Excess,
Exergue,
Experiment.

EX Series   02

This is volume 02 of EX Series, a multilingual book series entirely devoted to experimental cinema. The volume analyses the video artwork *Grosse Fatigue* (Camille Henrot, 2013) as a quest through off and online archives unfolding as a creative process. It considers the artwork as the first example of Desktop Cinema, an emerging genre that is sketched with the help of a broad theoretical toolkit and the input of artists and scholars gathered in a roundtable.

EX Series. Excess, Exergue, Experiment.

EX Series è una collana multilingue interamente dedicata al cinema sperimentale, con un focus specifico su singoli film. Ha l'ambizione di favorire approcci innovativi e provocatori alle opere più significative della sperimentazione sulle immagini in movimento. Il titolo "Exergue, Excess, Experiment" trae ispirazione dal dibattito contemporaneo sul cinema sperimentale e riflette l'intento della collana di esplorare forme di ibridismo, radicalità, eterodossia tra le pratiche creative e artistiche sul film. Ex Series sollecita un "ritorno al film" e alla sua doppia natura di base materiale ed evento mediale, come riflessione provocatoria sul medium cinematografico, a partire da quei tentativi "sperimentali" di scardinare le sue configurazioni materiali, ripensare la sua essenza, rivelare il suo valore politico.

I volumi della collana EX Series sono realizzati da DSL Press +, la casa editrice del Digital Storytelling Lab dell'Università degli Studi di Udine, con il contributo di ricercatori e studenti del corso di laurea DAMS e della Laurea Magistrale in Scienze del patrimonio audiovisivo e dell'educazione ai media—Curriculum in Digital Storytelling.

EX Series is a multilingual book series entirely devoted to experimental cinema, with a specific focus on individual films. Its mission is to promote innovative and provocative analysis of the most significant experiments in moving images. The subtitle "Exergue, Excess, Experiment" draws inspiration from contemporary debates about experimental cinema and reflects the intent of this collection to explore forms of hybridism, radicalism, and heterodoxy among creative and artistic practices on film. EX Series incites a "return to film" as a provocative reflection on the cinematic medium and its dual nature as material base and media event, interrogating "experimental" attempts to unhinge its material configurations, rethink it essence, and reveal its political value.

The books in EX Series are crafted and edited by DSL Press +, the publishing house of the Digital Storytelling Lab at the University of Udine, in collaboration with researchers and students from the DAMS BA program in Film Studies and the MA in Audiovisual Heritage, Media Education, and Digital Storytelling.

Camille Henrot, Grosse Fatigue. Notes on Desktop Cinema

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Chapter 1

The Milky Way, Just a Click Away

I had forgotten the Universe itself was technology, and that all real had once been mythology, and that to truly develop something sustaining and meaningful necessitated a sort of synergy and desire to break apart the operative principles of what was already here.
Chia Amisola

The sound of a deep breath in and out accompanies a rather empty computer desktop. The wallpaper is standard: one of those images seen a million times, depicting the milky way. The peak of abstraction, as this is the image of something we perceive as distant light years from us, and yet the heart of what we are, because we are indeed in the midst of that chaos made of stars and planets, distilled in one frame.
As the eye of the spectator adjusts to the light of the screen, a correspondence between the deep breathing and deep space is established just in time to notice the few icons on the desktop—a *grosse fatigue.mov* file and the *history of the universe* drive. However, this balance is soon broken: two windows suddenly appear. Inside each of them, a hand leafs through a photographic book, each page moving to the pace of a percussive sound determining a neat, repetitive, basic rhythm.

Cut.

The second sequence is connected to the previous one mainly by the continuous drum sound, which will eventually accompany almost the entire piece. The visual strategy of the windows, opening up and overlapping one another in choreographic and expressive ways, also represents a constant element throughout the 13 minutes of the video. This time, the new window fills the screen with footage shot by the artist showing a woman searching through an archive. A small browser window appears top right, initially almost all-white except for the Google logo and tabs until the cursor begins typing in the words "history of the universe" in the search bar. It seems as if there is no room left for imagining what will come next: the video will indeed deal with how the universe came to be. Except that artist Camille Henrot does offer an extraordinarily imaginative

version of the history of the universe, intertwining classical archival research and digital browsing, material culture and media performance, the depth of space and the recesses of our computer desktop [fig. 1.1].

This last binary especially shall be seen as the rationale guiding the piece; the artist reunites the two elements through the metaphor of human knowledge that applies to both. Further, she takes viewers along a journey that enters the mysteries of creation by using one of the tools many of us commonly use to create any piece of work—be it a simple text document, such as the one I am writing now and that you are reading, an intricate coding exercise, or a media art work. Henrot makes a classic yet complex myth accessible by approaching it through a familiar look, that of the computer graphic interface. In so doing, she implicitly highlights how the operations we deploy through simple automated procedures entail a depth that becomes apparent only if used creatively. In effect, hers is the first video work employing the computer desktop as a proper film set, an aspect we shall delve into further on. In this sense, *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) is digital technology at its finest, because it is able to shed light with extreme clarity on the aesthetic potential that media technology may offer beyond its designed function.

The Video

Centred on the narrative of the creation of the universe, the award-winning video *Grosse Fatigue* employs the desktop environment as a displayed working surface where manifold windows simultaneously show us fragments of origin myths. Combining a variety of traditions around how the Earth came to be, the artist uses the materials preserved in the collection of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., where she was awarded the artist research fellowship, of which the video is the outcome. Researching the rich material, Henrot completed a selection of artefacts, images, videos and texts and organised them in a trajectory that is documented by the video, which premiered at the 55th Venice Biennale. The trajectory moves in a *crescendo* from the egg—as the nucleus from which primal living beings have originated—to all species and, further, to all human-made artificial objects.

The rhythmic elements, which include both percussion and a monologue in voice-over, are highly relevant, as they constitute the through line of a rather complex narrative. The familiar sight of windows, cursors, and double-clicks complements an entangled articulation of the story, characterised by many digressions, and open-ended threads. These multiple elements are connected to one another by association, either via a conceptual link or on the basis of their similar appearance; this way, patterns, objects, animals, plants and other living beings create a chain where relations take original and unexpected shapes.

Images and sound give form to Henrot's associative thinking, which is then performed on screen. A case in point is the 'spots sequence' located a couple of minutes into the video: in order to give an account of the context where the narrative is set, images revolving around the imagery of the universe and the matter moving therein are edited together. The visual association starts with an image of an effervescent liquid overlaid with three different images containing stars in progressive close-up until they become but small shiny spots in dark space. It moves to two other images and ending with a man holding an optical tool, most likely a telescope. Each image appears in a dedicated window and is arranged in a partially overlapping fashion as in a stack of videos until the six windows in the foreground close. The remaining window contains a close-up on an undulating black surface with white spots and jumps to a medium point of view shot of crossed legs wearing the same pattern on dark trousers. The focus falls on the black and white contrast, which, alongside the shape of the dots on the background, is reminiscent of the black and white combination just seen in the pair stars/space. The irregularity of the blobs and splashes on the trousers conceptually and formally lead to the photograph of a drip painting abstract artwork that expands in a new computer window. Moving within this window, the camera eventually stops on the face of the painter engaging with the dripping gesture, allowing viewers to recognise Jackson Pollock. Interestingly, the fleeting painter portrait—we are analysing and dissecting a visual chain characterised by an extremely fast editing pace—fills the screen just as the voice-over pronounces the word "creator." The images shift at this time to a new window showing a human torso under the shower; we are not yet clear what it stands for, especially since this is followed by a short sequence including a fan of Pantone swatches, a man gesturing

towards the ceiling, and another man indicating a framed picture hanging on the wall and depicting a highly abstract round shape almost like a spiralling eyeball, which the caption under the picture reveals is the planet Mars. Quickly a soap bubble on the neck of a person having a shower appears, and its round shape echoes the previous image as well as the first shower image, which we now understand was preparing us for this one. The visuals in the last sequence are combined with the term "transparent," pronounced by the voice-over thereafter, which applies to the ephemeral consistency of the soap bubble. Yet another window opens developing the soap suggestion further: soap splashes fall on a solid black surface; again, we see white on black, where the former colour is once again echoed by the qualifier "milky" pronounced by the voice-over. These last images circle back on the chromatic contrast seen before and, meanwhile, another torso, this time female and covered in soap suds, fills the screen. The new image builds upon the roundness sown through the previous images such as the planet depicted in the hanging picture and the previous soap bubbles before being scaled to a smaller window among new ones.

The same associative effect is achieved through a strategy of illustration where images are selected in order to provide a depiction of the words spoken by the voice-over[1].

This aspect has already been touched upon briefly, so it is worth looking into another initial sequence revolving around the very beginning of the myth of creation, where the associative method is extraordinarily apparent [fig. 1.2]. Here, the narration is about the very beginning of the universe—a sense of things commencing that, not by chance, is made explicit by the anaphoric structure of the text itself—when the gods cause an explosion that eventually generated life. It is useful to couple the visual and textual registers of the video to notice the correspondences between the two: below is the excerpt of the text written in collaboration with poet Jacob Bromberg divided up by line *(t)* and interspersed with brief descriptions of the corresponding images appearing on screen (i).

(t) In the beginning there was an immense unit of energy.
(i) A female hand with painted nails dips a paintbrush into

a glass of water and triggers a reaction between dark paint and the transparent fluid on a yellow background.

(t) *In the beginning there was nothing but shadow and only darkness and water and the great god Bumba.*

(i) Big close-up on the previous dark paint expanding in fluid on a yellow background.

(t) *In the beginning were quantum fluctuations. In the beginning, the universe was a black egg where heaven and earth were mixed together.*

(i) Three new smaller windows subsequently superimposed on the image of the glass in full screen: A hand with colourful nails holding an exotic fruit on a bright blue backdrop, a pinecone and an embalmed black and yellow bird appear. They are creatures from the sky (bird) and from the earth (plants, fruits) arranged in the same assemblage.

(t) *In the beginning there was an explosion.*

(i) Sea: waves crashing on the shore creating foam. A new window opens on top showing colourful glass marbles thrown on a surface; the gesture and the chaotic movement of the balls echo the idea of explosion just evoked by the poem.

(t) *In the beginning, a dark ocean washed on the shores of nothingness and licked the edges of Night.*

As is clear from this short excerpt, the video relies on a visual cacophony which finds its counterpart in the voice-over, creating an explicit interaction between image and text that is as much rhythmic as it is narrative. In an interview devoted to the artwork, Camille Henrot argued:

> I felt like a voice-over is what's missing when we are exploring the world through the internet. To expand on the main differences between oral culture and internet [...]in oral culture, things are kept active in a living memory as opposed to being flattened and put on the same line by a research motor [Bailey and Henrot, 2015].

Henrot's Associative and "Primitive" Thinking

Whilst the elements in the examples provided above may seem quite scattered if taken alone, once inserted in the chain of associations compiled by the artist, they appear as signifiers that are continuously placed in relation to each other, and acquire meaning precisely because they are matched together. They are, in other words, "kept active" by the ordering and organizing gesture of the author. To the same end, the attempt to interpret complexity and avoid flattening the volume of knowledge feeding into the artwork is performed by the author with great originality. In the video, the relation she devises to connect the many sources and information employed is created first and foremost cinematically, by way of a literal hypertextual style translated to the visual level by the use of split screens and multiple computer windows characterising the entirety of the diegesis. A further iteration of the project in the form of an exhibition entitled *The Pale Fox* (2014) followed *Grosse Fatigue*. The show entailed mixed-media pieces and took place in a museum context. The artist actively reflected upon her way of exhibiting the pieces she wanted to include, arguing:

> The rectangle is the frame that demarcates civilization from nature, artwork from world, human from animal. The rectangle is also the most common shape of exhibition spaces. This shape seems to communicate the authority of institutions, provoking artists to subvert the rectangle either by dividing the space or by introducing so much chaos that the shape disappears. The function of museums is to contain this subversion within the limits of the institution, just as the newspaper offers an image of the world's disorder enclosed in rectangular format (Henrot 2014).

In the video, the physical rectangle of the picture frame, of the newspaper and—by extension—of the museum, which frames art pieces within an institutional context, is digitally mediated

by the shape of the windows on screen [fig. 1.3].
This reminds us of Elisabeth Grosz's observation: "framing is how chaos becomes territory. Framing is the means by which objects are delimited, qualities unleashed and art made possible" (Grosz 1995, 17). For *Grosse Fatigue*, the artist followed a strict scheme that inspired the position and the whole architecture of the video itself. Grosz's logic translates into a complex matrix, which Henrot employs to organise the bulk of materials available. Specifically, such a scheme intersects the phases of human life as well as a number of keywords applying to both the origin of life in the universe and knowledge production. Located along two axes, these elements criss-cross each other. Along one axis, then, we see birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, seniority and disappearance; on the other, the universe appears to serve as an umbrella-concept, containing nature and the human considered as both an embodied (organs, order of perception) and a psychological/emotional (symbols and forms, desire) being. The points of encounter of these axes result in unprecedented connections.

This scheme tries to create order and, in so doing, simplify what is an enormous mass of information and knowledge: "I was very intimidated by the institution and overwhelmed by the quantity of information it holds. I wanted to research everything and couldn't exclude anything" (Bailey and Henrot, 2015), the artist claimed. In effect, this is an organising approach also featured in her previous artistic production [fig. 1.4]. Sketches and tables are a familiar practice to the artist, who recombines diverse systems of thought and traditions so as to create new dispositions according to what has been defined, borrowing from Claude Lévi-Strauss' notion of la *pensée sauvage*, as a kind of personal "primitive thinking" (Watkins Fisher 2013, 25).

Diagrams such as the one above are the graphic rendering of such a savage attraction for an all-encompassing form of expression, able to attend to a desire for totality and inclusivity. Such a form re-orientates her navigation across the research material she engages with in the creative process and enables her to visualise the possible entry points into a certain topic. The final organisation of many pieces mirrors this structure, either reproducing the taste for abundance that it visually expresses, or proposing artworks conceived in series, a formula which en-

2   The sculptures comprising the Desktop series are: *The Formation of Nails* (2013), *The Formation of Teeth* (2013), *The Ark of the Fox* (2013), *Le Penseur de Rodin* (2013), *Stealing Part of the Placenta*, (2013), *Which Came First?* (2014), *Head of the Fish* (2014), *Amma's Door* (2014), *The Transformation of Ogo into a Fox* (2014), *A Clinging Type* (2014).   21

ables them to divide up the artist's key concept of interest into a number of iterations that process it, and offer a focus on different aspects and nuances of the same complex theme.
This is the case with many of her sculptures and paintings, which attempt to represent the topic they address from multiple points of view at once, or rather approach it through as many facets as possible. The bronze sculpture series *Desktops* (2013-14) for example, gathers 10 pieces[2] exploring creation, referencing a very similar use of the computer desktop to that which is actually experienced in *Grosse Fatigue*, that is, conceiving of it as a site of making; here Henrot's reflection on the topic of desktops also frames the aspect of tangibility/intangibility by coupling the materiality of the metal employed by the artist in the sculptures and the perceived immateriality of the electronic and digital environment.

Henrot has relied on the production/collections of multiple elements since her early production; an example of this is *Collections préhistoriques* (2009), which mobilises and puts the artist's personal archive of objects together with prints and collages. A more recent case in point when it comes to the production of multiple pieces forming a whole is the painting series feeding into the editorial and exhibition project *Jus d'orange* (2022). Resulting from an exchange with writer and art critic Estelle Hoy, the watercolours are Henrot's contribution (alongside sculptures and texts) to the duo's collective reflection on a way forward in the midst of life unfolding. Nurturing their respective artistic languages, the two women "accompany [...] us in the confusion of our existence" [Nuzzi 2023, 6], exploding reality with its many facets and diving into it in the attempt to tackle it in a multi-layered fashion.

Collections such as those in museums or libraries are also at the centre of Henrot's activity as a source of inspiration. In effect, in Henrot's hands, the elements gathered in these groupings,

become objects of new clusterings and taxonomies, which get processed by the associative primitive thinking mentioned above. Not by chance, perhaps, *Grosse Fatigue* was selected to participate in the edition of the Venice Biennale entitled *Il palazzo enciclopedico* (*The Encyclopaedic Palace*), the encyclopaedia being yet another system of collecting and organising knowledge and reality.

The result of this artistic endeavour is, most of the time, a new system—I would suggest, a dispositif—that reassembles and re-deploys the materials available to the artist to make sense of them, at times in new, original, creative ways. This is exactly the use she makes of books and flowers in her ikebana project *Is It Possible to Be a Revolutionary and Like Flowers?* (2012), where the concept of the encyclopaedia and the atlas as systems for arranging multiplicities comes back rather clearly. Here, a selection of significant items in Henrot's personal library is translated into kinds of flower sculptures that populate a new universe, a newly assembled cosmogony. If, according to Henrot, "[t]he way anthropology and contemporary art can enter into relationship with one another is above all through the question of alteration" [Copeland 2013, 39], then the spectrum of such an alteration is the room where artistic experimentation may well occur. In the case of the flower project, as curator Camille Moulonguet observed, whether these generate a new taxonomy or play with the vulgarisation of flowers' own symbolic meaning and their history, what results absolutely apparent is the artist's inclination towards practicing a new language taking shape through the 'palimpsestic' power of the ikebanas on display [Moulonguet 2012]. A stratification of meanings emerges from a compositional effort that interjects, at times subverts, and even thickens traditional significations.

Creating her own taxonomies, Henrot implicitly betrays a sort of distrust, a basic conviction of insufficiency of the existing systems of knowledge and organisation of reality that require a re-design. What happens on screen during the 13 minutes of *Grosse Fatigue* is, in effect, the result of such a gesture. She distils selected fragments like selected drops in a precious bottle, as a way of synthesising, re-ordering and re-writing reality following her own priorities. The selection stands for a much wider accumulation of knowledge, which undergoes a

radical re-assemblage. The words from the artist herself offer the most accurate account in this regard:

> I was feeling overwhelmed by the knowledge I was accumulating. The massive accumulation of knowledge and the effort to synthesise it could be described as a journey from the subjective to the collective, which ultimately returns to constitute individual subjectivity. This urgent desire to connect and totalise also relates to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as the effort to embrace a totality resembles the desire of the individual to reach beyond her own learning capacities (Bailey and Henrot, 2015).

Given the richness and complexity of this polyphony, Henrot gives herself a method to reduce heterogeneity and reorganise it into a possible new assemblage able to attend to the multiplicity it entails and, at the same time, to acknowledge the creation of a synthetic unity. Juxtaposition, for example, is practiced as a strategy to create connections where one would not expect them to be and propose a novel chain of meaning. Epistemologically, this approach challenges the disciplines, their boundaries, and accepted models of knowledge production. Anthropologically, it reflects by admission of the artist herself a "tenacious aspiration to connect different cultural spheres or knowledges" (Watkins Fisher 2013, 25) operated by primitive thinking. Pragmatically, it takes the shape of a controlled movement and disposition of the windows on screen: as framed pictures lying on a desk, they give themselves to the viewer via the screen. However, differently from an off-line picture on a physical desk top, the online environment of the digital desktop allows them to appear and disappear, open and close, move across, and overlap with one another. Far from flattening the information and memory they bestow, the windows on the screen mobilise it and keep it in motion, enhancing at the same time the non-linear course that the artist's creative process takes. In this sense, *Grosse Fatigue* is configured as a postdigital *Wunderkammer*, that is, an open-ended personal collection of precious

items illustrating knowledge and represented via the moving image to expressively convey its living nature. Furthermore, such a contemporary reformulation of the ancient cabinet of curiosities takes advantage of the potentialities of digital technologies, which extend, expand, multiply, archive and erase the digitised objects in one click.

Mise-en-abyme as a Marker of Entanglement

Another method employed by Henrot to preserve the sense of complexity, co-existence and mutual relation among the images and pieces of information she utilises in her video is the *mise-en-abyme* technique [fig. 1.5]. On various occasions, the video proposes a placement of the visuals encapsulated in the computer windows that reminds us of an image within an image. In other words, the frames appear to be superimposed, ordered according to their decreasing size and leaving only the perimetric areas visible, thereby creating a sort of Chinese box effect. This method suggests a strong sense of interconnectedness among the images, alluding to the stories-within-stories and information-within-information characterising the entangled myths of creation used by the artist.

Henrot's visual process can be conceptualised in terms of the notion of entanglement. According to Rey Chow, from whom I shall borrow the notion, this is the "intimation of a tangle, of things held together or laid over one another in nearness and likeness," which seems quite an apt description of what I just defined as a strategy of *mise-en-abyme*. However, it is Chow's explanation of how elements become entangled that resonates with the artists' flavour for complexity and her struggle to make a selection when facing overabundance: entanglement is "conceivable through partition and partiality rather than conjunction and intersection, and through disparity rather than equivalence" [Chow 2012, 1-2]. In effect, Henrot is constantly confronted with a deep fascination with totality: when facing the endless collections of the Smithsonian a partition is thus needed. Whilst associative thinking still allows one to keep many materials in the equation, coming to terms with partiality becomes a prerequisite for practicing it concretely whilst being able to negotiate partition and conjunction. On the one hand, then, the artist

opens up the archive of human knowledge; on the other, she organises it so as to give the viewer a post-cinematic entangled history of the universe, adopting the computer interface to unfold, juxtapose, superimpose mythology and astronomy, biology and poetry, and many other images belonging to the most disparate systems of knowledge. To put it differently, the juxtaposition and *mise-en-abyme* strategies are modes to express, "an imaginative attachment to systematicity as utopian fantasy, as a 'timelessness' and 'spacelessness' that could accommodate incommensurable orders" (Watkins Fisher 2013, 23).

How to harmonise partition and utopian fantasy? Partiality and timelessness/spacelessness? The aesthetics of the desktop environment comes in, providing a technical solution. The cinematic strategies of selection and disposition of the audio-visual materials both convey and visualise the logics of partition Chow mentions in her definition of entanglement in a world of unavoidable intersections; the desktop becomes the place of encounter of "the human desire to bring totality onto one's grasp [and] the void at the centre of such efforts" (Connor 2016, 9), the site where all the variables and the elements addressed in the film contaminate each other. Additionally, if looked at in their essential geometrical components, the multiple co-existing windows may be seen as an assemblage of rectangles. As we know, because it creates a frame, this is a shape used to mark, to separate, to practice partiality and communicate a sense of selection. The desktop interface plays a crucial part in making this possible; further, I would suggest that the video succeeds so well in expressing the epistemic urge and creative effort of the author just because it takes place on her desktop. To put it differently, *Grosse Fatigue* could not but be a desktop cinema piece.

