

“Moving into the Stillness of a Daydream”¹

Dr Dew Harrison
Reader in Digital Media
School of Art & Design
University of Wolverhampton, UK
dew.harrison@wlv.ac.uk

My practice generally concerns the use of computer technology to augment our thinking and elucidate deeper understandings of issues and situations. In particular I am interested in the parallels of facilitation for critical thinking which are evident in hypermedia research and Conceptual Art where both concern the semantic association of thoughts and idea networked into one overarching concept. Semantic networks, interlinked database items and the Indexes of Art & Language are different outcomes of the same process. The digital paintings presented here are pictorial representations of the semantic networks of social sports played in their particularly dedicated environs giving a spectator’s overview of each event. They constitute a triptych of non-linear films, “Blue”Green:White”, about social sporting activities, cricket, swimming, cross-country ski-ing, which represent the leisure time of a small community in rural N.E. Scotland without access to a cinema or theatre.

As a spectator, there are moments of concentrated focus on the event, on the action, and lapses of interest where the eye meanders around the scenery — daydreaming ensues until brought back to the action. The films exist as faithful memories of events where leisure and daydreaming are encouraged as legitimate forms of time out and therefore allow us a “disappearance” (Virilio 1991) from the everyday. They are part of a series of Digital Action Paintings comprised of looped films, which remain more painting than film in that they are each seen all-at-once and projected at painting scale in painting positions. Each film is a collation of overlapping still environmental images incorporating two QT movies of human action, all of various transparency levels combined into one piece. The collage effect is enabled by new lens technologies and combinatorial software for the interweaving of moving and still images. The work therefore bridges new media and traditional practice in that they are digital but address the conventional values apparent within flat surface picture making designed to move the eye around the canvas.

According to Nicolas Bourriaud “The Aura of

contemporary art is a free association” (Bourriaud 2002), he is referring here to Relational Aesthetics and so makes a case for social engagement within an art practice. This free association is a wider contextualisation outside the gallery spaces and into the everyday. The free association can also be taken as an extension of the semantic networked artwork continued out into the daily lives of its viewers. Thus delivering an escape route within their free time space. The triptych of digital paintings presents a spectator’s view of passing time pleasantly, at their leisure; they daydream and wander visually around a scene. They interconnect a game with a landscape, each to its specific environment. They interlink the human actions within the still surroundings to give one understanding of an event. The films then, give a holistic experience of watching a sport on a day out of work; they infer the daydreaming that took place there. The film watcher can further engage in this disappearance from the everyday in a free-association with the work, by daydreaming themselves whilst viewing.

Within this project ideas of daydreaming have arisen with regard to Paul Virilio’s work on inertia and piconlepsy. The need for daydreaming as essential to our everyday existence is understood from the ideas of Theodor Adorno on leisure and free time. Daydreaming is a non-linear activity of free-association and so can be readily represented digitally; it is the hypermedial device holding the multimedia items together by semantic association within the digital paintings.

Virilio’s argument for the acceleration of modern life, the immediacy of information and an understanding of distance as time, led him to the statement “Now everything arrives without any need to depart” — “Polar inertia” (Virilio 2000). Virilio observes that the arrival of dynamic vehicles carrying people or information such as the car, has been replaced by the arrival of multimedia items into static vehicles. Telecommunications have brought in the era of “staying on the spot” or “housebound inertia” (Virilio 2000). This is reflected in car design where speed is a selling point even when over the lawful limit. Within racing car



Green



White

performance the ultimate extreme, according to Virilio (Virilio 2000), is to make the starting and finishing line coincide, and this can be paralleled with the idea of teleportation into the architecture of the intelligent home. It is this understanding of “movement without moving” (Virilio 2000) facilitated by new technologies within our ordinary everyday life, which has informed the making of Blue:Green:White.

Corporate globalisation rather than art or philosophy determines our culture and lifestyle and also directs our everyday life by designing our work patterns and allotted free time. Adorno’s pessimistic predictions on the culture industry’s goal of homogeneity (Adorno 1991) still play out today and in particular with regard to the phenomena of free time or life outside work, our work-less time. His critique addresses the work ethics of wage labour with its distinct work and free time, and highlights the dilemma within “And yet, in secret as it were, the contraband of modes of behaviour proper to the domain of work, which will not let people out of its power, is being smuggled into the realm of free time.” (Adorno 1991) He focuses on the inanity of leisure activities and in particular the hobby supplied by the leisure industry for profit while keeping people as amateurs. If labour power has become a commodity then the expression hobby amounts to a paradox where “Organized freedom is compulsory.” (Adorno 1991)

We are given time for leisure and relaxation in order to work more effectively afterwards, without distraction or the need to lark about, but we are then provided with activities to prevent total inaction which would lead to boredom and objective desperation. Those activities are never too demanding i.e. Sunday cricket, or they would

become work, can be essentially passive i.e. watching T.V., or quasi-active i.e. recent spectator sports which, according to Henri Lefebvre, (Lefebvre 1991) allows the supporter to attend, participate and play sport via an intermediary. Lefebvre sees leisure and work as the interlocked elements of everyday life and insists that we cannot step beyond or escape the everyday in its entirety “the marvellous can only exist in fiction and the illusions people share...And yet we wish to have the illusion of escape as near to hand as possible.” (Lefebvre 1991) Employing daydreaming as a private method of escape from work is commonplace. Extending this through art facilitating the deep contemplation of the daydream experience offers a means of disappearance from our allotted leisure time and in so doing may offer us true stolen episodes from the chaos of contemporary life. Watch the film and drift away in a holistic understanding of the event.

1 Research into the ‘daydream’ as a convivial meeting place for art to happen is currently underway within a long term collaboration with fellow artist and researcher Dr Barbara Rauch, Chelsea College of Art & Design, London.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. 1991. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. London: Routledge, pp.164-165.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2002. *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris: Les presses du reel, p. 61.
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *Critique of Everyday Life*. London: Verso, p. 39.
- Virilio, Paul. 2000. *Polar Inertia*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 20-25.
- Virilio, Paul. 1991. *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. New York: Semiotext(e).