

Vivian Sobchack

Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text, or How to get Out of this Century Alive

J.G. Ballard's quasi-science fictional novel *Crash* depicts pathological characters who "get off" on the erotic collision between the human body and technology and celebrate sex and death in wrecked automobiles and car crashes. This novel, characterised by its author as a cautionary and moralistic tale, has been celebrated by Jean Baudrillard for its visions of bodies "with neither organs no organ pleasures [...] all under the sign of a sexuality that is without referentiality and without limits". This is an intentional misreading of the novel, and one based on a somewhat alienated view of embodiment and sexuality, as well as the relationship between body and technology, one that is linked to fantasies of transcendence as enabled by technobodies. For there is an important difference between *having a body* and *being a body*, treating the body as an object or experiencing it as a subject, as well as between enjoyment as bodily sensation or as textual practice. Juxtaposed with the experiences of living with bodily pain and prosthesis, the textual celebrations practised by Baudrillard and his disciples, the magazines such as *Mondo 2000* or *Wired*, are about wishes to escape mortality, but also about narrow masculinist views of embodiment, and, ultimately, of existence.

Thomas Elsaesser

Digital Cinema: Delivery, Event, Time

Digitization of images seems to have caused something akin to a cultural crisis, with exaggerated claims being made by some, while huge anxieties are being voiced by others. In spite of some deterministic understandings of media, and tendencies to overlook the role of media economy and policies, these debates have given rise to

important questions concerning the status of the moving image, and the long-held assumptions that visual images, when mechanically reproduced, are in some fundamental sense "indexical". The article focuses on these questions and illustrates the multiplicity of issues that are in stake when discussing digitization and the role of the visual in media culture – from the production, post-production and marketing of films to changes in cinema theatre architecture; video distribution; forms of immediacy and "liveness" on TV; the status of photo-realism, and narrative forms in computer and video games. What clearly surfaces from these examples is, that the digital often refers less to a given technology, but functions as a cultural metaphor for rethinking cinema and television across the categories of time, space and subjectivity. Digitization marks a cultural shift, which is not simply a radical rupture, but a redefinition and refiguration of narration, and the role of the indexical within media culture.

Patricia Pisters

Glamour and glycerine: Surplus and residue of the network society

David Fincher's film *Fight Club* (1999) and Bret Easton Ellis' novel *Glamorama* (1999) both deal with life at the end of the second millennium in which capitalism and media culture are very determinant, and their main characters struggle with schizophrenia and paranoia respectively. In both works the main characters end up quite mad, illustrating the notion posed by Deleuze and Guattari in their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, of schizophrenia and paranoia as the two dynamic poles of "madness" in capitalism. The article relates Deleuze's conceptions of a shift from disciplinary society to control society to Manuel Castells study on the information age, the rise of the media-saturated network society, and along with them, the culture of "real virtuality, a reorgani-

sation of reality and representation. As *Glamorama* illustrates, audiovisual cultural products are an integral part of the network society, but, as *Fight Club* points out, they also offer immanent possibilities of deterritorializing resistance and reterritorializing recodings. In the culture of real virtuality, cinema and other form of media have become like capital, the principal form of thought and consciousness, the centre of society that can shift in levels between virtual and actual. They constitute the various levels we move through in order to help reposition ourselves and society from within

Susanna Paasonen

Bargaining with feelings: Internet, romance, and the film *You've Got M@il*

Love on the Internet was a popular topic in public discussion throughout the 1990's, but the premiere of the film *You've Got Mail* in the spring of 1999 attracted even more attention on the theme. This article looks at the inter-connections of the film, commercial online services, and product placement, with a special attention on the use of Internet as a theme within the cinematic narrative, and romantic narratives on the Internet.

The film itself is a romantic comedy that actually fails in creating a desirable romance, particularly from the point of view of the romantic heroine. In fact, the romantic couple can be seen as secondary when compared to the "sexiness" of the Internet medium, and the very attractiveness of the theme of online dating and "love online" in the marketing of the film. *You've Got M@il* is packed with commercial references, most overtly to the service provider America Online, the services of which are used by the romantic couple. Interestingly enough, the film has since become something of a prototypical Internet romance, a point of reference that is used to illustrate the possibilities of online dating services.

