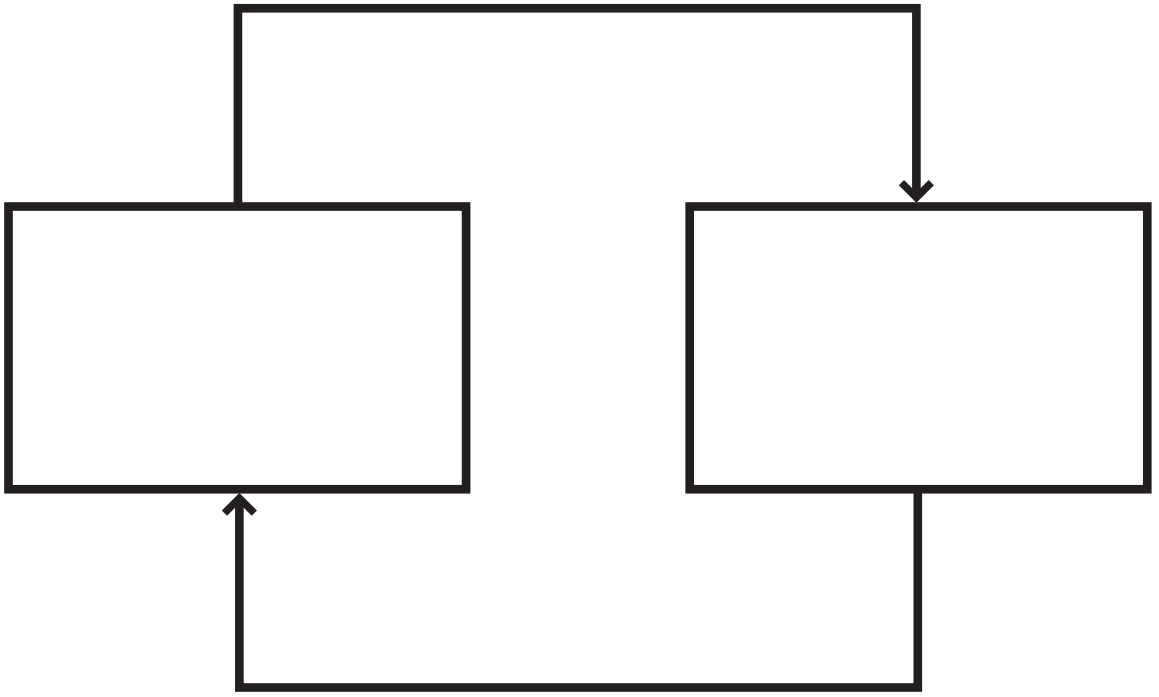


Signal:Noise is an experimental cross-disciplinary research project that aims to explore the influence of cybernetics and information theory on contemporary cultural life by testing out its central idiom,'feedback', through debates, artworks, publications, performances, events and exhibitions. The project is lead by Steve Rushton, Dexter Sinister (David Reinfurt and Stuart Bailey), Marina Vishmidt, Rod Dickinson and Emily Pethick.

This is the first in a series of occasional Bulletins to be published alongside the Signal:Noise project.

For his residency in AIR Berlin Alexanderstrasse, (organized by Aleksander Komarov, Susanna Kriemann, & Ilka Töd), Steve Rushton has established the Signal:Noise Bureau, Berlin Alexanderstrasse.

Steve Rushton has been a writer and editor for a range of projects with artists including: Who, What, Where, When, Why & How, Rod Dickinson in collaboration with Steve Rushton (2009); A Short Film About War, Thomson & Craighead in collaboration with Steve Rushton (2009); the Channel 4 project Flat Earth, Thomson & Craighead in collaboration with Steve Rushton (2007). Publications include the series 'How Media Masters Reality' for The First / Last Newspaper, issues 1 – 6, Dexter Sinister, (2009); 'New Walden', HB2, Issue 1, CAC, Glasgow, (2008); Experience, Memory, Re-enactment, Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam/Revolver, Frankfurt (with Anke Bangma and Florian Wuest) (2005); The Milgram Re-enactment, Revolver, Frankfurt (2003).

Susanna Kriemann is director of communications at AIR Berlin Alexanderplatz.

Susanna Kriemann: Your plan for Signal:Noise here at The AIR Berlin Alexanderplatz is to organize some screenings and talks and you want to follow up your research on feedback.

Steve Rushton: Yes, that's the plan. What interests all of us in Signal:Noise is how 'feedback' serves as an instrument in contemporary culture. It's a word we use all the time and it has a very particular history. It is one of those words we use to make sense of contemporary life; I suppose it helps us find our place in this thing called 'the immaterial economy' or the 'information economy'.

Susanna: And your current interest seems to be on feedback in the media.

