IV.

CORPO E ECRÃ

BODY AND SCREEN

POST SCREEN NOT DISPLAYED

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Resumo: Parece que estamos sempre à espera de ecrãs. Mas de que estamos realmente à espera? Encarando o ecrã como um objecto de preocupação escultural, este artigo tenta compreender o quão inerente as relações-evento podem escapar ao dualismo digital/analógico do ecrã. Partindo das construções de Graham Harman *things-in-themselves* e as noções de Tristão Garcia sobre a *compacidade* e *intensidade*, o 'nonsense' da imagem indexical é explorada através de discussão de recentes projectos de escultura do autor que desafiam a correlação de pressupostos acerca da presença e da necessidade de esperar por ele (Harman, 2011; Garcia, 2014).

Palavras-chave: ecrã; digital; realismo especulativo, escultura; imagem; presença.

Abstract: It seems that we are always waiting for screens. But what are we really waiting for? Treating the screen as an object of sculptural concern, this paper attempts to understand how inherent event-relationships might escape digital/analogue dualisms of the screen. Drawing on Graham Harman's constructs of *things-in-themselves* and Tristan Garcia's notions of *compactness* and *intensity,* the 'nonsense' of the indexical image is explored through discussion of the author's recent sculptural projects that challenge correlational assumptions about presence and the necessity of waiting for it (Harman, 2011; Garcia, 2014).

Keywords: screen; digital; speculative realism, sculpture; image; presence.

LOADING...

Fig. 1 — *Throbber.*

I find them rather calming really — the slow expectant cycle of the *throbber* — the animated gif, loading icon, its never-quite-closed circle holding my gaze like a thwarted Ouroboros[1] that can never quite grasp what it's looking at. It is a gaze that goes beyond the screen to an event not yet here — the arrival of content yet to come.

These tiny byte-size files — simple sequences of images played one after another in an endless loop — are the image of wasted time, of time spent *unproductively,* somehow suspended between past and future events. Inserted between that which has happened and that which is yet to happen, each image is itself a discrete image marking its own time –waiting for the next image in the sequence to arrive. Waiting for the moment when the download is complete and the present is realised.

It is this space of becoming — the event space between *images* — that I want to explore in this paper. It is this space that I might term the *space of practice*, which is situated between *images,* between *objects*, for it is here in the act of becoming that the opposition between pre and post, between the dichotomy of digital and the analogue can be understood.

Talking through my recent practice I will try to understand how we wait, watch and live with screens as objects in order to approach a notion of a *logue* that is both discrete and continuous. Although as a sculptor I lay no claims to the screen image, the screen is clearly an object available in the world like any other object and as such is of sculptural concern. To this extent the terms *image* and *object* might be interchangeable, but more crucially the screen is an *object* in a flat ontology of *things*. As defined by Graham Harman, *things* are a construct of *real objects* and *sensual objects/images* (Harman, 2011, p.60). To this end I will draw on Speculative Realist (SR) constructs of both the *object* and time as it relates to my own research practice that seeks to wait somewhere in the becoming between the digital and the analogue — between the screen and events.

It is in this waiting space that I seek to locate my practice, not as a practice of crisis or hesitation but as a state of potential. To explain this I first need

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1   Symbol depicting a serpent eating its own tail.

to stipulate a reading of the digital and analogue within the context of my research. The digital, although culturally embedded in the computation architectures, is not, I argue, tethered to technology, but is a type of *structural method* within the framework of materiality.

*Structural method*s I propose are, like Jane Bennett's vital-matter-assemblages –emergent properties that are distinct from individual agents (Bennett, 2010). In a state of becoming, *structural methods* emphasise the dynamic means through which *things* emerge. Drawing on Lewis[2] and Florridi, a digital *structural method* might be seen as a method of becoming that promotes discrete non-corporeal structures, regardless of the ontological affiliation of its constituted parts (Lewis, 1971; Florridi, 2009). Conversely, the analogue is a method of becoming that supports non-corporeal continuities of structure.

