

Pop Dead Pictures

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Who killed pop culture? At first, I thought the neighbors phone was ringing by a window. There was something strange about the ring, a low series of connected pulsing tones that seemed to arch. I recognized that ring but at the same time it was alien distant. Tricked again. It was a bird ringing. A gray parrot. It lives in the back ally. It has caused the death of pop culture. I listen to him sing all day long in the back between buildings. He imitates other birds and all sorts of technical devices-- pagers, computers-- and most of all he mimics the phone. The bird is very good at what it does. Over time I realized that the ring was from an old 1980s phone, one of the first cheap models that came onto the market after the AT&T monopoly was broken. Why was he singing an old song? It dawned on me that gray parrots live 150 years and that the creature must have learned to sing the ring in 1980. The bird was like an organic loop across time, linking 20 years ago to today erasing everything in its path. What was the bird trying to tell me, why was it calling me from so long ago? The ring was dangerous, powerful and had clearly killed pop culture, what else did it want?

The Influence Machine was the culmination of an extensive research project. First I wanted to chart the history of mimetic and virtual images, starting from the camera obscura and continuing forward in time through the technological developments of today. This is a shadow history of art from the point of view of the moving image. The idea was to keep the history extremely accurate and focused on technology so that people could draw their own cultural associations. Art history from the point of view of a media artist. The result, Timestream, is organized in terms of dark and light, good and evil, which seem to follow all developments in technology. The devil appeared throughout. People tend to polarize these discoveries; just look at the cloning debate today. Timestream turned into a web site for MOMA and will eventually become a book. It was also the inspiration for most of my work for a number of years.

The final project in Timestream was The Influence Machine. The work linked a trend in recent history of using technology to communicate with the dead, starting with spirit photographs, then the telegraph, radio, television, computer and finally the Internet. This became the subject of the work. In the installation, various characters from history were channeled and projected into smoke: Gaspar Robertson, founder of the phantasmagoria; Baird, inventor of the mechanical TV; Farnsworth, inventor of the electronic TV; and the

adolescent Kate Fox who was able to communicate with a dead man through a mysterious knocking code. Knocking became a key concept in the work; a violent force, causing energy to move from one medium to the next, resulting in vibration, sound and communication with the other side.

In subsequent works knocking has morphed into the idea of the transmission process: messages, images, ideas, objects must be sent someplace. The material must be encoded, transmitted, received and decoded in another place. But of course, this is impossible. Distorting media specters abound in the electromagnetic spectrum and everything gets mixed up, lost, trans-mutated, and miscoded. Technology ghosts everything. We base much of our world on this fragile means of exchanging information. Somehow communication occurs in spite of the obstacles.

A ghost is a comic character, unless you have just had someone close to you die. Then you have a different understanding of ghosts. It's not funny when your TV programs are interrupted by fuzzy, electric characters faintly bleeding into your channel. You are upset because they don't belong here in this time and space. Ghosts superimpose themselves, steal our space and time. What's the point? Are they stupid? Do they have something important to say to you? This is a good assumption. But they are hard to see and hear, otherwise they would not be ghosts, would they? If you watch and listen carefully you can start to make out some of the words and sounds. It may take some time and concentration before the understanding begins. You must record the information, play it back repeatedly before the message is revealed. Record. Play-back. Uncanny.

Superstition? Primitive interpretation of physics? Does the signal emanate from another dimension, just another place? If you had the right equipment or antenna you could pick up the signal clearly and understand that it's just some guy dispatching taxis in another language over some outdated radio system which is interfering with your TV set. No ghost! What if it's a long dead actor in an old black and white movie? Sometimes all those actors are dead--moving around on the screen. Maybe it's a military emergency signal sharing our bandwidth. Or a pirate broadcast unable to transmit very powerfully. Or someone's good idea gone astray reaching you in a degraded form. Maybe some signals are parasites.

Antennas are ugly. All the connections form a disturbing web--roads, electricity, telephones, cables. They cut and claw the horizon into lines and spikes that I have come to appreciate. TV antenna, dishes, cell nodes and towers, this hardware reveals the true ugly nature of the system it supports in beautiful ways. The movement of waves is made evident in structure of antennas. They reach for something beyond their

dull existence: signals. For example the untethered Internet, operating at the unlicensed junk frequency, 2.4 gigahertz called Wi-Fi. Wireless implies freedom, the citizen is connected to the world by antenna but is isolated, mobile.

