"Jam to-morrow and jam yesterday — but never jam today."
The White Queen to Alice, *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll

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Reality jamming implies prior identification of realities to be jammed, and this in turn implies recognition of the framing mechanisms which separate phenomena that otherwise constitute a single experiential flux. Because the ways we aggregate and segregate our experience into categories constantly evolve within individual and social contexts, framing devices to effectively demarcate spheres of activity for one individual or group may prove totally inoperative for another. This elusiveness of the mechanisms whereby experience is differentiated is what gives reality jamming its critical transience.

Zaum and sdvig

One historical eruption of what might be construed as reality jamming is Russian avant-garde *zaum* or "transrational" art. Malevich, Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh and Matyushin sought to wrench percepts (colour, sound, morphemes and phonemes) from entrenched usage to make them the unbridled bearers of spontaneous meanings, of a fresh and soaring perception of the world. Their cubo-futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*, produced in Saint Petersburg in December 1913, was a spectacular attempt to embody and stage the disruptive energies of this new aesthetic vision. Under resourced and barely rehearsed, its use of powerful projector beams to lacerate starkly geometrised costumes and sets, and of strident chorister declamations to shock the ears, made it a twentieth century artistic turning point which launched determinant breakthroughs by Malevich and his entourage.

Key to *zaum* creation is the concept of *sdvig* — displacement, shift, dislocation — brought about by subverting rules, scales, foreseeable logics. The dynamic reality of *zaum* aesthetics literally makes sense by contrast with existing perceptive orders. This implies a process and aesthetic strategy that is intimately wrought into a specific historical context: the orders with which *zaumnyaks* or futurists sought to break were those that characterised conventional discourse and perceptions of their time. *Sdvig* manifestations are of necessarily fleeting impact, since disruptive manipulations of foreseeable processes in turn become foreseeable over time. This dilemma of impermanence that besets art is summarised by Victor Shklovsky, proponent of the notion of artistic estrangement (*ostranenie*) or defamiliarisation: "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important."[1] My question is how and whether the concept of estrangement that underpins sdvig might be manifest in a culture where already, according to Bolter and Grusin's formula, "the remediation of reality has been built into our technologies of representation."[2]

Syncretism and the extended body: holistic framings to jar the jam

Steve Anderson's argument for technological syncretism, which opposes the bland rhetoric of convergence by foregrounding the historical and material components of digital media, is inspired by the collage and montage heritage exploited by works he richly analyses.[3] In some ways one might see as analogous to Anderson's syncretism Symbiotica's concept of the Extended Body, comprised of living and quasi-living, liminal beings whose hybrid constitution defies and challenges traditional taxonomies.[4] By reframing the latter anachronistic classifications, Symbiotica raises our awareness of the degree to which our lives have become technologically riddled. Anderson and Symbiotica propose overarching concepts which can both highlight and accommodate difference. They shift us beyond the immobilising grip of obsolete mindsets and open up fresh horizons by reframing the thrust of art, its

historicised and radically technologised actualities. To vivify recognition of the incongruity (*sdvig*) vis-à-vis the everyday world on which art draws, they scaffold systems characterised by permeability between registers of reality previously considered as discrete.

This raises a tricky issue: might not work that readily enfolds and commingles difference perhaps bear the fatal seeds of its own indifference? Do we behold it from within or without, and where are its boundaries relative to outlying zones of difference, i.e. phenomena relegated to another order? Since our engagement with creative visions that are the stuff of art hinges on how they are offset from everyday reality, the very notion of "reality jamming", of playing with the boundaries of different reality constructs, depends on how these boundaries are instantiated.[5] The jamming and jarring inherent to *sdvig* and to *ostranenie* raise the question of how one can break with a familiar experiential continuum to make art "*a science of singularity*; that is to say, a science of the relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances." (Michel de Certeau, 1984; his italics).[6]

Never jam today

Malevich et al broke new aesthetic ground through reality jamming which employed distancing mechanisms (aggressive visuals and lighting, *zaum* declamations by a chorus of aliens) to generate singularity from the seamful — as opposed to seamless — relationship instated between beholder and artefact.[7] Belgian performance group Crew's *Crash* at the Anatomical Theatre in Amsterdam in 2004 embroiled realities perceived by a volunteer inter-actor and beholders through a seamless, high-tech jam of sensations (visuals, sound, texts, time lapse projections), to create a disturbingly mastered experiential drip feed. Thus described, these works constitute extremes on the reality jamming continuum, yet they might be uncannily comparable if their respective historical and material realities were differently foregrounded. Perhaps reality jamming, the wrenching of percepts and concepts from habitual contexts to trigger new sensibilities, is as fleetingly utopian as it is culturally vital, and perhaps fleeting vitality is inherent to poetic constructs, such that art is haunted by the "never jam today" paradox offered by Carroll's looking glass, where "memory works both ways".

1   Shklovsky, Victor. 1917 (1988 edition cited).

2   Bolter, Jay David, and Grusin, Richard. 2000.

3   Anderson, Steve. 2006.

4   Catts, Oron, and Zurr, Ionatt. 2006.

5   Norman, Sally Jane. 2003.

6   De Certeau, Michel, 1984.

7   Notions of seamful ubiquity and design have invested HCI discourse in the wake of work published by MacColl, Chalmers et al as part of the UK Equator Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration (2001-07); cf. [www.equator.ac.uk/].

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