to these terms and they cover a wide range of problematics, practices and disciplines, from art history to anthropology, from philosophy to media studies. They are also flexible and evolving concepts, or, as the title of this volume suggests, they are moving and mobile entities. Any attempt to pin them down in a comprehensive way is not only beyond the scope of this book, but, I believe, doomed to incompleteness.

In the search for common ground for discussion, however, one should note that what connects the notions image and body before anything else is the etymology: "image" means, among other things, "idea", which comes from the Greek *idein* "to see" both in the sense of bodily perception and that of acknowledging. After all, images do not exist outside the body: they are light focused onto the retina.[1] The main sense of the term image, however—although one that is no less related to the idea of body and perception—is given by the concept of mimesis, with which it shares its root "im." Hence, the senses associated to the word image: imitation, copy, likeness, statue, picture, phantom, similitude, semblance, appearance, shadow.[2] An image, therefore, is something that gives a presence, it re-presents something which is, at least apparently, absent.

[1] "[Images] do not exist by themselves, but they *happen*; they *take place* whether they are moving images (where this is so obvious) or not. They happen via transmission and perception." Hans Belting, "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Winter 2005), 302. "Strictly speaking, things are invisible: what we see is not things but light (...) What we witness is instead the becoming-visible of light." Sean Cubitt, "The Latent Image." *The International Journal of the Image*, 1, No 2, (2011). http://ontheimage.com/journal/ (accessed December 2017).

[2] "Image." *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Second edition, Prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, Volume VII. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 665.

The status of the image vis-à-vis the object it represents is always a subject of "negotiations". For Plato, for example, the image is necessarily inferior to the object. For him, "ideas are the ultimate reality" and things are conceived first as ideas before taking practical shape in our world. The objects around us are thus copies of the original, that is, of the perfect ideas. An image of the physical object is twice removed from the idea and thus from reality—it is only a copy of a copy. By imitating objects through images, the artist, believes Plato, presents us with illusions and thus takes viewers away from reality, instead of getting us closer to it.[3] In contrast, Jean Baudrillard decries the extinction of all referentiality in images and thus of any relationship between original and copy. According to him, we live in a world of simulations, where models precede and anticipate the "real". More exactly, we live in "a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal"[4] in which images, spectacles and the play of signs replace reality itself. Image, writes Baudrillard, "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum."[5]

Leaving aside the dispute between the different modalities of conceiving the image—as a copy (*eikon*) or as simulacrum (*eidolon*)—we can safely assert that the image not only manipulates, but also *produces* the real. By saying that, I am referring to the ways in which many of the numerous species within what James Elkins calls "the domain of images" directly affect our lives, actions and relationship with reality. Elkins' list of such visual objects is relevant in this sense: "graphs, charts, maps, geometric configurations, notations, plans, official documents, some money, bonds, patents, seals and stamps, astronomical and astrological charts, technical and engineering drawings, scientific images of all sorts, schemata, and pictographic or ideographic elements in writing."[6] But, beyond the practical impact such rather "technical" images might have in constructing our reality, an image resonates also in a more emotional way. Think about the political impact and traumatic force certain images can have on the way we experience the world and on the decisions we take regarding real-life actions: the photograph of the falling soldier during the

[3] "So you call 'imitator' the maker of the product which is two removes from nature, do you?" "I do indeed." Plato, *The Republic*, Book 10, 597e. Edited by G.R.F. Ferrari, Translated by Tom Griffith. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 316.

[4] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*. Translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman. (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 2.

[5] Baudrillard, *Simulations*, 11.

[6] James Elkins, *The Domain of Images*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 4.

Spanish civil war by Robert Capa (although a proven fake), Nick Ut's photograph of a young Vietnamese child running from a napalm attack, Charlie Cole's picture of a man in a white shirt confronting the tanks and blocking their advance in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the images of the falling Twin Towers in New York on September 11, 2001, or the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed published by the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* which provoked a terrorist attack in 2015. Indeed, images attract or repel, fascinate or frustrate, animate or demystify, but—at least some of them—seems to unleash a powerful aesthetic, moral or political energy.

Much of the impact and power of these images is due to their mobility: they are well-known icons distributed around the world through various means, over and over again in the last decades. However, the confirmation of the fact that a nomadic image means an influential message came actually long ago, with the issuing of coins that carried powerful political messages such as symbols or emperor's portraits. At a different scale, and with different means and goals, innovations in printmaking and easel painting in the 15th and 16th century, respectively, turned the image from a static visual object attached to architecture into a mobile and thus more effective visual object. The influence of the image in society was then facilitated by the standardization of communication means in the 19th and 20th centuries and, more recently, by the rapid development of network technologies that have permitted the broad distribution of, and the democratisation of access to, knowledge and art production.

