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memory:  
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StreetView

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## **The pleasure of looping**

PLAY. STOP. REWIND. PLAY. REWIND. PLAY. Activities incorporating the use of media are inscribed into our daily lives, shaping our perceptions and co-creating our memories. The traces of their use overlap in a chain of interactions with technology. Does this experience with media “record” any memories in us?

I remember my first Walkman. It really was something: to be able to take your favorite music with you, to go for a walk with it, to listen to it on a bus, to go to sleep together. A “custom” soundtrack like this changed the way in which you perceived the environment, and, at the same time, in some way separated you from it, transforming the environment with music. My eyes would “choose” an image which corresponded to the rhythm and music. This experience was an interesting one. New possibilities for

imaginative play opened up just by pushing PLAY. It triggered new associations between sound and what I saw, but also suggested “invisible” images. Today, I see in this experience an analogy to the experiences offered by *VJing*.

The REWIND button allowed one to go back and play a given fragment again by pressing PLAY. This sequence of operations created a loop. Rewinding and replaying fragments of one’s favorite songs was like turning back time. That was how I discovered the “pleasure of looping;” this is my memory of how I first used the media and how I established their relationship to reality. I then experimented in a similar fashion with video tapes on which I recorded MTV video clips (I could play them whenever I wanted; they were mine). This time the sound was assigned to the image, but this did not prevent me from “entering the content”. I would recreate dance moves I saw, sitting in front of the TV. For a moment I was someone else, someone I saw on the screen. I was eight years old then. Today, I find my first experiences with these media to be similar to Massimo Furlan’s 1973 performance or numerous versions of the *Harlem Shake* published by amateurs on You Tube.

When I look at four-year-old children touching iPads, intuitively opening up the world hidden beneath their fingers, I see that the media with which we play may have changed, but they still influence how our perception develops. After touching iPads, children approach an “old-fashioned” screen trying to touch and activate it. They want to interact with it, and explore new possibilities for imaginative

play. Children grasp media instantly; they create “memories of their use” and use them actively. Media memory is convergent, and the “spectre of their use” distorts our perception and influences subsequent experiences with new devices, technologies and interfaces, and in this way changes art, as well. Andy Danzler’s or Jens Hesse’s paintings are a good example here. Both artists find inspiration in images damaged in a manner characteristic of the media. Danzler alludes to jammed VHS tapes, where pressing the pause button and stopping the film, created blurs in some parts of the frame. Hesse, in turn, alludes to digital distortions by introducing them into his paintings. As you can see, an error, noise, characteristic of image recording media is establishing itself as an aesthetic that goes beyond new media artistic practices. On the other hand, it provides a reference to an era when a given medium was dominant, which the audience (remembering distortions characteristic to a given medium) recognizes right away. Noise transfers the atmosphere of a medium and can be seen as a collective memory of the individual experience of using technology.

Let us go back to the PLAY button which started my childhood loop play. The word PLAY, which would start the song, was associated with child’s play or a game, although it was, in turn, usually associated with the word START. In the case of audio or video recordings, pressing PLAY need not be synonymous with the beginning of a song stored on a medium. In order to find the beginning you have to “rewind the tape.” Today we often hear the word ENTER

in this context. ENTER sounds more like an encouragement (“go in”), announcing a space in which you can act and immerse yourself. Interestingly enough, it opens the door to new ways of experiencing culture, with a focus on immersive experiences. That is what we call the feeling of “being” present in another space, either on the physical or mental level (which is linked to the co-creation of experience by means of memory), or both at the same time. Thus, an immersive experience is closely associated with space, a deeper polysensory experience that engages our memory. It is not necessarily related to specific images or memories, but is linked with sensual “sensations” and impressions.

Further on in the text, I would like to investigate looped images, effects applied to the image, and navigate through this virtual reflection of reality. “Media memory” created by various media loops will be an important element of my considerations. By this term I am referring to those media that remain in our memory and perception.

### **VJing: Postproduction of reality**

Sampling and re-mixing are used today in many fields of art. Selected fragments of existing artworks are incorporated into new artistic environments, thus becoming an integral part of a new experience. Such “samples” may also function as a memory of the source: forgotten artworks exist in new contexts, triggering interest in the original work. A fragment may even “resurrect” an entire work. Each piece “cut out” of the original environment

causes a distortion of meaning in the selection. Including such samples in new contexts can be compared to the operations performed by human memory.

The loop can be described as a repetition in the broader context of time and space. The researcher Nicolas Bourriaud observes that “artists today program forms more than they compose them: rather than transfigure a raw element (a blank canvas, clay, etc.), they remix available forms and make use of data.”<sup>1</sup> Bourriaud mainly focuses in his studies on the musical practices of DJs, analyzing them in the context of contemporary visual art. It seems, however, that it would be more appropriate to look at another form of art, one practiced by VJs on images.

