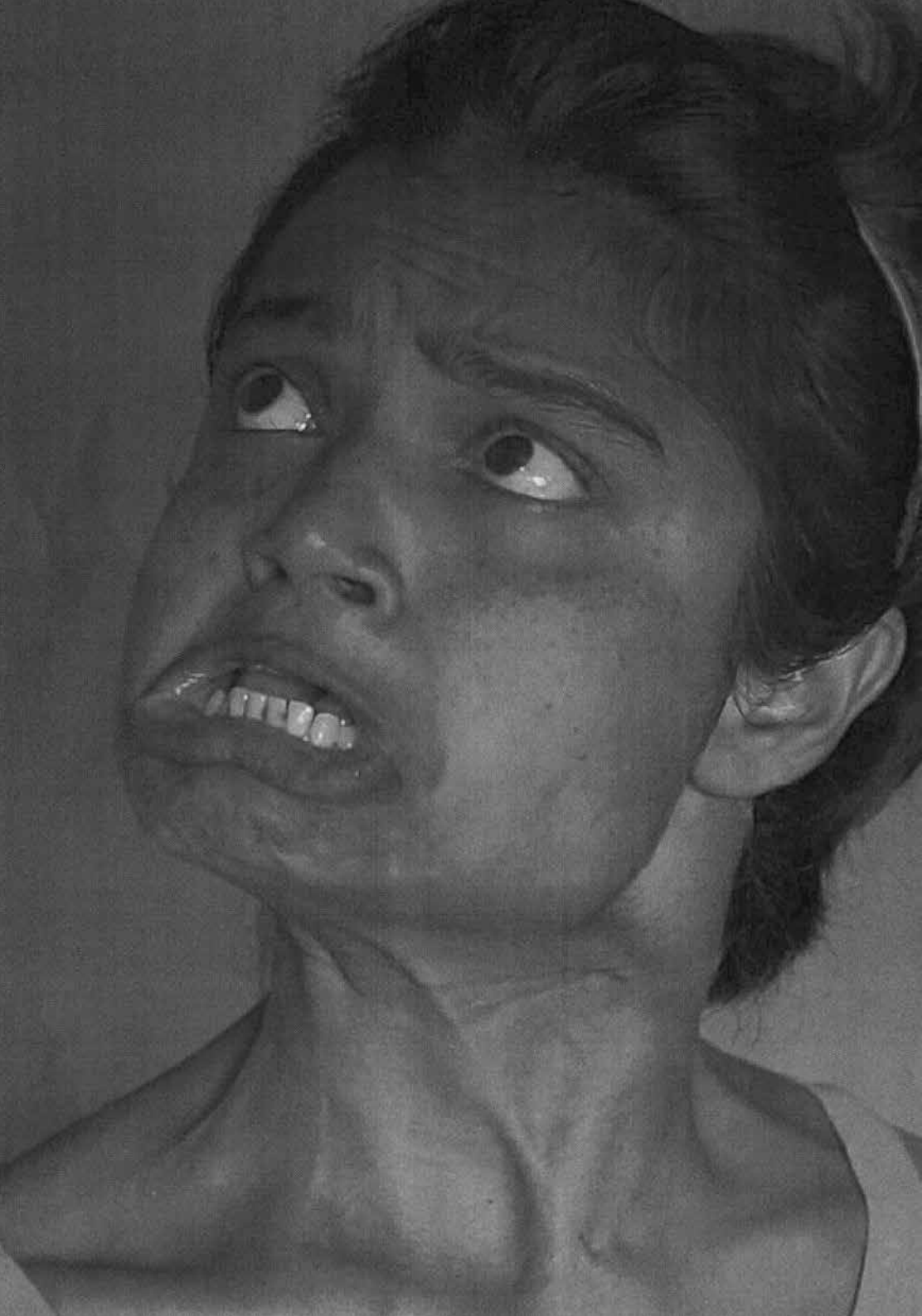