Signals are full of potential as they float in the air before they are received. I was trying to capture this floating moment. What ephemeral substance would become a lens to make visible the invisible? It became a material question. After lots of searching I arrived at transparent fluorescent plexiglass shaped into disks, sawteeth and waves to hold the video projections, as well as to let them spill onto the walls and ceiling. The effect was faux holographic, like the screens you see in sci-fi movies, transparent and hanging in mid air. Later I discovered a metal screen material.

The Antennas needed faces but they had to be wandering in their own atmosphere, lost in the ether, unstable. Moving lights were used while shooting to emphasize the shape and dimensions of the faces, like the way a person looks in a car driving at night. The faces are constantly being formed visually, chiaroscuro in waves of light. Then I needed the faces to move in a mechanical slide or loop, like a TV rolling. This was done with computer animation; they bend and distort as they travel over the surface of the sculpture. There is a lot of power, tension in the juxtaposition of the three kinds of movement human, light and mechanical.

These heads are flying through space in a trance state. Language emanates from them. Words orbit them, like space junk. What they say is inspired in part by technical jargon, manuals, text books on satellite, radar, TV transmission, reception. The words take on new meaning out of context, sexualized, personified, equations for interpersonal power, interiorized revelations. They sound like a machine trying to fix itself, maybe fix you at the same time. That's the way the heads are talking, verbally downloading their own personal instruction manual. Its very intimate: E L F extremely low frequency avoid telephone get inside home stay away from open water avoid areas projecting above landscape go to low place valley isolated feel your hair stand on end drop off internet capture signals trap transmission avoid contact with the ground spherics: atmospheric interference admittance coordinator I get tired I get normalized lines candy candy candy constant resistance circles gray zone where? pulse under various conditions oh I see people walking up and down the street come on hurry up Doppler shift shadows listen to shadows ...

These works were high up in the gallery installation, countered by works-- the blobs or pods-- which are down low, on the floor. These pod heads covered in glass slime or ectoplasm, like embryonic sacks. They

are earthbound and a little sad about it. They wish they were able to wander the sky, disembodied but that's not their lot in life. They are in their own worlds, insulated, looking out, babbling to themselves, waiting. But there is something glowing inside them-- rays of light flow away from them, like they have developed special powers through isolation. I particularly like the glowing effect which was achieved by working with blown glass and projecting through it. There is a point just on the edge where some very interesting optical effects, refraction takes place. After a long research project on optics, it felt like the physics of it had slipped into the work.

Technology embodies Science and Fiction literally. What seems like pure science is, in fact, steeped in fiction--the ghost in the machine. I wanted to go inside the machine for the next projects which involved computer circuit boards, cylindrical plexiglass forms and wire block antennas. Very cyberspace... I fell in love with computer boards, acid green, silver solder, patterns snaking through their systems are over overwhelmingly beautiful. The computer, motherboard, opened up and animated is like the old computer game Pong: heads bounce around inside an imaginary space box.

Bregenz Austria is a small border town on a large lake in the mountains adjacent to Germany and Switzerland. Here I was asked to produce a large scale work for the outside of the Kunsthau building. The landscape with all the borders and broadcast towers, mountains sloping into a vast lake inspired me. It seemed to be the physical embodiment of the politics of borders, public space: the passage of images, ideas, cultures, and information from one medium to the next, one zone to another -- a place where one could easily escape. I used the outside of the building which faces the lake as a screen, as it was naturally divided into a grid of frosted glass blocks or pixels on a large scale. We used four projectors on scaffolding to cover the building with video. While preparing the video, I continued to use moving lighting on the performers faces, pushing for an extreme high contrast metal-ice blue to fuse with the cold glass surface of the building. The video was a computer-animated sliding puzzle of faces which slipped in one of four directions on the grid. The four video elements combined randomly as did the text. As with a border there is always someone coming or going invading or retreating, escaping into something new, a great open space of potential. We used six foot long trumpet-like speakers on the top of the building to project the sound towards the promenade along the lakefront. The speakers had been used by the Pope on his visit to Austria and could direct and throw the sound very far .