But let's return to the selection operation that the graphic interface of the desktop computer enables. As for the rectangle evoked in reference to the exhibition *The Pale Fox*, on the desktop, objects, shapes, colours, and actions are selected, yet held together because they appear inside computer windows. It is inside the frames of these windows—rigid rectangles appearing and disappearing or liquidly floating across the surface of the desktop—that moving and still images are offered to the viewer. The artist navigates through the desktop and within these windows alike, browsing and guiding the viewer's eyes

along her train of thoughts, here translated into images and thus made visible. Because they overlap, these windows cause visual short circuits, expressed by Henrot through simple poetic images such as glass marbles crashing into and bouncing off each other, a hard-boiled egg being peeled, and two sets of hands leafing through two different books on two different windows, flipped so as to create a mirroring effect.

Entanglement works in a particular way: as Rey Chow suggests, "This condition of overlapping recurrences […] is invoked […] to suggest a topological looping together that is at the same time an enmeshment of topics" (Chow 2012, 1).

The artist's way of thinking, then, is not only associative and primitive but also topological[3]. Differently from Chow, however, I would suggest that partition does not necessarily exclude conjunction. On the contrary, the logic of mutual implication that characterises entanglement is well exemplified and applies quite precisely because it promotes selection (partition) but also new conjunctions resulting from the coupling of the selected elements. Her rearranging of concepts and disciplines via the images that symbolise them does not necessarily make them close in proximity, rather it creates unexpected visual bridges and linkages: diverse threads are woven into a texture and distant concepts create new dynamic patterns of conjunction.

The way the conjunction that we have observed so far in aesthetical terms is actually fabricated and eventually perceived has quite a lot to do with the space where it takes place and the performativity of the artist, two aspects that will be tackled in what follows.

Chapter 2

Desktop
Cinema

1   "The image stands before that which represents".
    2   In this sense, the desktop environment constitutes a paradigmatic example of a postmedium dispositif. According to Ruggero Eugeni (2015) alongside individualisation and socialisation, one of the main epos characterizing the narrative of the postmedium condition is a naturalisation of the media within everyday experience. This suggestion is developed by much literature on the notion of postmedia and the debate around medium specificity, eventually feeding into the conceptualisation of the postdigital, which I propose to adopt in order to better frame media artefacts and artworks such as *Grosse Fatigue* (see the second part of this chapter).
    3   On this, please see Grusin 2018, Keidl et al. 2020, Ramírez-Blanco and Spampinato 2023, Carbone and Lingua 2023.

Das Bild stellt sich vor das was es vorstellt.[1]
Vilém Flusser

Since its early days, cinema has been able to offer a spectacle and yet appear somewhat natural to spectators, making them travel along the far-off avenues of imagination, while retaining a sense of immediacy that allowed it to be easily grasped. *Grosse Fatigue* is a powerful piece because it is endowed with this same fascinating tension, combining at once thrill and mundanity. Whilst the former is produced by the sense of abundance, totality and sublime to be found in the vastness of the archival materials Henrot interrogates, the latter is mainly due to the location where the action takes place, namely her computer desktop. Some ten years after the premiere of the piece, it is arguably a very familiar environment to the majority of us that includes a set of graphic conventions, media configurations, and operations which make it not only as an intuitive but also as a fully-fledged metabolised system that is now employed in a variety of sectors.
Created as a screen captured video, the artwork basically uses the desktop as a set, compressing each and every production phase of the audio-visual piece within the same working station, which is fully integrated and visualised by the outcome. This observation may appear a practical detail of little importance, especially after having experienced a forced and intensified computer-based situation, both in terms of labour and social interaction due to the recent global health emergencies. This situation has somehow naturalised[2] the presence and function of the desktop as a platform for social engagement, affective bonding and creative endeavours[3].

Despite the role of the desktop environment as a highly accessible technology perceived as a familiar system, however, it shall not be underestimated in its capacity to offer a range of operations able to stimulate the most creative minds to experiment with alternative uses, going beyond the scripted and most common ones. What may seem to be a media artefact characterised by technical aspects that provide a coded set of possibilities in fact sets the stage for innovative pragmatic and aesthetic solutions. These opportunities are in effect how the screen capturing option included as a native function of our computers—either via the hardware or via specific software—became the key tool for creating pieces like Henrot's, initiating a new genre that I term desktop cinema.

The 13-minute video is an emblematic example of desktop cinema insofar as it incorporates "the desktop environment in the narrative by way of a combination of pre-recorded desktop footage and other sources, including original or found footage, as well as PC-delivered data" [De Rosa and Strauven 2020, 249]. Further, it appears to be the first artwork of this kind, surely the first to be presented in a prestigious artistic context such as the Venice Biennale.

In a text discussing his own video *Transformers: The Premake* (2014)—also a desktop-based piece albeit destined for an online consumption from the very outset—Kevin B. Lee, to whom, I would posit, is owed the circulation across a wider audience of this genre, also admittedly pointed to *Grosse Fatigue* as an inspiration. Lee's important contribution is worth mentioning because on multiple occasions he has defined his practice in terms of "desktop documentary" production [Lee 2017]. I have reconstructed the enormous effort put in by Henrot to tackle the rough material used for her work and the concept informing it in part to prove that what is first and foremost documented is this very endeavour. Put another way, the computer windows opening up in sequence or concomitantly offer the viewer multiple universes that are therefore documented.

Researchers busy looking into archives, searching for records, proofs, testimonies, pieces of information, objects, biological remains of animals, minerals, plants meticulously preserved in special repositories, deposits and libraries, etc., are shown through a treatment of the image that may well look like a simple

4   A vast literature addresses the problem of documentary and truth, deconstructing the supposed transparency of documentary film as a genre: choices such as what to keep in the frame, how to position the camera, and how to organise the photography and cinematography of the film surely impact on the latter, leaving a trace and thus demonstrating the basic impossibility of objectivity when it comes to film as a whole. This position is widely discussed, for instance in key texts such as Grierson and Hardy 1966, Blumenberg 1977; and, more recently, Hongisto 2015. Despite the clear position of scholarship, however, popular thought around documentary film still associates its forms with a transparency-enhancing kind of film. In the contemporary visual cultures, these forms of course distance themselves from a high-res, hyper-polished type of image to instead favour real-time aesthetics, low-fi and accessible production technologies that are considered indicators of a less fictionalised and thus supposedly less fabricated film. Desktop cinema fits into this category.

'unfiltered' recording—a 'transparent' record of actions, people and situations. Yet the most radical and relevant visual events that the video brings to the big screen are those activated by the artist. Her movements browsing, crossing the desktop, clicking and double-clicking, placing, and opening and closing the windows are the heart of the recording. If there is any documentary at all, then it is the documentation of the dramaturgy enacted by the director. At a closer look, however, even this element of the video has less to do with documentary as a supposed 'transparency-enhancing' genre[4], than with a proper performance. If anything, then, the genre is indebted to a well-mastered technique, generating a spectacle. In this sense, desktop cinema seems a more apt definition of the genre than desktop documentary, adhering more rigorously to the specifics of its particular genre conventions, and building on the idea of cinema as a spectacle.

Whilst the following chapter will delve more into the performative nature of desktop cinema, here it is important to insist on the ways in which the desktop environment as a "digital object" [Hui 2016] profoundly informs the genre to the extent that, not only is the genre named after it, but its affordances provide filmmakers with a set of practical options typical of the computer graphic interface. These options are able to turn the desktop into a practicable space where the artwork can essentially develop, take shape and unfold.

Captured in a 'Mosaic-like' World

Technical by nature, poor by genealogy, the images that compose *Grosse Fatigue* are the result of complex processing and an exacerbated media circulation. Qualifying them in this way, I refer to Vilém Flusser's concept of "technical images" [2011 [1985]]

as pictures owing their existence to technical apparatuses, and of which the photographic image provides the paradigm (Flusser 1984, 5). As Mark Poster puts it in his commentary on the notion,

> Since human beings depend for their lives more on learned and less on genetic information than do other living things, the structure through which information is carried exerts a decisive influence on our lives. When images supplant texts, we experience, perceive, and value the world and ourselves differently, no longer in a one-dimensional, linear, process-oriented, historical way but rather in a two-dimensional way, as surface, context, scene. And our behavior changes: it is no longer dramatic but embedded in fields of relationships (Poster 2011, 5).

Poster continues, proposing a model that frames the various phases of this process of supplanting, where technical images follow on from traditional images. To the end of analysing Henrot's artwork, however, for now it is enough to reflect on the overall scheme he proposes, so as to purposefully contextualise Flusser's notion.

Technical images can be defined as the driver and the means by which the process of overcoming linear textuality unfolds. If the age of texts marks the conceptualisation of history as linear, and texts themselves are chiefly adopted by culture and science as the mode of explanation to make the world graspable, technical images, as a replacement for texts, initiate a new age. In this novel context, writing is increasingly replaced by images, and these self-reflexively feed into a system and a spectacle symptomatic of the apparatus that produced them. Time ceases to be linear because this system surpasses the imagination of a singular reality: multiple worlds emerge thanks to (digital) technology and multiple narrations are free to overlap, intertwine and contaminate each other. Henrot's elaboration of the narrative around the creation of the universe is a case

in point: located in the realm of technical images, multilinear, co-present frames appear and in turn create multiple threads. The viewer can navigate them, guided by the skilful move-ments of the artist between her computer and the archives she interrogates. As proposed in chapter 1, and as is typical of the filmmaker's research and creative process, the connection between the images comes to the forefront. Henrot's associa-tive, primitive, topological thinking serves as a glue for a visual mashup that mediates the relationship between an immense amount of information and the viewer, multiplying the dimen-sions they can browse through and ultimately inhabit.

Much like the observer looking at them, technical images are located in a dimension of "calculation and computation" that has been put together to attend to the insufficiency of texts, which do not allow for "any further pictorial mediation" (Poster 2011, 7). The key question in this sense is then, if linear texts appear to be unable to clarify the world, what do technical images do better than texts to achieve this goal? In the case of *Grosse Fa-tigue*, it seems that the ability to better capture the world lies in the capacity to be faithful in rendering the complexity of reality, its malleable multiplicity and fluid fragmentation. Made up as it is of multifarious elements temporarily assembled amongst each other, reality cannot but be captured by images that are "mosaic-like" (Flusser 2011 [1985], 135). In this sense, technical images serve as "models that give form to a world and a consciousness that has disintegrated; they are meant to 'inform' that world" (170). This function is precisely what Henrot performs in her project: the computer windows are in her hands mosaic tiles that she locates, disposes, mobilises on the surface of the desktop in order to recompose a seminal story and to reconstitute a unique narrative, harmonising multiple narratives. In so doing, she informs the world because she tells the story of its crea-tion, ordering and associating pieces of information formerly processed as computational fragments that acquire meaning the moment they enter the artist's train of thought, eventual-ly visualised as a sequence of dancing windows on screen. This projection/activation of internal/hidden meaning seems to fit with a further definition of technical images proposed by Flusser when he writes "Their vector of signification is [...] the reverse of that of earlier images: they don't receive their mean-ing from outside but rather project meaning outward. They lend meaning to the absurd" (170). Whilst digital images such as those

we see in *Grosse Fatigue* are technically lacking a physical connection with a referent, and thus their meaning cannot come from outside themselves procedurally, their tendency to project meaning outward is a prerogative of their fragmented condition. This is a relevant point, as such a nature doesn't simply qualify as a constitutive feature, but rather speaks of the visual economy of which they are part. In a regime of hyper-production and hyper-circulation of visuals, technical images are often "poor images" [Steyerl 2012], too.

On the Surface of the "Wretched Screen"

Henrot shows Wikipedia pages, web-based figures, and thumbnails, interspersing them with her original footage and polished visuals. Their low resolution and apparent pixelation the operations that the filmmaker activates on them such as reproducing, remixing, possibly copying, compressing, ripping, etc., remind us of Hito Steyerl's reflection on the appropriation of contemporary digital imagery—an operation that forms the implicit foundation of desktop cinema. The processes employed by Henrot to create her piece rely heavily on a set of mechanisms that the German artist and scholar also observes in her own work:

> The poor image has been uploaded, downloaded, shared, reformatted, and reedited. [...] It transforms quality into accessibility, exhibition value into cult value, films into clips, contemplation vaults of cinemas and archives and thrust into digital uncertainty, at the expense of its own substance [Steyerl 2012, 32].

In her view, these dynamics are inextricably connected with the speed of the images as they travel across platforms, applications, and media, and converge *ad hoc*, employed for an often quick and temporary purpose, before they re-enter the circuit of visual economies and cultures. They are eventually re-purposed, losing part of their substance along the way. According to Steyerl, in effect, there is a causal link between the

acceleration and deterioration of images that become poorer and poorer. Such a process is well-illustrated by the crescendo of the rhythmic development characterising Henrot's video, in which multiple images opening in quick succession produces a peculiar composition (see chapter 1 for the *mise-en-abyme* effect). Superimposing, moving and clashing, the images in *Grosse Fatigue* are not always low definition, however, they surely express, rather emblematically, a paradoxical condition of deep dematerialisation. The artist faces a massive amount of material documents at the Smithsonian, but the moment she captures these materials, channelling them into the realm of technical images, their materiality is left behind. Steyerl's reflection on poor images stresses the concept of dematerialisation as a symptom of semiotic production in the contemporary context. The relevant passage is key to understanding the originality of the artwork, and it is therefore worth citing at length:

> Capital's semiotic turn, as described by Félix Guattari, plays in favour of the creation and dissemination of compressed and flexible data packages that can be integrated into ever-newer combinations and sequences. This flattening-out of visual content—the concept-in-becoming of the images—positions them within a general informational turn, within economies of knowledge that tear images and their captions out of context into the swirl of permanent capitalist deterritorialization [Steyerl 2012, 41].

If it is true that Henrot positions herself within the same economy of the visible Steyerl refers to, I would like to suggest she does so proactively, in that she takes advantage of the possibilities to manipulate, stretch, transfer, and refashion the images, but not simply for the sake of it. Instead, she offers a means of redemption from the pure optimisation purposes of late capitalism: inserting the images rather explicitly into her own chain of associations—or field of relationships, as Flusser would say—she makes her intervention clear and distinguishes her aim from mere selection and re-circulation.

Desktop cinema is in and of itself a critical response to the options offered by technology and the graphic interface it employs. It responds to the easy sampling and exacerbated decontextualisation present in contemporary visual cultures. In this sense, if the poor image is about "swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities" (Steyerl 2012, 44), *Grosse Fatigue* works as an experiment that takes up the challenge and responds to the generalised deterritorialisation, not avoiding but adopting it at its core.

This tactic produces a short circuit in the impoverishment of meaning and value of the image. Further, the mix of low and high-definition images, and the subtle integration of what may look like a 'poor procedure' with sophisticated *mise-en-scène* and choreography subvert the "flattening out of the visuals" by instead allowing them to unfold on the surface of the desktop in a critical way. While screen capturing is allegedly easy to do and therefore can be seen as a 'poor procedure', what happens on the desktop is not always the result of a spontaneous and easy operation.

Grosse Fatigue plays with this duality, as Henrot choreographs her moves across the desktop very meticulously; for example, she removes the cursor and a number of other interface elements that betray the extremely high degree of fabrication of her piece. This is a key aspect that will be discussed into detail in chapter 3. In these carefully curated gestures, the technical and poor qualities of imagery used in desktop cinema intersect, highlighting interesting aspects of the imagery through their new configurations.

Bits of images, pixels in the form of remains, and detritus of images end up on the desktop as screenshots, excerpts, clips and so forth, but also on the digital platforms that archive them dynamically, inside databases that are constantly enriched by a collective intelligence of unpaid content-creators. Being connected to the internet, however, the desktop is a surface showing information immediately available (i.e. saved locally), yet potentially open to the depth of global knowledge and content circulation.

In this sense, and in light of Steyerl's important contribution, Flusser's observation that traditional images are connected to a two-dimensional surface whilst technical images surpass such a planar conformation in favour of ungraspable computational

particles, seems debatable. I shall instead contend that what poor images underscore and strengthen is precisely the non-linear, multi-dimensional nature of our experience of the world, but two-dimensional surfaces—at least conceptually—may very much help in making more tangible what seems difficult to grasp. Within this framework, what for Flusser is an unachievable surface because it is "full of intervals, like a raster" and thus virtual—a kind of *trompe l'oeil* (Flusser 2011 [1985], 21)—becomes here a complex object, yet still a plane employed metaphorically, but also practically, to locate items in the same way one would do on a physical surface. This surface is enhanced by a few extra potentialities, adding on to the functionalities of a concrete surface proper, but the artist/user perceives and utilizes these qualities quite easily. This facility is due to the way the desktop is employed; integrated within an etiquette which is typical of a computer environment, it describes and translates actions that we would perform on a real desk table top. We can imagine the former because they are developed according to the latter.

Henrot can show us books being opened and leafed through with viewers understanding what is happening, because we would also put a physical book on a physical desk to look through it; she can open a folder sitting on her desktop and we expect files to come out of it because, whilst miniaturised and abstracted into icons, we also archive our printed documents in folders very likely situated on our desks when we want to consult or work on them. In other words, there is a specificity of the digital nature of the desktop, to which I shall return shortly, but the baseline for imagining it is that there is first and foremost a commonality between desktop and desk top (beyond the obvious one suggested by their names).

Desk Top, Desktop, and the Hermeneutics of Facticity

The commonalities between desk top and desktop call into question what Flusser claims, when trying to differentiate traditional and technical images in relation to surface:

> The gesture of the envisioner is directed from a particle toward a surface that can never be achieved, whereas

5   On deixis, see Butler (2019). Regarding the co-existence of the desk and the desktop   37
 it may be useful to associate the former with what Ruggero Eugeni (2010) terms "direct
world" and the latter with what he defines "indirect world". They interact within the frame of
our experience exercising a mutual influence across a fictional dimension and that lived in the
first-person.

that of the traditional image maker is directed from the world of objects toward an actual surface. The first gesture attempts to make concrete (to turn from extreme abstraction back into the imaginable); the second abstracts (retreats from the concrete). The first gesture starts with a calculation; the second starts with a solid object. In short, we are concerned here with two image surfaces that are conceived completely differently, opposed to one another, even though they appear to blend together (Flusser 2011 [1985], 21).

Henrot certainly exercises abstraction as she composes her version of the creation of the universe, but this looks very concrete as it unfolds on the surface of the desktop, and the passages she follows to put it together are unveiled to the viewer as if they were unfolding on a real-life surface. *Grosse Fatigue* may well be defined as a gesture of calculation, but it starts nonetheless with a number of very solid objects that the artist films and whose images she edits together. In sum, desktop cinema heavily relies on technical images, but at the same time oddly challenges the separation between them and the world, because it offers an opportunity to 'do something' with our digital technologies that resembles and seamlessly complements the everyday things we do in life. Picking up the suggestion offered in chapter 1 commenting on entanglement, the key here is not thinking in light of opposition but of conjunction. It is not either the technical or the traditional image, either the desktop or the desk top: it is both at once. They not only 'appear to' but conceptually do, in effect, 'blend together', even if they belong to two deictically separated dimensions[5].
The co-presence of these two objects is moreover linked by a

number of shared functions. Not by chance, such a functional, pragmatic reading recurs in at least two reflections dealing with the concept of surface, one in relation to the desktop in desktop cinema, the other to the desk and the way we think of it. The profound difference in context and background of these two positions are yet another demonstration that, no matter the frame, the nature of a surface may be an important element in describing it, but its function is essential in defining it. The first occurrence comes again from Kevin B. Lee, who explained how he had the idea of recording his desktop when producing his *Premake*: "I realized that a lot [...] of this investigation had taken place on my computer [...] so why not have the computer be the stage or the set for the story to take place? [...] So you can start thinking of the desktop in multiple definitions of what it's doing" (Lee, 2015). The author does not elaborate theoretically on this, but it seems clear that the pragmatic dimension is what provides the qualification to the object—the computer desktop—he is discussing. A thorough theorisation is instead provided in the area of philosophy. This 'doing' able to qualify the object it refers to is something that, in effect, can be found in Martin Heiddegger's thought, in particular in his works on facticity. In his text *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity,* he proposes the term to explain the linkage between ontology and doing (*facere* in Latin, from which fact, the root of the word *fact*icity). Evoking a particularly revelatory passage from Husserl, the philosopher provides an emblematic example to flesh out this idea, which—interestingly enough—is devoted to the figure of the table, in essence, not so distant from a desktop, only more 20th century, suggesting once again a fascinating sense of circularity among the category he is formalising and desktop cinema. He claims:

> What is there in the room, there at home is the table [...] at which one sits in order to write, have a meal, sew, or play. Everyone sees this right away [...]: it is a writing table, a dining table, a sewing table—such is the primary way in which it is being encountered in itself. This characteristic of "in order to do something" is not merely imposed on the table by

relating and assimilating it to something else which is not [Heidegger 2008, 69].

Sara Ahmed picks up this passage from Heidegger in a text that discusses the framework of queer phenomenology, a term she proposes in order to "put queer studies into closer dialogue with phenomenology" [Ahmed 2006, 543] by conceptually translating sexual orientation into spatial orientation. Such a move opens up a reflection that indeed pertains to the extension, surface and practice of space. In doing so, she offers a very instructive view that, I suggest, is quite useful well beyond queer studies, and allows us to better understand the object we are exploring in light of a broader concept of orientation in space.

