“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.”

On his way to the store Gauri Banerjee, 64 years old and blind, knocked his head against a door and could see again after 20 years. But in the same moment he lost his hearing.

Wolverhampton Express & Star (17 May 1995).

Hugh Williams was the only survivor of a vessel that sank in the Straits of Dover on 5 December 1660. One hundred and twenty-one years later to the day, another shipping disaster in the same waters claimed the lives of all on board, except a man with the seemingly charmed name of Hugh Williams. On 5 August 1820, when a picnic boat capsized on the Thames, all drowned with the exception of a five-year-old boy—Hugh Williams. Again about one hundred and twenty years later, on 10 July 1940, a British trawler was destroyed by a German mine. Only two men survived, an uncle and nephew, both named Hugh Williams.

Plimmer, M. & King, B., *Beyond Coincidence: Amazing Stories of Conincidence and the Mystery Behind Them* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 192.

Subject: **killed by book**
Date: Monday, March 12, 2007 12:19 PM
From: Tom McCarthy

“Absalom, Absalom!” Is such a good book to die with—or rather break a leg. In fact, “As I Lay Dying” would be better, since someone breaks the same leg twice in that book.

Hope you like the second draft.

Let’s talk about film more soon.
I have ideas…
Tom x

On 11 Mar 2007, at 9:55 AM, Johan Grimonprez wrote:

I survived! Unlike Bluma Lennon, who one day in the spring of 1998 bought a secondhand copy of Emily Dickenson’s poems in Soho, and as she reached the second poem on the first street corner, she was knocked down by a car—Imagine killed by a second hand book, of all murder weapons. —Books change people’s destinies,—Carlos Dominguez, mentions in “La casa de papel” the story of an elderly professor of classical languages, Leonard Wood, whho was left paralysed after being struck on the head by five volumes of the ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA that fell from a shelf in his library; and his friend Richard broke a leg when he tried to reach William Faulkner’s “Absalom, Absalom!”, which was so awkwardly placed he fell off his stepladder, and—funny—he even tells a story about a dog that died from indigestion from swallowing the pages of “the brothers Karamzow” one afternoon when rage got the better of him—

I’m about to read the new version of NEGATIVE REEL in a minute, on the train to paris,
Hope I don’t get killed now!!!
Johan

On 10 Mar 2007, at 1:33 PM, Tom McCarthy wrote:

How bizarre, given that I’d just written to you about your “encyclopaedic” knowledge of Hitchcock in relation to his mother’s death. How did it happen?

Tom x

On 10 Mar 2007, at 1:28 PM, Johan Grimonprez wrote:

Hey Tom,
Just got back from london,
Nearly killed by an encyclopedia, what a sentence-----
Just to confirm I got your text,
Will look at it tomorrow as soon as I have some time.
Warmest,
Johan

On 9 Mar 2007, at 4:06 PM, Tom McCarthy wrote:

Hi Guys,

Here’s the new draft. It’s gone up a little in length to incorporate an expansion of the question of what’s in the kitchen closet, as discussed by me and Johan two weeks ago in Paris.

I’ve moved it to the studio (in Los Angeles, right?). Also to 68, so the logo is “flying great in 68!”

The only thing I’ve guessed at is the mother’s death date, which I’ve called ’38. Frankly, if Johan, whose knowledge of Hitchcock is encyclopaedic, can’t find the real date out, then neither will anyone else be able to fault it. Now Alfred’s chasing down her birth certificate, retrospectively. I hope it works.

Let me know what you think.
Tom x

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.”

With contributions by

Herman Asselberghs
Catherine Bernard
Jorge Luis Borges
Chris Darke
Jodi Dean
Thomas Elsaesser
Johan Grimonprez
Asad Ismi
Alvin Lu
Tom McCarthy
Florence Montagnon
Dany Nobus
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Vrääth Öhner
Mark Peranson
Alexander Provan
John Rumbiak
Simon Taylor
Eben Wood
Slavoj Žižek

Contents

PART III
dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y

PART IV
Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?

Preface

—"Where would a wise man hide a leaf?"
—"In the forest."
—"But what does he do if there is no forest?"
—"Well, well," cried Flambeau irritably,
"what does he do?"
—"He grows a forest to hide it in."

Chesterton, G.K., "The Sign of the Broken Sword", in *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911).

Walter Benjamin's angel of history is standing ominously before us, open winged and gazing towards the past with a sense of dreadful premonition.[1] Where we see a series of chains of events, the angel sees one single, all-encompassing catastrophe piling up at its feet. From "history", the angel would like to pause for a moment, awaken the dead and make sense of the wreckage. This is nearly impossible. Caught up in its wings, the storm of progress is blowing hard and sweeps the angel into an unremitting future. It is this storm, this sky-borne threat that runs deep within the work of Johan Grimonprez. Whether it be in *Double Take* (2009), *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997), *Maybe the Sky is Really Green and We're Just Colorblind* (2005–11) or *Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?* (1992)—the four works studied within this volume—the threat from above is an allegory exposing a disjointedness within our contemporary society.

1 Benjamin, W., *Gesammelte Schriften I:2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974).

Maybe the Sky is Really Green and We're Just Colorblind, an ongoing curated video-library/vlogging installation, may be most usefully conceived as Grimonprez's artistic sketchbook. Representing his media archaeology practice whereby image associations are dealt with and re-contextualized in very personal ways, it is a tool that allows him to explore and elaborate on new themes and itineraries. As such, it is fundamental in understanding the trajectory taken to realize his three major works.

Grimonprez's earliest work, *Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?*, explores the confrontation, both physical and epistemological, of the first encounter between westerners and highland villagers of New Guinea. Played out through the image of the airplane, it is a deconstruction of anthropological discourse, one framed within a global power struggle premised on the notion of "the Other". Indeed, "nowhere is it more visible that 'the Other' is constructed within a social, cultural and historical context as when two differing cultures clash".[2]

From under the cover of a history of airplane hijackings, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* betrays the collusive relationship between the media and terrorists, and the subsequent hijacking of reality by the media. It unwraps hidden dimensions of our mediatized culture in terms of media spectacle, the cultivation of fear, oblivion and catastrophe, in order to reflect on the phenomenon of a paradigmatic double vision. Curiously, or perhaps inevitably, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* itself has been hijacked by the events of 9/11. It is now impossible to watch either the film or TV footage of the planes flying into the twin towers without being reminded of the other.

Set against the backdrop of the "space race" as a metaphor for the Cold War, *Double Take* scrutinizes the impregnation of fear within society's fabric. It crystallizes the process as one precipitated by the televisual assault on the home—one which has deep rooted links with our so-called "photoshopped" reality of today—through a series of cloned Alfred Hitchcocks. Symbolizing

2 Grimonprez, J., "Kobarweng, or Where is Your Helicopter?", in J. Grimonprez & H. Asselberghs, *Johan Grimonprez:… We Must Be Over The Rainbow!* (Santiago de Compostela: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, 1998), 85–6.

the doubling effect of cinema and television, and by extension that of capitalism and communism, commercials and warfare, such a diplopia creates a parallax that irrevocably fissures what is normally taken to be "real". Alluding to the "unknown knowns", it forces "reality" itself to be held up to scrutiny.[3]

It is this concern that formed the impetus behind the symposium *Shot by Both Sides!*[4] Deriving its name from falling between the worlds of film and fine art, art practice and theory, its aims were to challenge an audience's paradigms of perception. Pertinently, it also acted as the catalyst for this book. Published by The Fruitmarket Gallery, Blaffer Art Museum, S.M.A.K. (Museum of Contemporary Art Ghent), ARTIST ROOMS, Tate, National Galleries of Scotland, Beeldende Kunst Strombeek / Mechelen, Faculty of Fine Arts, University College of Ghent, Kamel Mennour Gallery and Sean Kelly Gallery, it traces a parallel itinerary to that of the symposium and the Johan Grimonprez exhibitions at The Fruitmarket Gallery, the Blaffer Art Museum and the S.M.A.K.

Our sincere thanks go to the writers who have contributed such original and insightful essays on Grimonprez's work: Jodi Dean, Dany Nobus, Catherine Bernard, Eben Wood, Tom McCarthy, Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Provan, Mark Peranson, Chris Darke, Alvin Lu, Florence Montagnon, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Vrääth Öhner and Simon Taylor. We thank Beatrijs Eemans, Lieze Eneman and Benoit Detalle for co-ordinating the publication, and Steven Jacobs, Edwin Carels, Pieter Vermeulen, Eva De Groote, Johan Grimonprez, Beatrijs Eemans, Emmy Oost and Pierre Drouot for organizing the symposium. Also, special thanks go to Anthony d'Offay and Lucy Askew for the additional support. Last but not least, many thanks go to Inge Ketelers for the book's wonderful design.

3 Žižek, S. "Philosophy, the 'Unknown Knowns', and the Public Use of Reason", in *Topoi*, vol. 25, no. 1–2 (2006), 137–42.

4 This symposium, which took place on 15 October 2009 at the Arts Centre Vooruit, Ghent, Belgium, was an initiative of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University College of Ghent, in collaboration with Arts Centre Vooruit and Zapomatik, and with the generous support of VAF (Flanders Image) and KUnstenSite vzw.

Assembling the most insightful texts written about Grimonprez's four major works—which include previously unpublished excerpts of the original scripts—we are convinced that this publication is a significant contribution to the critical appreciation of his output. Returning to Walter Benjamin, the angel of history is not (s)he who causes the disaster, but (s)he who tries to make sense of it. This is exactly what Johan Grimonprez seeks, and for this reason we are excited to bring his body of work to a wider audience. Emphasizing a disavowal of historical time, the book's chronology sets past into future, as after all *It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards*.[5]

Fiona Bradley
Director,
The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
Claudia Schmuckli
Director and Chief Curator,
Blaffer Art Museum, University of Houston
Philippe Van Cauteren
Artistic Director,
Museum for Contemporary Art, Ghent
Wim De Temmerman
Dean,
Faculty of Fine Arts, University College of Ghent
Luk Lambrecht
Curator,
Beeldende Kunst Strombeek/Mechelen
Robrecht Vanderbeeken
Postdoctorate researcher,
Faculty of Fine Arts, University College of Ghent

5 The title is taken from a dialogue in Carroll, L., "Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There" (London: Macmillan, 1871).

—"Living backwards!" Alice repeated in great astonishment.
—"I never heard of such a thing!"
—"…but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways."
—"I'm sure mine only works one way," Alice remarked.
—"I can't remember things before they happen."
—"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked.

Carroll, L., "Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There" (London: Macmillan, 1871).

PART I

Maybe the Sky is Really Green, and We're just Colourblind

11 September 1948:
Tiny bodies litter 5th Avenue

Swarms of birds crashed into the Empire State Building early on the morning of September 11th, before plummeting to the street. For more than two hours, the birds dropped to the sidewalks and street in 34th and 33rd Streets and along 5th Avenue. Many of the tiny birds that survived the fall were run over by vehicles. Pedestrians, moved by the plight of the birds, tried to revive some of them on the spot, while others headed home with the creatures, hoping to feed them. Not only was the intermittent plop of the birds disturbing, but particularly weird was the shrill chirping of many injured birds that dropped to setbacks or ledges.

"Fog Is Blamed as Birds Die Hitting Empire State Building", in *The New York Times* (12 September 1948).

11 September 2010:
9/11 Memorial lights trap thousands of birds

On the evening of the ninth anniversary of 9/11, the twin columns of light projected as a memorial over the World Trade Center site became a source of mystery. Illuminated in the beams were thousands of small white objects, sparkling and spiraling, unlike anything seen before. From beneath, it was at times like gazing into a snowstorm. It was hard not to think of souls. Those unidentified objects have now been identified as birds, pulled from their migratory path and bedazzled by the light in a perfect, poignant storm of avian disorientation.

Keim, B., "9/11 Memorial Lights Trap Thousands of Birds", in *Wired* (14 September 2010). Accessed 22 November 2010: www.wired.com/wiredscience/201%9/tribute-in-light-birds/

She took it all in. She believed it all.
Pain, ecstacy, dog food, all the seraphic
matter, the baby bliss that falls from the air.

DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991).

"Maybe the Sky is Really Green, and We're Just Colourblind"[1]: On Zapping, Close Encounters and the Commercial Break

Johan Grimonprez

January 2011

Remote Control

On Halloween 1938, channel zapping was partially responsible for inducing mass hysteria throughout the United States. Millions of Americans who had been listening to NBC's *Chase and Sanborn Hour* with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy, scanned channels at the commercial break and unwittingly tuned into Orson Welles's CBS radiocast *The War of the Worlds*.[2] In doing so, they missed the crucial disclaimer introducing the programme as a fake. The zappers were caught up in a public hysteria as Martians were reported to be landing.[3] At its climax, the broad-

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1 Groening, M., *Bart Simpson's Guide to Life: A Wee Handbook for the Perplexed* (London: HarperCollins, 1996).

2 The adaptation of H.G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds* was directed and narrated by Orson Welles. It aired on 30 October 1938 over the Columbia Broadcasting System network as the Halloween episode of the radio series *Mercury Theatre on the Air.*

3 Bellamy, R.V. & Walker, J.R., *Television and the Remote Control: Grazing on a Vast Wasteland* (New York/London: The Guilford Press, 1996), 16; Cantril, H., *The Invasion of Mars. A Study in the Psychology of Panic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

cast described a 9/11esque New York being taken down by extra-terrestrials: "poison smoke drifting over the city, people running and diving into the East River like rats, others falling like flies". *The New York Times* headline the next morning ran: "RADIO LISTENERS IN PANIC TAKING WAR DRAMA AS FACT!"[4]

Switching channels to avoid the ads was not solely responsible for the hysteria. *The War of the Worlds* also deliberately ran without commercial interruptions. This led credence to the show and compelled listeners to stay tuned. In their study of the remote control device, Robert Bellamy and James Walker identify zapping as a way to avoid advertising and other undesirable content, therefore better gratifying the viewer.[5] In 1953 a precursor of the present-day television remote, appropriately called the Blab-Off, was marketed as a way of shutting up commercials. "This hand-held device featured a 20-foot cord that was attached to a television loudspeaker. One click of the switch turned the sound off but left the picture on. Its inventor, an advertising executive, noted that the $2.98 Blab-Off allowed 'the TV fan to get away from the commercials he dislikes.'"[6]

In 1955, after research into push-button technology, the Zenith company introduced Lazy Bones, the very first TV remote designed to eliminate commercials. It was still attached to the TV by a cable that stretched across the living room, leading to consumers' complaints of frequent tripping.[7] In response, Zenith created the Flash-matic: the world's first "wireless remote", it activated photocells on the TV. However, this worked all too well on sunny

4 "Radio Listeners in Panic Taking War Drama as Fact", in *The New York Times* (31 October 1938). See also, Hand, R.J., *Terror on the Air!: Horror Radio in America, 1931–1952* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006).

5 Bellamy, R.V. & Walker, J.R., *The Remote Control Device: An Overlooked Technology*; and Bellamy, R.V., Walker, J.R. & Traudt, P.J., "Gratifications Derived from Remote Control Devices: A Survey of Adult RCD Use", in *The Remote Control in the New Age of Television*, ed. R.V. Bellamy & J.R. Walker (Westport: Praeger, 1993).

6 Benjamin, L., "At the Touch of a Button: A Brief History of Remote Control Devices", in *The Remote Control in the New Age of Television*, ed. R.V. Bellamy & J.R. Walker (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 15–22. See also, "Kill that commercial!", *Newsweek* (20 November 1950), 95–6; Walker, C.L.,"How to Stop Objectionable TV Commercials", in *Reader's Digest* (November 1953), 72.

7 "Remote Controls for Radio and TV", in *Consumer Reports* (March 1956), 165–6.

days, causing the sunlight to flip channels. The next model used radio waves, but never made it onto the market as it inadvertently changed the neighbours' channels as well. Zenith continued its research and in June 1956 introduced Space Command Television. This time using high-frequency sound, the successful remote was advertised with the slogan: "Just a touch of the button to shut off the sound of long annoying commercials."[8]

1950s: Something New in the Skies

By the 1950s, television had begun to replace radio as the dominant mass-communication medium. "Are You Ready for Television?" asked an early Dumont TV ad. Not quite yet. At first, the new family member was not that welcome. With its signals beamed in from skies, it was regarded as a somewhat alien presence in the home, and so the television was often hidden away or disguised within its furniture. The Hillsborough, with its new Hideaway Styling, allowed the TV to be flipped back into a regular salon table, acting as if the new medium did not yet exist.[9] Even, or perhaps especially, in Hollywood, the television was considered a hostile prop on film sets. Warner Brothers frowned on the appearance of a TV in the living rooms of its feature films, and would promptly order to have it removed. "The assumption," Erik Barnouw writes, "seemed to be that if television could be banned from feature films, it could not survive."[10] But not for long: Warner signed a contract to produce Westerns for ABC Television and by 1958, there were thirty Western series programmed for prime-time TV. Soon the telly would re-imagine what the living room was all about.

Leaving Hollywood for New York's growing television bustle, Lucille Ball became the first film star to attain more fame as

8 Johnson, S., "Zap!", in *Chicago Tribune* (27 August 1986), 1, 7.

9 See www.zapomatik.com: HILLSBOROUGH WITH NEW HIDEAWAY STYLING, Jam Handy Organization for RCA Victor, 1959, 2:30', USA (courtesy Prelinger Archives: www.prelinger.com).

10 Barnouw, E., *Tube of Plenty, The Evolution of American Television* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

a TV sitcom-actress. *I Love Lucy* portrayed her as a woman permanently on the verge of escaping the family trap but failing delightfully—that was until the following week's programme! In a January 1957 episode, on the occasion of her son's birthday, she makes an attempt to conquer the domestic space recently lost to the telly. She dons a Superman costume and makes her entrance through the third-floor living-room window. Alas, "supermom" gets caught on the drain-pipe and the "real" Superman, played by George Reeves, has to make a special guest appearance to save Lucy from domestic disaster. Heroes of the small screen were here to stay.[11]

The tube did not only zap superheroes into the home—the very first television signals beamed into the ether also attracted "foreign attention". In January 1953 the media reported that two mysterious "Men in Black", who were not from Earth, had landed with a saucer in the Mojave Desert, 200 miles east of Los Angeles. They claimed to have learned English by listening to TV broadcasts.[12] Already in 1947, civilian pilot Kenneth Arnold had observed nine elliptical, disc-shaped vehicles travelling in formation over Mount Rainier in Washington at extraordinary speed. He described the objects as resembling "a saucer skipping across the water". Newspapers baptized the unknown crafts after the household object, and thus "flying saucers" turned America's gaze skywards. Something was definitely out there in the skies…

Terror from Outer Space

Cold War nerves had caused paranoia in the ranks of America's Secret Service, always in fear of a commie Soviet plot. UFO contactee George Adamski fuelled their fears with his comment

11 *Lucy and Superman*, episode 166 of I Love Lucy (first broadcast 14 January 1957, USA). See also, Mellencamp, P., *High Anxiety. Catastrophe, Scandal, Age & Comedy* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

12 Redfern, N., *The FBI Files, the FBI's UFO Top Secrets Exposed* (Sydney: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

that the superior space people had "a communist-type government!"[13] The CIA set up a panel of top scientists, headed by Dr H.P. Robertson. It concluded that it would be strategically wise to debunk UFO reports, out of fear that the Soviet Union might use them to induce public hysteria in the US. Even *The Wonderful World of Disney* got involved in the television disinformation campaign. UFO groups were monitored for subversive activities, and contactees were branded as Soviet spies.[14]

In October 1957, Sputnik launched the Space Age. The very first satellite shot into orbit by the Soviets struck a serious blow to America's self-esteem, causing a major media crisis. TV networks were flabbergasted that instead of staying glued to the tube, their usually captive audiences ran into backyards hoping to catch a glimpse of Sputnik beaming across the night sky. The press likened the launch of Sputnik to Christopher Columbus's discovery of America. "Somehow, in some new way, the sky seemed almost alien," wrote Senate majority leader L.B. Johnson, the soon-to-be-president.[15]

In response, the US attempted to blast off with the Vanguard I rocket, but the "Flopnik" or "Kaputnik", as it was baptized, had hardly lifted four feet off the ground before an enormous explosion sent it crashing back down to Earth in front of a worldwide television audience. When the Soviets sent their dog into orbit, paranoia peaked within US ranks. After all, "Pupnik" Laika could potentially be carrying a hydrogen bomb! To America, the Soviet dog was a harbinger of war being waged from space. "What's at stake is nothing less than our survival," warned Senator Mike Mansfield, while Edward Teller, "father of the hydrogen bomb",

13 Adamski, G. & Adamski, L., *Flying Saucers Have Landed* (London: Werner Laurie, 1953).

14 Dean, J., *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 190–1. See also, Haines, G.K., "CIA's Role in the Study of UFOs, 1947–90: A Die-Hard Issue". Accessed 26 December 2010: https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/97unclass/ufo.html

15 Dickson, P., *Sputnik. The Shock of the Century* (New York: Walker & Company, 2001), 117–28.

went on television to suggest that the future now belonged to the Russians.[16] In the wake of Sputnik, a renewed saucer craze hit the American public. Newsrooms became overwhelmed with reports of sightings. "TOTAL TERROR FROM OUTER SPACE!" ran one caption in the trailer for the 1956 Hollywood production *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*.

The Fear Industry

During the Cold War, television was eagerly exploited to perpetuate a culture of fear in search of political gain. Live broadcasts in particular became ideal to shape political rhetoric, as was evident in the very first live televised summit that developed into a Cold War stand-off between Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev and US Vice-President Richard Nixon. Notoriously dubbed "The Kitchen Debate", the newly invented Ampex colour videotape recorded the historical event in a model kitchen at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. During the statesmen's rough-and-tumble debate—ranging from dishwashers, to nuclear arsenal, to the role of women—Nixon boasted that the wonder of television gave America the technological edge over the USSR. While Nixon bragged about 50 million TV sets for 46 million families in the US, the more feisty Khrushchev outsmarted Nixon with a quick retort, ironically displaying a true mastery of live television. With flamboyant disdain, showman Khrushchev declared that the Soviet space endeavours were far superior.

In June 1961 the Soviets successfully sent cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin into orbit, making him officially the first man in space. As the US space programme lingered behind, its media machine played on the communist scare of "The Red Planet Mars" attacking America.[17] By now the world's stockpile of nuclear weapons created a doomsday context that brought humanity to the brink of annihilation. The politically repressed subconscious haunted America in the form of an invisible power from a hostile universe invading the home. Superheroes and creatures from outer space colonized prime-time TV. Sci-fi programmes such as *The Outer Limits* and *The Twilight Zone* took control of transmission: "There Is Nothing Wrong With Your Television Set. Repeat: There Is Nothing Wrong With Your Television Set. You have crossed into the Twilight Zone!" But then, in September of that same year, reality surpassed television: driving back through New Hampshire from a short vacation in Canada, the interracial couple Barney and Betty Hill were abducted by a flying saucer hovering above, which evidently had dropped in from the Zeta Reticuli star system.[18] Officially the very first alien abduction case reported in the US, it opened Pandora's box. Or was it a can of worms?

1960s: Stay Tuned

In the early 1960s, another Cold War was in full swing: that of television threatening to liquidate its older sibling. Cinema was losing out to the small screen as many local film-houses were forced to close their doors. While Hollywood struggled to redefine itself against the encroaching presence of the new medium, Alfred Hitchcock, as cinema's delegate, took on the ambivalent challenge of the TV format. A displaced Englishman in Hollywood, Hitchcock readily donned the role of the double agent, sneaking into the American living room as a master of prime, only to deride it. His wry introductions to his TV series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955–62) were peppered with domestic paranoia that

16 Edward Teller's comments and similar commentary from US senators and journalists may be heard in the film *Sputnik Mania* (2007) by David Hoffman, as well as in the film *Double Take* (2009) by Johan Grimonprez. See also, Dickson, P., *Sputnik. The Shock of the Century* (New York: Walker & Company, 2001), 117–28.

17 Spiegel, L., "From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sit-Com"; and Sobchack, V., "Child/Alien/Father: Patriarchal Crisis and Generic Exchange", in, *Close Encounters. Film, Feminism and Science Fiction*, eds. C. Penley, et al. (Minneapolis/Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

18 Fuller, J.G., *The Interrupted Journey* (New York: Dial Press, 1966).

mirrored a catastrophic culture in the making. The heightened tension of the US–USSR relationship and its induced fear of nuclear terror forever loomed on the horizon. So, when the master of the macabre, as Hitchcock came to be known, chose to cross over into television, he took every opportunity to mock this evil twin of cinema, one that had morphed into a "propaganda box": "Television is like the American toaster," he quipped, "you push the button, and the same thing pops up every time." But Hitchcock's real obsession lay with commercials that had infected the format of storytelling. After all, "the story may be unhip, but those crazy commercials are pure poetry," he joked, adding that they "keep you from getting too engrossed in the story". Much to the horror of his sponsors, Hitchcock loftily denounced the accursed ads, and with sardonic mischief urged the early TV viewer to zap away from "these deadly boring commercials: I don't mind you leaving the room during the commercial, but I expect you to be in your seats for my parts of the program!"[19]

Media and Marketing Decisions magazine pointed out that the habit of physical zapping, running off to the toilet or grabbing a beer from the refrigerator during a commercial break, was practised by 30–40 per cent of television viewers.[20] At one point Hitchcock had jokingly appealed for longer commercials: "they are so short that one must be very agile to get to the kitchen and back!" But a handy solution was already in the making: adeptly tuned into the growing TV society, Swanson and Sons advertised their first TV Dinner in 1954.[21] The story goes that executive Gerald Thomas didn't know what to do with 270 tons of left-over Thanksgiving turkey. Inspired by the aluminium food trays used in the airline industry, he picked up on the idea of filling the trays with turkey and marketing them as a TV Dinner for 98 cents a piece. And so another new cultural icon zapped itself into the living room, transforming the eating habits of millions of Americans.[22] With the convenience of a food tray, one could easily stay parked in front of the tube without the need to run off to the kitchen, and thus the art of dinner conversation was rapidly replaced with "sappy sitcoms" sprinkled with commercial interruptions.[23]

An extra to the pre-packaged TV meals was the marvel of "canned laughter". Live audiences did not always laugh at the right moment, or laughed either too long or too loudly. So the "Laff Box", a backstage device with a variety of push-button laughs, was brought in as a substitute for live audiences to ''sweeten'' shows with pre-recorded laughter.[24] Similarly, the advertising industry was sugar-coating its image of a happy consumer to an emerging TV society.

1980s: An Advertising Industry in Panic

The remote control though, didn't gain any real ground until the 1980s, as previously channel-hopping was limited to just a few networks. By the mid-1980s, however, the vast cable industry and the video recorder had made the remote control a necessity. Being used to targeting their television audiences, the advertising industry became alarmed by the zap-behaviour of TV viewers who were inaugurating a radically different pattern of television usage. Viewers, traditionally sold by the media industry as

19 Grams, M. Jr. & Wikstrom, P., *The Alfred Hitchcock Presents Companion* (Maryland: OTR Publishing, 2001).

20 Fountas, A., "Commercial Audiences: Measuring What We're Buying", in *Media and Marketing Decisions* (January 1985), 75–6.

21 Phipps, R.G., *The Swanson story: when the chicken flew the coop* (Omaha: Carol and Caroline Swanson Foundation, 1977).

22 Shapiro, L., *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004). See also, Mingo, J., "How TV dinners became tray chic", in *How the Cadillac got its fins: and other tales from the annals of business and marketing* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1994), 197–200; Schwarz, F.D., "The epic of the TV dinner", in *American Heritage of Invention and Technology*, vol. 9 (Spring 1994), 55.

23 Research conducted in 2000 by Baylor College of Medicine (USA), showed that more than 42 per cent of dinners eaten at home involved TV watching. "The History of TV Dinners", accessed 26 December 2010: http://facts.trendstoday.info/food-and-drink/the-history-of-tv-dinners

24 Sacks, M., "Canned Laughter: A History Reconstructed. An Interview with Ben Glenn II, Television Historian and Expert on Canned Laughter", in *The Paris Review Daily* (20 July 2010). Accessed 26 December 2010: www.mcsweeneys.net/links/sacks/5sacks.html

only statistics for ad revenues, were now suddenly taking control by flipping away from commercials.[25]

At this point the habit of zapping away from commercials was at epidemic levels, practised by 80 per cent of television viewers. The threat of commercial devastation alarmed the advertising industry.[26] The trade press claimed that "advertising as a profession is very much in crisis".[27] In panic, the industry called for "zap-proof" commercials to dampen the power of the serial clickers in avoiding their product.[28] Ad agencies clamoured for new research angles to give them a quick handle on the ad-avoiding epidemic.[29] Stay-tuned strategies emerged to eliminate channel flipping and hook viewers to the TV set in order to carry them through a commercial break. Ad spots were reduced from 30 seconds to 15 seconds. Time crunching led to "hot switching" to reduce programme breaks, which were moved from programme end to mid-programme. Opening themes were reduced or simply eliminated. Superstars like Michael Jackson and Madonna were recruited for cross-over appearances in ads. Spots masqueraded as regular programming, and product placement was integrated into actual programmes.

No need to zap any more; the network did it for us.[30] Dense editing à la MTV, with strong lead-ins and closing cliff-hangers, made sure eyeballs were kept glued to the screen. Comedy Central's *Short Attention Span Theater* tacitly encouraged viewers to flip over

25 Meehan, E., "Commodity Audience, Actual Audience: The Blindspot Debate", in *Illuminating the Blind Spots: Essays Honoring Dallas W. Smythe*, eds. J. Wasko, V. Mosco & M. Pendakur (Norwood: Albex, 1993), 105–16.

26 Kostyra, R., "Zapping—a modest proposal", in *Media and Marketing Decisions* (March 1985), 94–5.

27 Stewart, D.W., "Speculations on the future of advertising research", in *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1992), 1–18.

28 Bellamy, R.V. & Walker, J.R., "Zapped into Action. Advertising Industry Response to RCD Diffusion", in *Television and the Remote Control: Grazing on a Vast Wasteland*, eds. R.V. Bellamy & J.R. Walker (New York/London: The Guilford Press, 1996), 49–69.

29 Advertising Age (30 July 1984).

30 Gleick, J., "Prest-O! Change-O!", in *Living in the Information Age* (2005), 147; "Advertisers Are Getting Worried", in *Rolling Stone* (28 February 1985); Ferguson, D.A., "Channel Repertoire in the Presence of Remote Control Devices, VCRs, and Cable Television", in *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* (Winter 1992).

to other channels, knowing they could rejoin the programme without losing the thread of the show.[31] MTV tailored the new viewing habits into an animated series featuring two slackers who were addicted to their zapper: Beavis and Butt-head. Obsessively on the hunt for videos that didn't suck, they satirized the very act of flipping channels. Critics claimed it was "*Sesame Street* for psychopaths", but the programme did succeed in making MTV less prone to zapping by keeping viewers glued to the "idiot box", as it came to be called.[32] Ever savvy about influencing our perception of reality, the political arena followed suit. Case in point was the US invasion of Panama in December 1989: it was carefully planned to occur during *The Super Bowl*, a "low-zapping event", assuring that the war would be consumed without much public outcry.

Incongruously, reality itself was about to turn into a zapping zone. Viewers' zapping behaviour also forced the TV industry to refashion newscasts into accelerated MTV-style info-bits. News broadcasts got structured along the lines of the home shopping channel, with one video programmed after another in a constant rotating flow. CNN adopted similar strategies by repeating newsworthy morsels of infotainment 24/7, so viewers wouldn't miss anything on their channel-hopping tour. The "drop-in" style allowed zappers to grab a beer from the fridge any time for a double dose of instant gratification.[33] Moreover, television turned public space inside out: network executives began to substitute dramas for reality shows, reality for entertainment, and ultimately the viewer for the protagonist, beer still in hand. Reality was literally zapped…

31 Eastman, S.T. & Neal-Lunsford, J., "The RCD's Impact on Television Programming and Promotion", in *The Remote Control in the New Age of Television*, ed. R.V. Bellamy & J.R. Walker (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993): 189–209.

32 Gleick, J., "Prest-O! Change-O!", in *Living in the Information Age: A New Media Reader*, E.P. Bucy (Florence: Wadsworth Publishing, 2004), 147. See also, Young, C.M., "Meet the Beavis! The Last Word From America's Phenomenal Pop Combo", in *Rolling Stone* (24 March 1994); Hulktrans, A., "MTV Rules (For a Bunch of Wussies)", in *Artforum* (February 1994). The series was created by Mike Judge for the MTV Channel and aired from 1993 to 1997.

33 Eastman, S.T. & Neal-Lunsford, J., "The RCD's Impact on Television Programming and Promotion", in *The Remote Control in the New Age of Television*, ed. R.V. Bellamy & J.R. Walker (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993): 189–209.

An Alien Force Among Us

Whereas the media networks hijacked reality for entertainment, the global political game entertained a fear factor for reality. On 21 September 1987, in a speech before the United Nations General Assembly, former Hollywood actor turned US president, Ronald Reagan hinted at the possibilities of a hostile extra-terrestrial threat to Earth: "Perhaps we need some outside universal threat. Our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world. And yet, I ask you: is not an alien force already among us?" He had used the same analogy in 1985 as a rationale for governments to put aside their differences at the Geneva summit meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet president. Gorbachev's aspiration, though, was to quit the nuclear poker game, one which already had 1.5 million Hiroshima-sized chips on the table. However, when he suggested the unprecedented move to liquidate all nuclear arsenals worldwide, Reagan bluntly counter-proposed with his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). "Star Wars", as it was dubbed by the media, was publicized as a "planetary defense shield" against incoming Soviet ballistic missiles, but many UFO researchers claimed differently. In fact Star Wars was only a public cover for its real mission: shooting star-ships out of the heavens in order to retro-engineer its foreign technology.[34]

Crushing military expenditures had brought the crumbling Soviet superpower to the brink of bankruptcy. In similar fashion, the militarization of the American economy, which nearly doubled under the Reagan administration, had left the US with "ramshackle cities, broken bridges, failing schools, entrenched poverty, impeded life expectancy, and a menacing and secretive national-security state that held the entire human world hostage".[35] Symptomatic of this context was the waning US space

34 Corso, P.J. & Birnes, W.J., *The day after Roswell* (New York: Pocket Books, 1997). See also, www.drboylan.com/ as well as www.disclosureproject.org/

35 Rhodes, R., *Arsenals of Folly. The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race* (New York: Random House, 2007), 308.

programme: NASA's space shuttle fleet remained grounded in the wake of the January 1986 Challenger disaster. Instead of exploring outer space, outer space was suddenly colonizing us.[36] Steven Spielberg's ET (*ET: The Extra-Terrestrial*, 1982) had already nestled himself comfortably in an American suburb, checking out the fridge, getting drunk as he was channel-surfing UFO flicks on the telly. Meanwhile, waves of alien abductions invaded the American bedroom. The media now portrayed the contactees as abductees zapped inside the UFOs, their bodies' intimacy breached. Obsessed with the human reproductive system, the ETs had their hands full harvesting ova and sperm to create a hybrid race in space.[37] In May 1987, a couple of months before Reagan's infamous speech at the UN, the alien account *Communion* by abductee "experiencer" and author Whitley Strieber reached number one on *The New York Times* best-seller list.[38] The cover with the image of a bug-eyed "Grey" alien was suddenly catapulted into the mainstream. "Abductees evoke a nostalgia for a future we seem to have abandoned," writes Jodi Dean, "as the dark underside of official space, as a return of the repressed dimensions of astronaut heroics. They point to the shift from outerspace to cyberspace, and the widespread crisis of truth as we begin dealing with the virtual realities of the information age." The abductee narratives seemed to mirror the alienation felt towards an ever-increasing complex and uncertain reality of a corporate techno-culture taking over the world. "They bear witness to a lack of control, insecurity, and violation, to a lack of response from those who are supposed to protect and care."[39]

Harvard psychiatrist John E. Mack, who co-chaired with physicist David E. Pritchard the 1992 Abduction Study Conference[40]

36 Penley, C., et al., *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism and Science Fiction* (Minneapolis/Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

37 Hopkins, B., *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987).

38 Strieber, W., *Communion, A True Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1987).

39 Dean, J., *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 100–3, 122–3.

40 See Pritchard, A., et al., *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

at MIT, observed that the restrictive epistemology of a prevailing scientific paradigm was perhaps not adequate and incomplete to account for what was happening. At the core of the abduction phenomenon "experiencers" were coping with an "ontological shock"[41] that fundamentally challenged the "consensus reality" of a western scientific worldview. Both traumatic and transformative, the abuctees recounted a narrative of radical ecology connected to the fate of this Earth, that had been ravaged by rational materialism and greed. In a post-conference interview Mack called for a "politics of ontology"[42] to acquire a shift in worldview that can expand our understanding of reality—or rather, realities, in plural. An exploration into the possibilities of human consciousness ought to reconnect to "profound questions about how we experience the world around us and how as a society we decide what is real".[43] The abductees' narratives of ecological redemption sounded light-years away from Reagan's plea for a Star Wars build-up. Reality itself was now at stake, and with it a planet in peril.

1990s: Couch Potato Politics

Geller and Williams concluded that by the 1990s there were more American homes with a TV than homes with a refrigerator.[44] Subsequently some people must have missed out on grabbing a beer from the fridge during commercial break. But no urgent need for "physical zapping" any more as the remote control was by now largely sold as a standard feature with every TV

41 Mack, J.E., *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 12, 52.
42 "Post-conference Interview with John E. Mack, M.D." in *Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind: Alien Abduction, UFOs and the Conference at MIT*, C.D.B. Bryan (New York: Knopf, 1995), 254–78.
43 Mack, J.E., *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1999), 46–50.
44 Geller, M. & Williams, R. (eds.), *From Receiver to Remote Control: The TV Set* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990), 7.

set. Zapping devices became so omnipresent that households confused their video remote for the stereo remote, and the stereo remote for the television remote. Next usability became unwieldy: the lack of accepted interface guidelines guaranteed that the amount of buttons kept multiplying. Remote control anarchy reigned.[45] *TV-Guide* noted that the zapper had also entered couch potato politics as "the most avidly used and fought over device in the electronic cottage".[46] Howard Markman, head of the University of Denver's Center for Marital Studies, identified channel-surfing as "one of two major marital issues of the '90s, the other being the scarcity of time together".[47]

As the nineties powered on, the global village was bargained off to a corporate media society. Worldwide players like Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Corporation and 20th Century Fox, gobbled up thousands of publishing houses and radio stations. Now able to sell global audiences to their advertisers, they spiced up the political spectacle, serving their economic greeds, and entertaining with it the public's perception of history and manipulation of reality alike. War turned into a staged reality TV show when in January 1991 the bombing of Baghdad hit CNN live. Special effects were no longer the monopoly of Hollywood. The real became a bad-taste parody of the video game, as smart missiles zoomed in on their targets. "Join the Navy" advertisements were cancelled as the news itself provided a twenty-four-hour commercial for the armed forces. "Surgical war" seemed almost pre-packaged by the news as a commodity hyped around smart-missile technology. Spectacle replaced critical distance and obscured the reality of the war being waged in the Gulf. Suddenly

45 "Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox June 7, 2004: Remote Control Anarchy". Accessed 3 January 2011: www.useit.com/alertbox/20040607.html
46 Arrington, C., "The zapper: All about the remote control", in *TV-Guide* (15 August 1992), 8–13.
47 Valeriano, L.L., "Channel Surfers Beware: There's a Channel-Surfer Zapper Afoot", in *The Wall Street Journal* (24 November 1993). See also, "How to Wrest Control of Your Set", in *The Chicago Tribune* (19 December 1993) 8; "How Americans Watch TV: A Nation of Grazers", in *Channels Magazine* (New York: C.C. Publishing, 1989).

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, 1997

the news industry had transformed itself into a surreal shopping zone serving a corporate world in the interest of a global war industry: apart from television's claim to reality, what the media was selling was history itself. Soon reality would be mistaken for a commercial break.

By 1993, CNN live was now a zapping option in 200 countries, its most watched catch show *Larry King Live* beamed around the world, hosting presidents and alien abductees alike. One episode invited alien abductee researcher David Jacobs together with Whitley Strieber, author of *Communion*, to discuss the phenomenon. "Why don't they come here right now; my God, what a move that would be!" stirred Larry King.[48] As George Bush Sr.'s ratings fell after the first Gulf War and faced with his up-coming presidential campaign against Bill Clinton, he too decided to appear on *Larry King Live*. By now the public's trust in the powers-that-be had drastically waned. Apparently, more people believed in aliens than in the president: an early 1990s Gallup poll performed by the *Center for UFO Studies Journal* found that UFO believers outnumbered the voters who placed Reagan, Bush Senior and Clinton into office.[49] Politics suddenly appeared to have been taken over by aliens, suggested by the cover story that ran in the tabloid *Weekly World News* of 7 June 1994: "12 US SENATORS ARE SPACE ALIENS!"[50] A month later the Hollywood blockbuster *Independence Day* zapped the White House to smithereens.[51]

48 See: http://larrykinglive.blogs.cnn.com

49 Cousineau, P., *UFOs: A Manual for the Millennium* (New York: Harper-Collins West, 1995). In *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace*, Jodi Dean makes reference to a 1994 discussion of American disillusionment: "People talk as though our political system had been taken over by alien beings." See "Antipolitics '94", in *The New York Times Magazine* (16 October 1994), 37.

50 Dean, J., *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 156–7.

51 *The Simpsons* episode *Radio Bart* stages a broadcast to the Springfield locales where Bart pretends to be the leader of a Martian invasion who has eaten the US president. Obviously a spoof on Orson Welles's famous broadcast *The War of the Worlds*, it causes his dad to burst into a panic attack (Matt Groening and James L. Brooks).

A New Fear Factor

When re-runs of the popular sci-fi classic *The Twilight Zone* were programmed in the early nineties, they had to compete for airtime with the monster-hit *The X-Files*,[52] the show that propelled conspiracy theory into mainstream. Challenging the authority of official truth and reality that kept a lid on corporate frauds and governmental lies, conspiracy culture simply mirrored the political inadequacies of a system that failed to offer alternatives to a world that was being bargained off by greed. UFO communities were now convinced that the powers-that-be were covering up all evidence of aliens.[53] And, worse still, as governments were in league with alien powers, they couldn't be trusted to protect their citizens from being spacenapped right out of their beds. A Roper Poll claimed that at least one in fifty Americans, whether conscious of it or not, had been abducted by aliens.[54]

As the Cold War gave way to the Gulf War and the New World Order, America found itself refashioning its imaginary "other". With the fall of the iron curtain and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, America's war industry was running out of villains[55] and had to look elsewhere to cast a next fear factor. The political unknown and the insecurities around big-brother technology and the imaginary other, had yielded infowar[56] and the image of the hostile alien. No longer was it the James Bond-versus-Russia scenario, but Mickey Mouse versus

52 *The X-Files*: a science-fiction series running on FOX network from 10 September 1993 to 19 May 2002.

53 "Is the Government Hiding Facts On UFOs & Extraterrestrial Life?; New Roper Poll Reveals that More Than Two-Thirds of Americans Think So", in *Business Wire.* Accessed 8 August 2010: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_moEIN/is_2002_Oct_15/ai_92843602/

54 Hopkins, B., "The Roper Poll on Unusual Personal Experiences", in Pritchard et al., *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference Held at M.I.T. Cambridge, Ma.*, A. Pritchard et al. (Cambridge: North Cambridge Press, 1995), 215–16.

55 Colin Powell was quoted as saying at the time: "I'm running out of demons… I'm running out of villains. I'm down to Castro and Kim Il Sung", in *Arsenals of Folly. The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, R. Rhodes (New York: Random House, 2007), 292–3.

an evil ET. Nevertheless, the US government was already speculating to sell its ideology on an interplanetary level as a National Security Agency (NSA) Report on Alien Contact suggested: "What if someone from another world demanded to be taken to our planet's leader? That leader, the report insisted, must be the President of the US. There are economic concerns. Suppose the US purchased, on an exclusive basis, say, antimatter fuel from the alien trade representatives—in return, to neatly tally up the intergalactic balance of payments, we might cut them a deal. All the Pepsi they can drink, all the Big Macs they can eat. From the first moment of contact, the report recommended that the US government exclusively supervise, monitor and control all communication with other planets."[57]

Yet, on a micro-political level alien abductees came out of the closet to populate small-screen talk shows. Quickly ridiculed as tabloid sensation, they were readily debunked by a society that underscored a fear of the unknown. The "ontological consensus" had to be held in check. In a 1999 study John E. Mack remarked that our western society is perhaps as "reality deprived" as the main character of the Hollywood movie *The Truman Show* (1998). Trapped inside a seamless bubble, Truman's life is scripted by television corporate executives who profit from the limitation of his horizon. "Abductee experiencers might be thought of as ontological pioneers, who not unlike Truman, break out of the bubble of a constricting worldview."[58] Mack cited physicist Michio Kaku, who described our universe like a bubble, created within a "multiverse" of bubbles. Perhaps someday we may leave the bubble

56 Denning, D.E., *Information, Warfare and Security* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1999); Stocker, G. & Schöpf, C. (eds.), *InfoWar, Ars Electronica* (Vienna/New York: Springer, 1998). See also, Sobchack, V., "Child/Alien/Father: Patriarchal Crisis and Generic Exchange", in *Close Encounters. Film, Feminism and Science Fiction*, eds. C. Penley, et al. (Minneapolis/Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

57 Blum, H., *Out There: The Government's Secret Quest for Extraterrestrials* (New York: Simon & Schustre, 1990), 150–1.

58 Mack, J.E., *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1999), 36–7, 60. See also Chiten, L., *Touched* (65min/colour, 2003), a documentary about John Mack's work.

of this universe to enter other universes, where the laws of physics could be quite different, not unlike Alice stepping through the looking-glass or Truman pricking through his bubble.[59]

Boldly Going Where Everybody Had Been Before

Bart Simpson's Guide to Life had already warned us: "Maybe the sky is really green, and we're just colourblind!" *The Simpsons*' family paradigm reigned from the mid-nineties onwards. The metatextual gags played out in the TV series zapped across the entire media landscape. One episode, *The Springfield Files*,[60] featured *X-Files* agents Scully and Mulder as special guests. The team pulls up in Springfield to investigate Homer Simpson's ET encounter and finds him jogging on a treadmill in his underwear. Another script saw couch-potato Homer, avid addict of the television remote, beer in hand, calling NASA to complain about the boring space coverage on television. NASA, frustrated over its drop in TV ratings, invites him to join the next mission, which turns into a Nielsen rating hit.[61] But during his *Deep Space Homer*[62] our accidental hero loses control of his potato chips and crash-lands—boldly going where everybody had been before: Springfield, the one and only town exempt from dystopian anxiety.[63] The real NASA actually loved the episode, and sent a DVD copy on a supply ship to the International Space Station, where astronauts are now enjoying Homer's calamities.[64]

59 Kaku, M., *Parallel Worlds: A Journey Through Creation, Higher Dimensions, and the Future of the Cosmos* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006).

60 Groening, M. & Brooks, J.L., *The Springfield Files*, 8th episode of the 8th season of *The Simpsons* (originally aired on FOX networks, 12 January 1997).

61 Nielsen ratings are audience measurement tools developed by Nielsen Media Research in the US.

62 Groening, M. & Brooks, J.L., *Deep Space Homer*, 15th episode of the 5th season of *The Simpsons* (originally aired on FOX networks, 24 February 1994).

63 Springfield, in reality, can be found in thirty-four states throughout the United States in a way that suggests a reflection of common society as we know it to be. See Brown, A.S. & Logan, C. (eds.), *The Psychology of The Simpsons: D'oh!* (Dallas, BenBella Books, 2006).

Homer Simpson was not the only zapping calamity. In 1997 wrestling control over the zapper started getting really out of hand. In downstate Illinois a thirteen-year-old honors student plunged a butcher knife into her fifty-two-year-old step-grandfather's chest after he switched channels. In October a woman in Florida shot her husband when he switched channels to watch The Philadelphia Eagles versus The Dallas Cowboys. She wanted to watch the news. A seven-year-old boy watching *RoboCop* (1987) shot and killed the family maid when she switched channels in order to watch *Young Love, Sweet Love*. In November, an off-duty Detroit officer shot and killed a twenty-one-year-old mental patient who he thought had pointed a gun at him. It was a remote for the video recorder.[65]

But 1997 was also a busy year for ufologists: Roswell, New Mexico, celebrated its 50th Anniversary of Ufology, to mark the infamous saucer crash of July 1947 nearby. Already on 13 March, earlier that year, the Phoenix Lights were widely sighted in the skies over Arizona and Nevada by thousands of people. Former Arizona Governor Fife Symington III, after initial denial, confirmed he too had witnessed a "craft of unknown origin".[66] Meanwhile, smash hit *Men in Black*, released in July, showed a New York teeming with resident aliens. And that same month, when Jodie Foster's character deciphers a signal from outer space in the movie *Contact*,[67] CNN host Larry King makes an appearance as none other than CNN host Larry King.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, people from the military, intelligence and science communities stepped forward to expose the UFO secret. In 1999 a high-level French study com-

64 D. Mirkin on the *The Simpsons*, season 5: DVD commentary for the episode *Deep Space Homer*, 20th Century Fox, 2004. See also, Turner, C., *Planet Simpson: How a Cartoon Masterpiece Documented an Era and Defined a Generation* (New York: Random House, 2004).

65 *The Village Voice*, 1997, at www.villagevoice.com/

66 Kitei, L., *The Phoenix Lights… We Are Not Alone* (84min/colour, 2008), based on the book of the same name.

67 Zemeckis, R., *Contact* (150min/colour, 1997), adapted from Carl Sagan's novel of the same name.

mittee of experts, including General Bernard Norlain, retired commander of the French Tactical Air Force and military counsellor to former Prime Minister Mitterand, and Andre Lebeau, former head of the National Center for Space Studies, the French equivalent of NASA, published the COMETA Report. In it, they criticized the US for its policy of disinformation and military regulations prohibiting public disclosure of UFO sightings. In May 2001 the Disclosure Project convened a conference of witnesses to the National Press Club in Washington, DC, with the aim of persuading the US Congress to disclose the UFO cover-up.

2001: The Unknown Unknowns[68]

Then ET returned with a new face. If anything, on that fateful morning of 11 September 2001, Hollywood's imagination came back to haunt America's political unconscious: symptom (flying saucers beaming out of nowhere) met with reality (the dark underside of repressed world politics striking back at the symbolic centre of its economic power).[69] But this time there was no Hollywood redemption. Zapping became useless as all channels were beaming the very same images of the collapsing "Towering Infernos", over and over again. No longer did the media have to keep up with reality, but rather reality was now keeping up with the media.

Directly after the attacks, the alien morphed into the "Arab terrorist" while politics spun a web of lies to sell war in the name

68 In reference to US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's news briefing of 12 February 2002 at NATO headquarters in Brussels:"… there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know." See www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2636 (accessed 5 January 2011).