Steve: Yes, it's amazing how the logic of feedback works in contemporary media. It works as a metaphor and also as a material condition. The reality TV show, for instance, is predicated on the idea of feedback. Viewers are required to join the feedback loop in order to make the show happen. Social networking sites also rely exclusively on the flow and feedback of information. So we, the users of these media, are necessary to make the feedback loop work. The whole shift to non-scripted TV formats and social networking sites is symptomatic of a collapse of the difference between producer and consumer. This has a very interesting result economically because although we work to make these media happen, we are paid little or no money for the work we do – in fact, in most cases we pay out of our own pocket. The profit from our work actually goes to the TV production companies; the phone companies and big media conglomerates, along with the media retail outlets that sell us upgraded equipment. As a consequence of all this we can no longer say we live in 'the society of the spectacle', we are no longer passive consumers of products; we live in a society of self-performance in which we constantly present ourselves and excite the interest of others in what we do, and this self-performance is a commodity that has a price. I don't think I'm straying into the realms of science fiction to suggest that contemporary media has created a form of immediacy in which human subjectivity is the principle object of production and consumption, and media serve to facilitate that production and consumption. Lauri Ouellette and James Hay, in Better Living Through Reality TV, link Foucault's idea of governmentality with the current liberal strategies of 'privatization, volunteerism, entrepreneurism and

responsiblization'. So the training and testing which is central to reality TV shows, along with the personal investments in the aims of the show ('this will teach me something, make me a better person'), serve to translate the negatives of travail and ruthless competition into the positives of self-improvement and personal empowerment. It is also worth remembering that within cybernetics (the science of feedback systems) the 'control' of a system comes from within that system, it is not imposed from the outside.

The feedback loop of reality TV should be understood in this broader social and technological context, as an agent of governance (the word 'cybernetics' has its roots in the verb to govern, incidentally). But there are other economic considerations, as well as the shift from scripts to formats in reality TV – formats in which behavior is controlled and regulated – there has been a second significant shift; revenue is now produced directly from sources other than advertisers, such as phone-votes, so the relation between viewers, advertisers and producers is made much more complex than in the days when advertising agencies would target very broad demographic groups. The divisions between the different parts of the media are also more porous these days so a media product patches into several media such as telephones, SMS, e-mail, blogs, websites, TV, etc. On a material level, these shows are cheaper to produce than scripted shows but they also allow for the narrativization and mythologizing of the production process itself. The reality shows have created this self-validating feedback loop that has shifted from the skuzzy margins of the TV schedule into prime time. How the industry understands itself in the light of this shift is demonstrated by Chris Short, head of interactive media at Endermol UK, the producers of the reality TV franchise Big Brother. Back in 2002 he said: "We're creating a virtuous circle that excites the interactive audience about what's going on in the house, drives them toward the TV program, the TV program will drive them to the internet, the internet to the other ways they can get information, and the other ways back to the TV."

This Panglossian spin is worth juxtaposing with a comment made by a recent president of the American Society for Cybernetics, Louis Kauffman, who defined cybernetics as 'the study of systems and processes that interact with themselves and produce themselves from themselves.'

So, the non-scripted TV show is at the high end of an imperative to perform which is exercised on the most mundane level – from sending an e-mail to logging on to Facebook, blogging or tweeting – or in any number of instances in which the community is sold to itself as a commodity.

Susanna: But aren't you mixing up a metaphor with a scientific principle? A non-scripted TV show is like a feedback system, but the two can't be regarded as the same thing.

Steve: A lot has been written about how cybernetics has this ability to actualize metaphor. The writers N. Katherine Hyles, Peter Galison, David Tomas and Ted Turner are particularly informative in this respect.[1] They put forward the notion that in the late 1940s the architects of cybernetics and information theory (principally Norbert Wiener and Claude Shannon) were able to make unique epistemological and ontological claims by constructing a narrative of reality in which the ideas of feedback and code were fundamental. For instance, we understand social organization as a network that is regulated by feedback from the different members, and our fundamental understanding of biological processes is through the code of DNA. There was a moment, just after the Second World War, when the figures of code and feedback became legitimating agents for what was to become the new worldview of the information economy. This was instituted in the manner of a performative speech act – they were 'spoken into existence'. For David Tomas, the triumph of cybernetics was its ability to redefine the concept of life itself in order to bring it in line with the operational characteristics of cybernetics.[2]

And Paul Galison argues in 'The Ontology of the Enemy', the founder of cybernetic theory, Norbert Wiener, claimed that the principles of feedback, which in the first instance related to Wiener's World War Two military research project 'antiaircraft (AA) predictor', could be extended to universal scientific principles. Galison charts how the principle expanded and became all encompassing in Wiener's thinking. Gregory Bateson's Steps to the Ecology of Mind went on to posit feedback as the central organizing principle of the natural world and of human society. So we must understand the cybernetic societies posited by Norbert Wiener, Gregory Bateson, Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan as positivist utopias, they posited technologies for living.

The present-day conclusion of this intellectual coup is demonstrated in what Hayles calls the 'Regime of Computation', which 'provides a narrative that accounts for the evolution of universal life, mind, and mind reflecting on mind by connecting [the emergences of the natural world] with computational processes that operate in both human-created simulations and in the universe understood as software running on the "universal computer" we call reality.'[3]

In this scheme code is regarded as the discourse system mirroring what happens in nature. So, for instance, the biological occurrence of DNA is mirrored in the notion that DNA is actually coding reality, generating a natural world that is coded at its very base.

Susanna: But what do you really mean by 'speaking into existence'? It takes more that just making a statement to make that statement true!

Steve: Yes, you are right, the ontology of the information age was not simply conjured up by an incantation, there are institutional reasons for the success of the discipline of cybernetics within culture at large. The Macy meetings were interdisciplinary conferences on cybernetics that took place just after World War II. They included mathematicians, biologists, physicists, sociologists and anthropologists, along with engineers and they were so influential because they could export the idea of feedback into different realms, and effectively instrumentalize the model of feedback and actualize the metaphor of feedback. During World War II, many of these people had applied cybernetic notions of network communication in military research projects, such as the Rad Lab in MIT. These ideas are now common in business and academia – like non-hierarchical, horizontal communication; groups from different departments forming networks; the idea of a 'trading zone' for ideas – all these ideas arise from the practice of cybernetic theory in institutions that were developing cybernetic theory.