If the computer desktop is a surface, and therefore a kind of space, then, following Ahmed, looking at Henrot's desktop offers a privileged observation of the surface she works on to create her artwork, and by extension of the logics characterising desktop cinema at large. In fact, Ahmed continues her reflection, discussing the space of a surface and, more specifically, she uses Heidegger's suggestion of facticity via the table example, and what it is possible to do with it: "What we do with the table, or what the table allows us to do, is essential to the table. So we do things 'on the table,' which is what makes the table what it is and take shape in the way that it does. The table is assembled around the support it gives" [Ahmed 2006, 551]. From this perspective, the potential function of the table and the gesture inherent to it, are that which make the table what it is. If the same is true for the desk, which is a kind of table, and for the desktop, which is its virtual counterpart, then what is possible to do with/on the desktop is what makes it what it is. Put differently, the surface we are presented with in *Grosse Fatigue* becomes a site for artistic creation insofar as it allows Henrot to potentially open, elaborate, couple, cut, and edit infinite windows and images, having been turned into the specific room necessary for her sampling, elaborating, and re-ordering gesture.

Desktop Cinema

Arguing for the mutual implication between desktop and desk top operations does not remove the specificities of the former in relation to the latter. When the Smithsonian archive enters the realm of the artists' desktop surface, it gets processed and is transformed. As Giuliana Bruno has observed with regards to Henrot's artwork, it "probe[s] the capacity of the digital to explode the frame and create new screens of projection" (Bruno 2022, 143), where a new depth is created. Material archive and database logics merge, and so do the working spaces employed by the artist a desktop designed and conceived on the basis of its physical double.

The same suggestion, in addition to the methodological mobility that features in Aby Warburg's *Atlas Mnemosyne*, serves as the ordering principle of the *Warburghiana project* (2007-2016)[6]. Conceived by artists Aurelio Andrighetto, Dario Bellini, Gianluca Codeghini and philosopher Elio Grazioli, it proposes "synoptic concerts" and "desktops" as their elective artistic formats. Conceived as the dynamic collection of pieces and reflections, the latter look like online themed catalogues. Grazioli writes:

> Each desktop is themed and *Warburghiana* is its director. The cinematographic term indicates the authorship of whomever choses, produces, and orders the different components as a whole as an online collection. However, the term desktop alludes to the possibility of having everything at one's disposal 'on the table', too; [this table] is now an interface inviting the visitor to practice it with the same spirit, that is, without firming [the elements] up in the version that is given to them (Grazioli 2012, 107, my translation).

(Post-)Digital Surfaces

Returning to *Grosse Fatigue*, we can see that the digital surface of the desktop in itself allows for an integrated recording of the operations performed by Henrot that exhibits the working surface and fetishises its image. The viewers gain access to a visualisation of the recesses of the artist's computer memory as she enters it in search of the materials she needs, adopting what Bruno aptly defines as a "vibrant 'windowed' way" (Bruno 2022, 143).

At this point, Flusser's claim about the so-called "age of writing" comes to mind. According to him, prior to technical images, lines were the centre of the attention and "meant the three-dimensional world in which we live, act, and suffer" (Flusser 2004 [1973], 21). The computer desktop is not only a new place of writing, but *Grosse Fatigue* also shows that we can well live, definitely act, and possibly suffer, in the three-dimensionality of the digital surface of the computer desktop. The *mise-en-abyme* strategy discussed in chapter 1 contributes towards the creation of such a sense of depth [figg. 2.1-2].

The layered disposition adopted by Henrot but also in other desktop cinema pieces such as *All That is Solid* (2014) by Louis Henderson or *48 War Movies* (2019) by Christian Marclay nearly carves out a three-dimensional space opening up onto the planar surface of the desktop[6]. Commenting on the latter film, Giuliana Bruno observes, "In shifting perspectives, formally, the multiple edges of the screen not only create frames within frames but also enhance an effect of perspectival depth, as if one could actually access the dimensional space of projection in order to question it" (Bruno 2022, 150). This depth goes hand in hand with a potentially infinite extension achieved both with the 'stacking' mode of visualisation, masterfully shown for example in Suneil Sanzgiri's *At Home but Not at Home* (2019) [fig. 2.3], and the 'multiple desktops' mode of visualisation. In the latter, the rapid ascendant movement of the hand on the mousepad allows for a new ancillary space: a horizontal stripe of sorts appears in the top part of the screen, where the plus button enables us to create new desktops, and thus widen the working surface at our disposal.

7 By no means to be intended as a temporal term indicating something coming after (*post*) the digital, the concept of the postdigital refers to the co-presence of digital and non-digital in the same context in such a way that the two are mutually implicated by and functional to each other. This implies a non-linear notion of technological development in favour of a complex history characterised by irregular, layered evolutions, with deviations, twists, turns and recurrences coming up in cycles. Such a framework finds its key formulation in Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002[1972]) and has notably informed the media archaeological approach. Though the thinkers and scholars who have worked on the concept of the postdigital do not make this connection explicit, I argue for a continuity between the two perspectives. For a focus on the term, please see the first formulation by Kim Cascone (2000) and the subsequent reading in the realm of media studies proposed by Christiane Paul (2017) and Florian Cramer (2014, 2021). An attempt to relate the concept to that of postmedia (with reference to Krauss) and postcinema (with reference to the debate on cinema's medium specificity) is offered in De Rosa (2022).

These functions speak to the versatility of the computer desktop as a digital surface that offers numerous ways of being practiced, of unleashing our agency on and through it, and, ultimately, of inhabiting digital space. It is perhaps because of this, that the computer desktop has lately become an object of two-dimensional representation itself. This is the case of Erin M. Riley's hyper-realistic embroidery works, where the graphic interface of the computer screen is reproduced in mixed-textile pieces, as *in Recycle Bin* (wool, cotton, 2021), or in Trisha Baga's recent painting work, reproducing the computer desktop superimposed with the environment where the screen is inserted as in *Time Machine 2045* or *Sleep Mode* (both oil on canvas, 2022, fig. 2.4-5). These artworks may be seen as a return to two-dimensionality after having thoroughly experimented in the three-dimensional space opened up by digital technology; they display/disclose an experimentation with traditional images that could not be so detailed and acute without the experience gathered along the avenues of technical images. All in all, these artworks share with *Grosse Fatigue* a sensibility for the mutual implication between screen-space and user-space; desktop cinema constitutes the natural vantage point to observe the exchanges occurring between these two dimensions. It negotiates a space of reflection and representation across 2D and 3D, analogue and digital surfaces, and off and online space. As it is emblematically exemplified by Henrot's video, desktop cinema as a genre bridges the navigation occurring on the physical desk top with the browsing taking place on the desktop. In this perspective, the images we see on screen are not only technical and poor, but also a symptom of the postdigital age—a concept that formalises the blended nature of desktop and computer desktop affordances.

By 'postdigital'[7] we mean the seamless assemblage of digital and physical elements in our daily life and our media practices[8]; amongst them is indeed included the graphic computer interface with the desktop as the main workstation. *Grosse Fatigue* interprets this stance and speaks of the presence of the digital beyond its strict realm, to instead interweave with artistic practices and media art forms. More broadly, the video explores the current mediascape and the intersections with our lived space. This produces a meditation of rare expressive clarity, able to grasp the very fibres of our contemporary visual cultures.

In a reflection around art in the postdigital age, Marie-France Rafael suggested that "artists are exploring approaches to images by developing new picture practices that consistently look at their contexts, relations and conditions, and conceive images not just as cultural entities but forms of practice in their own right by way of an online-offline recursive process" (Rafael 2022, 9-10). Henrot masters the threshold between online and offline, and her video chooses from both dimensions to craft an organic narrative through a profound and thorough excavation of the physical archives. In doing so, she offers a highly aestheticised use of the digital tools available to interrogate and thematically reorganise them in the digital realm. Henrot's research in the Smithsonian collections is artistically translated into a documented practice that unfolds on her desktop.

Desktop cinema as a genre revolves around such a translation, constructing the space of action as a space of display of the artists' personal creative journey. This exhibition element is precisely what makes Henrot's thinking and compositional processes visible to viewers, encapsulating the complex nature of technical, poor, postdigital images that characterise the screen recording generated video, displaying at the same time the skilful and performative gesture of the artist. It is to this double-edged performative gesture to which chapter 3 is devoted. Desktop cinema celebrates the fascinating double nature of the screen: exhibiting and concealing emerge as the key features of the screen, as well as the basic operations guiding the gesturality of the artist. This exhibition fluctuates between the supposedly full transparency and total visibility of her apparently spontaneous moves across the desktop, and the fully opaque meticulously fabricated choreography she plays out for us.

Chapter 3

Cineplastics
Digitised

1   See for example the perspective offered by Shane Denson in the roundtable inclu-
ded in chapter 5, or more broadly, think of Steven Shaviro's take on this topic (2010).
2   This exacerbates the features of the "dynamic screens", as defined by Lev Manovich
(1995) in his study around the archaeology of the computer screen.

*Once again it will be a way to mark my space, a slightly
oblique approach to my everyday practice, a way to discuss
my work, my story, my apprehensions, an attempt to seize
something belonging to my experience, not much in the form
of scattered reflections, but rather in their becoming.*
Georges Perec

The postdigital culture that represents the scenario where desk-
top-generated images are produced, circulated and reproduced
attests to the compression of phases once separated (produc-
tion, post-production and exhibition) that finally coincide in a
recorded gesture, encapsulating at once a sense of fresh ongo-
ingness and the realisation of a crafted artificiality.
For some scholars, this simultaneity is the mark of the postcine-
matic nature of desktop cinema,[1] whereby the on-screen space
becomes a site of negotiation between camera and projector,
but also, I would suggest, the blurred threshold between author
and character, authenticity and performance.
This chapter attempts to come to terms with the desktop in its
multifaceted, rich nature. It is an undoubtedly reduced sample
and yet a representative space, easily relatable to all of us who, in
different capacities, find themselves in front of their networked
desktop and, from there, make their own (i.e. as in video calling
or any other telepresence service) or any other image an object
of display, exhibition or consumption for others.
One of the basic conditions enabling these processes is that
desktop users conceive it not only as a dense (see chapter 2),
but also as a dynamic form,[2] where processes take place, and
ongoing mechanisms are activated. Here, the encounter and the
subsequent interaction between author and images are cap-
tured, alongside their gesturing and the creative process they
feed into. Particularly worthy of attention are elements such as:
the presence of the author, even when (or perhaps *especially if*)
aestheticised and translated into a symbol made visible on the
desktop that bears an agency, such as the cursor; the presence
and morphing of images, grasped in their operational, technical

and screenic nature[3]; and the presence of the systems (i.e. interfaces, codes, softwares, etc.) that support the creation, circulation, correlation and discorrelation of images by means of their affordances.

If in some desktop cinema works the presence of the author is symbolised by that of the pointer moving across the screen, not all pieces belonging to the genre unveil the presence of their *deus ex machina* by aestheticising its arrow-shaped agency. Conversely, some works exclude the cursor or the computer pointer, producing the impression of a more direct, real-time event. The images seem to 'unfold on their own' on the screen, though of course, as digital literate viewers, we might easily notice that several strategies are employed to conceal the director's intervention. Oddly enough, interventions such as hiding or freezing the desktop date and clock while screen-recording result in an apparent transparency, which is instead only symptomatic of a very obvious opacity. It is by means of these procedures that the carefully planned, hyper-mediated and sophisticated nature of the desktop video as a media artefact comes to the forefront. Perfectly illustrating the now-classic double logic of remediation [Bolter and Grusin 1999], desktop cinema may lean towards an overtly displayed or a tactically concealed authorship; either way, it unveils its nature as a rather subjective artefact. *Grosse Fatigue* is no exception, because as suggested in the previous chapters, Henrot's stylistic and technological choices attend to her own subjective way of creating with the available materials. In his analysis of desktop documentary as a genre belonging to videographic practice, Miklós Kiss reflects specifically on this point. He argues that these works are characterised by an increasing display of the videographer's subjectivity [Kiss 2021]. Moving away from an observation of this feature in the frame of video essays alone and advocating instead for desktop cinema as a genre that cuts across videographic studies but also enters the area of artistic moving images, the subjective element may be liberated from the tight constraint of working as a synonym of "subjectivisation of criticism and scholarship" [Kiss 2021]. Looking at *Grosse Fatigue*, the subjective element serves linguistic purposes, offering the terms with which to interpret the components and features of desktop cinema as an au-

dio-visual artistic form.

In this wake, I methodologically embrace an interpretation of *Grosse Fatigue* from an artistic rather than a videographic point of view, whereby the essayistic aspect is present as much as it is in experimental cinema pieces, and not as the sole or primary feature. In a similar way to experimental cinema, then, the desktop of desktop cinema becomes more comparable to a workstation, a lab, a locus of creation and an artist studio, rather than a specific place of scholarship. As admitted by the artist herself, besides referring to the act of creation, *Grosse Fatigue* is first and foremost Henrot's **'fatigue'** in coping with the abundance of materials, the best way to channel them, and the ultimate shape given to her creative output. As observed by other artists who opted for desktop screen capture for their films, the presence of the author in the piece is not limited to an essayistic voice in the classic sense (i.e. a voice-over as in *The other images* by Iris Blauensteiner and in *Disruption* by Belit Sag, or as an overtly autobiographical element as in Suneil's Sanzgiri trilogy—all of which are discussed in chapter 5), but becomes procedurally visualised on screen.

Focussing on the indicators that betray the presence of the author represents an exercise that both locates the author herself and unveils a number of aesthetic features of her choice. Specifically, Henrot decides not to guide the viewer explicitly by way of a pointer opening the folders located on the desktop. The more we get to the heart of the piece, the more this omission turns into an unmarked absence because the public is increasingly busy falling inside a process that unfolds before their eyes. Directed by the ongoing flow of windows dancing across the screen, and possibly caught by the crescendo of the soundtrack, they are taken in the midst of things happening, progressively evolved into an increased intensity[4] of image and sound [fig. 3.1]. Key concepts for the purposes of properly analysing *Grosse Fatigue*, then, are less subjectivisation than the sense of making, the act and its happening, the agency of the images enabling this to happen, and the way in which such a sense of ongoingness is technically translated on screen.

All in all, the visual strategies described in chapter 1 feed into an apparently spontaneous pattern, with subsequent windows

opening, overlapping and eventually closing. Henrot's intention is clearly to adhere to a real-time-inspired language and aesthetics, characterised by an exacerbated gesturality. As only briefly anticipated, the sense of freshness and liveliness conveyed by the process ongoing on the desktop clashes with an extremely high degree of 'stagedness'. Because our emotional engagement would be limited if we perceived the orchestrated nature of the spectacle, a sense of naturalness, spontaneity and liveness is injected into the piece to keep the viewer engaged. How to achieve this goal? For example, we clearly see the interface (frames of the windows, option bar at the top of the screen, desktop in the background, icons on top of it), and yet no cursor shows us the presence of an agency operating on the desktop, which is undoubtedly at work. We are presented, in other words, with images in their unfolding.

Grosse Fatigue and (Not Quite) Operational Images

The poor, technical, postdigital images employed by the author (see chapter 2) hint at an operational nature which somewhat differs from that of operational images proper. Notably coined by Harun Farocki, this notion refers to images that speak of the apparatus producing them, and in turn are produced almost as a courtesy of said apparatus, so as to visualise the process that is taking place in order to make it graspable to man. When the concept was elaborated, Farocki had in mind his *Eye/Machine* trilogy (2000-2003), where the notion is to be found in regards to the new regime of visuality initiated by machine vision, and therefore to images that "do not represent an object, but rather are part of an operation" (Farocki 2004, 17). In contrast to this definition, Henrot's images refer to a processuality that does not simply consist in the description of an operation made available for us to understand the technical passages that lead to the visual outcome we see on screen, but rather it stages a supposed series of operations made more palatable and appealing.

As Jussi Parikka also observed in this regard, the force of operational images is more epistemic than representational, in so far as they provide the metrics and scales of reference for measurement, evaluations and ultimately operations to be carried out (Parikka 2023). Because of this very nature, I shall rehearse

that the images in *Grosse Fatigue* hint at a sense of operationality but they are not non-representational or non-pictorial: on the contrary the thorough use of the graphic interface, allegedly user-friendly in its essence, makes them profoundly pictorial. Henrot's images ought to indicate the options and the commands selected by the artist to make narrative progress but in fact the latter does so thanks to passages that are not fully unveiled and operations that are not given to the viewers to see. Paradoxically, what is crucial here is the idea of operationality rather than its genuine appearance. Put differently: the sense of image-making conceived by the artist is crafted to make what happens on screen possibly less tedious, to keep our attention alive and thus follow what otherwise could take longer, with the risk of losing the viewers' engagement. So, similarly to operational images, the images we see at work in desktop cinema speak of the apparatus producing them, yet such an operational nature does not come from the machine generating them per se, nor do they categorise "snippets of body in movement" (Parikka 2023, 75) that feed into datasets extracting information from media archives. The machine is instead manipulated by way of omissions, compressions, editing, artistic choices and forms of labour introduced by the author in order to produce the impression of images in their doing, images that make something happen, images that perform one or more gestures.

The unveiling of the process is therefore a fake spontaneous effect: were it true, the invisibility of the black box characterising technical apparatuses would be subverted and opened in favour of a new regime of enhanced visibility, in which viewers are given access to the workings of the machine. Here, instead, we are given the impression of accessing Henrot's mental and working space, now relocated on her desktop, but analysing the piece carefully it becomes apparent that such an unveiling gesture is, on the contrary, staged. The way the author does so consists in adapting to the system governing the desktop and manipulating it fictionally in place of just using it functionally. The thinking and making process typical of desktop cinema, therefore, endows the interface, tools and instruments of the operative system with an extra of aestheticisation and fictionalisation.

Navigating Stagedness, Performing Aestheticisation

Ra'anan Alexandrowicz efficaciously touched upon this sta-
gedness element interviewing Chloé Galibert-Lainé and Kevin
B. Lee about their co-authored desktop video *Bottled Songs*
(2020) on the occasion of the film's presentation at Open City
Documentary Festival in London: "Watching this piece it sud-
denly invoked this feeling of the desktop as a location which
makes sense because it is the location of life, and I became
aware of [...] the cursor as an acting device."[5] The same can
be observed in Camille Henrot's piece: here the desktop quite
literally becomes the site where the story of life on earth is told,
and the images operate in a sort of linguistic and symbolic echo
on its surface, as they perform a set of operations also evoking
and exemplifying their work as acting devices. In particular, I
would argue that they perform these technical operations as if
to translate them into digital gestures, mediating the off-screen
gesture of a subject whose agency is filtered by the graphic
interface, eventually codified and rendered through images.
Gesturality is then yet another important concept I would like
to suggest when it comes to desktop cinema, for it is through
such a set of gestures describing a number of operations that
the ultimate conceptual, formal, aesthetic aspect of the image
is determined.

In light of the preceding discussion, I shall contend that desk-
top cinema can be framed within a model that ostensibly dis-
plays the processes of vision and exhibition of the moving im-
age. Such a model presupposes a gesture that explicitly unveils
these dynamics, *as if* (the hypothetical clause here rehearses
the non-spontaneous nature of the operation) the creative pro-
cess would be overexposed and nonetheless left at the dis-
posal of the viewer's eye to be caught. Digital technologies
therefore provide a new set of possibilities to integrate, refine
or interpret anew the gestural forms I mentioned, favouring
and facilitating an aestheticisation of the working, technical
passages that lead to the production of the piece. The ultimate
result is that they implicitly superimpose the sphere of the form

(the constitution, the coming into being of the form) and that of the content (in *Grosse Fatigue*, the history of the universe).
Through an arsenal of digital transformations, the images become gestures flowing across the desktop via familiar operations of searching, visualising, downloading, saving, overwriting and so forth. If in the analogue dimension, the footage is assembled and reassembled, perhaps dissected, zoomed in and out, re-photographed, manipulated in its temporality by speeding it up or slowing it down, in the digital environment of the desktop all these operations are not means to achieve an image but rather are made images themselves, they are visualised and feed into the work itself. The crafting of moving image-making is not simply shown but performatively exhibited: because it occurs on screen, it is itself the image to be screened.

Questioning the concept of the screen as a surface for projection, *Grosse Fatigue* shows instead a practiced space symbolised by the desktop—a space practiced in a pragmatic fashion, that is, technically crossed by gestures. Albeit mediated, synthetic, artificial, machinic, such gestures—corresponding to operations—make visible the artist's "thought in the act" [Massumi 2014] and enliven her intention when capturing it, set in motion in all its plasticity.
As with any desktop cinema piece, Henrot's artwork expresses a curious and innovative interest in surfaces, which I believe stands for both the urge and the desire to creatively explore a support—either material or symbolic—able to shelter the cinematic gesture. To employ and interrogate her desktop as a creative site, the artist apparently unveils the dimension behind the curtain: the curtain becomes substantiated—literally or metaphorically—into the table, whose importance as a surface has been highlighted in chapter 2. What is crucial to add at this point, however, is how this surface is operated. The concept of gesturality as a complex assemblage of gestures activated by the artist and mediated via the dispositif, is helpful in this context.

6   See Blümlinger and Lavin 2018, De Rosa 2019, Grespi 2019.
7   This is a feature that characterises the disembodied gestures (i.e. no hands, no pointer) that Henrot performs as operations that exquisitely feed into a narrative of labour extraction. It is possible to retrieve it quite clearly also in Harun Faocki's *Schnittstelle* (*Interface*, 1995), where the author explains that "a modern conception of scientific labour would prefer that the hand does not intervene in process. As long as the experiment lasts, the scientist is a 'pure spirit'" (Farocki 2006, 101).

Desktop Cinema: the Realm of Gesturality

Whilst in the last few years a flourishing scholarly production has addressed the topic of gesture in general[6], *Grosse Fatigue* offers an exceptional opportunity to look into the specific gesturality at play in desktop cinema. In effect, the multiplication of the frame and its variety of movements offers to the viewers a whole set of variations in the disposition within the bigger frame of the screen that occurs by way of gestures. Seen in light of this, Henrot's artwork can be considered as a story of digital browsing: an invisible mouse guides us throughout the internet via YouTube, from one software to another, from one file to another. It also guides us in the archive of the Smithsonian in its digitally recorded representation, and filters Henrot's intentions to create a narrative through the language of interfaces. Though absent, the artist's hand is virtually extended onto her desktop operating and clicking; it guides the viewers through the objects she's working with, while the system enables unexpected superimpositions of frames. Following it, we are initiated in the windows' opening and closing, copying, saving, ordering, cataloguing, and to their dancing choreography on screen.