These observations need a short clarification which has to do with the very notion of "moving image." First, moving image can be understood—as we have seen above—as an image that circulates. That is, an image that has the quality of being mobile and locational. Second, moving image is defined by the movement contained in itself: it is an image that changes its morphology, texture, the viewing angle, or the relationship with the context; an image with an extended temporality. With regard to this dimension, Sean Cubitt is right to remark that "time is integral to the image: not just the ontology of a new creation supplementary to God's; but time as the raw material of imaging today, as space was in the renaissance."[7] Moreover, being fundamentally time-based, moving image goes beyond pure visuality: it is multimodal, multimedial and multisensorial. Third, moving image might be seen as a "plural" of the static image, a succession of sequences that change in time and/or mark the time (perhaps the best examples being the film strip and the video). We

[7] Sean Cubitt, "The Latent Image.".

should ask together with Sean Cubitt, however, "How can we describe a moving image, composed of thousands of successive images, as 'an' image?"[8] There is no short answer to this question and it requires a mobilisation of arguments in the ontological, aesthetic and medial registers; an effort that is not among our objectives here. Nevertheless, what counts for us as viewers or users with regard to the moving image is the experience we have, the impression of movement and transformation, and not the essential nature (or the "essence") of the medium per se. In fact, if we look closer into the medium of film for example, we should agree with Peter Kubelka's claim that "Cinema is not movement (...) cinema is a projection of stills."[9] Yet we cannot help to also agree with Bill Viola's opinion that "a still image does not exist; (...) in fact at any given moment a complete image does not exist at all."[10] Indeed, moving image "is not a medium-specific notion," as Noël Carroll insisted,[11] but a series of very different visual situations that engage the perception in progress.

This is why we might include in the category of moving image a great variety of mediums, platforms and instruments, such as magic lanterns (a sort of slide projector with painted or photographic images developed in the 17th century); zoetropes (a 19th century animation device that produces the illusion of motion through a sequence of drawings or photographs); Eadweard Muybridge's work in photographic studies of motion; Étienne-Jules Marey's experiments in chronophotography; cinema (on film strips) whose very optical principle is based on motion pictures; television, a medium that displays electrical signals on a screen as moving images (with sound); video, an electronic medium that records and plays back video and sound streams either as a continuous signal (analogue) or as data in a binary format (digital); motion graphics—from mechanical/optical animations to electronic media technology; multimedia, i.e. the various forms of computer-controlled integration of video, photos, graphics, drawings, text, animation, audio, and any other media available on our desktops, laptops, smartphones or other mobile platforms.

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Peter Kubelka, "Interview with Peter Kubelka," in *Film Culture Reader* edited by P.A. Sitney. (New York: Praeger, 1970), 291.

[10] Quoted in Catherine Elwes, *Installation and the Moving Image*. (London and New York: Wallflower Press), 2015, 5. Viola's observation applies, technically speaking, mostly to the analogue video.

[11] Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 72.

This simple mentioning of the different forms of moving image—some of them representing indispensable daily instruments—indicates that those who proclaim that, in the last century or so, we live in a world dominated by virtuality, in a society of spectacle or simulations, or within a pictorial turn might be right. However, as W.J.T. Mitchell warns us:

> Whatever the pictorial turn is, then, it should be clear that it is not a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial 'presence': it is rather a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of a picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality.[12]

It is precisely this complex interplay between various elements which defines our contemporary world or, as I have pointed out above, effectively produces the real by affecting our actions and emotions. The process of imaging which might be identified with this "pictorial turn", does not, therefore, "double" this world in the image as it creates the world as an image. More exactly, a world *performed* as an image, since the agency of the body is essential in this process. This is the biological and cultural body, an imaged and imagined body, a body that functions as the catalyst for the image, or rather works *as* image: positive, negative, symbolic, material, carnal, aesthetic, metaphysical, social, political, etc.

Indeed, the body has multiple manifestations and its image, meaning and mission have varied extensively throughout the centuries. The theories surrounding the body are as diverse as the visions about it: the body may be (seen as) the biological framework of a living human (the organic entity in flesh and bones including senses, affects and emotions), it may be (seen as) a conceptual pattern in philosophy, a metaphorical presence such in religious sacraments and transubstantiations, an etalon in visual arts and architecture, the individuality incorporated into the collectivity, or a discursive cultural practice, where culture is understood in a broader sense, from art to politics to identity.