There is an interesting relation between how scientific claims can have a perfomative function (in the sense of a performative speech act, where a statement becomes an action) and the way in which cybernetics and information theory became a central, dominant model for understanding how the world is organized. Margeret Mead, who was one of the central figures at the Macy gatherings, along with her then husband Gregory Bateson, provides us with a concrete instance of this. In the 1976 she and Gregory Bateson did an interview for Stewart Brand's Co-evolutionary Quarterly (a publication that came out of the cybernetically inspired Whole Earth Catalog) and she explained how the notion of feedback worked performativley, Mead says:

> "So we [the people at the Macy meetings] used the model, 'feedback,' and Kurt Lewin – who didn't understand any known language, but always had to reduce them to concepts – he went away with the idea

> of feedback as something that when you did anything with a group you went back and told them later what had happened. And he died before anything much else happened. So the word 'feedback' got I introduced incorrectly into the international UNESCO type conferences where it's been ever since."

So the key thing here is, whether a thing is understood correctly or incorrectly as a scientific principle it still has an effect – we still have to live with the consequences of misunderstandings if people continue to take them to be real. The whole debate around Weapons of Mass Destruction was a good illustration of that.

Susanna: And what will you be working on here at the Signal:Noise Bureau Berlin?

Steve: Last November I wrote a series of six articles for Dexter Sinister's First/Last Newspaper in New York – they were called How Media Masters Reality and were about the media feedback loop. I want to present an edited version as performance-lectures. I would also like to show some films by the US art-media collective Ant Farm that relate to those articles. Ant Farm's Media Burn (1975), is the film of a media event they staged in which a custom Cadillac is driven into a big pile of burning TV sets, and The Eternal Frame (1975), the re-enactment of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas in 1963. What interests me about this period is that the new technologies of the portapak, video, cable and satellite seemed to offer a genuine alternative to the mass media – we could make our own media and have control over it – this is a persistent promise whenever a new media emerges, but now it seems that this promise of self-sufficiency is translated into the imperative to be constantly visible, media-active and media-savvy. So there is an interesting paradox – in the mid-seventies technology would help us become producers of our own content and here in the second decade of the twenty-first century, producing our own media is part of a new economics of visibility and self-performance. We constantly work to be watched.
I see this as a dialectic: groups like Ant Farm provided a critique of their own media and at the same time articulated the conditions of possibility for the future (which we are now living through).

I will also be working with the British artist Rod Dickinson, writing

a companion the piece to *Who, What, Where, When, Why and How* (2009), which was a reconstruction of a press briefing made up of fragments of speeches and press briefings delivered between1946 to 2008. The texts that make up the piece come from all parts of the political spectrum and were edited together into a single, flowing speech in four parts. In the performance that resulted, two actors play a military person and a politician who deliver a protracted justification for armed conflict. It is surprising how consistent the arguments are. Whoever the politician is they seem to use the same language to justify war.

The press briefing is a complete, perfect media circuit; all the reporters, politicians, cameras, the stage and the flags only exist to be mediated. It is a good example of something that interacts with itself and produces itself from itself. We had a lot of fun playing with that circular structure. The piece is in four parts and each part goes in a rhetorical loop and the four parts also make a loop of the whole. So, structurally it is about making circuits and using lots of bits of text to make 'text-software' that can be reorganized and reconfigured. Our working title for the piece was *Media Burn*, in homage to Ant Farm who had a profound understanding of the critical implications of the 'pseudo-event'.

There is also a beautiful piece by Samuel Beckett called *What, Where* which uses the same text repeated and reconfigured, and this was very influential on the way we structured the piece. We are now at the stage where we want to take these elements further.

1. N. Katherine Hyles, *My Mother Was a Computer and How We Became Post Human*; Peter Galison, *The Ontology of The Enemy* and David Tomas, *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies Cyberpunk*.
2. Tomas, *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*, p.25
3. Hayles, *My Mother was a Computer*, p. 27

Still from *Who, What, Where, When, Why and How* (2009), by Rod Dickinson and Steve Rushton

Ant Farm: The Eternal Frame *, 1975 (above) and* Media Burn *, 1975 (below)*

How Media Masters Reality #2

THEY CAME TO SEE WHO CAME

TIVOLI, NY — You know the script: A politician and a military spokesperson mount the stage, each takes their place behind a podium. They face the ladies and gentlemen of the press and a bank of TV cameras. A line of flags provides an appropriate backdrop as the politician begins to speak. The politician reminds us of the necessity of the action they have taken. The politician reminds us that we did not want war, in fact we did everything in our power to prevent conflict, but if an aggressor willfully turns aside all overtures for a peaceful resolution, and if the aggressor continues to threaten the fundamental values of our society, then there is no choice.

The military spokesperson now points to a screen demonstrating the efficiency of the weaponry our forces have employed against the aggressor. It also displays evidence of the military capacity of the aggressor. It seems if they were given the opportunity they could inflict terrible harm on our forces, and to the way of life many have died to preserve.

But the press briefing is more than just a script; you also need the stage, the podium, the uniforms, the flags, the press, and the cameras if you want to *master reality.*

Simply through their performance, certain media events can have an effect in the world. In 2003, a military man mounted the stage and provided evidence of Weapons of Mass Destruction. What surprised many about this performance was the comparative ease with which it was exercised and the potency of its result — a war could be prosecuted despite any real "evidence" produced to suggest that such weapons did exist. It was as if the whole machinery of the press briefing was a feedback loop, which justified military action but also legitimized the press briefing itself. This is mastering reality.