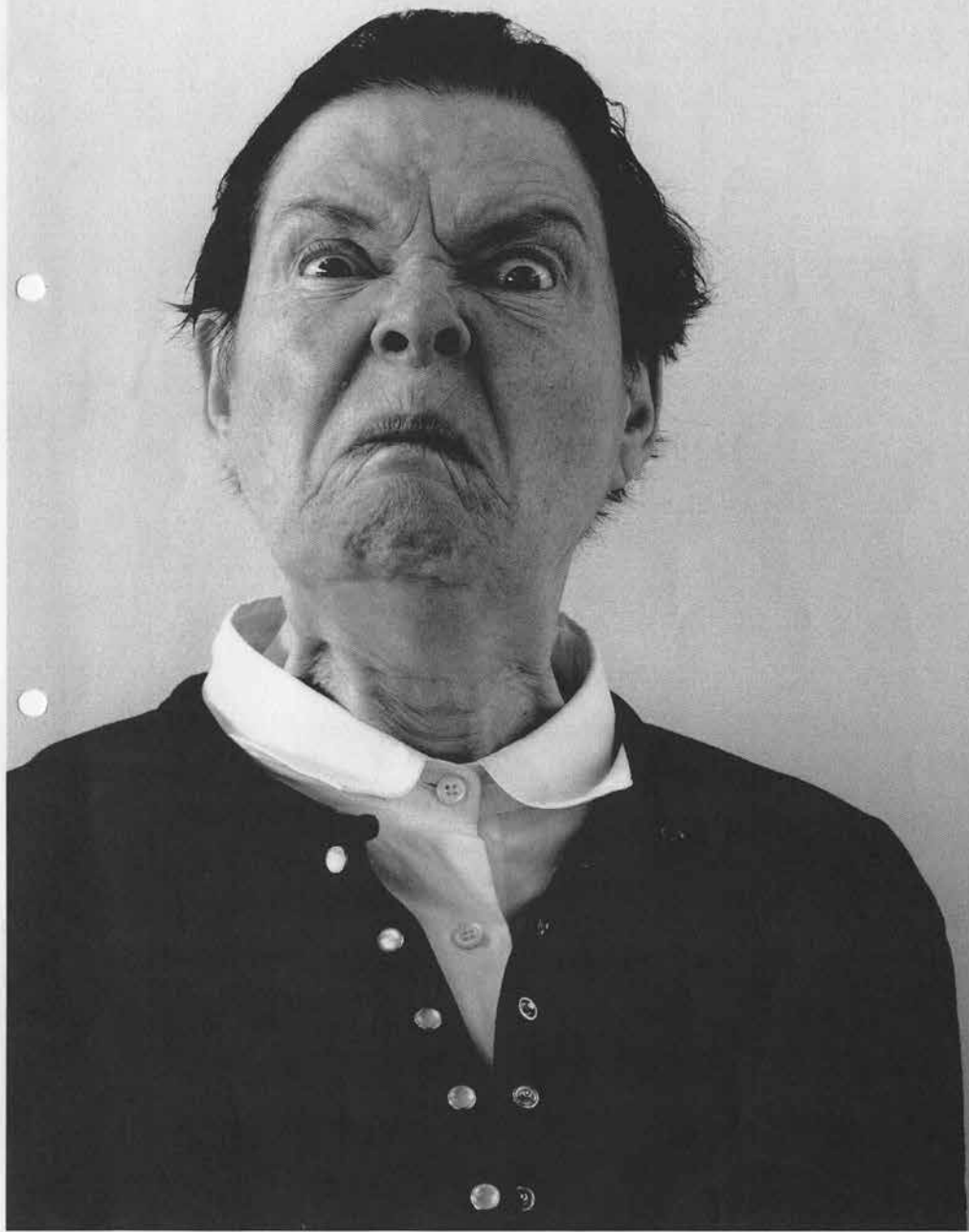