69 This is paradoxical given that the number of victims from 9/11—tragic as it may be—totally eclipses the far greater number of deaths in Iraq since the invasion, let alone the total number of victims from the direct and indirect involvement of the US in the overthrow of 50 countries, as well as the attack of 30 countries since World War II. See Kealy, S., "Maneuvering in the Shadows of Absolute War", in *Signals of the Dark: Art in the Shadow of War* (Toronto: Justina M. Barnicke Gallery & Blackwood Gallery, 2008), 61.

of democracy. Hollywood, on the other hand, felt implicated in the acts of 9/11. "Within days, studios were re-calling, re-cutting, and cancelling movies."[70] Symbolic of this twist of events, at the behest of the US Army in October 2002, government intelligence specialists met with top Hollywood filmmakers and writers at the Institute for Creative Technologies at the University of Southern California. Their mission: to imagine possible terrorist scenarios. Finally, the story of *The War of the Worlds* had come full circle. The new disaster movie was re-imagining the 9/11 event, Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005) deliberately evoking the collective trauma.

YouTube Me and I Tube You

Just over a year after the first video was uploaded onto YouTube in April 2005, the number of uploads was growing at a rate of 65,000 a day.[71] Facebook, whose approximately 500 million members totalled 7.6 per cent of the human race, became the online emblem of the virtual society at the dawn of the twenty-first century. More than 3 billion mobile phones—one for every other person on the planet—foreshadowed the convergence of media into one portable device.[72] With this new remote control, we were perpetually online, connected and multi-tasking, living in a world suffering from ADHD and devoid of sleep. Firmly placed at *the centre* of the network, the individual could now "tap", "pinch" and "flick" touch-pads, navigating and skipping through their personalized prime-time of other people's lives. If the launch of MTV in 1981 sang that "Video Killed the Radio Star",[73] then the YouTubes and Facebooks were transforming

70 Hoberman, J., "The New Disaster Movie", in *The Village Voice* (17–23 May 2006), 62–4.

71 Lovink, G. & Niederer, S. (eds.), *Video Vortex Reader, Responses to YouTube* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008), 34.

72 Jenkins, H., *Convergence Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

73 MTV was launched on 1 August 1981, with the video clip "Video Killed the Radio Star" by the band The Buggles.

who or what the "video star" was. Set within logics of consumerism, these websites promoted the idea of user-generated content, only to gobble it all up for themselves under outdated copyright laws. Trapped within private databases, reality was now defined by search engines and tags, connectivity and buffering-times.

Navigating the Net not only redefined, but also magnified our addiction to channel surfing, where the ubiquity of push-button technology enabled endless clicking and ceaseless pop-ups. A perpetual distraction, this illusion of abundance staged by techno-magic hid the ugly face of an info-dystopia. Images of Abu Ghraib, 9/11, swine flu, the BP Gulf oil spill and the economic crisis composed our new contemporary sublime. Political debate had shrunk into mere fear management. No longer happy innocent consumers of a bygone TV era, we were now both avid consumers of fear[74] and the protagonists of an increasing ubiquity of systems of surveillance.

Replacing our "consensus reality" with a surplus reality, the virtual was surpassed. The world and life within it was already being genetically modified and photoshopped. Corporations was abducting our very essence. DNA, life's building blocks, were becoming their property, patented and privatized for profit. With its genetically modified variant, food became alien.[75] From what we digested, to what we ingested, Big Pharma invaded the intimacy of our bodies with a vested interest in the propagation of the swine flu epidemic; immune systems offered the promise of a multimillion-dollar market. From biological viruses to digital viruses, advertisers were now looking at the possibility of digimercials, by which viruses would disseminate logos into the electronic environment.[76] Where will this take us? Case in point: twenty-five-year-old Matthew Nagle, a quadriplegic permanently paralysed from the neck down, had a 4-millimetre-

74 Klein, N., *The Shock Doctrine* (New York: Knopf, 2007).
75 Smith, J.M., *Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies About the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You're Eating* (Darington: Green Books, 2003).
76 Schrage, M., et al., "Is Advertising Really Dead? Part II: Advertisers, digimercials, and memgraphics: The future of advertising is the future of media," in *Wired* (February 1994), 71–4.

wide silicon chip placed on the part of his brain that co-ordinates motor activity. Using only the power of his mind, Nagle took a day to learn entirely new computerized skills, such as zapping his TV channel, adjusting the volume, moving a computer cursor, playing a video game, and even reading his email.[77] Add some recombinant DNA cortex rewiring on a nano-level and, instead of mistaking reality for a commercial break, life will literally become an advertisement, the ultimate commodity. In his novel *Nymphomation*, Jeff Noon speaks of genetically modified flies, programmed to transmit commercial slogans in their flight paths.[78] When this happens, zapping will be pointless.

Close Encounter?

The contemporary condition of what it is to be human calls into question the relevance of politics and reality, one that has collapsed under the weight of an information overload and mass deception. Paranoia suddenly seems the only sensible state of being, where it is easier to ponder the end of the world than to imagine viable political alternatives. J. Allen Hynek—the person who coined the term "close encounters"—has pointed out that from the vantage point of the thirtieth century, our knowledge of the universe may appear quite different: "We suffer, perhaps, from temporal provincialism, a form of arrogance that has always irritated posterity."[79] The question then should not be "is there intelligent life out there?", but rather "is there intelligent life on Earth?" After all, wouldn't it be us who are actually the aliens?

77 Called the "BrainGate", the chip was pioneered by John Donoghue, a neuroscientist at Brown University. See Kaku, M., *Physics of the Impossible* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 95–6.
78 Noon, J., *Nymphomation* (London: Corgi Books, 1997).
79 Hynek, J.A., *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972).

Based on a text that was first published as: Grimonprez, J., "Remote Control. On Zapping, Close Encounters and the Commercial Break", in Are You Ready for TV?, digital publication available at www.macba.cat/uploads/TWM/TV_grimonprez_cat.pdf

PART II

Double Take

Borges' and Hitchcock's Double Desire

Dany Nobus

October 2009

"Every day in the mirror, he'll see the man who killed his brother." This is how, on 25 June 2008, journalist Elaine Keogh from the *Irish Independent* summarized the words of Defence Counsel Derek Kennealy SC, after the jury had returned a guilty verdict in the case of his client Aodhan Donlon, who had stood before the Central Criminal Court in Dundalk, Co. Louth accused of murdering his twin Colm with a chopping knife the year before.[1] "Every day for the rest of his life when he looks in the mirror, he will see the man who killed his twin brother who he loved deeply" is apparently what Mr Kennealy really said, in a statement faintly echoing some famous lines by Oscar Wilde from *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*: "Yet each man kills the thing he loves/By each let this be heard…"[2] Yet given the fact that Aodhan and Colm were identical twin brothers, products of an unexplained natural clon-

1 Keogh, E., "Every Day in the Mirror, He'll See the Man who Killed his Brother", in *Irish Independent* (25 June 2008). Accessed 18 September 2009: www.independent.ie/national-news/every-day-in-the-mirror-hell-see-the-man-who-killed-his-brother-1420588.html

2 Wilde, O., *De Profundis, The Ballad of Reading Gaol & Other Writings* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), 116.

ing event—although some scientists would no doubt dispute the idea that monozygotic twins are clones, on the grounds that they stem from sexual reproduction, involving sperm cells, and are not genetically engineered—which compelled them to share the same DNA, neither the newspaper journalist nor Mr Kennealy himself seems to have dared to state the real and much more tragic consequence of Donlon's act. Every day, for the rest of his life, when looking in the mirror, he shall not only see the man who killed his brother, but much more dramatically and disturbingly, and precisely because his brother was also his identical twin, he shall actually see the man he killed! When looking in the mirror, he shall involuntarily bring to life the copy of himself that he himself is responsible for destroying, thus demonstrating how he carries within himself the power of a double annihilation: that of murdering the identical other outside himself, and that of undoing this very act of murder in the pure maintenance of his own existence. If Donlon killed the thing he loved and, as Wilde's ballad professes, if "The kindest use a knife, because / The dead so soon grow cold", with his "bitter look" the murderer shall also have to love the thing he killed, because he himself shall make the dead stay warm.[3]

Undoubtedly, it all started long before the invention of mirrors, with Romulus and Remus, the rivalrous twin sons fathered by Mars with the vestal virgin Rhea Silvia, to whom Roman mythology has attributed the founding of the eternal city. Quarrelling over the best location for erecting the city-walls, the twins decided to rely on an auspicium. From the top of his mount, Remus allegedly saw six vultures. In his own place of choice, Romulus allegedly saw twelve, yet some would have said that Remus saw the birds first and that Romulus did not see any birds at all. "When Remus knew of the deceit, he was enraged," Plutarch contended, "and as Romulus was digging a trench, where his city's wall was to run, he ridiculed some parts of the work, and obstructed others. At last, when he [Remus] leaped across it, he was smitten… and fell dead there."[4] And so it is believed that Romulus struck down his twin brother, although in disclosing that it could also have been one of Romulus' companions Plutarch did not seem to be a hundred per cent sure. When they agreed to have a battle, Romulus and Remus were clearly no Tweedledum and Tweedledee, who when they saw "a monstrous crow, as black as a tar-barrel;… [it] frightened both the heroes so, they quite forgot their quarrel."[5] Remus dead, Romulus built his city, created the Senate and the Legions, ordered the abduction of the Sabines in order to increase population and became the first King of Rome. And the rest, as they say, is history.

"They say that if you meet your double, you should kill him or that he will kill you. I can't remember which, but the gist of it is that two of you is one too many." This provocative injunction, articulated by the voice-over in Johan Grimonprez's *Double Take*, suggests that killing one's identical other is nothing more, nothing less than an act of self-protection or even self-preservation, which takes away the constant threat of victimization at the hands of one's counterpart, while releasing and restoring agency in the singular subject, from the moment the latter becomes a murderer. "Colm had punched him [his twin brother Aodhan] twice on the side of the head," the *Irish Independent*'s journalist reported, before Aodhan stabbed him twice in the back with the chopping knife.[6] The stabbing, then, was a self-defensive reaction rather than an unprovoked attack, which may explain why the jury accepted the plea of manslaughter and Aodhan got away with a mere three-and-a-half years imprisonment. When they agreed to have a battle, Colm and Aodhan were clearly no Tweedledum and Tweedledee either; they may have agreed to have a battle over who had spoiled the rattle, but they never quite forgot about their quarrel. Unfortunately for Aodhan

3 Wilde, O., *De Profundis, The Ballad of Reading Gaol & Other Writings*, 116.

4 Plutarch, "The Life of Romulus", in *The Parallel Lives*, trans. B. Perrin, vol. 1 of the Loeb Classical Library, ed. J. Henderson (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1914), 118.

5 Carroll, L., "Through the Looking Glass". Accessed 18 September 2009: www.sabian.org/Alice/lgchap04.htm

6 Keogh, E., "Every Day in the Mirror, He'll See the Man who Killed his Brother".

Donlon, Rome had already been built and Ireland was not directly in need of another major city. But at least he got noticed. Borrowing from Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Mao II* in his 1997 "film-essay" *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, Grimonprez supported the cinematic narration with the lines "Get killed, and maybe they will notice you" and "Men have tried throughout history to cure themselves by killing others. The dier passively succumbs, the killer lives on."[7] If these lines, when taken together, seem contradictory, they can nonetheless be realized simultaneously when the other is the killer's identical counterpart. Kill your double, cure yourself, live on and they will notice you.

Why are doubles, identical twins, "enantiomorphs" or other types of duplicates simultaneously fascinating and terrifying, generally terribly fascinating for an observer and often ferociously terrible for the one who is being doubled or twinned? Some hundred years ago, the honourable Professor Sigmund Freud attempted an answer which, however much it may have elucidated the question, did not seem to have alleviated the affect generated by the subjective experience nor, for that matter, the actual occurrence of the experience as such. In the third chapter of his celebrated 1901 volume *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud wrote: "One cannot help having a slightly disagreeable feeling [*leicht unangenehmen Empfindung*] when one comes across one's own name in a stranger. Recently I was very sharply aware of it when a *Herr S. Freud* presented himself to me in my consulting hour."[8] Years later, in his famous 1919 essay "The Uncanny", Freud reported a peculiar incident while travelling on the train: "I was sitting alone in my *wagon-lit* compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet,

7 Grimonprez, J., *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997); DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (New York: Viking, 1985); DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (New York: Scribner, 1991). See also Bernard, C., "Supermarket History: Interview with Johan Grimonprez about his film *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*", in *Inflight: What to Do with a Stolen Boeing 777*, J. Grimonprez (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 68–72.

8 Freud, S., "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 6, ed. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960), 25.

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and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay [*erkannte aber bald verdutzt*] that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance."[9] Contemplating our (and his own) affective response to confronting our double, Freud accepted Otto Rank's argument that the creation of doubles originally served the narcissistic purpose of ensuring the immortality of the bodily ego.[10] Yet to this he added that once the psychic state of primary narcissism has been superseded, the double transforms itself into the opposite of what it originally represented. From a figure endowed with life-supporting power, it becomes "the uncanny harbinger of death".[11] In confrontation with our double, we are at once enthralled by the observation that it is possible to survive in the other and reminded of the fact that this very possibility only exists at the expense of our own individuality, that is to say by virtue of our willingness to relinquish our subjective uniqueness. The ambiguous status of doubles, which elicit admiration as well as hostility, repulsion as well as attraction, explains why our relation to ourselves, as reflected in similar others, is governed by what Freud called the "narcissism of minor differences" (*Narzißmus der kleinen Differenzen*).[12] In relation to the similar other, we tend to rescue our love for ourselves, our oneness and

9 Freud, S., "The Uncanny", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 248. For a perspicacious Lacanian reading of this scene, see M. Dolar, "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night: Lacan and the Uncanny", in *October*, vol. 58 (1991), 5–23. p. 15 in particular.

10 See Rank, O., "The Double", trans. H. Tucker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971)

11 Freud, S., "The Uncanny", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 235.

12 Freud, S., "Civilization and Its Discontents", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, ed. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1964), 114.

exclusivity, by emphasizing the small differences in the other, yet precisely in concentrating on these small distinguishing features we surreptitiously reinforce our similarity. After admitting to his "slightly disagreeable feeling" when meeting *Herr S. Freud* in his consultation room and thus, we may assume, to facing the prospect of somehow having to analyse himself in the other, Freud added between brackets and six years after *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* was first published: "(However, I must record the assurance of one of my critics that in this respect his feelings are the opposite of mine.)"[13] Freud rarely agreed with his critics, yet in this case the guarantee that his namesake had experienced a "slightly agreeable feeling" when meeting his nominal alter ego seemed entirely worthy of mention.

There are numerous literary examples of how the alter ego triggers affective ambivalence in the ego and how the Freudian "narcissism of minor differences" prompts the ego to recognize and aggrandize the differential characteristics in the other. "It is difficult, indeed, to define, or even to describe, my real feelings towards him," the narrator stated about his alter ego in Edgar Allan Poe's *William Wilson*, "[t]hey formed a motley and heterogeneous admixture; —some petulant animosity, which was not yet hatred, some esteem, more respect, much fear, with a world of uneasy curiosity."[14] As the narrator confessed, the other William Wilson was in all but one respect a copy of himself: "[M]y rival had a weakness in the faucial or guttural organs, which precluded him from raising his voice at any time *above a very low whisper*. Of this defect I did not fail to take what poor advantage lay in my power."[15]

In *August 25, 1983*, Jorge Luis Borges exploits the theme of the double by weaving a narrative about a fleeting encounter with himself as a dying older man in a hotel room. It should be noted, here, that this short story is in itself the reflection and continuation of another short story called *The Other*, published eight years earlier, in which Borges recounts an incident of meeting a younger version of himself on a bench in Cambridge MA.[16] Hence, in both stories the alter ego is both similar and different, older in *August 25, 1983* and younger in *The Other*, and the same can be said about the two stories themselves. Similar in their narrative of Borges encountering himself, they are different insofar as the older narrator of (the older story) *The Other* appears as younger in (the younger story) *August 25, 1983*. For Borges, this double take on self-doubling elicits thought-provoking exchanges between the ego and his alter ego about dreams, the dreamer and the dreamt, which could be regarded as reflections upon the relative status of selfhood and subjectivity. "Who is dreaming whom?", the narrator's older self asks him in *August 25, 1983*, "I know I am dreaming you—I do not know whether you are dreaming me…" "I am the dreamer," the narrator asserts, to which his older self replies: "Don't you realize that the first thing to find out is whether there is only one man dreaming, or two men dreaming each other?"[17]

In his work *Looking for Alfred*, which may be considered a prequel or preliminary outline of *Double Take*, Grimonprez substituted Alfred Hitchcock for Jorge Luis Borges, adding to the effect of doubling by placing the director in the place of the writer and exchanging the textual narrative for the diegetic space of the film essay.[18] Grimonprez's decision to replace Borges with Hitchcock, here, is particularly astute, given the latter's lifelong obsession with effects of doubling. Indeed, from *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) to *Strangers on a Train* (1951), from *Rebecca* (1940) to *Vertigo* (1958), and including *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Spellbound* (1945) and *North*

13 Freud, S., "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 6, ed. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1960), 25.

14 Poe, E.A., "William Wilson", in *The Complete Illustrated Stories and Poems* (London: Chancellor Press, 1988), 38.

15 Poe, E.A., "William Wilson", 39.

16 Borges, J.L., "August 25, 1983", in *The Book of Sand and Shakespeare's Memory*, trans. A. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 99–104; Borges, J.L., "The Other", in *The Book of Sand and Shakespeare's Memory*, trans. A. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), 3–11.

17 Borges, J.L., "August 25, 1983", 101.

18 See Bode, S., (ed.), *Johan Grimonprez: Looking for Alfred* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 54–59.

by Northwest (1959), Hitchcock's films contain a kaleidoscopic array of doubles, replicas, duplicates, lookalikes, copies, surrogates and substitutes. Hitchcock's "double desire" should not be interpreted, here, as a dual, twofold desire—that is to say as a desire to animate his characters with a set of conflicting motives—but as a fundamental desire for doubles, which constantly raises questions about the significance of explosive interpersonal rivalries for the emergence and maintenance of identity, selfhood and individuality. The paradigm of these strange dual relationships is captured, of course, in the opening shots of *Shadow of a Doubt*, which Hitchcock himself regarded as his favourite film. Uncle Charlie (played by Joseph Cotten) and his niece Charlie (played by Teresa Wright) are both lying on their beds, uncle's head to the right and niece's head to the left, with the doors in the background situated respectively to the right and to the left, as if reflected in a mirror. "We are like twins; we are both alike," niece Charlie concedes later on. In other Hitchcock films, the effect of doubling is rendered in rather more subtle ways, and in some cases the duality of relationships is effectively reduced to the power of language or, as Lacan would say, to the intrinsic ambiguity of the signifier. As such, in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), Ambrose Chapel is first (and mistakenly) associated with the name of a taxidermist and only subsequently identified as the name of a place of worship. While acknowledging François Truffaut's seminal analysis of doubling effects in *Shadow of a Doubt*, Mladen Dolar has argued that Hitchcock's endless stream of dual relationships between people, places, scenes, names, motives and so on are actually more complicated than they appear, because they are invariably mediated by a third element, which "is not doubled in the mirror-image and which presents the hinge of the duplication".[19] In *Shadow of a Doubt*, this third element is evidently money, which is present in large quantities in Uncle Charlie's bedroom, whereas niece Charlie is awoken from

19 Dolar, M., "Hitchcock's Objects", in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. S. Žižek (London/New York: Verso, 1992), 33.

her dreams by a conversation about its very absence. The object, here, resembles the famous Hitchcockian MacGuffin, something which serves the purpose of positioning the dramatis personae and carrying the narrative, without containing much significance in itself.

In *Double Take*, Grimonprez reinserts Hitchcock himself into a deadly dual relationship, yet the director's encounter with himself as a dying man—Hitchcock's encounter, in the first instance, but by a curious twist of fate also Grimonprez's encounter, since the main Hitchcock double (Ron Burrage) he identified would also prove to be a dying man—is no longer mediated by any kind of recognizable material object. Much like in Borges' stories, the mediating object between Hitchcock and his older avatar is recognition itself: that is to say, the acceptance by the other of being first and foremost, one, unique and original. Although each of them is "a caricature of the other", each of them is desperate to assert their singular existence, and the more desperate they become to see themselves recognized for who they are, the more their relationship descends into utter parody. Grimonprez's structure, here, involuntarily brings to mind Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, which he employed to describe and explain how the child's ego emerges as a result of an imaginary identification with its reflection in the mirror—a constituting ontological moment which signals the start for an endless power struggle between the ego and its alter egos, with prestige and recognition as the principal stakes of the resulting social conflict.[20]

The brilliance of *Double Take*, of course, is that Grimonprez demonstrates how these conflictual dual relationships do not only occur in the fictionalized space of the Borgesian and Hitchcockian universe, but equally in the mediatized arena of western political ideology and mass-market advertising, especially during the Cold War. Although one may feel hard pressed to regard the explosive Kitchen Summit Conference between

20 See Lacan, J., "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience", in *Ecrits*, trans. B. Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 75–81.

Khrushchev and Nixon as driven by the narcissism of minor differences, it nonetheless appears that they had "scripted the moment together", battling for power, domination and hegemony in an infernal spiral of narcissistic self-assertion. Throughout the mutual taunting and reciprocal bluff, the threat of world-destruction is far less intimidating than the fear of being second. And if there is no other option than to admit that the other was first, whether in conquering space or in the discovery of fresh-perked coffee, then there is always the possibility of reproducing the original in improved form, quantitatively and/or qualitatively. In addition, Grimonprez suggests how western political ideology and mass-market advertising are deeply intertwined in their competitive quest for the recognition of their product superiority. And the strict allegiance of both forces does not only reveal itself in the identification and pursuit of common goals, but equally in the reliance on a shared set of interests. If a televised advertising campaign can persuade millions of consumers to buy a particular commodity, why would television not be effective in selling the political ideology of liberal economy and its free consumerism? If a certain type of political ideology rests on the social pillar of the nuclear family, as the heartland of consumerism, why wouldn't a televised advertising campaign be effective in selling the normative image of a happily married life alongside the product that allegedly sustains it?

In *Double Take*, Grimonprez demonstrates, then, that we as human beings are at once animated by a visceral desire to be first, one and unique and obsessed with copying, replicating and reproducing, seemingly accepting the loss of originality if the substitute brings with it the promises of newness, progress, enhancement and improvement. Why stick to fresh-perked coffee if instant Folgers tastes as good and it moreover allows for marital conflict to be transformed into newfound domestic bliss?

Paper presented at the symposium "Shot by Both Sides! Double Take", Arts Centre Vooruit, Ghent, Belgium, 15 October 2009.

Double Take

Narration of the Film by Tom McCarthy

2009

They say that if you meet your double, you should kill him. Or that he will kill you. I can't remember which—but the gist of it is that two of you is one too many. By the end of the script, one of you must die.

I have pondered many times, but somehow never understood, the meaning of that fateful encounter one August afternoon in 1962—a story, I was to find out, that was scripted nonetheless by me. I have chewed the details over and over so repeatedly that the memory of it has become inaccurate, like a film scratched and faded by the years. The episode seems too strange to be real. Perhaps it happened, perhaps it still has to happen, perhaps it has never stopped happening.

We had replicated Davidson's pet shop on a set at Universal Studios in Los Angeles. We were shooting an episode of the type that my audience had already come to expect in each new film: the scene in which I myself make a fleeting appearance. This one had me exiting the shop, my two white terriers Geoffrey and Stanley trotting along the sidewalk in front of me, quite oblivious to the threat massing in the sky above.

I substituted a body-double for myself so that I could oversee a walk-through of the shot. I was about to re-insert myself into

Hitchcock double Zale Kessler (*Looking for Alfred*, 2005)

the scene when my assistant informed me that I had an urgent phone call waiting for me in the studio offices. Since we were using twelve-minute reels, I'd acquired the habit of measuring time in twelve-minute chunks. So, I called a twelve-minute break.

As I left the set and navigated the studio's staircases and corridors, I experienced a sense of déjà-vu. It seemed to me that I had created this moment before, in one of my own films. I had indeed walked through this environment several times before, but now it felt different, somehow artificial—as though the entire complex had been replaced by its own replica.

Whereas the security guard always addressed me by name and with a certain reverence, on this occasion, strangely enough, he failed to recognize me. Then, when he did, he gasped:

—"I'm sorry, Mr Hitchcock," he said; "I thought you'd already gone upstairs."

—"You were mistaken," I responded.

—"Yes, perhaps," he replied. He cocked his head a little, scrutinized my features, then continued: "The other gentleman was older."

The exchange left me rattled. Yet it was the least of the surprises I would encounter that day.

As I advanced towards my assignation, I felt a deep sense of foreboding—as though I were entering some kind of trap. The sequence of passages that led from the main corridor to the production office was like a labyrinth. I thought I'd navigated it correctly this time; but when I opened the door and stepped into what I expected to be a secretary's office, I found another scene entirely.

It was as though I'd wandered onto a period set that had been sprung on me unannounced, in a sly act instigated by another mind, another director. In some respects, it was like the tearoom at Chasen's in Los Angeles. In others, it was like the corresponding salon at Claridge's back in London. Yet it precisely resembled neither. Its furniture and décor were older, more archaic.

—"This is a prank," I said. I looked around the tearoom, expecting to find my Assistant-Director and chief of make-up sniggering behind some column. But they were nowhere to be seen.

Beneath an arabesque of cigar-smoke, a shadow lay across the floor. It was the trademark silhouette I'd cultivated in my television programmes. But the shadow wasn't mine: it fell towards, not away from, me. Its presence made me shudder.
—"Did I frighten you?" a voice asked.

I recognized the voice immediately as my own. Slowly, the figure turned to face me:
—"I've been expecting you," he said.

It was as I had feared. The man, into whose presence I'd been lured by a fictitious phone call resembled me in every way but one: he was, as the security guard had implied, older. As though staring into a dark mirror, I came face to face with myself.

I scrutinized the old man's face. The features were mine alright: no amount of latex, rubber or make-up could emulate the lifetime of concern stored up in them. The hair was grey, the lines on the forehead and around the eyes sunken and cragged.
—"We have scripted this moment together," said my alter ego, "in this very room. It was 1962."
—"But it *is* 1962," I told him.
—"For you, maybe. Oddly enough, for me, Alfred Hitchcock, it's 1980."
—"You must be mistaken," I protested, "I am Alfred Hitchcock!"
—"We *both* are," he answered.

I felt my own reality slipping away, felt that I risked becoming no more than a character in someone else's film. I decided to accept the situation and to play along with it, sensing that a failure to do so could prove catastrophic.
—"If you really *are* me," I said, "then you will know our secrets."
—"Test me if you like," he answered.

I took a step towards him and ordered:
—"Show me your belly button!"
—"Certainly not," he retorted.

He waved his cigar at the seat in front of him and said:
—"Why don't you sit down?"

I obliged. A waitress passed by and set down two pots: one tea, one coffee.
—"So tell me," I asked him, "what was in the kitchen cupboard at our flat in Leytonstone?"

Hitchcock's cameo appearance in the Thames for *Frenzy* (1972). Preproduction *Looking for Alfred*, 2005

—"You tell me," he countered.
—"But I want to know if *you* know."
—"If I told you what was in the cupboard," he replied, "I would lie about its nature, just as you would."

If I had previously harboured any doubts that this man was myself, these words dispelled them. I realized I was playing for my life, and that the next few minutes would be decisive.

I waited for my double to make his next move. He waited for mine, pouring himself coffee from the pot in front of him.
—"When did we acquire the taste for coffee?" I asked, pouring myself tea.
—"One changes one's habits as necessity dictates," he answered, smiling—though the smile seemed to be directed not at me but rather to the blonde waitress, who was staring at us from the far end of the room.
—"I'll prove things to you," I suddenly exclaimed, striking off on a new tack; "I'll tell you things a stranger couldn't know."
—"Those proofs of yours would prove nothing," he replied. "It's only natural that you know what I know. Each of us needs to believe he alone is the director. Perhaps one day this encounter will play out in one of our films, perhaps it won't. Though only one of us will leave this table."
—"But for now at least, we are two."
—"Precisely! We have scripted this moment together," my alter ego repeated. "It was 1962."
—"No, no, no, it is 1962," I told him.
—"*Certainly not*," he replied. "It's 1980."

I feigned a self-assurance I was far from truly feeling:
—"If it is 1980, as you say, you must recall having encountered, back in 1962, an elderly gentleman who told you that he, too, was Hitchcock."
—"Perhaps the incident was so odd that I made an effort to forget it," he replied. "Time edits out as much as it records." He paused for a moment, then continued: "Eventually your fate will become mine; yet, you will have utterly forgotten this curious dialogue taking place in two times and two locations. When it next plays out for you, you'll be who I am, and you'll be in my seat. And it won't be tomorrow either, it will be many years from now."
—"So tell me then," I asked, "what's happened in the last eighteen years of our lives—that is, in your past, which is now my future?"
—"What can I tell you?" he replied. "The misfortunes you are already accustomed to will repeat themselves. You will make the film we dreamed of for so long, but in the end you realize that you have failed. That film was one of the roads that led me to this night. The others: the humiliation of old age, the conviction of having already lived each day. My words, which are now your present, will one day be but the vaguest memory of a dream…"
—"Your script lacks discipline," I protested, "I'm sure we will forge a new cinematic language."

—"In time," he answered, "you will come to see that cinema merely confirms the old language. If we were successful, this was because we showed people what they recognized of themselves: guilt, desire, anxiety, death, love, guilt, above all guilt."
—"I wonder if we'll set this scene to film," I said.
Equipped, as ever, with that fiendish sense of humour, he responded:

—"Now this, Mr Hitchcock, that is bestowed upon us, our encounter, will be part of a great story, but this is the film you will never make. The world will overtake you. History, sudden catastrophes and global struggles will play themselves out in ways still stranger and more spectacular than your films."

—"Tell me another thing," I said. "Who wins the Cold War?"

He waved away the question, as though it were trivial, then, becoming more animated, sat forward in his chair and told me. "Half the movie theatres in the country have closed down. Television has killed cinema, broken it down into bite-sized chunks and swallowed it, like… like…"

—"Like birds devouring their own parent," I said.

—"I knew I could trust myself to come up with a good simile," he chortled. "It is the destiny of every medium to be devoured by its offspring. And we two are not without fault in this: we helped hasten the new format's rise to power."

—"Maybe we loved cinema so much we annihilated it," I ventured.

—"It's possible," he concurred. "We always fell in love with our characters, —that's why we killed them!"

We lingered for a while on the pleasures of murder. I argued that dying was an act of love, of complete surrender:

—"We always played our crimes as though they were love scenes."

—"Intimate and domestic," he murmured in agreement. "Television brought murder into the American home, where it always belonged."

He sat his cup down, then said:

—"So, tell me, how would you like to die?"

The question jolted me back to my senses. I looked around for a potential assassin lurking in the salon, but could see no one but ourselves and the waitress.

—"Come now," he mocked me. "We have imagined every type of murder, shooting, strangulation, stabbing, being hurled to death from a national monument, marriage—oh, yes, marriage can be very deadly: some of our most exquisite murders have been conjugal, performed in all tenderness with the aid of a kitchen appliance…"

—"Scissors…" I added, "the birds beaks that we're using in the current picture are like scissors, cutting at people willy-nilly, as they swoop from roofs and phone lines. Death always comes from above."
—"Above or within," he corrected me. "Personally, I like poison. It can only be administered to those who trust their killer—their family, spouses, lovers. Murder is a gift, like love. So, tell me, how would you like to die?"

They say that if you meet your double, you should kill him. Or that he will kill you. I can't remember which—but the gist of it is that two of you is one too many.
—"Who says there's only two of us?" he added mischievously. "Maybe there's three—or four of us. I never felt much for that *whodunit* sort of thing; I prefer something more devious." He sat in silence for a while, then continued: "My whole life has been a setting-to-film of this moment. Now, events have caught up with the film, and overrun it. It will end badly for someone. Just as it did last time."

I interrupted him: "I know what you're thinking: it's the murderer who will tell the story."

As I spoke the words, fear surged inside my chest, sharp as a knife. It dawned on me that this might be my own death scene playing itself out. I felt a need to assert my existence forcefully. I glanced about me for a prop, a weapon.

We could not deceive one another. Each of us was almost a caricature of the other.
—"I hate your face," I said, "which is a parody of mine. I hate your voice, which is a mockery of mine."
—"So do I," he answered, smiling.

This situation could not continue for much longer.
—"I'm not sure," I said, "if I'm capable of killing you."
—"You're capable of killing off your characters," he answered. "Treat me as one of those. Try me."
—"Done," I said.
—"Done? What do you mean: done?"
—"It won't be long now. This is your last cup."
—"Well then," he said, "let's get to know each other a bit. Contrary to what you would think from my measurements, I'm not a heavy eater. I'm simply one of those unfortunates who can accidentally swallow a cashew nut and put on thirty pounds right away."

As he spoke the words a trickle of coffee spilled from the corner of his mouth and ran down his chin before dribbling onto his shirt. The cup slipped from his hand and fell to the carpet. I bent down to pick it up—and saw, when I looked up again, that he was dead.

I won—or did I? I've always missed a part necessary to complete the puzzle. Until today, that is: April the 29th 1980—sitting in a chair on the studio lot, the set of a film that's ceased to be my own. I'm projected through accelerated time, revolving as the point of view shifts to the chair. I am here. I was always here. But who is directing?

My inescapable fate comes back to haunt me. Another man will come, a younger man. Again I will be face to face with myself—only this time I shall be the older one. Beneath an arabesque of smoke, I await him whose arrival will bring my death, listening for his footstep on the carpet. Another killer come, he, who will continue the story.

Inspired by the short story "August 25, 1983" by Jorge Luis Borges.

Karen Black: "Hitchcock didn't have a Belly Button."

He looked to me like a combination of worried or disgruntled, thinking I might have done something wrong. I wanted to find out, so I went to his little room. It was on stage, unusual and kinda nice. I went in, and said: "Mr. Hitchcock, are you upset with me? Have I done something… wrong?"
—"[as Hitchcock] Oh no dear, I don't… have a belly button."
—"Oh Mr. Hitchcock, you don't have a belly button! Of course you have a belly button, what are you talking about?!"
—"Nay, I don't *have a belly button!"*
—"Sure," I said, "you do have a belly button!"
—"Nay, I say…"
And he had this way of pulling up his clothes. He pulled up his shirt, and pulled up his undershirt and sure enough… no belly button! There was like about of a foot wide stitching, horizontally across his stomach.
—"I had an operation and… they stitched all across it. It's gone."

Karen Black on her experience with Alfred Hitchcock on the set of *Family Plot* (1976) in an interview with Johan Grimonprez, August 2008.

The Real Double

Jodi Dean

October 2009

I.

If you meet your double, you should kill him.

But who is your double and how do you know?

If the double is connected with death, indeed, with murder (or is it self-defence?) then identifying one's double is no trivial task. It's a pressing one, particularly if one's double has received the same advice. It's a matter of life and death, of kill or be killed. It could even be a matter of preparation, defence, reaction time. A few minutes could be decisive.

Who, then, is my double and how do I know?

There are numerous options, too many, really. Here are some:

1. The double is a copy of me; my clone. As anxious B movies and thrillers attest; we are suspicious of clones, replicants. We suspect that duplication is necessarily duplicity. One is natural. Two are monstrous, a horror the clone's ontological uncertainty compounds: if clones don't know they are clones, if they think they are real, my confidence in my own reality doesn't count for much.

2. The double is not quite an identical copy, but too close for comfort, nevertheless. This double is my twin, one who accompanied me *in utero*, who was with me before I was born. If my twin dies at birth, I am shadowed, haunted: why not me? What would she have been like? If my twin is born and lives, the two of us are perpetually linked together, sharing birthdays, subjected to twin studies, reminded of the uncanny ways we will inevitably do the same things, at the same times, somehow destined never to be our own person but always another's person as well. We will be urged to live separate lives, to develop individual identities of our own, condemned to monstrosity if we remain too close, too together.

Those of us who are not twins often see twins as uncanny, awry—*one* with *two* faces, a *two-faced* person we can't quite trust. How do we know which one is which when they are two? How can we avoid being tricked, fooled, duped? Doesn't their doubleness make them complete, a couple, a unity into which the rest of us can only intrude?

In David Cronenberg's 1988 film, *Dead Ringers,* Jeremy Irons plays identical twin gynecologists, Beverly and Elliot Mantle. The movie is based on the novel *Twins* by Bari Wood, which is itself based on the true story of New York twin gynaecologists, Stewart and Cyril Marcus, who died in the summer of 1975, presumably of causes related to drug addiction and withdrawal. In each version of events, the brothers go to the same high school, college and medical school, ultimately sharing a medical practice focused on fertility. In the novel, the brothers become lovers, increasingly isolated in their mutual absorption as they sink into drug addiction and death. The novel opens with the twins as young boys in front of their old Yiddish grandfather: "In the old country, they say that twins are cursed… not one person, yet less than two." From the speculation in the New York press following the doctors' deaths—they were found dead in an apartment bolted from within; one was in an extreme state of decay, the other not so much; one was wearing socks, the other shorts—accounts of these twins fixate on the *jouissance* of their mutuality, whether it be in their drug use, medical practice, or immersion in narcissistic sexual enjoyment. A contemporary, rather less disturbing instance of the imaginary enjoyment of twins is in the US reality television show, *The Girls Next Door*. The show focuses on life at the Playboy mansion, where Hugh Hefner, founder of the Playboy empire, lives with three blonde girlfriends, two of whom are identical twins.

3. Perhaps the double is, as the tabloid magazines would have it, my mini-me, my child. Capturing images of celebrity children, the tabloids render them not simply as fashion accessories but as something slightly more unnerving, replications of their famous parents. As if they were installing or bowing before a hereditary aristocracy, the photographs elide star and child, actor and progeny, amplifying the reversal from active to passive. To be a celebrity is to be known for being known, a circuit that, set in motion, can continue and branch and spread from object to object, in a kind of extra twist of reflexivity: celebrities are those who are known for being known by celebrities.

4. Then again, the double could be a kind of fake, a forger, mime, or impressionist. Imitation is supposed to be a kind of compliment, the highest form of flattery. Why, then, do the greatest mimics and impressionists cause a bit of pain, inflict a bit of a wound? They take a seemingly inconsequential tic or weakness, a little nugget that is barely anything yet still somehow constitutive of who we are, and display it for all to see; they *expose* us. The mime makes *my* gesture *his*. We don't *both* get to keep it. After it is foreign to me, alienated from me, it can't be mine the way it was, even though I may not be able to shake or avoid it.

5. The double could be my stand-in—a body double or stunt double or vocal double, one occupying my place because I can't quite be bothered or until I am ready to occupy it myself. Poor double—why didn't they make their own life? Why did they need mine? What are they lacking, these doubles? They lack singularity, uniqueness, but what else? What really makes them incomplete, unreal? What is their lack and what if it overlaps with mine?

Still, the stand-in can be a big boost to my ego. It's flattering that I'm so much, so needed and important, so valuable, that I have to occupy more than one body—maybe this suggests the appeal of the double in politics (or, more specifically, to Third World dictators): I have to be in more than one place, I cannot be replaced, and they, my enemies, should never be able to place me. We might observe here that it's no surprise that Alfred Hitchcock lost an Alfred Hitchcock lookalike contest—of course he doesn't look like Hitchcock; he *is* Hitchcock. But if he doesn't look like Hitchcock, what does that mean for his stand-ins? Are they more Hitchcock the less like him they look?

6. The stand-in suggests yet another version of the double, the double as usurper, the one who can and will take my place, the double as my replacement or substitute. If I think of myself as singular, as irreplaceable, this double will be particularly threatening. He destroys what it is that makes me "me", my status as a unique person.

In his 1997 film, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, Johan Grimonprez positions the terrorist as such a double of the novelist. Remixing Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1984) and *Mao II* (1991), he inhabits the usurpation, the displacement of art by violence as a force capable of altering the inner life of the culture. "Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness."[1] Grimonprez reflects, redoubles, these raids, highlighting the explosive power of the media that drive them, television and, later, video-recording. Novelists, DeLillo and Grimonprez observe, sold or lost out as terrorists emerged as vectors of meaning, as forces of discipline and conviction capable of being noticed. But television, the circulation of ever-intensifying images, our circulating through the dial in search of something else, usurped the terrorist. "So we turn to the news, which provides an unremitting mode of catastrophe. This is where we find emotional experience not available elsewhere. We

1 DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991), 41.

Leonid Brezhnev and Nikita Khrushchev, Moscow, April 1964 (*Double Take*, 2009)

don't need the novel… We don't even need catastrophes, necessarily. We only need the reports and predictions and warnings."[2] Hijackers depended on media to broadcast their messages. The same broadcasts, though, necessarily hijacked the terrorist content, repackaging it in the tasty bits suited to the consumer event. The image is the double as usurper.

7. My double might be my shadow, the dark outline I cast and cannot avoid.

8. My double is my reflection, me, inverted, in a looking-glass world I see only partially and never enter. How much of me does this double invert? Is he the saint for my sinner or my obscene underbelly? Which of us is Doctor Jekyll and which is Mr Hyde? If we are two sides of the same coin, who is on which side? What is our currency? Fear? Enjoyment? Diversion?

9. And, maybe, my double is me, in another time, my future me looking back, finding himself in a double take. One of us confronts the other: with regrets? With recrimination—how could you, how could I? With curiosity—what happens? Does it work out? Tell me what to do! Can I meet this double with any hope or must I squirm under the burden of knowing that he knows the mistakes I will have already made?

Joan Copjec writes, "It is our own *jouissance* which cannot be escaped, got rid of, even though we never manage to claim it as our own. It is *jouissance* that not only singularizes us, but also doubles and suffocates us… *Jouissance* makes me me, while preventing me from knowing who I am."[3] My double knows things a stranger couldn't know. I suspect that she knows the secret of my enjoyment, but perhaps not. After all, I don't know it. I can't know it. If my double is me, then what is unknown to me is unknown to her as well.

2 DeLillo, D., *Mao II*, 72.

3 Copjec, J., "May '68, The Emotional Month", in *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, ed. S. Žižek (London: Verso, 2006), 102.

If you meet your double you should kill him. I've mentioned nine possible doubles. This is starting to look like a bloodbath, or to suggest how it is that a concern with doubles and doubling could end up featuring beautiful images of nuclear blasts, atomic explosions, hydrogen bombs, the ultimate destruction of the world haunting the Cold War. My doubles redouble, exponentially, in an excessive, violent, chain reaction. I can't kill them fast enough.

Perhaps a different approach will save some lives. Either/or can be doubled by both/and, a doubling that necessarily leads to three options. Jacques Lacan famously distinguished between the three registers of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the Real. Slavoj Žižek argues that each of the three registers itself appears in three registers, such that we have something like the imaginary imaginary, the imaginary symbolic, the imaginary Real and so on. Although this complication may seem to reinforce the likelihood of having to kill at least nine doubles, it's clearly overkill: not every double is the Real double. So, which one is? And how do we know?

An initial reading of *Double Take* suggests that the "me" of the time warp, of the twist in time that enables me to encounter myself, is the Real double. Not only does Hitchcock meet himself but he dies in the end. This answer to the question of the Real double, however, could be hasty, as if one is trying to avoid confronting the way that the uncanny, and often very funny, effect of *Double Take* is closer to that of the missed encounter. *Double Take* confronts us with anxiety, with the sense of "being doubled by an inhuman, impersonal partner, who is at the same time me and disquietingly alien".[4] This anxiety is the experience of our necessary failure ever to encounter our Real double, even as we can never fail to avoid him—or her. It is also the anxiety pervading, indeed, constitutive of, the Cold War and confronting us when we look back at it, when we see it as one of the sources of what we have become. After all, things could have been other-

4 Copjec, "May '68, The Emotional Month", 100.

wise—clearly worse, the mushroom cloud, but maybe better. We'll never know.

If you meet your double, kill him. But maybe the Real double is precisely the one we cannot meet but cannot avoid. The Real double, the one who accompanies us, shadows us, taunts us, the one who causes us most anxiety, occupies this impossible, alien, position. Its place is a gap, in Žižek's terms a parallax gap, marked by a shift from "cannot avoid" to "cannot encounter" without ever occupying the position of encounter between them. Copjec writes, "But instead of breathing freely, we begin to asphyxiate in the air of an overly proximate otherness. This sense of being overburdened and doubled by *jouissance*, of an embarrassed enchainment to an excessive body" is the anxiety of encountering the *jouissance* of our own being.[5] The Real double is already in us, part of us, a disturbing object or excess that may impress itself on us like a voice or a gaze. We cannot meet the Real double, so we don't need to be enjoined to kill him if we do. Killing the double is thus the fantasy that holds the place of this impossible meeting, a masochistic fantasy of self-annihilation. (Žižek views this enjoyment in provoking one's own ruin as the part of the ambiguous charm of the Hitchcockian villain; that the villain experiences his guilt gives his subjective position an ethical dimension.[6])

II.

A remarkable achievement of *Double Take* is the way that the double is not simply one side of a static binary opposition but rather an active, seemingly limitless, doubling or redoubling. In an interview with Chris Darke in 2007, Grimonprez mentions this redoubling in connection with the relentless documentation part of the *Looking for Alfred* (2005) project: "Not only were we looking for a Hitchcock double, but the idea of having the project itself

5 Copjec, "May '68, The Emotional Month", 103.

6 Žižek, S., *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 121.

double—and then doubling and doubling further—was there from the very beginning."[7] Two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, one hundred and twenty-eight; the very process of doubling takes us further from a double, our double, as if it were or could be one, as if the Real double were one we could encounter rather than a gap or rupture. Repetition, in this view, is less the trap of the same than a network of unfolding possibilities. To be sure, these possibilities are not detached from anxiety. Rather, insofar as each doubling takes us further away from the very beginning, whatever that might be, it brings us closer to "the risk of annihilation, of being devoured by the very insubstantiality of the unrealized".[8]

These days, many of us experience this insubstantiality online: there is always another link, another video, another blog, another comment, another game. One minute turns to two, to four, to eight, to sixteen. Our own searching, linking and archiving is redoubled as traces that can themselves be searched, linked, archived. An archive of searches makes incompleteness an unavoidable feature of what must now necessarily remain fragmented and partial.

The persistent looking back at the early days of colour television, live global satellite feeds and video recording characteristic of Grimonprez's film-essays suggests that our experiences of online insubstantiality emerge out of a change "in the way we plugged into reality". *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* recovers the carnivalesque dimension of hijacking. Grimonprez's footage of sexy, mod flight attendants and a press interview with a cheerful boy who had a good time—the hijackers were "real nice"—short-circuits the now dominant image of the evil, criminal, terrorist. Even the violent sequences of exploding planes appear differently: on the one hand, tactics of oppressed people engaged in serious political struggle; on the other, the screen face of upbeat seventies disco music. To dial history isn't to call up or access a

7 Darke, C. & Grimonprez, J., "Hitchcock is not himself today", in *Johan Grimonprez: Looking for Alfred*, ed. S. Bode (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 79.

8 Copjec, J., "May '68, The Emotional Month", 105.

Soviet General Secretary Nikita Krushchev and US Vice-President Richard Nixon. The Kitchen Debate: First televised Summit, Moscow, July 1959 (*Double Take*, 2009)

Richard Nixon:

There may be some instances, for example colour television, where we are ahead of you.

Nikita Krushchev:

In what are they ahead of us? Wrong! Wrong! I share the enthusiasm of Soviet engineers about the cleverness of the American people, but we too, as you know, don't kill flies with our nostrils.

singular truth of hijacking or terrorism. It's to find in the switches of the dial the multiple unrealized turns that were present but unrealized. What if hijacking had inspired masses of oppressed and exploited people into overthrowing repressive regimes? What if hijackers had been able to retain control over their message, their image? What if the apparent antagonists of the Cold War, the US and the USSR, had not agreed to condemn hijacking? What if it all hadn't become so terribly bloody and violent?

In the interview with Darke, Grimonprez associates the change in how we plug into reality with "the way we relate to the world through its double, through its representation".[9] Given the excess of doubling Grimonprez deploys, the doubling he performs and the redoubling that renders the doubles uncountable—in fact, that makes counting them itself yet another exercise in doubling—the term "representation" is misleading. The immediacy of feeds and screens and the awareness that those of us raised on television have of the way that things appear, the way that things, events, persons are made to appear, and the way that this very being made to appear incites a reflexive circuit as it doubles in on itself, is not representation at all but rather the splitting in and of appearance into doubled and redoubled paths, tributaries, and networks. At stake isn't "what's going on in the real world" but how the Real necessarily exceeds and ruptures attempts to capture it in a world.

Consider *Double Take*'s images of Richard Nixon. In the first third of the film, Nixon seems to be encountering his double, Nikita Khrushchev, in the Kitchen Debates in Moscow in 1959. Yet even as each man might be figured as defending a side in the Cold War, and television newsman Walter Cronkite certainly represents the exchange this way, Nixon isn't Khrushchev's equivalent—Nixon is the Vice President, not the President. He and Khrushchev don't occupy the same symbolic position. And there is another twist as well, a twist that involves the very terms of Cold War, the measures of the race, the technologies through

9 Darke, C. & Grimonprez, J., "Hitchcock is not himself today", 89.

which their competition is carried out: while Nixon acknowledges Soviet superiority in rocketry, he asserts US superiority in television (and Grimonprez reminds us later in yet another twist that the very term "television" was coined by a Russian).

This technological doubling at work in the Kitchen Debates is more than just a doubling: it is the site for staging the opposition between television and rocketry. Television is more than rocketry's other; it's where the competition between television and rocketry appears as a competition. Television is redoubled as itself and one of its contents. Nixon attempts to make Khrushchev aware that their conversation can be transmitted immediately far beyond its setting: that is, to alert the Soviet leader to the fact that their conversation is appearing to a larger audience. And even as Khrushchev continues, seemingly unaffected, we feel Nixon's sense of being seen. It's as if Nixon is troubled, even rendered rather passive, by being the object of the very technology he has invoked as a signifier of US achievement.

In the second third of the film, Nixon appears with another potential double, a competitor for the seat of symbolic authority, John F. Kennedy. Yet while each may seem to occupy an equivalent position, the two alternatives in a binary choice, we already know that they are not symbolically equal. In retrospect, it's clear that they were never really symbolic doubles. Nixon resigned in disgrace; Kennedy's assassination made him the bearer of the lost hopes of a generation, his death an erasure not simply of lost potential but of the myriad moves and choices amplifying Cold War anxieties and US militarism.

In the clips from the televised debate between the two candidates for the US presidency in 1960, Grimonprez provides some tight close-ups of Nixon, accentuating Nixon's anxiety. These images highlight a paradox: Kennedy is denying the importance of television even as television is ensuring his victory. He is denying the very means of his own triumph over Nixon, in a way echoing Khrushchev's own preoccupation with rockets. Nixon, ever anxious about how he appears, is again rendered passive. His awareness of the gaze doesn't enable him to change or alter his appearance but entraps him in the sense of being made to

appear, made to appear in a way he doesn't want to, made to appear less desirable, less appealing, than Kennedy. The split, then, is not between appearance and representation but a split within appearance. Kennedy's representation of television (as not a significant element in the Cold War) is displaced by the appearance of Nixon's appearing.