For those of us raised with the notion that the press and TV news exist to somehow "get to the bottom" of things, and that the news media is a forum in which things can be proved or disproved, the ease with which transparent nonsense became a matter of fact that could justify fatal action came as a shock.

Whatever this thing we call "the news media" is, it is not in its nature to simply test matters of fact. The WMD incident demonstrated that the apparatus of the media actually has the ability to *produce facts.* The press briefing demonstrates two fundamental things about the structure of contemporary media: 1) It's a feedback loop that gives legitimacy and conveys narrative to its producers, 2) The incantation that "produced" WMD reminds us of French philosopher Michel Foucault's most valuable lesson — *discourse produces its object.*

Today I'd like to travel back to the beginning of the video revolution and reflect on two media events produced by Ant Farm in 1975: *Media Burn* — in which a customized Cadillac was driven through a pyramid of blazing television sets — and *The Eternal Frame* — a reenactment of the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

Twenty-two seconds of footage of the assassination, taken in Dallas in 1963 by Abraham Zapruda, was sold to *Life Magazine* on the night of the shooting for $150,000. *Life* published stills from the film shortly afterwards. (Later, the Zapruda family would be paid $10 million by the U.S. government for rights to the film). Stills were also reproduced in the Warren Commission Report of September 1964. The Warren Commission also used the film as the basis for a series of reconstructions that served as part of their investigation. The film itself was not broadcast until 1975. Perhaps more than any other, this moving image defined the turbulence of the 1960s for a wide American public during the 1970s.

Don Delillo's 1997 novel *Underground* captures the sense of this moment in a fictional account of one of the film's first public, or semi-public, viewings in the summer of 1974. The scene takes place in an apartment with

television sets in every room. In each room a video of the same piece of footage plays, with a slight delay.

Delillo writes: "The event was rare and strange. It was the screening of a bootleg copy of an eight-millimeter home movie that ran for twenty seconds. A little over twenty seconds probably. The footage was known as the Zapruda film and almost no one outside the government had seen it. [. . .]

"The footage started rolling in one room but not the others and it was filled with slurs and jostles, it was totally jostled footage, a home movie shot with Super 8, and the limousine came down the street, muddied by sunglint, and the head dipped out of the frame and reappeared and then the force of the shot that killed him, unexpectedly the head shot, and people in the room went ooh, and then the next ooh, and five seconds later the room at the back went ooh, the same release of breath every time, like blurts of disbelief."

In this scene, Delillo combines multiple screens plus the delay techniques of Dan Graham's video pieces from that era (a technique also used by Gillette & Schneider in their highly influential *Wipe Cycle*). It merges the use of video as radical software — elements can be patched and re-configured in ways that were not possible with film — together with with an understanding that television has been around long enough to be regarded as *junk*. All this is blended with the shock tactics of art-media groups from the early 70s such as Ant Farm, Radical Software, and TVTV (Top Value Television).

If the 8mm footage was created in the age of the news reel, it is mediated in the age of video, which operates under the economy of the feedback loop — to be re-recorded on to tape and repeated over and over again, to be set in the eternal frame, to cycle within the eternal return of "rolling news."

Ant Farm's re-enactment of the Kennedy assassination, *The Eternal Frame*, was made the year that Zapruda's footage became "publicly available." Ant Farm's copy of the film came from conspiracy theory sources and was originally bootlegged out of the *Life Magazine* lab.

Ant Farm originally wanted to film early in the morning, to avoid the crowds, but it became evident to them that the light was not the same as the light on the Zapruda footage and they needed it to be as close to the "real thing" as possible.

Via the Warren commission, the Zapruda footage was already caught in a media feedback loop, forming a catalyst that generated the noise of speculation, folding back to create a conspiracy panic. Because it was not visible as a moving image for eleven years after the event, the footage became the absent center of the Kennedy assassination — 22 seconds of action stretching into eternity.

The re-enactment served as a response to the belief that the Zapruda footage could somehow reveal something that had been hidden and repressed. But maybe the footage is re-played and re-enacted so often precisely because it *fails to represent*. A failure of representation is, in psychoanalytical terms, the central characteristic of trauma, but the reenactment also fails to speak of something at the centre of the technology of non-scripted film: its promise to display evidence, its promise to *carry the burden of proof*.

Four years after Ant Farm's historic media interventions, Pope John Paul II staged his own media event when he visited Poland. The visit was described by writers Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz as a *shamanized media event*, which through its staging actually steered a course of events (the rise of the Solidarity movement and the eventual collapse of the Polish government). The event was a ceremony, but a ceremony of a particular sort. Like the incantation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, through its performance it established the meaning of the event and institutionalized it in collective memory. It is the moment of shamanistic feedback when a new definition of what is possible is established, and it is then that the next step is urged forward. The media event can be seen as a form of consecration because it gathers into itself a series of values that feed back to form a narrative of a state of affairs that requires action. The ceremony of the countdown (which is itself a media invention, introduced in Fritz Lang's *Frau im Mond* in 1929) begins the narrative that ends with the moon landing. This event — staged for television from countdown to touchdown — inscribes a series of values through its performance. It speaks of an era of positivist triumph, when American know-how knew how, and it represented the end of an era in which the vision of a murdered president was finally realized. It joins a string of images that are pre-scripted, including the 22 seconds of the Zapruda footage and the televised funeral of Kennedy, which folds back into its self to make a narrative of reality.