**Sander Breure &
Witte van Hulzen**

**In a Flickering
Light**







Cool to see my brain though, and yes that is my god damn nose.

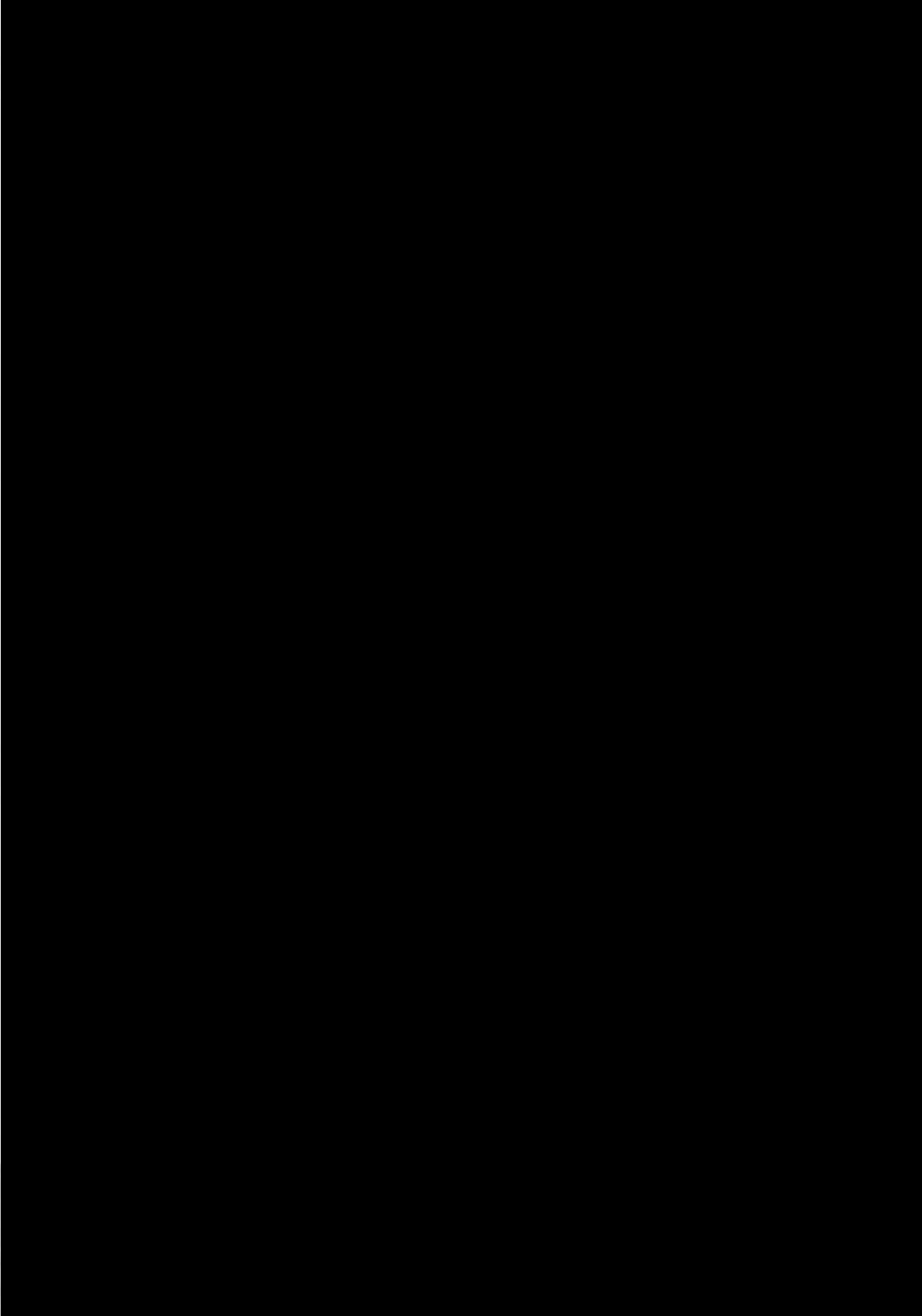


Mother Elephant tries to wake dead calf.