*Vjing*, to put it simply, is a unique and ephemeral creation and manipulation of the image in real-time, which takes place in a continuous relation to the sonic and spatial layers of representation. VJs work with materials they have prepared in advance, use materials that are streamed or generated during the actual performance, or combine available source materials into unique sequences of visual samples. The ephemeral act manifests itself not only in the narrative structure of the image in relation to sound, but also by temporarily defining some spatial form or plane as a projection screen. The image is placed onto a surface, but it also influences the visual representation by co-constructing the narration and individual graphic elements or video. This is particularly evident in the prac-

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1 N. Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, New York 2007, p.17.

tice of *video mapping*, where architecture and bas-reliefs frame the projection. The façade functions here as an area where a tense game involving ephemeral visual elements is played out. The game involves actions carried out at the margins of the architectural structure to which they have been adapted, and their crossing of these boundaries in illusory transformations of the façade's static elements.

VJs' visual material is subject to *real time* postproduction.<sup>2</sup> Time and space, experienced by the audience directly, are also subject to postproduction. *Video Jockeys* not only sample and process visual culture, but are also increasingly involved in producing their own samples. Not only images but also space or different aesthetics, represented by various filters and effects offered by real-time graphics mixing software, are remixed and visually transformed during *Vjing* live acts. Thus, the style of live image mixing differs: it depends on the approach to post-production. The narration of these practices is based largely on the use of loops and quick-paced "play" with visual samples. The repetition of images can also be accompanied by distortions, such as adding more visual layers. The loop sets the rhythm for the visualizations and corresponds to the music. Yet, it need not be created solely by repeating an image. For example, it may be based on a rhythmicity corresponding to the method used to mix samples, or be a "reflection" of the elements' movement during the projection. VJ Emiko<sup>3</sup> admits that she usually does not make

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2 Postproduction is a term referring to manipulation, which recorded produced visual or audio material undergoes.

3 A sample video documenting VJ Emiko's live set shows that looping is the main strategy for

use of the effects offered by *VJing* software. However, she uses transitions between layers, for example, strobe disappearance or alpha transparency, which allow her to include in her compositions only selected elements of a video's individual layers and control the level of transparency. Thus, the method used to combine samples in real time is what constructs the narrative. One example of the use of these effects to create live images is VJ Emiko's act and Nmls' music during the Ambient Festival in the Puzzle Club in Wrocław (2012). A video documenting the live act<sup>4</sup> shows how different video samples intermingle. The aesthetics of the shots differ little from one to the next, repeating in various sequences. Yet slight changes in the composition of the elements make them appear blurred, creating distorted repetitions. A sequence of similar samples of hands emerging from a white liquid appear in different places on the screen, intertwining rhythmically with the music. New visual elements are introduced in time with the flashing of strobe lights. The image flickers, rapidly changing. An ephemeral sample is preserved in a loop, building tension by means of repetition, and creating a story that we easily remember. In this performance, VJ Emiko uses the movement of the emerging body, a dance created in different spaces, the tension resulting from slowly exposing a body, all contribute to the effect of fragmentation, which develops a rhythm, forms a compositional whole, and "constructs" the figure of a dancer by means of repetitions in the narrative.

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building a narrative. It consists of carefully prepared, very sensual, sample video shot by the VJ, in which motion plays a key role. <https://vimeo.com/55229048> .

4 <https://vimeo.com/55229048> .

*Vjing* can be seen as “the art of the loop” in reference to both our experience with the media, and to the narrative mechanisms of our own memory. Fleeting experiences can be preserved through repetition, through the use of memory. “The pleasure of looping” is also present in the individual interpretative effort made by each participant: the viewer tries to make sense of the sequence of images, developing it into a story. In the case of video samples, the loop creates a visual memory, thereby co-constructing the performative act as a whole.

### **Video mapping – navigation of illusion**

In an interview with Mirosław Filiciak and Andrzej Zaborowski about the *OpenStreetMap* project, Alek Tarkowski says: “(...) the map is still a key interface that allows one to embrace reality – on the map, on its subsequent layers, one can record not only spatial information, but also historical knowledge, heritage, basically any data. I think that we will increasingly look at the world through a map; it will be a point of contact between real space and “virtual information” attached to it.”<sup>5</sup> While the above statement relates generally to the phenomenon of mapping, it can also be considered in the context of video mapping. The only difference would be that the map in projection mapping remains “empty” until it is temporary filled during an audiovisual performance. In projection mapping an image is projected onto a plane or spatial form, whose visual elements determine the shape of the map and the points of reference for further artistic activities. By means of a grid

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5 Uwolnić mapy! O projekcie *OpenStreetMap* [*Free maps! The OpenStreetMap Project*], [in:] “Kultura Popularna”, No. 3-4 (29-30), Warsaw 2010, p. 45.

and virtual models of mapped space created in advance, one is able to design dynamic visual images which will then be projected onto a real object.