So, what is a body, after all? Assuming that I will provide no exhaustive answer to this question we might try to see it in summary from an historical perspective, an approach that will hopefully help us better understand the relationship between corporeality, senses and visuality, and between all these and artistic practices. For example, in pre-Socratic philosophy, most thinkers (either monists or dualists) saw and defined the body loosely in relationship with the soul, associated—from an

[12] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16.

etymological perspective, at least—with the breath of life. Plato, in contrast, regarded the body and soul as separate entities, with the body as the imperfect container that hosts the immortal soul travelling back and forth to the realm of pure forms. Aristotle considered that the body and the mind exist as parts of the same being, with the mind being simply one of the body's functions. Augustine, meanwhile, shared Plato's view according to which the soul is immaterial and eternal while, in contrast, the body is material and mortal. Thomas Aquinas, however, took Aristotle as a model, seeing the body as the matter, and the soul as the form of man. Some centuries later, Descartes, through his famous dictum "I think therefore I am," defined the body as nothing more than an automaton, a fleshy machine with which we could hardly identify; instead, it was through the mind by which we define and identify ourselves. Lacan complicated the mind-centred understanding of the body even further. He conceived the subject's corporeality as an accumulation of different bodies sensed simultaneously, and whose entire image can only be recomposed in the mirror (stage). Foucault revisited the old mind-body dualism, overturning the Christian belief by stating that "the soul is the prison of the body." He thus defines knowledge as a way to escape bodily confinement—the physical disappearance of the body and the social constraints of the mind. Foucault's idea that the body is both natural and cultural is shared also by Deleuze and Guattari who explained the body in its double dimension: as a limited set of traits, habits and affects, and as a manifestation of virtual potentials (connections, affects, movements); this is what they call (although fail to clearly define) "body without organs." Feminist theorists such as Judith Butler or Elizabeth Grosz, adopt an anti-essentialist, social constructivist approach to explain the cultural formation of the body within a *new* new materialist context. Another theorist from the same family of thought, N. Katherine Hayles, conceives the body as a construction directly related to the contextual/historical understanding and functioning of technology, culture and embodiment. The end result is a condition of the body that does away with the notion of a "natural" self so as to become no more no less than "post-human." Equally concerned about the effects technology has on our lives, Marshall McLuhan rethinks the debates about corporeality from a rather positive and constructive perspective, asserting that media act as extensions of the human senses. What is more, writes McLuhan, every technological advancement is actually an extension of the body's senses, and thus of the body as a whole. As many contemporary theorists have argued, however, is this extension not a way to alienate the body, turning its functions into an artificial construct? Or is it rather a process that leads to what

postmodernist angst has called disembodiment? Slavoj Žižek provides a somehow cynical but actually lucid answer to this fear when he argues that there is no escape from disembodiment since a direct contact with reality is impossible because we cannot get away from the sensory transformations media cause us. The only way to cope with this situation, believes Žižek, is to act—perhaps paradoxically—so as to embody, to internalize and anthropomorphize media objects. Considering our behaviour, now apparently entirely dependent on technology utilisation and media consumption, one would be tempted to agree with such a view.

Aspects of corporeality and embodiment are crucial in the economy of many recent art practices. Unsettling the conventional—static, unidirectional—modes of bodily experience, contemporary art productions of various genres rather take on a corporeality constructed around a subjective, flexible, interactive and contingent—that is—mobile body. Such artistic strategies are most of the times connected with a similar philosophy of image production: instead of displaying a detached, static and unique visual object, these works offer the experience of a networked, open-ended, fluid and multiple—that is—moving image. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that moving images and mobile bodies are the two axes on which the present studies revolve and which give the title of this book. The essays included in this volume raise critical questions and create a discursive field about the nature and significance of these artistic practices and their theoretical frameworks, proposing an interdisciplinary poetics centred on the problems of corporeality and associated visualization processes. The term poetics here describes the various models of interpretation, the ways to understand the perceptual properties of the artistic discourse, its function and effects, how meanings are generated by the artwork and the fundamental principles on which the work is constructed.[13]

The authors in this volume discuss a wide range of issues centred on the image-body equation and employ different methodologies: from aesthetics to practice-based research, from cultural studies to phenomenology, from media theory to feminism.

The first section, entitled *Images of the Body*, is opened by the essay "The Imbued Agency of Performer Driven Narratives in Telematic Environments" by Paul Sermon. The author identifies and highlights the levels of agency that give rise to the performer role within what he calls "telematic art installations" (art projects using computer mediated telecommunications). In the same way that Lacan maintained that the

[13] "Poetics", David Macey, *Critical Theory*. (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 301.

human psyche is constructed in the mirror - as if on stage in front of us, the author suggests that the method of identity construction in his own artistic practice is taking place on the screen. Sermon concludes that it is in the form of interactive telematic environments and their user determined narratives that we are able to become consciously aware of the performer role we are adopting.