If a movie was so good it ruins you, would you watch it?

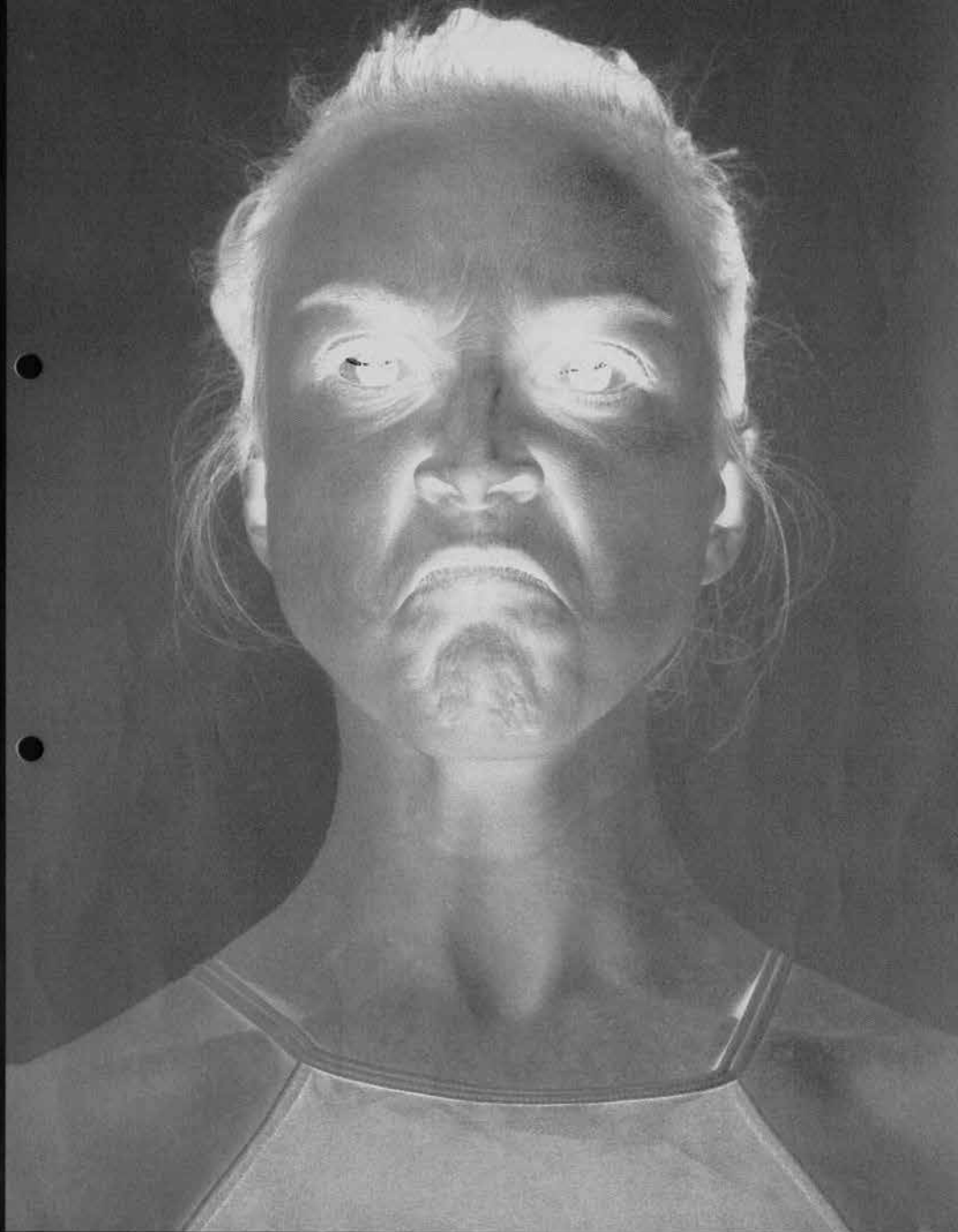
Eat shit you traitor scumbag.