The third version features the remaining alternative: Kennedy and Khrushchev. Tensions are high; television, newspaper and radio echo and intensify the stakes, the risks, the edge of global annihilation. Yet in this third encounter, the doubles don't meet, not face to face, not ship to ship or missile to missile. Well, they do, briefly, for a bit, in Vienna, but the moment passes, uninvested, barely televised, hardly a key moment of Cold War accelerated anxiety. It's almost as if this were a chance encounter or even rehearsal for the bigger encounter, like a run though before the Real thing. The Vienna meeting, then, doesn't really count. The significant encounter is the one that doesn't take place. The Cuban Missile Crisis is the ultimate failed encounter, one that we repeat and revisit in the trauma of proximity to annihilation.

The doubles don't meet, crisis is averted.

Or is it? In the version of the Cuban Missile Crisis that Grimonprez presents, there are still losers. Someone has to die. Khrushchev is ousted and Kennedy is assassinated. So was there in this missed encounter a meeting with the Real other?

The Cuban Missile Crisis is an odd sort of event, one comprised primarily of an absence, of what did not happen, but could have happened. So there was intense anticipation and anxiety, the possibility of nuclear war, of the end, but, in the end, there was no nuclear disaster. We recollect, then, our fear, our anticipation, our anxiety, reliving the tension—something horrible could have happened. And indeed the anxiety and anticipation is the best part of the story. The outcome, the compromise involving missiles in Turkey and the like (a compromise historians tell us was really just for show) is barely remembered, a minor diplomatic settlement, not like giving up Poland. Joan Copjec observes that the edge that anxiety touches is the "unrealized, the 'thrust-aside' powers of the past that might have caused my personal history or

history *tout court*… to be otherwise". Our anxiety, she tells us, is born out of our encounter with the "risk of annihilation, of being devoured by the very insubstantiality of the unrealized."[10]

Copjec is surely right about anxiety and insofar as the Cuban Missile Crisis is one of the Cold War's, indeed the twentieth century's, defining events it makes sense to understand the anxiety it incites in terms of this risk of annihilation. But why do we return to it? Why do we repeat the anxiety? Why do we participate in repetitive practices through which we experience, again and again, this brush with annihilation, with being devoured?

Easy answers moralize the event, instructing us to learn from the past, to appreciate that the worst could happen. They enjoin us to disarm, to seek peace, to appreciate how close we came to oblivion and to work to make sure that we never get to this point again. These sorts of answers might figure in Kennedy nostalgia or even in nostalgia for something like a simpler world, one with clear rights and wrongs, erasing as they do the reality of Cuba as a country with its own revolution and politics not to mention the fact that there has been, if not nuclear war, then the use of nuclear weapons in war, against the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Grimonprez's Cuban Missile Crisis avoids this nostalgia and moralizing even as it accentuates anxiety, revels in anxiety, plays anxiety like a canon or collage, like a montage or mash-up. It makes me think of Lacan: we repeat because we enjoy. The beautiful, shocking, impossible mushroom crowds, luminously expanding to occupy the entire field of vision—Grimonprez enjoys explosions, from the cockpit engulfed in flames in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* to the nuclear tests of *Double Take*; each blast mesmerizes as it disrupts the normal order of matter and energy. And these aren't special effects. We know that. We've seen the footage before and we know that the explosions are Real, even if we don't know why. We witness their power, their destruction, and in witnessing experience ourselves as beyond or outside

10 Copjec, J., "May '68, The Emotional Month", 104.

their violence. Witnessing, we survive the crash, the bomb in the cargo hold. Present at the end of the world, we can continue to inhabit our fantasies of immortality: we imagine the annihilation of everything, except ourselves, the ones who are seeing, witnessing. We can withstand the sublime power of the nuclear explosion, as if our power were more, were excessive, were without limit or boundary. We witness and enjoy an infantile fantasy of omnipotence for which we need not take responsibility: the Cuban Missile Crisis is a story of a failed encounter; nothing exploded; so we can sit back and enjoy power in its sublime excess.

Might it not be the case then that we enjoy a fantasy of omnipotence, that in the midst of the failures of the present, the present's overwhelming sense of failure on all sides (the crisis of neoliberalism is also a crisis for neoliberalism) we return to and enjoy fantasizing our ability to destroy the world? Or, is this move too quick as well, occluding what we might call the gaze of the Cold War? Žižek observes that part of the power of film noir is our fascination with the gaze of the naive spectator, the one who takes it seriously or who "believes in it for us, in place of us".[11]

The appeal of the Cold War footage Grimonprez uses so well in his films stems at least in part from the way it enables us to posit people who really believed in communism, in capitalism, who believed in a global fight, and whose belief gave them not only something worth dying for but something worth the destruction of the world. In *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* we see Soviet citizens mourning their fallen leaders, weeping for Lenin, weeping for Stalin. We see Chinese communists attempting what now seems impossible—a total cultural revolution. We see hijackers who know what they want and why. In DeLillo's words, "In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the only meaningful act… Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for his faith."[12] Even on the capitalist side, what seems to be a pointless waste of money—stock-

11 Žižek, S., *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, 112.
12 DeLillo, D., *Mao II*, 157.

piling weapons—a senseless venture to the edge of oblivion—risking nuclear war, becomes, from the perspective of the Cold War gaze, a matter of the beliefs that matter, the beliefs that cut through daily preoccupations with provisioning to occupy the very ground and purpose of human existence.

What fascinates us in the Cold War encounters in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* and *Double Take*, and which appears so vibrantly in the missed encounter of the Cuban Missile Crisis, is the gaze of those who believed. We fantasize their belief, trying to occupy their position, to look on the Cold War as something that could have mattered. The films insert us in moments we imagine as full of alternatives, as forks, as if capitalism were not inevitable, as if collective aspirations and projects could change the world. Fantasizing this younger, earlier gaze of the Cold War, *we* are the older, decrepit, undead other, circulating round and round in the loss of our ability to produce, to direct, our own world. No wonder our younger self has to kill us. That fantasy that he can is *our* way out.

III.

Grimonprez uses the missed encounter as an opportunity to make an encounter with the Real other appear. Such an encounter is impossible directly, only possible accidentally or anamorphically. I've considered it in terms of absence, fantasy and gaze, each oblique approach twisting and splintering into the others. And I've argued that Grimonprez's presentation of the Cuban Missile Crisis as a missed encounter confronts us with the particular anxiety of our enjoyment, whether of power, opportunity, or even failure. We meet our double and he kills us. Fascinated by the gaze of our prior Cold War selves, we imagine that other futures had been possible, futures of terrible nuclear annihilation, but also, perhaps, of forms of collective enterprise and aspiration not already absorbed by the circulation of commodities and the drive for profit.

Which leads to the commercials. Commercials figure differently in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* and *Double Take*. In the former, they

mark narrative gaps. Such gaps indicate the capture of hijacking in the televisual image, in television as medium for delivering consumers to advertisers, and in viewers' capacities to avoid commercials (whether by walking out of the room, changing the channel or, after the introduction of the VCR, forwarding past them). How seriously can we take the murder of a pilot and the unceremonious tossing of his body through the cockpit window when it's followed by a commercial? How much of an event do we encounter when all we have to do is turn the channel to avoid it, to find something more pleasant, funnier or even more shocking? As Grimonprez notes in an interview that appeared soon after the release of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, "on TV, imagery becomes more and more extreme and the accumulation of images more rapid: the TV set has swallowed the world. Reality has lost credibility. Even when confronted with real death one feels detached, as if the violin strings are missing in the crucial scene."[13] The very gaps breaking up official presentations of news and events, the gaps that open up possibilities of escape, are at the same time gaps derealizing the world as they increase its insubstantiality.

Double Take, in contrast, is punctuated by Folgers commercials that we look back at in near wonder—when were we, when was television, ever so young, so naive? Even more than the news footage, the commercials take us back to the beginning of the sixties as a time of opportunity and aspiration. With them we return to the space of domestic fantasy that early television staged so well. The straight young couples, dressed up for dinner (they won't start swinging, swapping keys and wearing jeans for at least five more years). We grin, with just a bit of superiority: *women aren't confined to looking for the best coffee anymore* (now we can all look for good coffee, and pay four euros a cup for it at Starbucks).

Yet the commercials Grimonprez mixes in, humorously, delightfully, breaking—and helping build—the tension of political and Hitchcockian events, bringing with them the Cold War gaze,

13 Bernard, C. & Grimonprez, J., "Supermarket History", in *Parkett*, no. 53 (1998), 6–18.

these very commercials double the anxiety *Double Take* incites. They remind us that rather than actually a time of opportunity, rather than really a fork, the years of Khrushchev and Kennedy were already determined. As they constitute the space of appearance, the television commercials make clear that the deal was done, the gig was up. Hitchcock asks Hitchcock who won the Cold War—but Hitchcock dismisses the question as trivial. The commercials advertise products and incite insecurity (but less about nuclear war than about bad coffee and worse marriages). The Cuban Missile Crisis appears like a fork, but the space in which it appears—marked in the film by television—makes clear that there wasn't a fork at all, the road was already built in one direction, that of capitalism. The moment of choice, of encounter between communism and capitalism, was already behind us, having never appeared at all. The commercials, in other words, suggest less the space of a struggle between consumers armed with remotes as advertisers fire at them fantastic images designed to incite their desires than capitalism's triumph that is, the inevitable acquiescence to capitalism, and not just capitalism as in markets unleashed to the brutal pursuit of monopoly and profit but a fantasy of capitalism as a haven of privacy, domesticity, and the individualized pursuit of happiness. Derealization is a specific effect media produced in and as the Real of capitalism.

Since at least Guy Debord's work on the society of the spectacle the idea that television is a medium for transmitting fear has often been repeated. It has likewise been common to note that television, particularly in the United States which is dominated by commercial television, is primarily a delivery system for advertisers, a way to give them access to consumers; in fact, to turn rather amorphous, undetermined beings into lacking beings that nonetheless enjoy, even if that enjoyment is little else than a cup of coffee, satisfaction over making it, or the little charge of amusement at commercials in their/our idiocy. Yet it has less often been noted that television's transmission of fear is its transmission of capitalism and this not because of its content but because of its form, its emergence as the space within which anything that opposes it has to appear. The remarkable achievement of *Double Take* is this coupling, this doubling of the Cold War and its television setting that makes the conflict end with its televisual appearing and still be an occasion for anxiety. It's important to note, moreover, that mobile personal media extend and deepen this phenomenon rather than challenge it, a point to which Grimonprez alludes at the end of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* with video-cam footage of the crash of a hijacked plane taken by a honeymooning couple.

IV.

When we say that someone did a double take, we are saying that they looked again, looked back. They saw something and rather than assimilating what they saw into the manifold of impressions, they were pushed, impelled, to look at it again. With a double take, it's not that the person chooses or decides to look again, to look back; rather, they find themselves already looking back.

What makes one look again?

A rupture or a glitch, a disconnection or seam, a fault line in the manifold of impressions that, somehow, is more than that manifold. The plenitude of sensory impressions, the multiplicity in which one persists, at that moment exceeds itself. Some kind of excess in the field calls attention to the field. The Lacanian term for that excess rupturing the field is "the gaze". The gaze, then, isn't what the viewer sees. It's what makes her look and become aware that she is looking. The gaze confronts the viewer in her viewing, disturbing it, denaturalizing it, making what was formerly seamless appear with seams, with cuts, with splices.

Set in a media habitat filled with interruptions, with cuts and splices, segments and segues, the gaze, rather than becoming more apparent, retreats. The field itself seems comprised of bits of footage, multiple layers of impressions impressing themselves into layers. Interrupting this field of interruptions thus becomes a challenge: what makes one interruption different from another, what lets it effect a rupture and become an opportunity for an

encounter with the Real of the gaze rather than simply another moment in the imaginary? In a field of interruptions the gaze manifests itself as an interruption of the interruptions, a bracketing that makes us say, "But wait! there's more", and that in so doing calls us to look back on our looking. We find ourselves already lost in it, already having turned.

Paper presented at the symposium "Shot by Both Sides! Double Take", Arts Centre Vooruit, Ghent, Belgium, 15 October 2009.

Jim and Jim

In 1979, when he was thirty-nine, Jim Lewis decided to try to find his identical twin brother, from whom he was separated at birth. Six weeks later, Jim Lewis knocked on the door of Jim Springer. The moment they shook hands, they felt close as if they had known each other their whole lives. Not only that, they also learned about an amazing series of coincidences in their twindom. To begin with they realized they both were named Jim by their adoptive parents. Both had grown up with adoptive brothers called Larry. Both had married girls named Linda, divorced them and then both married girls named Betty. Both had named their sons James Allan. Both had owned a dog named Toy. Both chain smoked the same make of cigarette. The twins were fascinated, not only in these similarities in experience but by their mental similarities—one would start to say something and the other would finish it.

"Jim Lewis and Jim Springer". Accessed 28 December 2010: www.angelfire.com/dragon3/annabelle/twins.html

Laura and Laura

In June 2001, a 10-year-old girl, Laura Buxton, was celebrating her grandparents' wedding anniversary at her home in Burton, Staffordshire. Her grandfather suggested that Laura write her name and address on a label, attach it to a helium balloon, then release it into the sky. As the balloon floated off, Laura returned to the party and forgot about it.

The balloon drifted 140 miles until it came to rest, 10 days later, in a garden in Pewsey, Wiltshire. There, another little girl of 10 found it. Her name, astonishingly, was also Laura Buxton.

"The Unlikely Event, Destiny's Children", in *The Sunday Times Magazine* (10 July 2005).

It's a Poor Story if it Only Works Backwards[1]

Catherine Bernard in dialogue with Johan Grimonprez

May 2009

Catherine Bernard: We're are at the United Nations building in New York on the occasion of the Goodwill Ambassadors Celebration. While we're hiding out in a corner to start our dialogue, suddenly a huge flock of birds flutters up over the General Assembly!

Johan Grimonprez: Yeah, funny, it's Hitchcock all over! Although, rather than *The Birds* (1963), the UN gives me more a taste of *North by Northwest* (1959), where the Cary Grant character is entangled in a case of mistaken identity chasing his very doppelganger, and then gets framed for murder committed right here on the premises of the UN. By the way, Hitchcock never had the permission to shoot here, so he had to make a double of the UN on a Hollywood set. And of course Hitchcock was keen on national monuments: they were his preferred spots where love stories and political intrigues ultimately met in a public stand-off.

1 The title is an interpretation of a dialogue from Carroll, L., *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (London: Macmillan, 1871).

C.B.: It reminds me of what you do in your latest film *Double Take* (2009), how the political reality doubles the fictional narrative played out through the intimate dialogue between two Hitchcocks. The plot is unfolding at a time when history starts being staged on TV, when cinemas are closing down and the family gathers around the evening news. The media spectacle slowly begins to invade the home and eventually ends up standing for reality, or doubling it.

J.G.: Exactly, one could even say that reality itself is caught up in a case of mistaken identity. In *Double Take*, the evidence of multiple doubles points to an ontological shift in the media industry. Just look at the reality of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), which literally became a case of mistaken identity. The Bush regime was pointing the finger at the Middle East, while ironically the world's biggest stockpile of mass destruction was located in the US. And nobody dares say the emperor hasn't gotten any clothes on! Mainstream reporters simply endorse the charade as corporate advertisers for a war industry.

It's actually right here at the UN that Colin Powell presented the blatant lies of the Iraqi WMD programme to the press in February 2003. He did this in front of a duplicate of Picasso's *Guernica*, which had been covered up for the speech, concealing the horrors of war! Wasn't that a bit of real life photoshopping, the Bush regime condemning precisely what was being perpetrated in Iraq?

But after all, that's Hitchcock's basic recipe for good storytelling: blame "the wrong guy"! And the meaner he is, the more work the protagonist has to do. The mainstream press loves it! Very convenient, as today Iran has become the new deflection in the mirror palace of lies. However, the largest nuclear stockpile in the Middle East is not in Iran but in Israel, a country that has threatened the use of a pre-emptive nuclear first strike.[2] What's

2 On 18 December 2003, Iran actually signed the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) and allowed inspections to Iran's nuclear facilities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The treaty specifically gives Iran the right to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. On the other hand, Israel refuses to sign the NPT, and its nuclear facilities are closed to outside inspection.

more, the US was not only the first to drop a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima, but repeated this feat in "Desert Storm" by detonating mini-nukes between the Iraqi town of Basra and the border of Iran. This clearly violated all nuclear treaties and ultimately provoked Iran.[3]

C.B: Such masquerade of reality is evident in the infamous speech given by Donald Rumsfeld (Bush's Secretary of State Defense at the time) about WMDs, which is placed as an epilogue to *Double Take*: "There are known knowns; these are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—that the ones we don't know we don't know."

J.G.: Ha! WMDs as the present day MacGuffin! Slavoj Zizek pointed out that Rumsfeld left out the 4th hidden idiom: besides the known knowns; the known unknowns; and the unknown unknowns; there is also the "unknown known", namely the repressed side of politics flaunting its ideology. It's a mirror game that hides horrors in plain sight. According to Zizek, the reason why Rumsfeld lost his job is because he didn't know what he knew!

C.B.: And wasn't it Rumsfeld himself who visited Iraq in the eighties under the Reagan administration to sell biological and chemical agents to Saddam Hussein? The unknown known! Indeed our reality today is embedded in a culture of fear that can be traced to the Cold War and has now become the modus operandi. It is part of the same ontological shift, the encroaching of society by a culture of fear, a game of mirrors and doubles. In fact, in *Double Take*, former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev almost looks like a clone of Hitchcock.

3 Maurizio Torrealta reports that an American veteran who participated in "Desert Storm" accuses the US administration of having used a small nuclear penetration bomb with an energy of 5 kilotons between the Iraqi town of Basra and the border with Iran. (Maurizio, T., "The Third Nuclear Bomb, The Veteran's Accusation", *RaiNews* 24 (7 October 2008). Accessed 2 December 2010: www.rainews24.it/inran24/rainews24_2007/inchieste/08102008_bomba/video_ENG.asp

Former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, WMD Press Briefing, NATO headquarters, Brussels, 6 June 2002 (*Double Take*, 2009)

Donald Rumsfeld:

There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know.

J.G.: Actually my favourite historical event to take place here at the UN was when Khrushchev, at the height of the Cold War in October 1960, pounded his shoe on the pulpit during a plenary session of the General Assembly. The CIA was involved in the Congo, setting Mobutu up against Patrice Lumumba who, after leaning towards the communist bloc, was assassinated a year later.[4] I would have pounded my shoe just as Khrushchev did, even though he only got demonized in the American press for it. Not much different from today when reality of a divided world is constructed by inventing a bad guy, such as the fabrication of Al Qaeda, through storytelling and lies.[5] The subtext in the 1960s was of course the Cold War's nuclear arms race, the Congo being crucial due to its rich resources of uranium. The whole world was being conditioned by a culture of fear, one played out through television sets staging two rival world powers mirroring one another.

Even Kennedy came to power by exaggerating the Red threat. And television played a huge part in drilling fear into people during the Cold War, which seemed to justify a zero-sum accumulation of hugely expensive military nuclear stockpiles. This was not only the case at the beginning of the Cold War, but even more so at the end, when, with no reasonable gain in security, defence budgets escalated with the Star Wars programme while public programmes were eroded to a Third-World standard. History repeats itself.

C.B.: Your film is framed between the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall, after which the narrative unfolds all the way up to Rumsfeld. Francis Fukuyama was quick to claim the end of history; the end of utopia with the collapse of the Soviet Union and a universalization of the western model of democracy.[6] Almost immediately,

4 John Pilger mentions that since the end of World War II, the US has directly or indirectly overthrown 50 governments, plus attacked 30 countries. (Pilger, J., "Freedom Next Time", in *Internationalist Review*, no. 55 (September–October 2007), 33).

5 Curtis, A., *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear* (180min/colour, 2004).

6 Fukuyama, F., *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

however, history was being rewritten with the invasion of Iraq, creating a new outlet for the war and fear industries. *Double Take* shows how history repeats itself, and how the fear industry is forever pervasive today.

J.G.: The Cold War established this global mirror game: JFK versus Mr K, Nixon versus Brezhnev, Reagan versus Gorbachev, and so on. Despite the fall of the Wall, a new configuration kept the world in a similar setting: a double generation of Bush versus the imaginary other of Saddam Hussein. Today Cold War anxieties are not only absorbed in politics but they are mirrored in the very fabric of life; it's a war on terror out there and it's a war on our immune system within our own bodies. However, it's a photoshopped version of reality. The swine flu pandemic orchestrated by the WHO was complicit with Big Pharma.[7] We have said goodbye to history but at the same time said hello to a conspiracy reality.

C.B.: The idea of a photoshopped reality brings up the question of how news media, and also films, TV soap operas, commercials, consumerism, etc.… construct our reality. The constant flux of images demands us to revise the very notion of a reality borne out of historical, social or economic contexts and blurs the boundaries between the phantasmic and the actual.

J.G.: Reality is not a given. It's almost as if the world suffers from reality vertigo. The very notion of reality itself is at stake, or at least the access to reality that media is controlling. Reality has always been entangled with the stories we tell ourselves. Even the language we share, or not for that matter, right now while we're having this dialogue, is after all embedded in a worldview

7 Chossudovsky, M., "The H1N1 Swine Flu Pandemic: Manipulating the Data to Justify a Worldwide Public Health Emergency," in *Global Research* (25 August 2009). Accessed 3 January 2011: www.globalresearch.ca/PrintArticle.php?articleId=14901. See also, "Blood on Their Hands: The World's Slickest Con Job and a Stack of Deadly LIES…". Accessed 3 January 2011: http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2010/11/04/big-profits-linked-to-vaccine-mandates.aspx

we agree on sharing. Reality is co-agreed upon, it's a "consensus reality" that is co-authored.

Funny how Hitchcock used to say that reality is stranger than any fiction we could concoct. It reflects the new epistemology that is now emerging from within science confirming that reality is indeed much weirder than we initially thought. "You're theory is crazy," Niels Bohr once quipped to his fellow quantum physicist scholar Wolfgang Pauli during a lecture at Columbia University, before adding "although what divides us, is whether your theory is adequately crazy enough!" And really, quantum experiments describe the world as completely absurd—that the mind of the observer is entangled with the observed phenomena. We basically live in a participatory universe. Cognitive and life sciences assume that nature and mental phenomena emerge from matter (albeit not defining what matter really is) and do not acknowledge findings in quantum physics that have come to question matter altogether. Whereas consciousness used to be considered as something of a sidebar, as an after-effect of matter itself, a new epistemology redefines the emergence of reality as implicitly embedded within consciousness. Much in the way, quantum physicist turned philosopher David Bohm, defines consciousness as implicit to the basis of reality.[8] So, we're back to storytelling! Science can only tackle this "reality" gap by including the storyteller, by including the observer.

The old paradigm of a presumed objectivity as a privileged one-dimensional position meant only to relieve us from our core responsibilities, which only contributed to the bankruptcy of our world, obscuring ecological disasters, and adding to the military build-up and the global imbalance evident today. Just as the quantum paradox redefines reality as participatory, it's time we include our own responsibility as part of the reality we construct, as part of the stories we tell ourselves. Ultimately we're storytelling animals. Alberto Manguel once said about Jorge Luis Borges that "There are writers who attempt to put the world in

8 Bohm, D., "A New Theory of the Relationship of Mind and Matter", in *Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 3 (1990), 271–86.

a book. There are others, rarer, for whom the world *is* a book."[9] It's Borges' participatory universe of storytelling. For him, a book only exists when read. "It's the reader who gives life to the literary works because he rescues the words from the page." Similarly one could say: a film only exists when someone watches it. It's the viewer or reader who becomes the protagonist.

C.B.: Let's go back to the idea of a constructed reality through politics, the culture of fear and the role played by the media. Nowadays the staging of reality has shifted from the TV screen to the big screen, which seems almost a sort of reversal of what happened in the sixties when TV pushed cinema over. Loads of films are prodigious commercial successes as they stage alien forces, cyborgs or extreme technology as the enemy. These also operate as doubles of the corporate or political entities that exert real power, and allow for its displacement into a series of spectacles outdoing each other in special effects and technological prowess. The created anxiety then justifies subsequent abuses of power. Look, for example, at the acceptance of surveillance systematically applied to our daily lives in an "age of terrorism", and whose necessity is fed though the news, movies or the web… Or for example the swine flu pandemic orchestrated through the media and powerful organizations such as the WHO, the UN and international governments as an attempt to generate control by disseminating fear.

J.G.: Yup, today, Hollywood seems to be running ahead of reality. The world is so awash in images that we related to 9/11 through images we ourselves had already created prior to the event. In a sense, fiction came back to haunt us as a lookalike reality. As for our immune systems, they're being hijacked. Pharmaceutical corporations like Baxter merely buy market opportunities from governments who only legalize their greed: they want to own our immunity system! Buckminster Fuller once pointed out in

9 Manguel, A., *With Borges* (London: Telegram Books, 2006), 63–72.

an interview that corporations benefit from keeping humanity in a state of inherent failure and fear, and hence control. At the security control, before you board a plane, you're forced to take off your shoes. You're fumbled all over, your bag is searched into its most intimate details, you're not allowed to take your water, etc. Literally our bodies have become the very site of terror. It's symptomatic of a global system that turns permanent war and crisis into a modus operandi! It's what Naomi Klein calls the new phase of "disaster capitalism".[10] It's the new contemporary sublime our world finds itself in today. We have been turned from happy innocent consumers into savvy consumers of fear.

C.B.: In *Double Take* you juxtapose these narratives to structure the film along those different political, psychological, and fictional layers, as if to mimic the construction of reality as a composite…

J.G.: Hitchcock used that a lot—in many cases he would libidinize the political plot. For example, the Cold War would be revisited through the love story, as in *North by Northwest* between Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint. His love stories are often set against an international political backdrop that instigates the desires of the characters to keep the plot rolling.

C.B.: This interpretation could also apply to *The Birds* where Melanie is the victim of the bird attacks and becomes progressively terrified, a situation that stands for a metaphor of the Cold War-induced paranoia. Birds take the metaphoric place of the missiles or war planes, and are revisited in *Double Take* as catastrophe culture descending into the home through the TV-set, trapping people as birds in a cage…

J.G.: The anxiety in *The Birds* is usually interpreted by Hitchcock scholars in a Freudian sense: the birds mirror the tensions between the characters, as a metaphor for Melanie's repressed

10 Klein, N., *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

sexuality or the repressed anxiety of the mother coming back to haunt the village, but yes, maybe there's more going on… Today we could perfectly rethink the birds as an embodiment of the so-called ominous terrorist threat coming out of the sky (and propagated through the news media), very much in the way Slavoj Žižek compares them to the 9/11 planes attacking the WTC.[11] Political spin in fact is only one way of looking at it, but more than any other of Hitchcock's films, *The Birds* refutes interpretation and has generated every possible contradictory explanation by Hitchcock scholars. As Thomas Elsaesser points out, cinema studies about Hitchcock have proliferated to such a degree that they start to collapse under their own weight.[12] He goes on to identify a Schopenhauer Hitchcock, a Heideggerian Hitchcock, a Derridean Hitchcock, a Lacanian Hitchcock, several Deleuzian Hitchcocks, a stab at a Nietzschean Hitchcock and even a Wittgensteinian Hitchcock. I could easily imagine them sitting around the dinner table, having a lively discussion. And in a sense this is the *Double Take* plot, where two Hitchcocks have a dialogue over a cup of coffee. Their conversation is partially inspired by the Truffaut–Hitchcock dialogues. Despite the fact that Hitchcock never meant to make an overtly political movie, seen in retrospect *The Birds* seems to perfectly reflect the zeitgeist and the anxiety of that period. At the same time as Truffaut was talking with Hitchcock in August 1962 on the set of *The Birds*, Khrushchev was sending missiles to Cuba. Two months later the Cuban Missile Crisis broke loose over TV, and the world was pushed to the brink of a nuclear confrontation, all played out as a media drama.

C.B.: On another level this political backdrop also mirrors the repressed sexuality in the fifties, at a time when lots of women were at-home mums. This comes through in the Folgers ads that

11 Žižek, S., *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002).

12 Elsaesser, T., "'Casting Around': Hitchcock's Absence", in *Johan Grimonprez: Looking for Alfred* ed. S. Bode (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005), 137–61.

literally function as commercial breaks throughout *Double Take*, in which the woman is seen trapped at home desperately trying to make good coffee for her husband.

J.G.: As Heiner Müller once observed in relation to the impact West Berlin television commercials had on East Germany, commercials are the most political part of television.[13] It's funny how in *Double Take* two guys do pretty much all the talking, but we could easily do the Hitchcock trick and libidinize the plot here! Not only the two Hitchcocks, but also the political figures of Khrushchev and Nixon who keep on talking about their rockets in the so-called "Kitchen Debate" while the repressed sexuality comes back to haunt kitchen dialogues between man and woman in the very first coffee ads broadcast on TV!

C.B.: But then the woman exchanges roles and turns murderess by poisoning the coffee, thereby making this perfect symbol of domesticity a symbol of transgression and empowerment. In *Double Take*, the woman takes revenge, as she is the agent who brings the poisoned cup to Hitchcock. Did you want to point at the fact that his films are filled with women repressed by the culture of that time, and in a sense also by Hitchcock himself – the ordeal suffered by Tippi Hedren while filming the final scenes of *The Birds* is telling in that regard? Hitchcock is suspicious of female sexual power and can't let it overtake the story. In *The Birds*, Melanie falls victim to the birds, punished for what we learned early in the movie: for her carefree lifestyle and her ability to choose and pursue her partner herself. In the end, she isn't given any choice but to passively accept the birds as her fate…

J.G.: Hence Hitchcock's confession in *Double Take*: "we always fell in love with our characters, that's why we killed them." All the characters in his movies are trapped in this situation, exposed to the Hitchcockian terror! He often portrays strong females leads.

13 Wark, M., *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

But isn't it precisely because they're agents of dangerous sexuality that they have to be castigated? Ingrid Bergman is a very independent character in *Notorious* (1946), so she's poisoned. Likewise with Janet Leigh in *Psycho* (1960): she's stabbed to death. Ditto with Tippi Hedren. As a free-spirited socialite from San Francisco she drops in at Bodega Bay, only to be attacked by the birds. Although fascinating and seductive, they're threatening!

But maybe it points to a symptom of male hysteria, a man who is suffering from a split personality as the James Stewart character in *Vertigo* (1958), or caught in a case of mistaken identity as in the case of *North by Northwest* (1959). A man whose fear of intimacy or fear of death prevents him from really looking at the other, one who's trapped in his own narcissism. These characters only mirror Hitchcock's own fears and phobias projected back onto the female character as a way to try to contain her, or even poison her. Similarly, this male hysteria is also displaced onto the woman in *Double Take*. Just as in *Vertigo*, it goes back to the schizophrenia within the man, the doubling that stems from the fact that the woman he tries to mould never really corresponds to his projection. He wants the woman to embody his own desire, but his dream woman never redeems his anxiety precisely because she refuses to fit into that mould. The man then is ultimately faced with a split reality.

C.B.: Isn't it peculiar how Sigmund Freud mentions in his 1919 essay "The Uncanny", the terrible anxiety he felt when he encountered his own double in the wagon-lit during a train journey, only to realize it was his own mirrored reflection?[14] To Freud, meeting one's double is an encounter with the uncanny. It occurs at the boundaries between mind and matter, when subject and object blur, generating a feeling of unbearable terror. In order to keep his or her sanity the subject must reject the intrusion of the uncanny brought on by such an encounter with one's double, one which threatens the common reality through the emergence

14 Freud, S., *The Uncanny*, trans. D. McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003).

of the "real". A fateful meeting with the double becomes the moment where the real begins to speak back.[15]

J.G.: Hence he has to kill his double! Hmm, maybe I need to get some therapy myself now that I've finished the film. But I believe so do some politicians!

C.B.: Funny then that in your film it's actually the woman who poisons Hitchcock. The scene in *Notorious* where Ingrid Bergman drinks the poisoned cup of coffee is entirely reversed in *Double Take*. By shifting the aesthetic codes the commercial comes to stand for its exact opposite and turns the cup of coffee into a murder weapon—yet another example of juxtaposition of different layers in the film.

J.G.: Well, Hitchcock's cup of coffee is never just a cup of coffee! The coffee ads in *Double Take* not only count for their documentary value, revealing the underlying ideology through their historical displacement, but they're also woven into the fiction plot: it's the commercial that literally becomes the murder weapon. They come to stand for the arrival of television. Indeed, one of the Hitchcocks in the film contends that television has killed cinema, alluding to how TV's commercial breaks have changed the way narratives were told. Hitchcock was very much part of that early television landscape, he who always faithfully introduced his own TV show *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. A minute of commercials typically followed this intro, but not before Hitchcock had berated the sponsor by voicing his contempt, jokingly and sardonically demanding how an ad could possibly dare interrupt his stories. It turned Hitchcock into the biggest television prankster of his time.

The doubling of fiction and politics is also mirrored in *Double Take* through the rivalry between cinema and its televisual double. This in turn mirrors the plot that sets up Hitchcock the film-

15 Dolar, M., "'I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night': Lacan and the Uncanny", in *Rendering the Real*, vol. 58 (Autumn 1991), 5–23.

maker versus Hitchcock the television-maker. The encounter happens at a time when Hollywood had to redefine itself due to the closure of many cinemas caused by a loss of audiences to television. TV was on the rise, and it had to carve out a niche for itself within society. But alas, it's almost as if the social ritual of the coffee break gave way to the commercial break.

First published as: Bernard, C. & Grimonprez, J., "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards: Johan Grimonprez en dialogue avec Catherine Bernard" in *L'image-document, entre réalité et fiction*, ed. J.-P. Criqui (Paris: Le Bal/Marseille: Images en Manoeuvres Éditions, 2010), 212–23.

Philosophy, the "Unknown Knowns", and the Public Use of Reason

Slavoj Žižek

September 2006

In March 2003, Donald Rumsfeld engaged in a little bit of amateur philosophizing about the relationship between the known and the unknowns: "There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know." What he forgot to add was the crucial fourth term: the "unknown knowns", things we don't know that we know—which is precisely the Freudian unconscious, the "knowledge which doesn't know itself." If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq are the "unknown unknowns," the threats from Saddam about which we do not even suspect what they may be, the Abu Ghraib scandal shows where the main dangers are: in the "unknown knowns," the disavowed beliefs, suppositions, and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, although they form the background of our public values. The task of philosophy as the "public use of reason" is to unearth these "unknown knowns." It is not to solve problems, but to redefine them; not to answer questions, but to raise the proper question. In an old joke from the defunct German Democratic

Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; aware of how all mail will be read by censors, he tells his friends: "Let's establish a code: if a letter you will get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it is true; if it is written in red ink, it is false." After a month, his friends get the first letter written in blue ink: "Everything is wonderful here: stores are full, food is abundant; apartments are large and properly heated, movie theatres show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair-the only thing unavailable is *red ink*." The structure is here more refined than it may appear: although the worker is unable to signal in the prearranged way that what he reports is a lie, he nonetheless succeeds in getting his message across-how*? By inscribing the very reference to the code into the encoded message, as one of its elements.* Of course, we encounter here the standard problem of self-reference: since the letter is written in blue, is not its entire content true? The solution is that the very fact that the lack of red ink is mentioned signals that is SHOULD have been written in red ink. The nice point here is that this mention of the lack of the red ink produces the effect of truth *independently of its own literal truth*: even if red ink really WAS available; the lie that it is unavailable was the only way to get the true message across in this specific condition of censorship. And is this not the matrix of critical philosophy, not only in "totalitarian" conditions of censorship, but perhaps even more, in the more refined conditions of liberal censorship? One starts with agreeing that one has all the freedoms one wants-and then one merely adds that the only thing missing it the "red ink": we "feel free" because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom. What this lack of red ink means is that, today, all the main terms we use to designate the present conflict-"war on terror," "democracy and freedom," "human rights," etc. etc.-are FALSE terms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think it. In this precise sense, our "freedoms" themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom-that is what philosophy should make us see.

Excerpts from: Žižek, S., "Philosophy, the "unknown knowns", and the public use of reason", in *Topoi*, vol. 25, no. 1–2 (2006): 137–42.

If You See Yourself, Kill Him

An interview with Johan Grimonprez and Tom McCarthy by Alexander Provan

July 2009

Alexander Provan: Johan, for your latest work, *Double Take* (2009), you collaborated with Tom. It must have been a tight collaboration given that Tom wrote the story upon which the film is based. How did this collaboration come about?

Johan Grimonprez: Tom and I first met at a 2005 screening of my film *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1997) at the British Film Institute. Tom, who had recently published his novel *Remainder*,[1] was on the post-screening panel and I was in the audience. I was then invited to join the panel on stage.

Tom McCarthy: [On the phone] I remember that an academic complained that the film "didn't render ideology as ideology", to which I responded by comparing its structure to Greek tragedy, with the modern terrorist as Antigone, "who sets herself against the state by invoking a higher, more divine law".

1 McCarthy, T., *Remainder* (Paris: Metronome Press, 2005).

Zeppelin accident, early 20th Century (*Double Take*, 2009)

A.P.: The first words we hear in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* are "Shouldn't death be a swan dive, graceful, white-winged and smooth, leaving the surface undisturbed?" Yet for much of the film death is deferred, the eventual crash is delayed.

J.G.: The film is more than one about terrorist acts. Rather, it explores the dramatic structure prevalent in the collusive relationship between the terrorists and the media. The advent of the airplane and cinema were concurrent—the technologies infiltrated the realm of dreams simultaneously. And with the appearance of television, the image of the airplane gave way to the image of the airplane disaster, and the drama of flight developed around this narrative of impending catastrophe, where the postponed disaster of a hijacking gives the drama room to evolve. That's why there are so many images in the film that deal with floating, being between two states, between ascent and descent, hanging in the air. That is a crucial metaphor.

A.P.: The protagonist in *Remainder* is also hanging in the air—inhabiting a space between the past and the present—for much of the novel, as he meticulously reconstructs the scene of the accident that has damaged his memory, an accident about which we know little beyond the fact that it "involved something falling from the sky".

T.M.: Both *Remainder* and *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* start with something falling from the sky. In the film, one of the first images is this stunning picture of a house falling from the sky and crashing to Earth. And in fact, at the end of *Remainder*, the hero hijacks an airplane and is flying it in a figure eight just to get that moment where it kind of turns, where it bends, where it achieves zero gravity—that moment of being suspended in the air, held above gravity, weightless.

A.P.: Which is the physical manifestation of his mental state throughout the novel.

T.M.: Exactly. He's in a holding pattern between two catastrophes. I'm pretty sure I had seen *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* when I wrote *Remainder*.

J.G.: And I read *Remainder* when I was starting on *Double Take*.

T.M.: The figure of the terrorist outlined in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* appears in *Remainder*. There's a character named Naz, the "facilitator", who sets up a kind of plane-bombing for the hero—or antihero—at the end. But in a way, terror, in both *Remainder* and *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, is a metaphysical condition. I was thinking about a line from Rilke, from the beginning of the *Duino Elegies* (1923): "For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we are still just able to endure,/and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us./Every angel is terrifying." It's an amazing line. Reversed, it's almost like, "Every terrorist is an angel."

A.P.: Which is equally true—a kind of angel.

T.M.: There's a kind of beauty that terrorizes us, a kind of terror that is beautiful. After September 11, people like Stockhausen—who called it "the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos"—got into so much trouble for drawing attention to the most blatantly, glaring obvious aspect of the event, which was its aesthetic dimension. I was talking soon after to the Czech artist David Černý—he was the one who painted the tank pink in Prague back in the early 1990s—and his take on it was that they got the aesthetics wrong. "The planes shouldn't have exploded at the last minute," he said. "They should have dumped their fuel so they just stuck in the tower!" He had a purely aesthetic take on it, and the political dimension was utterly irrelevant for him.

A.P.: It's interesting that you mention angels. In the biblical tradition, avenging angels take two forms: those who carry out God's justice on earth ("The riches unjustly accumulated shall be vomited up; an angel shall drag him out of his house") and those dark angels who are themselves born from Satan's fall from Heaven. I think these contradictory images are part of what make the figure of the terrorist in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* so seductive.

J.G.: Ah, the beautiful ones, they hurt you every time! Or so Prince claims. But I don't think there's aesthetic redemption here. Many of the skyjackers—especially Rima Tannous Eissa, who hijacked the Sabena plane in 1972, and Leila Khaled, who hijacked TWA Flight 840 in 1969—both of whom look like the women in a Godard film (the beautiful ones!)—take a very fierce pro-Palestinian position in interviews from that time. They say, "You're all seduced by the rhetoric of the media." Then they've produced this entire spectacle which is itself a terribly seductive media event.

T.M.: There's another kind of mythical figure of the angel. Walter Benjamin describes the angel in Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (1920), who's looking backwards as he travels forwards—as if he's facing backwards in a plane—as the angel of history.[2] Where we might see one event, followed by another event, and then another event, he just sees this continual, amassing catastrophe, which is what we call history. The angel in this case is not the person who causes the disaster, but the person who understands it.

A.P.: Johan, were you thinking about these differing conceptions of the generative forces of history during the production of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*?

J.G.: Well, I was thinking about it on less of a holy and more of a profane level, in terms of the seduction of the commercial image. Maybe that's why communism fell, because the spectacle began to be projected into society differently, with the seduction of the commercial competing with the seduction of the political. Heiner Müller, the great German dramatist, has said that the commer-

2 Benjamin, W., *Gesammelte Schriften I:2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974).

cial was the most loaded political message East Germany inadvertently received from the West. In *Double Take*, we've literally inserted five breaks for Folgers coffee commercials. They keep you from getting bored, but bit by bit they're inscribed into the narrative and subvert the plot.

A.P.: One of DeLillo's lines from *Mao II* (1991), "What terrorists gain, novelists lose", is repeated throughout *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. But the end of the film seems to suggest that the media is now the ultimate author of fictions that transform themselves into events as they're broadcast.

J.G.: DeLillo's narrator suggests that the terrorist is better equipped to play the media, and traffic in this sort of seductive imagery. So he concludes that his role as a writer may be obsolete. But *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* follows that trajectory even further, suggesting that the media controls the spectacle, and has hijacked the hijacker.

T.M.: The disaster is not taking place in the airplane with the machine gun, it's happening with the camera and the microphone. That's the vehicle, and also the space in which the disaster is visited upon us. The relationship between death, mediation and technology is a triangle. You couldn't have one without the others.

A.P.: *Mao II* is coloured by this anxiety about novelists not being able to captivate the cultural narrative anymore, and about whether literature is still capable of producing events in the same way.

T.M.: I think DeLillo is taking a very nineteenth-century model of the writer—the kind of person who declares the way the world is and maybe changes it through that declaration. The writer is perhaps obsolete in that sense, and the terrorist is a good index of that obsolescence. But the twentieth-century modernist—like Beckett, for example, or Blanchot, or Alex Trocchi—recognize that obsolescence, and argue that the task for literature is now to accomplish its own dying, not to contain the world heroically and serve it up to itself, but to manage or mediate a kind of slipping away into silence.

It's interesting that you chose that passage from *Mao II*, Johan, because it's about the status of the writer, and you're making a film about television. The way that literature understands the event is quite interesting, because way before technological modernity came along, the "event" in literature had always had the aspect of something that was scripted and could be activated—but an event doesn't really happen out of nothing. This goes way back to Oedipus Rex. The event has already happened—he married his mother, the event was scripted by the gods, even before his birth—and what happens in the play is the archaeology of that event. The only action available to Oedipus is to do what he was always going to do anyhow.

A.P.: In so many of Hitchcock's films, the general action is scripted. You know there's a dead woman waiting for you at the end of the film.

T.M.: Yeah, in order to die again. Like with Orpheus and Eurydice—she's already died, but he recovers her in order to kill her again, effectively.

A.P.: Beyond Oedipus and Orpheus, traditional communal or mythological narratives are truly scripted. Each time you tell that story, it's the same—the action and the plot are inevitable. Of course, these narratives actually differ with every telling because of who's telling it and how. The context changes, the narrative slips, the meaning is altered.

T.M.: You get that in modernism, too, in a play like Beckett's *Happy Days* (1961), which consists of a woman half buried in the sand, who does the same set of actions every day. She takes out her handbag, a mirror, a shaving brush, and a gun. But she's aware of it. She says, "I am now going to take out the mirror, I am now going to take out the gun, and I did it yesterday, and the day before, and I'll do it tomorrow." There's this sense of

time not moving in a line, but in a loop, and as a protagonist you enact these moments within the loop, even if you're conscious of enacting them. Still, there's always the possibility of breaking out of the loop. Towards the end of *Happy Days*, Winnie's husband takes the gun and is crawling towards her like he might shoot her, but he doesn't—so everything is going to repeat again. The script may be changed, but not escaped.

J.G.: Though *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* declares the death of the novelist, it's also based on a novel. It's the same with *Double Take*, which is all about the rise of television at a time when cinemas were closing down and Hollywood had to redefine itself, but takes on Borges and Hitchcock as its authors. The film is rooted in a story of a earlier project *Looking for Alfred*, which goes like this: Hitchcock walks around the block and drops his hat. He picks it up, walks around the block, and meets himself picking up his hat. He continues around the block and meets himself seeing himself picking up his hat.

A.P.: *Double Take* contains the injunction, written by Tom, "If you meet your double, you should kill him", and towards the end, one Hitchcock holds a gun to the head of another Hitchcock.

T.M.: Yes, they're in a John Woo-style stand-off. I can't even remember where I heard that, but it's an old mythological dictum. If you see your doppelganger, you're seeing a premonition of your own death—one of you is going to die. The double is a constant theme in literature: *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (James Hogg, 1824), *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley, 1818), *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Robert Louis Stevenson, 1886). By the end of *Frankenstein*, the monster and the creator are just chasing each other around the Arctic regions. They can't even be distinguished from each other—they just merge into one black, fleshy mass.

J.G.: In your book *Tintin and the Secret of Literature* you take on the characters of Thomson and Thompson, the identical, but unrelated, detectives.

T.M.: Derrida mentions them in *The Post Card*. He writes about how they repeat each other in what is, for him, a figure of originary repetition.

J.G.: That's where we're arriving in the digital age. *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* was about the transition from film to video, to around-the-clock news, while *Double Take* is about skipping from one image to another—instead of rewinding or fast-forwarding—or zapping, and how that makes you relate in a different way to the image.

A.P.: Throughout *Double Take*, the US and the USSR are represented as doubles. With the introduction of television, these doubles could see each other.

J.G.: I grew up in Belgium, jammed in between the USSR and the US and their respective ideologies. You're always split between two languages, Flemish and French, so you live with subtitles. When you buy a bottle of milk, it always comes with a translation in the other language. When I was growing up, I would watch *Star Trek* and *The A-Team* with subtitles. So I always related to this doubleness, this experience of living at a certain distance from the original—which can be seen in Tintin's Thomson and Thompson, who cut a very Belgian figure. That's also where Magritte's "this is not a pipe" underneath the image of a pipe comes from. It's a subtitle just like the ones you see on Belgian television.

A.P.: This means that you live with the constant sense of decoding the information presented to you.

J.G.: Exactly. And that may be why identity in Belgium is so strongly tied to irony.

T.M.: It's funny that you say irony, because Paul de Man, the literary critic, argues that irony is a direct response to what he calls *dédoublement*, or doubling.

J.G.: He's Belgian, right?

T.M.: Absolutely! He's Belgian. But he moved to America and became an English-language speaker. He wrote this really brilliant essay in which he says that the basis for comedy is doubling. So comedy is basically, like, a man falls over in the street, and we watch him and we laugh. That's basically it, right? But de Man says that some people can be both the man who trips and the man who is aware of the trip and laughs. Only a special few can do this, only artists and philosophers. And this is both a blessing, because we're elevated to the position, but at the same time it's a curse, because we're splitting, having both experiences—we're doubled, and we can never be an authentic, singular self. Our only response to this condition can be to repeat the experience of doubling on more and more self-conscious levels. And he calls that irony, which he says is the mode of the novel.

J.G.: That's also what happens in the introductions to Hitchcock's TV show, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955–62).

T.M.: Totally. There it's very funny, but very melancholic as well. Hitchcock enters a Hitchcock lookalike competition and gets eliminated in the first round. In another scene, he's led away by psychiatric nurses who think he's mad for thinking he's Hitchcock.

J.G.: It's sad. But if he didn't lose, it wouldn't be ironic. The thing is, they're all Hitchcock—he's losing to himself. He's really embodying the Thomson/Thompson principle, being the one who trips and at the same time laughs. In 1955, when Hitchcock was approached to do the series, playing himself and introducing the films that were shown, he was very much hammering away at the format. He had reservations about the fact that stories were told differently on TV than in cinema, that the films were being interrupted by a commercial break. But at the same time, he was inventing the medium, or already reinventing it. He would talk about the commercials in a sardonic way, trashing the sponsor. I read recently that he was also trying to come up with a way of doing the commercials himself. He would vacuum the whole set, and then at one point it would explode, or he would brush his teeth and his teeth would fall out.

T.M.: In the 1990s there was an advertisement for car insurance in the UK that was made using still frames of Hitchcock. They put the frames together in order to make him say, "Buy this type of insurance—it's very good." So he's kind of the Frankenstein's monster who was reanimated long after his death.

A.P.: I remember something similar happened to John Wayne. There was this technology that was introduced in the mid- to late 1990s with which you could revive dead celebrities and put words in their mouths without having to get anyone's permission. It was cheaper than a lookalike.

J.G.: No other figure is out there to such a degree as Hitchcock. He's proliferated to such a degree that there are many different Hitchcocks, as Thomas Elsaesser has written—the Nietzschean one, the Heideggerian one, the Foucauldian one, the Lacanian one. I imagine them sitting around the dinner table, having their own discussion.

A.P.: It's interesting that these people, these characters, despite their own deaths, are still caught in the scripts that have been created for them, and that are still being created for them. Ultimately, you'd think that characters who become conscious that they're trapped in a narrative loop would want to escape. But even death is no escape.

J.G.: Towards the end of *Double Take*, Hitchcock realizes that he's going to be killed. And he is killed. But then the loop repeats itself, and suddenly it's 1980, and the young Hitchcock is now the old Hitchcock, threatened by the younger version of himself. But isn't that the paradox of time travel? That if you go back in time, there is either a parallel timeline or the other has to be replaced?

T.M.: This is what Chris Marker's film *La Jetée* is about. He travels back in time to try to save everything, but what he ends up doing is killing himself all over again, or witnessing his own death and failing to stop it. The only way you can see yourself is dead.

A.P.: Freud wrote, "It is impossible to imagine our own death, and whenever we attempt to do so, we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators."

T.M.: Exactly. It's the one event that can't be contained ontologically or conceptually. Cinema literally moves in a loop. It's a spool, a reel. Joyce has this bit in *Finnegans Wake* where he talks about the real world, spelling it "reel". He was completely perplexed by the cinema in that book, and its circularity. But it seems that at the end of *Double Take*, there's a surprise ending. You think all the way through that cinema is going to be killed by television or television is going to kill cinema or America is going to kill Russia or Russia is going to kill America. But at the end, it's the third one, the new one, the younger one, that comes along and kills them all—which I guess in media terms would be the internet, and YouTube, which in the film is represented in some ways by that wonderful Donald Rumsfeld clip where he talks about known unknowns, and unknown unknowns, and known knowns.