I used to live two blocks from the tallest TV broadcasting tower on the east coast, the World Trade Center. On September 11, we awoke to an explosion, that shook our bed -- the sound of the first jet striking the

north tower. I could see the gapping hole in the building, flames, bellowing smoke spotted with floating white papers in the sky through my skylight. Immediately I grabbed my video camera, went to the roof and started shooting the horrors that unfolded on that blue, crystal clear morning. Smoke and flames poured from the gaping inferno. Jacqueline Humphries and I descended to the street and went closer to the towers, the street was a mix of people robotically on their way to work and people in shock. From a closer vantage, what seemed like debris falling from the building was actually people leaping to their death. This was one of the many moments when I had to turn off my camera that day for a variety of reasons: horror, fear, shock, and death. I couldn't even focus my eyes on the tiny falling bodies, or process the event which was just beginning.

I kept shooting video for the next weeks and months documenting the traumatized city's spontaneous memorials, the Bosch-like remains of the tower and the strange transformation of my neighborhood and city. We collected detritus from our roofs, bits of building, paper and jet. I kept shooting photos and video because there was little else for me to do, everything stopped here at ground zero. I had no land phone or internet for six months. Everyone has deep feelings about what happened, political and personal. My reaction was to counter the material which was being filtered by the major media and document what was happening around me. I would make a documentary by piecing together bits of my footage, TV and friends video to fill in the parts I missed, importantly a shot from Brooklyn of the collapse of the towers by John Kelsey.

I shot a number of ambient videos of the pit in various stages of demolition. But the street life near Ground Zero was what really fascinated me as it transformed into an instant tourist site and memorial populated by visitors from all over the world. I used to go over in the middle of the night and once I saw the saddest thing I ever experienced: a woman was screaming and crying out a name into the darkness of the pit. All kinds of religious characters arrived to preach and give solace, pamphlets were printed and distributed and ramshackle perimeters were erected and altered daily. But almost everyone who made the gruesome pilgrimage wanted to do one thing: take a picture with his or her camera. I started shooting the people shooting ground zero, studying the way they related to their cameras their screens. People are selling horrific snapshots of the event, and one series of images are marked, "devils head". The peddler explained, "if you look closely you can see the face of the devil in the red-orange fire ball".

John Edwards performs cold readings on his popular TV show, "Crossing Over." He is the latest in the long tradition of those who claim to communicate with the dead and have visions. People go on his show to find

a way to communicate with their lost loved ones. As he cold reads the audience, he becomes a sort of machine of percentages: "you lost someone older, an aunt or uncle, I see very white hair" . He has a great understanding of the averages, and has at least a 50/50 chance of being right. He knows what we want is universal and the more universal his statements, the more correct he will be; thus more psychic. The more universal, the more profound and boring. As seen on TV, when the paranormal is real it's about the simple details of life. We need the medium to tell us: the dead have all the same problems as the living.

What is interesting to me is the way spiritualism has changed from an evidence based operation to a faith based operation, from a visual cultural to a culture of language or pure message: verbal possession, channeling or multiple personality of the dead. The visual evidence of the past, the spirit photographs, the video feedback of Timestream (the spirit TV station of the 1980s) are replaced by spoken word spirits. Who can argue with I guy who says he sees the dead, that they talk through him? There is no tangible evidence to judge his claims. His voice is beyond proof. It is remarkable that in an age of amazing special effects that depict all kinds of fantasy spaces, the most convincing connection to the spirit world is simply a guy talking on TV.

"Hot ear" is the major complaint about cell phones, yet no one knows if the phones give you cancer. Urban myth warns that if you talk on a cell phone while pumping gas, your car will explode. Exposing rats to RF radiation at an average whole-body exposure of 1 W/kg of body weight caused breaks in the DNA of their brain cells. When testing for RF exposure, a computer model or a tank of liquid in the shape of a head is used. Cell phones in the United States operate between 850 MHz and 1900MHz. If we look at the sky we see it as a blank blue slate but at the same time we know all the information in the world is up they're in the heavens. Its full of the spectrum. The delegation of frequencies is a cultural organizer from 3KHz to 3000Ghz: Citizen Band Radio, Time signals, Radio and Television Broadcasting, Wildlife tracking collars, Satellite, Radio Astronomy, Space Research, Earth Exploration. So much information moves from one station to the next, through rocks, trees and buildings. We are antennas, all that stuff moves through us. Different parts of our body, organs, bones conduct differently and can be measured. Here is a model of the average human bodies as an antenna for ELF (extremely low frequency):