Everything is on fire and slowly burning.

STERUE WELKER

GIF + LINKER ONDER
006 OPTREKKEN



I'm wondering why her mouth sounds so moist all the time.

Blinking. Thoughts off / Thoughts on

Marta Ramos-Yzquierdo

Light flickers. The interval between illumination and darkness lasts the slightest of instants. Just like blinking. Just like a camera shutter opening and closing. Just like a cinema projector changing from one frame to the next. Just like the electrical signal refreshing a pixel on a screen.

First half of the blink

The light on the screen illuminates the face with open eyes. What can be perceived in that split second?

“Let there be light”, so begins the world in the Book of Genesis. Our eyes are capable of grasping matter, and therefore of creating an image, because there is light.

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

“Il était une fois...” [Once upon a time, there was] the white light of the moon crossed by a cloud and lighting up a woman’s face. A man slit her left eye with a razor, a visual echo of the cloud crossing the moonlight. The eye fabric opened and released a large, transparent drop.

Le chien andalou, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1929

The light particles on the screen interact with the molecules in our eyes, which transfer physical signals to our brain. Our brain forms an image, and its interpretation, founded on cultural experience, identity and affections, produces a reaction in our mind and, therefore, in our body. The screen is molecular which interacts in a circuit of flowing matter and particles with the molecular system of our body, our eyes and our brain. The brain is the screen, as Gilles Deleuze said¹. The speed of light determines the amount of information we receive, and the duration of light affects our notion of time.

Possibly, on the screen we cannot see:

A boy turns on a flickering TV and the memories begin...

“What is your name and surname?”

The Mirror, Andréi Tarkovski, 1975

¹ Flaxman, Gregory, Ed., “The Brain Is the Screen. An Interview with Gilles Deleuze” *The Brain Is the Screen. Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000.

Second half of the blink

Light disappears from the screen and the face is left in the dark. The eyes are closed. It is the infinitesimal time interval during which the given image does not exist.

What can be imagined in that instant? What memories appear? What dreams are shaped? What desires are produced?

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

“You saw nothing in Hiroshima. Nothing.

I saw everything”.

Hiroshima Mon Amour, Alain Resnais, 1959

In her study *Deleuze. Altered State and Film*², Anna Powell analyses Deleuze’s connection with Spinoza and Bergson, specifically in regards to their theory on cinema and the moving image as an analogy of brain perception and its implications on desire and human affects. Dependence on the image is one of the core elements when it comes to thinking about the perception of matter, the very materiality of the brain and its capacity to recreate experience, and thus the nature of memory and the conception of consciousness as an illusion: “Arguing that ‘the brain is the screen’ Deleuze presents cinema as both expressing and inducing thought. Like film, the brain itself is a self-reflexive moving image of time, space and motion.”³ We could therefore consider reality to be an illusion, but also, consequently, to be a possibility for thought and action.

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

Three men tell their account of a crime that will eventually remain unsolved. One of them recalls walking through the forest looking for firewood. The sun, excessively bright, shines in between the tree leaves and is reflected by the axe on the man’s shoulder.

Rashomon, Akira Kurosawa, 1950

The mirror. The screen

Before light, there was only darkness. Before the screen, the moving image existed only in the mirror.

² Powell, Anna, *Deleuze. Altered State and Film*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2007.

³ Op. Cit. 2, p. 4.



Narcissus saw his reflection in the lake, a mirror. Pushed by pure desire for his own image, he fell into the water and drowned. Alice continued her journey across Wonderland “through the looking-glass.”⁴ She entered a world where logic was inverted, where everything seemed possible... She dreamt of a world where a king dreamt her.