Horea Avram's essay called "Presence and Presentness in Performative Media Art: Two Case Studies" discusses the problem of presence in performative media arts following the relationship between corporeality, materiality and virtuality. By critically analysing concepts such as index, chronotope and liveness, the author demonstrates that in the "video walks" of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller we engage with multiple temporal and representational strata, multiple "presences" that complicate their simple understanding as a live manifestation. This intersection of different temporal levels or presences through the use of media technology builds what he calls "presentness." That is, a complex manifestation of the live spatial and temporal configuration of the work that equally empowers and undermines each temporal level.

In "Panoptic Options: Renegotiating the Body's Social Contract in Public Space and Online", Robert Lawrence addresses the problems of video surveillance, media and the new panoptic control systems. In the face of these terms, and in line with emerging Post-Internet approaches to artmaking, Lawrence proposes that the current combination of public physical surveillance of the body and data surveillance of mind, desire and belief, demands a critically engaged art practice that explores possibilities arising from the combination of bodily and virtual forms. His essay presents a number of embodied performances that renegotiate panoptic contracts, including his ongoing sousveillance projects, *Tango Panopticon* and *Horizon,* both of which renegotiate modes of seeing the body by incorporating live streaming web-video from metaphorically charged, site-specific, embodied public interventions.

Georgina Ruff's essay "From *Please Turn* to "Please Don't Touch:" Finding the Embodied Viewer in Otto Piene's Early *Lichtballette*" investigates the alterations made to an early *Lichtballett* by Otto Piene and the concomitant impact upon the role, position and interaction of the viewer. Using archival research, first-hand observation, primary sources written by the artist, and the theories of contemporary scholars, Ruff's essay traces the history of the work *Please Turn* (1961) to its current iteration. Beginning with the lineage of the Environment art form and the derivation and definition of the "activated viewer," the essay seeks to explain the intentional positioning of the viewer not as a passive,

homogenous observer within a space, but rather as an active collaborator in the creation of an environment. The author concludes that Piene's *Please Turn* (1961) has undergone significant restructuring to the extent that it no longer reflects the original intentions of the artist.

Rodica Mocan and Ştefana Răcorean's "Beyond virtual bodies. A new frontier?" takes a different approach, proposing the exploration of the extension of the human body through technology, focusing on the impact these extensions have on the mind and human consciousness. The recent emergence of certain systems of artificial intelligence not only undermines the discursive body by redefining notions such as self and identity, but also promises new forms of presence and social life that surpass the existence of the physical body altogether. These are platforms that create an avatar of a person based on his/her lifetime online presence, and which can emulate the person and interact with its loved ones even after that person's physical death. The essay investigates from an interdisciplinary perspective the implications of this "after-life" in the digital world and how it challenges concepts such as time-distance-space, virtual-real, corporeality and boundaries.

The second section of the book, entitled *Body and Images*, opens with Sozita Goudouna's "Mat Chivers. The Establishment and Rupture of Chiasmatic Space and Embodied Spatiality," an essay that investigates the ways in which one structure, originally composed in one medium (drawing), is mapped onto another structure in another medium (new media and dance). The author reflects upon artist Mat Chivers' experimentations with the correlation between drawing, sculpture, dance and technology so as to understand the ways his aesthetics translates into artistic practice and the ways terms such as "chiasmus" and "bodied spatiality" are expressed in his works. Sensory, perceptual and sensate approaches to Chivers' artistic practice are intended to understand the potential of the symbiosis of the visual, the aural, the tactile, the corporeal and the technological.

In her chapter entitled "Imaginary Bodies and Scenic Presence. A Phenomenological Approach to Theatrical Practice," Raluca Mocan discusses the complicated relationship between audiences' attention and the artificiality of representation, as well as the role of imagination in creating scenic bodies. Accounts of practitioners belonging to various theatrical traditions (R. Carreri, L. Jouvet, Y. Oida, J. Varley, P. Zarrilli) allow the author to study the extra-daily techniques used by performers to develop their spontaneity and to create imaginary scenic bodies. Husserl's perspective on kinaesthetic awareness, and on the lived body as a mediator of intersubjective empathy, permits a precise understanding of the

experience actors and spectators share during the performance. From this standpoint, the author provides a description of the actor's specific embodiment and of the principles regarding scenic presence within a phenomenological framework.