Media Burn was performed on July 4, 1975, a few months prior to *The Eternal Frame*. A modified 1959 Cadillac El Dorado Biarritz (The Phantom Dream Car), piloted by two drivers guided only by a video monitor, was driven through a pyramid of blazing television sets. As in *The Eternal Frame*, *Media Burn* featured the Artist-President, John F. Kennedy, played by Doug Hall. He gives a content-less speech that sets the stage for the main event. Indeed, the speech highlights the degree to which a media event needs to be ritualized. The speech is one of the support structures that need to be put into place in order to constitute a "real" pseudo-event. The President speaks:

"Who can deny that we are a nation addicted to television and the constant flow of media, and not a few of us are frustrated by this addiction. Now I ask you, my fellow Americans, haven't you ever wanted to put your foot through your television screen?"

The artist-president is the rhetorical shell of politics itself, his speech collapses past, future, and present as the ghost of politics past reports on the significance of what is about to happen.

"Today, there stand before us two media matadors, brave young men from Ant Farm who are about to go forth into the unknown, and let me say this, these artists are pioneers, as surly as Louis and Clark when they explored uncharted territory, they are pioneers as surly as Armstrong and Aldrin when they set foot on the moon . . . "

Ant Farm's Chip Lord, speaking on the subject of *Media Burn* in 2002, cited Michael Shamberg's seminal book *Guerrilla Television* (1971), which inspired various initiatives combining the collectivist ideals of the 1960s with the potentially democratizing (new) technologies of video, closed-circuit TV, and cable of the 1970s: "[Using TV to destroy TV] was consistent with the *Guerrilla Television* position, to destroy the monopoly of centralized television. There was a lot of rhetoric about how cable TV was going to democratize production."

Ant Farm's media critique can be understood as a critical response to the promise of video, and perhaps more than any other artists they articulated its contradictions. Released from the monopoly of the networks and accessed by ordinary citizens, the Portapak video camera promised personal and social empowerment — make your own social and technological networks, make and distribute your own programs, construct your own social software, democratize artistic practice. But, as we will see in subsequent issues of *How Media Masters Reality*, the values of self-empowerment could easily be accommodated within a media feedback system in which our performance becomes not only a commodity that we sell to ourselves, but also a means by which the media could narrativize and legitimize itself.

In 1962, Daniel Boorstin coined the term "pseudo-event" to describe events designed solely to be reported: presidential debates, press conferences (and media burns). But Andy Warhol understood better than anyone else that the media event isn't something you simply consume. Describing the unfolding hallucination of the factory, Warhol said, "They came to see who came." The people who come to see the party become the party, the figure and ground become a single flowing image. In the same way, the figure and ground of the press shifts backwards and forwards from the press as they arrive to report the event and to the press as their bodies provide the props for the event. In the next installment of this series we will look at why we, as performers in the media feedback loop, are losing the script and picking up the format. (SR) ■

Portapak camera (1968)

How Media Masters Reality #3

HOW TELEVISION STOPPED DELIVERING PEOPLE AND PEOPLE STARTED DELIVERING TELEVISION

TIVOLI, NY — Today's installment of *How Media Masters Reality* begins with two quotations. Situated at opposite ends of a media revolution, both describe the medium of TV as a feedback loop, but with apparently different ideas of how that loop works. I will suggest that these perspectives have more in common than we might at first suppose.

In the video *Television Delivers People* (1973) artist Richard Serra makes the bold statement: "You are the product of TV. You are delivered to the advertiser who is the customer."

This statement came at a time when any number of artistic and critical projects suggested alternatives to the mainstream media described by Serra, ranging from Michael Shamberg's seminal book *Guerrilla Television* (1971) to initiatives that combined the collectivist ideals of the 1960s with the potentially democratizing (new) technologies of video, closed-circuit TV, and cable. The new breed of art-activists included media collectives such as TVTV (Top Value Television), Raindance, Radical Software, Videofreek, and Ant Farm. These TV Guerrillas helped provide the conditions that make the current media feedback loop of self-performance possible.

The second, and more recent, perspective comes from a statement made by Chris Short, the head of Interactive Media at Endermol U.K., the producers of the reality TV franchise *Big Brother*. In 2002, Short was happy to report: "We're creating a virtuous circle that excites the interactive audience about what's going on in the house, drives them toward the TV program, the TV program will drive them to the Internet, the Internet to the other ways they can get information, and the other ways back to the TV."

Both Serra and Short understand the TV audience, for better or worse, as a *performative commodity*. In both cases, the audience performs as an agent in the production. The more recent case differs from the earlier, however, because the actions of the audience directly determine the actions within the *mise en scene*, or template, of the non-scripted TV show. In the *Big Brother* formulation, an array of media outside the TV show itself provides the support structure that allows the TV show to air.

Back in 1972, the TV audiences described by Serra were distracted by scripted entertainment or by information (news and quiz shows for instance) while advertisers smuggled messages into their consciousness. The model for the TV economy (in the U.S. at least) traditionally worked on the principle that the networks would lease programs from production companies and pocket the advertising revenue.