The film can also be seen as a tool in "domesticating" Internet as a medium by linking it to the traditions of romantic fiction and love letters, and in targeting female users.

Warren Buckland

Video Pleasure and Narrative Cinema: Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* and Video Game Logic

In this paper I will analyse the emergence of digital narratives in contemporary society. Digital media offer potentially new technological practices for manifesting pre-existing narrative discourse, although the specific potentials and constraints of digital media – most notably, interactivity – transform narrative structure. My aim is to develop a poetics of digital narrative, and to analyse Luc Besson's film *The Fifth Element* (1997) as an example of the way film narrative is being digitalised. In other words, I want to analyse the way film narrative has adapted to and been transformed by other types of cultural experience, such as video games (a term I am using as a synecdoche for electronic texts and digital media in general). The second half of this paper will focus on the way *The Fifth Element* combines traditional narrative structures (the psychologically-motivated cause-effect narrative logic) with a logic based on video game rules. In combining traditional narrative with video game rules, films such as *The Fifth Element* construct a mode of address that attempts to engage the consumer habits and forms of pleasure specific to the experience of today's film audience.

Aki Järvinen

Rules of the Game – Pixel and Game Aesthetics

Computer and video games are blurring the boundaries of such categories as play, narrative, space, entertainment and art. It is interesting to see how contemporary movies are incorporating game-like ele-

ments and aesthetics: the mortal kombatesque fighting scenes of *The Matrix*, and in *Speed* Keanu Reeves' character is basically playing a driving game. This development is tied to the digitalisation of cinema.

But films are not games – the sense of participation runs on a different level. Games are, if anything, a form of popular art. They present us with a particular kind of problematics regarding narrative and aesthetics. The article discusses computer and video games' techniques of narration and audiovisual presentation, with an effort to place these phenomena into the cultural history of the moving image. The focus is on one type of games in particular. This is the game genre known as 'first-person shooter' (FPS), which became hugely popular with *Doom* (1994) and has spawned numerous other popular games (e.g. the *Quake* and the *Unreal* series). The distinctive quality of the genre is its mode of representation, where the game-world is presented from the first person viewpoint.

Pre-cinematic devices and techniques, special effects, 'cinema of attraction', and theories of the gaze and the 'technique of the observer' (Jonathan Crary, Anne Friedberg) serve as points of reflection. The differences between games and narratives are discussed as well, and some key concepts of *environmental aesthetics* are reformulated in order to apply them to games. As a result, new concepts such as *game archaeology*, *game-space poetics*, and *the shooting gaze* are introduced in order to conceptualise games and their aesthetic qualities. Games are situated between the paths of two aesthetic disciplines: aesthetics of the moving image (film, television, video) and on the other hand, aesthetics of the environment (landscapes, architecture, space). The formulations presented in the article help to understand the inter-dependent nature of virtual environments and their users. In this way, they light the way towards understanding new media from an aesthetic perspective. For more on the topic, see the author's web pages at [http://](http://www.uta.fi/~tlakja/GA/)

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Lev Manovich

The Empire Strikes Again: A Review of *Stars Wars: Episode 1 The Phantom Menace*

May 1999. All across the USA long lines of young Star Wars fans lined up to catch the first show of the new (or rather, old, as it takes place before the original Star Wars trilogy) film *Stars Wars: Episode 1 The Phantom Menace*. The US newspapers dropped or reduce the stories about the war in Yugoslavia in order to cover the much anticipated premiere.

The film brings together several features of Northern California, digital imaging, military culture, and flaunting displays of technological and economical resources. If you take away the humans and the plot, what you are left with, on some basic level, is pure display of computational resources. In a nutshell, *Stars Wars: Episode 1* is a shameless advertisement for NATO and its rendering farm, a showcase for Western technology. Millions of polygons and millions of particles making every frame. And every frame dense with detail whose only motivation seems to be to show off human and computer labor which went into its making: In all its rendered glory and with all its shots featuring the endless armies of Droids, the automated soldiers of the future, *Stars Wars: Episode 1* is the ultimate military parade.