A.P.: The film enters into the Cold War through scenes from the televised "kitchen debate" between Nixon and Khrushchev in 1959, during which Nixon boasted of the US's superior domestic appliances. The analogy to the here and now is pretty clear, known unknowns aside.

J.G.: Well, the sense of fear that was projected out into society then is revisited in the end. What was going on in 1962 happened again in the 1980s, and is happening again now. You see Reagan and Gorbachev, but today it's not much different. As we were finishing editing the film, media was fixated on the so-called New Cold War.

A.P.: But the way in which events were produced changed dramatically in the time period that you track in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, because of the ability to organize an event around the arrival of the video camera.

J.G.: Yes, but the arrival of the commercial break had a different impact, which was further enabled by cable, video and the remote control, so that we were able to zap, and even zap away from commercials; whereas zapping—or rather skipping nowadays, with digital media—has affected the way we mediate reality. Why were we talking about the death of the novel? Because of television. Why are we talking about the death of television? Because of the internet. Everything accelerates, and the novelist or filmmaker has to position himself within that accelerated world where everything is now measured in terms of download time. Now that doesn't mean those ways of mediation will disappear, they just coexist, one affecting the other—just as in the 1980s, CNN utilized Hollywood codes to stage the news, and vice versa.

A.P.: Tom, has this sense of acceleration affected the way in which you write or consider writing novels?

T.M.: Not really. I agree with Johan that every media, every art form, is continually negotiating itself out of obsolescence. The writer has to confront the gauntlet of other media and all the other ways of figuring symbolic information out there. Literature is, and has always been, aware of its own impossibility. You can trace this right back to the beginning of the novel. *Don Quixote* is a book about how novels don't work anymore. This guy tries to live like he's in a novel, and it just doesn't work; there's a sort of systematic failure. With so much of Joyce, or later writers like William Burroughs or Thomas Pynchon, they're saying, "What do we do now that we've got cinema?" You can see the same crisis in painting when photography comes along, which has been a good thing. After that crisis you have artists like Gerhard Richter really coming to grips with what it could mean to paint after photography, after mass production.

A.P.: This anxiety is manifest in various forms in *Double Take*. The Folgers commercials feature a woman who's having trouble preparing coffee to her husband's liking, a suspenseful situation made all the more unnerving by the use of Hitchcock's famous

line, "Television has brought murder back into the home, where it belongs."

J.G.: Yeah, you have all these guys talking about their rockets, and then you have all these women who can't make coffee, but by the end the tables turn: the coffee turns into poison. Truffaut talked about how Hitchcock's films always portrayed murder as an act of love, and vice versa. For me, that's the crux of *Double Take*—these contradictions, one act masquerading as its opposite. At the end of the film, the Folgers commercial is subverted in such a way that its message, "Tastes good as fresh-perked", becomes coded as part of a murder plot.

Adapted from: Provan, A., "If you see yourself, kill him: Johan Grimonprez & Tom McCarthy interviewed by Alexander Provan", in *Bidoun Magazine*, no. 18 (July 2009), 32–9.

Parable of the Palace

Jorge Luis Borges

1956

That day the Yellow Emperor showed his palace to the poet. Little by little, step by step, they left behind, in long procession, the first westward-facing terraces which, like the jagged hemicycles of an almost unbounded amphitheater, stepped down into a paradise, a garden whose metal mirrors and intertwined hedges of juniper were a prefiguration of the labyrinth. Cheerfully they lost themselves in it—at first as though condescending to a game, but then not without some uneasiness, because its straight *allées* suffered from a very gentle but continuous curvature, so that secretly the avenues were circles. Around midnight, observation of the planets and the opportune sacrifice of a tortoise allowed them to escape the bonds of that region that seemed enchanted, though not to free themselves from that sense of being lost that accompanied them to the end. They wandered next through antechambers and courtyards and libraries, and then through a hexagonal room with a water clock, and one morning, from a tower, they made out a man of stone, whom later they lost sight of forever. In canoes hewn from sandalwood, they crossed many gleaming rivers—or perhaps a single river many times. The imperial entourage would pass and people would fall to their knees and bow their heads to the ground, but one day the courtiers came

to an island where one man did not do this, for he had never seen the Celestial Son before, and the executioner had to decapitate him. The eyes of the emperor and poet looked with indifference on black tresses and black dances and golden masks; the real merged and mingled with the dreamed—or the real, rather, was one of the shapes the dream took. It seemed impossible that the earth should be anything but gardens, fountains, architectures, and forms of splendour. Every hundred steps a tower cut the air; to the eye, their colour was identical, but the first of them was yellow and the last was scarlet; that was how delicate the gradations were and how long the series. It was at the foot of the penultimate tower that the poet (who had appeared untouched by the spectacles which all the others had so greatly marvelled at) recited the brief composition that we link indissolubly to his name today, the words which, as the most elegant historians never cease repeating, garnered the poet immortality and death. The text has been lost; there are those who believe that it consisted of but a single line; others, of a single word. What we do know—however incredible it may be—is that within the poem lay the entire enormous palace, whole and to the least detail, with every venerable porcelain it contained and every scene on every porcelain, all the lights and shadows of its twilights, and every forlorn or happy moment of the glorious dynasties of mortals, gods, and dragons that had lived within it through all its endless past. Everyone fell silent; then the emperor spoke. "You have stolen my palace!" he cried, and the executioner's iron scythe mowed down the poet's life. Others tell the story differently. The world cannot contain two things that are identical; no sooner, they say, had the poet uttered his poem than the palace disappeared, as though in a puff of smoke, wiped from the face of the earth by the final syllable. Such legends, of course, are simply literary fictions. The poet was the emperor's slave and died a slave; his composition fell into oblivion because it merited oblivion, and his descendants still seek, though they shall never find, the word for the universe.

Borges, J.L., "Parable of the Palace", in *Collected Fictions*, trans. A. Hurley (London: Penguin, 1999), 317–18.

If You Meet Your Double, You Should Kill Him

Johan Grimonprez on *Double Take* by Mark Peranson

Spring 2009

Mark Peranson: *As a media artist who turns media into art, and makes art about media, your career is a double take—jumping from the cinema to the art gallery and back. Your films also inspire double takes in the viewer.* dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y (1997) *shows how terrorists use the media, and vice versa, fostering a state of panic and paranoia within people; in* Double Take (2009) *the same psychological relationship is transferred, then doubled to the US and USSR during the Cold War, to Alfred Hitchcock and popular culture. Why Alfred Hitchcock?*

Johan Grimonprez: Just as from a contemporary perspective there is no one "history", so too are there a multitude of Hitchcocks. So I was interested in making a film about Hitchcock that was not "about" Hitchcock per se, but where he is used as a mirror, both of himself, and for a period of history. For what was the Cold War if not one long, painful MacGuffin?[1]

1 MacGuffin: "an object, event, or character in a film or story that serves to set and keep the plot in motion despite usually lacking intrinsic importance" (Merriam Webster Dictionary. Accessed 20 December 2010: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/macguffin)

M.P.: *In* dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y *the feeling of the sublime is driven home through copious quoting of Don DeLillo: in* Double Take, *it's inscribed in Hitchcock's voice, via his lead-ins and promos, or via a voice double who speaks while a physical Hitchcock double appears on screen.*

J.G.: It's the Borgesian confrontation with the Other, but it doesn't comes without a warning: "If you meet your double, you should kill him." Maybe that is why the paranoid state of mind is in a way often the most grounded because it constantly questions and reevaluates given notions of "reality" and our political status quo.

M.P.: *As an artist with a keen grasp of the political and the social, you forego interpretation, dancing with density in a way that's far from stodgy: pleasure leaps out amid the seriousness, and, in a way, Hitchcock is reborn, freed from the academy's shackles.* Double Take *zips and zaps like the most addictive of television shows.*

J.G.: I didn't invent this style, CNN, MTV and YouTube did. Just as the Master himself kept three sizes of suits to allow for his frequent weight changes, I too am inspired to zap through eclectic footage to bring the absurdity of it to the surface. For example, *Double Take* ends with the footage of Donald Rumsfeld's infamous riddle about knowns and unknowns. It is clear that the commoditization of fear for political gain is happening again, only this time the Other has changed. History is written to make sense of the present and as DeLillo wrote, "Nothing happens until it is consumed."[2]

M.P.: *Is your art practice based in activism?*

J.G.: That would be a reductionist reading, but there's an activist component. I've been very unhappy with the state of the world, so, yes, let's change it! What's going on upsets me, so more than

2 DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (London: Penguin, 1992), 44.

ever we should question what's going on in the media. The mainstream media don't correspond to the actual state of the world. And then the repressed comes back to haunt you in the form of *Independence Day* (1996), flying saucers into the World Trade Center. For me that was one interpretation of 9/11. Very often when we were analysing the early nineties with the collapse of the Soviet Union, that image of the alien kept coming back, and the imaginary Other of America was not filled in. Then 9/11 reshaped those boundaries.

M.P.: *So if there is this activism behind* Double Take, *the film can be read as you writing (or rewriting) history with the war on terror in mind, and using the beginning of the Cold War as a parallel cautionary tale.*

J.G.: Definitely it's a component of it. It's part of our world and it's so hard to deny that. When you put gasoline in your tank, it's part of your everyday reality.

M.P.: *Why not make a film about that, why bury it in something historical?*

J.G.: Well, apparently you got the message.

M.P.: *At the beginning of the film there is the image of the man falling from the Empire State Building, one might say that's a pretty clear allusion to 9/11.*

J.G.: At one point the film began with an anecdote that we found in an article from *The New York Times* from 11 September 1948: on that day, hundreds of birds crashed into the Empire State Building, landing onto Fifth Avenue. But I don't know why I took it out… The film is now showing in a gallery in New York, and when you walk in that quote is on the wall.

M.P.: *What is the difference for you between a feature film and an installation?* Double Take *also began as another installation,* Looking for Alfred *(2005), about the casting of the Hitchcock doubles.*

J.G.: I think what's more important is the general social context in which the work is read. For example during Tiananmen, the Chinese were watching CNN to compare it to Chinese television to look at the contradictions. But in the second Iraq War CNN was inscribed as a tool of war for Americans, something completely different. So the point of reception, the context in which something is shown, makes you read it in a different way, more so than the format. For *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* the way it was shown in Israel was very different than in New York.

M.P.: *In* Double Take *you quote Hitchcock's winking critique of television—it's like a gun, your enjoyment depends on what side you're on. When television is analysed in an art (or filmic art) context, it usually comes with a wholesale critique. You imply that it's not the medium itself that is problematic, maybe because the new threat to traditional media arrived with the internet.*

J.G.: But television is such a big word. Just like how you can't say "history" but "histories"—interpreted by whatever time period or geographical area as something different. Think of American television versus European television. Let's narrow it down to what's going on in the film: It traces the rise of that medium at a moment where Hollywood needed to find itself, and how Hitchcock helped to define that medium. Because he suddenly had to take into account that a sponsor will interrupt the broadcast with a commercial. He came to terms with that by laughing at it, presenting a kind of anti-commercial, or making a joke or a pun on the whole commercialization of the television landscape. At one point he was joking that he would do the commercial himself, like for a toothpaste company, and he'd brush his teeth and they'd fall out. The sponsor would complain, and he'd say, "It's going to sell more toothpaste!" But he wasn't allowed to do that. CNN adapted to the commercial as well, it's called the "drop-in style" where they repeat morsels of news every half hour, so if you zap and return you haven't missed anything. In *High Anxiety*, Patricia Mellencamp does a Freudian analysis of this where she sees it as an obsessive behaviour, how our culture has become obsessed with catastrophe to the point of neurosis.[3]

M.P.: *And* High Anxiety *is of course Mel Brooks's Hitchcock parody.*[4]

J.G.: Mel Brooks told a funny story where he went out to dinner with Hitchcock, and Hitchcock ordered a steak—well, an appetizer, a steak and a dessert—and they finished, and then Hitchcock says, "Let's do it again", and ordered another full meal.

M.P.: *There's so much that you could mention about Hitchcock, he's almost an endless well, so to confine yourself from 1957 to 1963 must have been crucial.*

J.G.: *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* runs from 1955–62, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* starts in 1962. James Allardice was a writer for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and he wrote all the lead-ins. He died in 1966, so maybe that's why the introductions stopped. He was also Hitchcock's speechwriter—his double in a way that he came up with the rhetoric, the jokes, and the idea of the doubling. The same with the MacGuffin story, it's actually a Scottish screenwriter, Angus MacPhail, who coined it.

M.P.: *And during that period is also the first time when Truffaut interviewed Hitchcock.*

J.G.: On the set of *The Birds* on 12 August 1962, which is also the date of my birth.

M.P.: *At times though you do fudge the historical record a bit… such as when you intercut the promo for* The Birds *with the news story on the launching of Sputnik.*

3 Mellencamp, P., *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, and Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
4 Brooks, M., *High Anxiety* (94 min/colour, 1977).

J.G.: Sure, but it's not that far off, because when you talk about 1957, it's also the time he started the TV series, and I lump *The Birds* in with that period, and his relationship to television. In 1959 he shot *Psycho* with his crew from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Yes, it's not always accurate chronologically; the film jumps back and forth based on what's appropriate for any moment. He introduced *The Birds* by looking at the sky, so I cut to the paranoia that came with Sputnik; it made sense. In 1962 people were still freaked out… America wasn't far behind in the space race, but the paranoia was there. They drilled it into the television audience and the cinema newsreels. It was still the moment when television took shape, so that's also why I jump forth back in time.

M.P.: *But this also speaks to its unclassifiability; you can't simply call it a documentary, a fiction, or an essay film—it has all these things together.*

J.G.: In the way we actually construct our reality, or document that reality, there are always fictions that proliferate, there are always things that you project, and the way that we construct reality is based on fictions and paradigms that coexist—it's that way with Robert J. Flaherty. The wife of Nanook is his mistress, and the igloo is not a real igloo, they cut it in half.[5] And, on the other hand, sometimes when you see a film that's fiction, it grabs you, because the violence is there, you get moved, closer to what the feeling really is. I like to put those things on their head, because they affect and inform one another. And CNN now dramatizes the news. The war is a complete fiction, but the news is supposed to be "documentary". It's so crucial to question those boundaries. For me the labels are secondary. *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* was trying to explore the shift at the end of the '70s and beginning of the '80s when they got rid of the Bolex and took the video camera into the field, and bit by bit our relationship to video imagery shifted.

5 Johan Grimonprez refers to Robert J. Flaherty's 1922 film *Nanook of the North* (76 min/b&w).

M.P.: *Do you think the media has become more a part of the power structure since the '60s? Or are people more desensitized to the imagery today?*

J.G.: At the beginning of the '80s they began controlling who from the press got invited to the White House. With the first Iraq War Colin Powell said that you can't win the war without winning the media; in the second Iraq War they were so conscious about it. It's also crucial to talk about which geography you're talking about—if you were born in Iraq, the images would mean more to you. Hitchcock got that reaction a lot, that he desensitized people to violence, especially around *Psycho*. And at one point a father wrote him a letter telling Hitchcock that his daughter wouldn't take a shower after *Psycho*, and Hitchcock responded, "Well, send her to the dry cleaner." But maybe we did reach a threshold…

M.P.: *And with television Hitchcock brought murder back into the American living room where it always belonged.*

J.G.: The film is sort of about that as well, but on a more personal level, like two guys talking about their characters, and how they kill them… maybe that's a poetic level, but it's weird to go from talking about the Iraq War to talking about poetry. But Truffaut wrote how Hitchcock portrayed his murder scenes like they were love scenes, and vice versa. It's like exploring what the boundaries of that narrative might be—you push the boundaries of what a love story might stand for.

M.P.: *It's also this mirror thing—if you have a double you can love it and hate it.*

J.G.: But television is a mirror as well. When images come back from Iraq, it's a mirror that we don't want to acknowledge. Then it comes back to haunt us on another level. It's a tough one, the power of the image… And Hitchcock was very much aware of that.

M.P.: *Does the fascination with Hitchcock come from the films themselves? The persona? A combination?*

J.G.: A combination, for sure. But, first of all, he went through everything, starting off in the silent period, the black and white period, crossed from Britain to the US, played on television, tried 3D, Panavision, etc. He went through the whole evolution of the medium: if one character would epitomize the history of cinema, it would be Hitchcock. He worked with all the clichés and metaphors… maybe also because he was such an influence on the Nouvelle Vague. And some of his best films have the typical symbols of the fairy tale, like *Notorious* (1946). But more than we realize now, he set forth a lot of our contemporary vocabulary. *North by Northwest* (1959) is a combination of spy thriller and comedy, which set forth the James Bond genre.

M.P.: *To talk about the editing for a second, you build complexity by repeating scenes in different contexts, such as the Folgers commercials.*

J.G.: Ah, again that's obsessive behaviour, like I was talking about with CNN. I thought it was fun to have five commercial breaks, with real commercials. At one point there's the ad where the coffee pot turns around, and at that point in the conversation the coffee becomes the poison—it's metaphorical as it's the advertising that's going to kill you. In the conversation they say television killed cinema. That's what Hitchcock would say, not me. But the obsessive behaviour of images being repeated is like the drop-in style, but when they're repeated they're set in a different context. You would be surprised at a lot of the things that I left out. For example, we have a Folgers commercial from the eighties with Rod Taylor, the star of *The Birds*.

M.P.: *How does Borges fit into the project?*

J.G.: Borges was a big part of *Looking for Alfred*. Which was about Magritte too, who is also a magical realist, or symbolist. I relate to Borges as a Belgian, as doubling in Belgian culture is very present: everything is subtitled. So "This is not a pipe" is a literally very Belgian thing, as when you see *Star Trek* or a Hollywood film on Saturday afternoon you have to read subtitles. So you're already removed. And there's no such thing as a Belgian language, there's either Flemish or French, so as a Belgian you always have to relate to something in a distanced way, with a kind of irony.

M.P.: *Also in terms of the structure of the narration, which is a kind of postmodern narration, like the literature of Borges…*

J.G.: Well, first you have to define what you mean by postmodern, and as I still believe in a utopian project, which is very much in the film, I don't know if you'd call it postmodern… It's the same with *The Birds*, which lends itself to so many interpretations, because Hitchcock refused to put "The End" at the end, so it's open-ended. One analysis of *The Birds* is that they stand for television, Žižek says *The Birds* are libidinized by the repressed atmosphere of the relationship between the mother and the son, and so on. I think maybe I'm still a modernist—*dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* is very moral. CNN is postmodern.

M.P.: I was talking more about structure.

J.G.: I would call the Borgesian structure more magical realism. You know that Borges and Hitchcock were both born in August 1899, at the beginning, when the Lumière brothers were showing their films. Magritte was born in 1898, he's one year older than both of them. The shots in *Double Take* where Hitchcock is walking through the long corridors to go meet himself were shot in Brussels at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, where Magritte has a long history… Maybe that's where my background comes in. For Borges, the doubling also has to do with how language doubles reality. For Hitchcock it came to me first through the cameos, how he became a kind of double agent, and also plays on the doubles in the TV introductions. But the double is a very well-known literary figure. Borges wrote the story that is the basis for

the script of *Double Take* twice, once as *The Other* (1972) and later as *August 25, 1983* (1983). Dostoyevsky, funnily enough, also rewrote *The Double* (1846) as it wasn't well received.

M.P.: *That also brings to mind Gus Van Sant's remake of* Psycho *(1998), or, of course, the fact that Hitchcock himself reshot* Blackmail *(1929) and remade* The Man Who Knew Too Much *(1934/1956).*

J.G.: Even on *The Simpsons*, you have it—Bart Simpson meets his double. Maybe it's been overused, but maybe it's also part of our consciousness. Maybe the nature of language, the idea of the double is built into the way we conceive and can talk about reality. I think the film has this philosophical application as well. It's also a doubling of what history is. We forget so easily that what was going on in the '60s is what's going on now, with nuclear proliferation and paranoia with Iran. Paranoia is turned into fear, and fear into a commodity.

M.P.: *And how popular culture can be an unconscious vehicle to transmit this paranoia… One thing that struck me is how Hitchcock's work, maybe unconsciously, stoked this Cold War paranoia, like* The Birds*, or, with Cuba,* Topaz *(1969). Or is it about how certain cultural objects take on the meaning of what's in the air, the social context of the time?*

J.G.: Or maybe it goes back and forth, yeah? Like Žižek would say, he libidinized the story, making a film about Cuba to be about sexual politics. That's how he makes you care about it. When I was editing I'd pick up on stuff and only later realize how present it is in the conversation today. It's invested with meaning, but maybe you pick it up in an unconscious way, and when it's out there you let the material take you. It's how novelists say the character takes over and dictates how the story is being told. With *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, I started off wanting to tell a story about saying goodbye, but the material took me in a different direction, to airplane hijacking and terrorism. This film was about the history of happy endings, and it became something completely different. Gaumont used to make films for France that had happy endings, and for the Russian audience they'd make a tragic ending. It's not explicit in *Double Take*, but from the beginning of the '60s—and I think it's related to television—a lot of directors in Hollywood started to take away "The End". The idea of what an "end" is had to be redefined with television. Like what Borges writes about the book of sand, you keep turning the pages and it keeps going, you can never finish it.[6] Television is like that—it' s an image that doesn't end. And I watched as many *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* episodes that I could, then, bit by bit, you realize, oh, he has a lookalike contest, or he's walking off with his head, or playing his brother, or dresses up as a woman. Then you are confronted by Ron Burrage, the Hitchcock double. I was invited by the Hammer in Los Angeles, and they set me up in the UCLA archive. So I started researching that time period of *The Birds*, and stumbled onto Sputnik, and the first man in space is in 1961, right before *The Birds*. And the Bay of Pigs happens just after Gagarin got into space, on 12 April 1961. Also the Kitchen Debate, that I stumbled on in UCLA, that was the first summit on television. And how does it all relate? From the beginning of the '60s we started thinking about time in a very different way, we started thinking about "The End" in a very different way. Television is on when you have food, or you can go to the bathroom and come back, at that point you began to relate to the image in a very different way.

M.P.: Double Take *also seems to me to be a post-internet narrative, if you will. Look at how storytelling has changed since the internet, even Hollywood films have become much more complex, and it has to do with how people's minds have adapted in a way to this situation.*

J.G.: Exactly. *Double Take* takes into account the 'YouTube-ization' of the world. Even if it's not explicitly about that, it does analyse the intrinsic relationships between two or even three coexisting

6 Borges, J.L., "The Book of Sand" in *The Book of Sand and Shakespeare's Memory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2001).

media, and the time slippages that occur between them. For example, the rupture instigated by the commercial break is as important as Hitchcock meeting his double from a different time period.

Cinema is about an unfolding reel in time—at its most basal, it is a medium that makes use of time in an abstract way in order to construct a narrative. Storytelling will always be an interpretation of time.

Adapted from: Peranson, M., "If You Meet Your Double, You Should Kill Him: Johan Grimonprez on Double Take", in *Cinema Scope*, no. 38 (Spring 2009), 14–18.

"Casting Around": Hitchcock's Absence

Thomas Elsaesser

2007

But in his Absence he still Commands the Scene

In January 2001, just after his death had been announced, I noticed, on the back of the Dutch film magazine *Skrien*'s Christmas number, a photo by Johan van der Keuken, renowned Amsterdam documentarist. It showed a bend in a single-lane tarmac road, cut into rocks like a wedge, on a fairly steep incline. A holiday snap, taken in southern Spain, where an ailing van der Keuken had fled to escape the inclement weather at home. What arrested my eye was the caption he gave it: "The spirit of Hitchcock has just passed and disappeared around the corner. But in his absence he still commands the scene."[1] It struck me as a surprisingly resonant, if unexpected juxtaposition, turning a banal shot into a moment of mysterious menace, reminiscent of no less than three Cary Grant "dangerous driving" scenes: in *Suspicion* (1941), *To Catch a Thief* (1955) and *North by Northwest* (1959). Perhaps after all an apt homage to the master of montage

1 The photo is online at http://esvc001069.wic023u.server-web.com/5/elsaesser.html

and innuendo, from another master of montage and innuendo, however far apart the two filmmakers were in every other respect. I gave it no further thought, more preoccupied with the loss of a director whom his own country had never given his due. Over the years, however, as I noticed how inescapable and indispensable references to Hitchcock had become in my field, and not only in academic film studies, but for artists, curators, photographers, filmmakers, biographers, and critics, I began to wonder why "in his absence, he still commands the scene". Indeed: why twenty-five years after is death, his absence has become such a presence.

A brief reminder of just how ubiquitous, but also how elusive he is: type "Alfred Hitchcock" into Amazon.com "books" and you have more than 7,000 hits. Even subtracting the scores of ghosted Ellery Queen mystery paperbacks that appear under his name, there are well over 600 books in print that deal with his films, his life, his women, his stars, his collaborators and associates. Look under DVDs, and all his films (as well as many of the TV shows) are available in digitally remastered re-issues, bundled collections, special editions and boxed sets.[2] If this is the thick ground-cover of his fame, academia and the art world provide the taller trees. Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol's study from 1957, Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films* from 1965, Truffaut's interview book *Le Cinema selon Hitchcock* from 1966 (English translation, 1967) and Jean Douchet's *Alfred Hitchcock* (1967) set the stage. But instead of four books in ten years, the average since the 1980s has been more than tenfold that number for each decade. The 1980s and 1990s also saw artists bring Hitchcock to the gallery: Judith Barry (1980), Victor Burgin (1984), Cindy Sherman (1986), Stan Douglas (1989), Christian Marclay (1990), Douglas Gordon (1993), David Reed (1994), Pierre Huyghe (1995), Tony Oursler (1996), Cindy Bernard (1997), Christoph Girardet and Matthias Müller (1999).[3]

2 "Hitchcock is already everywhere in American culture—in video stores and on cable TV, in film courses and in a stream of critical studies and biographies that shows no sign of letting up, in remakes and re-workings and allusions that mine the oeuvre as a kind of folklore." See O'Brien, G., "Hitchcock: The Hidden Power", in *New York Review of Books*, vol. 48, no. 18 (15 November 2001).

Filmmakers, almost too numerous to count, have rendered homage to Hitchcock's films: foremost, Brian de Palma who, starting with *Obsession* (1976), *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and *Blow-Out* (1981), has virtually devoted his career to *Vertigo* remakes. David Mamet's *The Spanish Prisoner* (1997), Robert Zemeckis's *What Lies Beneath* (2000), Steven Spielberg's *Munich* (2005; the phone bomb scene) have all been praised for their "Hitchcockian moments", while every film version of Patricia Highsmith's Ripley novels, from *Plein Soleil* (1960) to *The American Friend* (1977) and from *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999) to *Ripley's Game* (2002) has had to pass the Hitchcock (*Strangers on a Train*) litmus test. Roman Polanski might well be considered the most gifted among Hitchcock disciples: much of his oeuvre is a careful, as well as witty response to the challenge that Hitchcock presents: *Repulsion* (1965) his *Marnie* (1964), *Frantic* (1988) his *North by Northwest*, *The Tenant* (1976) his *Psycho* (1960) and *Bitter Moon* (1992) his *Vertigo* (1958). Gus Van Sant famously restaged *Psycho* shot-for-shot in 1998,[4] and most recently, the Shanghai filmmaker Ye Lou has been introduced to western audiences as "Hitchcock with a Chinese Face".[5]

To each his or her own: academics have praised Hitchcock for defending family values[6] but also for sadistically intertwining love, lust and death.[7] He has been compared to Shakespeare and

3 Most of these artists were brought together in the group show *Notorious: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art*, a 1999 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.

4 Santas, C., "The Remake of *Psycho* (Gus Van Sant, 1998): Creativity or Cinematic Blasphemy?", in *Senses of Cinema* (Great Director series, no date); Žižek, S., "Is there a proper way to remake a Hitchcock film?", *Lacanian Ink*. Accessed Autumn 2007: www.lacan.com/hitch.html

5 Silbergeld, J., *Hitchcock with a Chinese Face: Cinematic Doubles, Oedipal Triangles, and China's Moral Voice* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

6 Brill, L., *The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

7 Love, lust and death are the words used for the Scottie-Madeleine relation in *Vertigo*, or to typify the attraction-repulsion between Mark and Marnie in *Marnie*. See Holland, N.N., "Hitchcock's Vertigo: One Viewer's Viewing", in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on Literature and Psychoanalysis, Boston (USA)*, ed. F. Pereira (Lisbon: ISPA, 1996) or Moral, T.L., *Hitchcock and the Making of Marnie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

Alfred Hitchcock in *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour, #57: The Gentleman Caller*, broadcast on 10 April 1964 (*Double Take*, 2009)

Alfred Hitchcock:

The reason for my lack of enthusiasm for this Alfred Hitchcock lookalike contest will be apparent when I tell you that I entered and was eliminated in the first round.

Mozart, and "outed" as an eternal Catholic schoolboy racked with guilt. Writers have identified a misogynist Hitchcock and a feminist Hitchcock,[8] an Oedipal Hitchcock,[9] a homophobe Hitchcock and a "queer" Hitchcock.[10] There is the Cold-War anti-communist Hitchcock of *Topaz* (1969) and *Torn Curtain* (1966), and the "hot-war" anti-fascist Hitchcock not only of *Saboteur* (1942), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) and *Notorious* (1946),[11] but also present in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). He has made fun of psychoanalysis in *Rear Window* (1954) and *Psycho*, but he is Jacques Lacan's best interpreter.[12] There is a Gothic-Romantic, a Victorian,[13] an Edwardian Hitchcock, with his imagination steeped in E.A. Poe and French decadence,[14] and a modernist Hitchcock,[15] influenced in turn by Weimar Expressionism,[16] French Surrealism and Russian montage constructivism. And, of course, there is the post-modern Hitchcock, already deconstructing his own presuppositions in *Vertigo* or *Family Plot* (1976).[17] The "British Hitchcock"

8 Lee, S.H., "Alfred Hitchcock: Misogynist or Feminist?", in *Post Script*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Summer 1991), 38–48.

9 Kelly, D., "Oedipus at Los Angeles: Hitch and the Tragic Muse", in *Senses of Cinema*, no. 24 (January–February 2003).

10 Modleski, T., *The Women who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988). Price, T., *Hitchcock and Homosexuality: his 50-year Obsession with Jack the Ripper and the Superbitch Prostitute: A Psychoanalytic View* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1992). Corber, R.J., *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). Robinson, M.J., *The Poetics of Camp in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* in *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 51, no. 1 (Spring 2000).

11 Simone, S.P., *Hitchcock As Activist: Politics and the War Films* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985).

12 Samuels, R., *Hitchcock's bi-textuality: Lacan, Feminisms, and Queer Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

13 Cohen, P.M., *Alfred Hitchcock: The Legacy of Victorianism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

14 Perry, D.R., "Bibliography of Scholarship Linking Alfred Hitchcock and Edgar Allan Poe", in *Hitchcock Annual 2000–2001*, ed. S. Gottlieb (New London: Hitchcock Annual Corporation, 2001), 163–73.

15 Hutchings, P.J., "Modernity: a film by Alfred Hitchcock", in *Senses of Cinema*, no. 6 (May 2000).

16 Gottlieb, S., "Early Hitchcock: The German Influence", in *Hitchcock Annual 1999–2000*, ed. C. Brookhouse (New London: Hitchcock Annual Corporation, 2000), 100–30.

17 Allen, R., "Hitchcock, or the pleasures of meta-skepticism", in *October*, no. 89 (Summer 1999), 69–86.

has been given new cultural contours and local history roots, to balance the general preference for his American period.[18] And in recent years, we have had Hitchcock the Philosopher:[19] but which philosopher? There is a Schopenhauerian Hitchcock,[20] a Heideggerian Hitchcock and a Derridean Hitchcock, several Deleuzian Hitchcocks, a stab at a Nietzschean Hitchcock (*Rope*, of course) and most recently, a Wittgensteinian Hitchcock.

How can a man—and his work—be so many apparently contradictory things to so many different people? What is it that draws them—and us—to Hitchcock and makes him return, time and again, as so many doubles of his own improbable self? Proliferating even as they voice their protest, each one implicitly claims the kind of authenticity, which must strip the others of their usurped pretensions. Slavoj Žižek, himself not someone to pass up an opportunity to bring Hitchcock into the debate, irrespective of the subject, once suggested a plausible if possibly tautologous answer: his claim is that Hitchcock has since his death in 1980 increasingly functioned not as an object of study or analysis, but as a mirror to film studies, in its shifting contemporary obsessions and insecurities. Commenting, by self-referentially double-backing on his own contributions to the unabatedly thriving Hitchcock industry, he diagnoses the logic behind the various hermeneutic moves and changes in reputation and predilection I have just enumerated, as the effects of transference (a major theme, of course, in Hitchcock's work, itself magisterially dissected in the very first book of the cycle, the Rohmer/Chabrol study). This transference has made of Hitchcock himself a monstrous figure, at once too close and too far, a (maternal) super-ego "blur" as much as a super-male Godlike "subject supposed to know".[21]

According to this logic, Hitchcock occupies the place not so much of the film-auteur analysed, as of the (psycho-)analyst,

18 Barr, C., *English Hitchcock* (Moffat: Cameron & Hollis, 1999).

19 Yanal, R.J., *Hitchcock as philosopher* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2005).

20 Mogg, K., *The Alfred Hitchcock Story* (London: Titan Books, 1999) most persistently (and quite persuasively) argues for Hitchcock as a disciple of Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*.

analysing: listening impassively to the interpretative talking (auto-)cure, his famous silhouette over the years getting to look more and more like those giant faces of the Egyptian goddess in the British Museum in *Blackmail* (1929), the Statue of Liberty (in *Saboteur*) and the Mount Rushmore Presidents (in *North by Northwest*). "Hitchcock" is always already there: in place and in control, when the interpreting critic arrives with yet another definitive or diabolically ingenious reading. The various stages of Hitchcock's reception from the late 1950s to the 1990s and beyond, thus do not even chart the inner dynamic of film studies, as scholars refine, redefine or overturn the reigning critical paradigms. What drives the Hitchcock hermeneutic (wind-)mills would be an impulse altogether more philosophically serious; namely the desire to overcome, across transference and mirror doubling (and thus doomed to fail), the deadlocks of ontological groundlessness: from "pure cinema" to "pure deconstruction", as it were, —and beyond.[22]

What is plausible in this thesis is that Hitchcock, once canonized as the towering figure of his art—no different indeed from Shakespeare, Mozart, Jane Austen or James Joyce—feeds an academic industry that, once set up and institutionally secure, largely sustains itself without further input from the "real world" other than reflecting the changing intellectual fashions of the respective disciplines. The author and the work become a sort of "black box" into which everything can be put and from which anything can be pulled.[23] What is close to a tautology, however, is that in

21 "Hitchcock as the theoretical phenomenon that we have witnessed in recent decades—the endless flow of books, articles, university courses, conference panels—is a postmodern phenomenon *par excellence*. It relies on the extraordinary transference his work sets in motion: [his] elevation into a God-like demiurge […] is simply the transferential relationship where Hitchcock functions as the 'subject supposed to know'." See "Introduction: Alfred Hitchcock, or, the Form and Its Historical Mediation", in *Everything You always Wanted to Know About Lacan: (But were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. S. Žižek (London/New York: Verso, 1992), 10.

22 For Hitchcock, Derrida and deconstruction, see Morris, S., *The Hanging Figure: On Suspense and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

23 See also, Belton, J., "Can Hitchcock Be Saved from Hitchcock Studies?", in *Cineaste*, vol. 28, no. 4 (Autumn 2003), 16–21.

thus turning the fascination and "return" back to the writers and academics, it creates a closed loop. But why such a loop should form in the first place, around this particular figure and director, rather than another, and why the magic seems to work not just for academics, but extends well beyond to popular audiences, artists, novelists, the general public, is less plausibly explained, because it is already presupposed.

From a Work to a World

If we grant that Hitchcock, that constant reference point, now almost synonymous with the cinema itself, has become indispensable in the wider field of art, culture and the popular imagination, then something must have happened, both to his work and to the cinema, which he personifies and embodies. To recapitulate: from being a gifted craftsman behind the camera, technically skilled and ambitious, with a morbid imagination covered up by a mordant wit (the view of the British establishment well into the 1960s) and of being a superb showman with a rare talent for second-guessing popular taste and an uncanny gift for self-promotion (the Hollywood view, almost up to his death in 1980),[24] Hitchcock, some time between the 1970s and 2000, also became one of the great artists of the twentieth century, not just without peers in his own profession, but on a par with Picasso, Duchamp, Proust and Kafka.[25] Like Kafka, his name has become an adjective, and like

24 Kapsis, R.E., *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

25 "Salvador Dalí was unique with his representation of dripping clocks. Picasso was unique with his two-eyed profiles, and Van Gogh was known for his swirling brush strokes in *Starry Night*. And there's a reason why people stare intently at these art works in the galleries rather than the vinyl placemats and canvas diaper bags resembling them in the museum gift shops. Although replicas can be just as appealing to the eye, without the innovation the masterpiece demanded in its conception, a replica can never compare to its original. That's why I still, to this day, have not seen the 1990s remake of *Psycho*, and that's why I'd like to throw rotten tomatoes at every *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* movie poster I see." See Sauers, E., "Hitch-what-ian?", in *Indiana Daily Student* (16 June 2005).

Picasso, everyone knows not only what his work looks like, but what it "feels" like, whether they have studied it or not. These artists define more than an age, an art form or a sensibility; they are a way of seeing the world and even of being in the world.

Hitchcock's consecration became complete and official in 2001, when first in Montreal and then at the Centre Pompidou in Paris *Hitchcock et l'Art: Coincidences Fatales* opened to wide acclaim and largely rave reviews. Curated by Dominique Paini and Guy Cogeval, the exhibition was a fetishist's paradise: accompanied by the strains of Bernard Herrmann's music, the visitor entered via a large room where "pinpoint spotlights stabbed out of the darkness at twenty-one small display cases mounted on a grid of twenty-one black columns. Each glass case bore a single cherished object arranged on a bed of red satin: the gleaming scissors from *Dial M for Murder* (1954), the bread knife from *Blackmail*, the key from *Notorious*, the cigarette lighter from *Strangers on a Train* (1951), the black brassiere from *Psycho*."[26]

This distillation (and dilation) of the films to the telling detail, to the tactile object, the dizzying erotic power emanating from these strangely familiar and murderously innocent objects, like deadly insects or poisonous snakes under glass, also seemed to be endorsed by the citation from Jean-Luc Godard, hung over the entrance portal as majestically and incontrovertibly as the words inscribed in Dante's Hell:

> People forget why Joan Fontaine was leaning over the cliff […], why Janet Leigh stops at the Bates Motel, and why Teresa Wright remains in love with Uncle Charlie. They forget what Henry Fonda was not altogether guilty of, and why exactly the American government employed the services of Ingrid Bergman. But they remember a car in the desert. They remember a glass of milk, the vanes of a windmill, a hairbrush. They remember a wine rack, a pair of glasses, a fragment of

26 Lubin, D.M., "Hitchcock and art: Fatal coincidences", in *Artforum International* (November 2001).

> music, a set of keys. Because through them and with them, Alfred Hitchcock succeeded where Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Hitler failed: in taking control of the universe. Perhaps ten thousand people have not forgotten Cézanne's apples, but a billion spectators will recall the cigarette lighter in *Strangers on a Train*, and if Alfred Hitchcock has been the only *poète maudit* to achieve success, it is because he was the greatest creator of forms of the twentieth century and that it is forms which tell us, finally, what there is at the bottom of things; and what is art except that by which forms become style.[27]

The passage (originally from *Histoire(s) du cinéma*) is justly famous, full of the extravagant hyperbole of the youthful Godard, but now intoned with the growl and rumble of late Godard, blackened by the ashes of the Holocaust, which he sees himself as having survived, but which has cost the cinema its soul. Godard makes the all-important move from Hitchcock the kinky fetishist to Hitchcock the canny world-conqueror. Without the hyperbole and the apocalypse, one can say that the "Hitchcock" posthumously anointed at the Pompidou[28] is now no longer an artist among other artists, with a body of work and an inimitable stylistic signature, however unique this is for a British commercial filmmaker working within the Hollywood studio-system, but that he is a "world": complete, self-sufficient, not just immediately recognizable in and by its details, but consistent through and through: in short, holding the promise or the premonition that his cinema and thus *the cinema* can be/has become an ontology, an inventory of what is and can exist.

At any rate, it seems a battle is on, about the reality status of each: the world of Hitchcock/Hollywood and the world of history/memory, and it is not always certain which will win. Perhaps this very battle is what we need to witness, because it is

27 Godard, J.-L., *Histoire(s) du Cinéma,* vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1998). Quoted also in G. O'Brien, "Hitchcock: The Hidden Power".

28 Vest, J.M., *Hitchcock and France: the forging of an auteur* (Westport: Praeger, 2003).

as much an ontological one as it is perceptual. Ontological: the power of the cinema to define our reality, or as Jean-Luc Nancy once put it: coming to terms with the possibility that "the lie of the image is the truth of our world". And perceptual: the philosophical stakes of mimesis, representation and simulation.[29] I come back to Johan van der Keuken. It is not only that "in his absence he still commands the scene". The scene only exists, because it reminds van der Keuken of Hitchcock. Has it come to the point where we notice something only because it repeats a scene from a movie? In *Sans Soleil*, Chris Marker, on a visit to San Francisco, can only see the Golden Gate Bridge as an artefact from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, a gesture repeated by Cindy Bernard, when she took her photograph *Ask the Dust: Vertigo* (1958/1990) from the exact spot (now railed off), where Scottie fished Madeleine out of the water and carried her back to his car. For his television programme *The Pervert's Guide to the Cinema*, Slavoj Žižek went to Bodega Bay, took a boat, and played Melanie, in order to deliver once more the cage with the love birds and to re-experience the first attack of the gulls,[30] a scene from *The Birds* that had already served Raymond Bellour for one of the most dense and delirious pieces of close textual reading.[31] It became a sort of primal scene of psychoanalytic film theory, next to the crop-

29 In David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas*, there is a scene where one of the main protagonists, Luisa Rey, reports an interview she did with Hitchcock, in which she "put it to the great man, the key to fictitious terror is partition or containment: so long as the Bates Motel is sealed off from our world, we want to peer in, like at a scorpion enclosure." Cited in Byatt, A.S., "Overlapping Lives", in *The Guardian* (6 March 2004).

30 From Johan Grimonprez's interview-statement: "What actually fascinated me in this new work, is how much our understanding of reality today is filtered through Hollywood imagery. For instance, when Hitchcock scholar Slavoj Žižek compared the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center to a real-life version of *The Birds*, he called it the ultimate Hitchcockian threat that suddenly appeared out of nowhere. He referred specifically to the scene when Melanie, played by Tippi Hedren, approaches the Bodega Bay pier in a small boat, and a single seagull, first perceived as an indistinguishable dark blot, unexpectedly swoops down and gashes her forehead. It is strikingly similar to the plane hitting the second World Trade Center tower. In this sense 9/11 brought fiction back to haunt us as reality."

31 Bellour, R., "Les Oiseaux: Analyse d'une Séquence", in *L'Analyse du Film* (Paris: Albatros, 1979). First published in *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 216 (1969), 24–38.

dusting episode from *North by Northwest*, the Indiana prairie stop that many a Hitchcock fan (including myself) has tried to locate, and which Cindy Bernard, again, claims to have found in her *Ask the Dust: North by Northwest* (1959/1990). Is Hitchcock's "world" metonymically present, because these are the "primal scenes" of an ontological switch, establishing a new "order of things" an archive of first-cause references, of which the phenomenal world is merely the reflection and residue? Has his "world"—and by extension, the world of (Hollywood) movies—become our Platonic Heaven, making its memory thus the "hell" (of obsessions, fixations, murderous designs, palpitating terrors and feverish longings) which our "returns" try to turn into a "home", and to whose impossibly flawed endeavour our repetition compulsions bear witness? In other words, is one of the reasons we now have (Hitchcock) "installations" in our museums, due to the fact that these are the "worlds" we need to, want to, but finally cannot install ourselves in?[32]

The Paradoxes of Mimesis from Parrhasios to Hitchcock

From a two-dimensional picture on the screen, Hitchcock's world invites one to think it three dimensional—to gratify an almost bodily urge to enter into it, to penetrate it, furnish it, surround oneself with it, irrespective of, or precisely because of one's awareness of the dangers, even courting them: besides repeating Norman Bates's gesture, it is the Scottie syndrome—taking *Vertigo* as the most accomplished version of the Hitchcockian *mal à voir*, the swooning sickness—that sucks the viewer into his films, and of which *Psycho* would be the more hysterical spasm. It may explain why some artists have tried to "inhabit"

32 "The collapse between what is real and what is fake is very much part of the exploration throughout *Looking for Alfred*, in particular with reference to lookalike culture. Film stars become fake imitations of their celebrity projections and in turn lookalikes, while adopting the attitudes of their cherished idol, become a more real version of what they try to look like." Interview with Johan Grimonprez.

this universe by dilating it: Douglas Gordon's installation-projection *24-hour Psycho*, by taking up a complete day, is wall to wall Hitchcock: not in space but in time. If such a move sounds drastic, the paradox it points to is nonetheless unavoidable: as Hitchcock never tired to point out, his films are all about artifice, not lifelike realism,[33] so how can they exert such a strong mimetic pull? In other words, if after Hitchcock, Life Imitates the Movies, how did we get there, and especially how did Hitchcock get us there?

One obvious way that Hitchcock lures us in, Caligari-like conjuror and showman that he also was, is with his cameos, the walk-on parts which should now perhaps be described as "walk-in" parts: not just in the sense that often enough, Hitchcock literally "walks into" his own films, giving us, for a split-second, the double-take impression of seeing in 3D. He also beckons us in, nowhere more so than in those cameos, where a quick look over the shoulder (most ag/trans/gressively in *Marnie*),[34] invites us to follow him along the corridors of his character's secret,[35] but initiating also a gesture of display, like a shopkeeper showing off his wares, or a gamekeeper presenting the habitats of exquisitely exotic, enigmatic or merely eccentric creatures. Hitchcock's films, at certain moments, become walk-in zoos, taking us on a safari of familiar, if far from open-range obsessions. At other times, scenes generate a pull of immersion, where one is led on, not by the master-magician himself, but by his female assistant, the blonde heroine. She is the one who ventures into ominously silent attics, tries and rattles locked doors, or takes us down some dark pas-

33 "Film is not a slice of life, its a piece of cake" (Hitchcock). But see also Cohen, T., *Anti-mimesis From Plato to Hitchcock* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

34 This scene, too, has been exhaustively analysed by Raymond Bellour. See Bellour, R., "Hitchcock the Enunciator", in *Camera Obscura*, no. 2 (Autumn 1977), 66–87.

35 "One crucial and recurring moment in the work is of Hitchcock meeting himself. The point where he turns his head and glances back refers to *Stage Fright* (1949) and *Marnie*. I've mirrored these with the Hitchcock cameo from *Foreign Correspondent*, where he passes someone on the street. This glancing back appears also recurrently in the casting sessions as we asked each impersonator to do this to camera." Interview with Johan Grimonprez.

sage way, no: down the cellar stairs in Norman Bates's house: an Alice, either falling into a Wonderland of screeching birds, or as in *Psycho*, of an equally screeching (if we're still listening), as well as grinning, mummy's skull.[36]

The "walk-in" effect, as well as the beckoning gesture, invariably calls to mind the most famous of all stories of mimetic representation as a bodily effect, the story of the two Greek painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasios, as related by Pliny. Zeuxis once painted some grapes that were so realistic that birds swooped on the canvas and pecked at them. But then, his rival Parrhasios asked Zeuxis to his studio, keen to demonstrate a similar feat. Zeuxis, in front of the work, demanded Parrhasios to draw back the curtain, which hung across the canvas, in order to be able to judge for himself the skills of his colleague. But the curtain *was* the painting. Acknowledging that Parrhasios was the better of the two, Zeuxis said, "I took in the birds, but you took me in."