The space in which I refer to the work as *waiting*, in a state of potential, is not so much the potential of Deleuze's virtual as it is Aden Evens' *fold* (Evens, 2010). The *fold* for Evens, like Cascone's glitch, is like a failure in the surface of the digital that makes it available to the analogue (Cascone, 2000).[3] But as we will see, it is not necessary to hermetically frame the analogue and the digital in an oppositional framework in this way if we allow for an agency of the event: if we wait.

WHO IS PRACTICE WAITING FOR?

Waiting Practice 32 exists as a still image from a public action that took place in Berlin in August, 2014. The artist, carrying thirty-two tennis balls, walked diagonally across an intersection. Upon reaching the centre, without breaking stride, the thirty-two balls were dropped and the artist walked on.

As an *action* rather than a performance this work draws us to its singularity — to the simplicity of the act that can be summed up in a short sentence or articulated in a singe image. It is a singularity that in one sense keeps us waiting — waiting for a resolve that will never come, as the image itself is not waiting, not wanting. It is complete. Yet at the same time the image demands that we consider the work as more than a point out of context in time. We cannot, indeed we are asked not to, forget that the image exists in time — the time of the image before and the image after.

Like the thirty-two balls spraying out across the cobbled street, the image itself is shadowed by a trail of Bergsonian moments that blur the duration of the action into an event of duration. As the inner autonomy of each ball dissolves like a Bergson 'sugar cube'[4] in the autonomy of the experience that is this image

2   Lewis defines *t he digital* as a discrete representation in opposition to the analogue, which is seen as a
    continuous representation (Lewis, 1971).
3   Evens' fold is '*the* mechanism by which the digital connects to the human and the actual' (Evens, 2010,
4   p.32). See also Bergson, Creative Evolution and Deleuze, Bergson — 1859-194V (Bergson, 2014,
    pp.32-33; De-

Fig. 2 — Charlton, *Waiting Practice 32*, 2014.
Fig. 3 — Charlton, 32-*Bit Catch*, 2013.

as a whole, they become qualitative multiplicities without number (Bergson, 1960, p.226-232).[5]

Yet in contrast to the 'purely qualitative world of Bergsonian duration' (Garcia, 2014, p.173), the image here is indexically insistent that we must con-sider this work from more positions than the image alone allows. The status of the photograph, as stated by Lefebvre, is never indexically disqualified. Images exist, like all things, anchored in the world of semiotic function that indicates what it is 'about to stand for' (Lefebvre, 2007, p.224).

Waiting Practice 32 problematizes not simply the relationship between event and documentation that is now so clearly evident in the work of 60/70 performance artists as presented by Rodenbeck in her analysis of Allan Kaprow's *Happenings*, but also in regard to the event itself (Rodenbeck, 2011, pp. 221-228).

Unable to unshackle themselves from abstract expressionism indexical register, Happenings and Performance events can only ever be experienced as 'thoroughly mediated' (Jones, 1998, p.85). Despite Kaprow's attempts to untan-gle his work from documentation by *instructional* strategies, documentation remains a 'means of showing what experience is like' (Jeff Wall 1995 as in Ro-denbeck). Images in this sense 'provide(s) an experience of an experience' that estrange <u>both</u> the live event and the event of the image from the present. The event according to Jones is no less an indexical moment than an image. Both make it equally 'clear that there is no original It is event' (Jones, 2011). not surprising then that a single frame of the *throbber* removed from its animation sequence still seems to move before our eyes. Forever indexical, embedded in the throbbing sequence of our memory, each image is as present as the event ever was.

Waiting Practice 32 is then not waiting for anything and least of all for the practice of an artist who is impossibly present (Jones, 2011). It is non-anthro-pocentrically complete in itself through the indexical function that has arrested it as a discrete image. Yet, as problematised by Jones, waiting exists in a state of tension between *presence* and *present*, in a state of '*now* that can never be grasped' (Jones, 2011).

GRASPING SCREENS

This tension is central to the absence that we see in 32-*Bit Catch* — a video work in which a ball is thrown against a wall and caught again thirty-two times. The video starts with a blank wall defined by the optically distorted corner towards

the left of the screen. Only when an arm enters the frame on the right of the screen are we aware that the video is in slow motion. Gradually the hand holding the ball primes itself to throw. In the moment preceding the release of the ball the video cuts — we hear a dull thud and the ball is suddenly hitting the wall on the left and bouncing back. No sooner has the ball bounced back than the video cuts again, and suddenly the ball is back in the disembodied hand. Each thirty-two frame segment is repeated thirty-two times, punctuated by the sound of the ball hitting the wall.

