

Lately We Have Been Here Just About All The Time  
Even When We Are Sometime Else We Should Be Here Too

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**Abstract**

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Photomedia

As a way of approaching the work which was exhibited at the Henry Art Gallery as part of the 2019 University of Washington MFA + MDes Thesis Exhibition, this text outlines a film, and within that film a discussion of the use of strobe lights within the varied venues of theatre, club, and art gallery. Through the strobe light I return to the film and bring the text back around to the exhibition. The aim of this text is not to clearly outline or fortify the exhibition, but rather to optimize the space allotted by the thesis paper for the introduction of a third work to be considered in relation to the two that shown at the Henry Art Gallery.

## 1. 2013 - 2017

I spent the majority of my time in a basement originally designed as a shopping mall. This collection of storefronts which had long been vacant was stripped of remaining merchandise, gutted out, and tasked with adapting to our needs. Like Sorcerer Mickey, who between boredom and laziness transformed a broomstick into automated servant, basement detritus was altered to suit various functions. Through a combined auditory magic and added light, the rolling cart, which was stored in the same closet as unshipped art and various toiletries, became the bar. Walls, back rooms, and light fixtures performed similar transformations while acquainting themselves with the language of lounges and green rooms. These architectures were unstable, existing only long enough for an exhibition, performance, or concert to happen, before sagging back to their pre-existing state.

On the occasion of this thesis I would like to outline a film as a way to approach the two works presented at the Henry Art Gallery. When placed next to one another, there exists between them a focus on timelines. The works<sup>1</sup> themselves make this clear in their titles. Back issued magazines spanning decades and the placement of years, durational in their included dash marks present a certain type of history. One which exchanges words for the digits of annals, void of information outside of reaffirming a year past or the prospect of one to come. In their layout a timeline is constructed and through its construction, narrative, however thin, is produced.

Within this notation of history the dash becomes the operative symbol. Represented within its horizontal line is the quickest way between the point of genesis and the point of an end. The narrative dash is brief and definitive. It does not account for story or digressions, it simply moves forward, terminating all that falls on the other side of it.

Fittingly, cinema has long been preoccupied with notions of time travel. How many times have we attempted to travel back or forward in time only to be blocked by the need to 'maintain the timeline'? To evade past versions of ones-self, to not disperse information about the future, to mend something broken as not to shatter into alternate timelines?

This film can serve as a way to splice the timeline proposed by the dash. The images which make up its interior mass have laid dormant for a number of years, only to be browsed as thumbnails or as unremarkable strings of digits in place of file names. They were taken in haste, accelerated by amphetamines and the rising temperature of a room pushing the limits of capacity. Drunkenly framed, they were shot under impossible conditions, with the digital zoom maxed out, the flash reaching its limits even when aided by the echoing flashes from surrounding cameras.

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<sup>1</sup> 1962-1990 1995-2023 and *Back Issues* 51,98,105,107,111,112,117,126,141,142,153,154

Relatively few images made their way out of the basement for the amount of time I spent there. Maybe I misplaced the files, let them corrupt in a lost drive, or deleted them, maybe I only believe that I ever took them. Where is Jonah riding his motorcycle down the parking ramp? The leopard hat? Everyone huddled around the brushed metal table turned ticket desk?

But clear images never do what we want them to. Anyway, this is not a slideshow for graduation. It's not mounted above a kiosk or subway terminal. This document is a more general one which zooms in on sections and transfers ink.

Here is my film:

## **2. The Film as Demanding Artist or What is Your Rider?**

TF<sup>2</sup>'s frame rate (only thirty-six total frames) is comparable to that of a slow strobe. These frames have been severed from one another, pulled out of sequence, blown up, and reconstituted by a slide projector which has been hardwired to advance as quickly as possible. When the carousel rotates and a slide is situated in front of the projection bulb the photograph becomes less intelligible. Image quality is exchanged for a textural parsing of light more akin to the theatrics of gobos than to that of the cinema. TF, in its iconoclasm fails to convey internal movement and any focused directionality. Or more appropriately, it can't be bothered to engage the eye in a convincing display of animism.

We could say that internally the film is lazy. It sits in the GNT<sup>3</sup> doing nothing more than the bare minimum of what is desired. When asked to be exhibited it does not provide images but demands the eye's attention all the same. TF is selfish. Over the years it has grown delirious in its appearance. It expects a discount or free drinks and provides almost nothing in return, predicated simply by the fact that it has 'been around' for a while.