Liviu Malița, in his chapter "The Body as a 'Secular Sacred' Space in Ritual Theatre," explores the radical reforms in theatrical spatiality that took place in the 1960s, provoking a split between the traditional "Italian box stage" and the more radical "living theatre," where life and representation overlap and converge. The author discusses how the two antagonist, although coexisting, models have transformed the performative *weltanschauung*: from an ego-centric model promoting individual values and the differences, to another one, more focalized on "neo-tribal" solidarities and, implicitly, on the close connections with the place (Peter Brooke, Arianne Mnouchkine, Eugenio Barba, *Living Theatre* etc.). The evasion towards other, non-conventional spaces, Malița concludes, has important consequences at the dramatic level, but also at the broadly ideological and, specifically, cultural level of the spectacle, now including postcolonial discourse and the fascination with the oriental theatre.

Ulrike Gerhardt's "Bodies as Indexical Topographies in Contemporary Art from a Post-Socialist Context" proposes an examination of the role of the body as a corporeal reading tool invested in the mnemonic process of indexical analysis within the context of post-socialist video art and (video) performance practices. Taking into account concepts of indexicality formulated by Peirce, Jakobson and Krauss, the essay discusses the ways in which the body can be conceived as a topographical carrier of indices leading to overlooked and neglected traces of the (post-)socialist past. In addition, it analyses how some specific artists embody letters and words—the most elementary structures of language—in their works for the sake of a performative and spatial "ex-scription" (Boyan Manchev) of cultural processes in public space.

The essay entitled "The Body of the Empathic Spectator" by Miruna Runcan analyses, from a combined neurological, psychological and semiotic perspective, the relationship between perception/imagination/immersion processes and the solitary spectator's physical reactions to performing arts. The aim is to demonstrate that the conscious/subconscious dynamics of sequential interpretation and understanding (of any and each spectator) are founded on a more profound ground of personal experience, self-sensitivity and physicality. The author assumes that spectatorship is, at least in cinema and performing arts, not only a cognitive/semiotic, but also a physical experience about otherness as self-perception.

Erandy Vergara-Vargas' chapter "On Movement, Technology and Difficult Feelings: Alfredo Salomón's *Infinite Justice*" proposes a closer examination of the interactive installation by Mexican artist Alfredo Salomón entitled *Infinite Justice* (2004). Here, a device consisting of a replica AR-15 rifle and a video camera swings perpetually toward observers, following them around a darkened room and releasing gunshots sounds if they stop moving. The author argues that this case study is a "difficult" work in two ways: the work frames the question of armed violence beyond the victim/victimizer binaries, putting the observer in a conflictive position; this position is bounded up in the observer's vulnerability to injuries and death. As such, the installation prompts difficult feelings, and although the risk, as the artist maintains, "is nothing *but feeling,*" in the production of that difficulty emerges the critical operations of the piece.

Although opting for a great variety of themes and taking different methodological approaches, all the contributions to this volume assume the main aims of the book: to map a number of relevant contemporary artistic productions centred on the conjunction between body and image and to contribute to the current efforts in the theorisation and historicisation of these artistic practices. Geographical factor plays a crucial role, as the volume includes authors from different countries, backgrounds and cultural identities, thus reflecting not only a variety of aesthetics, but also political idiosyncrasies and sensibilities. Our aim here is, therefore, not only to harmonise all these methodological and cultural differences, but also to capture the actually unstable nature—both at the artistic and discursive levels—of the generic concepts. In other words, we seek to cut across and find the unifying ground between a shifting and ubiquitous image and an adaptable and nomadic body, that is, between what we have called here moving images and mobile bodies.

PART I:

IMAGES OF THE BODY

THE IMBUED AGENCY OF PERFORMER DRIVEN NARRATIVES IN TELEMATIC ENVIRONMENTS

PAUL SERMON

The telematic performer role

Jacques Lacan suggested in his early psychoanalytical writings that the human psyche is constructed as a mirror image that we contemplate as if on stage in front of us.[1] This metaphor has become significant for the present developments in new media art, as we can observe a similar process of identity construction through a digitally mirrored world in networks and installations. Artists in this field are increasingly experimenting with interactivity as an open system that embodies agency, generative content and what I refer to as a "user-determined" narrative, in contrast to a closed system of finite variables that default back to their original state upon leaving the piece. Likewise, the role of the audience in this context is far more complex and cannot be labelled simply as a "user". The imbued agency is signalling a performer, actor or creator, often played out through avatars and agents within these environments. Through descriptive accounts of my working practice it is my intention to identify and highlight the levels of agency within these telematic art installations that gives rise to the performer role. In the same way that Lacan suggested the human psyche is constructed in the mirror—as if on stage in front of us—I am suggesting the method of identity construction in my work is taking place on the screen; and it is in the form of interactive telematic environments and their user determined narratives that we are able to become consciously aware of the performer role we are adopting.