Besides the swooping birds, there is another point to this story that relates to Hitchcock. For whereas the lifelike grapes give us versions of photorealism, and refer to an effect achieved "out there", in the world of objects, producing, in other words, a "fake", the curtain veiling the "painting" achieves an effect "in here", in the beholder's mind, and thus produces a "truth": not about the world, but about this mind, its imagination, its desire and/or (self-)deception, which may be too painful to confront, putting the viewer in a state of denial, or into the loop of (compulsive) repetition. In other words, Zeuxis and Parrhasios are two kinds of "realists", whose strategies are, however, different and almost diametrically opposed, in the sense that the second is the meta-commentary on the first. It is not that Parrhasios is merely a "baroque" trompe-l'œil realist against the "classically" representational Zeuxis. What matters is the interaction

36 "He was in some sense our Lewis Carroll, populating his Wonderland with looking-glass inversions of the same world we inhabit: a world of spies and murderers, lovers and tennis players, actresses and jewel thieves. They exist, apparently, to make fascinating patterns in which the spectator, like the director before him, can become lost." See G. O'Brien, "Hitchcock: The Hidden Power".

or interchange between the two, where Zeuxis' "demand to see" mistakes Parrhasios' curtain as interposing itself between him and whatever he hopes to see represented. Zeuxis' category mistake *is* Parrhasios' painting, or put differently, whereas Zeuxis paints *grapes*, Parrhasios paints (the) *desire* (for grapes). Similarly, whereas some directors have filmed Marlene, Marilyn, or Madonna, Hitchcock has filmed the *desire*—for Madeleine, Melanie or Marnie.[37]

This doubling of mimesis by its own impossible desire for possession (and often fatal entanglement in the paradoxes of representation) points to another way of accounting for the mimetic pull in Hitchcock: the unexpected realism he engineers at the scale of detail (again, detail!) when the overall picture makes no sense at all: say, the miniscule lady's razor on Cary Grant's enormous jowl in the railway station washroom of *North by Northwest*. Accurate in itself, but misaligned in its proportions or settings, this is, of course, what makes an object hyperreal and a scene oneiric: such moments are the tipping points of mimesis, the ones practised and perfected by the Surrealists. These switches, or parallax perceptions, are reinvented by Hitchcock in another idiom, and extended, one might argue, to include the plot. The endless fussing over minutiae, the obsession with getting the settings "right" (which is to say, getting them from the

37 Žižek, who in a comment on the "veiled Muslim women" debate in several European countries also refers to the Zeuxis/Parrhasios competition, draws an even bolder conclusion: "And this brings us back to the function of veil in Islam: what if the true scandal this veil endeavours to obfuscate is not the feminine body hidden by it, but the *inexistence* of the feminine? What if, consequently, the ultimate function of the veil is precisely to sustain the illusion that there is something, the substantial Thing, behind the veil? If, following Nietzsche's equation of truth and woman, we transpose the feminine veil into the veil, which conceals the ultimate Truth, the true stakes of the Muslim veil become even clearer. Woman is a threat because she stands for the 'undecidability' of truth, for a succession of veils beneath which there is no ultimate hidden core; by veiling her, we create the illusion that there is, beneath the veil, the feminine Truth—the horrible truth of lie and deception, of course. Therein resides the concealed scandal of Islam: only a woman, the very embodiment of the indiscernability of truth and lie, can guarantee Truth. For this reason, she has to remain veiled." See Žižek, S., "A Glance into the Archives of Islam" (2006). Accessed Autumn 2007: www.lacan.com/zizarchives.htm

register of verisimilitude into that of the absurdly improbable, by the tiniest of shifts in incident, like Marnie's shoe falling out of her coat-pocket, as she tiptoes past the—deaf—charwoman, away from Mark Rutland's safe), speak of the determination with which Hitchcock is said to have used up and was accused of abusing so many able Hollywood screenwriters. The point was to arrive at a screenplay whose move and countermove are invariably slung across an abyss, if we follow the self-cancelling logic of the MacGuffin. The solid strands of plotting that anchor character and motivation in the "real world", yet leave so much unsaid and unspecified as to force the viewer to surmise most of it in his mind, serve to weave as dense a curtain as possible across the "nothing there", or rather across the chuckling repartee that concludes the story of the famous device's origin: "(Then) this is not a MacGuffin."[38]

Now you see it, now you don't: Magritte's Pipe and the Double, negative

The MacGuffin thus conceived suggests a revision to the idea of the mimetic pull, providing first an ontological gap that could suck one into a black hole, while also complicating it by the reappearance of the Double, materialization of this gap, and its always already implicit negative: the non-identity of this world with its own felt presence. And besides, "Then, this is not…" is, of course, itself the double of: "Ceci n'est pas…" It repeats perhaps the most famous gesture of indexical negation, the line written by René Magritte into his advertisment (or school primer) drawing of a pipe, with the word/image combination creating an endlessly reversible rebus puzzle, or "switch" (the painting is called: "the treachery of images"). If we follow Foucault's commentary on "Ceci n'est pas une pipe": at stake is the distinction

38 In the famous exchange between the two travellers, which Hitchcock tells Truffaut by way of explaining the origins of the MacGuffin, the final lines are: "But: there *are* no lions in the Highlands!?"— "Then, *this* is not a MacGuffin".

between resemblance and similitude in visual representation. When implying that an image *resembles* reality, one assumes the ontological superiority of the latter. This is indeed what Magritte forestalls with the negative, rather than merely saying something as obvious as that you cannot smoke a painted pipe. With *similitude*, there is no originary referent, however much we might fantasize one: according to Foucault, things and images are "more or less 'like' each other without either of them able to claim the privileged status of model." But Magritte not only breaks with resemblance, while apparently sticking to its representational rules. He also flouts another principle of classical painting: that the space of representation (the picture) and the space of writing or linguistic reference (the title) be separate and hierarchically subordinated to each other. What Magritte achieves by placing the words "inside" (but why not "on top of" or merely "in"?) the painting and phrasing them in the negative is to create an oscillation or a hesitation, a kind of "thrilling" of our perceptual norms and habitual expectations. These norms imply that perceiving, recognizing and comprehending a two-dimensional image as a depiction of space requires an act of associative seeing, whereby optical and tactile, as well as linguistic and cognitive registers all work together, to confirm and synthesize the different sensory input. By separating the senses from each other, and putting them under the sign of negation, Magritte makes us aware of the "division of labour" among their respective registers, while also bringing into play all kinds of traps for the mind and the eye that lurk in the folds of visual representation. The subtle, but excessive self-evidence of bourgeois order in Magritte—the tailored suits, the bowler hats, the umbrellas and other accessories or accoutrements of a regulated life—are thus so many pointers to the mode of representation which his pictures at once instantiate and forever destroy. Many of Magritte's most typical effects are thus referenced to the basic issue of perspectival painting (but also cinema): how to depict a three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. What he puts in crisis, for instance, are the signifiers of spatial depth, such as figure-ground relationships, perceptual cues with respect to light source and shadow-

Double Take, 2009

ing, the scale and positioning of objects within a perspectival image-space, or the direction of the characters' looks in relation to each other: meant to meet in mutual confirmation and yet destined forever to miss their (ap)point(ment)s of intersection, and instead vanishing into horizonless voids.

Obviously, it would be hard to substantiate a one-to-one correlation between Magritte's techniques and Hitchcock's plotting or framing, but the "this is not…" formula gives a clue to their kinship, suggesting that a separation of the sensory registers and the production of cognitive dissonances may well be a factor in the kinds of uncanny each is able to achieve in his respective medium. If we do indeed take selective input from our perceptual field and create our own cognitive coherence—matching what we see with what we hear and with other perceptual cues, letting the brain take the strain of making it fit—then the slight misalignments Hitchcock habitually produces in his own solid worlds of middle-class mores, are what brings about the peculiar mobilization of the body, pulling us into the picture as a kind of supplement, at once necessary and in excess: which is itself a definition of the monstrative and the negative that come together in the indexical gesture asserting that "this is not…"

This is not Alfred Hitchcock

The phantom double stepping into this breach—necessary when he is not there and excessive when he appears—is the lookalike, apparently healing the rift, but in fact, also deepening it. Everything said so far: about the too many Hitchcocks of academia, about the Sphinx-like posture he occupies in the Oedipal scenarios of his critics, about his fatal attraction to artists and other world-makers, about Parrhasios' painted veil and the mimetic pull one feels before his films, finally points to nothing else: that Hitchcock is most himself when he can point to or index himself and say "this is not Alfred Hitchcock", as he so often did, when stepping "out of" the cinema and, for instance, "into" television.

"Looking for… (the 'real') Alfred" is thus a productively futile exercise in more senses than one. First of all, because Hitchcock's (diegetic) presence in his films, through the walk-in cameo parts, at once in-side, out-side and be-side his creations, disavows his God-like control and thereby reasserts it the more incontrovertibly, with the ontological knot being tied by what Bellour has called "Hitchcock the enunciator",[39] but which I am now suggesting has also to do with "Hitchcock the indicator": the invariably implied gesture of pointing. Not (only) voyeurism or scoptophilia is his trademark, but the metaphoric index finger, along which our spectatorial vision is led, as it were, by the nose, towards those divergent-dissonant vanishing points that make up the "treachery of images". They remind us all too palpably of our awkwardly real bodies, in what has been called Hitchcock's effects of "motor mimicry",[40] or they propel us into his universe as if by gusts of wind, carrying us along, like dry leaves, before a downpour.

Productively futile also, because this "looking for" has to be a "casting around", rehearsing and repeating the founding gesture of the necessary excess, and following therein the (paratactic) logic of similitude rather than the (hierarchical) order of resemblance in representation, the latter's truth supposedly sustained and guaranteed "from outside". The lookalikes are thus of the order of "similitude" rather than "resemblance", for it is this order of similitude which ensures that the world of Hitchcock can appear more real than the real world, while being so self-confidently artificial: the "piece of cake" rather than "the slice of life", as Hitchcock notoriously put it. If the lookalikes acknowledge the (minimal) gap of all representational regimes, their serial similitude (as in Magritte) ensures the mise-en-abyme of (filmic) representation in two-dimensional space. By casting for the part,

39 Cf. n. 30.

40 For "motor mimicry" in Hitchcock, see Noll-Brinckmann, C., "Somatische Empathie bei Hitchcock: Eine Skizze", in *Der Körper im Bild: Schauspielen – Darstellen – Erscheinen*, ed. H.B. Heller et. al. (Marburg: Schüren Verlag 1999), 111–21.

as it were, they preserve that moment of hesitation and oscillation on which is founded but also flounders our fascination for "the Hitchcock moment": neither Aristotelian identification, nor Brechtian distanciation can here negotiate the dialectic of appearance and reality, and instead, it is the possibility of a double, *our* double, that haunts each of these (p)lunges, making them at once unreal and too real. From this apparition, this spectralization of ourselves, in the act of seeing, the lookalike rescues or protects us, as the fake-double, being a sort of ontological scapegoat, in the guise of a fetish. How fortunate, therefore, that they do in fact exist, these Hitchcock lookalikes, and in so many preposterous, improbable or near perfect embodiments! They prove that the "right man" has to be the "wrong man" (and vice versa), in order to sustain the parallax vision, or "partition" that marks the space where (not only) Hitchcock has just turned a corner: a whole hauntology of realism and reference, in its absence, is destined to still command the scene.

First published as: Elsaesser, T., "Casting Around: Hitchcock's Absence", in *Johan Grimonprez: Looking for Alfred*, ed. S. Bode (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 137–61.

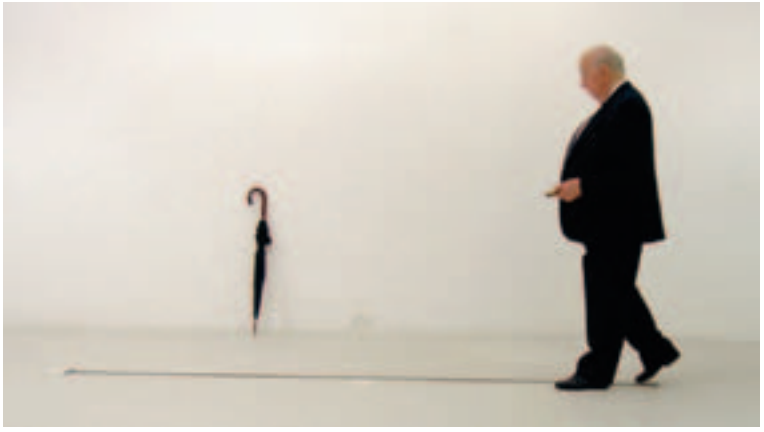
Hitchcock is Not Himself Today…

An interview with Johan Grimonprez by Chris Darke

2007

Chris Darke: *We're talking only a short distance away from The Gainsborough, the first film studio Hitchcock ever worked in. Having been on the trail of Hitchcock for almost four years with this project, you must have the feeling that his shadow is everywhere you go.*

Johan Grimonprez: This reminds me of the MacGuffin anecdote: I've read three, four, maybe five versions of this story where Hitchcock tells an almost but not quite identical account about two guys who meet on a train. One asks the other: "What's that thing you're carrying in the luggage rack?" "That's a MacGuffin" comes the answer. The first guy follows, "What's a MacGuffin?" The second replies that "It's a device to trap lions in the Scottish Highlands", at which point the first retorts: "But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands." Nonchalantly, the reply comes as "Well, then that's no MacGuffin!" In our search for the perfect Hitchcock, perhaps he has himself become our own MacGuffin, our illusion pushing the search forward. In the end it's like those Russian dolls, one hiding within another and within another and within another, until finally you realize that there is nothing hiding beneath at all.



Ron Burrage, Hitchcock doppelganger. The Hitchcock casting, London, June 2004 (*Looking for Alfred*, 2005 / *Double Take*, 2009)

Ron Burrage:

I thought I was safe until you guys came along, digging up all those other Hitchcock lookalikes. Now we will have to find ways of disposing of them.

C.D.: *Indeed in his interviews with François Truffaut, Hitchcock speaks at length about its inherent meaninglessness. Among other things, he says—in a delightfully paradoxical way—"the main thing I've learned over the years is that the MacGuffin is nothing. I'm convinced of this, but I find it very difficult to prove it to others." It seems to me that, for your purposes, the MacGuffin is not quite nothing…*

J.G.: It's the oil that greases the wheels of suspense, as Hitchcock would claim. It sets the story in motion: a device to start the story-telling process, to make people curious. With the Hitchcock castings, it was the same. Although we never found the "Alfred" we were looking for, the pursuit of him led us to other things. Even in *not* finding what, in the end, turns out to have been a MacGuffin, you arrive at another story… This was vividly brought home to me shortly after the London casting, where I met Ron Burrage, a professional twenty-year veteran Hitchcock lookalike. When I looked at the footage of Ron afterwards, it was eerie and uncanny to see what I began to believe was our perfect Hitchcock double. But then, just when everything was in place and we were ready to shoot, Ron fell ill and had to go into hospital…

C.D.: *You had to get a double for the double…*

J.G.: In a way, yes. I asked myself: "How can I solve this?" The spontaneous solution was to go for the complete opposite, our Chinese Hitchcock lookalike, Bruce Ho. It turned out to be a happy accident. We subsequently integrated some footage of Ron into the film, but since so much was missing, I felt I needed to visit him again and I came to London to interview him. This subsequent footage forms a major part of a further development of *Looking for Alfred* (2005), a project called *Double Take* (2009). In a way, I'm aware that I'm continuing to look for something I haven't quite found, and maybe never can.

C.D.: *One of the things you find in your search is that Hitchcock is cinema, or cinema at a certain moment in its history, when first confronted*

by television. The challenge of television was one that Hitchcock took on in a variety of ways: fronting, in a markedly sardonic fashion, his own TV series, Alfred Hitchcock Presents (1955–62), *as well as adopting TV production methods (short schedule, small crew, black and white) to make* Psycho (1960), *for example.*

J.G.: Indeed, but I'd add that Hitchcock had already made a number of similar transitions: the change from silent to sound cinema, from black and white to colour, and also the change from Britain to Hollywood. At the height of his career, in the mid-fifties, he was becoming acutely aware of the challenge of television. That's why *The Birds* (1963) is pivotal: it reflects the ideology of that particular period, with television—just like the birds themselves—about to invade the home. It represents a moment when Hollywood had to redefine itself, losing its audience to television.

C.D.: *Given the role that doubles and doubling play in* Psycho *and* Vertigo (1958), *why choose* The Birds *as your central Hitchcock work?*

J.G.: *The Birds* has generated every possible contradictory interpretation by Hitchcock scholars: the birds embody the tensions between the characters, they're a metaphor for Melanie's sexuality or the repressed anxiety of the mother, etc. But, like the MacGuffin, they refuse interpretation. I went for *The Birds* to allude to Hitchcock's ambivalent relationship with television and, by way of a detour, to lead back to the theme of the double—in particular, television as cinema's "double". I came across an essay by Angelo Restivo in which he asks the interesting question: "Why does nobody switch on the TV set in *The Birds*?"[1] For me, the first thing you'd do if trapped in a house with some kind of catastrophe going on outside would be to turn on the TV! The implication is that the model community of Bodega Bay is being invaded by birds in the same way that television invades suburbia, turning the American nuclear family into happy consumers; in the process (and this was the concern for filmmakers like Hitchcock) displacing people's relationship with cinema. In Hitchcock's words: "TV brought murder into the American household, where it always belonged."

1 Restivo, A., "The silence of *The Birds*: sound aesthetics and public space in later Hitchcock", in *Past and Future Hitchcock*, ed. R. Allen & S. Ishii-Gonzáles (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 164–78.

It is interesting that when Hitchcock chooses to cross over to television in the form of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, he goes out of his way to poke fun at TV. He points out the extent to which the medium is itself infected by advertising, hijacked by the commercial break. Although he made his name in cinema, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and its successor, *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* (1962–65), were equally responsible for turning Hitchcock into a household figure: the belly, the protruding lip, the double chin… Over a period of around ten years, Hitchcock hosted about 370 episodes of his TV series. He introduced each and every one, as he said "to lay his customary one-minute egg", in which he basically berated the sponsors while announcing the commercials with a large dose of sardonic humour. This adds up to about 360 minutes of Hitchcock performances which have hardly been examined at all in Film Studies, although they constitute an essential part of what Hitchcock was about: the biggest television prankster.

C.D.: *It strikes me that Hitchcock colonized our childhood imagination: yours, mine, and that of the New Wave directors in 1950s Paris, to mention only a few of his many victims! How old were you when you saw your first Hitchcock? Was it in a cinema or on TV? When did you realize he was more than just another filmmaker?*

J.G.: As a little kid, I remember a paperback from my Dad's bookshelves. On the cover was a man who looked very much like my Dad: double chin, bald head, a protruding lip puffing on a cigar, a big belly with the pants set too high. I guess that must have been my first confrontation with the image of Hitchcock, only to later learn there's more than just my Dad to Hitchcock's image. Funnily enough, as we were casting in Belgium, I invited my Dad

along, never thinking he would make it into the film. However, he ended up restaging Hitchcock's cameo from *Strangers on a Train* (1951), carrying a double bass, while picking up the bowler hat that rolls into shot. As for Hitchcock's films, I didn't discover them in the cinema. We're a generation who discovered his legacy second hand, either through re-runs on television or through video and DVD (the "doubling" of his films, as it were). The very first time I saw a cinema screening of *Vertigo*, reels two and three were projected in the wrong order which meant I saw the point where Madeleine had changed into Judy before I should have, giving the plot a very disconcerting and bizarre angle. But this is actually very similar to how with DVD you can skip scenes, and jump back and forth through the storyline.

C.D.: *In* Looking for Alfred, *you also jump backwards and forwards combining cameo appearances from Hitchcock films from completely different eras. Tell me a little more about what attracted you to these cameos.*

J.G.: Hitchcock loved to play hide-and-seek with himself, as well as with the audience. "Spot the director," as Thomas Leitch calls it. Or, in the words of Raymond Bellour, Hitchcock, by making a cameo, "inscribed himself in the film's chain of fantasy". To invoke a more literary model, it's a classic case of the storyteller mirroring himself in the story. The cameos started when he ran out of extras on the set of his directorial debut, *The Lodger* (1927), and to save money he took on the role himself. Later on, they became a kind of superstitious ritual that he enacted in each of his films. Often, he's a casual passer-by or a fellow traveller who pops up at an airport, in a train, in a street or a hotel lobby. His appearance, when it arrives, frequently foreshadows a fateful decision or a turning point in the story. In *Strangers on a Train*, for example, Hitchcock boards the train where the two strangers are about to exchange murders. The larger and more devoted his audience became, however, the more familiar they were with both Hitchcock's image and the regular nature of his walk-on appearances. Because of this, the cameos were in danger of turn-

Alfred Hitchcock Presents, #10: *The case of Mr. Pelham*, broadcast 4 December 1955 (*Double Take*, 2009)

ing into a gag that distracted from the story, and he decided to get them out of the way as early as possible in a film. Think of *North by Northwest* (1959) for example, when he misses the bus just before his name appears in the credits. We actually restaged this cameo during the LA casting, the deal being that I'd invite the doubles for dinner on the condition that they'd re-enact the cameo on the way there. We attempted to shoot the scene on Wilshire Boulevard but it turned out to be trickier than planned. Unexpectedly, the bus drivers didn't play their parts by being too friendly and hitting the brakes upon seeing our Hitchcocks running after them in their rear-view mirrors!

C.D.: *In* Looking for Alfred*, you address Hitchcock's cameo appearances, while in your new, extended version of the project* Double Take *you look more closely at his TV persona. One of the things you seem to want to do, with the cameos at least, is to make them come alive again through one of the strange outgrowths of celebrity culture, the celebrity impersonator. Do you call on this as a way of casting a light on the Hitchcock persona or on his relationship with cinema and television?*

J.G.: The fact that Hitchcock always wore a suit, for example, was a disguise to hide his shyness and unease with his own body. As the "cavalier of the macabre", as he came to be known, he would transform this into a persona that became part and parcel of his practical jokes. And then later, in his appearances on TV, he clearly, and very cleverly, played with doubles of that persona. He would work the strings of a life-size lookalike marionette, walk off with his own wax head under his arm (which later ended up in his wife's fridge as a prank), dress as a woman or a dog. He'd be mistaken for himself, meet his stand-in, or often appear as his own brother explaining that Alfred is nowhere to be found… The funniest example of all is when Hitchcock himself is disqualified in the first round of a Hitchcock lookalike contest, with him playing three other lookalikes introducing his show!

C.D.: *But my point is that when you start to deal with the celebrity lookalike as double, don't you risk losing what's crucial to Borges,*

Dostoyevsky and Poe—just as it is to José Saramago's recent novel, The Double (2004)*—the underpinning of existential angst that's in all those classic narratives of the double? After all, a doppelganger narrative is meant to make you feel that the ground beneath your feet is a bit uncertain, that the world is a little strange.*

J.G.: Absolutely. Seeing one's own doppelganger is usually depicted as a harbinger of bad luck, and it's often a premonition of death. Also, strangely, the double is believed to have no reflection in the mirror. Because he performs the protagonist's actions in advance, he *is* the mirror that eventually takes over. It's like the evil twins narrative with Bart and Hugo Simpson: the double plays the same part as the hero but from the evil angle.[2] The template for the film I'm working on at the moment, *Double Take*, is based on a similar plot to that, where a Hitchcock doppelganger takes over the role of presenting the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* episode, *The Case of Mr. Pelham* (1955).[3] The narration is inspired by the Borges novella *The Other* (1972), in which the author encounters his older self. It's interesting to note that there are two versions of this story, as Borges wrote a later version called *August 25, 1983* (1983). The story has its own double! It's this later version that novelist Tom McCarthy reworked for *Double Take.* In Tom's reworked version, it is Hitchcock who bumps into Hitchcock, a clear allusion to his famous cameos where Hitchcock, the storyteller, doubles himself in his own stories.

C.D.: *In both* Looking for Alfred *and* Double Take *you examine the function of iconography in Hitchcock. There are everyday objects and details that are deadly (lethal cups of tea and coffee), or malign (sparrows that kill!), or that act as a form of disguise, such as the bowler hat, an affectation that Hitchcock shared with Magritte.*

2 Grimonprez is here referring to the *Treehouse of Horror VII* episode (season 8, episode 1, first aired on 27 October 1996).

3 This is reminiscent of Edgar Allen Poe's *William Wilson* (1839), a story of mistaken identity where the protagonist is dogged by his counterpart.

J.G.: I could almost imagine Magritte and Hitchcock disguised as Laurel and Hardy appearing from around the corner in the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels! Or, as the famous double act Thomson and Thompson, the Belgian bowler-hatted detectives from the Tintin books. Thomson and Thompson are utterly Belgian. There's something about their doubleness that rings so true for a country that's embedded in the cultural schizophrenia of two languages living side by side; one constantly translating or repeating the other and never taking it seriously. Everything has to be duplicated or translated. Just like Thomson and Thompson, you're always forced to do things twice (and our doubled governing institutions, the Flemish and the Walloon). Before you even start talking, you first have to decide which language you'll speak in. So misunderstanding becomes culture, the poetry of misinterpretation. And words and things start to disconnect. Belgian reality comes subtitled. Simply in the act of buying milk and reading the labels you're immediately enmeshed in the act of translation. To always be confronted with the other side of things sharpens the sense of irony. Most television programmes and films are subtitled (a big chunk of our television programmes were always imported). This is second nature so, as a kid, you think the whole world is subtitled. You grow up translating the world. This is so much part of Magritte's language paintings, as well. He subtitles his pipe with "pipe" and "not a pipe". It's always already something else. It's maybe this irony that leads to a particular variation of surrealism. "Today there were two Mondays," writes Magritte. "To speak is to commit tautologies," says Borges.

Magritte was only a year older then Hitchcock. Both were born in the very late 1890s, which coincided with the Lumière brothers projecting their first film. The idea of blurring boundaries between what is the same and nearly exactly the same—but not quite—is very much a recurrent theme in both of their work. For Hitchcock, it was a plot device in a lot of his films. Think of Madeleine in *Vertigo*, for example. For Magritte, doppelgangers often appear. I was interested in this as a way of exploring mistaken identity. The uncanny feeling that in a situation, something, or someone, looks exactly the same as another but somehow is not and hence is totally displaced. It creates unease and a sense of anxiety that both prefigures impending disaster but, precisely because of this, also reveals a glimpse of the sublime. Both admired the work of de Chirico and Poe, masters of what Freud called "the uncanny".[4]

Like all saboteurs, Hitchcock and Magritte avoided detection by dressing inconspicuously in their everyday suits, using them as bourgeois disguises, but through their work they were both out to disrupt the apparatus of bourgeois reality—like Magritte's favourite anti-hero Fantomas, a man of infinite disguises who always manages to outwit the police. For Magritte, the bowler hat is a prop to conceal one's identity beneath the guise of everyday life, just as Hitchcock had infinite disguises in his television series (usually accompanied with an oversized prop, as in Magritte's paintings).

C.D.: *This is the idea of Hitchcock as a "double agent" that you pick up on from Thomas Elsaesser who's written that there was a time when Hitchcock was a "dandy" in the sense of a particular kind of European, aestheticized subversion.*[5] *But when he goes to America he takes on the guise of what Elsaesser calls the* saltimbanque, *a buffoon, a performer…*

J.G.: Yeah, wearing a suit in the middle of the Californian summer and never taking it off…

C.D.: *But is it the case that one retrospectively finds in Hitchcock the image one wants to find? Such as the image of the subversive artist working in the heart of Hollywood. Do you feel sure that he was as subversive as these retrospective assessments cast him?*

J.G.: No, there's a complete bourgeois pose, as with Magritte. Nonetheless, in the work itself he absolutely pushes the lan-

4 Freud, S., *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003)
5 Elsaesser, T., "The Dandy in Hitchcock", in *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays*, ed. R. Allen & S. Ishii-Gonzales (London: BFI, 1999), 3–14.

guage of cinema and now, in retrospect, those things have become part of our common everyday language. Of course, he was limited by the constraints of the time, and of working for a major studio, but still he was trying to stretch the agenda and the vocabulary. We have to be very specific about which period in his career we're talking about. I certainly feel he takes on a number of taboos in his television work. The criminal often gets away with the crime; and Hitchcock himself, of course, takes a few jabs at the programme's sponsor. And then I think of *North by Northwest*—a genius film, pre-James Bond, that set the genre, but in which the politics are so right wing, re-inscribing itself in the Cold War…

C.D.: *In* Looking for Alfred *and* Double Take *you're dealing with Hitchcock as representative of cinema at a moment when it's having to deal with the challenge from TV, a transitional moment. I'm wondering what you think about the fact that you're doing this at a moment when cinema is undergoing a further mutation relative to digitalization and when the gallery and the museum have become sites where cinema—quite often through the figure of Hitchcock—becomes if not personified then memorialized?*

J.G.: With the invention of photography, the portrait within painting had to be redefined. Painting still exists but photography is now fully recognized as an art form. With the whole digital revolution there's now a way, with Final Cut Pro, to edit very quickly. These digital tools mean that the museum has to redefine itself, and Hitchcock and, to a degree, the whole archive of film history, are part of that. There's also a whole shift going on within the art world in terms of its own relationship to new media, to web design, etc. Hitchcock pops up everywhere. For me, though, it's a secondary question; something I shy away from. I would rather say "OK, let's look at *The Simpsons*." The fact that there are a couple of Hitchcock spoofs on *The Simpsons*—for example, Hitchcock walking his two dogs Geoffrey and Stanley past Maggie's day-care centre (a spoof of his cameo in *The Birds*) or Bart spoofing James Stewart with the broken leg and the big lens camera (a parody of *Rear Window*)—is as interesting a phenomenon to me as Hitchcock's recent appearance in galleries and museums.[6]

The gallery is one part of all of this, I think, but it's bigger than that. It has to do with a larger shift brought about by digital technology where images are increasingly available in so many different ways. We already mentioned how our generation grew up more with television than cinema. DVD makes Hitchcock even more readily available, to the point where you needn't ever have to go to the cinema. The way we relate to the world through its double, through its representation, changed the way we plugged into reality. There's an echo here of the themes I explored in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-*Y (1997); a sense of having been born at a certain moment in time, in 1962 (the year of the making of *The Birds*!), when the shift from cinemas to television was fully happening and Hollywood had to redefine itself.

C.D.: dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y *raises an interesting question regarding the way you work. The length of time over which you tend to develop a project seems to allow you to go deeper into an idea or obsession and uncover connections that other more superficial appraisals of the subject frequently miss.* dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, and the way you're dealing with Hitchcock, could be described as a kind of "media archaeology". You're interested in the way that media mutate and the ways that mass perception changes.*

J.G.: It's also a way of questioning myself as an artist. It's present in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y,* in the use of Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991) where the writer is in dialogue with a terrorist and in which the book contends that the terrorist has taken over the role of the writer in terms of the range of his influence over what DeLillo calls "the inner life of the culture". Where does he stand? It's a way to break open those boundaries and ask where, as an artist, do you stand politically and relative to the mainstream. It's a way of opening up the agenda rather than trying to reduce it.

6 *A Streetcar named Marge* (season 4, episode 2, first aired 1 October 1992) and *Bart of Darkness* (season 6, episode 1, first aired 4 September 1994).

I do take a lot of time over each of my works! I like to chew the cud like a cow! But working in this way helps me see parallels and continuities in them. There is a metaphor of birds-as-planes that carries over from *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* to the present work on Hitchcock, but which goes all the way back to a much earlier piece, *Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?* (1992). Tracing the after-shocks of the first encounter between a group of New Guinean villagers and western scientists who first arrived, by aircraft, into this "uncharted territory", *Kobarweng* translates literally as "language" of "the airplane". Having very much an auditive perception of their surroundings, these New Guineans inscribed the unfamiliar noises of propellors within their cosmology, interpreting them as animal, and particularly bird, sounds. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that at their core, all my works deal with threats emanating from the sky!

This intercontextual reading also allows me to pull in a number of other reference points, such as Slavoj Žižek's description of the 9/11 attacks as a real-life version of *The Birds*. For Žižek, 9/11 is the ultimate Hitchcockian threat that suddenly appears out of nowhere. He's thinking specifically of the scene when Melanie (Tippi Hedren) approaches the Bodega Bay pier in a small boat, and a single seagull, first perceived as an indistinguishable dark blot, unexpectedly swoops down and gashes her forehead; an image that is strikingly similar to the plane hitting the second World Trade Center tower.

Our world is packed with an abundance of images that constantly bombard us, and inevitably much of our reality today is filtered through cinema and media imagery. In that respect, 9/11 brought fiction back to haunt us as reality—that eerie sense that we've seen these things before; that things are doubled. There's an echo here of what Thomas Elsaesser refers to as an "ontological shift", in which Hollywood seems to run ahead of the facts.[7] It's a direction I'm looking to explore further in *Double Take*.

7 Elsaesser, T., "'Casting Around': Hitchcock's Absence", in *Johan Grimonprez: Looking for Alfred*, ed. S. Bode (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2007).

C.D.: *We should make it clear that* Double Take *is a project that doesn't yet exist as a finished work and is very different to the gallery film of* Looking for Alfred.

J.G.: It's a "double take" on the whole project. You look at it twice. There are elements from the *Looking for Alfred* film, and lots more from the casting material. There is the doppelganger plot that I mentioned above in relation to Hitchcock's use of a double persona on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. And, in relation to that, there's a much greater spotlight on Ron Burrage. I believe that Hitchcock would have loved to encounter himself. And in that sense, Ron was a big part of pushing this project into something else. Here's someone from a totally different world, whose connection with a Hollywood icon, through circumstances not entirely of his making, has become his life. It seemed an interesting twist of fate to start exploring. For years, Ron impersonated Hitchcock in everything ranging from Robert Lepage's *Le Confessional* (1995) (itself a remake), to soap and shampoo commercials, to guest appearances in music videos for Oasis, to introducing *Hitchcock Presents* on Italian television, to starring in a Japanese documentary about the life of the master…

There was more to the resemblance than met the eye. As well as Hitchcock's mannerisms, Ron seems to have adopted much of Hitchcock's persona, including his fondness for pranks. In one of those great coincidences, Ron actually shares his birthday (13 August) with Hitchcock. The first time he told me this, he actually said "Our birthday", and when pressed on this, he joked: "The Queen would say 'We are not amused'." "*We*." "That is, Alfred and me."

The Hitchcock centenary (1999) was a busy time for Ron. Among the many tribute events that year, Ron attended the launch of the newly restored print of *The Birds* in Locarno, at which Tippi Hedren, after all her history with Hitchcock, was introduced to the audience by doppelganger Ron. In a further (Hitchcockian) twist, the event actually took place on 13 August, with Ron not only filling in for the master, but literally taking over his role, and cutting (his 70th and Hitchcock's 100th) birth-

day cake on stage. This phenomenon of a doubling of the personality—a recurring theme in Hitchcock's films—appears to have affected his lookalike. He is the "Wrong Man", displaced by his uncanny likeness to someone else. To an extent, he has interiorized this identity and blurred the lines between his reality and Hollywood celebrity.

C.D.: *I understand he doesn't particularly like H's films.*

J.G.: He likes opera! He and his partner, an occasional Rembrandt lookalike who unfortunately passed away last year, used to go to the opera whenever they could. Ron was a flight attendant for British Airways, and one day, by strange twist of fate, found himself serving tea to Ingrid Bergman. Before that he worked in London at Claridge's and the Savoy; places that Hitchcock frequented whenever he was back over from Hollywood. But here Ron was at the opposite end of the food chain: a waiter serving Cary Grant, James Mason and, among others, Laurel and Hardy. Next time, I promised to turn things around and take him for lunch at Claridge's for our next rendezvous…

But for the moment we've only had coffee! The version of *Double Take* I'm working on starts with a Folgers coffee commercial and then jumps to the cup of coffee we share with Ron at his home. And hovering in the background, of course, is Hitchcock's famous poisoned coffee cup, his way of spiking the ritual products of the commercial break…

C.D.: *In* The Birds, *the setting of Bodega Bay functions as this new utopia of suburban domesticity and, in his essay on the film, Angelo Restivo suggests that this world somehow coheres around the ritual of drinking tea and coffee…*[8]

8 Restivo, A., "The silence of *The Birds*: sound aesthetics and public space in later Hitchcock", in *Past and Future Hitchcock*, ed. R. Allen & S. Ishii-Gonzáles (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), 173.

Looking for Alfred, 2005

J.G.: The screenwriter of *The Birds*, Evan Hunter, wanted to do something with the relationship between Melanie and the mother that would libidinize the plot. So there's a certain tension beneath that suburban setting, a love story underneath the tea ritual. And remember, too, how the birds zoom in on the teacups… Hitchcock treats the cup of coffee with deserved suspicion. His strong female leads are often portrayed with their sexuality as perilous, set against a figure of male hysteria, a man who is often doubled, or trapped in a case of mistaken identity. And his fear of intimacy (or death) is projected back onto the female character as a way to try to contain her, and poison her (*Notorious* (1946) and *Suspicion* (1941)). However, in *Looking for Alfred* the tables are turned. Instead of the female protagonist being trapped and poisoned, she brings the poisoned cup to Hitchcock. Not only does she poison him but, instead of being attacked by the birds, she devours the bird.

Restivo relates how coffee houses were an integral part of early democratic culture, and how these places of conversation and discussion were increasingly replaced by television giving us the commercial break (instead of the coffee break). It's interesting how the characters in *The Birds* fail to forge social links, and by extension a public sphere is lost to consumer culture (and its repressed undercurrent: the catastrophe). But here, of course, the birds—as harbingers of catastrophe—shatter the coffee cups, invade the world of domestic bliss! It's maybe not a coincidence that 1963, the year of *The Birds*, was also the year when the Federal Communications Commission limited the amount of advertising on radio and television! I haven't yet fully developed how I'm going to integrate all this into *Double Take*, but it definitely ties back into the idea of the commercial break and the happy ending. Although the growing popularity of television in the 1960s didn't mean the end of cinema, it did mark the end of "The End". By which I mean that the words themselves went out of fashion, losing out to endless credits. *The Birds* is the first Hitchcock film not to feature "The End". He leaves it deliberately open-ended (as if waiting for the next episode or instalment), and then dispenses with "The End" in all of his subsequent films. To an extent, you could say that television has redefined what an "end" is all about. It gave us everlasting TV serials with postponed endings, coached us in the obsessive behaviour of live "around the clock" news reports, not to mention "zapping" during the commercial break. What does that leave us with? Essentially, with an image without end… And isn't it funny how it was Hitchcock, in the early days of television, who urged us to zap away from those deadly boring commercials?

First published as: Darke, C., "Hitchcock is not himself today…", in *Johan Grimonprez: Looking for Alfred*, ed. S. Bode (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2007), 77–99.

PART III

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y

Mind Terrorist

Alvin Lu

May 1998

Study reveals dog lovers
live longer than cat lovers

Weekly World News, quoted in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997.

What is the difference between novelists and film directors? Directors like conspiracy theories with nexuses of political power pulling the strings of a large and complex cast. Novelists go for the lone gunman theory. The lone gunman plots in his dingy, unfurnished room, trapped in chaos, cut off from history. His is a myopic, shameful life. In Don DeLillo's novels, at the centre of the vast religious mystery of the reclusive novelist/assassin is a guy in his room cutting his toenails with scissors, sneezing snot on his manuscript. But with a single miraculous shot, he's propelled into the body politic. The act of writing/shooting/bombing occupies the central paradox of democracy, the irreconcilable tension between the individual and the mass culture.

"Isn't it the novelist, above all people, above all writers, who understands this rage, who knows in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels? Through history it's the novelist who has felt affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark… It's the novelist who understands the secret life, the rage that underlies all obscurity and neglect." Or is the relationship between novelists and terrorists one of "playing a zero-sum game", where "what the terrorists gain, novelists lose"?[1]

Three hijacked planes on desert airstrip near Amman, Jordan, 12 September 1970 (*dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997)

Stewardess Augusta Schneider (PanAm Flight 93, Cairo, 6 September 1970):

Meanwhile, this demolition expert of theirs was looking for a light. We'd seen him going around planting the dynamite and we knew pretty much what was going to happen. But just before we were ready to land, this guy came over to me and asked me for a match… and I gave it to him. What else could I do?

Arey, J.A., *The Skypirates* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 42.

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y samples DeLillo's riffs from *White Noise* and *Mao II* and plays them out in the arena of mass media.[2] Editing together broadcast news of Cold War-era hijackings, surreal found footage and personal video, this work pits meaning and imagery against one another in an elliptical dialectic. The work's shadow is therefore cast much further and wider than a singular history of airplane hijackings. Reading between the lines, space is left for the viewer to complete the experience by giving an innate sense to the mind-blowing imagery colliding before their very eyes. The fabric of everyday life is turned inside out and becomes lethal: private resentment, revolutionary movements and pop-culture banality clash and mix, hitting a nerve of quiet discomfort deep within. Revolutions have been televised and commodified before, but perhaps television's dark underbelly does hold potential to point the way towards our only valid revolution, one where we take a long and hard look at ourselves.

Few films explore the complex, troubled relationship between commodification and violent death. While recent films and art seem increasingly removed from relevance, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* moves into the dangerous but vital territory that's been home to artists who are willing to fight. This is the fertile region that the avant-garde *should* thrive in. Has *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*'s widespread dissemination inspired future generations of dying breeds: novelists and terrorists? Digital media finally presents the possibility of an alternative kind of filmmaker, the promise of a different kind of film. Here, at least, is the illusion and fantasy of the lone editor in a dank video editing room, taking the mind-controlling stuff of mass media and spinning it back. Like the novelist, the lone editor is not in the business of building political coalitions or working with real people, but is instead blurring the boundary between thought and action.

Because *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* speaks in the mass media's own language of sound and image, a kind of liberating energy galvanizes it, lending hope that art has not been rendered obsolete.

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1 DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991).
2 DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (New York: Viking, 1985).

Meanwhile, the novel now broods and plots underground, perhaps where it belongs. "The writer belongs at the far margin, doing dangerous things. In Central America, writers carry guns. They have to… The state should want to kill all writers. Every government, every group that holds power or aspires to power should feel so threatened by writers that they hunt them down, everywhere."[3] Writers, welcome home.

3 DeLillo, *Mao II*, p. 97.

Adapted from: Lu, A., "Mind Terrorist", in *The San Francisco Bay Guardian* (6 May 1998).

Against Documentary

Critical Art Ensemble

1994

1. Choose a title carefully, since it is the one of the primary framing devices. It should present itself purely as a description of the images contained in the work, but should also function as a privileged ideological marker. For example, "The Struggle for Freedom in ___". Remember, do not mention "guerillas" in the title. Such words have a connotation of a lost or subversive cause that could lead to irrational violent action, and that scares liberals.

2. If you have a large enough budget (and you probably do if you are making yet another film on political strife), open with a lyrical aerial shot of the natural surroundings of the country in question. Usually the countryside is held by the guerillas. This is good. You now have the traditional authority of nature (and the morality of the town/country distinction) on your side. These are two foundational codes of didactic western art. They are rarely questioned, and will create a channel leading the viewer to the belief that you are filming a populist uprising.

3. Dissolve to the particular band of guerillas that you are going to film. Do not show large armies, and show only small arms,

not heavy weaponry. Remember, the guerillas must look like real underdogs. Americans love that code. If you must talk about the size of the rebel army (for instance, to show the amount of popular support for the resistance), keep it abstract; give only the statistics. Large military formations have that Nuremberg look to them. If at all possible, choose a band comprised of families: it shows real desperation when an entire extended family is fighting. Keep in mind that one of your key missions is to humanize the rebels while making the dominant group an evil abstraction. Finish this sequence by stylishly introducing each of the rebels as individuals.

4. For the next sequence, single out a family to represent the group. Interview each member. Address their motivations for resistance. Follow them throughout the day. Capture the hardships of rebel activity. Be sure to show the sleeping arrangements and the poverty of the food, but concentrate on what the fight is doing to the family. End the sequence by showing the family involved in a recreational activity. This will demonstrate the rebels' ability to endure, and to be human in the face of a catastrophe. It is also the perfect segue into the next sequence: "In this moment of play, who could have imagined the tragedy that would befall them…"

5. Having established the rebels as real, feeling people, it is time to turn to the enemy, by showing for instance an atrocity attributed to them. (Never show the enemy themselves; they must remain an alien abstraction, an unknown to be feared.) It is a preferable if a distant relative of the focus family is killed or wounded in the represented enemy action. Document the mourning of the fellow rebels.

6. With the identities of both the rebels and the enemy established, you must now show an actual guerilla action. It should be read as a defensive manoeuvre with no connotation of vengeance. Make sure that it is an evening or morning raid, to lessen sympathy for the enemy as individuals. The low light will keep them hidden and allow the sparks of the return gunfire to represent the enemy as depersonalized. Do not show guerillas taking prisoners: it is difficult to maintain viewers' sympathy for the rebels if they are seen sticking automatic weapons in the backs of the enemy and marching them along. Finally, only show the action if the rebels seem to win the engagement.

7. In the victory sequence it is important to show the tie between the rebels and the non-military personnel of the countryside. With the enemy recently beaten, it is safe to go to town and celebrate with the agrarian class. You can include speeches and commemorations in this sequence. Show the peasants giving the rebels food, while the rebels give the civilians non-military materials captured during the raid. But most importantly, ensure that the sequence has a festive spirit. This will add an emotional contrast to the closing sequence.

8. Final sequence: focus on the rebel group expressing their dreams of victory and vowing never to surrender. This should cap it: you are now guaranteed a sympathetic response from the audience. The sympathy will override any critical reflection, making the audience content to ride the wave of *your* radical subjectivity. Roll credits. Perhaps add a postscript by the filmmaker on how touched and amazed s/he was by the experience.

First published as: Critical Art Ensemble, "Against Documentary", in *The Electronic Disturbance*, ed. Critical Art Ensemble (New York: Autonomedia, 1994), 43–6.

Stars, that's what we were. Japan, Norway, Düsseldorf, the United States, Holland—don't be surprised if I count them up on my fingers—England, Belgium, Korea, Sweden, places we'd never even heard of and couldn't find on the map—they all sent people to film us and photograph us and interview us. "Camera", "in shot", "tracking shot", "voice off"—but gradually the fedayeen found themselves "out of shot" and learned that the visitors spoke "voice off".

Whenever Europeans looked at us their eyes shone. Now I understand why. It was with desire, because their looking at us produced a reaction in our bodies before we realized it. Even with our backs turned we could feel your eyes drilling through the backs of our necks. We automatically adopted a heroic and therefore attractive pose. Legs, thighs, chest, neck—everything helped to work the charm. We weren't aiming to attract anyone in particular, but since your eyes provoked us and you'd turned us into stars, we responded to your hopes and expectations.—"But you'd turned us into monsters, too. You called us terrorists!"

Israel calls everyone in the PLO terrorists, leaders and fedayeen alike. They show no sign of the admiration they must feel for you.—"As far as terrorism is concerned, we're nothing compared to them. Or compared to the Americans and the Europeans. If the whole world's a kingdom of terror we know whom to thank. But you terrorize by proxy. At least the terrorists I'm talking about risk their own skins. That's the difference."

Genet, J., *Prisoner of Love* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1992).

No Man's Land: Politics in the Sky[1]

Herman Asselberghs and
Johan Grimonprez

1997

1958
ENTER THE JETSET AND A NEW WORD "HIJACK!"

From the get-go, hijacking planes had strong potential for political exploitation. With their capacity for speed and lift-off, planes were able to transgress political boundaries and undermine the concept of nationhood.[2] Just after the Peruvian revolution, PanAm pilot Byron Richards discovered how politics and piloting fly side by side. His plane was seized by the world's first skyjackers when he landed into Arequipa as part of his regular mail run on 31 February 1931, "to drop propaganda over cities in Peru".[3]

Between 1947 and 1950 there was a rash of hijackings involving the crossing of the Iron Curtain—the hostile divide between the

1 Adapted from: Asselberghs, H. & Grimonprez, J., *Nergensland* (Leuven: Dietsche Warande & Belfort, 1997) and Grimonprez, J., "No Man's Land", in *Inflight Magazine* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 10–53.
2 See Beer, G., "The Island and the Aeroplane: the Case of Virgina Woolf", in *Nation and Narration*, ed. H.K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1992), 265–90.
3 Quoted in Phillips, D., *Skyjack: The Story of Air Piracy* (London: Harrap, 1973).

"Eastern bloc" and the "capitalist West". Vocabulary evolved accordingly: skyjackers fleeing from east to west were "freedom fighters" or "political refugees", while those seizing planes to go the other way were branded as criminals and spies. By 1958, *The Times* had adopted the term 'hijack' to describe the act of commandeering a plane.[4] The word was popularized during the Prohibition in the US when one bootlegger, while robbing another, would invariably say: "*Hi, Jack*, raise your hands!"

1 NOVEMBER 1969
FIRST TRANSATLANTIC HIJACK

Vietnam vet Raffaele Minichiello forces a TWA Flight 85 out of Los Angeles to make a detour across two continents and an ocean. Two days and 6,869 miles later the plane lands in Rome, accomplishing the world's longest and first transatlantic skyjack. On the tarmac he convinces police to give him a getaway car, and speeding away in it, Minichiello manages to outrun the Italian police. The car is later found abandoned in the Appian hills of the Italian countryside as helicopters and search dogs unsuccessfully continue to track him down. It is only five hours later that Minichiello is found. He is taking haven in a country church—The Sanctuary of Divine Love. He is wearing Bermuda shorts, and it is his 20th birthday.

In Italy, Raffaele's skyjacking is acclaimed as the most exciting event since the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Touted as victim of the imperialist American war machine, he becomes an instant celebrity. Marriage proposals pour in. Movie starlets tearfully confess their love, and Minichiello is offered a leading role in an Italian spaghetti Western. He spent $15.50 on his plane ticket.

4 *The Times* (19 February 1958).

Raffaele Minichiello, first transatlantic hijacker, Rome, November 1969

1969
HIJACK INN:
CUBANS WINE AND DINE AMERICANO

By the end of 1969 the restaurant and gift shop at the Havana airport expands their business to take care of the unexpected flux of visitors brought in by the skyjackers. Landing fees are inflated and the runway is enlarged to take care of the unscheduled joy-rides to the Caribbean island. When Rudolfo Rivera Rios makes history with the first hijack of the 747, his destination of choice is Cuba. Upon landing, Premier Fidel Castro himself hurries to José Marti Airport to admire the jumbo jet. While the hijacker gets off the plane and disappears, Captain Watkins gets out to chat with Castro. Everyone else stays on board. Castro is fascinated by the gigantic aircraft. Captain Watkins asks him if he would like to go on board to see what it looks like inside. Castro graciously declines.
—"I would probably scare the passengers," he says.
Could the hijacker get his luggage off the plane though? Sorry, the 747 requires special baggage-handling equipment that is not available in Havana. The man's luggage will have to be shipped back on another flight.

A routine pattern is established: hijackers are lodged in the "Casa de Transitos" ("Hijacker's House") in Havana's Siboney district. Pilots and crew rest briefly, smoke cigars, and then fly their empty planes back to the US. Cubans wine and dine the Americano tourists and take them on a sightseeing tour of socialist Cuba. After this memorable side trip, generally enjoyed by the skyjack jet set, they are boarded on a return trip to the US, laden with rum, cigars, revolutionary literature, sombreros and pictures of Che Guevara. Castro forwards the bills to the American airline companies: for every hijacked airliner to Cuba an additional $2,500 to $3,000 cover charge is demanded for landing fees, fuel, plus food and accommodation for the passengers.

Anonymous hijacker, Panama, January 1970

29 AUGUST 1969
7-MINUTE DETOUR OVER OCCUPIED HOMELAND[5]

A stylishly clad Leila Khaled, in white bell-bottoms and matching hat, boards the flight from Beirut to Rome. The person sitting next to her is a clean-cut sociable American on his way to New York. She knows that Americans, like most other tourists, like to make casual conversation about everything under the sun. He must be bored, and he wants to talk.
—"Where are you going?" he asks.
—"I am going to Rome," she replies.
—"Why are you going to Rome?" he continues.
Khaled pauses momentarily to fabricate an answer, and says with simulated shyness,
—"I am going to meet my fiancé who is coming from London to meet me in Rome in a few days."
—"How on earth would an Arab girl be going to Rome to meet her fiancé alone and get married?" he asks.
In truth, Leila Khaled is on her way to Rome in order to hijack the TWA Boeing-707 that will be leaving for Tel Aviv in a couple of days.

Once airborne her other accessories appear: a pistol and a hand grenade. As she makes her way towards the cockpit, her companion, Salim Issawi, announces that the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) is now in command of the very first American airliner hijacked in the Middle East. Captain Carter, looking down the barrel of a pistol, is obliged to agree.
—"What shall I do now?" asks Carter.
—"Let's take a seven-minute tour of the fatherland."
The image of her father appears before Leila's eyes, while she can hear his voice saying, "When will we return home?" Her whole world comes together. She is silent. She looks out at the greenery and mountains of Palestine. She can see Tel Aviv below. She weeps out of affection and longing.

5 Extract from Khaled, L., *My People Shall Live; Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973).

Leila Khaled, Palestinian hijacker, August 1969

31 MARCH 1970
SKYJACK CAPTURES TELLY!

Tokyo's streets are deserted as millions watch the very first hijacking broadcast live on television. Nine Japanese Red Army members hijack a Japanese domestic flight to start the 84-hour long saga. They are all students, conservatively dressed in coats and ties and look for all the world like young office workers. But instead of briefcases they carry samurai swords, wielding them like warriors of old as they rush down the aisle. Their demand? To be flown to North Korea. Fighter planes accost the airliner in the sky and escort it in the direction of an airport, which identifies itself from the control tower as Pyongyang. They look as though they might be North Korean planes, and perhaps that is what all or most of the passengers think they are. In actual fact, they are South Korean, and the airport is South Korea's Gimpo International Airport, disguised as a North Korean air base for the occasion. Communist banners replace western flags, English signs are removed and two trucks of airborne troops in stolen North Korean uniforms roll in. Nobody on board asks any questions; South Korean skies look no different to North Korean ones. Floodlights are blazing as the planes approaches. It is not yet dark but soon will be, and perhaps the blaze of light will help to fool the eye and blot out the view beyond the airfield. In front of the plane official greeters wave "Welcome to Pyongyang" placards. Loudspeakers blare out the same message. Soldiers with smiling faces and communist insignia take up positions alongside the plane as if forming a guard of honour. They are joined by girls carrying bouquets of flowers. The hijackers are suspicious. The set-up turns sour when one of the hijackers turns on his transistor radio and hears American jazz. The hijackers refuse to disembark. The waiting game commences. The aircraft cabin gets unbearably cramped, the toilets have reached their overflow point. The men, tied to their seats, are extremely uncomfortable and the women help them by mopping their brows. Men with no women nearby are out of luck. A new word enters the Japanese vocabulary: "Haijakku".