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<sup>2</sup> The Film

<sup>3</sup> Gallery Nightclub Theatre

### **3. The Strobe as Socialite**

Only enough light escapes its shutter as to convey the forms of those in proximity, or to allow oneself to become firmly situated in a room void of any particular adornment. This is TS's<sup>4</sup> tactic for resisting viewership, while maintaining the draw of the eye. Light is emitted and reflected, thus disguising the inner workings of the venue, eliminating its edges, polishing its grime, and veiling its construction. It is a tool for focusing the retina. Beckoning the eye towards its interior as it eliminates all that is outside of its boundary.

A vortex is emitted from TS, which consumes all that is within reach of its many hands. As all mechanisms of the GNT, TS exudes influence, thus placing all who find themselves within it into a zone of suspension. These zones are struck to warp the architecture of any given space into that of the dance floor, or of blinding pain to retinal pleasure. There is no position outside of this mechanism short of staying home. One cannot simply close their eyes or look away. TS is a tuning fork, which while resonant maintains a certain gravitational field, holding all within its orbit. In the manner of one who is in a perpetual state of putting off asking their boss for a raise, or one who remains waiting in a queue which is continually growing, TS entraps the viewer in its fickle circuit.

### **4. Kubelka**

Like Kubelka's cinema, only a single light source is permitted to operate in the GNT. All others, including the exit signs have been extinguished or masked with electrical tape to make way for TS. Unlike Kubelka's cinema, TS does not operate within a fixed situation; one where everyone is seated, quiet, and divided by cowls and curtains. Rather, the GNT is defined by its insistent shifting, its movement of bodies, and its various utterances.

Where Kubelka places the body in a velvet stasis chamber<sup>5</sup>, folds its hands, and closes its mouth in order to watch the beam, TS erects an amorphous theatre around itself. A theatre which claims to displace TP<sup>6</sup> while simultaneously obscuring its magic.

### **5. The Proscenium**

The proscenium arch, once joined to the floor, is most simply a perimeter which designates the air within its confines as; TP. It is a threshold, a gate, a boundary, a frame within a frame, and the glint of another world. It is the last remaining appendage of the invisible link

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<sup>4</sup> Variouslly; The Strobe, Strobe, Strobe Light, etc.

<sup>5</sup> This appears more generous than simply saying coffin because of course when the film ends and we leave our seats we surely do not wish to consider ourselves the rising dead.

<sup>6</sup> The Proscenium

between the theatre and the fiction that takes place on the other side of the stage, or upon the projection screen.

This zone is bolstered on either side by vertical columns, drawn curtains, or smoothed walls, and on top by an evenly stretched arch or a horizontal line which runs parallel to the floor or bottom of the screen. It is a safety measure, one which prevents the total collapse of viewer and viewed, of fiction and reality and of our time and another. It is a locking mechanism, which collapses any attempt at three dimensional forms, and renders only flat images. TP is a hand reaching out, pressing its palm too the viewers head, holding it flush against the padded head rest, and preventing it from dipping to far into the production.

This is not to say however, that it is a portal, which it of course is not. It is only an illusory wall or phantasmagoric mirror. Its presentations are only ever propositional, not directly obtainable. They exist enough to become image. To become affective. Upon any attempted breach the screen fractures, particles disperse. Action cannot be altered, the role of director cannot be assumed.

## **6. Ticket Desk Interlude**

*The GNT has become too hot and our eyes must rest as not to go blind. Let us move to the scene at the ticket desk.*

Its colder up here, less bodies, less movement. The door remains open, mornings continue to be cold. Hands stay in pockets, the sweater that remained around the waist, or tied over the shoulder downstairs is now properly situated on the body, or doubling as a blanket.

The DJ is not particularly enjoyable from this position, but the noise holds the building in place and fortifies its materials. Particles of cold air move more slowly than those of warmer air. At a micro level this allows the music to take its time, to build its sound gradually in the hallway, feeling the edges of the walls before being pushed out the door to settle and mix with the sounds of conversations and cars arriving to drop people off and pick others up.

Unlike TS sound waves remain invisible. Their vibrations run through, bounce off of, and resonate within, but do not directly reveal themselves. Their source exists on a shifting stage, which expands and retracts in correlation to the volume of any given noise. Where in one instance the scale of this stage may be restricted to the dance floor downstairs and the entryway at the main level as it is constituted and held taught by the reach of the PA system, the introduction of a motorcycle engine becomes a spotlight, bringing forth from the shadows an extension of the stage. The stage must fill this gap, stretch its boundaries, and account for new action. As the motorcycle continues into the distance the stage continues to expand, consuming city blocks until it is no longer audible. Then the stage snaps back, the ear shrinks, and once again the PA resumes dominance.