If it is true that the pointer and the interface components translate Henrot's hand into the digital realm as they make her creative thought visible, then, it is worth dwelling briefly on such an important mediation that emerges in the form of digital gestures. Writing in an age very far from that populated by the desktop, and yet acknowledging the importance of gesture in the act of creation that expresses "the life of forms," Henri Focillon embarks on a famous "praise of hands" that—moving from the premise I just suggested—unexpectedly applies with unprecedented precision to *Grosse Fatigue*, where "the hands are present without showing themselves, and, though touching nothing, they order everything" (Focillon 1992 [1943], 178)[7].

Focillon discusses the linkage between thinking and making, attributing to the hands the potentiality to give shape to the artist's thought via gestures: "Through his hands man establishes contact with the austerity of thought." [157] He writes, "The hand means action: it grasps, it creates, at times it would seem even to think" [158]. Bearing in mind the object of Henrot's inquiry and her fascination for the myth of creation, we can see that Focillon's recurrent reference to both the creative act and to the universe seems to find a natural synthesis in *Grosse Fatigue*.

According to the art historian, the universe is the frame where creation takes place but it is at the same time that which is itself refashioned by the power of the hands. Meanwhile, Henrot's piece is all about a creative endeavour that unfolds onto a synthetic image of the universe to hint at its creation. In this very context, hands—via gestures—are charged with a special agency that, whilst translating the thinking into a shape, are not to be underestimated in their own centrality in comparison to intellectual labour. Focillon writes "The hand is not the mind's docile slave. It searches and experiments for its master's benefit; it has all sorts of adventures; it tries its chance" [180]. However, also according to Focillon, "Gestures multiply man's knowledge with a variety of touches and contours whose inventive power is now hidden to us by centuries of practice" [163]. I would posit that, with *Grosse Fatigue*, Camille Henrot re-introduces such an inventive force, and she does so through a mediated and exquisitely digital gesture. Precisely because of this contemporary gesturality made of clicks, motion on the desktop, and so forth, the desktop artist's digital gesturing "expresses accurately an early state of man, the memory of his efforts to invent a new language" [163]. There couldn't be a more apt description of Henrot's own effort, better yet, *fatigue*.

This emphasis on the hands as per Focillon's reflection, locates their legacy and digital counterpart within a desktop which becomes a site not only of creativity, but also of pure performativity. This is another significant element I would like to underline: if gestures are what enable us to draw a connection between the hand and the cursor, they are also the bridge between desk top and desktop. The peculiarity of the spatial dimension characterising desktop cinema is in other words the ability to coexist as a surface across the physical and the virtual world by means

8   Once again, Focillon comments on precisely this kind of semi-erasure in an extra-   55
ordinarily fitting passage: "The most delicate harmonies, evoking the secret springs of our
imagination and sensibility, take form by the hand's action as it works with matter; they
become inscribed in space, and they take possession of us. *The imprint of this manual
process is profoundly marked, even when it covers its own tracks*, according to Whistler,
to push the finished work back into transcendental worlds by *eliminating every evidence of
the artist's headlong and feverish attack*" (Focillon 1992 [1943], 172, emphasis mine).

of gestures. Pieces of the likes of *Grosse Fatigue* are compara-
ble to those artworks that have been observed to formulate the
praise of hands, that is, a "handmade thing [where] everything
is understood and ordered within the limits of a stage that is
not only diminutive but immense" [(182)]. It is striking how suit-
ing to the desktop such a description first proposed in 1943 is,
considering that, at the time, the graphic interface we are so
used to was yet to be imagined. Also, as we have already seen,
and as a number of artists also confirm in the roundtable that
closes this book (see chapters 2 and 5), the desktop is used as
a (display) space where it is possible to intervene.

Grosse Fatigue as Imperfect Cinema

The chance to feel a sense of intervention on screen, triggered
by the artist's mediated gesture, is a way to address the pub-
lic. The surface of the desktop appears as the very place of an
active, engaged, programmatic, ongoing attitude, performing a
creative act showed in its becoming to offer a chance for iden-
tification, in so far as the viewers may see themselves in the
artist's shoes performing a set of actions.

At first, these look like something very familiar to them, which
they could be able to reproduce easily. The apparent easiness
stands in for a meticulously scripted and not so easy proce-
dure, that despite the removal of the traces of the fatigue still
retains the mark of the effort[8]. This aspect taps into a very rel-
evant aspect that is not limited to the potential identification of
the public with the author, but instead highlights an inherent
contradiction characterising desktop cinema.
We know that what we see on screen is difficult to achieve, and
yet it looks familiar and easy to produce. At the same time, we
don't want the procedural difficulty to come through too much,
in order to offer an easy palatable view to the viewers, but at
the same time any virtuosity that may be caught, every detail

revealing a personal choice of the artist, is actually a proof of authorship, standing out at the time of crowdsourcing and bottom-up media-production. In this sense, *Grosse Fatigue* expresses, as the poor images it is made of, all the "contradictions of the contemporary crowd: its opportunism, narcissism, desire for autonomy and creation, its inability to focus or make up its mind, its constant readiness for transgression and simultaneous submission" [Steyerl 2012, 41]. Further, as a piece of desktop cinema, Henrot's artwork is also a piece of imperfect cinema. The hyper-accessible technology necessary to create a desktop cinema piece situates it as a potentially bottom-up production, as the video itself also suggests via the evident screen capture technique that it shows off. In this sense, *Grosse Fatigue* echoes Julio García Espinosa's argument regarding imperfect cinema that, it "strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society." He continues:

> It merges art with life and science, blurring the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author. It insists upon its own imperfection, is popular but not consumerist, committed without becoming bureaucratic [Garcia Espinosa 1979, 25].

Read in light of Hito Steyerl's theoretical contribution, desktop cinema as an imperfect cinema made up of poor images adheres to an economy that emphasises everyone's input to take advantage of the value it produces. This manoeuvre elucidates how the narrative of easy access to creative technologies, democratisation, and free content circulation can serve as a conduit for the widespread dissemination of personally created media that revolve around hyper-performativity, an over-display of oneself with the anxiety corollary that this entails. "While it enables the users' active participation in the creation and distribution of content, it also drafts them into production. Users become the editors, critics, translators, and (co)-authors" [Steyerl 2012, 40]. This is telling of the affective condition of viewers-makers: if Henrot's digging at the Smithsonian displays her own neurosis, fears, as well as her craving for intensity, fun and distraction, the feeling of those viewing her *Grosse Fatigue* is similar, and attends to the condition of the images she employs,

too, which may well be the images anybody could potentially employ to craft their desktop cinema piece. Steyerl again: "The condition of the images speaks not only of countless transfers and reformattings, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, upload them" [(41)]. The backdrop to all of this is the atmosphere of profound performativity entailed in the outcomes of this creative endeavour.

If technically desktop cinema looks quite easy to create, the way in which the operations of screen capture, choreography, etc., are deployed are where the artistic talent lies, where the spectacle's potential may germinate, where the cinematic feature blossoms. As a matter of fact, Henrot's choice to address the myth of creation by way of a well-rehearsed screen capture endeavour suggests that the artist's focus was not simply on the actual story, on the 'what', but on the means to tell it, on the 'how', on the language, medium and format that such a story can indeed inspire. The result is a narration that explores creation by reflecting upon creativity with a twist of stylistic innovation and a pinch of novelty. Her gestures, consequently, are surely mediatised as those of anybody deciding to embark on the journey of creating a desktop cinema piece but emerge in all their artistic value and in a way that enhances the technique she has selected. As Gilles Deleuze notably stated in his essay on the creative act, "Ideas have to be treated as potentials already engaged in one mode of expression or another and inseparable from the mode of expression" (Deleuze 2006, 317). The potentiality endowing expression to which Deleuze refers recalls in effect much literature around the concept of gesture, whereby the motion of the body and the performance of the subject or of the machine unleash an energy able to shape an intention into a purposeful act. The desktop, then, is a surface where these passages are condensed and translated via the graphic interface. In other words, it gathers the gestures necessary to create, it offers room to what's essential to the creative act and becomes inseparable from it, as it is transformed into a set for the recording/filming to take place.

Mediality—or, the Performative Genealogy of Desktop Cinema

What Henrot achieves with her piece is to epitomise the me-diatisation of her own gestures as she interacts with surfaces and digital objects in the process of creation. The translation of her gestures in itself becomes an object of the story she tells, it becomes aestheticised. A specific feature of desktop cinema is precisely an aesthetic ability to grasp gesturality and its com-puter-based mediatisation in a way that enhances—as Giorgio Agamben (2000 [1992]) would term it—mediality.

At the 2017 Venice Biennale, Anne Imhof represented Germany with her performance of *Faust*. The piece consisted of a cho-reography performed by actors in a space created by position-ing a massive plane of glass covering the entire pavilion at a certain height from the ground. Whilst they moved underneath this surface, the visitors were encouraged to move on the sur-face itself, used as a floor. Serving as a threshold between the world of fiction (performance) and that of reality (audience), the transparent layer separating the two spheres, and yet ensuring visibility across the two, worked as a screen. In a commentary about the artwork, Marie-France Rafael wrote:

> [T]he performers know full well that their gestures are not ends in and of themselves, but only exist as pure mediality. They seem forever on the verge of transforming themselves into pictures ready for consumption; [...] In an era characterized by an ex-treme degree of mediality, images, far from merely depicting reality, create it (Rafael 2022, 25).

The similarity to desktop cinema is apparent: on the computer desktop, disposed not as a desk top anymore but as a screen facing the viewer, the motion of images as well as of the graphic interface tools create a reality in and of itself. They give shape to a set of gestures grasped into visual representations which are also, at the same time, functional to achieve a goal. They mediate with the aim of 'doing something', which constantly

transforms them into something new, a new reality created through gestures that will eventually unfold on the surface of the screen.

To look in detail at the workings of the desktop caught in its gestured mediality, it is interesting to dig into its genealogy as a practicable surface. We have already encountered a specific sensitivity towards what is 'done' on the desktop that, borrowing from Heidegger, in chapter 2 I have proposed to conceptualise in terms of facticity. Considering Camille Henrot's desktop starting from what she does on its surface through a set of digital gestures, relates it to a number of physical surfaces that have been mediated in a performative way in the frame of desk top video-performances. In effect, it is possible to see a genealogic connection between desktop videos and off-line table top installation and performances, where the table surface serves as a space for creative elaboration as well as for (live) experimentations, as much as we see happening on Henrot's computer screen. Looking into video performances from around the same period as *Grosse Fatigue*, it is easy to retrieve similarities across a relatively vast spectrum.
Just one year after Henrot's piece was awarded a prize at the Venice Biennale, Gautam Kansara premiered with his multimedia project *Save As* (2014) at Shrine Empire Gallery in New Delhi [fig. 3.2]. Working as the sole performer, the artist combines photography, video and sound with organic materials; specifically, he throws family pictures on a table top where they are mixed with flour, water, bleach, etc. Employing a sort of diaristic imagery, Kansara reflects on a series of memories that are altered in their image, broken, stretched and thus reconfigured by way of gestures unfolding on the working surface. Pretty much as is the case with the files on our computer desktop, the author overwrites the images and *saves them as* new pieces of information. Meanwhile, the process is recorded and live projected onto the walls of the gallery.

The 2015 Venice Biennale saw iconic artist Joan Jonas taking over the United States Pavilion. The project she developed on the occasion was entitled *They Come to Us without a Word*, and alongside the exhibition at the Giardini, it was complemented by a live performance that ran for three nights at Teatro

Piccolo Arsenale in July 2015. Proposing a dispositif that the artist has been experimenting with for decades (see, for example, the re-enactment of the 1974 work *Disturbances* held at Hangar Bicocca in Milan 40 years later, under the evocative title of *Reanimation*), the piece consisted of a simultaneous projection on multi-layered screens located centre stage of what Jonas performs on a table placed on the side and live recorded from above. Here, she combines papercuts and images, while jazz composer Jason Moran creates a live score for the artist's gestures. The outcome is as if the artwork would result not only from the intermingling of mixed media but also from an encounter between hands—Moran's action of touching the keyboard resembling Jonas' hands on the table surface, before they become part of the projected image showed to the public.

More recently, emerging artists inherited and relaunched Jonas' setup offering new interesting iterations within the same genealogy. Shiyi Li's performance *Minister of Loneliness*, which was part of the 2019 Coventry Biennial of Art and took place at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, is a case in point. As in the previous cases, and to confirm the continued use of the same dispositif, Li also worked with live music and incorporated live camera animation occurring on the surface of a table and multi-screen live projections [fig. 3.3]. The images, which the artist created to give shape to a sense of hardship and psychological challenges that proved to be a visionary prediction of a vastly shared sentiment just shortly thereafter, transferred the experience of the artist unfolding on the table to the gallery walls, creating an immersive effect. Diving into the mix of music and visuals, which the camera also shows in the process of being crafted, the public gains a better view of what is happening on the work surface before the artist's eyes.

It is interesting to see how all these projects employ a table—as Heidegger suggested, to do something, to perform on it, as a site for facticity to unfold through gestures. "Diminutive and immense" at once, as Focillon observed [(1992 [1943], 182)], the small planary surface of the table is magnified via the projection, eventually mirroring the images caught in their making on a big screen or often on the gallery walls. Also, both the unfixed nature of the piece, scripted and rehearsed but, differently from *Grosse Fatigue*, performed live, recorded and streamed in real-time for the

9   *Screen Walks* is a series of live-streamed talks and performances by researchers and   61
artists exploring digital spaces. As per the mission of the organisers, The Photographers' Gallery
in London and Fotomuseum, Winterthur, the initiative "gives an insight into practices using the
screen as a medium" (screenwalks.com, last accessed June 2024).

public, as well as being accompanied by the live score, enhance the ongoingness and the happening-quality of the project.
Encapsulating the spirit and the technological means of expression of their time, these performances are indebted to table top installations, where the table surface is also a key room where the artistic action unfolds. Looking into the first examples of this dispositif, it is worth mentioning Janet Cardiff's *To Touch* (1993) and *Tavoli* (*Tables*, 1995) by Milan-based artistic group Studio Azzurro. These works, both conceived in the mid-nineties, represent a first step in the genealogy that I am suggesting. They speak of the exploration of interactive media art typical of that period, but also of the combination between a scripted design and an input from the side of the public involved in the project, bringing in a degree of spontaneity that is ultimately way more genuine than the apparent one featuring desktop videos. However, this spontaneity is instead particularly apparent in desktop-based performances that combine the presence of the artist in the flesh, in line with the performance work mentioned above, but differently from *Grosse Fatigue*, when the artist performs on the desktop (instead of a desk top) in front of an audience, in a live setting. Cases in point are Chia Amisola's live browser poems and (live/online) desktop performances and Molly Soda's 'desktop dumps'.

Amisola's work is vast and ranges from game coding to building "internet ambience", from online archival projects to desktop and networked performance practice. In the piece presented online for the 2023 *Screen Walks* series[9], the artist combined three projects into an online live-streamed performance where pre-existing web-based works were activated on the desktop by way of a system of traditional hypertext features commonly used on websites, and through a multiplication of concomitantly opened windows offering a unique visual experience [fig. 3.4]. Either showing a variety of different images or working as digital tiles of a mosaic representing a unitary scene, this work is very reminiscent of Flusser's notion of technical images (see

chapter 2). The artist adopts early internet technologies now considered obsolete that have been supplanted by more efficient tools in the name of "a more productive internet" [De Mutiis 2023] to create a choreography of tabs, pop-ups, feedback loops, windows and browsing histories. Similarly to what *Grosse Fatigue* shows only aesthetically, Amisola's work embraces a live performance model, including a good degree of randomness which is turned into a generative strategy. The artist admittedly explained that, whilst the piece mixes game and online fiction which are presumably scripted and coded, on the whole it "is different every time it is performed" [Amisola 2023].

Content-wise her performances bring to the public a personal take on images, technology and media ecology that betray a high degree of familiarity with the critical discourses around contemporary visual cultures and mediascape. The result is a poignant visually creative, essayistic production inspired mainly by countercultural references that also give voice to an environmentalist sensitivity developed into immersive performances [fig. 3.5]. Alongside this example, there are however more intimist works in Amisola's oeuvre, especially as in the case of *When We Love* (2023-ongoing), which is more an online project than a performative one [Norman 2022]. Molly Soda's creative production shifts more decidedly in this second direction.

Soda's performances are based on more explicitly personal and everyday practices with one's computer and one's desktop. For example, looking at one's computer desktop to reorder what is on it and basically tidy it up becomes the exquisite expression of the contemporary networked self; as such it is worthy of being recorded by the artist and shared, directly streamed or performed. That is the case in her *Desktop Dumps*, which could be briefly described as a series of 'pragmatic diary entries for the postdigital age,' whereby simple everyday operations (such as eating, cooking, unboxing a new item, and cleaning) become a spectacle, or at least, in being shared, are made to look like one. Looking at the author's blog makes this spirit apparent. On June 6th, 2023 she posts a blog entry entitled, "*Desktop Diary #1: some things I saved to my desktop last month*," followed by the brief explanation of what was saved and why it is worth looking into [fig. 3.6].

Gathering what interests her and reassembling her room, Soda confirms the desktop to be the place where one moves around to make things clearer, to make up one's mind, to address issues perceived as subjectively important. For her, the desktop is where anything interesting is dumped performatively, that is, publicly operating the process in a live or recorded performance. This harnessing of the private space for public show speaks—allowing me a quick literary leap—of what Virginia Woolf famously contended regarding women's creativity:

> Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must need harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics ^(Woolf 1935, 131).

The image captured by the *camera* (as in, video/photo apparatus) and eventually visualised on the desktop becomes what derives from the Italian *camera*, as in, private room, a term that up to a certain point is used to indicate this sense of enclosure also in optical devices, such as the *camera obscura*. However, this connection also speaks to the close relationship between desktop, mediation, and performance, the latter being conceived in this instance as a sort of gesture framed in between the intimacy of what is perceived as one's own and the desire for over-sharing it in a self-spectacularising manner. The two elements echo the presumed spontaneity of Henrot's gesture on her desktop and her artificial crafting. Whilst for the purpose of constructing a genealogy of the performative aspect characterising desktop cinema, Soda's desktop dumps are quite apt, her non-live, non-strictly performative work offers a precious occasion to push forward Wolf's suggestion and reflect on the contradiction between intimacy and self-exhibition with which, to different degrees, many if not all desktop cinema pieces are tainted. Her first personal exhibition is instructive.
Taking place at Anna Kultys Gallery in London (2015), the show was entitled *From My Bedroom to Yours*. The reference here goes to selfie practices—video and still—whose set, the bedroom, sees its features shifting from the physical private

dimension to the metaphorical representational dimension of the computer desktop. The latter is, of course, completely virtual, yet, in Soda's work, this space becomes a highly domesticated working site, establishing itself also as the place of our contemporary visual regime, where one expresses oneself but also gets in touch with others. In other words, besides being the site of creation, gesturing and mediation, the desktop appearing in Soda's *Desktop Dumps* is the space-image (De Rosa 2013) of her networked self.

As a matter of fact, her work critically interrogates the relationship between subject, the screenspace that is represented in the form of the desktop, and online space. The physical components of these elements are thematised and explored with irony. In *Cleaning My Desktop* (2018), for example, the artist's body and her desktop are one [fig. 3.7]. The computer screen is filled with images and files stacked one on top of the other, without leaving any free room. The space of the desktop is managed as if it was a bedroom space: tidying tools in hand, Molly Soda appears while cleaning, thereby emphasising the way this virtual, metaphoric, screen space is handled as if it were real and inhabitable, echoing the relation between desk top and desktop discussed above. Furthermore, Soda's desktop is indeed inhabitable: instead of simply structuring a folding system, the artist appears on-screen in her bodily presence, merged with it. Far from a disembodied, polished and well-orchestrated set of gestures piloted at a distance, here we see the artist's full body at work. Hers is a full body gesturing. She appears busy decluttering, precisely as it would happen with her wardrobe or her bedroom. This testifies to the perception and subsequent mode of conceiving of and employing the desktop not only as a thinking and working site but as a dwelling space: its main characteristic clearly is inhabitability, be it via giving shape to one's thought, having it as the realm of a mediated hand gesturing to create something, or the two things altogether. The artist thinks of and uses it as an inhabitable, practicable space.

I click, drag, dump, screenshot, move, delete, organize, and forget about the items on my desktop. It is a space of constant upheaval and an intimate look into what I may or may not be thinking about, during a given

10   The kind of labour displayed by the piece is more precisely what has been termed "immaterial labour." For lack of space and to avoid the risk of too dense of a detour, I recommend referring to Maurizio Lazzarato 1996. A discussion applied to digital media of this concept as in Tiziana Terranova (2006) would open up interesting avenues of research that however exceed the analysis of *Grosse Fatigue* alone.

moment in time. [...] I feel a tiny little rush when I glance at someone's desktop over their shoulder at a coffee shop or on the projector before a presentation. The desktop is the computer's bedroom (Soda 2022, 26).

Both Amisola and Soda consciously locate themselves on the threshold between self-spectacularisation and intimate account, thematising a spectrum of dynamics that range from privatisation (as is highlighted by the artists taking part in the roundtable in chapter 5, too) to exhibition and hyper-spectacularisation.

Differently from the first performance works discussed in this chapter, which still aim to provide a genealogic account of the elements characterising *Grosse Fatigue*, Henrot's artwork and the genre of desktop cinema on the whole are well immersed in the contemporary visual cultures, where a taste for ostentatious display easily blurs into hyper-performativity. The exacerbated display of the process of browsing and recomposing a personal version of the origin myth speaks to this rather explicitly. Instead of embracing such a mood like the performance artists listed above, however, *Grosse Fatigue*'s author seems to be pointing more at the actual *fatigue* necessary to produce her artwork. As we read in chapter 1, her desktop navigation is the result of the personal fear of not being able to contain everything and the frustration of not wanting to cut out anything from the massive amount of materials made available to her. The emphasis on the dimension of labour[10] is very strong and represents a legitimate, important critical position which Henrot decides to stand for: to create something that appears to be smoothly flowing in a natural, spontaneous fashion there is in fact quite a lot of work, anxiety and nerve-wracking rehearsals that need to be acknowledged.

