

ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE

## FULL STREAM AHEAD

The growth of opportunities to stream film and video online is offering a new generation of artists an alternative exhibition platform

**By Nathaniel Budzinski**

Recent decades have seen an increase in artists' film and video being shown in galleries but artists have also been moving towards another new exhibition model: the screening – or streaming – of film and video online.

The internet has its own preoccupations and aesthetic forms, currently being explored and defined by a new generation of artists who specifically produce video for – and in reaction to – this context. So what could some of these qualities be – and what relation might they have to such effects as 'content monetisation' or the cultivation of isolated and frantic attention spans?

Current concerns over culture, cash and a perceived sensorial assault upon our selves echo artists' earlier interests in television and broadcast technology during the 1960s and 70s. And as the cultural-economic wilds of the internet become tamed by more rigorous enforcement of copyright and the belated awakening of commercial media outlets to the potential of

online content delivery, the form's situation increasingly resembles that of television, with moral panics and issues over dumbing down and psychological health coming to the fore.

There are many varieties of online distribution. Mark Aerial Waller has used Vimeo – a highbrow YouTube and the streaming channel of choice for many artists and filmmakers – to stream *Time Together* (2012), a series of pseudo-science-educational 'webisodes' that were available temporarily as part of an exhibition. Ben Rivers uses Vimeo to host excerpts of his ethnographic fantasy films, each a few minutes long, acknowledging both the power of public accessibility (read: Google) and the need to titillate cinephiles' desire for exclusivity (although his post-apocalyptic science-fiction film *Slow Action* is available in its entirety at [animateprojects.org](http://animateprojects.org)). Ryan Trecartin has put the many of his frenetic, Warhol-superstar-inspired videos online. For a commercially successful artist to make his work freely available to watch online goes against the grain of gallery culture, which is still pragmatically attached to notions of auratic uniqueness (read: money).

It's not just a gift economy; some artists just take. James Richards, winner of the 2012 Jarman Award – a new prize for contemporary moving-image artists – makes work that captures the

spirit of the internet. His anti-narratives, whose subject matter mirrors the internet miasma of music videos, self-shot animal footage and pornography, surely belongs online. But it isn't there: it's only ever shown at screenings or as part of Richards's installations. His fellow 2012 Jarman Award nominee Benedict Drew has a more porous relationship with online video culture. Many of his humorously abrasive videos are viewable online, excerpted from his expanded-cinema installations. Another peer of Richards and Drew, poet and artist Heather Phillipson, uses Vimeo like a sketch pad to upload ideas in development, as well as finished work.

Two London-based artists' collectives, Auto Italia South East and LuckyPDF, have been a consistent source of energetic online activity. Initially working together in 2007, they used vintage analogue video mixers and synthesisers to produce a five-episode series without any external funding. Covering a range of topics – from leashed men wrestling within a circle of fire, to a torch

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Team spirit: the work of London-based artists' collectives Auto Italia South East and LuckyPDF has been a consistent source of energetic online activity

song, to giving anarchist academic David Graeber a haircut in exchange for an impromptu lecture – the programmes are made by numerous artists operating under a single moniker. Equal parts public-access programme, light-entertainment variety show and chaotic happening, their first series is inflected with cheesy movie-of-the-week and animated-GIF aesthetics. Core members of Auto Italia cite as influences the television opera work of American composer Robert Ashley and Jef Cornelis's experiments while working at the Dutch-language Belgian channel VRT. With its carnivalesque atmosphere, their work also looks back to earlier experiments like multimedia pioneers Otto Piene and Aldo Tambellini's *Black Gate Cologne* (1969).

The examples of artists' video online are endless, so curation is important. There's been increased art-world interest in television and how artists are responding to mass media, exemplified in museum shows such as Mumok's 'Changing Channels' in Vienna and MACBA's 'Are You Ready for TV?' (both 2010) in Barcelona, alongside a plethora of curated screening programmes. There are online streaming platforms that take the exhibition format as their model: tank.tv, an offshoot of the fashion magazine *Tank*, has been presenting curated shows since 2003, working with artists such as Jeremy Deller, Rosalind Nashashibi and curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. The Space, recently launched as part of the UK's Cultural Olympiad project, hosts a raft of media from across the arts, emulating a catch-all European Kunsthalle approach, albeit in far more cramped environs.

