

## On The Importance Of Mediation

I pulled at a bit of loose thread, it had attached itself to my leg, by my leg, under the sleeve of high performance running bottoms. I pulled it in a tight fist - a quick resistance to snap it free away, but it slid, smooth, into the round of my last finger, slicing it open. It was a light cut to the skin, a groove felt against another finger; the sensory imperfection of feeling a lack, a thing that isn't a thing, but a gap on a boundary. There must have been a steady and consistent exchange of sensory information that existed between the two fingers rubbing against each other, now interrupted by a thin gap. But it's registered as a bump. It is a ridge made of air, non-being, an area no longer apprehended by the contours of the body. The skin as both perceiving object and subject of perception. This slight groove of parted skin felt as its opposite, as an interrupting presence.

I am both the perceiving subject and object of perception in a sensory system that encompasses itself and re-encompasses. It is through these drifts of perception, sensory experience and subjectification, regulated by opacities, non-opacities and misreadings that we can retain some sort of openness to the experience we are trying to access or process. To the coding and translatability exercised in delivering experience. Where the coding operates at a distance in order for us to process it, in order for the subject of perception to retain its position precisely as a subject and receive experience as something external.

Because without distance, without mediation, the eye and the subject becomes what it sees. Without the learned acquisition of depth perception for example, all sensory information registers in the eye as a single plane, on a surface experienced in the subject's eye unable to disentangle itself from the image. The subjects and the eyes that do not accomplish this separation are those of the blind. For example, in 1728, the first recorded corrective procedure on a blind patient was performed by the surgeon William Cheselden. In his report of the patient's response, Cheselden notes that "when he first saw, he was so far from making any judgment about distances, that he thought all Objects whatever *touch'd his eyes* (as he express'd it)". The eye/image here is no longer a representational system since the subject can't separate itself from the image in order to perceive the image. It is a closed system of image/eye/subject as if everything were inside itself. The distance between the 'eye' and the object is annihilated, everything occurs inside the eye and subject / 'I' without reference to an exteriority. Or the subject / 'I', has moved from its interiority to an exteriority as it is in contact with everything it perceives. Everything touches the subject / eye as if it could not assume a position apart from what it sees and so becomes everything. In the same sense, the subject jettisoned, at the same time as, being in the same time as, unconnected at the point the body visibly, but not spatially acquires itself.

Mediation is what sets the subject apart and is therefore required for perception. It is part of the learned registers of sight and so always already an effect of convention. That convention is always a mediated activity: coded, transmitted, regulated and operating over multiple modes - social, political, psychological, economic and technical. In the opening speech when the 'Artist President' in *The*

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*Eternal Frame* introduces the "forces which have assumed control of the American System [...] these forces are militarism, monopoly and the ... mass media" he is setting up mass media as the subject of analysis. Mass media is the convention through which society perceives and experiences the world and therefore "like all presidents in recent years, I am in reality, nothing more than an image on your television sets". Suggesting it is not just that mass media mediates our experience, it is that it is our *only* experience.

T.R. Uthco and Ant Farm examine the media through a sort of second-order distance, a mediation that reveals itself as mediation. They show the staging, documentation, performance, re-enactment and reception of capturing one of the most defining broadcasts 10 years earlier (arguably the other most important broadcast images of the time was the Apollo moon landing and it's interesting to note how both recordings generated such a wealth of conspiracy theories). There can be no such thing as the immediate, unedited presentation or representation of an event in media and so *The Eternal Frame* performs a media performance to reveal that there ever was a performance to begin with.



T.R. UTHCO AND ANT FARM: DOUG HALL, CHIP LORD, DOUG MICHELS, JODY PROCTER  
STILL FROM *THE ETERNAL FRAME* (1975), COURTESY ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX (EAI), NEW YORK

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*I suffered my image death on the streets of Dallas Texas, August 10th 1963 in order to render my ultimate service to the media which created me without which I would be nothing. I did this to emphasize the fact that no president can ever be anything more than image.*

The 'Artist President' re-stages his image death to show the fallacy of image worship and disclose the mediated relationship Americans have to events through mass media. When the video also includes the spectators around its production, for example the first spectator shown asks the crew "Did you see it on TV right now?", they are documenting American relationships to television - something that functions as the primary marker or testimony for an events existence. There are repeated moments where the onlookers reflect on this when the cameras are on: "Oh look he's re-enacting it [...] it's just like the real thing", [crying] "it's terrible, so realistic [...] I feel bad and yet I feel good" and how she herself wished she had a camera because "it was too beautiful". As if she were unable to adequately testify to its beauty without it being inserted to the mass media conventions of representation.

The 'realness' of the reenactment, however, is not due to any attempt at authenticity or verisimilitude. On the contrary, the rendering of the event seeks to make its performed production visible. At the filmic level, the presentation of the reenactment is a distanced one, with a background of an upbeat marching "Glory Glory Hallelujah", multiple views, colours, qualities and depths. The figure of Jacqueline Kennedy performed by Doug Michels in drag can be taken as an example of the *The Eternal Frame's* position as a whole. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler states by "imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency" and that gender practices are "denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization".<sup>1</sup> Like drag, the conspicuously imitative practice of T.R. Uthco and Ant Farm refers back to the already mediated activity of the mass media and parodies the mechanisms of this construction. As Michels says: "I don't relate to it as an image now, I don't relate to it as acting [...] What it is, is figuring out what it is". Just as drag reveals the performed nature of gender norms, the exposure of mediation in mass media also forces an open, but attentive relation to it. The play, its 'phoniness' is the resistance that allows us to recognise our relation to something.

1. BUTLER, JUDITH, *GENDER TROUBLE: FEMINISM AND THE SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY*, LONDON: ROUTLEDGE (2006)