Kozo Okamoto, Japanese Red Army commando, Tel Aviv, June 1972

6 SEPTEMBER 1970
YOUR WORDS HAVE REACHED MY EARS[6]

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine increases the stakes by turning skyjacking into a worldwide political phenomenon and making Palestine into a household name. The Six-Day War leaves thousands of Palestinians homeless and without a voice. The impact of previous televised hijacks is not lost on the PFLP. In skyjacking, they see a weapon with which to make their cause known to an international audience. The strategy is simple: turn your cause into prime time. The method: hold passengers hostage in full view of TV cameras and negotiate with political authorities while the world watches. The stage is then set for the most daring plot in the history of civil aviation: Skyjack Sunday Over Europe!

A total of five planes are hijacked with "Revolution Airstrip" in the Jordanian desert as destination. The demand: the release of imprisoned PFLP commandos. Two jets make it to the desert, the 3rd jet is blown up on Cairo runway. The 4th plane hijack is foiled and two-time hijacker Leila Khaled is captured. A 5th plane is seized—the new demand: Khaled's release. *The Times* proclaims 1970 as "Year of the Hijacker".

Palestinians learned geography by going from one airport to another.[7]
Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*

6 Sheikh Muhammed ibn Rashid Al-Maktoum, Dubai Airport control tower, replying to hijackers aboard a diverted JAL, July 1973, in *Hijack, 144 Lives in the Balance*, S. Bunsei (Los Angeles: Gateway Publishers, 1975).
7 Genet, J., *Prisoner of Love* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1992).

Mouna Abdel Majid, Palestinian hijacker, Amman, August 1970

6 SEPTEMBER 1970
SECOND RENDEZVOUS WITH HISTORY[8]

One day my eldest son, Badr, came home from kindergarten and asked me if I was a thief. His teacher had told him I had hijacked an airplane, and now he was wondering where I was hiding it.
Leila Khaled[9]

After a celebrity tour of the Arab world, Leila Khaled undergoes facial plastic surgery to prepare her for her second rendezvous with history. Ever since the 1969 TWA hijack episode, Khaled's picture plasters the walls of airports worldwide, yet there is hardly a glimmer of recognition as the veteran skyjacker boards an El Al flight bound for New York. This time her companion is Patrick Arguello and she wears a "wonderbra" in which two grenades are concealed. They attempt to divert the plane to join their comrades at a deserted military airstrip in the Jordanian desert. On the infamous quadruple "Skyjack Sunday" the El Al hijack is foiled. Patrick Arguello is shot and killed, while Leila Khaled is apprehended.

Captive in a London prison, Khaled's capture gives the PFLP a headache: the British refuse to exchange Miss Khaled for non-British hostages. Realizing they do not have any British nationals among those in the Jordanian desert, the PFLP decide to seize three days later a 5th, British plane, with which to negotiate for her release. It is the first British commercial airliner to be hijacked and is christened "Leila" in her honour.

8 Extract from Khaled, L., *My People Shall Live: Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973).
9 Excerpt from an interview in *Der Spiegel* (November 1996): "Die Waffe gab mir Würde", cited in *Former Hijacker Leila Khaled on Palestine, Peace, and Death*, ed. J. Hogrefe (trans. K. Lum), 158–62.

Leila Khaled, Palestinian hijacker, Amman, August 1970

8 MAY 1972
BLACK SEPTEMBER MASQUE!

Incognito, in wigs and forged passports, four Palestinians board a Sabena jet at Brussels Airport. Of the four, two are Palestinian women, Rima Tannous Eissa, 21, and Therese Halaseh, 19. Both ladies wear special girdles made of highly explosive material; each have a hand grenade hidden in their beauty-cases with the detonators tucked in their bras. Approaching Sarajevo, the girls go to the washroom to remove their girdles: Rima handles the explosives, while Therese announces to the passengers over the intercom that they are being skyjacked by the Black September unit of the Palestinian guerrilla organization. "As you can see," Captain Levy tells the 90 passengers, "we have friends aboard."[10]

Touching down in Tel Aviv, the "friends" demand the release of 317 Palestinian commandos held in Israeli prisons. They warn that if their demands are not met, they will blow up the plane with the passengers still on board. They send Captain Levy over to the terminal with a sample of the hijacker's explosives to show they mean business. He does more by telling the Israelis that, crucially, nothing is blocking the airplane's emergency doors. In the first successful assault carried out on a passenger airliner, Israeli soldiers disguised as airplane mechanics and who include Ehud Barak and Benjamin Netanyahu, storm the plane and kill the two male commandos and one passenger. The female hijackers are captured.

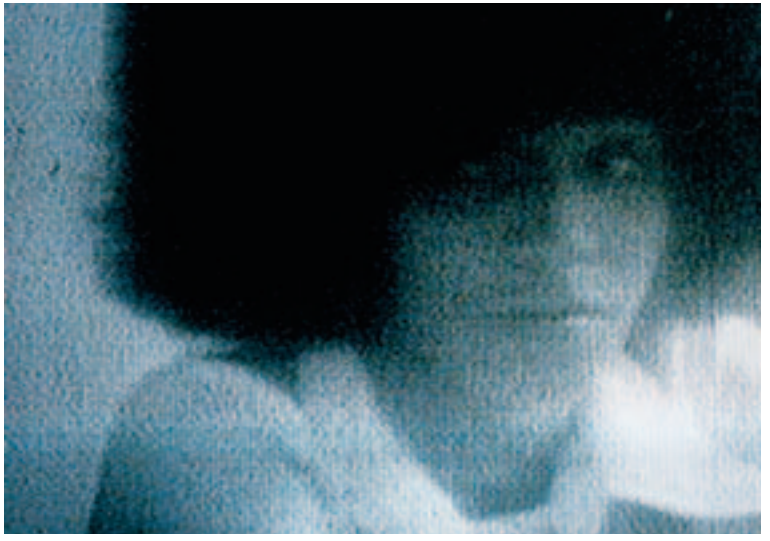
10 Hevesi, D., "Reginald Levy Is Dead at 88; Hailed as a Hero in a '72 Hijacking", in *The New York Times* (4 August 2010). Accessed 7 December 2010: www.nytimes.com/2010/08/05/world/europe/05levy.html

Rima Tannous Eissa, Palestinan hijacker, Tel Aviv Prison, May 1972

10 NOVEMBER 1972
FBI IN SWIMMING TRUNKS

In 1972, swimming trunks become standard uniform for FBI agents during hijack situations. Three black men, Henry Jackson and his two half-brothers—Lewis Moore and Melvin Cale—hijack Captain William Haas's Southern Airways Flight 49 out of Birmingham, Alabama. Paranoid that the other male passengers could be concealing weapons, the hijackers have them all strip down to their underwear. The women are ordered to throw their purses into the aisle, during which time dinner is served. The hijack turns into a two-day ordeal across the US, Canada, Cuba and the Atlantic; making nine forced stops, two of them in Havana. During one such stop in Chattanooga, the hijackers demand that money, two dozen buckets of fried chicken, parachutes, seven bulletproof vests, pep pills and a six-pack of beer be delivered to the plane by a FBI agent in his swimming trunks.

It turns out that Jackson and Moore have a bone to pick with the mayor and police of Detroit. They had unsuccessfully sued the city for $4 million on the count of police brutality and could hardly believe it when the city offered to settle for $25: for them, it is clearly a matter of race discrimination. It is so that they decide on their hijack, with a ransom demand of $10 million. They threaten to crash-land into the atomic plant at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, if their demands are not met.



Black Power family hijack, Algiers, January 1972

APRIL 1985
GET KILLED, AND MAYBE THEY WILL NOTICE YOU[11]

When I read in the papers about a virgin of sixteen blowing herself up in the middle of a group of Israeli soldiers, it doesn't surprise me very much. It's the lugubrious yet joyful preparations that intrigue me. What string did the old woman or girl have to pull to detonate the grenades? How was the bodice arranged to make the girl's body look womanly and enticing enough to rouse suspicion in soldiers with a reputation for intelligence?

Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*[12]

The Shi'ite faction National Resistance Front (PPS), based in South Lebanon, announces in April 1985 that 17-year-old Sana'a Mehaidli has become the first woman suicide car bomber to perish in action. Sana'a Muheidli is a member of the "Brides of Blood", a team of teenage girls trained for suicide missions. Before she sets out to meet her fate, she records a suicide note by way of video, explaining her actions:

"I am very relaxed to go on this operation because I am carrying out the duty of my people. I decided on self-sacrifice and martyrdom for the sake of liberation of our land and our people, because I have seen the tragedy of our people from the humiliation of occupation and oppression, the killing of children, women and old men."

She exhorts her mother not to mourn her death, rather, "be merry, and let your joy explode as if it were my wedding day".

Sana'a tells her parents that she is off to buy lipstick. She then drives off in a white Peugeot stuffed with TNT, crashing it into an Israeli convoy. She kills herself and two soldiers.

11 DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991).
12 Genet, J., *Prisoner of Love* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1992).

Sana'a Mehaidli, sacrificial martyr, Beirut, Feburary 1985

1980s
TERRORISM IS WHAT THE BAD GUYS DO

June 1985: Beirut–Algiers: Shi'ites commandeer TWA Flight 847. Media spectacles deflects from Reagan administration's clandestine activities in Central America: the one American hostage killed in the Middle East eclipses 10,000 people killed in Central America.

Then in 1986, terrorism peaks: 25 US dead from terrorism, 12,000 more die from slipping… in bathtubs.

4 April 1986: Nezar Hindawi puts unsuspecting (and pregnant) girlfriend on a flight to Israel; her bag lined with enough Semtex to blow the plane up. Inside the bag is a pocket calculator fitted with a detonator. Luckily, she is busted. Rumours of a double agent double cross. The official version is that the bomb was allegedly made by Syrian intelligence operatives and passed to Hindawi through his Syrian handlers. However, French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac cites the West German Government as authority for the alleged involvement of the Israeli Secret Service as a provocation designed to embarrass Syria and destabilize the Assad regime.[13] The Heathrow bomb was never intended to go off, and its discovery by an Israeli security guard a mere charade.

1993
FROM CHECHNYA WITH LOVE:
NEW NATIONS, NEW JACKS

Eastern block topples, skyjacking on the rise: "To you westerners, borders represent barriers and limits, to us they represent opportunities," claims a Chechen terrorist.[14]

13 *Le Monde* (11 November 1986).
14 Quoted in Akahane, T., "Governing the Last Continent?", in *Subetage* (Vienna: Sabotage Communications, 1999).

Anonymous, St. Petersburg, February 1993

The supermarket shelves have been rearranged. It happened one day without warning.

DeLillo D., *White Noise* (New York: Viking, 1985).

Supermarket History

An interview with Johan Grimonprez by Catherine Bernard

1998

Catherine Bernard: *Paul Virilio once said, "To invent the ship is to invent the shipwreck, the train the derailment, and so on." In your film* dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, *the opening line, "Shouldn't death be a swan dive, graceful, white-winged, and smooth, leaving the surface undisturbed?", also seems to relate speed and death, history and speed.*

Johan Grimonprez: I'd like to quote Nixon from *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, who, while speaking to an audience of scientists, paraphrased Virilio. He said something like: "If it wouldn't have been for science, there would be no airplane, and if there was no airplane there wouldn't have been any hijackings, so we could make the argument that it would be better not to have science at all." True, every technology invents its own catastrophe. TV technology has reinvented a way to look at the world and to think about death. That is, in fact, what the film is about. It analyses how the media participates in the construction of reality. We could say that with the reinventing of reality, a culture of catastrophe is also being invented, and with it a new way to look at death. The acceleration of history is also related to technology: the film shows both how TV news has been historically presented, and how it has been

accelerated by the new technological means of recording reality. The film ends with the camcorder revolution: honeymooners who inadvertently taped a hijacked, crashing plane, and were immediately invited onto CNN to host Larry King's talk show. It reveals how the distance between spectator and history has entirely dissolved. The spectator has become the hero; now the "Best of Home-video" programmes even urge us to send in our own little catastrophes.

C.B.: *The title refers to the multiple choice of automated voice-mail systems. How is the relation of hijacking to history presented in your film?*

J.G.: History conflates with hijacking. The plane is a metaphor for history. It is transgressive, always on the move between several countries, between several homes. Nowadays, home is a nomadic place. The Palestinians didn't have a country so the airplane became for them a sort of home. At the end of the sixties and seventies, the political implication of home became very clear. Leila Khaled stated in an interview that because there was no Palestinian territory, war had to be fought in planes; the plane claimed as the home, in a state of nowhere. Hence, the recurring image of the flying house, appropriated from *The Wizard of Oz*. The twister which carries Dorothy's house over the rainbow into the land of Oz parallels the hijacking of a plane across a violent border towards a political utopia.

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y is like supermarket history: there is so much available and history cannot be understood as singular. It tells of how history is recorded and catalogued, and how these techniques accelerate and accumulate memory, almost as an excess of history. If you punch the word "hijacking" on the internet, or look for footage, you get so much information that you don't know where to start. You are already lost in push-button history, so you have to zoom in on specific aspects. In focusing on hijacking, I chose one detail which revealed history in another way. Looking at details is much more concrete because history, after all, is the conflation of the personal with the global.

C.B.: *Hijacking takes place between spaces, political and physical. It has the possibility to literally explode historical dialectics: bombs explode rationality. So could terrorism represent a moment outside of historical determinism?*

J.G.: History is always on the move, one step ahead. It is not fixed or in place, so hijacking is very much part of history. History is always happening between places, right? It is only afterwards that the structures of power consolidate it into a text, an image, a TV series, a narrative. History is read differently by different people—for example, the Palestinians and the Israelis. Vincent Alexandre, the assistant editor, was doing research at the TV archives in Cairo and was looking for images from the colonial period tracing Palestinian history, but all of them had been removed by the Israelis, either destroyed or stored somewhere else. So, if Palestinians have been written out of history, then by hijacking they can re-inscribe themselves into it.

Abstract statements about terrorism are hard to make. The whole terrorist spectacle has been absorbed by a game of political masquerade: Right is playing on the icon of the Left—government is playing terrorist. It is more perverse than simple dialectics or a destructive bomb: when interviewing Carlos for his book *Carlos the Jackal*, David Yallop realized in it that he was not dealing with the real Carlos. There were two or three versions of Carlos or, in the end, maybe Carlos didn't exist at all; maybe he was just an invention of the counter-terrorist movement or the power structures in place.

C.B.: *As we watch the film, the story of hijacking unfolds as a way of telling the story of the media, how it engineers drama and fiction as forms of control. I am thinking, for example, of the sequence which collages the generic music of Westerns and frontier myths with images of a congressman, Reagan, rockets and missiles.*

J.G.: I traced the history of hijacking from the first passenger flights onwards, and how it has changed through the course of history, but this is just a cover under which to talk about the

story of the media and of the (mis)representation of hijacking itself. For example, if a hijacked plane explodes mid-air in Africa it is turned into a thirty-second news byte. If there are a few Americans on board and no deaths, then there is a narrative, a suspense involved: the suspense of a postponed death. A narrative can easily be constructed, so the media takes it on. So, it's actually all about narrative and the narrator telling the story, not transparency.

The story of hijacking is inextricably linked to the Cold War, and its playing field largely defined by the ideological divide between communism and capitalism: for instance, Cuba aligned to Russia; the Japanese Red Army and the Palestinian Liberation Front aligned to Mao; Israel aligned to the US "Skyjacking", as it was called, was somehow written into the romantic idea of the revolution during the sixties and seventies. East and West were, more or less, clearly defined and the hijackers had names: Leila Khaled, Ulrike Meinhoff, Kozo Okamoto, Rima Tannous Eissa, Mouna Abdel Majid… But towards the eighties the utopian project has imploded; the former dividing lines disappear, hijackers are killed, cynicism is put in place. The media is more and more implicated as a key player; the image of the individual is substituted by a flow of crowds; hijacking is replaced by anonymous suitcase bombs. The image of the hijacker has vanished: TWA Flight 800 can be explained as an accident or a missile or an extraterrestrial attack; the Lockerbie bombing got woven into several political rhetorics, each legitimizing a global power game. Since the eighties, the Reagan Administration started to accommodate the terrorist spectacle to veil its own dirty game in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Terrorism became a superficial game played through the media to hide the big shit underneath. It might be premature to invent subliminal narratives, but the fact that anonymous parcel bombs have replaced hijackers might very well reflect the dynamics of abstract capitalism, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the US trying to redefine itself in terms of its imaginary Other: no longer James Bond against Russia, but Mickey Mouse versus ET.

C.B: *The idea of catastrophe is constantly highlighted in the film through the editing and the musical score. In doing so, is your intention also to deconstruct the language of TV docudramas, news, and talk shows?*

J.G.: I mimic what is going on in the media, rather than deconstructing it. In choosing to do so, I think that criticism is more implicit than explicit. The news has turned into a soap opera, as in the Clinton–Lewinsky affair. A lot of it was inspired indirectly by the Gulf War reportage, which reduced history to a video game, the sights mounted on top of a missile. It catapulted the camera's proximity to destruction right into our living room. As we saw with the O.J. Simpson trial and, more recently, with Princess Diana's death, catchy logos and soundbites are put in place immediately; the news adapts Hollywood's aesthetic codes or styles itself after MTV. Only the applause and laugh tracks are missing. At one point Hollywood even ran ahead of reality. The invention of a war to divert attention from the president's sexual escapades—as portrayed in the film *Wag the Dog*—preceded the recent Gulf crisis. It made the whole Clinton–Lewinsky affair look like a poor soap-opera adaptation. Saddam Hussein took the story one step further by broadcasting *Wag the Dog* on national cable in Iraq: Hollywood goes political on a global scale.

C.B.: *Zapping is a strong syntactical element in the film, done with fast editing and syncopated rhythm. Is this form of collage related to the narrative—the history of media and media techniques?*

J.G.: The ideology of zapping could be defined as a new sort of Brechtian rupture. It can be an extreme form of poetry, going much further than collage. It reflects the television vocabulary that was online during the Gulf War: Reporting was all mixed up—baby diapers and politics, ketchup and smart missiles, commercials between images. If one could transpose a videotape of the Gulf War reportage into the Vietnam War period, it would immediately reveal how the news industry has transformed itself into a surrealistic shopping zone. In the former, the distance between the event and the camera, mounted on top of a missile,

seemed as close to death as it could be. This spectacle replaced critical distance and obscured the fact that the war was launched to sell 'surgical war' technology, boosting the US economy. What the media is selling is history itself. Zapping, then, is a new way of looking at reality. It can't be denied and it's everywhere: walking through a city, we are bombarded with impressions. It's like Walter Benjamin's "walk through the city", but in fast-forward mode. Soon we will mistake hard reality for a commercial break.

C.B.: *The way you juxtapose the images—colour and black-and-white, accelerated and slow motion, circular motion, fast-paced editing—creates a poetics of space in which they sometimes barely touch and sometimes permeate each other. Is the idea of flux between spaces and narratives one of your concerns?*

J.G.: The juxtaposition shows how memory works: domestic banality coexists with TV; intimate, domestic stuff is also part of history. Like I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when the Gulf War started: drinking a cup of coffee over a household quarrel. It was like watching *Star Trek* in pyjamas as a kid in the seventies. Both worlds are colliding all the time. This is what history is all about. The hijackers in the film are also mostly portrayed in a banal manner: Rima Eissa washing her face behind bars; Kozo Okamoto falling asleep in the courtroom; Minichiello smoking a cigarette; the Shiite hijackers drinking Pepsi; Leila Khaled in close-up after her facelift.

C.B.: *The idea of a fluid structure is also enhanced by the use of precisely dated and identified sequences, organized not necessarily chronologically but in strata. This would seem to refer to the dynamics of desire in the way we apprehend reality. Can it be read also as a critique of linear history and of the rationalization of sociopolitical space?*

J.G.: There is a specific structure in the tape—the story of hijacking—but the way I approached it was empirical. I was dealing with something which was outside myself, but very much part of my memory. While I was researching and collecting images,

exploring the relationships between camera and event, I would find connections in a non-chronological way. The film starts with the first live hijacking to be broadcast on Japanese TV, and goes on to depict a sort of voyeurism of voyeurism. The image of the camera pervades the film and, indirectly, it becomes an account of how reality is mediated. But initially I wanted to make a tape about people saying goodbye in airports, to trace how that has changed in just thirty years. It was to be something more autobiographical, a recollection of memories in relation to my little daughter who was at that time living on the other side of the Atlantic; reunions always happened in airports. Marc Augé has called the airport a "non-space", where everything is in flux, the whole world transforming into one big airport with the accompanying feeling of homelessness. The film reflects this loss of home, conflating desire and politics, public history and personal memory.

C.B.: dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y *is about the transgression of borders and state, arguing against the old dichotomies of fiction and reality, movies and documentary.*

J.G.: Whereas traditional documentaries are tied to epistemological limitations to describe reality, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* plays with the presupposed notions of structure and chronology. For that reason I choose to depict a double narrative that sets the television timeline against the backdrop of a story. In the classical documentary, chronology and structure are logical and a specific vocabulary is used to describe reality, whereas in my film, the chronology of hijacking is underscored by a fictionalized storyline based on a novel by Don DeLillo, which plays with how these notions collide. The film also tries to trace intimate politics to point to historical alternatives. Reality is always co-constructed; it is not only the news, the political forces beyond us, but it is also inside us, part of our desire. I criticize certain notions or structures of the state, but I feel that I am also implicated in them. On an emotional level, one feels several things at the same time: revulsion and desire, seduction and repulsion; the disco beat of

Do The Hustle accompanies the final sequence of planes crash-landing, urging on the ultimate disaster.

C.B.: *In the political arena, women are represented in the media in a few distinct ways: the passive* faire-valoir *figure who enhances humanitarian causes and other charities through her presence; the threatening figure with an appropriate nickname, like Margaret Thatcher's "Iron Lady"; the spokesperson. In the history of terrorism, women are almost absent: the media have all but obliterated their role. One of the reasons for this disappearance is that they actually were not accorded any important role besides that of companion. Obviously war is seen as a man's affair. I would like to suggest a parallel here with the emphasis placed in the official history of terrorism on whatever served the Cold-War cause (Cuba, Israel/Palestine, Libya/Eastern bloc), where Third World countries were featured only when it directly affected the principal power structures. Can you comment about such frame presences which translate into visual lacunae?*

J.G.: History is definitely selective. While researching at ABC News, I realized that there were so many images of hijackings! I knew that in choosing some, I was eliminating lots of others. Walter Benjamin said something like, "History is written by the guys who went to war",…right? You realize how much is never written down, recorded, or even taped. It also has to do with power and money: CNN can afford to send news crews everywhere. So history is always related to power, to the narrator who tells the story. In the film I make fun of Dr David Hubbard, the American psychiatrist who specializes in hijackers. He focused on the Freudian principle, trying to analyse the plane as a big Freudian machine: pilot, stewardess and hijacker caught in an oedipal triangle, and so on; so skyjacking—the "flight of fantasy", as he calls it—is reduced to a mere sexual impulse. But then where does that leave Leila Khaled, the Palestinian hijacker? She could embody the phallic woman. It was pretty smart on the part of the Palestinians to introduce Leila Khaled: seduction as part of guerrilla strategy. For her second hijacking, she went even further, undergoing a facelift and dressing herself up as a tourist.

C.B.: *The film's narration consists of excerpts of Don DeLillo's novels,* Mao II *and* White Noise *which establish a relation between hijacking, terrorism and writing.*[1] *Are they really even comparable?*

J.G.: In *Mao II*, a relation is spun between the terrorists and the novelist. It questions the status of the artist versus the status of the TV image. What is the role of the artist today? "Novelists and terrorists play a zero-sum game, what terrorists gain, novelists lose," says Don DeLillo in *Mao II*. The book contends that the terrorist has taken the writer's role in society, because he is able to play the media. In *White Noise*, catastrophe is a member of the family. TV stages the clash between the little world of domestic bliss and the bigger political picture that surrounds it. Nowadays even the terrorist is hijacked by this global political spectacle staged through the media.

C.B.: *The text also affirms the precedence of media drama in plotting the narrative of the contemporary world while the fiction writer is assigned the role of dinosaur. How do you see your own situation as an artist making films? Is any definite place possible?*

J.G.: Yes, the reason why I chose the writer-versus-terrorist narrative is to speak about the artist versus the media. The situation is, in a sense, also contradictory: the film declares the death of the novel, but at the same time is based on a novel. It presupposes the necessity of writing while it proclaims the impact of the suicidal die-hard. "Get killed, and maybe they will notice you," runs a line in the film. Thus the game played out between terrorist and novelist becomes an autobiographical story, a metaphor for the role of the filmmaker within a media-saturated world. Nobody can deny television; as a filmmaker, it certainly cannot be denied. This dilemma is very much part of my life. The world is full of meanings, an abundance of meanings, all scrambling for attention, says DeLillo. On TV, imagery becomes more and more extreme and the accumulation of

1 DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991) and DeLillo, D., *White Noise* (New York: Viking, 1985).

images more rapid: the TV set has swallowed the world. Reality has lost credibility: even when confronted with real death one feels detached, as if the violin strings are missing in the crucial scene.

A lot of sixties and seventies films and videos about countermovements situated themselves in a dialectical process against TV or in the avant-garde. Nowadays the situation is much more inclusive, like contemporary criticism. Mellencamp points out that the dream of the global village to invent "counter-TV" has already materialized, but in an inverted sense: the sitcom.[2] *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* situates itself precisely in this sort of everyday schizophrenia in which shock and catharsis happen at the same time: it is inclusive and critical at the same time. It is about both seduction and the displacement of desire. Commercials can become a metaphor for very intimate things.

C.B.: *During the seventies, hijacking and terrorism played an important role in the construct of a sociocultural imaginary in Europe. Fear, bomb scares, and "terrorist chic" went hand-in-hand, especially among intellectuals. Is this aspect interesting to you?*

J.G.: "Terrorist chic" captures very well the failure of what happened with the romanticized ideas of revolution in the narratives of the sixties and seventies. Consumerism has absorbed the revolutionary impulse. The utopian project has imploded, and in the end there is not one projected dream or idea left. When we look at images now, we realize how much everything has been absorbed by the seduction principle. When, back in the seventies, Baader and Meinhoff went off to training camps in Palestine, it was very much like Duchamp's urinal. The urinal shocked because it was displaced inside the boundaries of a bourgeois world. Recently someone peed in Duchamp's urinal at an exhibition: back to start.

"Terrorism" has become an empty term, just like "democracy", a fig leaf to disguise whatever ideology lies underneath. Just as the Wizard of Oz turns out to be a big fake! Terrorism is

2 Mellencamp, P., *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, 1997

such a vast concept that it has to be contextualized, geographically and historically. If it happens in a country in South America, it is totally different from what happened in the seventies in Europe or what is going on with recent extreme-right bombings in the United States. Ideologies also have to be localized; you can't generalize unless you're speaking from Hollywood. The end of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, set in St Petersburg in 1994, portrays a Russian terrorist, a bullet in his stomach, a microphone pushed in his face, dying on camera. No longer capable of answering why he took hostages, he dies on the set with TV's full complicity. Final declaration: silence. The media is left alone with itself.

C.B.: *More recent hijackings and terrorist actions have turned into bloodbaths (Lockerbie, Marseilles), and the state has also adopted guerrilla tactics. Could this be a form of victory, or the complete absorption of terrorist dynamics within the state? Take the Unabomber story: danger and disaster become ubiquitous yet impossible to locate. Perhaps it also points to technological warfare as a last frontier?*

J.G.: Maybe the state wants precisely to claim terrorism's ubiquity, to further entrench its police control. Didn't we used to wave goodbye to our loved ones from the observation deck, watching the take-off? Now our *bon voyage* ritual involves security gates, X-rays, surveillance, lasting-lipstick billboards, a little bit of shopping. The intimate body has become totally controlled. Terrorism and hijackings were followed by counter-measures. Every time a terrorist would invent something, the state adopted a strategy of mimicry. It has gotten to be an extreme situation. All the recording security systems in today's airports is a result of seventies hijackings. Paradoxically, there is so much security in place now but bombs pose a bigger threat than hijackers. Take Lockerbie, for example. 270 people died and we're left with a suitcase bomb: no terrorist anymore. The terrorist is absent. It's a total masquerade of the structures of state.

First published as: Bernard, C. & Grimonprez, J., "Supermarket History: Interview with Johan Grimonprez", in *Parkett*, no. 53 (1998), 6–18.

On Seeing, Flying and Dreaming

Vrääth Öhner

1999

1. In his anthropological investigation of cinema, Edgar Morin compares the development of cinema with that of the airplane. Both have conquered the continents; but while the airplane "fulfilled the most nonsensical dream pursued by mankind since he first beheld the sky: to break free of the Earth", cinema accomplished the exact opposite, namely "reflecting earthly reality directly". "While the airplane moved away from the world of objects, the cinematographer's main aim was to reflect this world in order to be able to scrutinize it more closely." The point of Morin's little story about a historical coincidence is that the airplane and cinema soon came to swap roles. Due to its usefulness, the airplane obediently fitted into the world of machines and became an expedient instrument for travel, trade and warfare. Film, on the other hand, "rose up into a sky of dreams, […] populated by adorable figures who had fled earthly reality, whose servant and mirror it evidently had been planned to be".[1]

1 Morin, E., *Der Mensch und das Kino* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1958), 9.

Benghazi hijack drama: hostages return home, Tokyo Airport, July 1973
(*dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997)

Of course, this story does not tell us the whole truth; it fails to mention the links that film has had, and still has, with trade and war, for example. It is a *falsifying* tale whose sole purpose is to present familiar facts from an unaccustomed perspective. But according to Friedrich Nietzsche, this "perspectivism" is the last possibility of truth left to us because, by merit of its apparent narrowness, it at least preserves us from the greatest illusion of all, namely that such a thing as an objective or universal truth exists at all.

Johan Grimonprez follows an analogous structural principle in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, although the objects of his examination are slightly different: film has been replaced by television, the airplane has been replaced by the air disaster, and the dream is embodied, at least for a while (under the conditions of the Cold War), in the figure of the terrorist who occupies television and airplane alike. In 1997, in the terms of the history proposed by *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, we are now in a completely different situation again: there are bombs that explode without warning, bombs that various political liberation movements claim to have planted (Lockerbie), and there are honeymoon couples who film plane crashes by pure chance.

2. The title, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, refers to conceptual issues in the same way as the video itself: is it really possible to call history? What sort of apparatus will make the connection? Will history answer? And most importantly: who would make such a call and why? The idea that it is possible to call history in the first place requires a set of stable relations: there is history, there is someone with a desire to find something out or just chat, and there is a channel which is able to create such a connection. In fact, no part of this scenario is true, or even as unambiguous as implied by the description: history is a fiction which, under certain conditions, can confuse reconstructed history with the past as it "really" was. Subjective interest in history is based on underlying prerequisites which exceed the subject's reflexivity. After all, the channel is transparent in the first place thanks to the

Benghazi hijack drama: hostages return home, Tokyo Airport, July 1973
(*dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997)

exclusion of third parties, the demon, white noise. Showing that calling history, creating a type of "supermarket history", is possible therefore means at the same time pointing out changes in the conditions under which history is produced and represented in a critical way.

"Where once [history] was something one read about, inspected through stone monuments and written documents, drew lessons from or tried to leave behind, it now appears to exist in suspended animation, neither exactly 'behind' us, nor part of our present, but shadowing us rather like a parallel world, hyper-real and unreal at the same time," wrote Thomas Elsaesser.[2] The history he was referring to is the one which has been recorded in images and sounds; it is a television history and therefore *our* history: *we* can call it because, when history still existed in the zone between event and representation, this type of history already called us (as described by Louis Althusser), as ideological subjects and subjects of ideology, i.e. subject to ideology. In *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* this situation is given an unambiguous name: the claim is made that the reporting of daily news has now replaced narratives of social events in novel form. This cancels out not only the temporal difference between past and present, which is constitutive for all narratives, but also the spatial difference between observer and object: society is no longer reflected in the mirror of an individual perception but only in an image of itself.

3. As soon as it was able to do so, television began reporting on skyjacking all around the globe. It derived advantages from this by availing itself of the dramatic possibilities offered by a hijack (above all, the time frame between the unforeseeable attack and the conclusion of negotiations concerning release of hostages that allows enough time to set up cameras). Due to the fact that hijacks were events that lasted an (increasingly) long time, television was able to become established as a medium that could update

2 Elsaesser,T., "'One train may be hiding another': private memory, history and national identity", in *Screening the Past*, no. 6 (1999).

Benghazi hijack drama: hostages return home, Tokyo Airport, July 1973
(*dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997)

its viewers at any time on the particular event with pictures and sound. A form of event direction that could not help but underscore the spectacular aspect of every single hijack in order to focus on the current one as something quite unique and distinctive (first transatlantic hijack, first live TV broadcast of a hijack, first attack on a skyjacked plane, etc.). Television emphasizes the difference of the similarity that is the only material suitable for television screening. In this way, this similar event can be presented as a whole, complete occurrence comprising all differences.

When Grimonprez assembles a chronology of hijacks on the basis of television images in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, we see that they show us almost nothing at all, or rather, what we see are the gaps and spaces that the television image has to mask because of its immediacy, because it has been broadcast simultaneously with the occurrence of the event, so that it can be perceived as an image. In this sense, the television image corresponds exactly to the definition of the visual as given by Serge Daney. The television image, he maintains, is an image that lacks reference to the other and in which this lack is no longer noticed. "An image is what I call something that is still based upon a visual experience, and visual is what I call optical confirmation of the procedure of powers (of a technological, political, military or commercial nature) that, as a commentary, aims merely to elicit a sense of 'Got it!'."[3] The history of skyjacks in television images is a visual and thus blind history, which is why to Grimonprez it can become a history of this blindness.

However, this makes it necessary to link television images with other images (with a flying house reminiscent of *The Wizard of Oz*, with images from a training video for the event of a hijacking, with pictures of the other side of the Iron Curtain: the dead Lenin, Stalin in mourning, the people in formation), and to add to the montage a voice-over that only makes indirect reference

3 Daney, S., "Vor und nach dem Bild", in *Politics/Poetics: Dokumenta X*, eds. C. David & J.-F. Chevrier (Kassel: Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), 610.

Benghazi hijack drama: hostages return home, Tokyo Airport, July 1973
(*dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, 1997)

(Grimonprez uses quotations from two novels by Don DeLillo, *White Noise* and *Mao II*, for this purpose). And yet there would seem to be a close tie between Grimonprez's and DeLillo's intentions: *White Noise*, for example, not only records the vibrations of American consumerism, it not only contains the theories on the subject of death and conspiracy that Grimonprez cites, but rather its very title refers to both ends of the information spectrum that is also the focus of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. In terms of information theory, *White Noise* not only implies the pure information beyond any redundancy, but also the disinformation that appears as a result of the unconnectedness of each individual piece of information with all others—to which the dial in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* refers: at the push of a button, we can obtain such a wealth of information from the internet that we no longer know where to start, Grimonprez noted in an interview.[4] Above and beyond that, white noise in the acoustic field embodies the only audible range that we perceive as static, as unmoving.

Between an unreadable history and a superabundance of available history, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* seeks to arrive at statements that do not, in turn, lay claim to the static essence of a viewpoint, but rather make history describable as a field of virtual (re)connections. *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* operationalizes the co-presence of several different points of view, thereby crossing the borders of any fictional narrative. As Elena Esposito noted, the term "virtual" comes from the field of optics and refers to the reflections of images in a mirror. "The mirror does not 'represent' [in contrast to fiction] an alternative reality for the observer (which can be attributed to a different observer); it 'presents' the real reality from a different point of view, thereby expanding the observer's field of observation."[5] The reflection refers not to the differentiation between reality and fiction but to the conditions under which the

4 Bernard, C., "Supermarket History: Interview with Johan Grimonprez", in *Parkett*, no. 53 (Zürich, 1998), 12–8.
5 Esposito, E., "Fiktion und Virtualität", in *Medien, Computer, Realität*, ed. S. Krämer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998), 287.

observation takes place: because the virtual history suggested by *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* comprehends television images as reflections of social progress which we are as yet unable to describe, it does not reflect them as fictional reality but as the reality of fiction.

To return to Morin: after cinema had outstripped the airplane as a dream factory, the dream of flying returned on television as a nightmare.

First published as: Öhner, V., "On Seeing, Flying and Dreaming", in *Camera Austria*, no. 66 (1999), 29–30.

Grimonprez's Remix

Eben Wood

December 2010

Desire, more than any other point in the range of human possibility, meets its limit somewhere.
Jacques Lacan[1]

In the first image, I'm riding in the passenger seat of a beat-up, dust-covered Subaru south along the border between the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Jordan.[2] The river is to our left, invisible beyond chain link fence, spiral razor wire, minefields. To the right is the wreckage of a bombed hotel, one of many that dotted the Dead Sea's northern shore before the territory was annexed in 1967. The wreckage is recognizably a multi-storey

1 Lacan, J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (trans. A. Sheridan, ed. J-A. Miller) (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), 31.

2 My thanks to Maria Gough for introducing me to *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, Julia Apitzsch for initiating the conversations that led to this talk and subsequent paper, and to Peter Schneck and Philipp Schweighauser for organizing the international conference "Terrorism, Media, Literature: Don DeLillo and the Ethics of Fiction", held at the University of Osnabrück, Germany, from 25 to 27 April 2008. Special thanks to Philipp for his detailed criticisms of my original written version. Special thanks also go to Johan Grimonprez and Benoit Detalle for help in remixing the original version of this essay to its present form.

building, grey, eroded looking, with mostly intact walls and eye-socket windows. Through huge cracks and fissures we can see the mountains rising away from the sea towards Jerusalem. Crowning one of the largest and most intact of the buildings is an IDF observation post, sandbags the same nothing colour of the building, the white flag with its light-blue star bright against the sky. Below the watching soldiers, scrawled on the wall in huge, spray-painted letters that would be legible far across the river border, is a message in English: "Fuck Your Dreams."

In the second image, I'm waking up at dawn after riding all night from Rafah crossing in the Gaza Strip, west across the Sinai to Cairo. Stretched out on the bench-like seat of a small bus, I'd awakened several times in the night, once to see the lights of a freighter moving dreamlike across the moonlit desert, knowing we'd reached the Suez Canal. In the morning light, the rest of the passengers still asleep, the driver and his relief talking softly, I can see we've reached the outskirts of a city, a broad, sparsely tree-lined avenue that is bordered by concrete grandstands. I've never been to Cairo before, but this scene is somehow deeply familiar. We continue along the empty avenue, the city approaching out of the night desert behind us, as that eerie feeling of familiarity, of déjà-vu grows. Suddenly, with a bodily certainty, I remember watching, over and over on the tiny black and white television of my rural American childhood, looped images of Anwar Sadat's assassination. It had happened, I realize, on this avenue, in these concrete grandstands, in the deep intimacy of distant memory.

You remind me of something / I just don't know what it is

Distinct from simply editing an existing work, remixing is the process by which a song is disassembled and then recombined with new elements and contexts to produce something both like and unlike the original, a kind of uncanny double. Describing the origins of the remix in late 1960s Jamaica—in the one-off doubles or "dubs" of ska originals made by producers, engineers,

and DJs such as Ruddy Redwood, King Tubby and Lee "Scratch" Perry—Ben Williams writes that a "good dub mix is like an inverse of its original, the ghostly imprint that's left over when you take the song away".[3]

By introducing a new structural rhythm, a new punctuation, to the song's elements, remixing also transforms the relations between the work and the world around it, its spaces of performance, exhibition or consumption. In this process, what is remixed is not simply an individual work but the very quality that had once made film the paradigmatic modern art. Catherine David, co-curator with Jean-François Chevrier of the 1997 Documenta X in Kassel, in which Johan Grimonprez's film *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* was first exhibited (alongside Gerhard Richter's monumental photographic archive, *Atlas*), has pointed out that "[o]ne of the great privileges of cinema of [the twentieth century] is that of being an art form which is confronted with and defined by its conditions of production, that is, by its relations to the institution, but especially by a logic of industrial production".[4] David talks about the "irrealization" produced by the postmodern culture of images, in which the specific material, technical, or experiential qualities of different media are lost in "a soft, generalized image with no particular character and lacking qualities", in which an indexical analogue relationship with the ruptured "real" is replaced by the digital simulacrum's absorptive totality.[5]

Countering David's "image crisis", DJ and ethnomusicologist John von Seggern has described remix as "a major conceptual leap: making music on a meta-structural level, drawing together and making sense of a much larger body of information by threading a continuous narrative through it […] The importance of this cannot be overstated: in an era of information overload, the art of remixing and sampling as practised by hiphop DJs and

3 Williams, B., "The Remixmasters: A History Lesson for Puffy Coombs", in *Slate* (23 July 2002). Accessed 25 July 2009: http://slate.msn.com/id/2068368
4 David, C., "Photography and Cinema", in *The Cinematic*, ed. D. Campany (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 145.
5 Ibid., 148.

producers points to ways of working with information on higher levels of organization, pulling together the efforts of others into a multilayered multireferential whole which is much more than the sum of its parts."[6]

The different approaches to digital or synthetic media mapped by David's and von Seggern's comments conform to a predictable binary, with the media spectacle's levelling totality alternating with, or flipping into, complex or recombinant forms of cultural exchange. To paraphrase David, the great privilege of the twenty-first-century remix is to be an art form that both confronts and is defined by the collapse of medium specificity into media indifference, of the politically possible into the instrumentality of the virtual.

Meaning here lies in movement, but the tectonic rhythms of that movement correspond to a body that is neither individual nor self-evident. Summing up a discussion of "sampling, memory, and the semantic web", Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky, reminds readers of the dialectic between meaning and movement that Duke Ellington captured in a pragmatic axiom: "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."[7] Miller adds that in understanding the simultaneously interiorizing or psychological and exteriorizing or global implications of the information age, it would be wise to recall and remix the [cautionary] tale of a bored billionaire living in a dream world in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, who said: "It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to lucid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was

6 von Seggern's remarks accompanied an exhibition at the University of California at Riverside; the link given in the list of works cited is no longer active (Seggern, J. von, "Postdigital Remix Culture and Online Performance", in *Society for Ethnomusicology, Southern California and Hawai'i Chapter*. Accessed 12 July 2007: http://ethnomus.ucr.edu/remix_culture/remix_history.htm).

7 Miller, P.D., "Loops of Perception: Sampling, Memory, and the Semantic Web", in *HorizonZero*, no. 8 (2003). Accessed 15 July 2009: www.horizonzero.ca/textsite/remix.php?is=8&art=0&file=3&tlang=0

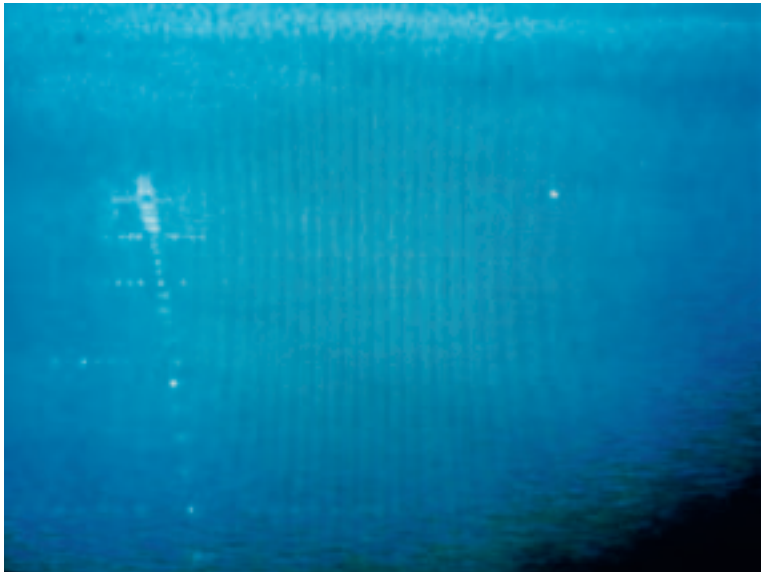
the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole."[8]

As DeLillo reminds us through the simultaneously (trans) fixed and mobile character of Eric Packer, in the era of media spectacle, the adjective industrial now haunts the West everywhere as a ghostly absence. Similarly, discussions of documentary practice are increasingly haunted by what has been called documentary's "museumification", its incorporation into art-world spaces and modes of aesthetic consumption. The relationship between Grimonprez's now well-known work and DeLillo's novels, particularly those two "originals" on which Grimonprez explicitly drew—*White Noise* and *Mao II*—directly addresses this historical change in the location and function of documentary, as well as the relationship between documentary and other narrative modes of representation.[9] DeLillo himself uses the rhythmic interplay of still and moving images to interrogate fiction's defining narrative time and, conversely, uses narrative time to query the image's claim to self-evidence, to transparent meaning. Given the divergent readings of digital culture by David, von Seggern and Miller, there is one particular aspect of the documentary image that I think is important here: the doubled idea of resolution.

Narratively, resolution refers to the drawing together of a story's composite elements to provide some sense of an ending that is not simply the last word before the cover closes, the credits run, and the frame is confirmed. Visually, resolution refers to the quality of an image's surface in comparison to some normative notion of clarity or transparency. In conventional archival

8 DeLillo, D., *Cosmopolis* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

9 Some reflections on *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* as documentary can be found in Altena, A., "Hello? History? Hello? (2): Thoughts on Terrorism and History on the Occasion of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*", in *Mediamatic*, vol. 9, nos. 2–3 (1998). Accessed 15 July 2009: www.mediamatic.net/article-5960-en.html



dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, 1997

There was a line I kept repeating to myself that had the mystery and the power I had felt nowhere else but in the shared past of people who had loved each other, who lived so close that they'd memorized each others warts and cowlicks and addled pauses. So the line was not one voice but several and it spoke a more or less nonsensical theme to remind him that words stick even as lives fly apart.

documentaries, resolution operates as the principal mark of the image's authenticity, of an artlessness that belongs to the narratives of "real time", outside the documentary's structuring polemic and against the already absorbed surfaces of the feature film. Increasingly feeding a mainstream "documentary culture", as Tom Holert has recently argued, the media has also instrumentalized these "signals of authenticity" on which earlier documentary relied, to de-politicizing ends. In reporting on the war in Iraq, for instance, broadcast networks such as CNN and BBC World "use a whole gamut of contradictory image types and image qualities—pixellated video-phone images in low resolution, the more usual video images, 'talking heads' stagings, video animations with maps and other graphic devices" precisely in order to domesticate or foreclose the narratives that rely on that authenticity to work: "they frame these images with more or less precise data about their provenance, their function and so on."[10]

Grimonprez finds both senses of resolution in DeLillo, the ironic relationship between them exemplified by the question he samples from *White Noise* for the first voice-over in his film: "Shouldn't death be a swan dive, graceful, white-winged and smooth, leaving the surface undisturbed?"[11]

Our bodies and oceans are here, knowable and whole

We are reminded here that DeLillo is present in Grimonprez's film not as a visual but as an aural image, as sound. Re-framed from voice to voice-over, the irony of DeLillo's lines is transformed. In this process, the question is confirmed not simply as a rhetorical negative (indexing the character that utters it within DeLillo's narrative, the narrator Jack Gladney), but as what

10 Holert, T., "The Apparition of the Documentary", in *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*, ed. F. Gierstberg et al. (Rotterdam: NAi, 2005), 160–1.

11 DeLillo, D., *White Noise: Text and Criticism*, ed. M. Osteen (New York: Penguin, 1998), 18.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls "allegorical irony" or "parabasis", i.e. "the activism of 'speaking otherwise'".[12] As Brent Hayes Edwards explains in a pertinent discussion of postcolonial literature's hybrid genres and the global remixing of cultures on which these genres operate, "Allegory is a practice of 'persistent interruption' in language where the cognitive or epistemological is continually breached by the performative or ethical, forcing the attentive reader to move against the current of the prose, to hear the charge of what it pushes away."[13]

In the opening shot of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*—into which DeLillo's question is inserted—we follow a descending point of view through greenish clouds towards the cipher-like lights and painted numbers of an airfield. The atmosphere is streaked, grainy, hallucinatory, and it is made even more ominous by the rhetorical question that accompanies it. We didn't need the attacks of 9/11 to associate aircraft with violent death, Grimonprez here reminds us (as DeLillo did) before the fact. Such deaths are unlikely to be as ennobling as the allegorical swan dive or its accompanying song, and the surface on which it occurs is likely to be highly disturbed and disturbing.[14] Immediately, and especially in relation to the smooth-voiced narrator, we are reminded of the role that resolution plays in the documentary, and indeed, in media narratives generally. By quoting absent narratives (the haunting authenticity of which I spoke above), Grimonprez repeatedly invokes resolution in its double sense: that of the individual image's immediate, visible surface, and that of the movement between or among images, visual and aural, that structures

12 Spivak, G.C., *A Critique of Postcolonial Reading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 156. Spivak relies heavily on the very dense final pages of Paul De Man's *Allegories of Reading*. Cf. De Man, P., *Allegories of Reading: Figural Reading in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

13 Edwards, B.H., "The Genres of Postcolonialism", in *Social Text*, vol. 78, no. 22.1 (2004), 8.

14 This reversal of cause and effect, of input and outcome, of articulation and disarticulation, is traced by Grimonprez at various points to the work of Paul Virilio. See particularly Virilio, P., *Unknown Quantity* (Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, 2003).

the film's temporality. "It's not going to be pretty", the saying goes, speaking of future resolution, but at the visual level, what we see frequently *is* pretty, semi-detached from the implications of what we see, the "actual"—that is, allegorical—death at which the narrative terminates.

I write "semi-detached" because while we may feel that the opening images are those of a flight-simulator—and thus not "not real" but simulated, instrumental to the very relations those images both conceal and reveal—their power rests in their likeness to what is apparently not simulated, to that which is (or appears to be) un-mediated, artless or accidental. Collapsing the temporal or hierarchical distinction between what is simulated and what is "real", or between the aesthetic and the political, the unconscious and the conscious, we next see a forward shot through an aircraft cockpit as the aircraft seems at first gently to touch down, then shakes more and more violently, finally dissolving into a blurred wreckage of particulars, swirling, slow-motion fragments reminiscent of confetti-filled paperweights. Now the soundtrack turns sweepingly cinematic before dissolving into ominous white noise. That dissolution is paralleled by a reverse shot—outside and front-to-back—of what is (in narrative logic) presumably the same aircraft we have seen from within the cockpit, crashing headlong into the viewer. At that point, looking at the distinctive, black and white markings on the aircraft's nose, and framing those markings, the precise and controlled placement of the camera, we recognize that this is, in fact, a set-up that belongs both to Grimonprez and to the images he is sampling: a simulation, a test, and at the same time, a mediated event that is ineluctably present.