My work in the field of telematic arts explores the emergence of user-determined narrative between remote participants who are brought together within a shared telepresent environment. Through the use of live

[1] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Ecrits: A selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York and London: Norton, 1977..

chroma-keying and videoconferencing technology these divided audience participants enter a video installation and initially suppose they entering a passive space—sitting, standing or sometimes lying within it. Their presence within the space is recorded live and mapped in real-time, via a chroma-key video mixer, with an identical camera view of another participant in an identical installation space—combining two shots of live action by replacing a blue or green back drop in one image with the image of the other. The two spaces which can be any geographical distance apart are linked via an internet videoconference connection, making it possible to link and combine these telematic installations and there performing audiences between almost any locations in the world.

This is essentially how all my installation projects function, but what is most surprising for the intended viewer is that they form an integral part within these telematic experiments, which simply wouldn't function without their presence and participation within it. The audience participant rapidly becomes a performer, or at best an actor within these spaces, by observing their body within a telepresent space represented on self-view video monitors in front of them. The user/actor ascends a rapid learning curve and begins to control and choreograph their human avatar representation of themselves in a new telematic space, in combination with another physically remote role-playing user. My main intension is to allow my audience to view and experience my work in a passive and active role, drawing very different experiences and initial conclusions from them. Whilst in the passive viewing mode the audience is observing the public in what often appears to be a well rehearsed piece of drama confidently played out by actors; compelling viewing, but a complex issue to contend with when it is understood the performers are also audience members merely participating in an active role. Once the audience participant enters this space they immediately represent two dynamic performer roles; consciously as the controller, or puppeteer, of their own avatar performer, yet unaware of their secondary performing role to the off camera members of the audience. Who are themselves awaiting the next available slot on the telematic stage - soon to be sharing in this split dynamic. The Narrative that unfolds here would appear to be self determined by the user, on and off camera. But what is essential in such experiments is the architecture of this installation. As an artist I am both designer of the environment and director of the narrative, which I determine through the social and political context that I choose to play out these telepresent encounters in. This is exemplified in four example case studies that will be described and discussed further in this paper:

There's no simulation like home

The commission by lighthouse Media Centre Brighton and BN1 to produce this piece came at a time when I wanted to combine many of my previous telematic installations/experiments within one entire fabricated walkthrough environment, staged as a domestic interior of a house. Initially I intended on linking two identical "Show Homes", which often use identical blueprints for housing estates throughout the UK – ideally enabling me to link and combine the two spaces as one shared telematic environment. As always the concept changed for a number of reasons, including budget, and I started to develop the idea of completely reconstructing a domestic home interior as an entire stage set inside the Fabrica Gallery in Brighton. Consequently this new installation plan allowed more passive modes of viewing the active participants inside the installation to emerge - via surveillance cameras and spy holes. At the time this was certainly influenced by Peter Weir's "The Truman Show" (1998), whose main character "Truman" (Jim Carrey) unconsciously displays an overacted melodramatic role in his supposed normal everyday private life - a personality whose temperament is developed and encouraged by his apparent performer friends and family that surrounded him. It was for the same intension that I chose to enhance and disguise the two modes of viewing and performing in the installation. The result of this division in modes of participation ultimately led me to present these ideas in this paper.

Fig 1. Paul Sermon *There's no simulation like home,* 1999, telematic installation, Fabrica Gallery Brighton, UK; photograph provided by the artist.

There's no simulation like home was the culmination of telepresent and telematic research since 1992. The exterior of the installation resembled the back of a plasterboard stage set, or as if the bricks of a house had been removed to reveal the back of the inner plasterboard skin. Electricity and video cables were traced and attached all around the surface of the structure, looking like the back of large circuit board. The installation was architectured on the typical floor plan of the English terraced house and by using a walk through narrative sequence, from front door to back door, the audience encounter differing telepresent interfaces in each of the four rooms: the living room sofa, the bedroom, the dining room table and the bathroom mirror. Before entering the installation the audience had the possibility to view the installation through a series of peepholes positioned along the plasterboard exterior. Offering a passive form of viewing other users who were already involved in the process of navigating the installation narrative as an actor within it.

