

Peer Bode

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

LI YIZHUO

VIRAL TRANSMISSION: A MEDIUM IN BETWEEN

Viral Transmission: A Medium in Between
Curated by Li Yizhuo

The article is written in response to interview questions on Peer Bode's exhibiting videos and artistic practice over the decades.

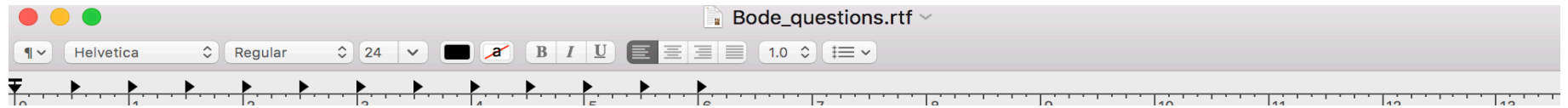
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OCAI Institute

Jinchanxilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100023



Surely more can be said. Hopefully this beginning is of use to you.

Bests,

Peer

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White noise, video memory, and Muybridge

The early videos from the mid-1970s were a group of works I called the “Process Tapes.” A general term suggesting multiple systems, in play, a concretization of a systems theory, considering the significance of the video physical means, considering the video and television signals and temporal-spatial mapping system, the physical and electrical details of the video and ourselves. A number of states stand out.

The analog video systems we used, NTSC video, allowed one to map and encode the image, with a series of electrical time-based oscillations, creating scanned time-based electronic video images. Inside the cathode TV tube, an electron beam was magnetically deflected, horizontally and vertically to trace out the image, line

by line across the florescent material surface of the picture tube. The deflection scanning is based on two timed oscillators, one for the horizontal line scan and one for the vertical repositioning of the scan line.

The color NTSC video standard has a picture frame rate of 29.97/second. Each video frame is made up of two picture fields, namely the even and the odd scan lines, together creating an interlaced picture frame of video with 525 lines. A corresponding time scheme is evident in the video camera. The light sensitive tube mechanism scans the lens image, converting it into an electrical signal stream. This has equivalences to the physical film image encoding and projecting mechanism of celluloid film. In the case of film projection, the carrier transport, so to speak, is a sprocketed strip of film mechanically moved in relation to a spinning shutter, intermittently projecting, for example, 24 frames per second or with a two leaf shutter 48 pulses per second, two flashes per film frame.

In the non-mechanical video system, the encoding of space and time is accomplished with a set of timed oscillators.

The electro-magnetic spectrum of white visible light and colors is a variance of electromagnetic frequencies.

What was mechanical in film, that sewing machine, and emulsion pickling technology, becomes transducers and timed electrical oscillations and signals in video. Russian inventor Boris L. Rosing in St. Petersburg, Russia, 1907, patented the first cathode ray tube.

Remember that our own nervous system, receiving and transmitting system, is a bio-electrical and chemical based system to process and transmit information. Brain waves varyingly oscillate

at frequency rates named Gamma, Beta, Alpha, Theta, Delta, and Infra-Low frequencies.

White Noise

The primary colors of light, red, green, and blue, electromagnetic frequencies, combine into white light. In sound, the mix of all sound frequencies creates what is called white noise, also occurring in sounds of wind, leaves rustling, and others in nature.

Oscillation frequencies: We can hear frequency oscillations traduced through speakers approximately in the range of 20 cycles per second to the high of 20,000 cycles per second.

These same oscillator frequencies can be directed into the video encoding and scanning system, altering the display of the video image. In electrical and electronic systems, sound and image as frequencies are interchangeable .

Consider video's significant features, electrical oscillators and electrical white noise; these can be directed to creating varying changing image forms and vibrations.

Consider the set of 20th century electronic tools and technologies. Consider the physics and poetics of electronic/electric materials.