I started out as a painter when I was a boy. Painting is a base from which I work. I had a number of crises in relation to images. I believe that if an image exists , then it has already destroyed the possibility of being constructed by the viewer. I'm like the guy who goes to church because he likes the smell of incense. I'm lost but I'm looking for the magic. I'll try a little harder because Im happily lost. It's all about faith

otherwise forget it, there are too many images out there. The drawings are linked to my research in recent years. Im a manic collector of images, they inform all my installation work. They also act as an abstract diary for me. There is a tension between my graphic work and my installation work, they come from two different parts of the brain. I play with the 2-D work while I make it, use it as a way of meditating into material that fascinates me. That's how I think about images. Good ones are to be dreamed into, they dont tell you what to dream.

Recently Ive been reading psychology studies on the formation of mental images that fall into two categories. 1) Visual Trace: images, which have been directly observed and committed to short-term memory by the viewer (VT). 2) Generated Images: mental images constructed by the viewer from verbal instruction . Visual Trace comes form low-level processes, directly from perception and Generated Images result from higher-level processes including the comprehension of instructions. Tests concluded that some more complicated unstable images could be better committed to memory through GI then through VT. This separation of image construction is somehow at the core of my work. I want you to self-construct while Generating Image. Not self-destruct.

that's the problem here and now with images at the end of pop culture: they mean everything and nothing. See dead pop-pictures everywhere morphing as one big nonspecific drug-like mass. When everything is moving and nothing reflects us in the media stream an argument can be made that now is the best time for a still image. Hollywood, TV, advertising all work on you not with you. This is what separates art from pop culture. This is why art is alive and pop is dead. Statistically more and more people are going to museums. People respond to art because they find a space, which has vanished in pop culture, a place that is unique because it respects and acknowledges them, and seeks to engage them in dialogue.

Sleepwalk is the title of a collaborative installation which artist Jacqueline Humphries and I exhibited at the beginning of 2002. Jacqueline is a painter who uses abstraction to explore issues of contemporary screen space among other things. We are both fascinated by transportation space; where the traveler moves at the center of their own perspective which is in turn punctuated by the flow of architecture, advertising and cinematic space. It seemed like a good framework for us to collaborate within as Humphries has used these elements in her work for years. We designed a fanciful landscape filled with simple set-like wood and plaster constructions: hand-held placards, highway billboards, street signs and movie screens. Each of these spaces was blanked out and then reassigned a new purpose with video projections. As people wander through this semiotic dream space they are invited to carry one of the blank signs and catch parts of the

projections to participate. A movie screen becomes a distant gulf coast electric storm, a road construction sign, anchored with sand bags are endlessly slathered with something scatological brown, chocolate frosting? An acid green, infrared shot of a smoke-bellowing factory locates this landscape someplace in the industrial southeast of the USA. There is the rural existential symbol, the blank billboard, waiting to be occupied. Other screens are new developments in Humphries work: video paintings. These are large-scale projections which blow-up the fluid process of painting. The colorful liquid screen "Miasma," becomes a fractal-like toxic delta satellite image. A macro shot of a painting brush becomes six feet wide when projected, its bristles as thick as fingers raking endlessly through the paint. Each stroke of the brush slightly alters the colors like waves lapping at some alien shore. Even though parts of the installation contain sunshine of course the whole thing was meant to take place in a somnambulist state of mind at night.

Sunlight and video are a delicate mix. I really got the bug for working outside in public, its a natural extension of the use of found objects and liminal indoor space. But the light barrier has always bothered me technically and theoretically. Of course, there is an association with video installation art and dark spaces, black walls. I have worked in those dark rooms and used this as part of the subject of my installations but mostly I prefer more lighted spaces,. However, projectors in the past have been so weak that it became necessary to work in a mostly dark cinematic room.