Inside the installation the audience were encompassed within a simulated domestic home environment, exemplified in the dimensions of

the rooms, the wood-chip wallpaper, the light fittings, skirting board and wall sockets. The living room sofa and television screen formed the first telematic link outside the installation space, where a second sofa and video monitor were located. By using a system of live chroma keying the two separate people, who could have been any distance apart, shared the same sofa on the same telepresent screen. In the bedroom the viewer could lay down on a bed onto which a live video projection was being made of another person, who was located outside the installation space on a second bed. A video image of the combined audiences together on the projection bed allowed the viewers to interact in a telepresent space by touching with their eyes, where a shift of senses occurs through the exchange of sight with the sense of touch - touching with your eyes as if you are touching with your hands. In the same way a blind person will improve and rely on the sensory inputs of sound and touch, the loss of tactile touch on the bed is compensated by the sense of sight. Not unlike the visual sensory input of pain that is often stimulated prior to the momentarily numbed nerve endings in the tissue at the cause of it - the cognitive process of pain taking place via the eyes, regardless of where they are located, or as cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett explains:

> Blindfold yourself and take a stick (or a pen or pencil) in your hand. Touch various things around you with this wand, and notice that you can tell their textures effortlessly - as if your nervous system had sensors out at the tip of the wand. Those transactions between stick and touch receptors under the skin (aided in most instances by scarcely noticed sounds) provide the information your brain integrates into a conscious recognition of the texture of paper, cardboard, wool, or glass. These successes must depend on felt vibrations set up in the wand, or on indescribable - but detectable - differences in the clicks and scrapping noises heard. But it seems as if some of your nerve endings were in the wand, for you feel the difference of the surfaces at the tip of the wand.[2]

In the case of the telepresent bed the stick or wand being the visual simulation of the body at a distance, placing your finger nerve endings in the telepresent body. The exterior installation space communicated a contrasting image to the domestic interior. Unlike the inside, the technology was very visible - akin to a back-stage environment. The telepresent interfaces located on the outside of the installation, appeared as areas for interaction and observation of the experiment like situation taking place inside the installation. In keeping with the reference to the

[2] Daniel C. Dennett, Consciousness Explained. London : Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1992, 47.

user/actor within the space and the observer of the performance outside the installation, video images from small surveillance cameras inside were constantly being displayed on monitors outside.

Fig 2. Paul Sermon *There's no simulation like home,* 1999, telematic installation, Fabrica Gallery Brighton, UK; photograph provided by the artist

The dining room table was the third telematic interface to the outside installation. Offering a slightly less psychological complex platform for interaction by identifying different characteristics in user/performer behaviour, introducing telematic interaction in the forms of discussion and confrontation. Again working with a system of live chroma keying between two separate tables the remote viewer was able to sit at the same table in the same telepresent room. The final room and interface the user/actor confronted before exiting out the back door, was the bathroom mirror. What initially appeared to be a normal mirror lacked one essential truth - the viewer's own image. A momentary illusion that was broken only when the user realised the mirror was in fact a window into an identical room. Whilst the actor become accustomed to accept their existence in telepresent forms throughout the installation they were finally

denied the most simple telepresent truth they expect from a mirror. As Lacan identifies in his mirror stage by putting the notion of the real and the virtual into question, "We have only to understand the mirror stage "as an identification", in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image."[3] By representing the domestic reality inside the installation as a fabrication of the technological apparatus outside, *There's no simulation like home* attempted to present all realities as a construct of language.

"The visual and kinetic codes of proxemic relations." - Margaret Mores

Essential to all the interfaces in this installation is the use of nonverbal communication. By not using sound the user/performer is forced to communicate in a melodramatic style akin to a silent movie - bringing about an enforced use of gesture and body movement in order to communicate with the fellow participant. By restricting verbal communication the participant is further distanced from their telepresent reflected performer role, which allows a far less self-conscious experience in the space. Whilst the silent melodrama was introduced for precisely this reason, it also refers directly to Charlie Chaplin's comments on the end of cinema when sound was first introduced – highlighting that the inadequacy of a technology is its single most creative potential. The following extract from Margaret Morse describes the process of induced mime and mimicry extremely accurately and has been influential to me in further opening up this discussion around user defined narratives.

> By not transmitting sound, Sermon has chosen to explore the visual and kinetic codes of proxemic relations, that is, the relative distance of human bodies in private/social exchange, rather than verbal exchanges. A cyberspace couple on the bed can interact in any way gesture allows. The dematerialization of gestures and objects tendered, far from undermining their meaning, makes images and actions naked of anything but symbolic meaning and all the more powerful therefore. Thus, the stage has been set for an exploration of the effect of symbolic acts on the psyche.[4]

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[3] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 2.