Think of sound and cinema and video as vibrational systems. Each has its own time signature or window range of frequencies. The video frame is composed of specific H+V frequencies. Change them and the video frame drifts, breaks up, doubles, etc. This physical material event corresponds to the time/space mapping of

Eadweard Muybridge's 19th century photo cinema photography. Think of Muybridge's photographic time grids as one of an infinite number of time space maps. The work *Video Locomotion (man performing forward hand leap)* (1978) explores the timed video space with Muybridge's photo grid as a starting point evolving to a fluid electronic animation event space. *Art of Memory* (1985) revisits this idea by using a hand-built digital video frame buffer with analog oscillators controlling memory updates. Here the image movement inscriptions emerge via hybrid analog and digital interactions. In *Art of Memory Machine 3* (2017) and *Noise Cylinder Pull* (2020), we see first Muybridge runners further remapped as a 3D computer apparatus and the second white noise digitally 3D and 2D transformed.

White noise is the name given to the mix of all sound frequencies. It is a sound signal that can be fed into the video frame. The white noise video image is a characteristic, identifiable image. It is physical, a fact.

Memory: Video, television is a live real time process. It does not require recording, a kind of physical memory, writing, and inscription. Early television was recorded onto film, followed by video tape and then digital memory. Digital memory is a recording medium that can be updated in real time. The differences and edges between film and video taped and computer memory are physical and specific. Eadweard Muybridge's time photo grids, in addition to being captivating and philosophical treasures, are the necessary stop on the way to mechanical and then electronic moving image, illusion strategies. Muybridge's photo events correspond and further suggest the sequential continuous events found in sound, music, speech, language, and thinking.

Information, Knowledge, Experience

Working at an early moment of electronic television in the mid-1970s, there was already a rich history of 20th-century radio, television, music, electronic music, poetry, and the moving image to consider and learn from. My own education and experience in independent filmmaking, the New American Cinema, and experiences with electronic music instruments were key to my understanding and moving forward with the new electronic television.

As both image and object, the light bulb, bell, chair, bricks, objects basic, singular, solitary are at the same time rich with nested references and connections. These are presented within electronic spaces of oscillators and digital memory in a time frame of modulations and thinking. The tuned combination, so to speak, can open the image, moving, duration, and thinking event to a zone of sticky epiphany thought. The studio ambience of these objects and processes evolve in the imagination, emerging in the studio tool dialogue/event and the viewing, exhibition, reflection dialogue event. The objects in the videos function and act, so as to be able to fathom differences in change, to register differences that make a difference, differences that are an event, body, mind phantoms.

Inventions and experiments in artistic practice

There is a more than 2000-year history of individuals querying and testing sound tuning and the emanating principles of sounds. The 20th century saw accelerated opportunities for sound production expanding from mechanical to electrical means. By the late 1960s and early '70s, video and electronic television emerged as a creative possibility in all the arts, including music, literature, poetry, dance, cinema, theater, photography, painting, and sculpture. By the 60s and 70s, music by electronic means already had a rich history, including several generations of new electronic sound instruments/tools. These electronic sound instruments became the conceptual and material models for future video synthesis processes. With the expansion of international electronic industries, new and inexpensive parts and components became available for individual inventors and experimenters, allowing them to consider new television/video/electronic art vision potentials.

The many and varied electronic audio synthesizer systems became the basics for new and varied video synthesizers systems. These were developed first by by young independent artists and technologists, later followed by industrially organized developers. The next step became our contemporary tools of computer video software synthesizer and processing systems.

The Experimental Television Center (ETC) in Binghamton and later Owego, NY was a project created in 1971 by visual artist Ralph Hocking. With his vision of combining art, technology, and education, Hocking attracted a group of talented young experimenters and artists to join him in developing a set of new electronic television and new media tools. These were made available to interested artists in the form of artist residencies

within which to experiment, learn, and make artworks as well as conceive new studios. I was one of those young artists who became a part of the studio making and sharing group of the ETC.