## **7. The Shattered Proscenium**

Back within the GNT it would be easy to assume that TP is nowhere in sight. Its important however to remember that TP is never visible and does not necessitate the characteristics I assigned to it previously. What is most important about TP is that it renders flat all which are behind it.

Now, TS being what it is, does not settle for the position in which one has often placed the projector. It is not content sitting in the back of the room shining its beam towards the front. TS exists in a number of places throughout the GNT. There it is mounted above the DJ booth, on top of the bar next to the tonic water, near the exit, etc. This is not a unilateral division of space which places one half of those present in the position of the audience, spectator, viewer or what have you and the other half as that of performer, actor, character, and so on. Space within the presence of the strobe is shattered.

While in the middle of the crowd, surrounded by alternating beams, one phases through the many positions of viewership. If ones back is facing TS and their eyes run parallel with it, the bodies which are illuminated by its light appear as clearly defined forms. If ones eyes however are pointed towards the beam any body which stands between oneself and TS appears as a silhouette. Knowing that TS is distributed throughout the room and operating on various timescales it is reasonable to assume that anyone on the dance floor is simultaneously occupying both positions. The body is continually reconfigured by TS as it splits between TP.

## **8. Articulations**

Within this context, TS's beam allows ones to glimpse the wave of the hand as it moves from hip to opposite hip, or from grasping the face to poised above the head. It catches the twist of a foot as the sole of a shoe is ground into the floor, or lashed out, readying a spin. TS defines the perimeter of the mouth. A grin, a smirk, lips being pulled inward as one attempts to hold themselves together. Here, TS maximizes potentials, highlights movements within their arc, and obscures their completion through the disappearance of the beam.

## **9. Lens Flares or Dr. Strobe Light, The Maniacal Surgeon**

Bodies temporarily freeze within TS as momentary articulations impressed upon the eye. Shadows are cast, fluidity is exchanged for pulse, movements are stunted between 'on' and 'off'. In a subterranean concrete box, light becomes more luminous. It holds on a bit longer. As 'on' congeals to 'off' the two become difficult to parse. While the pupil shrinks, light disperses then cuts off.

Unable to react in time the eye is prevented from making sense of TS's absence. TS of course has a partner in the lens flare in the manner that it momentarily drawing ones attention, then vanishes before it can be caught. Its glow persists within the eye, binding to its surface, synchronizing vision, and holding it in rhythm. Now that TP has fractured the flare is no longer constituted by convex glass. It can just as easily adhere itself to the limits of the eye. Returned light from TS charges the air itself with these shimmering particles, who hover in silence, waiting to cast their beams. Potentials are built up on the rims of glasses, silverware, belt buckles, and ashtrays. They leap from these surfaces as sharpened points, alluring and grand, yet temporarily painful. Prolonged exposure has the ability to blind.

It is only in the trail of after images that gestures blur, and that one person becomes a mass. A flattened shape rendered upon the wall. Legs are attached to arms, ears to hands. As perspective shifts piecemealed forms continue to spawn from TS. Ones head exists not only for oneself but also attached to a friend by way of a northern facing beam, to love interest by way of a southern facing beam, and to various pieces of furniture by way of the others.

### **10. A Return to the Film**

It is in this stroboscopic state of combination that TF exists. What appears as a hand in one frame, drops to black, and then returns as a glass. Another flash and the glass is exchanged for the metal bars which prevent the windows from being shattered. The images have been flattened to the point of becoming digits. They reveal almost nothing more than that they were taken sometime between a span of years. But in their orientation within the loop of the carousel TF like TS becomes a device suspending time. The slides do not progress in any visible order or aid the movement of the dash. They prevent a point of observation that is outside of or after the years that are tethered to either side of its line.

Unlike the dash, TF is not consistent. In its gaps there remains room to envision other spaces, to drift out of the place one occupies within that moment. To eternally project a romanticized image, to contemplate another drink, or to conceive of a plan for finding ones way home.

From TF a temporal specter has arisen.

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My greatest appreciation for your continued reading of this writing and all the others the proceeded it,

Rebecca Cummins

Ellen Garvens

Aaron Flint Jamison

Jacki Granger

Sean Lockwood

and for your continued support and friendship,

Felisha Ledesma

Alex Ian Smith

*The title of this paper is indebted to the anonymous author of a text which appears in store fronts and shop windows throughout the world. It appears here slightly modified in its language, cut down to two lines, and placed in the context of this paper.*