In contrast, Short describes a media economy in which the advertiser is no longer necessarily linked to the show's production, because it is replaced, at least in part, by income from telephone calls and text messaging to the show. In 2005, Endemol's combined U.S. productions took money from 300 million calls and messages. The same year *American Idol* registered 500 million votes (63 million during the final) each at 99 cents a pop. More recently, shows without on-screen contestants such as *Jackpot TV*, *Get*

Lucky, and *Gala Games* (bargain basement U.K. shows in which people play at home over the phone) are proving profitable; product placement in these shows has risen from a negligible share to 10% of their total income in the U.S.; and further revenue is generated by the sale and export of formats in which both "playbook" and "coach" are provided on a franchise basis. Although still providing a comparatively small proportion of these shows' budgets, such funding methods are growing fast within TV's non-scripted sector, allowing production companies to compete at increasingly tight margins in an industry where four out of five new shows fail.

There are many reasons why non-scripted TV shows have grown from the margins of television programming into primetime. Over the past decades, and across the globe, the industry has seen deregulation, technological changes, radical changes in working practices, an increase in the number of channels and ways of accessing them, and the fragmentation of audiences.

The radical change to the network-advertisers system that served the industry for decades is well demonstrated by the reality TV hit *Survivor*. In 2002, CBS agreed to share the advertising revenue from *Survivor* with its producer, Mark Burnett, who also agreed to pre-sell the sponsorship. Burnett secured eight advertisers who each paid $4 million per show for a package of product placement, commercial time, and weblink. By contrast, the last season of *Friends*, which was produced by Warner Brothers for NBC, cost $7.5 million dollars per episode, with $6 million of that going to the six principle actors.

Survivor wasn't only cheap to produce (reality TV cost $700,000 – $1,250,000 per hour at the time) and effective at generating advertisement revenue, it was also popular, even outperforming NBC's highly popular, and hugely expensive, *ER*. *Survivor* was able to demand $445,000 for a 30 second spot, compared to *ER*'s $425,000. The success of the new model represented a tipping point for the broadcasters, and by 2005 20% of primetime program hours consisted of non-scripted content. TV's wild west is currently characterized by this increasingly rich mix of commercial funding, alongside increasingly sophisticated techniques for analyzing the effectivity of advertising that result in more diverse and nuanced targeting strategies by advertisers, and so on and so on.

Given that viewers are currently providing shows with both funding, via their phone calls, and content, via on-screen and online participation (typically deliberating and polling the fate of a contestant), it's ironic that the abolition of the space between production and consumption was one of the goals of the critical, self-initiated media architects that grew out of the 1960s counterculture. They wanted to see an end to the grip that the networks and advertisers held over the industry. Central to their critique was the notion that in order to break the circuit of monopoly of production it was necessary to dive into the feedback loop of self-production. In other words, they called for the rise of the participant — the self-performing subject in an economy where visibility itself becomes a commodity.

In the July 1968 supplement of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, Ant Farm published "Cowboy Nomad" in which they cast themselves as cybernetic, cowboy prophets of the future technological revolution: "YET THERE ARE COWBOY NOMADS TODAY, LIVING IN ANOTHER LIFE STYLE AND WAITING FOR ELECTRONIC MEDIA, THAT EVERYONE KNOWS IS DOING IT, TO BLOW THE MINDS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS AMERICAN SUBURBANITE. WHILE THEY WAIT, THE COWBOY NOMADS (OUTLAWS) SMOKE LOCO WEED AROUND ELECTRIC CAMPFILES."

Michael Shamberg, in *Guerrilla Television* (1971), wrote about how the feedback technology of TV might be used to break the stronghold that networks and their advertisers held over the minds of viewers back in the early 1970s: "[strategies] might include tactics like going out to the suburbs with video cameras and taping commuters. The playback could be in people's homes through their normal TV sets. The result might be that businessmen would see how wasted they look from buying the suburban myth."

For both Ant Farm and Shamberg, the subject ready for change is the corporation man — the individual conditioned by the commodity-centered media to accept his hollow existence and throw in his lot with the commodity. This is the endpoint of spectacular media: the message (the advertisement) stops when it hits the consciousness of the consumer, who, intoxicated by the spirit of bad faith, will go forth and buy stuff. Both Ant Farm and Shamberg understood that to break the hold of monopoly it was necessary to include the viewer in the feedback loop of production — to make the viewer visible to themselves, and thus create a shift in the economic logic of the media. The understanding of TV as a feedback mechanism that could reform an individual's behavior had already been appreciated and demonstrated by social psychologist Stanley Milgram, who conducted the infamous "Obedience to Authority" experiment in 1961. Milgram was greatly influenced by Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* — the TV format perhaps closest to that of present day shows.

When John Lennon and Yoko Ono staged *Bed In for Peace* (1969), Lennon described the act as an "advert for peace." This carries with it the assumption that the TV has the power to influence directly, that it's a "radical software" so powerful that anything — even peace itself — could be repackaged as a commodity. In this way peace found its natural equivalence with the commodity status of the pop star.

So how do we explain the schizophrenia of a radicalism that mistrusted technology and that looked to technology for the solution? Fred Turner's book *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* talks about two distinct trends that emerged during the 1960s which can be broadly categorized as the New Left and the Counterculture. The New Left emerged from the civil rights and anti-war movements. This group understood the world as driven by the material realities of class, race, and labor. The second group, the Counterculture, emerged from a heady blend of beatnik literature and cybernetics which understood individuals and systems (including ecological systems) as comprising networks that exchanged information with others. In this scheme the media could be understood as a media-*ecology*, the evolution of which could be redirected. LSD experimenters understood the drug as a technology of the self, a form of software that could change the program of a group or individual.