Here the screen event of the ball's movement through space is never made available to us. We can never quite grasp the screen image in total. It is withheld from us by the *thing* that is the video. It is as if the ball cannot wait for us. Instead we are shown what amount to still images — blocs of film that seem to operate as "*mobile section(s) of duration*' that change the duration of the whole (Deleuze, 1986, p.8).

While we understand the act of the hand throwing and the ball bouncing, we also construct a new duration of the whole from these actions. In fact, when the hand finally stops throwing the ball and disappears from the screen we are surprised — for there is no apparent reason why this cycle should be interrupted. The bounce and the throw might endlessly reciprocate each other — each projecting the trajectory of the ball back to the action of the other.

In the continuity of this *montage* each action becomes its own past and future as it coexists in the moment of the image. As a bidirectional projection of itself, the catch/bounce movement-image has become a *thing-in-itself* "inseparable from the before and after which belong to it" (Deleuze, 1989, p.38).

WAITING FOR LIVENESS

But the *thing-in-itself* constructed in the *montage* is not to be understood as an assembly of parts. Rather, as Graham Harman extending Heidigger explains, a *thing-in-itself* is an irreducible agent within non-anthropocentric schemas of *things*. As a *thing-in-itself* is for Harman an *object* that is always withdrawn from the world, *things,* due to time and space being internalised, need not be continuous. Just as Jones problematises the state of something being inside something else as a discourse of authenticity and presence (Jones, 2011, p.39), Harman proposes a *thing* that is withdrawn yet available only through its *real qualities. (Harman, 2013, p.176).* [6] In this sense it seems that the *thing-in-itself* is problematized as being a nonsense that is both a continuity of discreteness and a discrete continuity.

6   Harman redefines time and space as generated in the tensions between objects and qualities within his *quadruple object* framework (Harman, 2011, p.29).

Following Harman's *thing-in-itself,* the live screen is an always elsewhere[7] distribution of discrete events spread across a multiplicity of sites, that create unlimited *events-in-themselves* on a plethora of computer screens, televisions, LED/LCD displays in public and private spaces. This *elsewehereness* then, rather than being the result of On-demand streaming, Live+ and Timeshift broadcasting, is embed-ded in the viability of *liveness* itself that problematises the notion of the live screen.

Live screens whose synchronicity with an event-subject supposedly en-dow them with *liveness* are live only by virtue of being re-enactments — images that are *things-in-themselves* without need of an *original* act. 'There is no singu-lar, authentic *original* act we can refer to in order to confirm the true meaning of an event' (Jones, 2011, p.42). Always indexically tethered to a live-event[8] through the dependency of re-enactment, live-screens are insistently their own event.

Yet as a *thing-in itself* the live-screen event must also be withdrawn from the world. Within the construct of Harman's Quadruple Object the *live-screen* is never *live;* it must always be waiting for something. Waiting for something to re-alise its sensual qualities that 'exist(s) only insofar as some perceiver is occupied with them.' (Harman, 2011, p.60)[9]

Even the temporal displacement of Live + and Timeshift-broadcasting does not mean the screen waits for us. Time-shifting a screen or an object does not make it any more or less available as a *thing-in-itself*. The presence of an event is never present (Jones, 2011, p.19). The problem then with the func-tion of real-time broadcast is not whether it is synchronous or not but that it exposes the unavailability of itself as an event that is never live, never available regardless of when or where it is watched. To this extent the live screen is a re-enactment in which 'the past activates the now as already over' and 'the present (is) already turning into the future — and both continually escape human knowl-edge' (Jones, 2011, p.43).

