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Whitney Biennial 2014

Published by Whitney Museum of American Art

Victoria Fu speaks with Paul Pfeiffer and Brad Troemel

Paul Pfeiffer: Victoria, viewing your new video installations, I'm immediately struck by how the edges of the video image don't line up with the edges of the projection screen. The image spills off onto the walls and floor of the surrounding space. Also, the people and objects onscreen appear unfixed from their background, like cutouts suspended in an ambiguous, green-screen void. At one point, a hand tries to finger swipe a cockatoo as if to advance to the next page on an iPad touch screen. But the bird doesn't move. Each element in the picture seems isolated on its own separate layer. In the sound track, I hear background voices and someone typing on a key-board, which makes me think an invisible director or editor is controlling the action. All of this suggests to me a new, expanded image environment— one that blurs the boundaries of projected image, real physical space, and hyperspace. You're making installations that behave like cinema in some ways, like sculpture in others, and like the internet in still others.

Victoria Fu: Every figure and object in *Belle Captive* (2013) is an appropriated green-screen stock clip from the internet. The footage is overlaid and manipulated—cropped, looped, blurred—to appear as foreground on a color-field background that I've shot on 16mm film. Each layer is disconnected from the others, but at the same time they're legible all together as action within cinematic narrative space. Installed, the off-kilter projection merges the videos' spatial logic with ours in trompe-l'oeil fashion, toying with our perception of actual space. Cinema is pixels on-screen is projected light is a sculptural object is the walls of the room. In what some call a "postcinematic" or "postinternet" moment, is the viewer a spectator, protagonist, user, or all of the above? With the emergence of the digital, painting's problem of representation (Magritte's "This is not a pipe") persists with higher stakes: now, more intricate degrees of simulation ask us to engage with the constant flood of images on a haptic level—swiping, tapping, dragging. I recognize the impulse to translate the digital into analogue, extrude sculptural space out of the virtual, then back again.

Brad Troemel: Virtual!! [*giggles, pops leather-jacket collar, takes a drag before placing clove e-cigarette over magnetic- faux-pierced left ear, clears throat*] I'm interested in this feedback loop you describe wherein all physical art- things must eventually be digitally mediated (many works are now constructed with their inevitably mediated form in mind), but I'm also a fan of art's signal getting lost in the digital abyss. Decentralized image-sharing networks allow art to become something other than itself, reblogged into contexts and for purposes totally unrelated to the author's initial intentions. Art's integration (disintegration?) into everyday life feels most exciting here because this is a uniquely con- temporary phenomenon based on current mediating technologies. Can you imagine another time in history when twenty thousand fifteen-year- olds in suburban America were using Robert Smithson images to impress each other and get laid? [*wipes Andrea Fraser-based alligator tear from eye*] Historical avant-garde dreams do come true!!

PP: Great expectations! There's a sense of new possibility in this digital era, particularly around the emergence of decentralized modes of content distribution and consumption. Whole new horizons are opening up to support freedom of expression and interconnectivity, new ways to reinvent our identities and customize our user experience. But I wonder if all this really amounts to a kind of vastly extended shopping mall. In his book *Design and Crime* (2002), Hal Foster describes the endless possibilities in a suburban mall to choose just the right combo of clothes and accessories to formulate a unique identity and lifestyle. The only thing you are not free to choose is your ontological limits. In my opinion, what distinguishes art is the focus on ontology: the intent to question reality. It's not just the production of another object, image, or experience to be consumed; it's the production of self-awareness in the act of consuming. It's an experience of disjunction, of crossing a threshold from one reality to another.

VF: You've often considered these thresholds in your work, Paul, asking viewers to switch modes of engagement between differently mediated images. It makes me wonder, what happens when the threshold is broader and the apparatus less detectable? What are the phenomenological implications of engaging in digital simulation?

BT: [*embarrassed, looks up from one-handed sexting on a Motorola Razr*] I don't think scrolling on a device produces a greater degree of engagement for viewers. Scrolling is an act of indifference; it's a tepid, upstream doggy-paddle against the deluge of status updates, lunch decisions, selfies. Scrolling is a pattern-finding mission that doesn't privilege any bit of information over another but serves to identify links between posts. I won't click a news link until three people who don't know each other have shared it. We use our calloused index fingers to scroll, but it's a process derived from the organizational principles of machines. I am, by the way, totally fine with that. [*winks at Jaron in the front row of the press conference* Victoria, Paul, and Brad are holding at Madison Square Garden; Jaron angrily wind-flutes back]

VF: Scrolling appears to give freedom of choice, but we are still limited and informed by the system. Psychogeography at the virtual level still shapes being and consciousness. Just as our bodies conform to behavioral patterns dictated by our built environment and social status (whether we hunt for our food, jog on a treadmill, work in an office), I can imagine an analogous situation where our neurological pathways form along Google image-search typologies.

PP: I think it's important for artists today to acknowledge their roots in the legacy of Conceptual art—the generation of artists in the sixties and seventies who deeply distrusted images, for whom it was necessary to reject the visual and material in favor of words and ideas. But we're far removed from that moment. The Pictures Generation in the 1980s represents a shift like ours to a focus on threshold, where there's a desire to play with the power of spectacle, to appropriate the image toward other ends.

VF: Yes, we aren't far from the Pictures Generation's play with spectacle. The gesture of appropriation has been normalized (animated GIFs, for instance) but is no less relevant given the ease and speed with which we encounter and proliferate images. The global advertising network is imbricated in the stock footage I use, and the videos I make are just single nodes along paths of dispersion. Moreover, the footage, created on green screen, is meant for any kind of advertisement background; dictated by capital, the visual content adheres to a one-size-fits-all, generic flatness. Exaggerating the "home-less" aspects of green screen, *Belle Captive* weaves the blandness of stock media into a narrative-like spectatorial experience—looping and stretching the duration of actions, collaging absurd combinations. In a way, the images we encounter on the internet are Surrealist objects or ready-made combines—hyperlinked and endlessly divorced from their original contexts.

BT: One of the coolest things *The Jogging* [thejogging.tumblr.com] stole from advertising is the idea of having an unavoidable relationship with media. Lauren Christiansen and I started the project as a response to the attention economy. We wanted to create a way of producing (and a type of) content that would fluidly exist in a digitally mediated environment that privileges image ubiquity rather than operating on the scarcity model of the art market. [polishes flag lapel pin, runs hand through hair to appear more Romney-esque] The Jogging's Tumblr presence was always meant to maximize attention efficiency in that context. We would make and photograph multiple configurations of sculptures—let the free-market attention economy decide which version is best! Downplay authorship by only using abstract symbols—let the images' rebloggers decide what to do with the author's identity in relation to their online personas! Post more content than any one person could possibly share—let the rebloggers express individuality through what they choose to share! Make use of topical events and known products—let art become a background for the image consumer's comment threads! [puts hand up to high-five Rupert Murdoch, Rupert swings, Brad swipes hand over his head as if to run hand through hair—"Too slow, old man!"]