Sadly, video art was set up in opposition to the more traditional world of art which is locked into "neutral" white walls as a tradition. But if you look carefully at this tradition it soon falls apart. White walls and even lighting is a very recent and arguably artificial development. For example, some impressionists preferred colored walls and not so long ago the organic fluctuations of sunlight and gaslight were the norm. Is an artwork diminished when installed in a domestic setting? Once one starts to think about the complications of the perfect neutral space the details never end ; electric light is in no way neutral unless expensive full spectrum bulbs are used; at what brightness; what is the most neutral white paint? There is no end to it and in fact there is no such thing as an ideal art space: it's a cultural construct of the moment.

the outdoors is an attractive place for art to be installed. There one finds a different audience and a very un-neutral, highly charged setting. Television is a very powerful light source and can almost stand up to direct sunlight so I used one in Guard Booth, my first permanent outdoor installation in Korea. But I wanted to use other light sources and designed a laser system, and then an LED system though they were too difficult to produce. Recently projectors have become much brighter but they still cant project in direct daylight at the same scale they are designed to display inside. I decided to play a little inversion game with them: to

use a relatively large projector and project it on a rather small surface and see how it worked outside. This experiment coincided with the opportunity to produce an outdoor work in Bad Driberg and the result was Shock Rock.

When I visited the spa and looked around I was taken by the history of the place which dated from the mid 1700s. Of course the implications of the history of technological body/electricity was fascinating for me; as many of the most interesting developments on my time line were surely used in this spa at one time or another. But the one architectural feature which struck me was the wonderful, classical band shell, set in the trees. It is a physical embodiment of entertainment, more in the shape of a horn than a stage. In a very quaint setting one can see the roots of the development of media culture, the fluted shape of its walls intended to amplify the individual for the masses. This place felt like a vortex between different eras of popular music; constructed from the past, present and future. It has a lonely hearts feeling to it; a building designed to resonate, to focus the vibrations.

The cadence of speech can have a musical quality and I wanted to explore that quality with this installation, extend it. A transformation of my scripts takes place when delivered by a performer in a musical way; not sung but in an interior singsong voice in your head. Personal humming is a model for the kind of inside-out music I wanted to make for this work. I returned to the doubled self in the form of two large projected heads about three feet high, one vertical and one horizontal. I wanted a harmonizing and discord of two heads, of the exact same tones, the same inner voices. Let the voices eat themselves recreate themselves. I worked with Barbara Sukowa, a movie star, who is very well known in Germany. She has worked with Fassbinder and Von Trier so I was delighted to have the chance to work with her. She was able to melt into the text, to have it become extremely personal and fragile and then suddenly violent and aggressive. Yet somehow the performance remains playful at its core, which for me is the essence of music: play.

Whats dead serious is the fact that five or six companies own most of the cultural production in the world at the moment. Newscorp, Disney, Viacom, Universal Vivendi, AOL/Time Warner. Its one big food chain with the big beasts swallowing up the small. Harvesting through sounds and pictures, kid culture, everything you see and hear is connected and for sale. Pop consumes itself and shits out money. The equation is roughly: pop song=universal+ transcendence+ media control= capitol trap= sell you back to you and sell you back to you and sell you back to you where A is the vector potential vertically mounted surface perfectly conducting body wrestling remain positive, believe harmonics, power, shift, box, converter, stage? shell? Hey this is the vox pop you know elevated levels broadcast bursts under one wires

three phase transmission line let go blockbuster dead? happy in the head? You're not dead. Happy in the head? You're not dead near a power line useful in fringe area you come back time and again consciousness channel surfer kaleidoscope insulated free space that wants to hear it?

Within all information systems there is an undesirable build up of excess energy in the form of heat, light or interference which must be shunted, burned off, vented or otherwise dissipated before it threatens the functioning of that system. Interference may take the form of acoustic low-frequency noise (LFN) , deep drone, fluorescent buzz, diesel engine idling, or distant rumbling. You cannot tell where its coming from; a factory or power station or microwave communications network someplace else. It can come from far away, through the ground or air. In Kokomo the hum has been described as the sound of "butter in a hot skillet." People have complained that the hum is making them sick; they suffer from " dizziness, nosebleeds, extreme fatigue, joint and muscle pain, and excruciating ,unending headaches." There have been reports of "Taos Hum", in New Mexico, "Larg Hum " in Scotland, and "Bristol Hum" in England. There are also Hums in Japan and Scandinavia. Only some people are able to hear The Hum and IGZAB, a German group who suffers from the problem believes the following two factors must be present: 1. a personal disposition; 2. an influence from the outside. Nearly all victims perceive the tone as so perfect that it has to be man-made. Affected people have the impression that "vibrations" or "electric current" move through the body toward the head and involve two modulating tones whistling noise. A Hum simulator is provided at www.brummt.de with the following Warning: "Please keep in mind that humming noises generated by this software possibly endanger your health. Playing this sound is on (sic) your own risk."