In sum, *Grosse Fatigue* is reminiscent of the genealogy proposed here, and yet the crafted real-time effect technically makes it more similar to work of the likes of *et ils vont dans l'espace qu'embrasse ton regard: signaux de fumée* by Estefania Peñafiel Loaiza, where the ethereal, illuminated surface of a light box is used as a table by the author's hand [fig. 3.8], than to the performative antecedents just listed.

Despite the fact that the real-time effect is crafted within a piece that is meticulously scripted and recorded, similarly to what happens in these cases, the desktop in desktop video is also configured as a table surface, except that it is a virtual table. Precisely this feature, differently from the physical table top (as in Peñafiel Loaiza's work), is characterised by an ideally endless surface and depth. When Henrot explores the Smithsonian, she encounters the physical archives where she finds the materials for her video. However, when they are filmed or photographed or, again, researched online, the space to experiment with them extends exponentially: for an open drawer in the library we are given multiple windows in the online environment; for an image retrieved we are provided with a host of variations on the theme stacked in their exquisitely virtual versions on the desktop. Although translating into the virtual realm of the interface a very common physical gesture occurring on a 'real' table, the stacking strategy is often adopted in desktop cinema pieces to connect the on and off-screen worlds. In the former, an option such as the multiple desktops discussed in chapter 2, would potentially extend to infinity the room at the disposal of the narrative at the centre of the screen capture project. At the same time, the stacking effect similarly multiplies the planes available to the maker, introducing by way of 3D rendering an enhanced room for action. Whilst this action often takes the shape of an ordered organisation of visual and textual materials, thereby offering a direct visual desktop correspondence to what would happen on the top of a physical desk (i.e. photographs as it happens in Suneil Sanzgiri's *At Home but Not at Home*, documents in Belit Sag's *Disruption*, or pieces of information in the form of brief notes and post-its in Iris Blauensteiner's *the_other_images*—films that are discussed with their directors at chapter 5), it is interesting to underline that the order given to these materials is employed by artists to refer to something else. Advancing or keeping a visual element at the

back of a stack means to intervene in the degree of visibility given to certain content, and this gesture taps into the issue of power relations: the relationship between computer windows is attributed to their disposition and the hierarchy characterising it. These dynamics are an aspect to which artists seem to be very sensitive and careful, as comes to the surface in the roundtable included at the end of this book.

In this instance, a crucial role is given to the agency determining such a hierarchy. The entity (very often the pointer) and the gesture responsible for the disposition and the ordering action occurring on the desktop are, in conclusion, crucial. According to Suneil Sanzgiri, the intervention of the artist operates a bricolage that largely impacts on the hierarchical presentation of visuals by mobilising and subverting it. Strategies such as the stacking mode, then, become powerful tools to underline the unfixity of hierarchies that organise our knowledge and our representation of the world, ultimately helping us reconsider relationships of power.

The desktop, in this perspective, becomes in turn the space where this reconfiguration can take place through a gesture of repositioning and of unexpected arrangement able to re-design and push hierarchical orders. In this sense, gesturing on the desktop allows for a multi-layered experience, in line with the challenge to approach complexity that is at stake for Henrot in *Grosse Fatigue*. The potential for reconfiguration that is enabled, as well as for the actions described so far are all made technically possible through mediated gestures. They enact the authors' thinking—in the case of Henrot, her associative, 'savage' thinking—and in so doing they make visible an operative attitude. This attitude translates in turn into a (more or less) trackable motion of the digital objects we see on screen, which feed into the final artwork that is created.

I would like to suggest that the facticity theorized by Heidegger of referred to in chapter 2 coincides precisely with this mechanism that describes the activation of a creative process. This may well tell a story—the myth of the creation of the universe, the quest for one's origins, or else in other desktop videos—but in a way, and more importantly, it becomes the object of its own discursive practice by way of an aestheticisation of the operational gestures in its plastic qualities, performed on the surface

of the desktop. Put differently, the digital environment of the desktop becomes the site of a mediated gesturality that allows us to do something and captures a cineplastic attitude.

Cineplastics, a Hundred Years Later

In his 1923 essay *De la cineplastique* (*The Art of Cineplastics*), Élie Faure commented on the at the time new cinematic medium. In line with modernist critics and scholars, Faure acknowledges the theatrical ability of cinema to allow for a collective spectacle, and yet differently from theatre, it acts in a novel fashion. In his view, cinema "transform[s] the spectacle [and] act[s] on the aesthetic and social transformation of man himself with a power which [he] consider[s] to exceed the most extravagant predictions made for it" [Faure 1923, 19-20]. Such faith in the political potential of the cinema depends upon the fact that differently from the pantomime, which "is a psychological art before being a plastic art" cinema is "plastic first: it represents a sort of moving architecture."

Gesturality, we shall infer, is what lies behind Faure's cineplastics, the "art of expressing form in repose or in movement" [24]. In other words it refers to a subject or object gesturing. It is "living rhythm and its repetition in time" that, according to Faure, "are what characterize cineplastics" [25]. Such inclination to not only capture and intelligibly represent but also to convey and affectively reproduce the ongoing nature of motion is an inherent feature of cinema as an art ontologically taking shape "in plastics".

That the starting point of the art of the moving picture is in plastics, seems to be beyond all doubt. To whatever form of expression, as yet scarcely suspected, it may lead us, it is by volumes, arabesques, gestures, attitudes, relationships, associations, contrasts and passages of tone—the whole animated and insensibly modified from one fraction of a second to another—that it will impress our sensibility and act on our intelligence by

the intermediation of our eyes ^(Faure 1923, 29).

I am not entirely comfortable in aligning with an ontological position and, certainly, from the vantage point of someone writing a century later, I cannot unfortunately share Faure's conclusion that "Cineplastics will doubtless be the spiritual ornament sought [to develop] in the crowd the sense of confidence, of harmony, of cohesion" [45]. However, perhaps more modestly, the rapid visualisation of "volumes, arabesques, gestures, attitudes, relationships, associations, contrasts and passages" he mentions may work as a rather visionary description of what we see happening on screen today with desktop cinema.
The fascinating concept of cineplastics, in other words, to the important notions describing desktop cinema by integrating the gesturality occurring on the surface and the recesses of the desktop with a feature characterising the logics regulating the operational images that compose the works belonging to this genre.

If in the twenties of the last century the modulation of volume and tonality inherent to the images unfolding before our eyes hooked unprepared, astonished spectators, caught their attention, and possibly triggered their feelings and psychological reaction contributing to establish cinema's status as a mode of collective spectacle, in our twenties the plasticity at stake necessarily has to address profoundly media literate viewers, so well-accustomed to the medium that only the pretended unveiling of its machine and the sense of participation in its making may keep them in front of the screen. Oddly, then, if for Faure the well-scripted, refined, polished "composition of the film […] fixed once for all" is considered as the "character that the plastic arts are the only ones to possess" [Faure 1923, 23], I would instead suggest that it is rather in the pragmatic, gestural sense of things happening, ongoing, unfolding that we can recognise a cineplastic quality of the image today. Put differently, a cineplastics for the 21st century tells of the facticity of technical, poor, postdigital images emphasising their processual and operational nature. The images composing desktop cinema are digital cineplastics captured; they underscore an interest and attention for processes as they take place, unfold, and give themselves to the viewers in their making, *en train de se faire*.

Looked at in light of cineplastics, desktop cinema is nearly musical, an aspect that is dealt with specifically in chapter 4. For now, to bring the many intertwined concepts discussed in this section to a close, I would highlight how they all point to a broader trend to which desktop cinema contributes, and that is not limited to this genre. Such a trend consists of an emerging operational paradigm of contemporary images typical of our postdigital age, whereby technicalities and operative features become crucial not only literally, as in desktop cinema where they are reconstructed for display purposes and nearly celebrated, but also metaphorically, as a new mode of attributing worth and value to images.

Whilst I showed at length how the images feeding into desktop cinema are poor, technical, postdigital and hint at an operational quality which is not technically such but only exhibits an operational skill, it is interesting to remember Thomas Elsaesser's take on operative images as "instructions for action." According to him, in the digital media environment the instructive function seems to have become "the new default value of all image-making" (Elsaesser and Alberro 2014). Furthermore, the semiotic value connected to the meaning of images is replaced by an exhibition value, for the actual gesture of displaying an image becomes more relevant than the content of the image per se. Such an exhibition value, as Marie-France Rafael has observed "derives from the displayability and visibility of a work of art," establishing the contours of a situation where "the exhibition value has now become the work of art itself" (Rafael 2022, 31).

In the visual regime established on the basis of such a post-semiocapitalist frame[11], the images employed and produced in *Grosse Fatigue* work like many current "archives-cum-dataset" (though their nature is technically different), in so far as they rely on a kind of gesturality that "recircuits forms of micropolitics of the body" (Parikka 2023, 75). The same visual regime encompasses a variety of genres and formats; desktop cinema is just one that ought to be coupled, for example, with video tutorials, warfare videos, backstage videos, but also—more trivially and yet more often—unboxing videos, or *BeReal* reels. All these kinds of videos offer a set of images displaying actions and gestures once

occluded from the viewers' eyes, because they are in fact born as ancillary. The 'spectacle' or the actual event they refer to was simply meant to be located logically beyond and temporally after the actions that are now displayed.

They stand for a fake allowance for a freer voyeurism, which slightly perversely moves the viewers' interest and anticipation to the preparation, the working phases, an exaggerated in-progress mode, and away from the final outcome of a process. Hence the caveat to the terminology proposed in chapter 1 as regards documentary vs. spectacle: as these videos, desktop cinema pieces emerge as documentary images, because they are originally born as behind the scenes footage documenting what happens aside from the main scene. However, as they slowly become the main scene, their spontaneous documentary feature leaves room for a properly crafted stage that the performativity element discussed above should hopefully have highlighted—as in a movie. Desktop cinema, in such a perspective, becomes an interesting point of entry to focus a much wider visual culture phenomenon revolving around an aestheticised exhibition and self-exhibition.

The staged transparency characterising the genre shares a logic that subtly features data set and AI-based art and upon which Parikka reflects as he proposes the concept of invisual practices. If invisuality "holds on to the legacy of visuality while denouncing it" (Parikka 2023, 75), then both invisual practices and desktop cinema entail a kind of transparency that "is being sustained as the ideological backdrop for a machine that is primarily meant to make visible" (71).

The emphasis placed on transparent gesture and processuality also tap into such an aesthetics, contributing to it as key components satisfying a need for immediacy that conversely translates into the rather opaque transparency of a painstaking image-production effort. The implicit contradiction is what makes desktop cinema a site of tension and critical refection, which allows the use and misuse of digital technology to creative ends. This rich complexity at the heart of the desktop opens a way forward for reclaiming the desktop and our digital selves at large. Indeed, reappropriating these technologies with poetic and political purpose has thus far produced numerous excellent creative outcomes, such as *Grosse Fatigue*.

GROSSE_FATIGUE

HISTORY_OF_UNIVERSE

[fig. 1.1]

[fig. 1.2]

Size of this preview: 800 × 353 pixels. Other resolution: 320 × 141 pixels.
Full resolution (SVG file, nominally 940 × 415 pixels, file size: 1.45 MB)

[fig. 1.3]

science

instinct

opposite reunited

FEAR
Medusa
Tiresias
mimicry / symmetry

SEDUCTION
feminine seduction
male

FASCINATION
Hermaphrodite
Ardhanari
sex change

horror genre

Cinema

ADN
reptilian brain
python ≈ wisdom
Quetzalcoatl (inventor of mathematics)
language / scripture (tamil letters)
mysterious scripture — code — Poliphile
Alchemy

darkness

secret

snake tongue

Scopophilia

breath

music
dance
Shiva Nataraja

hypnosis (Jungle book
&Tintin, Cigars
of the Pharaon)

is whispering

DESIRE
bisexuality

light

Language

twist around

Judgement

Adam & Eve
orginal sin
— devil
knowledge

ondulate

is dangerous

SEXE

phallus
fertility (naga temple at Gokarna)
unconscious

DEATH
between 10 à 50 000 death in India
suicide —
Nehebkau   (egypt)
Laocoon

hair
ropes

serpent

LIFE

Cleopatra

ties

live underground

Shiva
to tame the fear
lingam / yoni
crescent moon
fire

roots

PAIN

muscle

is elongate (legless)

change skin

RECOVERY
use of the venom in pharmacy
(small roman Bronze at Le louvre) caduceus
Yoga

Kundalini
chignon of Shiva (Jamatâkuta)
mountain (Arunachala pilgrimage)

METAMORPHOSIS

resurrection

Hermes

mâyâ

CREATION
Shiva-Purâna
Amritamanthana
Shiva bindu
Oroboros
beginning of live on earth   primitive animal

DESTRUCTION
Apophis
Leviathan
(sea monsters)

cosmic serpent

Axis mundi

sky

enemy of the birds

earth

Nehushtan (bronze Serpent) (judaism tradition)

cosmological connexion

[fig. 1.4]

[fig. 1.5]

[fig. 2.1]

The Night

Dorsale Bossale

00:00:06

[fig. 2.2]

Most of the time they used to dis

[fig. 2.3]

scuss the things in Portuguese,
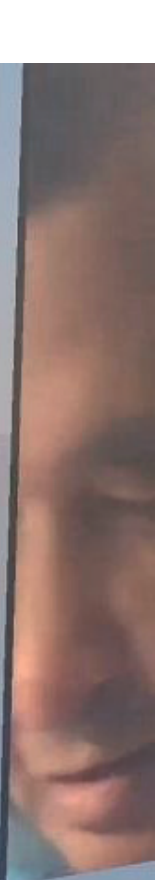
[fig. 2.4]

[fig. 2.5]

[fig. 3.1]
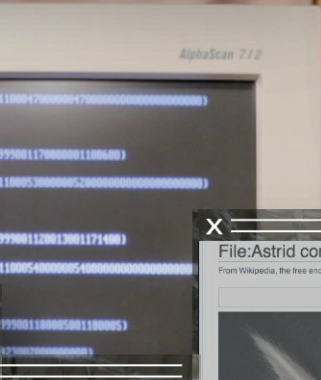
File:Astrid com orelhonas-crop.jpg

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

File | File history | File usage | Global file usage | Metadata

Size of this preview: 668 × 599 pixels. Other resolutions: 268 × 24...
Full resolution (836 × 750 pixels, file size: 143 KB, MI...

Description Odd-eyed cat, photograph showing eyeshine and red-eye effect.

AlphaScan 7/2

[fig. 3.2]

[fig. 3.3]

[fig. 3.4]

[fig. 3.5]

SPARK

SPARK

WAS

http://127.0...

http://127...

EVEN IN
NOTHINGNESS

I TOLD
YOU

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carnatio...

jasmine...

CLOUD

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http://127.0.0.1:6052\\only/heaven.ht...

PHILOSOPHY

HELP

SPARK

MOVING

morning...

snowdro...

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jasmine...

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THIS

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This just might
be returning

THIS

CLOUD

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LOVE

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WITH ME

LOVE

album.gif...

BIRDS

carnatio...

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TRANSIENCE

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LOVE

iris.gif (...

album.gif...

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SEEKING

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HERE

LOVE

SEEKING

Desktop Diary #1

some things I saved to my desktop last mon

MOLLY SODA
6 JUN 2023

♡ 11   💬 2

Hi everyone and welcome back to my blog. F
rolls off the tongue. Blog. Much nicer to say
post (see last month's), I'm going to share so

What sits on my desktop is a good indicator
thinking about. In a way, it's a more telling a
anything I could write. It's a vision board, a

Share •••

Blog, what a beautiful word. It just sort of
that Vlog. In lieu of a monthly favorites
ome things I saved to my desktop.

of what I'm interested in, working on, and
account of what I've been up to than
diary, a messy room.

[fig. 3.7]

🗁 BUTTERFLIES

Q Search

| littlebutters.gif | M81.gif | M98.gif | M115.gif | M118.gif |

| M140.gif | M141.gif | M206.gif | M261.gif | M299.gif |

| M300.gif | M305.gif | M346.gif | M352.gif | M379.gif |

| M380.gif | M405.gif | M415.gif | M445.gif | M454.gif |

| M465.gif | M511.gif | M513.gif | M522.gif | MARIPOSAS (1).gif |

[fig. 3.8]

1IMG_0980.jpg

rechnung133.jpeg

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Kalkulation-Milch 7.10. MA7_2.pdf (1 Seite)

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rech

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Anz. Datum 5.10.

Re: Zeitplan, die 2.

Kathrin Wojtowicz <Kath
an Judith

Liebe Judith,

eigentlich sind für die Woch
proben letztens so ergiebig
termine einfach so aus, wie

alles liebe-kathrin

[fig. 5.1]

rechnung83.jpeg

Z. Nr. 083

Mag. Peter Maur | Transport

ng und fotos.pdf (Seite 1 von 15)

skype

nung80.jpeg

9.jpeg

80

FOTOFACHLABOR
LINDENGASSE 7
1070 WIEN
KADMON G.m.b.H.
UID-Nr. ATU 56989389

Termine_27-2okt2008.jpeg

Oktober-November 2008

Freitag 31

Samstag 1

Kamera	JASCHA NOVAK
Produktion	KATHRIN WOJTOWICZ
	IRIS BLAUENSTEINER
Ausstattung/Kostüm	SIMONE RAAB
	BLANKA RADÓCZY
	ANDREA SIMEON
Setton	KONSTANTIN DROSSOS
Casting	WANDA LISM
Oberbeleuchter	MARKUS HARTHUM
Beleuchter	SETH STEVENS
	STEFAN REICHMANN
	ANDREAS WÖCKINGER
	JAKOB SLAVICEK

10

[fig. 5.2]

01:00

ghting.wav

00:18

Olivia_breathing.wav

02:13

2:12

2:44

that other places can't fill the gap, the void.

[fig. 5.3]

desktop cinema group1

[fig. 5.4]

Tools   Table   Window   Help

desktopcinema_roundtable

...dtable >   desktop cin...roundtable

rde ve dosya adlarında ara

Aa ~

Cristiano COLLEONI

[fig. 5.5]