The image must be “integrated” with a real element in order to make it complete. Once integrated, it transforms into a phantom aspect of reality. Acting as a map for this creative play with the image are new, intangible “frames” which facilitate navigation of the image, but do not limit its form. This skeleton is then supplemented with data that appears only during the ephemeral projection and corresponds with the musical layer.

In the case of a video projection, we are dealing with the spectacle of the map and the navigation of illusion. The physical object must be constructed or reconstructed using 3D programs, so that the image can be imposed on it first in a computer program, and then in reality. This creates a kind of loop between the real world which “composed” the map and the virtual world that filled this map in the real world. A virtual object may be a reflection of the real, or vice versa. The latter is the case, for example, when mapped 3D printouts, whose prototypes were created by computer programs, are used during projections. Thus a loop of “symmetric reflection” is created in which a reflection may precede the real thing.

Artists and artistic collectives transform the face of objects using projection mapping. As I have already mentioned, the map is a scaffold for the visual story: it pre-

cisely “describes” different elements onto which the image is later projected. Visualization, especially using 3D mapping, is sometimes inspired by a specific architectural detail and the possibilities offered by it for creating an illusion. Projections described on the map can be classified as site-specific art. Each mapping combines real space with projected space.

Objects become screens, visualizing data or helping to create a poetic visual tale inspired by scientific discoveries and research. One example of such a projection of “scientific metaphors” and the development of their artistic possibilities is the *Paelodictyon* project – a mapping/site-specific installation created by the AntiVJ group on the Pompidou Center Metz, a building designed by Shigeru Ban. In *Paleodictyon Nodosum*, geometric structures built by organisms invisible to the human eye provide the inspiration and a visual reference for the projection. Research on the origins of these strange fossils with complex shapes discovered at the bottom of the ocean have been visually interpreted by the authors of the projection.

The appearance of these fossils also affected the way the image was made on the building. The whole procedure was carefully planned by AntiVJ, who wrote a special software program for the installation. Simon Geilfus, the lead programmer for the spectacle, commented thus on the design of the visual elements: “Each layer bring[s] its new set of rules and surprises. Combining can sometimes result in something *greater than the sum of their parts*, and that

is where interesting and unexpected things can happen.”<sup>6</sup> The image is in constant symbiosis with the sound, as a result of the way the behavior of the “visual organism” – the living, generative shape formed during the projection – was programmed. AntiVJ makes use of light and darkness in this narrative as a metaphor for life and death. Visual light forms produced on the building emerge from dark shapes on a bright surface, smoothly changing into new designs. All of its elements are in constant interaction, and the final shape is not planned in advance, but rather, is the result of the interaction between generative elements. During a projection mapping, a static building becomes a dynamically changing audiovisual form. When the spectacle ends, the architecture returns to its former state. However, some people may still project the vision of the altered building onto its “normal” form in their minds after the spectacle is over.

The projection transforms a familiar place for a moment; it adds new visual data to a static architectural form, thereby creating a story and enriching the space with new meanings. Illusion becomes an important element of the structure and often also influences other, non-mimetic elements, as its use of movement and space gives one the feeling that it surpasses humanity’s capabilities and violates the laws of physics. This image goes beyond the boundaries of real-life interaction with the material. The human body could not participate in this reality, but a person can feel the new space of these events and “be”

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6 <http://blog.antivj.com/2013/bacteria-farming-and-software-design/> (accessed: 03.04.2013).

in it psychologically<sup>7</sup> thanks to synesthetic bodily experiences and one's memory. This environment is not one of total immersion. A change in perception, including that caused by the experience of media memory, allows one to discover immersive experiences in different forms of art and culture. Everything that happens on a mapped image takes place simultaneously in the real space inhabited by the viewer. The projection may "cover" the entire field of vision, transforming an object or space. In his discussion of the changes resulting from adding new information to the urban landscape, Lev Manovich introduces the term "augmented space," which means "the physical space overlaid with dynamically changing information." Augmented space is usually "in multimedia form and it is often localized for each user."<sup>8</sup> At the opening of Super Salon in Warsaw (December 12, 2012), Krzysztof Golinski and Magda Major presented an interactive and generative form of mapping. The projection on a geometrically modified block was interfaced with Twitter messages that changed the color of the light. In the case of such video mapping, where anyone can affect the projected image using their mobile device, we should in fact talk about a "hybrid space,"<sup>9</sup> a term introduced by Adriana de Souza e Silva. A hybrid space is augmented, but also dependent on interaction with the users of mobile devices. Video

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7 Katarzyna Prajzner in her book *Tekst jako świat i gra. Modele narracyjności w kulturze współczesnej* [Text as world and Game: Narrative models in contemporary culture], (Lodz 2009, p. 24), describes immersion as both a sensory experience and a psychological "presence" in the text, being involved in the narrative.