[4] Margaret Morse, "On Telematic Vision (1993)," *Hardware-Software-Artware. Die Konvergenz von Kunst und Technologie. Kunstpraktiken am ZKM Institut für Bildmedien 1992-1997*. Edited by Margaret Morse for ZKM / Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000, 56.

Specifically with the bed interface, the body has been turned into a visual interlocutor that is not only without the ability to have speech but also dominance, strength, smell and on occasions gender - depending on the clothing and concealed physique of the participant. Without these characteristics the performer is immediately persuaded to accept and interpret communication through touch with an otherwise complete stranger in a highly emotional and sensitive relationship. Morse further explains it:

> Paul Sermon's experiments with "telematics" or "telepresence" continue research that began in the late 1960's using satellites to link live interaction in sound and image between two or more sites. This strand of experimentation also has predecessors in the closed-circuit video and installation art of the early 1970's. Artists of the time experimented not only with "narcissism, but with temporal and spatial displacements of body and its image that reveal the gap between a body and its imaginary self or "identity." Sermon's work is the site of a collective imaginary, a public "family" reunion, albeit as a surreal composition of bodies without a counterpart in physical reality, akin to the condensations Freud identified in dreams. What the "live" mixture of bodies in Sermon's work exposes is the far from explored field of human relations as they have become inflected with and transformed by technology.[5]

Hole-in-Space

Emotional exchange in the telematic space is highly dependent on location and interface. Whilst I have chosen to use the bed or sofa as a meeting place, other artists in the field of telematic arts have relied purely on the dynamics site specificity. In the seminal telematic installation “Hole-in-Space” produced by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, in 1980, geographically remote public audiences were instantly transformed into performers in the first networked narrative performance in a social context of its kind. What initially appears to be a random choice of locations for this public intervention - from the point of view of the user/actor, becomes increasingly apparent that the artists chose theses cities and locations for very specific social and political reasons, creating a networked narrative within an extremely dynamic context. Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz describe the work as follows.

> HOLE-IN-SPACE was a Public Communication Sculpture. On a November evening in 1980 the unsuspecting public walking past the

[5] Margaret Morse, “On Telematic Vision,” 57.

> Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts in New York City, and "The Broadway" department store located in the open air Shopping Centre in Century City (LA), had a surprising counter with each other. Suddenly head-to-toe, life-sized, television images of the people on the opposite coast appeared. They could now see, hear, and speak with each other as if encountering each other on the same sidewalk. No signs, sponsor logos, or credits were posted—no explanation at all was offered. No self-view video monitors to distract from the phenomena of this life-size encounter. Self-view video monitors would have degraded the situation into a self-conscience videoconference. If you have ever had the opportunity to see what the award winning video documentation captured then you would have laughed and cried at the amazing human drama and events that were played out over the evolution of the three evenings. Hole-In-Space suddenly severed the distance between both cities and created an outrageous pedestrian intersection. There was the evening of discovery, followed by the evening of intentional word-of-mouth rendezvous, followed by a mass migration of families and trans-continental loved ones, some of which had not seen each other for over twenty years.[6]

Hole-In-Space relies on the US cultural cliché of the east coast - west coast indifference. Confronting the pedestrian passes-by in New York and Los Angeles and brining them up on a telematic stage to tell jokes "Question: how many New Yorkers does it take to change a light-bulb? Answer: None of your fucking business", sing songs "New York, New York" and play games – charades on one occasion. Viewers were instantly transformed into performers in an east coast meets west coast soap opera.

Focusing on location or stage set we can also consider the work soviet director Sergei Eisenstein. However, not in reference to his films, but of his lesser know theatre productions with the Proletcult Theatre in the 1920's. This was one of the most influential periods of his career; firstly as a theatre designer and later as director after having studied at the Directors Studio of Vsevolod Meyerhold in 1921. This is where most of the issues relevant to my argument were developed, described in his "Montage of Attractions"; which established a new principle of dramaturgy, producing extremely strong effects on the audience by means of combining posters, slogans, circus, variety show, gymnastics, scenery and theatre effects.[7] In 1923 Eisenstein staged *Gas Masks*, a play about the employees of a

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[6] Galloway, Kit., Rabinowitz, Sherie (1980) "Hole-in-Space" *Telecollabrative Art Projects Of ECI Founders Galloway And Rabinowitz, 1977 to Present*. http://www.ecafe.com/getty/HIS/ (accessed October 2017).

[7] The essay "Montage of Attractions" originally appeared in the Soviet journal *Lef* in May 1923under the direction of Mayakovsky.