WATCHING OBJECTS

The live screen then is caught up in the same tautology as other images — other *things* that in their being never become — spiralling endlessly away from us. Yet not only are we spending more time watching screens, we are watching more screens in the same place at the same time — we are doing more in less time (The Cross-Platform Series, 2014, p.3). We are waiting less. The screen event is no longer an isolated image framed by a techno-object, it is a device-independent

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7   The notion of the image as a product of "elsewhere" is outside of the scope of this paper but is discussed in Reconciling interiors: The screen as installation, (Charlton, 2003).
8   That I have already claimed via Jones is not present to anything other than itself anyway.
9   Levi Bryant's rejection of Deleuze's virtual pure past supports this position due to its co-existence (Bryant, 2009).
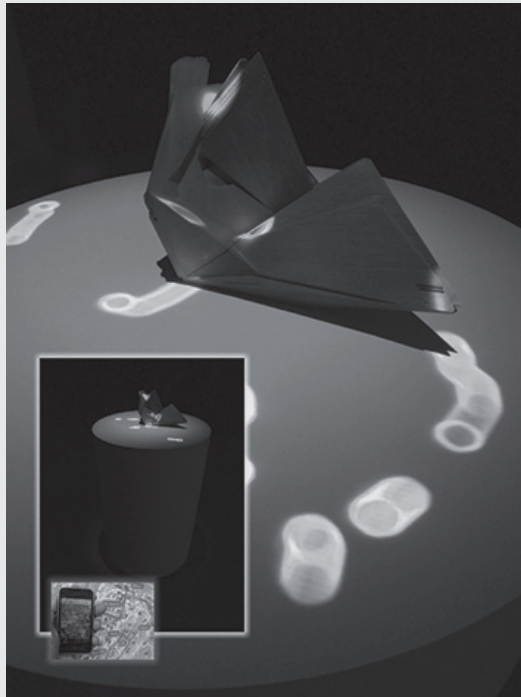
Fig. 4 — Charlton, *iForm*, 2010.
Fig. 5 — Charlton. *Three Actions in 56 Bytes* with Aleks Slota. 2014.

event that is instantiated on multiple objects, — the smart phones, tablets and laptops that are the *second screen* users engage with while watching TV.

The screen o*bject* then becomes a spatially distributed event that confirms not the object nature of the screen but that the screen event is a construct of our making it present — even if, as shown, the present is already past.

So when Robert Myres claims that he is 'watching *Raiders of the Lost Ark* on a baguette (Myres, 2012), he is not literally arguing that the screen is a baguette but that by implication everything becomes a screen. Although on the grounds of irreducibility I would contest the ability of the screen to operate by proxy, the proposition confirms the object as an indexical image as asserted earlier by Lefebvre. Following this argument, however, we might frame *iForm,* 2011, as a screen — as an object that is indexically located by our watching of it.

Mirroring Kaprow's instructional strategies, *iForm* is the *image* produced by a set of instructions in which participants with iPhones were dropped off in different locations around a circular bus route. At a designated time they opened a GPS App and started feeding geo-spatial data to a server where software *watching* the GPS data generated a real-time 3D model, which was subsequently realised as a 3D print.

Like the balls in *Waiting 32,* the participants in iForm are made present in the object as qualitative multiplicities, each GPS coordinate shadowing the former in an animated sequence of discontinuous moments that define the whole and yet are lost to themselves. The meta-event that is the 3D object — the indexical image — assimilates the participants' discrete digital being within its own whole — a whole that is an event of events of increasing resolution. However, to accept this reading of *iForm* would be to accept an 'it from bit' on-tology in which everything is derived from binary choices, in which everything is fundamentally digital in nature (Wheeler, 1990, p.310). To do this would once again position the *image*[10] itself as an impossible presence, as a *thing-in-itself* that in its presence declares it lack of availability. The problem then remains — how are things removed from a perpetual state of waiting to be made present in the world?

MOVING ON — NOT WAITING FOR THINGS

What I have tried to frame in this discussion of indexical practice, waiting images and watched screens, is a dilemma of presence — presence that requires *things* to be both available and yet withdrawn in a manner that I argue is similar in structural nature to the digital and analogue duality. Yet so far I have been unable to resolve the duplicitous nature of presence.

10   I have already established the image as a indexical function and thus *image* is used here to refer to artwork — *Waiting 32, iForm.*

Fig. 6 — Charlton. *Three Actions in 56 Bytes,* 2014.