Whatever Grimonprez's larger documentary interests—to which I will return below—he punctuates them with DeLillo's text and with the non-archival footage that often accompanies that text, the reflexive content of which does not remotely replace the film's rhythmic narrative drive. The opening crash sequence is followed by images of baby birds fluttering and apparently suffocating in a vacuum chamber, an eclipse, a sliver of moon in a night sky, the cartoon title-sequence and images of Lenin, a

bland official at a microphone announcing cryptically that "the aircraft is safe", and news images of the first transatlantic hijacking in November 1969. Following this montage sequence, the voice-over continues in first-person plural, turning from interrogative to statement in order to frame a further interrogative: "Everything around us tends to channel our lives towards some final reality in print or in film. Two lovers quarrel in the back of a taxi and a question becomes implicit in the event: who will write the book, and who will play the lovers in the movie? Everything seeks its own heightened version. Nothing happens until it's consumed."[15]

In Grimonprez's redaction of this passage from *Mao II*, there is no identified narrator. Thus, he evacuates the idea of character in the fictional sense and invites us to ask how character is produced in the overdetermined positions of a speech-act: not "who is speaking to us here?" but "how are the here and the now and the who located?" As readers of *Mao II* will know, the voice-over is lifted from the sequence in which the secretive novelist Bill Gray is being photographed, for the first time after decades of concealment and silence, by the photographer Brita Nilsson. It is Bill speaking, and he is commenting on the fact that, being photographed, he has become "someone's material. Yours, Brita". The conventional distinction between a prior reality and the documentary event that operates on that reality has been reversed, inserted into Brita's serial project of photographing living writers, a series that in its productive logic can offer no real resolution. For Bill Gray, this reversal tends literally deathward, as do all plots in DeLillo's fictions. As Jack Gladney, DeLillo's protagonist in *White Noise*, puts it in a passage that Grimonprez uses later in the film, "All plots tend to move deathwards. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot."[16]

15 DeLillo, D., *Mao II* (New York: Viking, 1991), 43–4.
16 DeLillo, D., *White Noise: Text and Criticism*, ed. M. Osteen (New York: Penguin, 1998), 18.

In Gladney's reflections, the conventional before-and-after relation of character to speech-act, reality to documentary, life to the consumer event, visual image to caption or voice-over, is never done nor undone. In Grimonprez's film, before-and-after diachrony is replaced by a synthesis that produces history as the constructive transformation of both past *and* future through the lens of the present. This is, of course, the hope that film originally held out for the avant-gardes, its lifelike motion in place of photography's deathly stillness.

Despite Bill Gray's abject death en route from Cyprus to Beirut, his image as developed by Brita lives on, simultaneously supplementing and displacing him. The apparent seamlessness of Grimonprez's back-and-forth move between *White Noise* and *Mao II* and his remixing of fragments from both novels, the assimilation of these fragments by the film's narrative despite its disjunctive archival and non-archival content (the occasionally visible "hand" of the artist's own camera), ironically exemplifies this process. The media's endlessly absorbing horror is itself the subject's eclipse by the objects that seem to reflect but instead absorb and displace that subject, echoing the particularly *hysterical* formation on which Grimonprez focuses: the intertwined histories of television media and aircraft hijacking.

By "hysterical" here I simply mean a formation that is precisely marked by the sign of desire, by the overdeterminations of deeper or more extensive cultural processes that seem to lie elsewhere and thus necessitate an interpretative journey both forwards and backwards in time, and ex-centrically through space. Lacan anticipates Spivak's reading of allegorical parabasis and its ethical implications early in the lectures that make up *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, when he defines the object of analysis and the concepts, particularly that of the unconscious, on which that object—and the desire that it seems preemptively to resolve—rests. Like the narrative concept of resolution to which I've referred, Lacan argues that the concept of causality "is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words the *law*". The privilege of the Freudian unconscious, he continues, is to demonstrate "that point, where,

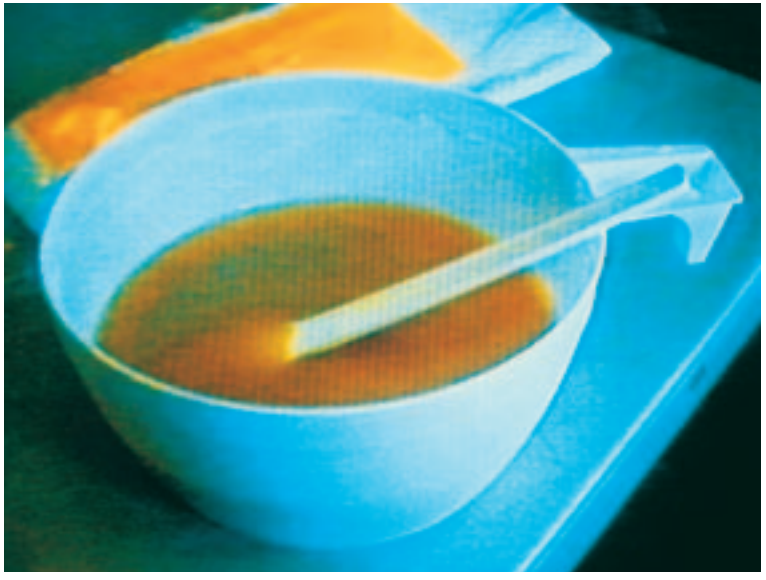
between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong". Thus the unconscious demonstrates "the gap through which neurosis recreates a harmony with a real—a real that may well not be determined".[17] This gap of indeterminacy provokes the very "activism of speaking otherwise" that Spivak identifies as an ethical imperative, the parabasis through which Lacan defines the Freudian unconscious, not as something "unreal" but "rather un-realized": "The status of the unconscious […] is ethical. In his thirst for truth, Freud says, 'Whatever it is, I must go there', because, somewhere, this unconscious reveals itself. And he says this on the basis of his experience of what was, up to that time, for the physician, the most rejected, the most concealed, the most contained, reality, that of the hysteric, in so far as it was—in a sense, from its origin—marked by the sign of deception."[18]

This reading of the unconscious as an ethical imperative, "marked by the sign of deception", points to a characteristic feature of Grimonprez's remix that connects it with contemporary discussions of documentary. As I've pointed out above, what is excised in the film's opening voice-over is precisely the fictional narrative's dependency on the primacy of character, first Jack Gladney and then Bill Gray. Elsewhere in the film, proper names are transformed into pronouns, male-gendered pronouns to female-gendered, first-person narration to third-person, and so on. Grimonprez converts multiple conversations and characters into a new singularity, a singularity that is nonetheless differentiated into particularly generic—and characteristically male—voices.

My angel rocks back and forth

Grimonprez addresses the overdeterminations of historical meaning and subjectivity (and the interdependency of both) through his remixing of DeLillo, through the seamlessness with which the author's words—distributed across two very differ-

17 Lacan, J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 22.
18 Ibid., 33.



dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, 1997

It is a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. What terrorists gain, novelists lose. Years ago, I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now, bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated.

ent texts—are worked across the received gap between artwork and medium, public and private, production and reproduction, I and you, male and female, and so on. Formally, it's the restless "zapping" of media images, visual and aural, that Grimonprez identifies as the conversion of modernist film tradition in the age of video and beyond, a zapping that is literally built into the absorptive surfaces of contemporary media, surfaces that exceed any particular medium. "In my film," Grimonprez comments, "there is the image of a man being pushed out of an IranAir plane on the runway at Larnaca, Cyprus, and then the words "INSERT COMMERCIAL HERE" suddenly appear on a black screen. I took this sequence as it stood. It is a breakdown in meaning, like something Brecht might have produced. It reflects the combination of two traditions: on the one hand, the fictionalization and the dramatization of history as in Sergei Eisenstein, and on the other, presenting the context in how the image is constructed through showing for example the presence of the camera in the image, as in Dziga Vertov."[19]

Instructively, however, we might note a certain repressed in Grimonprez's own assertion that he does not wish to disregard the meaning of terrorism in political terms. In writing that "What terrorists gain, novelists lose", DeLillo compares the position of the terrorist in public life to that of the writer. DeLillo is suggesting this is particularly so because terrorists know how to manipulate the media. Their actions are provocations, but must be presented in a contextual way, not abstractly. Terrorism in Palestine and terrorism among extreme right-wing groups in the United States do not have the same meaning.[20]

Of course, it is Bill Gray, not DeLillo himself, who compares the "position of the terrorist in public life to that of the writer"—a statement that "reveals" his private character as it conceals the actual media that create, circulate, store, and retrieve the public

19 Grimonprez, J., "Untitled Artist's Statement", in *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*, ed. F. Gierstberg et al. (Rotterdam: NAi, 2005), 174–75.
20 Ibid., 175.

image that determines that character. And yet, in relation to the ethics of representing terrorism, it is important to call attention to the slippage that does occur here between a character and its author. How do we read through the words of DeLillo's characters to an assertion of what the author himself means—a position that is surely distributed, in one way or another, across and throughout the text in its entirety? This question is analogous to the problems Grimonprez raises in his statement, that we apprehend media images and the indifference they promote, but somehow are able to convert that apprehension into a political or politicizing specificity. In its use of visual and aural images as well as text, Grimonprez's film can perform this critique in a multivalent way that DeLillo's written text must narrate discursively, producing (in Spivak's sense) an allegory of the visual supplement that is everywhere available in the ubiquitous media surfaces of our culture.

This is DeLillo's fundamental irony: the more he seeks seriously to interrogate the limits of cultural systems, the more he recognizes the productive capacity of those systems. The problem is contextualism itself, which in contrast to John von Seggern's hopeful comments on remixing, John Rajchman argues has tended to an immobilizing or ersatz nostalgia; collage or superposition among existing elements has tended to a play or a transgression increasingly devoid of any virtuality, any future. Once celebrated for their complexity, context and collage became obstacles to new architectures, vehicles of the sad ironies of the post- and the neo-.[21]

Through his process of remixing through multiple texts by DeLillo as well as the range of visual source material (with their respective, indexical resolutions), Grimonprez marks the discontinuity that "is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon—discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation".[22] As Tom Holert has recently remarked, a similar vacillation is palpable in the fact that "every overview that tackles the theories of 'the documentary' men-

21 Rajchman, J., *Constructions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 9.
22 Lacan, J., *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, 25.

tions that a documentary practice which does not reflect on the untenability of claims of objectivity has become impossible".[23] Nonetheless, the manner in which this refusal of objectivity is performed and the goals that motivate that refusal allow for crucial differences, enabling us to contextualize Grimonprez within contemporary documentary practices as disparate as those of Jeff Wall or Nan Goldin or Susan Meiselas, or of the Lebanese artist Walid Raad and his Atlas Group, particularly in the long-term archival project, *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair*.[24]

In a recent collective statement, The Atlas Group observes that "[w]e are not concerned with facts if facts are considered to be self-evident objects always-already present in the world […] Facts have to be treated as processes." Both Raad and Grimonprez assert that the binary of fiction and non-fiction "is a false one and does not do justice to the rich and complex stories that circulate widely and that capture our attention and belief".[25] Holert also comments on The Atlas Group's attention to the "ways in which a so-called document suddenly emerges from the archive, who and what makes it available, and why".[26] In doing so, the group's media-works shift viewers' attentions from the content or truth-claims of the document "to the space of speculation and imagination, of deception and adulteration. The authenticity—of sources, witnesses, surveys, images, and so on—is claimed, but an epistemological hesitation and vacillation is already implicit in staking that claim."[27]

In a concluding remark that relates to the hysterical method of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, The Atlas Group states that: "[o]ur works do not present a chronicle to posterity of the events and deeds of the [Lebanese civil wars], a record of 'what happened'. Instead we

23 Holert, T., "The Apparition of the Documentary", 159.
24 Raad, W./The Atlas Group, *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Documents from the Atlas Group Archive* (Cologne: Walter König, 2005).
25 Raad, W./The Atlas Group, "Untitled Artist's Statement", in *Documentary Now! Contemporary Strategies in Photography, Film and the Visual Arts*, ed. F. Gierstberg et al. (Rotterdam: NAi, 2005), 121.
26 Holert, T., "The Apparition of the Documentary", 166.
27 Ibid., 165.

think they offer us an image of what can be imagined, what can be said, what can be taken for granted, and what can appear as rational or not, as thinkable and sayable about the civil wars, and about the possibilities and limits of writing their histories. We urge you to approach these documents as we do, as 'hysterical symptoms' based not on any one person's actual memories but on cultural fantasies erected from the material of collective memories."[28]

The Atlas Group here stresses the vacillating, disruptive actuality of practice against the putatively one-dimensional "authenticity" of the material drawn upon by that practice. Importantly, it does so without supplanting assertions of truth and historical method with either cultural relativism or the supermarket forms of subjectivity that circulate globally in the putatively post-ideological, post-historical, neoliberal era (what Eric Hobsbawm has called the "ultra-liberal utopia" that followed the end of the Cold War). In Raad's own words, "[b]y shying away from a search for 'what actually happened', our intention is not to imply that such a search is futile. Nor do we want to suggest that historical writing is always interested and that consequently all histories are equally valid and/or equally suspect. The claim that writing is motivated by one agenda or another must be demonstrated and not simply stated. Furthermore, this demonstration must unpack the various meanings generated by any party's writings, meanings that are invariably overdetermined and thus potentially slip past the control of interested writers and their intended audience."[29]

Like more traditional archival documentary, Grimonprez's *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* stands poised ambivalently between the aesthetic ideologies of art-world culture and the visual politics of mass or popular media to which that culture seems opposed. To my mind, the idea of the remix is one of the most useful to understanding *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*'s relationship to DeLillo's "originals", if we take it as an ethics of reading, an ex-centric disentan-

28 Raad, W./The Atlas Group, "Untitled Artist's Statement", 122.
29 Ibid., 122.

gling of the conflated (narrative) strands of personal and global, private and political. Moreover, it helps us situate the film in relation not simply to documentary but to a range of practices that contend with media culture, particularly with respect to the extension as well as the repudiation of modernist collage or montage practices in contemporary culture. From that vantage point, one might also analyse DeLillo's response within his writing to the transformation of artistic practices after postwar modernism, to the practices of an international avant-garde that is concerned with the functioning of language across different mediums and previous categorical distinctions such as that between high art and popular culture.[30]

Participation is a key phrase for Grimonprez, as viewers fantasize their roles "within" and "outside" the media to which they respond (in ways suggested by the practice of Walid Raad and The Atlas Group), the alternating currents of personal and domestic, public and global. This fantasy runs throughout *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* as "the activism of speaking otherwise", and it establishes a relation to source texts and to informational networks that is most pronounced in the move from visual to aural image in passages remixed from DeLillo. The (apparently) non-archival images that frequently accompany these passages and form a kind of banal narrative thread throughout the film's allegorical disjunctures, "a double narrative that sets the television timeline against the backdrop of a story. In classical documentary, chronology and structure are logical and a specific vocabulary is used to describe reality, whereas in my film, the chronology of hijacking is underscored by a fictionalized storyline based on a novel by Don DeLillo, which plays with how these notions collide."[31]

30 Benjamin Buchloch, Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier cite the importance of Marcel Broodthaers to this discussion. Cf. Buchloch, B., David, C. & Chevrier, J-F., "The Political Potential of Art", in *Politics-Poetics: documenta X*, ed. C. David & J.-F. Chevrier (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, 1997), 374–403. See also Krauss, R., "A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition" (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

31 Bernard, C., "Supermarket History: Interview with Johan Grimonprez", *Parkett*, no. 53 (1998), 9–10.

Most simply put, this narrative thread follows a disembodied visual perspective as it leaves home, takes a taxi to a large urban airport, checks luggage, passes through the terminal and views docked aircraft through the windows of a departure lounge, enters the aircraft, taxis onto the runway, and takes off on a long, presumably trans-oceanic flight (with accompanying meals and in-flight film generating an ironic comic-relief).

To say that we are all directly familiar with this global narrative, beyond its mediated image, is of course grossly incorrect, as aircraft travel of the kind that guides Grimonprez's embedded camcorder narrative is bound to a specific geography of social and economic privilege. Among the many things shared between DeLillo and Grimonprez, one is the way in which the previously distinct realms of western, middle-class domesticity and the artistic avant-gardes (or neo-avantgardes) have, in the postmodern era, apparently collapsed into each other on a global stage. Echoing Marx's famous formulation, both DeLillo and Grimonprez remix the differences in history's repetitions, the movement from system to subject, sense to sensation, tragedy to farce, catastrophe to comedy.

This difference is, to return to the two images with which this discussion opened, the distance we must travel to our most intimate selves, to our dreams and waking surfaces, arriving right on time.

Based on a text that was first published as: Wood, E., "Grimonprez's Remix", in *Terrorism, Media, and the Ethics of Fiction: Transatlantic Perspectives on Don DeLillo*, ed. P. Schneck & P. Schweighauser (London/New York: Continuum, 2010), 110–29.

The Zapatista Air Force today attacked the local Federal Army encampment in Chiapas with paper airplanes. Some flew well and landed right into the dormitories, while others sputtered in flight and barely cleared the barbed wire fence.

The aircraft, white in colour and of the size of a letter, carried written messages for the federal troops, who have for the last five months occupied land on the outskirts of this community. The daily, persistent and almost incredible protest by the local indigenous population against this occupation has sought to make itself heard by troops who appear to live on the other side of a soundproof fence. Several versions were written to maximize the success of the Kamikaze letter-bombers:

"We do not sell our lives. We want to free our lives and those of your children, your lives and those of your wives, your brothers and sisters, your uncles and aunts, fathers and mothers, and the lives of millions of poor exploited Mexicans. We want to free lives so that they are not repressed by the orders of a few thieves."

Or, "Soldiers, we know that poverty has made you sell your lives and souls. I also am poor, as are millions of others. But you are worse off for defending our exploiter—Zedillo and his group of moneybags."

In recent nights, the military encampment has remained on alert, with soldiers unable to sleep. The paper plane has become the bomb and its message, the collateral damage.

Amador Hernandez, *The Mexican Daily*, La Jornada (3 January 2000) (trans. Duane Ediger).

Email Interview with Johan Grimonprez

Hans Ulrich Obrist

1999

Hans Ulrich Obrist: *A question about digital television: so far, digital channels are being watched by very few people. Does this "non-Audimat" situation create a laboratory, openness for experiments? To finally go beyond program television whose "homogeneity… is intrinsically hostile to art" (Alexander Kluge)?*

Johan Grimonprez: Couldn't homogeneity possibly trigger a creative context to read mainstream imagery in deviant ways, to read against the grain? Homogeneity, as a vocabulary, actually did provide a huge source of inspiration to explore certain themes in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. How do you struggle as an artist or filmmaker to position yourself vis-à-vis mainstream media? Art and mainstream media seem to remain mad twin sisters, always arguing. Hence the rivalry between a novelist and a terrorist staged as a metaphor in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. In this plot it's the terrorist who holds the winning hand, since he's able to play the media. The narrative is taken from Don DeLillo's book *Mao II*, which contends that the novelist's role within society has been replaced by that of bomb-makers and gunmen. "What terrorists gain, novelists lose," says the book. The end of the film, though,

alludes to the fact that the media nowadays outplays the terrorist. With 600 channels soon provided on New York cable, might the overall homogeneity not desire the other part: the urge for an extreme diversity, a kind of supermarket idea with specialized departments, evidently to push the viewer's quota? The recent corporate merger of ATT-telephone, MediaOne and Microsoft might very well give new meaning to the act of zapping. Impossible to surf every channel in a night. We are destined to plug in the internet browser, let the search engine pop up our favourite clips from the sci-fi channel or the history channel. We could also let the shuffle function simply perform the zapping for us, click for: TELEVISION ON MUTE and tune the stereo to some inflight groove.

The homogeneity of mainstream imagery does not necessarily dictate a homogeneous perception of that imagery. Image reception among the Warlpiri community at Yuendumu (Central Australia), for example, sustain cultural invention. Decodings of Jackie Chan movies or Australian TV-soaps like *Neighbours* would be interpreted along kinship obligations and different storylines appropriate to Warlpiri narrative. Similarly the gossip culture of Catholic mothers in Northern Ireland would see Joan Collins from the feuilleton *Dynasty* as an emancipatory icon: wasn't Joan rich enough to act independently and trash all those men? Translation of global culture across geographical (and political) boundaries can be read in most contradictory ways: commercials were the most powerful messages of the West, remarked East German writer Heiner Müller.

The television viewer is maybe not a passive consumer: isn't there always a sense of appropriation, creating one's own terms to read mainstream imagery with a certain iconoclastic pleasure? It became the point of departure to set up a mobile video-library: *Beware! In playing the phantom, you become one*, a project made in collaboration with film critic Herman Asselberghs, which has been travelling since its initiation in 1994.

H.U.O.: Beware! In playing the phantom, you become one *is your mobile video-library and archive. It includes films, documentary films, commercials, soaps and sitcoms. The programme changed from Kassel to Paris where it was shown after Documenta X. How do you relate global issues through a travelling archive with local adaptations and local necessities? It is interesting that the programme in Paris was different, it is no longer possible to send homogeneous exhibitions on tour and impose them to places. The terms have to be (re)negotiated every time.*

McLuhan speaks of hot and cold media, cold media being participatory media with few details, like paper, while hot media offer little possibility for participation—for example, television. How do you integrate participatory elements into your films and other works in general?

In an interview I recently made with Alexander Kluge he said that he tried to make films which are also, in your words, "the ideology of zapping which can be an extreme form of poetry, going much further than collage". Could you tell me about this last point, about how zapping transcends collage, where does it lead?

J.G.: The participatory elements would be sometimes as simple as a hot cup of coffee! We would never install our video-library without having cookies, the smell of coffee and the remote control present. These elements already induce a platform of conviviality, an atmosphere for chatting. You are invited to pick up the remote to zap through your own choice of videotapes, in a way to be your own curator. The stack of tapes we put out range from twisted commercials, underground documentaries and alternative MTV to mainstream stuff spun off from Hollywood and CNN. The visitors are also invited to include their own homegrown camcorder tapes: their honeymoon horrors, UFO-testimonies, their top ten of Oprah Winfrey shows.

The library alluded to the fact that the very act of watching television already contains a participatory nature. The way we receive, contextualize and recontextualize images—it's exactly what we do with the zapping tool (say: "zaptitude"). Zapping buys into the supermarket ideology, but at the same time it can embody a critical distance as well. It stems in fact from video deck terminology: zapping, i.e. fast-forwarding the videotape past the commercial. Commercial break = zapping time. In this sense, zapping technology allows for a poetic analysis or interpretation of what is seen.

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, 1997

All plots tend to move deathwards. This is the nature of plots. Political plots, terrorist plots, lovers' plots, narrative plots, plots that are part of children's games. We edge nearer death every time we plot. It's like a contract that all must sign, the plotters as well as those who are targets of the plots.

No need to zap though, the poetry is right there on CNN. CNN has totally surpassed the way Eisenstein and Vertov envisioned montage as a revolutionary tool. Similarly in how the avant-garde filmmakers of the sixties and seventies have become displaced by MTV's nature to swallow every different sort of novel style. The arrival of MTV on Muscovite TV in Russia was trumpeted in the Russian press as the biggest event since the 1917 October revolution: Vertov reconsidered through the eyes of MTV.

A zapping mode splices blood with ketchup, like CNN: images of war cut with strawberry ice-cream. It would rather point at an epistemological shift in how a "zaptitude" has transformed the way we look at reality. A jumpy fast-forward vision has replaced our conventional models of perception and experience. Sometimes I don't even know anymore if we're still in the middle of the commercial break or whether the film has already started. Soon we'll be mistaking reality for a commercial break.

H.U.O.: *The taboo of visible death is usually kept from the public sphere into the private realm.* dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y *evokes Holbein's sarcophagus painting where the viewer is both inside and outside and the active and passive view coincide. Allegorical death and death as a dumb fact.*

We are inside and outside, there is the obsession with death in dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y. *(You elsewhere described TV's complicity with death as "the desire we have for the ultimate disaster is one aspect of our relationship with death".) It reminds us of what Georges Didi-Huberman wrote about* Sarcophage*: "Ce que je vois, ce que je regarde." In your text* Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter? *you write: "The observer observed."*

J.G.: Paul Virilio remarked once that television turned the world into an accident, and that with the advent of virtual reality the whole of reality will be "accidented". Each technology invents its own catastrophe, and with it a different relationship to death. The boat invented the sinking of the boat, the airplane invented the crash of the airplane. Television has reinvented the way we perceive reality and the way we relate to catastrophe, history and death.

TV has turned our notions of private and public inside out, but, more importantly, the representational modes for portraying actuality and imagination have become intertwined: CNN borrows from Hollywood and vice versa. The everyday talk show has zapped the family right off their couch and into the studio. In the opposite direction, catastrophe culture invades our living room.

The territory of the home overlaps with the space of TV in a much more profound and psychological way than we are possibly aware. *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* ends with a scene of a hijacked, crashing plane, accidentally framed by some honeymooner's camcorder. The couple was immediately invited to guest on Larry King's talk show on CNN to tell how they were able to shoot the footage! The dynamics of abstract capitalism thus allow the spectators to be the heroes and political issues are simply reduced to explanations of how to operate a camcorder. Patricia Mellencamp calls it the shift from catastrophe to comedy: "We can't change the world, but we can change our socks." According to one Nike ad: "It's not a shoe, it's a revolution."

First published as: Obrist, H.U., "Email interview with Johan Grimonprez", in *Camera Austria*, no. 66 (1999).

Reality Mistaken for a Commercial Break

An interview with Johan Grimonprez by Florence Montagnon

2003

Florence Montagnon: *Your film* dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y *shows the history of skyjacking up to the year 1997 and your magazine* Inflight, *produced in 2000, is a how-to manual in piracy. How did you react when reality and fiction merged during the events of September 11th in New York?*

Johan Grimonprez: In retrospect, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* now seems like a premonition of the events that took place at the World Trade Center on September 11th in New York. These events are obviously symptomatic of a global structure, one which the United States' lack of political awareness is partly to blame for. September 11th is a bit like a backlash of their own violence exported elsewhere.[1] Anis Shivani, in an article entitled "Is America Becoming Fascist?", analyses violent acts people allow themselves to commit. The centrality of the question of "what is

1 "We may think that the debt and growing poverty in the south have nothing to do with the violence in New York," wrote Saskia Sassen the day after 9/11: "[Yesterday's] attack brings home the fact that we cannot hide behind our prosperity. The horrors of wars and deaths far away in the global south do not register." Cf. Sassen, S., "A Message From the Global South", in *Guardian of London* (12 September 2001).

a fascist state?" allows to draw pertinent parallels between the rise of Hitlerite fascism in 1933 Germany and the government of George W. Bush, one that manipulated an electoral outcome and seized the opportunity presented by an emergency situation to implement laws that curtailed democratic rights (the Patriot Act, etc.).[2] Hitler's rise to power was facilitated by the burning of the Reichstag, just as the attack on the World Trade Center enabled Bush to gear his administration towards waging war and setting in motion a propaganda machine demonizing foreigners (the only difference being that Jews are today replaced by Arabs). Intellectuals were afraid to broach this for fear of being labelled as traitors. One need only point to the German Minister of Justice Herta Däubler-Gmelin, who was dismissed for having dared to affirm that comparison.

F.M.: *In your work, violence seems to be the only means there is for gaining a purchase on reality. Do you think that art has to be violent? Does its impact depend on its degree of violence?*

J.G.: The question is rather secondary for me. The fundamental question is what is going on in the real world. Art is cut off from it, not only from the perspective of reactions and spaces of reflection, but also from the point of view of interventions. Art is sanitized of real violence. The explosion of the World Trade Center has to be repositioned within its global context. There is no comparison to be made between 9/11 and other geo-political crimes, at least in America's eyes. Violence must always be contextualized (historically, politically, geographically, socially…).

Whether art has to be violent or not to be effective is secondary with respect to what is going on in daily life. What is of importance is to analyse our tools of communication, language and terminology concerning violence. Western media reports in particular ways on what is happening in the Middle East. When

2 Shivani, A., "Is America Becoming Fascist?", in *CounterPunch*, ed. A. Cockburn & J. St. Clair (26 October 2002). Accessed 19 November 2010: www.counterpunch.org/shivani1026.html

the Israeli Army attacks Palestinians as part of what it describes as a military operation, Palestinian resistance is spun as terrorism. The enemy becomes criminal, even in a case of legitimate defence. Israel's true motive behind the Palestinian territories occupation isn't to prevent terrorist attacks as much as it is to sidetrack any peace agreement, and in so doing set the vocabulary by branding Palestinians as terrorists.

F.M.: *You emphasize the interconnections between different elements and the contrasting points of view they may give rise to (the history of airplane hijackings from a media perspective and the history of the media from the point of view of airplane hijacking, or the use of the media by terrorists and inversely the use of terrorist acts by the media). For you, how does* détournement *[diversion, displacement][3] operate in art-making? Is it pertinent and effective?*

J.G.: The contemporary articulations of the strategy of *détournement*, introduced in the 1960s by the Situationists, are to be found in the web-based work of *RTMark* (www.rtmark.com), or in the actions of Noël Godin of the *Gloupgloups* (www.gloupgloup.com), who toss cream pies at the faces of today's "key figures", such as Bill Gates, who was pied in Brussels on 2nd of February 1998. Diverting the media is one thing, but what interests me is provocation, creating short-circuits in order to critique a situation. To hold up a mirror to events is not enough. Finding openings and integrating them in my work allows me to forge from them a new kind of poetry. Take, for instance, zapping. You can only zap within an existing programme and the availability of channels. You can go further and find something beyond that.

F.M.: *Why is the question of the media everywhere in your work? What does it mean?*

3 Whether there is a conscious or unconscious parallel here, the French term *détournement* (together with its verb form of *détourner*) are the very same words used in French to denote "skyjacking" (and "to skyjack").

J.G.: Be careful! Nowadays it's possible for you to see your arse on television five minutes after going to the bathroom! Profound changes. Another example, missiles are no longer equipped with homing capabilities but cameras. We are all amazed by the "clean" imagery but disavow the dead. The media are everywhere in contemporary society. Impossible to deny their existence. It's even oppressive. So I can't do otherwise than to take them into account.

In the website zapomatik.com, I undertook historical research into the connections between zapping and commercial breaks in order to understand what the media are today. The definition of zapping stems from video-recording devices and their option of fast-forwarding through commercial breaks.

During the eighties, a great change occurred in television. People started to record on video, cable was introduced, and CNN and MTV first aired. Zapping away from the commercial was labelled an epidemic by the television industry, to the point where the advertising world established new strategies in order to reassert power over the consumer television audience. 'Zap-proof' commercials were sought to ensure that TV viewers remained seated during advertising breaks. The length of commercials was reduced from 30 to 15 seconds in order to shorten the interruption between programmes.

With the birth of MTV and CNN we witnessed the fusion of two worlds: alien abductees and presidents alike were being interviewed concurrently on CNN's *Larry King Live*—a reality borrowed from Hollywood, just like emotions after the events of September 11th. As if we were dealing with *Independence Day* live, the Hollywood "disaster" style becoming reality.[4] In October 2002, United States Army secret service agents met with Hollywood directors and screenwriters at the Institute of Creative Technology at the University of California in order to imagine terrorist scenarios. Apparently, more people believe in aliens than in presidents. An official investigation revealed that the amount of people believing in aliens outnumbers the combined number who voted in Reagan, Bush Sr. and Clinton to the White House.[5]

4 Emmerich, R., *Independence Day* (145 min/colour, 1996).

Following the fall of communism in the early 1990s, the western imagination was redefined. Capitalism is confronted with its own hegemony by continuing its tautology. The reappearance of the space alien in the early nineties makes sense at a time of global crisis when the capitalist unconscious finds itself facing a void. It's no longer James Bond against the USSR, but Mickey Mouse versus ET. Filled with aliens, this Hollywoodian void, is redefined in disturbing ways (*X-Files*…). In the United States, the international context is hardly ever questioned. Everybody focuses on the American tragedy. Ken Loach's film on September 11th shows that on the same date in Chile, Allende's palace was also bombarded. This signalled the start of 1973 Chilean coup, one which claimed the lives of 30,000 people.[6]

F.M.: *In what way do you treat the issue of context? Can art be "effective" while remaining in venues reserved for art, or do you think it has to enter into new spaces?*

J.G.: I question the limits of art, as I question my own. While I use the language of art (like simple tools for investigating our so-called consensus reality), I'm more interested in its new potential spaces. What is a documentary, a work of fiction? In political life, there are many narratives. As Hannah Arendt once pointed out, "a certain aestheticization of political life" is dangerous. For me, it is as important that one of my films be shown on cultural channels, in art institutions, as on the net. During the war in Afghanistan, CNN was used as a strategic tool of war to spread disinformation (at a time when zapping was reduced to choosing CNN, broadcast on all the global channels). On the other hand, during the events of Tiananmen Square, the Chinese

5 Cousineau, P., *UFOs: A Manual for the Millenium* (New York: Harper-Collins West, 1995).

6 The "United Kingdom" segment in *11'09"01 – September 11*, Y. Chahine et al. (134 min/b&w, colour, 2002).

compared their television channel with CNN in order to criticize their government. The point of view of reception is important. The East German writer Heiner Müller considered West German commercials as having been the most subversive images on television in East Berlin. I created a video-library that is premised on the belief that the viewer never has a passive role. The displacement of a situation can sometimes help to better understand it because it's disguised and displacing it automatically refers us back to reality. Then you have to be able to search beyond.

Thus, in the magazine *Inflight*, there is a chapter on activism (*HACKTIVISM*) and on Ricardo Dominguez's virtual demonstration, which sparked numerous reactions in media circles in the United States by asking the Mexican and American presidents to debate in public.[7] When they rebelled in 1994, the small army of Zapatistas disagreed with the Mexican Army in Chiapas. Their spokesman, Marcos, used his laptop computer as an effective weapon. By mobilizing international pressure through the use of university networks, churches and non-governmental organizations, the Zapatistas managed to end the government's assaults. They used the multiplication of hacktivists to block the government's computer network. (*Hacktivism* is the title of a book published by the Electronic Disturbance Theater, whose members include Ricardo Dominguez.) The aim wasn't to hack into sites, but to weaken those that effectively blocked steps towards peace. For the Zapatistas, this meant international support that saved them from total subjugation to the Mexican state apparatus (a situation that is completely different from Palestine today).

F.M.: *You haven't shown any pieces for some time now. What artistic projects are you currently working on?*

J.G.: Each of my projects has required a fairly significant amount of time to produce due to the nature of the project. It's very easy

7 Grimonprez, J., *Inflight Magazine* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000) and Digital Zapatismo. Accessed 15 November 2010: www.thing.net/~rdom/ecd/ecd.html

to quickly add something in a landscape that is already fairly cluttered, whereas questioning embodies more time. As such the video-library—put together with co-curator Herman Asselberghs—is sort of a toolbox to explore and elaborate new itineraries and themes. A recently installed version at the Museum of Art in Santa Monica incorporated the recent events of 9/11 and the subsequent manipulation of mainstream media to basically sell a war. For example some inclusions in the library juxtaposed the filmed Afghanistan war diaries of Russian director Alexander Sokurov versus *Rambo III*, where Sylvester Stallone fights alongside the mujaheddin.[8]

My time is now taken up with the next project, actually a feature-length. A work about the ending of films or how television changed the idea of the (happy) ending, and it inherently deals with television commercials. When we live in a time where people do not purchase products but rather buy an experience of the accompanying ad, or where gestures of love are portrayed as brand names, how can you possibly tell a love story? How do you tell a love story in a world that packages our most intimate feelings and desires for profit, a world where emotional content becomes mere product placement? Everything has become an imitation of something else and advertising starts looking better than the "real thing". When you say "I love you", everyone has heard that line before—but only with better lighting. In this context, the challenge of portraying a love story would be one of navigating the fragile borders of the private and the emotional as they are transformed by the media. We know all about those "happy ends"—and they had lots of kids and lived happily ever after—but what is so happy about that? The glossy commercial blurs our actual lives into the promise of fantasy and we begin to mistake reality for a commercial break. Trapped in this "ad", are we doomed to rewind our "happy ends" forever or what?

8 Sokurov, A., *Spiritual Voices* (328 min/colour, 1994), and MacDonald, P., *Rambo III* (102 min/colour, 1988).

Adapted from: Montagnon, F., "Reality Mistaken for a Commercial Break", in *Hardcore, vers un nouvel activisme*, ed. J. Sans (Paris: Palais de Tokyo/Éditions Cercles d'Art, 2003), 110–17.

PART IV

Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?

They go to all the places
and get all the languages.

[…]

We give them our language;
then they go to some other place.

Ngalgindali in Berndt, C.H. & Berndt, R.M.,
"An Oenpelli Monologue: Culture Contact", in
Oceania, vol. 22, no. 1 (1951).

Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?

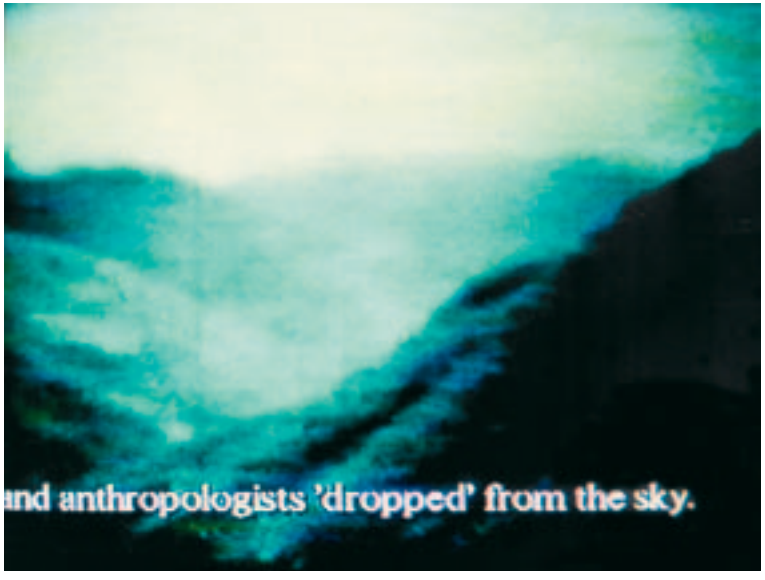
Johan Grimonprez

April 1991

Kobarweng's point of departure was Kaiang Tapior's question: "Where is your helicopter?", which puzzled me on the day of 6 July 1987 as I stood in the village of Pepera. Apparently in June 1959 a scientific crew, including anthropologists, had dropped down from the sky in helicopters; much to the terrified surprise of the villagers who watched in awe at these things from out of the sky, the likes of which they had never seen before.[1] "All the women pissed in fear, when the helicopter circled from the sky," recalls Kaiang Tapior, who still sharply envisioned the first encounter with these outsiders at the time when he was still a kid.

The video project *Kobarweng* traces the historical moment of a collision between two different cultures: a remote village set in the highlands of the island of New Guinea, only dimly aware of the larger beyond, is radically disrupted by an encounter with the outside world—a group of western scientists exploring unmapped territory only approachable by air.

1 Brongersma, L.D. & Venema, G.F., *To the Mountains of the Stars* (New York: Doubleday, 1962).



Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?, 1992

The first airplanes caused a shock that threw the New Guineans' worldview upside down, forcing them to redefine their known existence according to that outside world's encapsulation of it. The shock is still visible everywhere: the eldest son of Baman Uropmabin was born during the laying out of the Atmisibil airstrip and was named Kobarweng after "the sound of the airplane". The name became the title of the project *Kobarweng*. Translated literally, it means language (*weng*) of the airplane (*kobar*), or in the Sibil tongue: "the sound of the airplane".[2]

This touches on a fundamental difference in the Sibil's approach to identifying, representing and experiencing reality. The rainforest is first of all an experience of sound instead of sight. When anthropologist Steven Feld was collecting the names of all the birds as they are given by the Kaluli people from Papua New Guinea, they would respond: "it sounds like", instead of "it looks like". In front of Feld's tape recorder the Kaluli would imitate over a hundred sounds of birds without giving visual description. While western ornithological taxonomies are organized by morphological principles based on sight, the Kaluli use a different and broader set of criteria. Families of birds are categorized according to sound to create a metaphorical human society: those that say their names, those that weep, those that speak the Bosavi language, those that whistle, those that make a lot of noise, those that sing Gisalo song, and those that only make sound.[3]

It would make sense, then, that the outside world would emerge through sound: the roar of early airplanes prospecting the area, World War II squadrons swooping low during the 1940s on their way to bomb Japanese base camps in the South Pacific, or occasionally a distant B-17 crashing into the forest. These initial signs of a different reality from beyond the peripheries of their known world were perceived in a way similar to how the Kaluli approach their daily environment.

2 Hylkema, S., *Mannen in het draagnet* ('S-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).
3 Feld, S., *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

The unfamiliar sounds of aircraft were first explained in terms of the indigenous cosmology: "Perhaps it was only the sound of a cassowary? But the noise continued…"[4]—"Some said it was a hornbill (*sau*) flying in the sky, while others believed it to be the ruru frog, from the forest floor"[5]—"I thought I heard the voice of one of those marsupials that growl as they go along (*kui koklom*), we chased the noise through the undergrowth; it kept moving in front of us and we couldn't catch it"[6]—"[…] we thought it was our own Mokei spirits returning! We started digging […] We dug everywhere! We didn't realize the sound was coming from above".[7] Ancestors and the enigmatic larger political context intermixed. People thought their ancestral dead were returning with their cargo.[8]

Juxtaposing thirty-year-old documentary footage with the accounts of indigenous people, *Kobarweng* critically considers the myth of objectivity, the pretence to an epistemic and scientific detachment maintained not just by the anthropologist, but throughout the discourse of western science, where the observer finds himself caught in an alienated position of transcendence over his/her object. This bubble is truly burst by the statement of one of Margaret Mead's informants: "We never tell everything, we always keep something for the next anthropologist"!

4 Berndt, R.M., "A Cargo Movement in the Eastern Central Highlands of New Guinea", in *Oceania*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1952), 40–65.
5 Berndt, R.M., "A Cargo Movement in the Eastern Central Highlands of New Guinea", in *Oceania*, vol. 23, no. 1 (1952), 40–65; Josephides, L. & Schiltz, M., "Through Kewa Country", in *Like People You See in a Dream*, ed. E.L. Schieffelin & R. Crittenden (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 198.
6 Strathern, A., *Ongka, A Self-account by a New Guinea Big Man* (London: Duckworth, 1979).
7 Kubal Nori in Connolly B. & Anderson R., *First Contact; New Guinea's Highlanders Encounter the Outside World* (New York: Penguins Books, 1988).
8 Schieffelin, E.L. & Crittenden, R., *Like People You See in a Dream: First Contact in Six Papuan Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Connolly, B. & Anderson, R., *First Contact: New Guinea's Highlanders Encounter the Outside World* (London: Penguin, 1988).

First published as: Grimonprez, J., "Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter", in *Johan Grimonprez: We must be over the rainbow!*, J. Grimonprez & H. Asselberghs (Santiago de Compostela: Centro Galego Arte Contemporanea, 1998), 85–6.

Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter? Script

Johan Grimonprez

1992

The eldest son of Baman Uropmabin was born during the laying out of the Atmisibil airstrip and he was named "Kobarweng" after "the sound of the airplane"

Hylkema, S., *To the Mountains of the Stars* (New York: Doubleday, 1962).

The highland people on the island of New Guinea were first contacted by whites a few years prior to World War II. Less accessible areas indirectly encountered the outside world only during the Pacific War through low-flying airplanes or when a B-24 occasionally crashed into the forest. Much later Kaiang Tapior, still a child, watched in awe and wonder as a helicopter dropped supplies for the strange visitors in the village of Pepera, formerly the Nimdol Bivouac of the Dutch Starmountains Expedition of 1959.

WAS IT THE SOUND OF FLOOD WATERS? OR OF AN EARTHQUAKE […] PERHAPS IT WAS ONLY THE SOUND OF A CASSOWARY? BUT THE NOISE CONTINUED … (Berndt) — I THOUGHT I HEARD THE VOICE OF ONE OF THOSE MARSUPIALS THAT GROWL AS THEY GO ALONG AND HAVE TAILS LIKE LIZARDS' TAILS (KUI KOKLOM), WE CHASED THE NOISE THROUGH THE UNDERGROWTH; IT KEPT MOVING IN FRONT OF US AND WE COULDN'T CATCH IT […] WE ARGUED ABOUT IT. THEN IT WENT AWAY AND WE SAID WE WOULD FIND OUT ABOUT IT

LATER (Ongka) — WE NEVER HEARD THAT NOISE BEFORE — WE DUG IN THE GROUND […] WE DIDN'T REALIZE THE SOUND WAS COMING FROM ABOVE (Kubal Nori in Connolly & Anderson) — SOME SAID IT WAS A HORNBILL (SAU) FLYING IN THE SKY, WHILE OTHERS BELIEVED IT BE THE RURU FROG, FROM THE FOREST FLOOR, WHICH CRIES ONLY DURING RAINY PERIODS (Josephides & Schiltz) — OTHERS REMEMBER THINKING IT WAS SOME KIND OF INSECT […] AND SEARCHED THROUGH THE LONG GRASS BEFORE THE ENORMOUS VOLUME OF THE SOUND SENT THEM RUNNING IN TERROR. […] IT NEVER OCCURRED […] TO LOOK UP IN THE AIR (Connolly & Anderson)

6 July 1987; the village of Pepera: KAIANG TAPIOR PUZZLES ME WITH HIS QUESTION: "WHERE IS YOUR HELICOPTER?" "WHERE DID IT ALL COME FROM?" "OUT OF THE SKY" (Stow)

Pacific War; 2 December 1944; Baliem Valley: I FLEW AS LOW AS SEVENTY-FIVE FEET, AND NATURALLY THE NATIVES WERE TERRORIZED BY THE SIZE OF THE AIRPLANE AND THE NOISE OF THE PROPELLERS AND ENGINES. SOME TRIED TO HIDE, WHILE OTHERS RAN AT TOP SPEED AS IF TO ESCAPE FROM THIS ROARING AIRBORNE BEHEMOTH. IT WAS EVIDENT THAT FEW IF ANY HAD EVER SEEN AN AIRPLANE BEFORE (Rhoades, *Flying MacArthur to victory*) — [THEY] INDULGED IN BUZZ JOBS. SHELTON REMEMBERS ONE PILOT WHO FLEW A B-24 SO LOW IN NEW GUINEA THAT HE INADVERTENTLY BOUNCED IT OFF A BEACH, RETURNING TO BASE WITH CRUMPLED REAR-BOMB-BAY DOORS AND SAND IN THE BACK OF THE AIRCRAFT. ANOTHER PILOT LANDED WITH SHREDS OF PALM FONDS LODGED INSIDE FROM A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH A COCONUT TREE (Sheenan)

THEN WE LOOKED UP AND SAW IT WAS IN THE SKY AND WE SAID "IT'S A KIND OF WITHCHCRAFT (kum)" […] SOME SAID IT WAS A THUNDERCLAP GONE MAD AND COME DOWN

Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?, 1992

FROM THE SKY (Ongka) — WE JUST DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED. SOME PEOPLE SEARCHED THE GROUND WHILE OTHERS LEFT EVERYTHING AND RAN FOR THEIR LIVES (Nopornga Mare in Connolly & Anderson) — STRANGE NOISE CAME FROM THE SKY — THERE WAS A BIG SOMETHING (Berndt) — IN TERROR THEY FELL TO THE GROUND UNTIL IT HAD PASSED, NOT DARING TO LOOK UP AGAIN (Berndt) — SUDDENLY IT CAME FASTER LOUDER! WHEN IT CAME CLOSER, IT LOOKED HUGE, AND WE FELL TO THE GROUND AND HID OUR FACES. WE WETTED AND FOULED OURSELVES IN FEAR AND CONFUSION (Kentiga Anup Kwimbe in Connolly & Anderson) — IT COMES, IT GOES (Blackburn)

THEY [THE WHITE PEOPLE] SMELT SO DIFFERENTLY (Gavey Akamo in Connolly & Anderson) — WE CALLED [THE WHITES] SEBRIB, WHICH MEANS "DIFFERENT SMELL" OR "SMELL OF SOAP" (Amusep in Morren) — […] BUT THEIR SHIT SMELLS JUST LIKE OURS [THEY SAID] (Kirupano in Connolly & Anderson)

WE WERE RETURNING FROM THE FOREST, AFTER COLLECTING AND COOKING PANDANUS NUTS, WHEN WE MET WITH THOSE WHITES (Enjap in Sillitoe) — "WHY DO THEY COME HERE?" (Blackburn) — "WHY DID THEY COME?" PEOPLE ASKED AND THEY WERE AFRAID BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT FIND AN ANSWER (Berndt) — … AND WE WONDERED WHAT THEY WERE GOING TO DO IN OUR PLACE (Mokei Wanip Wan) — THEY COME, THEY GO […] THEY BRING THEIR SOMETHINGS (Dipapa in the Visitants)

OUR ANCESTORS AND THEIR ANCESTORS CAME HERE TOGETHER IN TWO FLYING MACHINES. THEY CRASHED AT ODAKINA (Stow)

THEY WERE VISITORS (Worsley) — "FIRST THE DUTCH CAME, THEN THE JAPANESE, THEN THE AMERICANS, THEN THE DUTCH RETURNED AND NOW THE INDONESIANS HAVE COME" (Elder from Dosal)

Nimdol; June 1959: GEOLOGISTS, BIOLOGISTS & ANTHROPOLOGISTS "DROPPED" FROM THE SKY […] [PEOPLE FROM THE REGION] HAD HEARD THE NOISE, AND, STANDING AT A SAFE DISTANCE OBSERVED THE STRANGE PROCEEDINGS WITH GREAT INTEREST (Brongersma & Venema, Starmountains Expedition) — 18 June 1959: WE HAD SEEN NOTHING LIKE IT BEFORE — ALL THE WOMEN PISSED IN FEAR WHEN THE HELICOPTER CIRCLED FROM THE SKY (Kaiang Tapior; 1987, village of Pepera, formerly Nimdol Bivouac)

ON 14 JUNE [THE MEMBERS OF THE EXPEDITION] KEPT AN ANXIOUS LOOK-OUT, BUT NO HELICOPTER CAME, NOR ON THE 15th — 17 JUNE: LOOKING WESTWARD TO SEE THE LONG-AWAITED HELICOPTER (Brongersma & Venema)

[THEY ARE] MAKING HOUSES AND TAKING THEM DOWN AGAIN AS THEY COME […] COME TO SEE US AND GO (Makwes & Waeb in Sillitoe)

WE NEVER TELL EVERYTHING, WE ALWAYS KEEP SOMETHING FOR THE NEXT ANTHROPOLOGIST (Informant to Margaret Mead)

Nimdol; 12 February 1958: RUMOURS HAD FLOATED IN ABOUT THE COMING OF KAKAWOKI [THE WHITE MEN] […] MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN RAN OUT TO SEE (Dragt)

MEMBERS OF ANOTHER VILLAGE WERE ANGRILY PROTESTING THAT SULULIB ALREADY HAD TWO ANTHROPOLOGISTS (Feld)

Ok-Bon Valley, Nimdol/Pepera; 10 July 1987: HERE I WANT TO LAY OUT THE AIRSTRIP (Kaiang Tapior) — Oksibil, 1958: OVER AN AREA OF 60 BY 30 YARDS OF THE SURFACE LAYER OF PEAT WAS DUG OUT (Brongersma & Venema; lay-out of the expedition airstrip) (919/53) — Miyanmin area, 1965: AMUSEP BEGAN HACKING DOWN HUNDREDS OF BIG

Ok-Bon Valley, 1958 (*Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?*, 1992)

We never heard that noise before—we dug in the ground we didn't realise the sound was coming from above. We had seen nothing like it before—all the women pissed in fear when the helicopter circled from the sky.