Screenshot...at 16.12.10
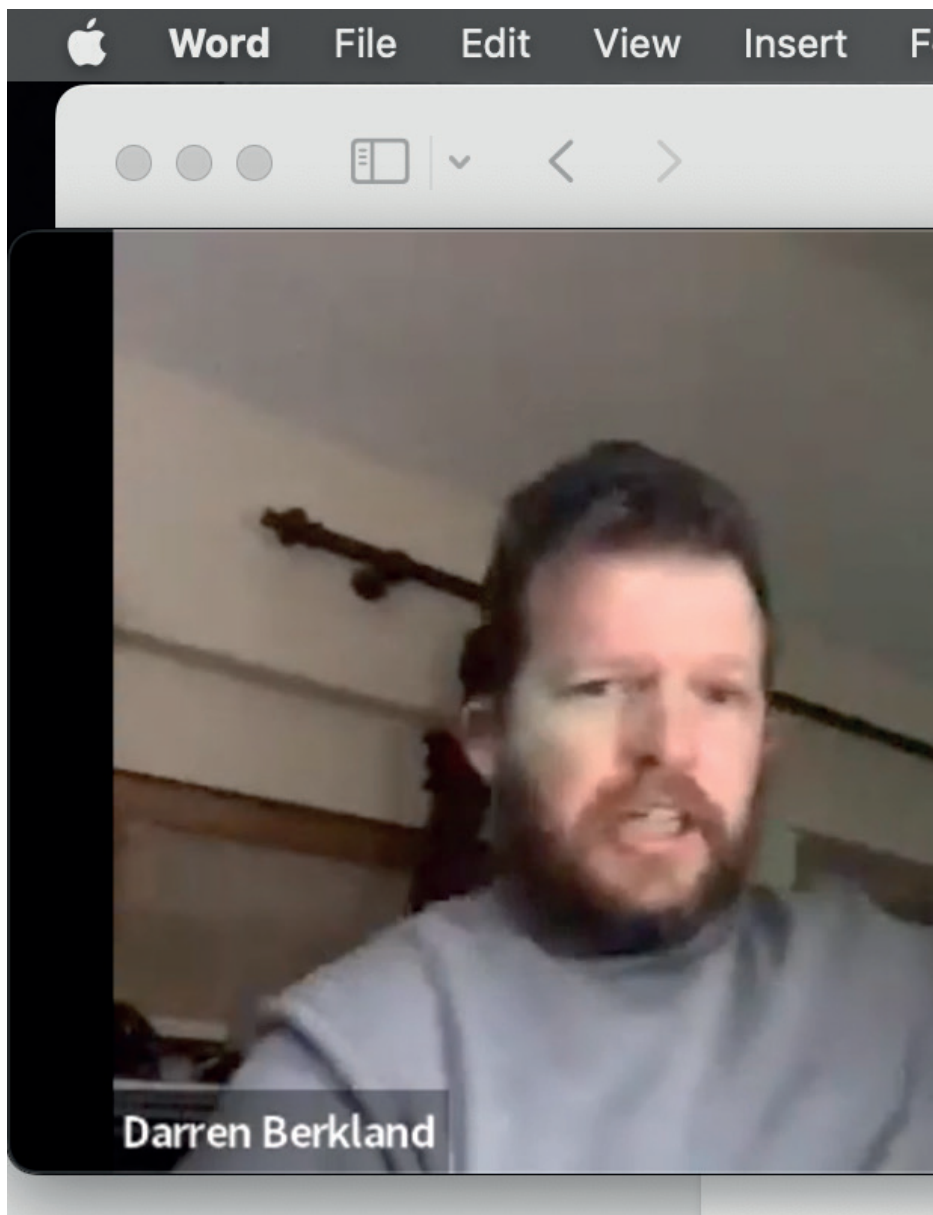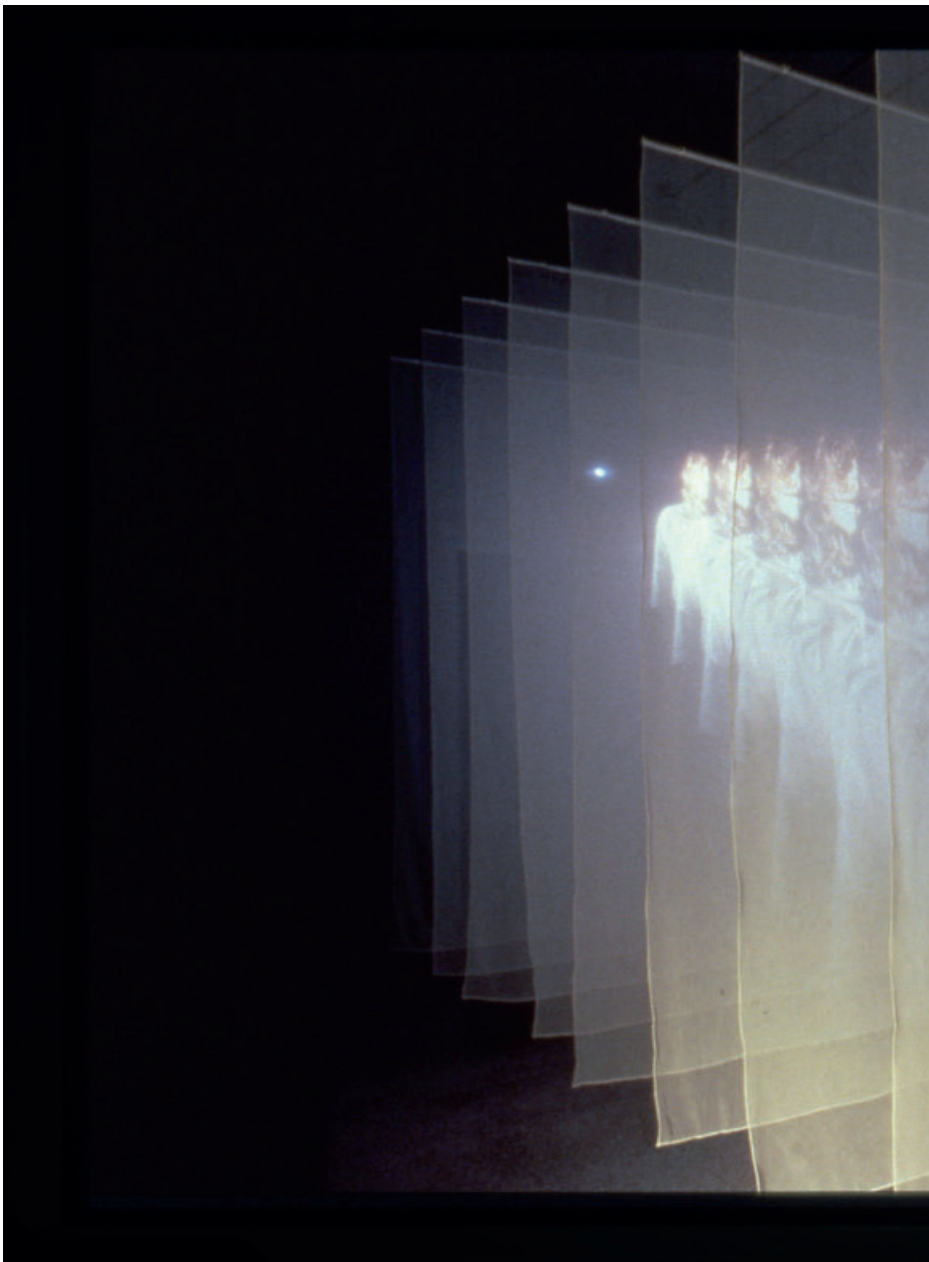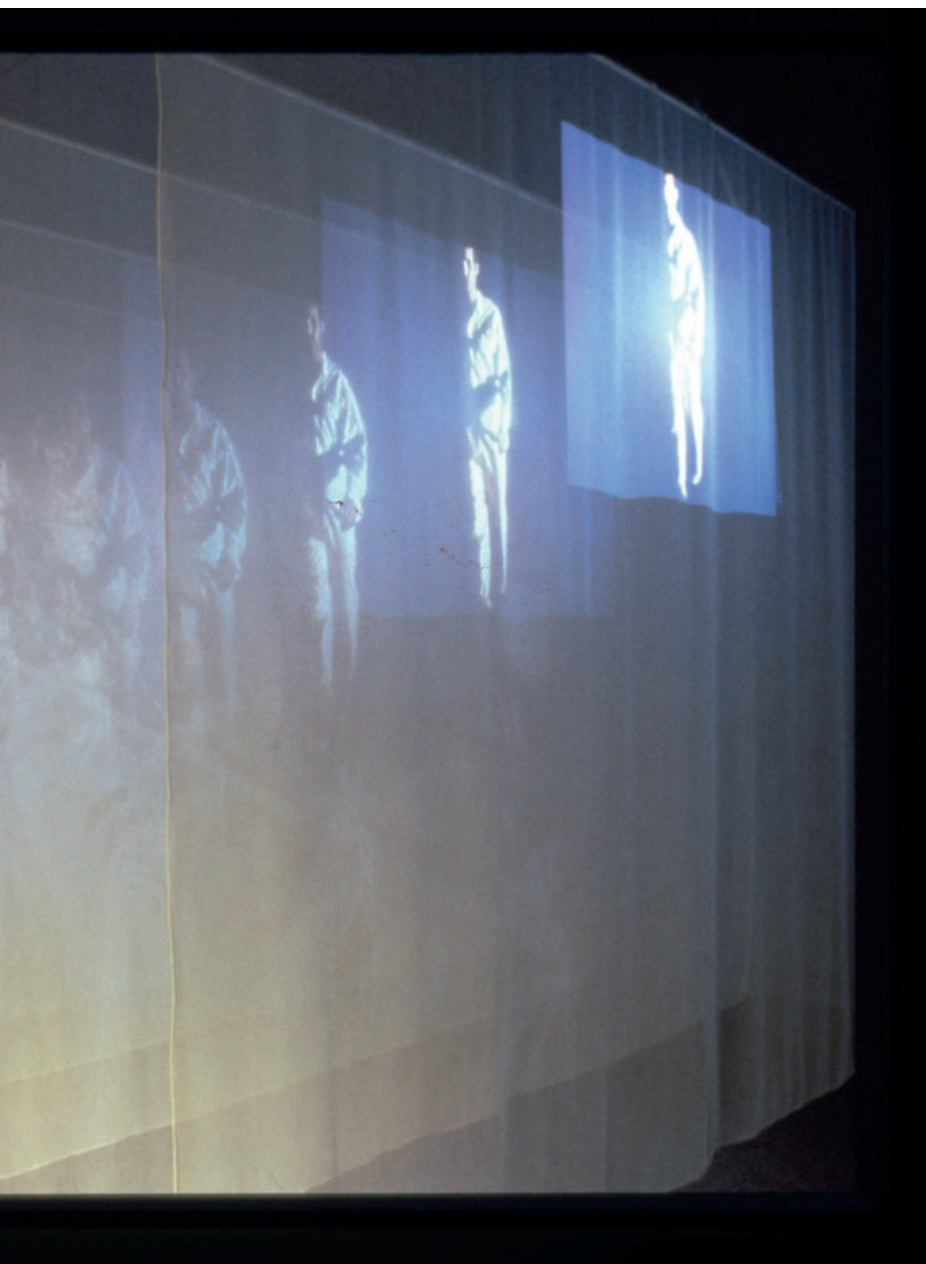
[fig. 5.6]

[fig. 5.7]

Bir grup asker Doğan Medya Ce

Chapter 4

Grosse Fatigue and Spoken Word: A Poem

In the old days,
The myths were stories we used to explain ourselves
But how can we explain
The way we hate ourselves?
But we are still mythical.
Kae Tempest

Seen in the context of cineplastics, as is proposed at the end of chapter 3, desktop cinema is almost musical. In his study *Une musique en train de se faire*, French composer Pascal Dusapin explains his creative process, comparing music to "the way the motion of thoughts takes shape" (Dusapin 2009, 32, my translation). This description resonates with the simultaneous opening of multiple windows on the desktop in the operations performed to reposition, reorder and arrange them, as well as in the act of browsing online and navigating across the desktop itself. Here, we may observe the implicit gesturing of the artist as well as the image in its becoming, an image that conveys a powerful impression of potentiality that is able to revamp the sense of making, of things coming into shape. Such processes unfolding on-screen describe—as Manning and Massumi (2014) also write—a "thought in the act," able to unravel the facticity of the scene and of the (subjects and) objects captured therein.

The presence and the activity of the interface, here, do not simply "describe the complexity of a work's workings, but [visualise the activation of] its modalities of thought" (Manning and Massumi 2014, ix), that is, the interface appears both as a choreographed, aestheticised image, and it contextually serves as an actual technique, as a functional digital object. According to Brian Massumi, techniques belong "to the act [because they are] not descriptive devices—they are springboards. They are not framing devices—they activate a practice from within. They set in motion" (iix). This ability is confirmed by Galibert-Laîné and Lee with regard to their piece *Bottled Song* when they describe their practice as a way "to use media in order to articulate thoughts and ideas" (Galibert-Laîné and Lee 2020). Again, processes are placed under the spotlight; these can hint at an artist's creative process

but also, simply, they may evoke a much broader interest and a need for a sense of ongoingness, spontaneity, open-ended-ness, immediacy and real-timeness, even as these qualities are quite often just supposed, most of the times fake, meticulously scripted, staged and carefully choreographed. Whilst the main narrative built up so far refers mainly to the visuals, in so far as the images were caught as they reveal and feed a discourse that revolves around the idea of making visible how things are made, these would not see the light at all without an aural element, chiefly consisting of a cadence providing pace to the gestures unfolding on the desktop.

On multiple occasions, Camille Henrot has emphasised the central role of the voice-over in her artwork. Profoundly differ-ent from her previous moving image production, which is char-acterised by an avant-gardist style where the visuals alone play the key role, in *Grosse Fatigue*, the aural component contrib-utes significantly to the shape of the final video, both in terms of musical score and text. The latter consists of a poem that imposes a clear rhythm on the piece, which is eventually rein-forced and underscored by the drum, as well as by electronic sounds. The collaboration with the multimedia artist Akwetey Orraca-Tetteh as the performer of the text ensures a delivery in the style of spoken word poetry that underscores the rhythm of the piece, with a decisive pace noticeably influencing the increase or decrease of the overall tempo. This sound-image relationship is reminiscent of the artistic expression typical of The Last Poets, a New York-based group active in the seven-ties (Chauveau 2019, 95).

The piece also includes peculiar ticking sounds employed in association with the fast opening and closing of windows on screen, perhaps alluding to the click operations required to make this happen in the desktop environment. The final result is a soundtrack that mirrors the technical images (Flusser 2011 [1985]) used to produce the video, and thus enhances a sense of on-goingness, of a process captured in its unfolding. Specifically, the music conveys an organic sense of browsing, navigating and moving across the computer screen we see on screen. The words pronounced by the voice-over follow this beat, produc-ing a cohesive cadenced effect.

Based on a re-elaboration of a variety of creation myths ranging from oral traditions to religious and literary sources, from Sioux to Inuit, from Navajo to Shinto, from Islamic sacred texts to Kabbalah, the poem combines multiple traditions into one multifaceted story. Such a syncretic project mirrors the artist's effort to bring together many heterogeneous materials, and ultimately represents a key element central to the text's powerful steering role: "the topic was more easily reachable with a textual approach," Henrot argued in an interview, "especially because that is the way the story of the universe has been told for centuries in creation myths" (Bailey and Henrot, 2015).

The performativity of the text, explicitly composed to be performed aloud and reminiscent of non-written form of knowledge transmission, is in line with the choreographed and carefully planned nature of the piece discussed in previous chapters. This sensation is particularly created by the euphony of the spoken word and by the anaphoric structure that adopts repetition as a strategy to create a sense of familiarity in the listener, who expects the same words to come. The ultimate effect achieved through this syntax is a sort of chant, where word play, intonation and recitation craft a powerful rhythmic score.

The following is the full transcript of the poem composed by Henrot in collaboration with the American writer Jacob Bromberg and recited by the multidisciplinary artist Akwetey in voice-over. The transcript of the voice-over is mine. The line breaks respect the pauses.

In the beginning there was no earth, no water—nothing. There was
a single hill called Nunne Chaha.
In the beginning everything was dead.
In the beginning there was nothing, nothing at all. No light, no life,
no movement, no breath.
In the beginning there was an immense unit of energy.
In the beginning there was nothing but shadow and only darkness
and water and the great god Bumba.
In the beginning were quantum fluctuations.
In the beginning, the universe was a black egg where heaven and earth
were mixed together.
In the beginning there was an explosion.

In the beginning, a dark ocean washed on the shores of nothingness
and licked the edges of Night.

In the beginning was the eternal night Han.
In the beginning, before all things, there was Amma, and he rested
upon nothing.
In the beginning, Ptah the demiurge born from the essential ocean.
In the beginning, the fabric of space-time unfurled, it inflated.
In the beginning, the atoms were formed.
In the beginning a giant cobra floated on the waters.
In the beginning everything was still, there was no beginning.
In the beginning and in the Void, the Oldest of Old Gods was formed,
the world had no time, no shape, and no life, except in the mind of
the Creator.
In the beginning the Word already was.

There was no world then, only the white, yellow, blue, black, silver,
and red mists floating in the air.
In the beginning was only the sky above, and water and marshland
below.
In the beginning was nucleosynthesis.

And when the universe became transparent to light, then the Milky Way
took form,
Then there was no need for light on Dzambu Ling, for the gods emitted
a pure light from their own bodies,
Then the Creator was in the form of a man without bones,
Then the gravity of galaxies slowed the expansion of the universe,
Then were units of matter,
Then Pan Gu died and parts of his body became parts of the universe,
Then there was recombination, local contraction,
Then the Supreme God Ometeotl, being both masculine and feminine
spawned four children,
Then Ra created his wife Hathor with whom he had a son, Horus, who
married Isis,
Then Atem took his penis in his hand to obtain the pleasure of orgasm
thereby,
Then Iusaas was Lady of the Vulva and the Hand of God,
Then Ogo introduced disorder into the world by committing incest
with his mother Earth,

Then the first menstrual blood came from this union, as well as Yeban
and Andumbulu, the spirits of the underworld.

And there was violent relaxation,
And God said, "Let there be light" and there was light,
And God saw the light, that it was good,
Heart-of-Sky only says the word "Earth,"
And the earth rises, like a mist from the sea,
And Bumba vomited up the sun, and the sun dried up some of the water,
leaving land,
And when the earth was to be made, it fell down from the sky. Earth,
hills and stones, all fell down from the sky,
And the earth rose up like a mountain,
And She used many colours of earth which she mixed with saliva,
And his spit was the oceans and his phlegm was the earth,
And denser elements sank to the earth's core,
And the King above the Sky said, "Punch holes in the Earth, the water
will drain away."

The Creating Power then took many animals and birds from his great
pipe bag and spread them across the earth.
First came self-promoting chemicals, and then fat formed membranes,
And then came the green algae colonies in the sea,
And then the oxygen, oxygen.
Eight-faced air, air to make winds and breezes,
Air filled with sounds, air carrying oceans,

And from the protozoa came the animal,
And from the bacteria came the plant,
Then came the fungi from which came the fungi,
Then came the corals and the sponges and anemones,
Then came the arthropods from which came the fruit fly,
Then the molluscs from which came the bees,
And then came the vertebrates, the jawless fish
And then came the nautiloids in the Devonian age of fishes,
And then came the amphibians from the coelacanth,
And then came the birds from the coelacanth,
And after the flowering plants came the bees,
And after the bees came the snakes,
And after the snakes came the ants,
And after the ants came the creodonts,
And after the creodonts came the primates,
And after the primates came the song birds, the parrots, the loons,
the swifts,
And then came the butterflies and the moths,
And came the grasses,
And came the marsupials,
And came the pigs and cats from the coelacanth,
And came the deer,
And came the hyenas, the bears, the giraffes,
And then came the tree sloths, the hippopotami, the zebras,
the elephants, the lions, the dogs,
And then came the mammoths from which came nothing at all.

There was the beginning of stereovision,
There was a man who went out, crying "Hok—hok—hok" and the dogs
came hurrying out from the hummocks.
When Neanderthal man considered the mysteries of the world,
Homo Sapiens came next to replace him.
And Obtala, being drunk, fashioned imperfect figures
And one figure was made of clay, earth, sand, water—Nzame made
a new man, one who would know death,
And the man who would know death made a woman from a tree and
in the trees lived arboreal primatest
And the first man, Mwuetsi, became the moon
And the Moon and the Morning Star became our ancestors
And our ancestors were cut up into very small pieces
And the eyes perceived light and then colour and depth.

Then the Gods split humans in two, making them each search
for their lost half.
Then some degree of sperm competition took place.
Then Eve of the rib was adorned in jewellery.
Then a brother and sister were locked in a yellow wooden drum.
Then the stones that they threw became men, became women.
Then the three sons of Bor found two stems of wood, which they
shaped into a woman and into a man.

And language was used to praise Heart-of-Sky rightly.
And mankind discovered the knowledge of history and nature,
of minerals, vegetables, animals and elements,
the knowledge of logic and the art of thinking,
the sciences of gratification and those of utility,
the art of remembering and pure mathematics,
the science of physics, the science of medicine,
the science of botany, the science of chemistry,
the knowledge of politics, the knowledge of alphabets,
the knowledge of magic and the science of God,
the knowledge of virtue and the mechanics of poetry,
the science of laws and the science of commerce,
the metaphysics of bodies and the transcendental geometry,
the dynamics, the hydraulics, the optics, the dioptrics, the acoustics
and grammar,
music, cosmology, geography,
orthography, chronology, zoology,
physiology, pathology,
astrology, aerology and more.

Then there was promiscuity and monogamy and polygyny
and polyandry and polygynandry.
Then Mayshe and Mashyane fulfilled their desire.

The whole earth was heavy and then Yahweh rested.

And Pan Gu felt lonely
And Heart-of-Sky felt lonely with the loneliness that ends the
worlds.

Who can understand the loneliness of gods?
Yaweh was lonely
And Ogo was lonely
Lonely like Wak
And lonely like Allah.
Loneliness was all in all each and each of each every
Surrounding surroundings surrendered to selves that
Speaking a simple word.
Snapping two fingers, or just thinking a thought
Lift loneliness and divide it in portions so that
Every electron is lonely as it flies around its lonely nucleus,
The nucleus, the heart of this.

But the Universe continues to expand and distend
indefinitely, indefinitely, indefinitely,
And Obatala settled down with the cat for company and grew bored
with his routine.
And humans evolved from the same clade as lemurs, rabbits and
rodents.
He decided to create beings like himself to keep him company.
In the beginning, there was no one to praise God's glory.
The sun bearer hauls the sun across the sky on his back.
Woman who fell from the sky, rested on turtle's back.
God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it He
had rested from all his work.
The arrow of time points to the heat death of the universe.
The whole earth was heavy
And then Yahweh rested.
Relaxation is the settling of a system into equilibrium.
Resting, Pan Gu laid down and resting, he died.

The arrow of time.
Heat death of the universe.
Pan Gu laid down and resting, he died.

Chapter 5

Experiments in Desktop Cinema: A Roundtable

This chapter offers primary research materials gathered within the framework of a roundtable devoted to desktop cinema that brought together scholars and artists, who both faced and are facing the challenges posed by this emerging genre in their research. Taking place in a blended mode, both online and in Venice in April 2022, the session involved the master's students of the Visual Cultures class of 2022[1] at Ca' Foscari and included the participation of international speakers, including: writer and filmmaker Iris Blauensteiner, artist, filmmaker and educator Belit Sag, and artist, filmmaker and researcher Suneil Sanzgiri, as well as colleagues Darren Berkland and Shane Denson. A biographical note for the speakers is provided at the end of the transcription in order to offer more context for the references mentioned during the conversation.

The roundtable was led by the author with the main objective of attempting a definition of desktop cinema as a genre and highlighting its key features both in theoretical and practice-based terms. It is precisely the combination of the two latter elements that appears to be significant and to aid in grasping the nature of an object that is so heavily shaped by a sense of ongoingness. This two-fold approach allowed us to underline from a variety of perspectives the central role of the processual aspect and its visualisation, albeit fabricated and choreographed, as thoroughly discussed in chapter 3. Multiple references in the discussion below point to a number of films screened following the roundtable, of which key visuals are provided to complement the text. The screening session was hosted by the Teatro Ca' Foscari a Santa Marta and was comprised of the following films: *the_other_images* (Iris Blauensteiner, 2018), *At Home but Not at Home* (Suneil Sanzgiri, 2019), *New Acid* (Basim Magdy, 2019) and *Disruption* (Belit Sag, 2016).