The many videos recordings and pieces I made with the evolving ETC studio tools, as well as additional tools I built with ETC's electronics designer David Jones, such as two digital video frame buffers, were explorations, experiments, and creations that came from a new world, a new set of images and sounds. We had the opportunity to immerse ourselves and along the way, create new artistic communities and audiences.

At a time when some artists were looking for post-studio approaches to develop their likings, we were developing deep material, deep electronic studio practices, with all the focus and social habits that we could create.

Many of the early video recordings like "The Process Tapes" series were simple, minimal forms and explorations that took on camera lens-based images as well as non-lens electronic processes. The pieces were electronic and phenomenological explorations, then cinematic and sculptural explorations in their exhibition forms. They are wonderful, simple, and clear forms of new grammars, new articulations of the electronic image and sound world, new experiences and new subject positioning. They are delicate as well as tough, as temporal, visual, and audio forms. In numerous surprising ways that the image and sound relationships emerged, formed and transformed what we imagined.

After approximately ten years of these practices I began to

make a new series that linked together electronic events across time to materialize larger compositional systems. This immediately created sequential narrative like forms.

After approximately ten more years, I began to regularly embed earlier recordings into newer recordings, exploring electronic based spatial montage strategies. Events of complex time and memory emerged out of these combines. The video piece *Theater of Metonymic Delights* (2003) is a piece built up of embedded electronic discovery images into the discovery camera images I recorded in Hangzhou and Beijing, China in 2001. I was thrilled to see how these combined and simultaneous recordings opened up electronic objects and events in dialogue with narrative, historical, and memory possibilities. Having evaded singular representation as a main driver of the works, the combines opened up experiential, conceptual, and representational multiplicities in unbound emerging forms.

Real time notions, in the sense of the process and system, open up a large array of possible events and connections. Real time as an interest came from thinking about the moving image form and a movement beyond montage, as we knew from the traditions of cinema. Electronics allowed the possibility of live, continuous, and real time engagement with image and sound. Some real time possibilities are simple and direct, others rich and tangled. If one considers the electronic tool system as embedded time/space architectural and kinetic forms, one can see the attraction to the notion of dialoguing with the system. This opens the controlling, manipulating, also looking and listening, thinking and responding to the video system as well as to oneself. A deep listening and deep viewing and deep

responding become strategies and scores for new works. Is this a one-way transmission of event into video? I don't believe so. The flow is the event to video piece which opens up again to audience event, dialoguing, creating video thinking and imagining space as a new event, together and in public. This is a rich ethical space of experiencing and experimenting in public. This is emerging media art cultural literacy in the time of new globally networked communication systems.

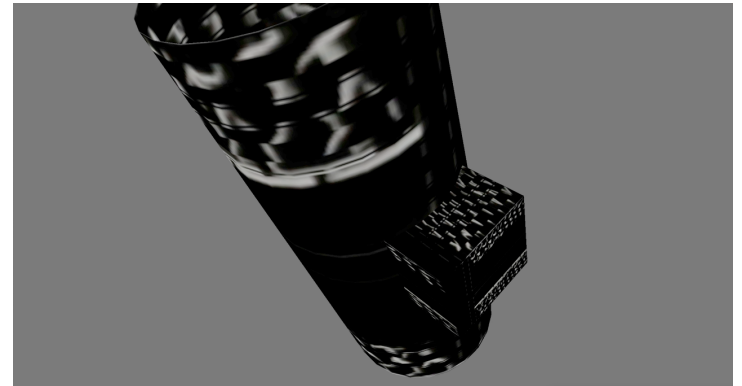
This is the great human liberating potential of new media as the art form for the new informationally networked world that we are both successfully and unsuccessfully, as in learning, to inhabit and make productively ours.