The underlying philosophy of *the network* was also a major inspiration for the 700,000 individuals who set up alternative communities throughout the U.S. between 1967 and 1971. By the early 1970s, cybernetic ideas had become axiomatic amongst the media-activists who had grown up through the counterculture of the 1960s. The Portapak camera and video represented new tools to extend the scale of human potential, just as every other new technology had done before. As Ant Farm put it, riffing on media theorist Marshall McLuhan's idea of the Global Village: "ALL I WANT TO DO IS EXPAND MY MIND THINK IN TERMS OF AN AGE-SHARING GLOBAL FEELING SCALES EXPANDING TO A GLOBAL NETWORK / VILLAGE MCLUHAN'S MESSAGE, MEDIUM RARE. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE THE LAG IN OUTLOOK AND CONSCIOUSNESS TO WHIPLASH FITTING THINKING/IDEAS TO TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES?"

Shamberg, in *Guerrilla Television*, made the radical distinction between a materialist left and a cybernetically-inclined left, saying: "True cybernetic guerrilla warfare means restructuring communications, not capturing existing ones." Timothy Leary, championing the new technology of mind-expanding drugs, stated: "[People should] drop out, find their own center, turn on, and above all avoid mass movements, mass leadership, mass followers." And this imperative for the individual to reprogram him or her self, rather than the masses to revolt, reached its technocratic extreme with Buckminster Fuller's assertion that "revolution by design" will mean "politics will become obsolete."

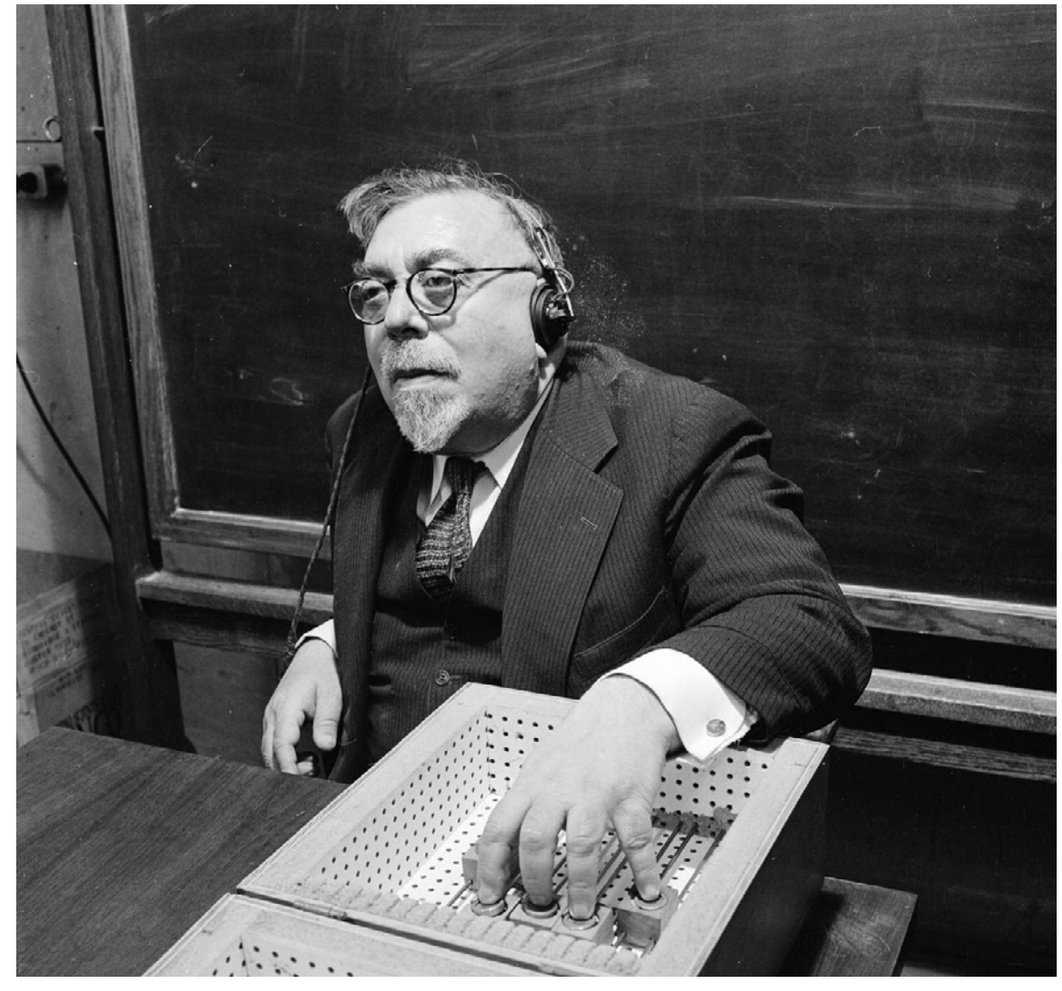
During the 1960s and 70s, media critique grounded in Marxism tended to emphasize the alienation engendered by the mass media — the distance between the viewer and the shining world of the commodity. As the

French radicals of the Situationist International put it, “Reality, the culminating point of the spectacle’s offensive escapes from all concrete usage, from all real communication, behind the shop window of an inaccessible spectacle.”

In the U.S., by contrast, a network of activists, architects, artists, and critics experimented with a different understanding of the medium of TV. Freed from the stranglehold of the networks and accessed by the people, TV could become a technology that could *make* reality, not just mirror it. Art media groups such as Ant Farm and Radical Software tested the possibilities of a medium that would indeed produce a participating network, which would collapse the difference between performer and producer, but what could not easily be foreseen was how the feedback loop of TV could make the commodity and the commodity-performer the same thing. In the feedback loop of non-scripted TV shows, the contestant and the prize are equivalent; the figure and ground that defined the old mass media is now replaced by a constant oscillation between producer and consumer.