The blended format of the session, amplified by the films, all addressing and embracing desktop cinema as a visual strategy for their narrative, also speaks to the content discussed in theoretical and critical terms. In other words, by interfacing with on- and off-line worlds, the roundtable puts into practice the issues it aimed at discussing, utilising a desktop as a working space for video-recording, potential screen capture and room for experiment. Such a blended nature reinforces the argument that the images typical of desktop cinema move across the

lived and on-screen spheres, and thus belong to the postdigital dimension, as proposed in chapter 2. Ironically, the screenshots documenting the session echo this postdigital element, and aim to underscore how the roundtable served as a meta-discussion of the topics explored. In this sense, the session is an exchange of opinions, but it also offers speculative knowledge that illuminates the state of the art of an emerging genre with unpublished statements. The brief given to the speakers was in effect to prepare a short statement about their perspective on desktop cinema—if they had any at all—including whether they had ever used the screen capture technique in their artistic research or the concept in their scholarly work. The following transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

MDR	Miriam De Rosa	SS	Suneil Sanzgiri
SD	Shane Denson	DB	Darren Berkland
IB	Iris Blauensteiner	S	Student
BS	Belit Sag		

MDR

I would like to open this session by saying that I am very grateful to all participants taking part in this. Each of the speaker has some experience in thinking about and confronting the desktop as a site of work for their artistic practice, which includes with some fluctuations and variations desktop cinema. I am also really happy to have the students of the Visual Cultures class with us, as they are also experimenting with desktop works, in terms of interrogating the desktop as an object of study, and as a dense surface interesting to be looked at. At the same time, they are experimenting the desktop as a site for practice—Belit Sag who is with us in Venice helped us out in a hands-on session, practicing creatively with the desktop, so the students who are attending are all in the process of putting together desktop clips. This two-fold aspect—theory and creative thinking—is the inspiration of today's session. The plan is for each of our speakers to share our statements on desktop cinema,

so that we can understand what it means to them followed by discussion. Maybe I can kick off the conversation by sharing how my own interest in desktop cinema emerges thanks to a number of different circumstances and factors. Previous research around digital images and postcinema, but also the encounter with the approach of media archaeology, whose typical attention for media grasped in their materiality brought me to think through the materiality of digital images. This topic really comes up clearly in some of the films by the directors we have here and led me to ask questions not only about the materiality of digital images but also about how it is represented. Being interested in artists' films, I was fortunate enough to go to various festivals and I quickly realised the way filmmakers ask and present this idea of the materiality of digital images. Their work provided a visualisation for concepts that theory was not quite attending to yet. Meeting with Belit and Iris at Alternative Film and Video in Belgrade[2] and talking to them, as well as coming across Suneil's film at the Rotterdam Film Festival and eventually reaching out to him to talk about it were incredibly enriching experiences for me, not only because they gave me a lot to think about but also because they fed directly into my way of thinking and practicing the desktop [as a creative locus]. The continued conversations with colleagues, too, were instrumental in translating these thoughts in my own language, and so in my writing I tried to come up with a possible definition of desktop film. For the purpose of sharing a statement, I shaped the outcome of my investigation into a 'desktop cinema manifesto' in four points:

1.   Desktop cinema is about translating into visuals a gesture that is digitally mediated and occurs thanks to a graphic interface.
2.   Desktop cinema embeds the interface and the procedures that this allows for in the aesthetics of a screen captured video.
3.   Desktop cinema speaks of our familiarity with screens and interfaces in the contemporary world. It is indeed a very contemporary object, however, it taps into classic forms of artistic expression such as performance, and classic narrative techniques such as the breaking of the fourth wall and the unveiling of backstage—except that here the supposed spontaneity that can be found in the backstage is also well-rehearsed and choreographed.
4.   Considering all of the above, desktop cinema is ultimately about labour—that of the author of the performance but also of the machine, and of the image as well (i.e. that which happens on the desktop).

This led me to a synthetic definition of desktop cinema as an emerging genre of films incorporating the desktop environment in the narrative by way of a combination of pre-recorded screen captured footage, other sources including original found footage, original footage, phone-footage, screen-device delivered data, so mixed material that I suppose speaks a lot of the visual cultures and the imagery we are surrounded by and we contribute to. These notes are just one way to break the ice and provide some entry points into the topic to enable further discussion.

SD   Thanks a lot for having me and for this opening, which I think resonates a lot with what I have to say. The reason for the proliferation of desktop cinema across narrative, documentary and experimental forms demands interrogation in terms of the overlapping technological, formal, political and experiential dimensions that it mobilises. As I argue in my book *Discorrelated Images* (2020), the mismatch between the time of human experience and the time of the computer has broadly aesthetic implications,

even if they are only indirectly or occasionally perceptible, for example in glitches, compression artefacts, buffering, things of that nature. Fictional productions such as the desktop horror movie *Unfriended* from 2014 or the pandemic-era zoom-based movie *Host* from 2020[3] capitalise on these transformations by re-situating digital devices and networks as new media for ghosts, demons and other forms of evil, offering self-reflexive explorations of digital temporality and its glitchy relations to human experience. Ultimately the anxiety harnessed in these movies concerns the new parameters of realism or reality itself, including above all the political question of collectivity and its constitution in a networked world. Desktop documentaries such as the *Bottled Songs* project by Kevin B. Lee and Chloé Galibert-Laîné (2020) takes up these questions and redirects them to contemporary realities such as online terrorism recruitment. Experimental works by artists such as Camille Henrot or Louis Henderson probe the desktop as the site of environmental and even cosmic changes. And so, while they are all very different in form and function, I think we need to look at all of these different forms side by side in order to account for the broadly affective material and social stakes of discorrelation as it manifests itself in desktop cinema's aesthetic appropriation of the computer screen. So let me start more generally: sometime in 2020, didn't all cinema become desktop cinema? Under the conditions of the pandemic many new film releases have gone straight to streaming services. We were able to watch them on our laptops or desktop computers. Of course, many of us choose to watch new releases on a television set but I would argue that from a technical perspective, there's very little difference, as digital televisions operate

with the same principles of computational processing, of streaming, buffering and decoding as our actual computers. So, while the living room as a dispositif might be somewhat different, we can count it as functionally similar to the now pervasive desktop cinema experience of 2020 and beyond.

But we can go even further: sometime in 2020, didn't all experience become 'desktop experience'? It certainly feels that way, sometimes: zoom delivers images that are no different, from the point of view of the computer, from the movies we stream, and the videoconferencing platform might in fact deliver a better image of many underlying processes, as well as social dynamics. Because we communicate in so-called real time, we notice the lags, the hiccups, the temporal mismatches and efforts to mask them even more in pre-recorded movies. In these mismatches, in moments when we suddenly become aware that the screen has frozen but it resumes before we can fully process this information, or when our interlocutors' speech is just perceptibly accelerated as the buffer discharges in order to catch back up to the present. In such moments we find ourselves out of phase with one another, though we might not be able to consciously identify or process this feeling. The temporal hiccups that we experience on zoom point to the central discorrelation between computer processing and human perception that characterises contemporary images, including those of desktop cinema proper, hence distinguishing them as postcinematic images. By this, I do not suggest that cinema is dead or over, but is in a sense a thing of the past; literally cinema in its traditional guises is a recording of the past, while postcinematic images are subject to real-time processing, turning playback in an original rendition or interpretation of encoding data into structures and streams of

pixels on our screens. And because this takes place before our very eyes, where 'before' can be understood both spatially and temporally, this process causes cinema's previously separate camera and projector to collapse into postcinema generative screen, producing an indistinction that any serious theorisation of desktop cinema experiential and philosophical stakes will have to account for.

The 2014 horror movie *Unfriended* illustrates this indistinction and connects it to contemporary social reality by way of a glitchy desktop interface. Here the screen is doubled, serving both as a diegetic object, and as an extra-diegetic environment that reproduces the characters' experiences, while in real time framing our own. Glitches foreground a temporal dimension of discorrelation, which marks the reality of our image worlds as fragile and shaken by processes that bypass our subjective perceptions. Finally, the movie links this interrogation of what may be called a postcinematic realism to the question of collectivity and the social in this world of the desktop.

In a different vein, Chloé Galibert-Laîné and Kevin B. Lee's ongoing collaboration Bottled Songs provides a powerful picture of this new realism by way of a triangulation of computation image infrastructures, online collectives and what they call our 'desktop subjectivities'. Consisting of a series of video-graphic letters to one another about their ongoing research into terrorism recruitment videos and underground networks, the work utilises screen recording software rather than cameras to document the researcher's and filmmaker's forays into what they call an unstable virtual environment of fear and attraction. Increasingly the video attests to the fractured and polyvalent reality that is mediated in the singular space of the screen, and the desktop is revealed as the site of unstable negotiations and framings

of subjectivity, a fracturing of moral, libidinal and perceptual agencies and allegiances in the networked environment. In yet a different mode, Louis Henderson's *All That is Solid* (2014) links the seemingly ethereal cloud popularised by Silicon Valley to the very material, political and environmental realities of Ghana's colonial history and its continuing role as an exporter of gold and recycler of e-waste. On Henderson's desktop we begin to see the broader ecological implications of our own desktop subjectivities. The desktop offers a series of recursively nested figure ground reversals that illustrate the ways that computers and their screens serve both as objects and as framing environments for our perception and action in the world, with all its colonial, racializing, and otherwise exploitative dependencies and implications.

Camille Henrot's poetic work *Grosse Fatigue* expands the purview of the desktop environment to the cosmic dimensions, restaging nothing less than the birth of the universe, as mediated through a variety of religious and secular narratives against the backdrop of a desktop wallpaper image of the milky way. In the process, scientific endeavours to catalogue human knowledge as enacted at the Smithsonian are crosspollinated with the emergent archive of the internet, including its tendencies to be distracted by cute cat pictures.

Finally, what unites all of these works which differ so dramatically in tone, style and purpose is a common aesthetic sensibility to the fact made clear by the pandemic but originating earlier, that computational devices and their screens have reshaped our modes of attention, perception and subjective being. The transformation is enabled by the discorrelation or mismatch between pre-existing speeds and scales of human existent experience and the underlying infrastructures and processes

of computation with which they are now confronted. Those processes are largely invisible to us, but rather than accept this invisibility, desktop cinema finds ways to make the transformation visible, showing us the desktop as both a ground and figure, an object and an environment, perhaps even a new cosmos within which we exist and must learn to take our bearings.

MDR   Thank you, that was very inspiring and very rich, Shane. I love the cat pictures in Henrot's film: they tap into the idea of distraction versus labour[4], as in, channelling our attention and the intellectual work required to operate with the desktop and with its discorrelated images—thanks for underlining that.
I would like to pass the word to Iris, whose film *the_other_images* (2018) offers excellent examples of such images [fig. 5.1].

IB   That is very true. I will get to that because I prepared a statement about my personal approach to the movie *the_other_images*, which we are going to see after the roundtable. I focussed on my subjective discoveries during the process of making the film, which was released in 2018 and made in 2017: since then a lot happened and we went through a lot digitally, so bear in mind the film was produced before that. It is an experimental essay short film and when I thought about it, a sentence that I read somewhere—I forgot where—came to my mind immediately, that is, the desktop is 'the face of the computer'. I think this was the initial idea I had for the film. The film is about a hard drive with 2.8 terabyte leftover data from a project that was shot 10 years earlier. The hard drive contained all my data from my very first short movie. During the movie the sub-

jective gaze, so to say, me as a character, sifts through this waste material, including out-takes, photographs, sounds, scripts, written passages or ideas. The data were archived well, but time transformed them, of course: not all data formats can be played anymore, or they cannot be played in the way they were meant to become visible through the current players, so their visibility changed. There are errors, image distortions and they disallow a comfortable recollection of the past, actually, images and sounds have sometimes become very unfamiliar. So *the_other_images* is a film about memories, the process of coming back to memories and also the change of the past connected to personal data. These require a different cinematic experience, I would say, a new narrative on the whole, and in the end that is why we have a new film with recycled materials.

MDR   So the key question for you was about mem-ory and the challenges posed by the digital when it comes to remembering.

IB   Yes, for me it was the question of memory and how remembering is possible when dig-ital storages fail or can't be accessed any-more. The possible answer in this movie was the form of recycling and reutilising the digi-tal personal archive. I guess it was about the decay of personal data and the inaccessibil-ity through current players, which also led to some glitch art experiments eventually includ-ed in the film. Someone asked me if I used any effects and the answer is no, it was the real material that was now glitched by the players. All the images and the sounds that I used in the movie are taken from my old hard drive, there was nothing additional [fig. 5.2].
             What I was also very interested in, was the intimacy of one's own computer, and as I

said the film is about personal archiving and re-watching data, then also about remembering through data and about composing a narration by collecting, choosing, and putting together new meaning. This was an emotional process, as it often is with memories, and it was a process occurring through the surface of the screen. As I said the perspective was subjective, because, of course, it is an essay film. There is a voice-over, which belongs to the actress who played in the movie, but she plays my point of view, and this is explicitly shown; this creates some kind of twist of which I am very proud. I believe the first inspiration for this, and more broadly, was Camille Henrot's *Grosse Fatigue*, which Shane also mentioned. The last part of my statement is about the making of the movie. While I was researching and opening all the data, I realised that this would become a desktop movie, because everything happens on screen; it has some cinematic parts in it, but we always come back to the space of the screen. I had a very free approach. I cut out some parts, files, passages, etc. It's not realistic all the time. It is sometimes very artificial and sometimes less so. Here, the desktop is the set with its own possibilities and restrictions and I asked myself how to use movement, how to use digital elements, and how to put everything into a narration, so I worked with very classic categories of cinema and, to me, the desktop was the stage. What was very challenging was to guide the attention or the gaze of the viewer, because so much is happening at the same time. I rehearsed a lot during the days of the recording with the movement of the cursor or with sequences, positions, transitions, how to record everything, how to choreograph everything—I practiced a lot. During the editing process I tried to condense processes on screen, for example finding a path through files

or folders, which were somehow boring for me to watch. For example, I thought that the computer symbols of the graphic interface are familiar to the viewers, who get the meaning super quickly, so I took them out. I also learned a lot about interface design aesthetics, but it was difficult to get a distance because they are so familiar to me, as for anybody working with a computer. The movie was made in 2017, it was only five years ago, but in that year the design and the applications changed a lot, so I think these kinds of movies have quite strong time markers inscribed in them, because technology changes so rapidly, as do applications, the quality of pictures, so time is very obviously written in. Possibilities to access the data are decreasing—I discuss that also in my movie—so each year it is less and less possible to make them visible, and when I thought about old analogue images, they also fade, so I compared them and digital ones, and I think each medium has its own conditions. I discovered that in a personal process while reflecting on memory, on selection, on rejection of images and on the composition of narration. So, in my work the perception of simultaneity, overlapping, and layering, plus the closeness and intimacy of the personal desktop makes the desktop itself an authentic location for the narration of memory.

MDR   Thank you, Iris, this is really insightful. Moreover, the idea of intimacy connected to screen devices is something that had not come up so far, and yet I think is crucial, as it confirms the importance of the subjective element. Thanks also for sharing the creative process and the challenges you encountered while putting together the film.
I would move on to Suneil to possibly reinforce the maker's perspective.

SS   Thank you again for the invitation. I wanted to talk a little bit about the three works [*At Home but Not at Home* (2019), *Letter from Your Far-Off Country* (2020), *Golden Jubilee* (2021)], which all use various forms and techniques of what can be considered desktop documentary in different ways, although not exclusively. The works combine a hybrid approach to thinking through the moving image in relation to how technology, and specifically screen-based technology such as the desktop, complicates the relationship to questions of identity and diaspora, as well as questions of decolonisation. The three works primarily focus on my relationship with my family in South Asia, the understanding of state-based identity within a diaspora, how the kind of ethno-nationalist grip of resurgent far-right religious identities ensnares identity into a consolidated space, and how a film can work against that. So, a lot of techniques that I am interested in in desktop cinema are in relationship with how it may complicate these questions of borders, nationalism, and through its multitudes of relationships to time—the instantaneousness Shane has referenced. I am going to share some materials and speed through the works to talk through some of the aesthetics. We have various forms of Google walk-throughs, which are captured by the 360-degree camera… these are pre-existing materials, not materials that I filmed, but as we see here there's stitching within the 360-degree perspective, where essentially the camera is looking in on itself and is unable to comprehend the image that it has seen, because of the way in which bodies move through space and move through time. To me this kind of blending, this almost grotesque form of stitching of bodies, speaks to a lot of the inability of the camera to capture the multitude of experiences of diaspora and of identity.

MDR   This describes well the intro to *At Home but Not at Home* [fig. 5.3].

SS   Yes, and the primary reason is because this is the first material I encountered—this was back in 2018—and it was just through Google search. My understanding of relationships to home, belonging and diaspora were mediated through the screen. This film was made before the pandemic, still I was doing online interviews with my father and there are email correspondences, where I have this kind of confession at the very beginning, talking about having not been to India ever in my life, and reaching out to a videographer in Goa to help with this project and essentially commissioning him to shoot drone footage. We'll talk a little bit about these terms of shooting, capturing footage etc, because there are complicated relationships to that language, and I think that language needs be reframed—but within this email is a sort of pre-requisite for understanding this relationship across borders, across space, across time. Having not been to India, I was seeing what the possibilities were for understanding my father's village through not only images that I did not take but that, as the videographer had said, have not been seen before. This area in Goa, where my father's village is located, had not been taken at this distance; some might say surveyed, but it's not a state-based surveillance, it's a more personal surveillance like a birds-eye view. The question how is identity constructed when diaspora is at a distance? which appears in the form of an explicit text in the film essentially runs throughout the three films, distance being primarily my distance in geographical relationship to this motherland or homeland, but also distance in relationship to time and space that is mediated through the desktop. So, we begin the whole series with this virtual relationship

taking the shape of skype interviews with my father that then take on different relationships throughout the three films. We have excerpts from other existing films; once again, how do images mediate our understanding of identity and heritage and histories? Specifically, there are scanned photographs but it's not just the photographs themselves, it's the searching, it's the navigating, it's the browser window as we see this kind of rapid movement across the screen. There are 3D renderings. There are investigations into the hollowness, perhaps, of some of these images and the breakdowns in these technologies. A lot of what I am interested in is the kind of margins of these technologies of the screen, whether it is 3D rendering or desktop-screen recordings, etc. I am interested in the ways these technologies begin to break down and what are the edges of these technologies: how do these edges point to or complicate our understanding of identity and diaspora, colonialism, borders, nationalism, as we see in the second film *Letters From Your Far-Off Country*.

Another interesting thing is this stacking effect: this is a 3D rendering but the way in which it mimics the kind of stacking of windows within our desktop screen, and the ways in which the stacking on the desktop is both a flattening but also a bricolage, helps us reconsider relationships of power but also a relationship of time and space. Here we have these kinds of glass panels of various images of my father throughout his life in Goa. Having this stacking, this multi-layered experience points once again to the desktop.

Here we have some 3D rendering as well, in which waves are created, and once again we see the stacking—the virtual appears on top of the immediate thing, i.e. the skype interview. Lastly, I am interested in renderings because they offer a kind of new reconfigurations of

imagination: by that I mean the way in which a 3D rendering is able to help us imagine alternatives, imagine virtual futures, imagine life outside the constraint of the camera. I think the desktop formally also has liberatory possibilities in terms of imagining different configurations, but how do these 3D renderings play into that? I would like to break down some of these terms just for consideration: the idea of screen capture I think entails a super complicated relationship given the colonial terminology that is inherent in this notion of capturing an image, of shooting an image, etc. relating back to the chronophotographic rifle which was the precursor to the moving image camera. So how might we be able to complicate that idea of screen capture? What does it mean to capture an image, to hold an image hostage? What does it mean to arrest an image? Another term for consideration is found footage: a lot of desktop works use this idea of found footage, in fact my film was nominated for a found footage award[5]. However, I would like to consider the term found footage also in relation to coloniality and the idea of discovery. Found footage is not something that is there for us to discover. I rather like to use a terminology that Ariella Azoulay uses, which is "co-conspirers through time." And I'll just leave it at that.

MDR   Thank you, you gave us so much to add to what we started to think through. The reference to Azoulay goes to her volume *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019), while these ideas of bricolage and of stacking, or again of rendering—these are techniques that crosscut different works and speak quite directly to the examples that Shane and Iris talked about, but also to the artistic research

of Belit. Shall I pass it on to you, Belit?

BS   Sure.

MDR I think you addressed the aesthetics Suneil was referring to in your work as well, even though it is not necessarily so explicit in terms of interface.

BS   Exactly, even though I am not using screen recording and we don't see the desktop in my films, I still use the aesthetic [fig. 5.4]. For me one of the essential points is that the effort and labour behind the making of the video is visible and lets us into the thought process that becomes the narration. *Disruption* was made in 2016 after the coup d'état attempt in Turkey and it is a deep dive into the headspace of being exposed to charged political events through the mediation of the screen and living in that space 24/7. Even though it doesn't use desktop recordings, the piece approaches the genre by using overlaid frames. This video was a way for me to think through the images in a more intuitive and improvised manner, the use of frames, and of a framing aesthetics, even though it is in the end very much choreographed, just like you said, Miriam. It's not only unpacking and revealing to people how the video itself is made, but it is also investigating what it is that the video is about. For me, it is an exploration through the media I am using, a process of unpacking, searching, investigating of a headspace I am myself in. One of the things the video speaks of is the violence that expands from the screen and how images of violence becomes the violence of images. Here clearly I am trying to talk about how the violence of the images is comparable to physical violence, which is leaking, spilling out of the frames. The mediated violence sustains the physical one.

To be as the audience—because, of course, I am positioning myself as the audience as well in relation to the desktop film I have seen—means to be in a position of witnessing. In *Disruption*, as a maker, I ask for such a witnessing position as well. I ask my thoughts and my translated affective experiences of witnessing to be witnessed. The layering of images and the aesthetics were one of the ways to bring in my own personal memories and my access to film history, and to tap into online and offline archives. Communal, collective, accessible archives are a recurrent theme; we cannot say this for each desktop cinema work, but in general, I find that this is a key aspect for the desktop cinema genre. What is compelling to me is also the critical engagement that desktop cinema asks with reference to the available content and media practices: it's not only the archive itself but the practices of remembrance. The film talks about how we remember, how we think and we make sense, and how we make connections, how power relations are linked to images, how we relate to them and how we try to dismantle them. So, these are also themes that I relate especially to *Disruption*.

MDR   These themes echo very much what Suneil discussed about his own work, too. It looks like the two of you are interested in very similar topics, but you relate them to different geographical and historical contexts, with the result of having two different and yet reverberating treatments of the image by way of an aesthetics characterised by visual strategies of playing with frames, the idea of surface, and with the screen that turn into very diverse films.

BS   It is also a way to translate film, video, social media histories, you know. In other moving image works as well, I take screenshots, Twit-

ter messages, and translate film, video, social media histories and knowledge to a new media context, which involves online media and social media, and refers to its own history, is self-referential and reflexive. Also, I am thinking how in a very simple way since March 2020, zoom meetings take us into the living spaces of people: desktop cinema does exactly the same, it opens up the workspace, we kick into people's living space and it feels like an intimate space. It doesn't have to be an intimate film in the end, but it gives a sense of intimacy due to the subject informing it. I am thinking of Kevin B. Lee's film *Transformers: the Premake* (2014), where we learn that his hard drive is named Farocki…

MDR   Very true. I realised myself that when I screenshotted my own desktop to create a visual for a talk devoted to desktop cinema my hard drive was plugged in and everybody can potentially know it is called Mnemosyne…

BS   These kinds of details, the personal choices of authors, add a very intimate layer that we get to know. Desktop cinema, in a way allows for research inwards and research outwards, which is another thing I am interested in. What is important to me is also the bodily experience embedded in desktop cinema: the mouse movements are very embodied and even though we don't see the actual physical mouse, we recognise each movement, so we know how the hand moves when the pointer shifts its position. The gestures become very bodily gestures.