An imaginary future archive.... of my work would involve a set of dynamic data bases of works, recordings, and experiments, accessible in linear and non-linear ways to keep the possibility of playback and unfolding, and also deep archival plunges via tags and keywords. The archives need also to be observant of variable exhibiting forms and parameters such as black box, white box, museum, gallery, theater, and internet exhibition practices. Parallel archives would be texts, books, and ideas I have surrounded my self in for more than 40 years. The texts and summaries are not totally unique to me but the world of new and old thinking lapping up upon my shore. Comedians might say, funny it up. Video media artists might say, unleash it, blast it, make it sticky. The archive space event must not lose this vitality and humor, as the archive puts the work in a very vulnerable state. The archive artist-presenter must step up to make the forms alive and vital. Flat-footed approaches are to be identified and avoided.

An archive is more than a collection of elements. It is a more complex and subtle collection presenting moments of being human with images, sounds, and thinking. An archive can crush that subtle vulnerable moment. It must sensitively project and present it, the event, the moment, the thought space.

Viral transmission... Epistemology, the nature, and limits of knowledge. A new, supported thinking in electronic and computer systems is the notion of the parameter-based event and the heterogeneous subject reception.

The result can be reductive, or it can be sensed in differences and new spaces that come from parameter explorations and subject redefinitions. This process-system inflected form lends itself to intermedial, visual-tactile translations and time/space constructions. The video piece *Music on Triggering Surfaces* (1978) activates a plethora of transformations and connections. Simultaneously reduced image tones, a speed changing drifting studio image becomes the score for a series of sound information tones, near musical sequences. The sequence duration has a surprising and evolving image-sound clarity. The piece, appearing as it is, unfolds in time. Parameters and grammars give us new freedoms of experiences and mental spaces. Parameter thought can be considered a virus in a fundamental sense. An informational complex enters our systems and changes us. It can be a source of sickness or worse. It can also be an intervention, like the invention of writing and reading which helped create new human beings in thought. Arts and culture invent us anew again. Experimentation and imagination grow our identity.



Bode, *Art of Memory Machine 3*, 2017, image courtesy of the artist.

Questions

Li Yizhuo

1. Certain notions and imagery have been threaded throughout the decades of your artistic practice, notably white noise, video memory, and Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies, which all appear ambivalent in between an absolute object and an epistemic access. Upon what kind of information, knowledge, or experience did you come to these ideas/objects and work on them repeatedly in different contexts?
2. In your videos, buffer, oscillator, or even light bulb, bell, and other quotidian objects in a studio setting usually function as both experimental tools for artistic creation and material entities to be contemplated on. In what ways would you connect such a "studio ambience" to the inventions and experiments underlying in the artistic practice of you and several artists you have closely worked with?
3. Related to the question above, I find a stronger presence of personal memory and affect in your later works, compared with the more focused inquiry into the vision, mechanism, and potentiality of machinery and media. Would you agree with this tendency? And if yes, how do you now consider the coexistence and interrelation between the personal, bodily, cognitive, and the mechanic, electronic?
4. Recording of the real-time process in many of your works—this involves channeling audio, visual, and tactile senses as well as the mechanic apparatuses—has produced mesmerizing

effects while seeming to produce a one-way transmission from the event to the video, concealing passageways to retrieve the event itself. Can you elaborate more on the fascination of the real-time process—how the performativity was formed and developed? And how do you understand its relation with the created video?

5. If constructing an imaginary archive of your oeuvre for a readership one hundred years from now, what unpublished but likely constructive materials would you want to include, and in what formats or styles? What technological, logistic, and other practical or artistic considerations would complicate or hinder the envisioned archival construction?

6. Under the title "viral transmission," I hope to highlight the entwinement of mediated bodily presence and digital network culture. For example, the study of viruses through electron microscopy already entails the aid of visual-tactile translation and constructed information. I find this analogous to the intermedial experiments in your work, particularly when looking at the sensor dot in *Music on Triggering Surfaces*. In an interview by the Experimental TV Center, you mentioned that these cross-disciplinary practices "surround issues of electronic systems, materiality, representation, and response." Can you elaborate more on these ideas, and potentially, how it might shed light on the deepening interdisciplinary characteristics of new media art now?