Surprisingly enough it was the act of removing objects, of making them indirectly available by withdrawing them from an exhibition space, that recently clarified this for me. Faced with some challenging gallery constraints, I resolved to relocate the bulk of an installation to a parallel site. The bike-pumps, inner-tubes, tennis-balls and audio-modules that make up *Three Actions in 56 Bytes* were thus installed in a different venue a few blocks away from the gallery itself. In the gallery I left only a blue scrolling LED sign that stated over and over again — *This work has moved 52°31'47.5'N 13°23'16.7'E 38.30m*.[11]

As a meta-structure for the work, the act of withdrawal played out strategies within the work itself — strategies regarding the availability of live actions, and the discreteness of objects that I have discussed as problematic in regard to the notion of screens and *objects*. In splitting the work across two sites, the work as a whole — as a continuity of discrete elements and a duplicity of presence and absence, is somehow resolved. Like the tennis ball being thrown against the wall in *32-Bit Catch*, the cohesion of the work resides in the separateness of ele-ments that are not wanting in themselves. Rather than being forced to accept the polemic of digital and analogue — of waiting and becoming — presence and absence are necessary parts of the same thing.

This is the point Tristan Garcia makes in distinguishing between '*that which is something*, and *that which something is*' (Garcia, 2014, p.52). Drawing on McTaggart's series construct of time which holds that the 'distinctions of present, past and future cannot be true' (McTaggart, 1908, p.464), Garcia offers us a third option for resolving the co-conditional construct of *things* as *things-in-something*, when he proposes a continuous model of time in which past and future are *intense variations* of presence rather than isolated positions.[12] The future, rather than being discreet and separate from the present, is part of the continuity of event time in which the discrete *thing* is something (Garcia, 2014, pp.177-187). Following this, then, a screen is something, but the *image* that the screen is, is not the same as the screen-event or the *original act*. All exist in their not being of the other, a process through which they maintain their *compact-ness*[13] by being in relation to each other. Massumi clarifies this point when, drawing on Whithead and James, he declares that 'event itself is a subjective self-creation' (Massumi, 2011, p.8)[14]. Massumi does not pre-suppose a subject; rather the subject begins in the event of the indexical image itself that Massumi defines as the inclusion of a *thing* in relation to another thing (Massumi, 2011, p.6). Massumi's term for this

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11   GPS coordinates of the parallel site.
12   While it is useful here to remember Bergson's treatment of duration and memory, as later developed Bergson's dualisms are seen as problematic (Bergson, 1988, p.71).
13   Unpacking the ontology of things, Tristan Garcia proposes that failure is in fact a condition of the com-pactness of an object being itself (Garcia, 2014, p.64).
14   Massumi's activist philosophy draws heavily on Whithead's process philosophy and James' radical em-piricism. (Massumi, 2002, p.230 -239; Massumi, 2011, p.14-15).

is *semblance —— the manner in which the event-potential appears, 'reflecting itself directly and immediately in lived abstraction' (Masumi, 2011. p.19) . In the self-realisation of Massumi's semblance and radical availability, Garcia's compact thing, the problem of causality, seems resolved in a way that evades the workaround of Harman's quadruple-object schema in which the indexical image seems to wait in perpetuity for something to realise it.*

The proposition presented by Garcia's intense compact ontology and Massumi's self-realising semblance is that the dualisms of intuition , the oppositions of matter and duration, quantity and quality, science and metaphysics, analogue and digital, reduce the world to sets of paired tendencies that are simply correlational assumptions about the nature of things. Thus, in this compact semblance, when we wait, we do not really wait for something - for waiting, as suggested by Jones, is never satisfied by the arrival of presence. Waiting then rather than being an interminable duration of 'what differs' (Deleuze, 2004, p.32), is a perpetual coincidence of events regardless of their presence. To wait in the cycle of the throbber's indexical image is simply to be present in an event of self-realisation that refutes the ontological dualism of digital or analogue.

The image is always loading, it never arrives and the screen is *not displayed*.

15   Massumi's semblance is paradoxical- 'never actual but always in some way in-act' (Massumi, 2011, p.19).
16   According to Deleuze, Bergson's *intuition* is "a method for eliminating false problems" and the root of Bergson's dualisms (Deleuze 2004, p.20-23).

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