



Pierre Huyghe, *The Third Memory* (2000), Double projection, beta digital, 9 minutes 46 seconds.
Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris.

Apperception, duration and temporalities of reception: The Repetition Festival Show

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The work of art is in a deep sense 'contextual'. It necessarily incorporates some projected sense of its conditions of reception into the logic of its production. It is through the spatial articulations of temporal relations that time is socialised. The temporal dialectic of distracted reception, into which art film and video intervene, is a socio-spatial, as well as a psychological, one [...] There is a complex overlay of rhythms condensed into the casual act of viewing a work of art. One criterion of judgement of a work – one new task of apperception – might be the extent to which it opens up this network of temporal connections (psychic, social, historical) to a reflective and transfigurative view. (Osborne 2004: 72–73)

In a short, but conceptually rich, contribution to the publication that accompanied the Tate Modern exhibition 'Time Zones' (October 2004–January 2005), Peter Osborne draws upon the writings of Walter Benjamin to develop an analysis of contemporary conditions of moving-image reception in the gallery. He focuses on the concept of 'reception in distraction' developed in 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' (1936), which highlights the difference between the mode of distracted reception often negatively attributed to the 'masses' and the concentrated, even devotional, attention displayed by the art lover. Osborne notes that the location of reception in distraction has shifted over time, from cinema to television in the 1960s and more recently to what he describes as the 'multiplying sites and social functions of the interactive computer-display screen' (Osborne 2004: 67). He is especially interested in modes of reception that might involve 'apperception', understood as the self-awareness of the perceiving subject.

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Clemens von
Wedemeyer, 'The
Repetition Festival
Show' (25
November 2010–19
February 2011),
Project Arts Centre
Dublin. © Clemens
von Wedemeyer.
Courtesy of the
artist and Project
Arts Centre, Dublin.

The role of art in the dialectic between attention and distraction is complex; it operates in part as a 'measure' of our capacity to perform new tasks of apperception or self-awareness, but it also potentially operates as a site of reflection upon processes of temporalization – the production of time itself. As Osborne points out, these differing, yet simultaneously occurring, perceptual states can produce 'a baroque space of distraction'. This is because, whilst art in the gallery space necessarily engages with the dispersed attentions of the viewer, it must avoid simply *reproducing* this mode of distraction, and offer a space of intellectual focus in order to function critically. At the same time, art also risks losing touch with the contemporary condition of distraction by fully entering the realm of contemplative immersion – 'becoming the vehicle of a flight from actuality, from the very temporal structure of experience which it must engage if it is to be "contemporary" and effective' (Osborne 2004: 69).

Osborne is ostensibly interested in collectivity and sociality, and in theorizing the relationship between contemporary film and video art and 'historical time'. To this end, he acknowledges both the specificity of media technologies, which are characterized by their own 'temporal differentiations' (such as the frame-rate of film) and the existence of 'other temporalities at play in the field of the viewer'. But although he focuses on the gallery as a site of both apperception and potentially critical forms of reflection, Osborne does not actually analyse specific situations of moving-image exhibition in any depth. Nor does he closely examine institutional or economic factors that might structure the reception of artists' film and video in the gallery, or elsewhere.¹

Instead, he comments more generally on parallels and differences between the large-scale quasi-cinematic video installation and early cinema, claiming that while both may acknowledge their spatial conditions as part of the viewing experience, the exhibition viewer (unlike the cinemagoer) tends to *sample* the work before moving on to the next distraction. This image of the viewer wandering through the gallery from one work to another is by no means new. Jeffrey Skoller, for example, argues that while 'complex experiences of temporality' are produced in the relationship between duration and image in film, these experiences are limited by the fact that 'durational viewing of individual pieces' is rarely part of the gallery-going experience (Skoller 2005: 177).² Perhaps Skoller is responding to a shift highlighted by Nicolas Bourriaud in the late 1990s – also noted by Osborne (2004: 73) – the displacement of the artwork by the *exhibition* as the 'basic unit' through which to experience the contemporary 'social image-space', understood as the broader media landscape.

The rise of the exhibition as a privileged site of engagement with reception in distraction does not, however, preclude a complex engagement with temporality. In fact, Osborne's account of duration reveals the critical potential that might reside in the explorations of temporalities of exhibition offered by some artists and curators. Rejecting Bergson's metaphysical concept of 'pure duration', which disavows the spatial representation or quantitative division of time, Osborne (2004: 72) endorses Bachelard's position that 'continuity is not given but made', because it must be established at the level of beings who exist in space as well as time. Bachelard conceives of duration not as a pre-existing continuity but rather as 'a dialectical process of continuity, interruption and beginning again', and it is this model that Osborne draws upon in order to theorize the relationship between artists' film and video and the broader temporality of the contemporary social image-space. Osborne, informed by Bachelard's notion of time as rhythm – or the 'restoration of form' – proposes that 'contemporary galleries can reproduce the agonistic multiplicity of the social image-space in such a way as to impose new reflective rhythms of absorption and distraction' (Osborne 2004: 73).