“EVENTUALLY WE WILL ABANDON PHYSICAL MOVEMENT FOR TELEPAPHIC/ CYBERNETIC MOVEMENT (TELEVISION) AND OUR NETWORK WILL ADAPT TO THE CHANGE.” (*Ant Farm, Truck Stop Fantasy One*, 1971) (SR) ■

‘They Came to See Who Came’ and ‘How Television Stopped Delivering People and People Started Delivering Television’ from the serialized collection How Media Masters Reality originally appeared in The First/Last Newspaper, a semi-weekly newspaperpublished by Dexter Sinister for Performa ’09, biennial of performance art in New York City from 1 November – 21 November, 2010.



Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Norbert Wiener, 196x

Name of Reality Television Show, 20xx

Susanna: You've chosen to review Mark Andrejevic's Reality TV , The Work of Being Watched (2004).

Steve: There is a very interesting core of work currently being done on reality TV. Susan Murry and Laurie Ouellette's compilation of essays by various authors, Reality TV, Remaking Television Culture (2009) and Laurie Ouellette and James Hay's Better Living Through Reality TV (2009) are both worthy of note. Hay, Murry and Ouellette tend to apply Foucault's notion on governmentality (or governing from a distance) to the subject. So I would like to situate myself somewhere in the constellation of Andrejevic, Ouellette, Murry and Hey and discuss the matters of interest that arise from reading all of them.

The imperative to perform has been a subject of discussion for some time, of course, and has been variously described as 'the experience economy' (Gilmore and Pine), 'the immaterial economy' (Lazaretto), 'the control society' (Deleuze), 'the mode of information' (Poster), 'the weightless society' (Leadbeater) and as the engine behind 'The New spirit of Capitalism' (Boltanski & Chiapello). All attempt to explain the shift from a manufacturing society, which is based on physical labor and material products, and a networked society, which is based on the exchange of information. The network, or non-hierarchical 'trading zone' are, as I mentioned before, cybernetic notions, and we use them all the time to understand and narrativise the world we live in. The very idea of feedback within the social network is one of those ideas that shapes our world. It is inescapable but it is possible to trace its origins, chart its effects and establish some sort of critical position. For his part, Andrejevic insists on an understanding of capitalism as a surveillance system that grows more sophisticated as it develops. I find Andrejevic's broad stroke is very convincing: since the time of the enclosure of land we have seen a 'consolidation of techniques not only of monitoring workers but of centralizing control over the manufacturing process.' So the phases are: (1) the enclosure of land, which peaked in the middle of the eighteenth century (2) Taylorism in the nineteenth century (scientific management which resulted in the division of material and mental labour), (3) Fordism in the twentieth century (subordination of the time of the workers to that of the assembly line and the 'de-naturing' of labour). (4) The digital age which promises to restore time to the individual and release the wage slaves from the factory floor &c. In actual fact this promise is not fulfilled because

the digital age actually represents a reordering of the relations between production and consumption, between 'our own time' and the 'company's time'. As we increasingly attempt to sell ourselves as a commodity, our subjecthood becomes one of perpetual presentation, and, of course, we seek to find our destiny in the new subjecthood we are forced to invent for ourselves.

Andrejevic argues that the panopticism of modernity – surveillance through monitoring individuals in the work place (the scientific management of Taylor) – has given way, through the processes of new techniques of information management, which results in the duel action of panopticonism (the few watching the many) and synopticonism (the many watching the few) The synoptic is the regime of the celebrity, of course.

Through necessarily exchanging data about ourselves we become herded into what Andrejevic calls a 'digital enclosure' in which our identities (or profiles) can be constructed and in which we can be identified as very particular consumers, and in which ultimately our own performance becomes a commodity for exchange. So the digital age essentially represents a 'new discipline of management relations', and perhaps it would be fair to say ' a new discipline of self-management'. Andrejevic's understanding of a digital culture of surveillance feeds back into a lot of what has been written recently about the legacy of cybernetic thinking, which taken together lead me to conclude that the logic of the non-scripted TV show is precisely the logic of the feedback system produced through the logic of a surveillance society. I may be laboring this point to exhaustion here, but: the surveillance system is produced through gathering and ordering information, so therefore a surveillance society carries the internal logic of a society that gathers information. The 'digital enclosure' is an outworking of a much older tendency to collect and collate information, in fact the political rational of Western societies since the enlightenment has been to take care of its citizens (Foucault). The digital enclosure (which to my mind is close to what Deleuze called Control Society) has allowed certain 'technologies of the self' to be taken over from direct state intervention and fed through the media feedback loop.

The fact that we seek our destiny within this economy, that we translate obligations and hardships into duties and challenges, is exactly how governmentalism works. The non-scripted television show becomes a medium through which norms are communicated, expressed and fed back. ('I don't

want my kids to grow up like the trailer trash on the Gerry Springer Show', 'If Kirstie Ally can lose weight then maybe I can'). In a past era the figure of the expert would mediate knowledge and good conduct, but today it is exercised through reality TV shows – which are all about, testing, training, measuring, examining – which culminate in the court of Judge Judy, on The Oprah Winfrey Show or in Reality Goes Dancing.*

* I made the last one up.

Signal : Noise Bulletin No. 1

Reality Goes Dancing

Steve Rushton

AIR Berlin Alexanderplatz,

Summer 2010