Some institutions have responded to the new digital opportunities by commissioning more focused original content. Since 2011, Channel 4's Random Acts initiative has been commissioning, broadcasting on TV, then streaming artists' work, providing a valuable mainstream showcase. Warsaw Museum of Modern Art's Filmoteka is in the process of digitising and streaming around 1,500 artists' films, handing over an archive of rare work for public viewing. The recently launched Vdrome.org (set up by Italian art magazine *Mousse*) runs a programme of artists' films, including Beatrice Gibson's *The Tiger's Mind* and Nathaniel Mellors's surrealist, TV-inspired *Ourhouse* series. Though so far it only features moving-image work commissioned elsewhere, through the selected streaming of artists' work, one at a time, Vdrome suggests a platform for the considered presentation of this work.

But as yet there's no online archive or viewing site that could deliver, say, the riches of London's Lux artists' moving-image agency (which has a good but relatively small selection of its work available online) or New York State's Experimental Television Center's archives – none, at any rate, that is as well curated and as adherent to copyright law.

There are, however, impressive collections being assembled, such as Ubuweb. Since 1996, this online archive has been run by New York-based artist and poet Kenneth Goldsmith and has blossomed (or bloated) exponentially into an iPlayer for experimental moving image. The effect it has had on the work of an emerging generation of artists is deep, and I would hazard a guess that



**In at the deep end: Vdrome.org streams artists' work such as Nathaniel Mellors's 'Ourhouse' series**

the artists mentioned here working today have all spent many hours trawling it. With the legacy of Western avant-garde and modernist work looming large, Ubuweb hosts a constellation of once rare artefacts: Fluxus films, Greenaway's documentaries on composers, Samuel Beckett film works, Andy Warhol's audio recording archive. Despite criticisms about a dismissive attitude towards intellectual property rights and its free-for-all anti-curation, Ubuweb does what all good progressive cultural institutions should do. Plunging the viewer into a froth of new ideas and ways of listening and seeing, it allows them to question what they've previously experienced, giving them various versions of the same history. And if the issue of copyright dogs the site, it's also now seen as something of a compliment to have one's art featured on it.

There are other platforms like it (indeed, much of Ubuweb's video comes from the defunct Art Torrents blog and private BitTorrent tracker, KaraGarga) but what it represents is important in understanding wider shifts in moving-image work. From within the noisy artefacts of compressed films ripped from VHS tapes, containing copies of earlier films or TV programmes (what artist/theorist Hito Steyerl has called "the poor image") emanates the spark of a contemporary fascination with resolution, the lively, fragmenting afterlife of the copy, and the ever-more-precise mimicry enabled by the supposed total recall furnished by the likes of YouTube.

One question emerges from this abundance of images: that of attention. Early artistic experiments in intervening with the televisual

continuum during the late 1960s and early 70s, such as those by David Hall in the UK and Chris Burden in the US, have remained influential. Both artists booked ad slots during television broadcasts, using the brief gaps to try to disrupt viewer's habituated expectations. One of Hall's 'TV Interruptions' showed a television set outdoors, set alight and burning. Burden booked time on a Los Angeles channel, broadcasting adverts for himself during late-night movies, seen by solitary individuals in the early hours. These short-form interventions in TV's temporal real estate were also attempts by the artists to try to reach a broader audience. In hindsight, this exposure placed their work into TV's own economy of attention. No matter how jarring a commercial might be, it is always subsumed into what critic Raymond Williams called the "irresponsible flow" of TV.

How to achieve such an intervention isn't so obvious today when so much activity in the online world already involves repeated entrepreneurial encroachments on our attention. Like TV, the internet thrives on distraction; but lacking TV's anxiety about upsetting domestic space with discomforts like political and social extremism, gore and pornography, it's potentially more insidious. The current maxim is that it has never been easier to get work out into the world but never more difficult to get people to watch it (unless it's a cat playing a piano). But, for the artist video-maker at least, the question is less how to grab someone's attention in a noisy world than how to focus, survive and flourish amid a rich plethora of images. And further: what it means to pay attention now. 📺



**Chris Burden's 'Full Financial Disclosure'**



**Ryan Trecartin's 'Ready (Re'Search Wait'S)'**