MDR   Thanks very much for this. It takes us back to what Iris was saying regarding the intimacy of the desktop, so to this idea of the wallpaper choice, the name of the hard drive, etc. As obvious as it may sound, we spend a lot of

time in that space, so it surely tells something about us as users and as persons dwelling in that space.

We were thinking about this with the students as well, when we were talking about the cover of our screen devices, the wallpapers we choose, the way we dispose our apps on the desktop, how we organise our work through the apps and how we prepare our gestures on the surface of the desktop, how we pre-organise our navigation through it, for example, by setting shortcuts on our devices.

Because you end with gestures, this naturally leads us to Darren who devoted his doctoral research to this topic, amongst other things.

DB   Gestures, yes, which open up the issue of embodiment. What interests me about the desktop is that it is always a kind of very embodied experience, and what is fantastic and fascinating to see is how we recognise these movements aren't our own. Iris mentioned before the strategies we put in place to get the eyes of the viewer and how we want them to look in certain places, at certain parts of the desktop. We recognise the movement of a pointer not just as an object moving across the screen but also as something that you have to do, something that happens throughout your own accord. In my research looking at selfies, which I know is not desktop cinema by any means, I have to do with something that is recognised as the image of a face; in many ways I took the image out of what is recognised as a very situated movement of the body. We understand this as a means of looking at the screen in a particular way, moving our body in a particular way, and situating ourselves in a particular way to understand how we—Suneil, to use your terms—*capture* ourselves, which is such a fantastic word because it speaks a lot to my own ideas and to the question I raise:

what does it actually mean to capture an image of yourself? For me it is a bit of a strange, unnerving thought to have at this stage...

In terms of my research into the desktop, it develops first and foremost from reading around the notion of interface; the interface being not just the layout of UX/UI, those terrible acronyms we throw around so loosely, but the interface of this relationship that we develop with the screens through our body: how do we interface with these screens? And in fact, I am not looking specifically at desktop cinema, but I am looking at how the desktop has become a ludic element in a lot of computer games [fig. 5.5]. In the last couple of years, you see the emergence of desktops (and you can see them projected behind me) as a template for play. It is a bit of an odd experience that you leave the desktop of your computer to enter another desktop and engage with this as a site of play.

In many ways it goes back to what you said at the very beginning, Miriam, and your four points to define desktop cinema: what is so interesting is that this play is very much predicated on a familiarity. We unconsciously or unthinkingly realise how to use this desktop, how to navigate the screen in a very particular way, and that is the thing that interests me so much. The image behind me is from a game called *Her Story* (2015), written and produced by Sam Barlow; it was released a few years ago and has a very affecting narrative. It is very much about this woman who has clearly a fragmented, non-complete story that you need to uncover, dig up, reveal through engaging with the desktop interface. The latter is based on the classic Windows 95. Today we could say it gives a very 'historic' idea of what a desktop should be, and it plays on what Shane was talking about earlier: it forces you to engage with limitations, discorrelations, and glitches,

6   The reference is to Susan David's book *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace*   151
Change, and Thrive in Work and Life (2016). The emotional dimension is crucial in relation
to the desktop as a threshold space located between (exhibited) private and public
spheres, and thus the implication of this psychologically-tinted reflection may be central
in many desktop cinema pieces playing with the unveiling of the subjective world.

and how you do that. For some reason, and again, in my research through the body and its gestures, I find that this doesn't distance us as much as it forces a certain level of empathy on us. Every encounter with a glitch or a moment of break generates what Susan David calls "uncomfortable feelings."[6] Whenever you encounter these things, it is not so much about the fact that they get in the way but about the fact that your body needs to navigate through them, so they almost oblige you to connect in ways that you might not have been expecting or you might not be ready for.

MDR   Thanks, Darren. I know you also experienced glitches that became a source of inspiration for your own work both in research and coding, so you bring to the table another good example of discorrelation that possibly generates uncomfortable feelings at first, but then allows for very valuable reflections that connect the selfie and the desktop...

DB   Yes, as you were saying: even though my work was on the selfie, it was only when I took one selfie in Scotland that all of a sudden was a glitched image, that ideas sparked. For some reason, the way it captured my face completely disrupted the way I saw my own face and how I situated myself, and it was a moment when the question clearly was—how do I navigate this through the body?

MDR   I think this, as many other aspects, raises so many compelling questions...

DB   One thing that really got my brain racing was Suneil's idea of stacking. The more tabs you

open on your computer, the less you know what you're looking at on your computer... If you maybe want to expand a little bit more on that aspect, I believe it is such a central one to desktop cinema because when you are on the desktop you always know there's something behind, which you can and cannot look at. I would like to hear more about that.

SS   Yes, I think there's something to be said about the drop shadow, too. That kind of *trompe l'oeil* effect is really essential [see fig. 2.3]. There is a sort of hierarchy that gets raised, however, the relationship of the user to the interface—and I think Belit's work does it excellently—is the ability to actually reconfigure images and reposition the hierarchy. Because there is no fixed hierarchy, as soon as you activate one image or one piece of material on the screen suddenly it's on top. So, the hierarchy is re-configured in as much as none of it is fixed. I think the desktop screen has this ability to cre-ate new relationships of unfixity, in as much as it is the moving image at large in terms time and space. The desktop screen shows how cinema has this ability to reconfigure time and space and to break down mostly, though not only, Western perceptions of time and space. The screen and the stacking can push our un-derstanding and our relationships to time and space as well as to hierarchies in general.

MDR   That also goes in the direction of building a depth on a planar surface that otherwise would be considered flat. So, in a way, it is really interesting when you do that operation because you move across the desktop, and you show that there can be a depth indeed. To me, that passage really reminded me of Bill Viola's installation *The Veiling* (1995) [fig. 5.6]. It is a work resulting from many veils with a beamer on one side, so the light goes through

the veils and the more you distance yourself from the light source, that is, the more you go through these veils, the more the image becomes grainy and poor à la Steyerl. The image loses something along the way but acquires a different kind of materiality. Obviously, that is not a digital desktop but rather a physical installation, however, the disposition is the same as in your 3D rendering, and I suppose the logic is very similar. Perhaps we can see that piece as a precursor for this logic, if we were to write a sort of genealogy of desktop cinema and its strategies. I don't know if you also had stacking in mind, Belit, when you were working on *Disruption* [fig. 5.7].

BS   Yes, to me what Suneil is saying really resonates when it comes to playing with power relationships. Especially in *Disruption*, talking about the coup d'état and seeing the current president on the run on a mobile phone screen, very tiny, in the hands of a journalist on TV, for example, and you can see the manicured hand holding the phone bigger than his head—this kind of really absurd imagery shows how his power is kind of shifted, yet exactly as in the stacking sequence in Suneil's film, at any moment this power can shift back. That is precisely what happened: the coup d'état attempt failed and that shift back meant there was much more repression and much more power that he would then exercise. It was such an interesting moment when this was unclear, so for me it was important to figure out a way, as a maker, as someone who has experienced it, to find a way out of this and to get control of the situation. That stacking was really playing out the shifts in power, and for me became a method to deal with images of power.

MDR   I really like that you, Suneil, talked about redis-posing the hierarchy in terms of reconfiguring: I suppose another key point when it comes to desktop cinema is very much about recon-figuring, isn't it? Reconfiguring the working space as a representational space, reconfig-uring the access in time, as in the hard drive that Iris uses in her film—it is about access-ing that storage of memory and reconfiguring it. So, in a way it looks like a method to make sense of something that is not fixed—navigat-ing the fluidity and approaching the unfixity to make sense of it.

BS   It is not about taking power, it is more about how power is distributed and how to make sense of this, as you said, how to reshuffle it on the screen and think of it almost as a deck of cards.

SS   One thing I would like to mention is how I have been thinking about the desktop as what is already happening in the way we reconfig-ure time and space through our memory, and how that makes it a very literal enactment of something that we do naturally as humans in our brains, and also of what the moving image does naturally. So, interestingly, I think that it's just a kind of hyperbole of what we already do.

MDR   I don't think that is just hyperbolisation, it is rather an exacerbation of a process that, as you say, already happens automatically, and as also Darren pointed out, is nearly uncon-sciously made available by way of showing it, as it unfolds in a familiar environment. Much of the work that you guys discuss plays with the sense of the familiarity of the desktop as a practicable space. Some good examples came up earlier: the familiarity of the desktop is expressed and taken advantage of when too obvious stuff is removed, or when you

as authors decide to reconfigure something. This is part of our practices in terms of how we navigate this digital space. I suppose these are two opposite poles of the same tension: there is an exaggeration and spectacularising of something, but somehow there is also the familiarity of the same object. I wonder whether this is something we can look into a little bit more.

But I see there's a question from the room, please Anaïs.

S   It is not a question but rather something to note. We are talking in this theatre at the moment, and we have the zoom session with you two [BS/MDR] on stage, speaking in front, and then we have the backdrop of the zoom session on the stage, too, so we are contributing to a live stacking, hyperbolising gestures. I think this is very important to know that when you speak your gesture comes back with a delay of a second, so there is this idea of the desktop creating a space, but it also creates a dimension of time. I don't know if anybody has anything to say about that.

MDR   That's true, sure, thanks for flagging that.

SD   Yes, in response to what has been brought up by various people, but what that comment right now made me think about is that what we are calling desktop cinema is really a very hybrid kind of experience, so obviously it can incorporate things beyond the desktop. Suneil was taking about incorporating things. Belit was talking about not being very strict about the conception of the desktop but also working around that environment and problematising it. I think one of the things that the pandemic (but not only the pandemic) made clear is that whatever it is that we mean when we say desktop, it is multiple. It is so many

different things. For example, when Darren was talking about the selfie in the context of the desktop, I think it is a really fascinating idea, because what the selfie is a frozen moment of real time video that has been generated through the gesture of me looking at myself, and all the while, generating all these videos, that is not 'desktop' per se, but it's not categorically different either. Then it all gets of course problematised further by the fact that now there are machine learning algorithms that intervene and fix whatever my selfie might be. Very likely it is an overlaying of multiple dimensions, which is another kind of compression of videos into a so-called photographic form—I was just trying to build on that and maybe someone wants to run with it...

DB   I don't want to make it all about the selfie, but you are exactly right, Shane, with this idea that it starts as a moving image. Actually, in relation to the comment by the person in the hall, the desktop is always a mirror, it always mirrors your movements, it always mirrors your response, your relations, and the selfie in particular begins with that mirror: you see yourself looking at yourself, but the thing is, because of the alignment of where the camera sits on the phone and where the screen is, you never really kind of connect. It's a bit voyeuristic, as you're looking at a version of you, which is not you right now, just like zoom. On the desktop, with the delay that the student mentioned earlier, I currently see myself delayed in zoom because I can currently see myself in four different screens, and all of a sudden, those movements are not my own. I think this speaks to the question of where does the subject fall into this apparatus? Because we can't separate them all of a sudden—your movements become so connected with the desktop; when the selfie is correcting your face and the desk-

top is correcting your movements as it does more and more, you can think that those face and movements are not your own. For me, it is just slightly terrifying.

MDR   The most terrifying thing to me is that this foreign feeling is so very familiar... It is a rather interesting process to end with as it invites further discussion rather than closing it, even though I am afraid we should soon come to an end. Any final thoughts?

SD   This was meant to be the opening of a dialogue that I hope shall continue further.

MDR   Indeed, I would like to keep on discussing with you all, because I think it can be generative of new ideas. Hopefully, we opened up some fruitful room to share, both digitally on the desktop and off, which can be conducive to new impressions, statements and questions to think together about desktop cinema in all its facets and implications.

Speaker Biographies

Darren Gary Berkland is an Assistant Professor and Course Director of Digital Media at Coventry University. Their research focuses on the conditioning of gestures and the body through the possible arrangements and organisations provided by increasingly ubiquitous media assemblages. Published research has examined selfies, screens, phonic gestural vocabularies, digital surveillance and profiling practices. Other research interests include phenomenologies of the home, artistic creative coding experiments, and spatial arrangements and their corresponding motilities.

Iris Blauensteiner works as a filmmaker and author. She studied Art&Digital Media at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and Film and Theatre theory at the University of Vienna. She has been making film since 2004, both as screenplay writer and director. Her latest film is *The world is blue at its edges* (2021); like her previous works *the_other_images* (2018), *Rest* (2016) and *Sweat* (2014) it was screened at international festivals. Her debut novel *Kopfzecke* was published in 2016, while the second novel *Atemhaut* was published in 2022 by Kremayr & Scheriau. She is a member of the Golden Pixel Cooperative, an association for moving images, arts and media.

Shane Denson is Associate Professor of Film & Media Studies in the Department of Art & Art History and, by courtesy, of German Studies and Communication at Stanford University. Since Fall 2022, he is also Director of the PhD programme in Modern Thought & Literature. He is the author of *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface* (Transcript-Verlag/Columbia University Press, 2014), *Discorrelated Images* (Duke University Press, 2020), and *Post-Cinematic Bodies* (meson press, 2023). He is also co-editor of *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives* (Bloomsbury, 2013), *Digital Seriality* (special issue of *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, 2014), and *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film* (REFRAME Books, 2016).

Belit Sag is a videomaker and visual artist living in Amsterdam. They studied mathematics in Turkey and visual arts in the Netherlands. Their background in moving images is rooted in their work within video-activist groups in Ankara and Istanbul, where they co-initiated groups such as *VideA*, *karahaber*, and *bak.ma*. They were awarded international artist residencies and their works have been presented in many festivals and museums, including Flaherty NYC; documenta14; Kassel, Toronto, Rotterdam, San Francisco and New York International Film Festivals; transmediale; and EYE Filmmuseum. Their work is distributed by LIMA (Amsterdam), and has been written about in Frieze, ArtForum, ArtSlant, Brooklyn Rail, and MUBI. Their ongoing artistic and moving image practice largely focuses on the role of visual representations of violence in the experience and perception of political conflicts in Turkey, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Suneil Sanzgiri is an artist, researcher, and filmmaker. Spanning experimental video and film, animations, essays, and installations, his work contends with questions of identity, heritage, culture, and diaspora in relation to structural violence and anticolonial struggles across the Global South. Sanzgiri's films offer sonic and visual journeys through family history, local mythology, and colonial legacies of extraction in Goa, India—where his family originates—deftly utilizing and vividly blending together 3D renderings, drone videography, photogrammetry and lidar scanning, 16mm film and animation, archival footage, and desktop documentary practices. Sanzgiri's work has been screened extensively at festivals and venues around the world, and he was awarded various fellowships and residencies, including SOMA, MacDowell, Pioneer Works, Sentient. Art.Film's Line of Sight, and Flaherty NYC. His first institutional solo exhibition *Here the Earth Grows Gold* took place at the Brooklyn Museum in fall 2023.

Film Synopses

At Home but Not at Home
(Suneil Sanzgiri, 2019)
In 1961, 14 years after India gained independence from Britain, the Indian Armed Forces defeated the last remaining Portuguese colonizers in the newly formed state of Goa. The director's father was 18 at the time and had just moved away from his village of Curchorem to Bombay for school when news reached him about his home—now free from the oppression of a foreign hand after 450 years of colonial rule. After spending years thinking about questions of identity, liberation, and the movement of people across space and time, the director finds himself returning to this period in search of moments of anti-colonial solidarity across continents. Combining 16mm footage with drone videography, montages from the "Parallel cinema" movement in India, desktop screengrabs, and Skype interviews, the resulting film utilizes various methods and modes of seeing at a distance to question the construction of artifice, memory, and identity through the moving image. These topics are further explored by the director in *Letter from Your Far-Off Country* (2020) and *Golden Jubilee* (2021) that, alongside *At Home but Not at Home*, form a trilogy.
[synopsis © suneilsanzgiri.com]

Disruption **(Belit Sag, 2016)**
Following along a short walk, we are taken on a journey that crosses images, old black and white films, current events and historical commemoration records. "Your picture belongs to my world," says a film character to another. Another movie character steps off-screen and addresses a woman in the audience. Children cut up and eat a huge cake effigy of the embalmed corpse of Lenin. Turkish president Erdogan appears in a FaceTime video released on CNN during the 2016 coup attempt. With a fragmented, ever-flowing, multi-layered assemblage of images resembling a form in between a living mosaic and a computer screen, the author combines a series of disparate situations coexisting on screen, all sharing the rich potential to invite the viewer to reflect on the use, permanence and impermanence of pictures.

New Acid **(Basim Magdy, 2019)**
Commissioned by La Kunsthalle Mulhouse (France), the film is tinted with a nostalgic look, and proposes a conversation between animals and bots in the form of text messages. These appear in flashy bubbles as per the contemporary aesthetic of the mobile interface. Filled with emojis and presenting a range of emotional attitudes—from conflict to attention yearning, from irony to intimate confession—the text messages take the spectator along a digital journey that mixes personal and universal issues eventually addressed to the audience, too: Are we trapped? In a zoo or a stream of data? Is tradition an alter ego of racism? What about nostalgia and nationalism? Have they finally become human?

the_other_images
(Iris Blauensteiner, 2018)
A hard drive, 2.8 terabytes leftover data from a project that was shot 10 years earlier. In 2008, the director made her first short movie. Now she sifts through this waste material: outtake scenes, photographs, sound files, e-mails, script passages, discarded ideas. This data was archived and well stored, but time has taken its toll. Old data formats cannot be played anymore because they are no longer compatible with current players. The multitude of read errors and image distortions disallow a comfortable recollection of the past, the pictures and sounds are not what they used to be. Ghostly, eerily magical scenes arise from the digital waste material and read errors. They reach into the visible and audible spectrum. Memories are recycled. They require a different cinematic experience, a new narrative, a different film. *the_other_images* poses the question how memory and remembering is possible in the face of digital storage's failure and decay, postulating a possible answer in the form of recycling and reutilizing the digital archive.
[synopsis © irisblauensteiner.com]

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Figures

Cover

Camille Henrot, *Grosse Fatigue*, 2013
Video (color, sound) 13 min
Original music by Joakim
Voice by Akwetey Orraca-Tetteh
Text written in collaboration with Jacob
Bromberg
Producer: kamel mennour, Paris;
with the additional support of Fonds de dotation
Famille Moulin, Paris
Production: Silex Films
Film presented on the occasion of *Il Palazzo
Enciclopedico* (*The Encyclopedic Palace*),
55th International Biennale di Venezia, 2013
Project conducted as part of the Smithsonian
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Washington, D.C.
Special thanks to the Smithsonian
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National Museum of Natural History,
and the Smithsonian National Air and Space
Museum.

Ch.1

[fig. 1.1]   © ADAGP Camille Henrot.
Courtesy of the artist, Silex Film,
Mennour (Paris) and Hauser & Wirth.

[fig. 1.2]   © ADAGP Camille Henrot. Courtesy
of the artist, Silex Film, Mennour (Paris)
and Hauser & Wirth.

[fig. 1.3]   © ADAGP Camille Henrot. Courtesy
of the artist, Silex Film, Mennour (Paris)
and Hauser & Wirth.

[fig. 1.4]   Snake schema for *Le Songe de
Poliphile* in the exhibition catalogue
*Is It Possible to Be a Revolutionary
and Like Flowers?* at kamel mennour
gallery, Mennour (Paris), 2012: 22
© Camille Henrot and Mennour (Paris).

[fig. 1.5]   © ADAGP Camille Henrot. Courtesy
of the artist, Silex Film, Mennour (Paris)
and Hauser & Wirth.

Ch.2

[Fig. 2.1]   *All That is Solid* (Louis Henderson,
2014, still from video). Image copyright
of the artist, courtesy of Video Data
Bank, School of the Art Institute
of Chicago.

[fig. 2.2]   Christian Marclay, *48 War Movies* (still),
2019 Single-channel video installation,
color and stereo, sound, Continuous
loop, Dimensions variable © Christian
Marclay. Courtesy Paula Cooper
Gallery, New York.

[fig. 2.3]   *At Home but Not at Home* (Suneil
Sanzgiri, 2019, still from film).
Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 2.4]   Trisha Baga, *TIME MACHINE 2045*,
2022, Oil on canvas. 122.5×153×4.2 cm,
127×157.4×6.5 cm (framed). Courtesy
of the artist; Gió Marconi, Milan.
Photo: Fabio Mantegna.

[fig. 2.5]   Trisha Baga, *SLEEP MODE*, 2022,
Oil on canvas. 122.3 × 183.3 × 4 cm,
127×187.8×6.5 cm (framed). Courtesy
of the artist; Gió Marconi, Milan.
Photo: Fabio Mantegna.

Ch.3

[fig. 3.1] © ADAGP Camille Henrot. Courtesy of the artist, Silex Film, Mennour (Paris) and Hauser & Wirth.

[fig. 3.2] *Save As* (Gautam Kansara, 2014, still from video). Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 3.3] *Minister of Loneliness* (Shiyi Li, 2018). Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 3.4] *Internet Ambience performance for Screen Walks* (Chia Amisola, 2023, still from video). Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 3.5] Chia Amisola, 2024, immersive desktop performance. Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 3.6] *Desktop Diary* (Molly Soda, 2023, screenshot). Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 3.7] *Cleaning My Desktop* (Molly Soda, 2018, still from video.) Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 3.8] *et ils vont dans l'espace qu'embrasse ton regard: signaux de fumée* (Estefania Peñafiel Loaiza, 2016, still from video). Courtesy of the artist.

Ch.5

[fig. 5.1] *the_other_images* (Iris Blauensteiner, 2018, still from film). Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 5.2] *the_other_images* (Iris Blauensteiner, 2018, still from film). Courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 5.3] *At Home but Not at Home* (2019) and director Suneil Sanzgiri; online roundtable, courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 5.4] *Disruption* (2016), and director Belit Sag; online roundtable, courtesy of the artist.

[fig. 5.5] Darren Berkland, *Her Story* indoor screening; online roundtable, courtesy Darren Berkland.

[fig. 5.6] Bill Viola, *The Veiling*, 1995. In collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum. Video/sound installation, two channels of color video projections from opposite sides of dark gallery through nine scrims suspended from the ceiling, two channels of amplified mono sound, and four speakers. 138×264×372 in (350×740×1150 cm). Photo credit: Carlos Avendaño.

[fig. 5.7] *Disruption* (Belit Sag, 2016, still from video). Courtesy of the artist.