While Osborne does not elaborate on precisely how galleries – or exhibitions – might impose these 'reflective rhythms', these issues can be explored through reference to an exhibition first presented at Project Arts Centre, Dublin (25 November 2010–19 February 2011).³ Entitled 'The Repetition Festival Show' and featuring the work of

1. These issues are far more directly addressed by Volker Pantenburg (2011).

2. Skoller is primarily interested in the relationship between history and avant-garde film, and in the production of what he terms 'a subversive space outside the overflow of modern experience in which images can open into the flow of time as an engaged reflective experience of thought'.

3. The exhibition was curated by Tessa Giblin at Project Arts Centre and developed as a co-production with Fondazione Galleria Civica, Trento in Italy, where it was presented in May–August 2011. It also toured to Kunsthalle Charlottenburg, Copenhagen in March–May 2011. For further information on the presentation at the Project Arts Centre see <http://www.projectartscentre.ie/programme/whats-on/1142-the-repetition-festival-show>.

Clemens von Wedemeyer, it consisted of four successive presentations of moving-image works. In order to view the show in its entirety, viewers were required to make at least four visits to the gallery over a ten-week period. The (relatively small) Project Arts Centre gallery space was temporarily split into two distinct areas and visitors entered into a relatively brightly lit space, not unlike the foyer of a small art-house cinema, with the lower half of the gallery walls painted white and the upper half painted black. For each new presentation, the wall-mounted works in this area were re-hung – moved up from the spot-lit, white-painted area into the darker section above, where they provided a physical trace of previous iterations.

A 'black box' space, reached via a short corridor, was used to show one single-screen projection in each iteration of the project. These works were presented almost, but not quite, in chronological order; with *Occupation* (2002) followed by *Otjesd/Leaving* (2005), *Against Death* (2009) and *Von Gegenüber/From the Opposite Side* (2007). While an in-depth discussion of any one of these works would be beyond the scope of this text, it is worth noting that all four draw attention to the choreography of camera moments, often characterized by a circular or looping progression. *Occupation* also invokes the idea of the crowd as 'mass,' because it depicts a film crew engaged in a night-time shoot, involving the complex and distinctly militaristic choreography of a large and undifferentiated group of extras.

The structure of The Repetition Festival Show very clearly drew attention to the circulation of moving-image works within a network of geographically dispersed exhibition spaces, and the economics of co-production. The foyer-type space housed small stacks of the posters produced for each presentation, which were freely distributed together with an extensive 'guide' published in English and Italian, featuring production credits for the works and detailed information about the commissioning organizations.⁴ At Project, the foyer-type exhibition space also served as the location for additional video and photographic work. The first and second iterations both included 'making of' videos, which might be expected to offer an insight into von Wedemeyer's production process and concerns. But unlike the largely promotional materials typically found on DVD releases of commercial features, *The Making of Occupation, 2002* and *The Making of Otjesd, 2005* instead complicate the relationship between the temporal distinctions of research, production and post-production. For example, *The Making of Otjesd* does not depict the production of the work to which it refers but instead features documentary accounts of experiences and events that relate to border control and migration. This material provides the (partial) basis for the narrative of *Otjesd/Leaving*, which slowly tracks a group of individuals as they move through an ambiguous landscape, trapped in an apparently endless loop of bureaucracy.

Von Wedemeyer is just one of a number of artists who use film posters and paratextual film and video materials (which might include trailers as well as 'behind the scenes' videos) to explore the temporalities and economics of exhibition.⁵ However, The Repetition Festival Show derives additional meaning both from its context – the Project Arts Centre was the location of a 1970s cinema club that aimed to radicalize Irish film culture⁶ – and from von Wedemeyer's juxtaposition of different modes of production and reception. While the 'making of' videos specifically allude to the distinctly domestic mode of reception associated with the DVD (soon to be displaced by newer technologies of online storage and distribution) the posters proclaiming that von Wedemeyer's films are 'coming soon' to the Project Arts Centre and Fondazione Galleria Civica emphasize the continued appeal of theatrical exhibition. The posters also have an obvious retro quality, implicitly recalling an era before the Internet, when films (like those featured in another work, *Found Footage, 2009*), could acquire a cult following precisely because they were difficult to see.

Significantly, von Wedemeyer's work is not characterized by nostalgia for an idealized social image-space that is located in the past. Even though it may borrow certain

4. The guide consisted of commissioned essays on each of the works, English and Italian translations of the (German and Russian) dialogue in *Otjesd/Leaving*, a 'filmography' and 'institutional profiles' of the Project Arts Centre and Fondazione Galleria Civica.

5. Jorn Schaffaff (2010) has highlighted Philippe Parreno's interest in the concept of 'exhibition as film'.

6. For a brief history of the Project Cinema Club, see Maeve Connolly (2004).

strategies from the film festival, there is no attempt in The Repetition Festival Show to stage the cinema in the gallery, or to propose the film theatre as an exemplary site of sociality (a recurrent trope in contemporary art practice over the past decade). Instead the project emphasizes the coexistence of multiple technologies and modes of reception as well as the continued force of memories (and fantasies) evoking earlier moments in the history of moving-image production and distribution, when posters and still images sometimes circulated more widely than the films they advertised. By making explicit its status as a temporal as well as a spatial form, The Repetition Festival Show invites reflection on the social and psychological dynamics of attention and distraction, while also revealing the extent to which economies of time and space shape the circulation of moving-image works, both within and beyond the gallery.

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