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JUNGLE TREES TO BUILD AN AIRSTRIP. THE RUNWAY WAS DISCOVERED BY ACCIDENT (Morren)

THE HARD ROAR […] FILLED THE SKY WITH A STRANGE NEW SOUND (McCarthy) — […] CROWDS OF PEOPLE GATHERED […] PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE PLACE. AND THERE IT WAS, WAITING FOR EVERYONE TO HAVE A LOOK […] IT WAS A PRETTY THING AND SHINING (N dika Rumint in Connolly & Anderson) — THEY ALL LOOKED AT IT. THEY HAD SEEN NOTHING LIKE IT BEFORE (Blackburn)

Village of Kandanganan: THE ELDERS ASKED THAT THE FILM BE BROUGHT BACK & PROJECTED, PROMISING TO ERECT ANOTHER SACRED ENCLOSURE FOR THE SCREENING — THERE WAS ABSOLUTE SILENCE AS THEY WATCHED THEMSELVES (Carpenter) — Tabubil 1979: EVERYBODY SCRAMBLED FOR A NIGHT'S VIEWING OF JULIE ANDREWS STARRING IN THE SOUND OF MUSIC (Jackson)

Goodenough Island, prior to World War II: AN OLD MAN [KUYAUNA] IS SAID TO HAVE SUMMONED ALL KWAIAUDILI PEOPLE TO GALUWATA. HE PROPHESIED THE COMING OF […] AIRPLANES AND GUNS (Young) — Yabob village, Madang 1942: SO VERY SOON, TAGARAB TAUGHT, KILILOB WAS RETURNING TO DRIVE OUT THE WHITES (Trompf/Lawrence) — WE ARE VERY NEAR. WE MAY COME TOMORROW. WE ARE COMING WITH TRUCKS & SHOTGUNS & BOMBS (Kulua'ibu in Stow) — Biak 1938–1943: JAN RONSUMBRE BUILT […] AN ENORMOUS LARGE HOUSE IN THE SHAPE OF AN AIRPLANE (Kamma) — Tanna: [NELOIAG] PLANNED THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN AERODROME (Steinbauer) — Madang district: DATES WERE ANNOUNCED, AIRSTRIPS WERE LAID OUT (Lawrence) — PEOPLE LIVED IN DAILY ANTICIPATION OF THE ARRIVAL OF THE CARGO (Worsley) — HE MISTOOK THE GROUNDLIGHTS FOR STARS AND ASKED WHY THE AIRPLANE WAS FLYING UPSIDE DOWN (Chatwin)

Sambia-Valley, 1979: WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM? WHERE HAVE YOU COME FROM? HOW HAS HE COME HERE? … I SAW THE HELICOPTER FROM DOWN THERE (Sakulambei in Herdt & Stoller) — THE ANCESTORS FLED (Yamsep Filim; Ok Tedi, June 1985)

Hollandia; Pacific War, August 1944: BULLDOZERS, REFRIGERATORS, 400,000 TROOPS, MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF CARGO & 200 OPEN AIR CINEMAS DESCENDED FROM THE SKY (Worsley) — Biak: WHEN THE […] AIRPLANES CAME GLIDING ALONG LIKE BLACK CLOUDS, NO ONE COULD TAKE IT IN […] IT BEGAN AT NIGHT, WHEN THE AIRPLANES DROPPED FLARES. THE BRIGHT COLOURS FOLLOWED BY HEAVY EXPLOSIONS […] THE WHOLE ISLAND BECAME ONE BIG WAREHOUSE AND THE BIAK PEOPLE IN THEIR FIRST ASTONISHMENT, SHOUTED THEMSELVES HOARSE (Kamma)

MY HOUSE IS ECHOING WITH THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE VISITOR (Osana in Stow).

Shortly after the Dutch expedition left, the Indonesian Army annexed the area (1962–65). The village of Nimdol was renamed Pepera, ironically the acronym for "the Determination of the People's Opinion". President Kennedy feared the communist leanings of Sukarno, Indonesia's President. Preventing this, he convinced the UN to consign the territory of Western New Guinea under protection of Indonesia. West-Papua was never consulted and represented in the UN. A secessionist guerrilla war has been going on, hidden away from the outside world.

Based on research in the village of Pepera, Irian Jaya, Indonesia 1986–87. Certain names of the persons and places have been changed to protect the privacy of those concerned.

Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?, 1992

They come, they go, they bring their somethings. We called [the whites] sebrib, which means "different smell"—but their shit smells just like ours.

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The "Exotic" is Uncannily Close

Simon Taylor

1994

Johan Grimonprez's ethnographic video projects address a pervasive condition in late-twentieth-century society precipitated by increased rootlessness and mobility. In *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford identifies this as a "condition of offcentredness in a world of distinct meaning systems, a state of being in culture while looking at culture".[1] Until the beginning of our century, writes Clifford, westerners regarded other cultures through exclusively Eurocentric eyes; all other races and classes were judged according to the normative ideal of bourgeois individualism, which was considered the pinnacle of human civilization. While two World Wars and the Holocaust destroyed any lingering pretence of moral leadership, the revolt against scientific positivism undermined the progressivist logic of the evolutionary worldview. In the same way that the Copernican map of the universe displaced humankind from centre to periphery, the

1 Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 9. The title of this essay, "The 'Exotic' is Uncannily Close", also derives from Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture*, 13.

cultural relativism expressed by the new ethnographic conception of the world implied that western truth-claims have no legitimate universal application.

Theoretically this meant that western culture was no more advanced than any other. Yet, the majority of anthropologists in the twentieth century continued to demonstrate ethnocentric bias by adopting patronizing attitudes towards "primitives" and "savages", labelling their cultures "undeveloped" and "Third World" even as they claimed to be the advocates of subjugated peoples. While anthropologists assured themselves that their relativist attitudes and allegedly neutral practices would promote an appreciation of non-western societies and combat racism, the scientific disciplines of anthropology, ethnology and ethnography were, in fact, complicit with western imperialism and colonialism—whether directly through the mediation of colonial authorities, or indirectly, through the epistemological constraints of a discipline traditionally based on Self–Other and Us–Them dichotomies. By the 1960s, cultural relativism was exposed as an ideology that reinforced the *status quo*: instead of acknowledging differences, it paradoxically erased them under the banner of pluralism. Ethnography entered a reflexive phase so that the economic, political and ideological relationship of the fieldworker to his "native informants" could no longer be taken for granted.

The "predicament" faced by anthropologists and ethnographers today is related to the national struggles for self-determination that began in the post-World War II period and intensified after 1957 with the liberationist movement in Ghana, Congo and Algeria. These political struggles for self-determination continue to play a leading role in the global environment in spite of the homogenizing effects of consumer culture and the recuperative power of neo-colonial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Due to advances in means of communication and transportation as well as the expansion of traditional trade routes, it is less possible than ever to speak of independent cultures with clearly demarcated boundaries. Given the proliferation of diasporic cultures, not to mention the influence of deconstructionist philosophy, we are forced to acknowledge that "identity is conjunctural, not essential".[2] The "postcolonial crisis of ethnographic authority" is therefore reflected in the following questions: "Who has the authority to speak for a group's identity or authenticity? What are the essential elements and boundaries of a culture?"[3]

In a survey of "Ethnographic film and museums", Asen Balikci, a professor of anthropology at the University of Montreal and an ethnographic filmmaker, argues that five criteria "make some films more ethnographic than others".[4] Noting the wide variety of styles (observational, reflexive, didactic-expositionary and documentary) used in the genre, Balikci writes that "serious" ethnographic films incorporate the following conventions: 1. a direct filming technique showing spontaneous actions in "natura" settings as they occur over real time; 2. the participation of a professionally-trained ethnographer; 3. a preference for "exotic" non-western subjects and locations; 4. pedagogical utility in the classroom; and, lastly, 5. the supporting corroboration of professional research. Balikci recommends straightforward *documentary realism* as the most appropriate style for salvaging cultures through visual representations. For reasons that will soon become apparent, this prescriptive attitude towards ethnographic media is theoretically problematic and politically dubious.

According to Balikci, "the levelling tide of modernity threatens with obliteration a number of traditional cultures and their original lifestyles. Modern audio-visual recording techniques can help preserve, in images at least, certain of those irreplaceable qualities of vanishing cultures."[5] Ethnographic media is here conceived solely in terms of a salvage operation, to record all the remaining "authentic" traces of the traditional culture.

2 Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture*, 8.
3 Ibid.
4 Balikci, A., "Ethnographic film and museums: a history, a programme", in *Museum International*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1985), 17.
5 Ibid., 24.

The inexorable narrative of cultural decay, familiar to readers of Claude Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), is now recognized as something of a racist fiction which denies subalterns any political agency in shaping history. The triumph of the West is thus a *fait accompli* for anthropologists subscribing to the "salvage paradigm".[6] In emphasizing cultural decay, and the backwardness and timelessness of an "exotic" culture, they neglect to draw any conclusions from the positive and constructive histories in other countries.

Balikci credits Margaret Mead (and Gregory Bateson) for being the first to systematically integrate visual recording devices in their ethnographic research, in films about Bali and Papua New Guinea, beginning in the late 1930s: "She had an inspiring influence on most cinematographers of the younger generation. The important developments in the United States during the 1960s were directly related to her contagious belief in the methodological validity of ethnographic film."[7] While Mead undoubtedly influenced younger anthropologists, the following generation also questioned the "methodological validity" of their ethnographic fieldwork by confronting the history of their discipline and its complicity in empire-building. The notion of the "return gaze", as articulated in Barbara Holecek's film, *Anthropology on Trial* (1984)—which begins by criticizing Mead's work in Papua New Guinea—has been an important influence on Grimonprez and other individuals engaged in ethnographic media.

Nevertheless, as recently as the 11th Margaret Mead Film Festival, held at the American Museum of Natural History in New York (1987), there was a hegemony of "classic" film documentary: "no video, no fiction, no serious tampering with the authoritative point of view that became the hallmark of the documentary as long ago as 1922, when Robert Flaherty assembled his ethnographic epic *Nanook of the North.* The message of anthropology as it appeared (at the festival) was the humanism and emphasis on everyday life that suffused the ethnographhy of Margaret Mead."[8]

6 See essays by James Clifford, Virginia Dominguez and Trinh T. Minh-ha in a section entitled "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage Paradigm' ", in *Dia Art Foundation Discussions in Contemporary Culture, Number 1*, ed. H. Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 121–50.

7 Balikci, A., "Ethnographic film and museums: a history, a programme", 24.

The moral and ethical dilemma confronting ethnographers is whether their efforts to represent cultural diversity can be achieved without ethnocentric bias. Given the risks involved, many individuals simply back off and refuse to get involved in the debates. As Faye Ginsburg writes, in her article "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?", "much of the current postmodern theory, while raising important points about the politics of representation, is so critical of all 'gazes' at the so-called 'other' that to follow the programme set forth by some, we would all be paralysed into an alienated universe, with no engagement across the boundaries of difference that for better or worse exist".[9] How does one distinguish between, on the one hand, the political refusal to "objectify" the Other and, on the other hand, the disavowal of cultural difference? While much has been written on the "political correctness" of representing other cultures, successful communication always involves the necessity of representation. More pertinent is whether this representation is accompanied by a colonial mindset, or motivated by political solidarity with the anti-imperialist struggles of subjugated peoples.

Three major influences (specific to ethnography) have informed Johan Grimonprez's projects and installations. First, there is the tradition of anthropological filmmakers from Robert Flaherty to Jean Rouch to more recent filmmakers like Dennis O'Rourke. The second influence on Grimonprez has been the development of indigenous media, such as, Terence Turner and the Kayapo, the Hopi filmmaker Victor Mayasesva Jr. and Francis Juppurrurla of the Walpiri Media Association in Central

8 Ball, E., "The Margaret Mead Festival", in *Afterimage*, no. 15 (November 1987), 5.

9 Ginsburg, F., "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?", in *Rereading Cultural Anthropology*, ed. G.E. Marcus (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982), 367.

Australia. Finally, Grimonprez's ethnographic practice can be related to avant-garde film and video-makers currently working in the United States, including Yvonne Rainer, Leslie Thornton, and Trinh T. Minh-ha, Ken Feingold, Su Friedrich, among others, whose works centre on the encounter with the "Other". In Trinh's films, for example, "documentary 'objectivity'" is revealed to be "more a matter of unacknowledged voyeurism than scientific fact-finding… What we see and hear is a questioning of the anthropological desire to know the Other."[10] Similar motivations are behind Grimonprez's efforts to undermine and subvert ethnographic authority.

Grimonprez's most widely-screened work, a twenty-five-minute videotape, *"Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?"* (1992) was made after a 1987 trip to the Ok-Bon Valley in Irian Jaya, formerly Dutch New Guinea. A montage of found footage, the video is intentionally reflexive in its construction; rather than exoticizing the indigenous people, the tape concerns the ethnography of ethnography through a dialectical-dialogical process. Fraught with ambiguities, lacking any sense of closure that might give a hint of mastery, combining the testimony of indigenous populations with personal history, *Kobarweng* conveys the artist's sense of dislocation and disorientation as he finds himself in the predicament of "being in culture while looking at culture". Incorporating strategies historically associated with Eisenstein's cinema (rapid editing to foreground the formal devices), Brechtian theatre (alienation effects), and Surrealism (e.g. Luis Buñuel's parody of the documentary genre in *Land Without Bread,* 1932), Grimonprez rejects the authoritative underpinnings of mimetic realism, as used in traditional documentary practices, in an attempt to subvert western forms of "Othering". What emerges is a *materialist poetics,* a blending of ethnographic surrealism and "impure cinevideo".[11]

10 Penley, C. & Ross, A., "Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha", in *Camera Obscura* (Summer 1985), reprinted as "When I Project it is Silent", in *Framer Framed*, T. Minh-ha (New York: Routledge, 1992), 225–42.

11 Larsen, E., "For an Impure Cinevideo", in *The Independent* (May 1990), 24–7.

According to Hal Foster, two sets of primal scene recur in modernism: the encounter with the primitive and the machine.[12] *Kobarweng* is about the *first contact* between whites and Papuans, and the representation of that encounter. The tape also concerns the arrival of airstrips, airplanes and helicopters in a remote part of the world. For an island, these flying machines have special significance since they transgress the island's physical boundaries and undermine the concept of nationhood.[13] One of the last areas on Earth to be colonized by white people, the island of New Guinea or Papua is situated in the Pacific Ocean, separated from Australia by the Coral Reef. Sighted by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the island was colonized by the Dutch, the British, and the Germans in the nineteenth century; even earlier, trade was established with Malaysian and Chinese sailors, who eventually called it the island of the "Papuwah" (the fuzzy haired). Under Australian administration since 1949, the eastern half became the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, while the former Dutch territories became West Irian under Indonesian rule.

In the 1920s, Australians, including gold prospectors and missionaries, colonized the coastal areas, but nothing was known about the interior of the island, with its tropical jungle and mountain ranges, until the 1930s. Among the earliest explorers of the interior were the Australian Leahy brothers whose gold-prospecting expeditions are documented in the film *First Contact* (1980), directed by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, and later issued as a book (1987). The first Highland people who met the Leahy brothers imagined that they were supernatural beings or ghosts of their ancestors.[14] During the Pacific War, when the Japanese and Americans invaded the island, Papuans living in even more

12 Hal Foster, a talk presented at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program during the academic year, 1992–3.

13 Beer, G., "The island and the aeroplane: the case of Virginia Woolf", in *Nation and Narration*, K. Homi (New York: Routledge, 1992), 265–90.

14 Connolly, B. & Anderson, R., *First Contact* (New York: Viking, 1987); and Schieffelin, E.L. & Crittenden, R., *Like People You See in a Dream: First Contact in Six Papuan Societies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

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Members of another village were angrily protesting that Sululib already had two anthropologists.

Feld, S., *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

remote areas had their first exposure to the outside world when low-flying airplanes flew overhead or crashed in the forest. As late as 1958–9, the villagers of Nimdol (now Pepera) encountered westerners when helicopters dropped supplies for a scientific team, including anthropologists, biologists and geologists associated with the Dutch Starmountains Expedition whose journeys are recorded in the book *To the Mountains of the Stars*.[15] Nowadays, some areas are increasingly inundated with camera-toting tourists, including westerners, whose crass exploitation of the indigenous people is documented in the film *Cannibal Tours* (1987) by Dennis O'Rourke ("I'm an exponent of primitive art," says one). In Irian Jaya, tourism is limited, since Indonesians want to hide their military policies against the indigenous people who are dispossessed of their lands by Javanese transmigration projects in a lot of the areas.

Since cultural difference is a negotiated, two-way process, *Kobarweng* explores the element of *dialogical reciprocity* in the encounter between cultural systems. In Sibil language, *Kobarweng* literally means, "the language of the airplane or the sound of the airplane". When Grimonprez visited the Pepera area in 1987 and gathered oral testimonies, one of the "natives", Kaiang Tapior, asked him, "Where is your helicopter?", alluding to the arrival of the anthropologists thirty years earlier, hence the full title of the video, *"Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?"* (The question was also highly ironic since Grimonprez had reached Nimdol, exhausted, after a three-day hike over difficult terrain.) When the highland people of the island of New Guinea first heard the sounds of airplane engines and propellers, we learn through the video, they were confused, variously identifying them as the cry of a cassowary, a ruru frog, a growling marsupial, floodwaters or an earthquake. Some, thinking that the sounds were coming from the forest floor, started digging to determine their origin. Still others understood the sounds in terms of their spiritual cosmology, attributing the unfamiliar noises to returning dead ancestors.

15 Brongersma, L.D. & Venema, G.F., *To the Mountains of the Stars* (New York: Doubleday, 1962).

The soundtrack to *Kobarweng* is scored so that most of the video passes in a loaded silence, punctuated at intervals by the sound of a helicopter, roar of airplanes, running water from a tap, a film projector, and other decontextualized noises that appear out of sync, though recontextualized in a displaced (metaphorical) relation to the images on the screen: the film projector versus landscape imagery, the screeching of a cockatoo connected to the image of an airplane or even the abrupt abscence of sound precisely there where classicaly dramatic ambience would be added. One of the themes of the tape is the different emphasis that westerners and Papuans give to the senses. In the ocular-centric West, as Michel Foucault has shown in several of his books (most notably, *Discipline and Punish,* 1975), vision has a privileged status in the hierarchy of the senses, and other sense organs become atrophied as a consequence. By contrast, the Papuans who live in the tropical rainforest are attuned to a wide variety of sounds; the Kaluli people, for example, are able to clearly differentiate over a hundred species of birds by their sonos rather than their visual appearance. Westerners, on the other hand, have developed ornithological taxonomies organized according to morphological descriptions based on sight.[16]

Whereas the film *First Contact* adopts the conventional techniques of the documentary, and avoids drawing attention to its own framing devices, *Kobarweng* goes in the opposite direction: some of the original location footage, including some "jungle" foliage, was shot in New York. The video begins with a tracking sequence along a hallway, until the camera arrives inside a room of New York's Greystone Hotel, where the artist temporarily resided—the image of the hotel signifying *transience*.[17] As the first contact narratives, oral testimonies and details of New Guinea's colonial past scroll across the monitor, viewers are presented with

16 Feld, S., *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

17 Clifford, J., "Traveling Cultures", in *Cultural Studies*, ed. L. Grossberg, et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 96–116, suggests that the hotel is a "chronotype of modernity" and a nostalgic image.

the choice of focusing on the textual or the visual register. While "TV ethnography" (e.g. Granada TV's *Disappearing World* series in Britain) remains heavily dependent upon narrative voice-overs, Grimonprez uses text in order to break away from the tradition of ethnographic film as "an evolutionary adaptation of the lecture format". As Eric Michaels has written, ethnographic documentary films descend from slide lectures and travelogues, in which the omnipresent narrator "acts like a priest, mediating images and reducing the potential richness, complexity and provocative ambiguity of the images [and text] to a linear, doctrinaire message".[18]

The heterogeneous images in *Kobarweng* include visuals appropriated from secondhand sources such as World War II newsreels, television and anthropological film footage attained from the Starmountains Expedition members. The preponderance of appropriated imagery from mass-media sources—copies without origins—parallels the idea that there is *no essential identity*. Although there are narrative components in the video, its overall structure coheres through the repetition of several shifting signifiers that seem poetically loaded—among them, a kettle, a running tap, airplanes and parachutes. Instead of exoticizing tribal artefacts, Grimonprez isolates these taken-for-granted everyday objects and machines, and makes them appear strange, or defamiliarized through a strategy of "mimetic excess". As described by Michael Taussig in *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993): "Mastery is mocked as First World and Other Worlds now mirror, interlock, and rupture each other's alterity to such a degree that all that is left is excess—the self-consciousness as to the need for an identity, sexual, racial, ethnic, and national, and the roller-coastering of violence and enjoyment of this state of affairs."[19]

18 Michaels, E., "How To Look at Us Looking at the Yanomami Looking at Us", in *A Crack in the Mirror, Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*, ed. J. Ruby (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 133–46. Tribe, K., "Real Lives and Disappearing Worlds: A Report on a Festival of Ethnographic Film", in *Screen* 27 (May–August 1986), 149–54, also notes that, with the use of the voice-over, "some images are relegated to the status of visual background to a lecturing voice" (p. 153).

19 Taussig, M., *Mimesis and Alterity; a Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 136–7. See also, Bhabha, H., "Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", in *October,* no. 28 (Spring 1984), 125–33.

"It will be all right if you come again, only next time don't bring any gear, except a tea kettle…"[20] *A Landscape of Mimetic Excess;—Nimdol June 1950—Nimdol July 1987* (1994) is the title of Grimonprez's site-specific installation for the Palais des Beaux-Arts. A multi-channel installation, *A Landscape of Mimetic Excess* further develops the themes of cultural difference and (post-)colonialism using a sequence of landscape footage from the *Kobarweng* tape intercut with new sequences, including scenes appropriated from the Hollywood musical *The Sound of Music*, starring Julie Andrews. If *Kobarweng* explores cultural difference through the vehicle of flight, *A Landscape of Mimetic Excess* is more directly related to representation *per se,* since it concerns the arrival of outdoor cinemas and films, as well as the role of anthropologists and missionaries, in Irian Jaya/Papua New Guinea; during the Pacific War in August 1944, 200 open-air cinemas descended from the sky (in Hollandia, the previous capital of the province, nowadays named Jayapura).

There is a constant interplay between the strange and the familiar in Grimonprez's video editing, enacting a sense of ethnographic displacement. Midway through a camera pan of the Ok-Bon Valley, filmed by Derk Jan Dragt of the Starmountains Expedition, there is an unexpected transition to a similar landscape zoom appropriated from *The Sound of Music.* When Grimonprez visited the Pepera region in 1987, the indigenous locals associated him with the European landscapes and urban environments—as depicted in films—which a missionary had shown them. Having travelled such a long distance with the expectation of encountering the unknown, the irony of being confronted with the most banal example of western culture, but also with the most familiar images of his childhood (his mother's favourite film), demonstrated to the artist that he, too, was subject to a process of stereotypical objectification.

Is the project overdetermined and Oedipalized as a consequence? Typically, ethnographers censor personal matters from

20 Appell, G.N., *Ethical Dilemmas in Anthropological Inquiry: A Case Book* (Los Angeles: Crossroads Press, 1978).

their fieldwork reports, which are meant to be "objective" accounts of individual societies. When Bronislaw Malinowski's intimate Trobriand diaries of 1914–18 were posthumously published as *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (1967), the contrast between the private journal, in which he often expressed feelings of contempt for the "natives", and his pioneering book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) sent seismic shock waves through the discipline of anthropology. Whereas most ethnographers followed Malinowski's self-censorship in writing up their fieldwork, an exception was Michel Leiris whose "self-ethnography—not autobiography but an act of writing his existence in a present of memories, dreams, politics, daily life" can be seen as a precursor of Grimonprez's work in video.[21] Aside from autobiographical notes, Grimonprez researched accounts of a number of his friends and associates to relate about *The Sound of Music*, including the Trinidad-born artist Todd Ayoung, who during his childhood, in the condition of never having been exposed to TV nor film before, confused reality with the space in the film, and Onome Ekeh, who saw the film over 300 times while growing up in Nigeria—these interviews form partly textual components of the video.

A recurring image in the video is the anthropologist's writing table, restaged by the artist to signify the discursive nature of fieldwork, since "ethnography is enmeshed in writing".[22] A great proportion of the text utilized in the video was derived from anthropological sources. We learn of rivalry between villages to acquire an anthropologist, as members of one village loudly complain that their neighbours already have *two*! (Economically dependent on the anthropologists as a major source of income, the informants now expect something in return for their collaboration and trade local legends as if they were commodities, which they are.) One anthropologist is told by an informant that they always save something for the next anthropologist, rendering futile any hopes of achieving a totalizing account of a society, while another anthropologist is surprised and undoubtedly amused when he encounters a native named Malinowski.

21 Clifford, J., *The Predicament of Culture*, 14.
22 Ibid., 25.

Some of the anecdotes told in the video, while disquieting, are also extremely funny. These often involve indigenous peoples mimicking the behaviours that westerners believe they do "naturally" as a matter of course. When westerners arrive in a village, the ghettoblasters are hidden, and the people "go primitive", entertaining the visitors by fingerpainting on tree bark, making fire with bamboo, and chopping wood with a stone axe—all very photogenic activities for the tourist to capture on film. Then, there are stories which relate the exact opposite: how one intrepid anthropologist, for instance, encountered the "wild" mountain Cuna Indians, only to be greeted by the chief, calling out, in perfect English: "How are you boys? Glad to see you." The chief, it turned out, had worked on sailing boats for twenty years, and had travelled from one cosmopolitan city to the next.

First published as: Taylor, S., "The 'Exotic' is Uncannily Close", in *Johan Grimonprez: It will be all right if you come again, only next time don't bring any gear, except a tea kettle…*, ed. D. Snauwaert (Brussels: Les Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1994), 9–17.

A New Guinean has been ordered to pay $5 compensation for eating an anthropologist's cat.

Carpenter, E., *Oh, what a blow that phantom gave me!* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).

West Papuans Oppressed by US Multinational

An interview with John Rumbiak by Asad Ismi

May 2003

Asad Ismi: *What is the history of West Papuan–Indonesian relations?*

John Rumbiak: Papua was forcibly integrated into Indonesia when Dutch colonial rule ended in 1963. Under pressure from the US Kennedy Administration, the Dutch handed over Papua to Indonesia without consulting Papuans. The whole province is occupied by the Indonesian military which has killed 100,000 Papuans in the last forty years for resisting its rule. Most Papuans oppose this occupation and demand independence. The independence movement is composed of the Free Papua Organization (OPM) and its military arm, the National Liberation Army (TPN).

West Papua is a mineral-rich area with considerable reserves of gold, copper, uranium, nickel, oil and natural gas. Exploitative mining and logging enforced by Jakarta are taking over the land of Papuans, and destroying their environment and culture. Massive migration to Papua is having the same effect. There are now 2.5 million people in Papua, 1.5 million Papuans and one million Indonesian migrants. There is no law which protects the rights of Papuans. Such exploitation and migration are new forms of colonialism and imperialism in Papua supported by the international community.

A.I.: *Can you tell us about the main exploiter of West Papua's minerals, the Lousiana-based US mining company Freeport McMoran?*

J.R.: Freeport is the largest foreign investor in Indonesia, and runs the largest gold and third largest copper mine in the world in Papua. In 2002, the company made a profit of US $1.9 billion from the mine which is 47 per cent of Papua's GDP. Freeport is the leading taxpayer in the country and the Indonesian government owns 10 per cent of the mine. The company signed the original deal for the mine with General Suharto, the Indonesian dictator, in 1967, without consulting the indigenous Papuan people whose mountains and rivers it has destroyed, the Amungme and Komoro tribes in the highlands of Papua. There have been a lot of protests from the indigenous people against the mine because their land has been taken over and their environment totally devastated.

A.I.: *How has Freeport damaged local communities and the environment?*

J.R.: The mine is 5,000 metres above sea level. It's a combination of an open pit as well as an underground mine. Freeport dumps 200,000 tons of waste (mine tailings) into local rivers every day. This practice, which is illegal in most countries, is devastating massive stretches of forest that the indigenous people depend on for survival. The dumping has contaminated local food sources resulting in sickness, poisoning, starvation and death among the local indigenous population. Freeport claims that destruction of coastal rainforest is part of its plan and has designated a 100 kilometres "sacrifice zone". In 1995, reacting to the damage that Freeport's mining had inflicted on the environment and human health, the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) revoked Freeport's $100 million political risk insurance, concluding that the mine had "created and continues to pose unreasonable or major environmental, health or safety hazards with respect to the rivers that are being impacted by the tailings, the surrounding terrestrial ecosystem, and the local inhabitants".

A.I.: *What about the role of the Indonesian Army in protecting Freeport?*

J.R.: When the West Papuan people protest Freeport's destructiveness, they face the special Indonesian army unit guarding the mine as well as the company's own security contingent. The army arrests protestors. Sometimes it shoots them, sometimes it detains and tortures them. Aside from the 100,000 people killed by the army since 1963, several times that number have been tortured, raped and intimidated. In 1994, the army killed 16 people, four disappeared and dozens of people were arbitrarily arrested and tortured. This was verified by the Indonesian National Commission of Human Rights (Komnas HAM), a government agency.

Komnas HAM and church groups have documented severe human rights violations in and around the Freeport mining area perpetrated by the military. In 1995, Komnas HAM publicly stated that these human rights abuses "are directly connected to [the Indonesian Army]… acting as protection for the mining business of PT Freeport Indonesia". The Catholic Church reports that torture and sexual harassment were conducted in Freeport shipping containers, the army commander's mess area, the police station and at Freeport security posts. Despite these well-documented reports, Freeport management continues to employ the services of the Indonesian armed forces and to fund the military's presence in Papua.

The special army unit guarding Freeport's mine numbers 550 soldiers. They build checkpoints from the coast where the port is up to the mining site, a distance of 200–300 kilometres. They have a checkpoint every one to two kilometres. Ordinary people travelling through these areas are searched; they have to have a pass or permit to be there, so it is not easy for someone to go in to the area. Since there is a guerrilla movement based around the mining site, the army carries out military operations. When the army sees the guerrillas, it shoots them. The army also sends spies into the mine and company offices to monitor what is going on. The army commits a lot of crimes. In addition to committing human rights violations, they steal gold and copper, I'm talking about a lot of money. This causes problems for the company but

Freeport never does anything to prosecute the army personnel responsible for these crimes.

In Papua we have no say in what happens to us. All decisions concerning us are made in Jakarta. Seventy-five per cent of the gold and copper revenues from the Freeport mine go to Jakarta and we do not benefit from our own resources. Meanwhile, our environment is polluted, our people are killed and our forests are destroyed for this mine that we don't get anything from.

A.I.: *You were recently in Washington DC. The US government is the Indonesian Army's main supporter. How do you see the US' role?*

J.R.: You hit a brick wall in the US when you try to do something about the environmental and human rights problems that Freeport is creating. This is because of the company's close ties to the US political establishment. For many years, Freeport paid senators from Louisiana to lobby for it; every year it pays one senator $6 million for such lobbying. Freeport gives campaign contributions to both the Democratic and Republican parties and placed second in total financial contributions from the US mining industry to US elections during the 1999–2000 election cycle; the company gave $262,703, only $53 less than the top contributor. In 1996, OPIC temporarily reinstated Freeport's political risk insurance. According to a 1997 article in the *Austin Chronicle*, then OPIC President Ruth Harkin (married to Senator Tom Harkin, an Iowa Democrat) stated that she had persuaded James Robert ("Jim Bob") Moffett, Freeport's CEO, to give $100,000 to the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is an advisor to Freeport. Just to give you an example of how powerful Freeport is: a *New York Times* reporter did a very good article on human rights and Freeport, and I helped him with it. When the article was going to be published, Kissinger called the editor and stopped the publication.

Also, the security manager of Freeport in Papua is a former military attaché at the US embassy in Jakarta. So the US government and Freeport are very close. The US government protects multinational corporations. The new advisor to Freeport who replaced Kissinger is a former US Ambassador to Indonesia, Stapleton Roy. Another former US Ambassador to Indonesia, Ed Master, is now the Chair of the US–Indonesia Association based in Washington and funded by Freeport. [The author adds: James Woolsey, former head of the CIA, represented Freeport in arbitration proceedings stemming from the OPIC insurance cancellation.]

A.I.: *It's no wonder that you cannot get much support in the US. The US government has always been behind the Indonesian Army; it helped the army to kill a million Indonesians in 1965 after Washington encouraged the military coup of the brutal dictator Suharto.*

J.R.: Absolutely.

A.I.: *How does Washington's so-called War on Terror affect the West Papuan struggle?*

J.R.: I think the US really misleads the international community with this war. The western media blamed Al Qaeda and radical Indonesian Islamic groups for the 12 October 2002, bombing in Bali which killed many Australians. But these radical groups, like the militias that butchered thousands of people in East Timor, were established by the Indonesian military. Radical Muslim groups such as the Lashkar-e-Jihad (Army of Struggle), which now operates in West Papua, were created by the Indonesian Army to carry out the "dirty work" of killings and kidnappings in order to facilitate the army's control of the country. The purpose is to keep people terrified and justify military intervention so that the army looks like the only "stabilizing" force in the country. So the "War on Terror" is fake. These Islamic groups are not independent.

When the US government asked the Indonesians for help in their "War on Terror", Jakarta conveniently labelled all groups seeking independence from Indonesia, "terrorist". In August 2002, two American Freeport employees and one Indonesian were killed in Papua for which the Indonesian military blamed the West Papuan rebels whom they called "terrorist". Twelve

other people were injured in the same attack. This happened on a road heavily guarded by the military. I stated publicly that the military was responsible for this attack—I have the evidence. The Indonesian Army wants to portray West Papuans as terrorists in order to get military aid from the US.

A.I.: *East Timor recently achieved independence from Indonesia. Are you optimistic about the West Papuan peoples' struggle for independence?*

J.R.: Yes. We will not accept wider autonomy which is being offered by Jakarta and supported by the international community. Forty years of Indonesian dominance is enough. There is growing international awareness about the Indonesian governments's suppression of the Papuan people; recently the Netherlands government has taken up the West Papuan case by doing a study on the annexation of West Papua by Indonesia. There is also a growing solidarity movement in the world for West Papua. Countries like Vanuatu have raised the issue of West Papua in the UN and New Zealand has offered to mediate between Papua and Indonesia.

First published as: Ismi, A., "May 2003: West Papuans Oppressed by US Multinational: An interview with John Rumbiak", in *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative Monitor* (May 2003). Accessed 26 October 2010: www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/may-2003-west-papuans-oppressed-us-multinational

He mistook the
groundlights
for stars
and asked
why the
airplane
was flying
upside down.

Chatwin, B., *The Songlines* (New York: Viking, 1987).

Falls of fishes are few and far between these days, but a splendid example happened on May 17, 1996. The incident occurred in Hatfield, England, at about 6:30 p.m., as Mrs. Ruth Harnett and her husband David were hurrying to unload the weekly shopping. It was not raining and the air became suddenly very chilly. Hearing a loud thump on her van's roof, Ruth was surprised to see a modest-sized fish. Looking up into the cloudy sky, she saw a second fish heading towards her. It hit the van's hood.

"I looked around, thinking it was kids mucking about," said Ruth. "Then three more fishes dropped in my garden and I realized they were falling from the sky." She called David, who was inside the house. "As he came out, I looked up again, which was a big mistake. I was bombarded with fish and one hit me in the face." Some local children came running up laughing and they all stood in wonder as about 20 more fish plummeted down.

They were thought to be young roach, common rudd or dab and weighed four pound altogether. Although they were dead, the fish seemed fresh and warm to the touch, as though heated by the sun in their aerial travels.

This was the second time in living memory that Ruth's family had experienced this strange phenomenon. "I remember as a child my father telling me that his father was caught in a shower of fish and frogs near Welwyn Garden City, just seven miles away, about 60 years ago."

First published in *Strange Days* #2, *The Year in Weirdness* (New York: Cader Books, 1997), 85. See also, Elliot, K., "Dead roach society", in *The Independent* (2 June 1996). Accessed 23 November 2010: www.independent.co.uk/sport/dead-roach-society-1335127.html

Filmography
Johan Grimonprez

You Tube Me and I Tube You, On Zapping, Close Encounters and the Commercial Break

Belgium, 2010
2-channel interactive installation and web project (www.zapomatik.com)
Curated by Johan Grimonprez (with Charlotte Léouzon) for MACBA, Barcelona (*Are You Ready for TV?*) and Blaffer Art Museum, Houston
Design and flash by Bruno Ricard and Suzan Ting, Code and database by JohnLouis Petitbon, Update by Sho Sho, Rotterdam
Filmcomponent edited by Sarah Dhanens
Produced by Zapomatik with the support of Edith Russ Site for Media Art and the Belgian Ministry of Culture

Hitchcock Didn't Have a Belly Button: Interview with Karen Black by Johan Grimonprez

US/Belgium, 2009, 18 min
Audio installation
Interview by Johan Grimonprez
Recording by Tyler Hubby and Cole Akers, Editing by Sarah Dhanens
Produced by Zapomatik, with the support of the Hammer Museum Residence, Los Angeles

Double Take

Belgium/The Netherlands/Germany, 2009, 80 min, colour and b&w
Film essay
Feature length film essay
Written and directed by Johan Grimonprez
Story by Tom McCarthy
Starring Ron Burrage as Hitchcock double and Mark Perry as Hitchcock soundalike
Music Christian Halten
Sound design by Ranko Paukovic
Editing by Tyler Hubby and Dieter Diependaele
Produced by Zapomatik in co-production with Nikovantastic Film and Volya Films
With the support of the Flemish Audiovisual Film Fund, Nederlands Fonds voor de Film, Nordmedia Fonds GmBH in Lower Saxony and Bremen, Rotterdam Film Fund, ZDF/ARTE, Beeldende Kunst Strombeek/Mechelen and The Hammer Museum
Distribution by Soda Pictures, London (www.sodapictures.com) Kino Lorber, New York (www.kinolorber.com), Imagine, Brussels (www.imaginefilm.be) and ED Distribution, Paris (www.eddistribution.com)

Manipulators: Maybe The Sky Is Really Green And We're Just Colorblind (French version: **Le Ciel Est Peut-Être Vert Et Nous Daltoniens**)

France/Belgium, 2006–today
You-Tube-o-theek
Curated by Johan Grimonprez and Charlotte Léouzon for Zoo Logical Garden, Ghent, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Le Plateau, Paris, Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall, Stockholm, Machine Project, Los Angeles and The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
Produced by Zapomatik and Passion Pictures

Bed

Belgium, 2005
Interactive installation (projection, monochrome, silent)
Produced by Zapomatik

Ron Burrage, Hitchcock Double

UK/Belgium, 2005, 1 min, colour
Video
Directed by Johan Grimonprez
Produced by The Video Art Foundation in co-production with Zapomatik

Looking For Alfred

Belgium/UK/France, 2005, 10 min, colour
Short film and installation
Directed by Johan Grimonprez
Hitchcock doubles: Ron Burrage, Erik Grimonprez, Bruce Ho, Zale Kessler, Roger Swaine. Hitchcock soundalike: Mark Perry. Tippi Hedren: Delfine Bafort
Cinematography Martin Testar
Soundscape by Dominique Pauwels
Edited by Nicolas Bacou
Produced by Zapomatik in co-production with Film and Video Umbrella.
In association with Anna Sanders Films, Palais des Beaux-Arts Bruxelles and The Photographers' Gallery. With the support of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund, Arts Council England, the Belgian Ministry of Culture and Image/Mouvement – Centre National des Arts Plastiques
With additional support from Deitch Projects, Riksutstillinger (The National Touring Exhibitions Norway), Yvon Lambert Gallery, Media Space Inc., Victoria and Productiehuis Rotterdam (Rotterdamse Schouwburg).

The Hitchcock Castings, London, June 2004

Directed by Johan Grimonprez
Concept by Johan Grimonprez and Daragh Reeves
Hitchcock doubles: David Adler; John Barrett, Ron Burrage, Simon Fischer-Becker, Stephen Guy Daltry, Peter Mair, Bill Moody, Richard Rycroft, Frank Scantori, Roger Swaine
Chloe Emmerson Casting
Cinematography by Bevis Bowden and Daragh Reeves
Edited by Nicolas Bacou
Produced by Zapomatik in co-production with Film and Video Umbrella
In association with Anna Sanders Films, Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels and The Photographers' Gallery
With the support of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund, Arts Council England, the French Ministry of Culture and Image/Mouvement – Centre National des Arts Plastiques-Paris

LOST NATION, January 1999

US/Belgium, 1999, 18 min
Directed by Johan Grimonprez
Commissioned and produced by Gojim 5.1 (Herman Asselberghs & Dieter Lesage) as part of the installation "Lost Nation, a library"
The COUGER MARCHING BAND
Directed by David Jr. Law Dianna Heddinger
"WELCOME TO LOST NATION" by Jim Schroeder, Mayor of Lost Nation, Iowa
Edited by JohnLouis Petitbon

Dorothy Doesn't Live Here Anymore…

Belgium/The Netherlands/Germany, 1997–2001
Video library/Inflight lounge
Curated by Johan Grimonprez for Museum of Contemporary Art, S.M.A.K., Ghent, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Centro Galego Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Museum für Neue Kunst/Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, The Kitchen, New York, Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht (Gallery 227) and Santa Monica Museum of Art, Los Angeles, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London and Deitch Projects, New York
Produced by Zapomatik in co-production with Büro Friedrich

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y

Belgium/France, 1997, 68 min, colour and b&w, stereo
Film essay

Written and directed by Johan Grimonprez
Original music and sample collage by David Shea
With excerpts from *White Noise* (1984, 1985 by Don DeLillo) and *Mao II* (1991 by Don DeLillo).
Produced by Centre Georges Pompidou and Kunstencentrum STUC
With the support of Documenta X, Klapstuk 97, Fundación Provincial de Cultura, Diputación de Cádiz, The Fascinating Faces of Flanders and The Ministery of Flemish Community
Distribution by Facets Multimedia, Chicago (www.facets.org), Other Cinema DVD, San Francisco (www.othercinemadvd.com) and Image Forum, Tokyo (www.imageforum.co.jp)

Beware! In Playing The Phantom, You Become One (French version: **Prends Garde! A Jouer au fantôme, on le devient**)

Belgium/France/Germany, 1994–8
Videolibrary
Curated by Johan Grimonprez and Herman Asselberghs for Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Documenta X, Kassel, De Vereniging van het Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, Centre pour l'Image Contemporaine, Saint-Gervais Geneva and De Beursschouwburg, Brussels
Produced by Andere Sinema

It Will Be All Right If You Come Again, Only Next Time Don't Bring Any Gear, Except A Tea Kettle…

Belgium, 1994–2001
5-channel video installation
Produced by Johan Grimonprez
Produced by Zapomatik in co-production with Les Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts/Tentoonstellingen van het Paleis voor Schone Kunsten (Brussels)
Restored within the Argos preservation programme, facilitated by The Little Archives of the World, Amsterdam

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Smell The Flowers While You Can

Belgium, 1994/2007, 6 min
Video
Directed by Johan Grimonprez in collaboration with Meg Stuart
Based on *No Longer Readymade* (Meg Stuart)
Performed by Benoît Lachambre and Meg Stuart
Music Hahn Rowe
With excerpts from *Close To The Knives* (1991 by David Wojnarowicz)
Produced by Ziggurat, Belgian TV BRT/TV1 for *Besmette Stad*

Besmette Stad

Belgium, 1994, 18 min
TV broadcast
Directed by Johan Grimonprez
With Paul Garrin, Meg Stuart, Alison Murray and Pascal Baes
Produced by Ziggurat, Belgian TV BRT/TV1

Well, You Can't Go To California, That's The First Place They'll Look For You

US/Belgium, 1993, 7 min
Video
Produced by Johan Grimonprez and the School of Visual Arts, New York
With excerpts from *Chapel Road* (1972 by Louis Paul Boon)

Kobwarweng Or Where Is Your Helicopter?

US/Belgium, 1992, 25 min, colour, stereo
Video
Produced by Johan Grimonprez and the School of Visual Arts, New York

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Nimdol June 18, 1959 – Nimdol July 6, 1987

Belgium, 1990, 16 min
Video
Produced by Johan Grimonprez and Kunstencentrum STUC

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Acknowledgements

The artist wishes to thank the following people: Lucy Askew (ARTIST ROOMS); Herman Asselberghs; Catherine Bernard; Steven Bode (Film and Video Umbrella); Rom. Bohez; Fiona Bradley; Bidoun Magazine; Camera Austria; Edwin Carels; Cinema Scope; Kristien Daem; Chris Darke; Jodi Dean; Eva De Groote; Anthony d'Offay; Wim De Temmerman; Sarah D'Hanens; Derk Jan Dragt; Onome Ekeh; Thomas Elsaesser; Susan Graham; Geraldine Grimonprez; Sibbele Hylkema; Asad Ismi; Steven Jacobs; Sean Kelly; Luk Lambrecht; Alvin Lu; Tom McCarthy; kamel mennour; Shirley Morales; Florence Montagnon; Dany Nobus; Hans Ulrich Obrist; Vrääth Öhner; Emmy Oost; Mark Peranson; Alexander Provan; Jan Pouwer; Daragh Reeves; John Rumbiak; Claudia Schmuckli; Kaiang Tapior & the people in the villages of Pepera and Oksibil; Simon Taylor; Robrecht Vanderbeeken; Bram Vandeveire; Valerie-Anne Van Peel; Mike Van Peel; Pieter Vermeulen; Philippe Van Cauteren; Frank Van Helfteren; Ronny Vissers; Theo Volpatti; Eben Wood; Slavoj Žižek

Colophon

This publication is a production of S.M.A.K. (Museum of Contemporary Art Ghent), The Fruitmarket Gallery, Blaffer Art Museum, University of Houston in collaboration with ARTIST ROOMS, Tate, National Galleries of Scotland, Beeldende Kunst Strombeek/Mechelen, Faculty of Fine Arts, University College of Ghent, kamel mennour Gallery and Sean Kelly Gallery. This book was published on the occasion of the exhibitions:

Johan Grimonprez
22 May – 11 July 2010
The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

It's a Poor Sort of Memory that Only Works Backwards
15 January – 2 April 2011
Blaffer Art Museum, University of Houston, Houston

It's a Poor Sort of Memory that Only Works Backwards
15 October 2011 – 8 January 2012
S.M.A.K., Ghent

Concept and compilation:
Johan Grimonprez
Editor in Chief: Benoit Detalle
Production: Lieze Eneman
Copy Editor: Lise Connellan
Graphic design: Inge Ketelers
Typeface: Palatino
Paper: Munken Lynx Rough, 90 g/m²
Printing: Die Keure, Bruges
Binding: Jansenbinders, Leiden

Trade edition published by
Hatje Cantz Verlag
Zeppelinstrasse 32
73760 Ostfildern
Germany
Tel. +49 711 4405-200
Fax +49 711 4405-220
www.hatjecantz.com

Hatje Cantz books are available internationally at selected bookstores. For more information about our distribution partners, please visit our website at www.hatjecantz.com.

ISBN 978-3-7757-3130-0 (trade edition)
ISBN 978-9-07567-937-3 (museum edition)

Printed in Belgium

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Bed, 2005

Subject: **A story that not only works backwards**
Date: Saturday, December 11, 2010 7:34 AM
From: Johan Grimonprez

Hey Catherine, besides the Hugh William peculiar story, we happened upon another story that NOT only works backwards: —a certain Richard Parker got killed in a book by Edgar Allen Poe before it actually happened—
cheerz, Johan

On 8 Dec 2010, at 5:57 PM, Benoit Detalle wrote:

hello hello, attached copy of the reworked version of the Richard Parker story, Ben

—

One day in the early summer of 1884, Richard Parker walked down to the docks in Southampton with the aim of running away out to sea. He eventually found work as a cabin boy aboard the *Mignonette*. At 16 meters long, it wasn't the sturdiest of ships and this particularly given that it had Australia as its destination, half way around the globe and across two oceans. Captained by a Thomas Dudley, the rest of the crew consisted of only two other men; first mate Edwin Stephens and able seaman Edmund Brooks. It is so that the four-man crew set sail on their long and hazardous voyage. After a few weeks of smooth sailing, the *Mignonette* was somewhere in the South Atlantic when it was hit by a particularly bad storm. A big wave rolled up and smashed against the stern of the ship, ripping apart its timber frame and sinking it in less than five minutes. In the ensuing panic, the men barely managed to scramble into their 13 foot open dinghy with only two tins of turnips and a sextant. With no fresh water, barely any food and sixteen hundred miles from the nearest land, the men's only hope was to get picked up by another passing ship. Their meager rations quickly consumed, for the next 19 days the men lived off occasional rainwater and a turtle they had managed to catch. Their lips and tongues parched and blackened from thirst forced them they to drink their urine. Eventually Stephens and the boy resorted to drinking seawater, the boy becoming very weak and delirious. It was in this desperate situation that the captain first brought up the idea of drawing lots to designate a sacrificial victim off whom the remaining three could feed off. Brooks would not hear of it; Stephens was hesitant, and the idea was temporarily abandoned. The next day, Dudley brought it up again but this time was no longer talking about drawing lots. To him, it was evident that the boy, who was near death and who had no dependents, should be the one sacrificed. Finally, Stephens agreed, and after saying a prayer over the sleepy boy, Dudley shook the boy's shoulder and said in a trembling voice,
—"Wake up my boy, your time has come."
—"What? Me, sir?" came the half-conscious, confused reply.
—"Yes, my boy," Dudley repeated, before plunging his penknife into the boy's neck.
For the next four days all three, including Brooks, fed on the young boy's body, eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Five days later, they were sighted and rescued by a German boat.

What makes this story even more peculiar is that 47 years before the *Mignonette* tragedy took place, Edgar Allen Poe wrote in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) of a group of seamen, adrift at sea, dying of thirst and starvation, who resort to killing and eating one of the crew. He wrote: "Such things may be imagined, but words have no power to impress the mind with the exquisite horror of their reality. Let it suffice to say that, having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands, feet, and head, throwing them together with the entrails, into the sea, we devoured the rest of the body, piecemeal, during the four ever memorable days of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth of the month."

Oh, and needless to add, both victims went by the name of Richard Parker.

A man, blind at his right eye, was hospitalized yesterday. A lost cauliflower seed had germinated behind his eyeball, and a 2 cm colli was surgically removed. He now sees again.

A newspaper story, quoted in Boon, L.P., *Menuet* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 1955).

“It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.”