8 L. Manovich, "The poetics of Augmented Space", *Visual Communication* (2006), p. 220.

9 A. de Souza e Silva, "From Cyber to Hybrid *Mobile Technologies* as Interfaces of Hybrid Spaces", *Space and Culture* 3 (2006), p. 261.

mapping provides a new context for discussing light projections: the focus is no longer on the image alone, but also on memory, perception and the transformation of the objects used in video performances, as well as on urban space.

### **Panoramic journey – Google Street View**

*Google Street View* is yet another form of mapping reality that undergoes creative visual postproduction and involves real objects. The collection of photos that forms the map is becoming an inspiration for many art projects. Some artists, for example, Clement Valla in *Postcards from Google Earth*, look for “mistakes” on the map.<sup>10</sup>

360-degree immersive cameras reproduce real space in photos. “Walking” on the map means looking at wide-screen or sometimes even stereoscopic photos. *Google Street View* is more than just a collection of images of reality; it is also an attempt to render space in such a way that one can travel move about the map just by looking at it. This requires a new navigation of “the eye” surrounded by images. Moving one’s eyes through a space mediated by images differs from observing reality or looking at traditional photos. This collection of images involves learning a new way to move about the map of a reality that is known or possible to know. The experience of a new cartographic form becomes immersive thanks to the possibility of movement and the loop it forms with our real experiencing of the environment. In other words: we can

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<sup>10</sup> <http://lightbox.time.com/2012/10/24/street-view-and-beyond-googles-influence-on-photography/#1> (accessed: 03.04.2013).

simultaneously be present at the same place in the real world and its recorded existence in *Google Street View*. Time in both places is different, and we experience both places differently. The map can be seen as a picture of the past, the memory of a space. In these photos we often find, for example, road works, traffic signs or objects which at the time were present in a particular place (and recorded by the camera) and which are no longer to be seen in a given place. People and events present in this “world” are images of a documented real presence. One may treat this map as a record of the monitoring of space. A loop is produced here between the environment one experiences every day, the view from the window, and an image of the world simultaneously present on a computer screen, its digital representation. The map can therefore be seen both as an image and as a window. According to Lambert Wiesing, “desktop windows are both images and windows: windows because they allow one to see something with which one can directly interact through the window, and images, because they allow one to see something that is not real, but only artificially present; it is only visible.”<sup>11</sup> But do we perceive *Google Street View* images as detached from reality? As artificially present? A strange coupling between two spaces, involving our memory and immersive experience, is created. It is another example of an *augmented* or even *hybrid* space, depending on where the user is located. *Google Street View* cannot be regarded as virtual reality. This is a form of documentation, augmenting space with memory.

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11 L. Wiesing, *Artificial Presence: Philosophical Studies in Image Theory*, Stanford 2010, p. 110.

## Summary

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun in her book *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* points out that: “Memory contains within it the *act of repetition*: it is an act of commemoration—a process of recollecting or remembering.”<sup>12</sup> She analyzes the ephemerality and durability of various forms of recording.

Today, memory is co-created by means of mediated experiences which undergo transformation along with the use and development of media and technology, their mobility and a new relationship with space and the map. Various means of technical recording and playback help us to explore other dimensions of the “archive,” which are present in real-time operations, augmenting space. Thus, the loop forms memory. In the rapidly developing art of *Vjing*, repetition has many faces. It can be found in the use of video mixing software and in the practice of sampling. The loop becomes an aesthetic determinant of this artistic practice. Narration in *Vjing* is a memory of repeated images and their interaction with music. An ephemeral and momentary “augmenting” of space can be seen in *video mapping*, which enters into urban space, changing its “memory” and static form through dynamic visual projections. In the process of preparing such an event, an actual real object has to be reproduced, which will later be used to create a map. *Google Street View* can be regarded as a global monitoring system. It documents certain events and at the same time plays with our memory. It is a means of traveling in space, exchanging the immersion of the body for the “immersion of the eye.” It can also create a new experience by combining the two.

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12 W H. K. Chun, *Programed visions: Software and memory*, Massachusetts 2011, p.133.

**Weronika Lewandowska**, In the loop of media images and memory...

We can see loops in our everyday lives; we all create loops through our use of media.

**translated by Małgorzata Olsza**