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

A woman sits in an armchair by the sun. Her eye closes. As if she looked out the window, the camera follows a figure covered by a dark cloak and going up a winding path. The figure turns around and instead of her face, a mirror is revealed. She keeps on walking, and her shadow begins to run after her. It does not reach her, and she enters a house. After passing through several rooms, where she finds a knife that reflects her face, the wind pushes her upstairs, reaching the room where the woman, who is herself, is asleep. She looks out the same window and, again, sees the cloaked figure, triggering a loop in which the dreamer and the dreamt cannot be distinguished.

Meshes of the Afternoon, Maya Deren, 1943

The first cinematic experiments came into being as an evolution of the photo camera. The potential of the shutter’s mechanical flickering, which captures the light and chemically fixes the image reflected in a mirror, was combined with stroboscopic light. Eadweard Muybridge’s zoopraxiscope, from 1879, is among the best known inventions of this kind. One of his sequences projected the movement of a horse’s skeleton. A montage, a fiction based on photographs and drawings, in which the transparent animal’s body moved in a phantasmagorical race, halfway between dreams and science. Six years later, the Lumière brothers presented the first film in history. It was a sequence touching on the themes of alienation and movement from a different angle: a group of workers leaving the factory.

The flickering light

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

The image of a cell exploding once and again in a sequence of lights and psychedelic colours. It is the vision of a scientist trapped in an isolation tank, experiencing the neurological effects induced by peyote consumption.

Altered States, Ken Russell, 1980

⁴ Carroll, Lewis, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, Macmillan Publisher, London, 1871.

“I began to wonder at that point also what kind of relationship there might be between the sort of subjective psychological, let’s say even phenomenological conditions of flicker, which as I understood it had something to do with alterations of the actual functioning of the brain on the one hand. Then on the other hand understandings of narrative, storytelling, linguistic and visual, more complex linguistic and visual activity, speaking in a subjective framework.”⁵

That is how Tony Conrad describes the ideas he had in mind while producing *The Flicker* in 1965, one of the first filmic experiences to explore the use of flickering light. These films, based on the theories of W. Grey Walter and the application of stroboscopic mechanisms in psychology, sought to alter perception and open up other spheres of consciousness by exposing the brain to the quick and repetitive alternation of light and darkness. The over-stimulation of the retina affects the brain’s time and sensory perception; a low-frequency flash can alter the information flow that light allows to register. In the 1960s, these technological strategies, which had already been experimented with as a means of controlling military troops (along with psychedelic drugs), became an access point to other states of human perception. Artistic activity liberated this practice, seeking not to control but to induce, at a collective level, an enhanced perception and unsuppressed, expanded thinking, like Brion Gysin’s 1960 *Dream Machine*. Conrad experimented with projecting abstract images, and even with projecting only the light of the projector, as did other structuralist films—among which we could highlight Peter Kubelka’s 1960 *Arnulf Rainer* and its negative version, *Antiphon*, from 2012, where black frames alternate with white ones. Going one step further, on August 30, 1968, Tambellini and Piene carried out their largest experiment by broadcasting on television *Black Gate Cologne*, which combined abstractions with scenes from recent history in an effort to consider “the social memory in terms of dynamic processes of differentiation and individualization.”⁶

The mask

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

The projector starts to work, the light blinds us before the film enters the roll (...) several disconnected images... One is the slaughter of a lamb that ends with a close-up of the dead animal’s eye. (...) A child lying on a stretcher in a white room. He wakes up, puts on his glasses and turns around to read a book. Then

⁵ “What was the inspiration behind *The Flicker*? Interview conducted 28 February, 2002 with Tony Conrad, by telephone from New York State University at Buffalo”, Flicker, 2008, <http://flicker75.blogspot.com/2008/01/tony-conrad.html> (last access 22/10/18).

⁶ Blom, Ina, *The Autobiography of Video. The Life and Times of a Memory Technology*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2016, p. 67.



he gets up and walks to the projection on the wall... he caresses the large image where the faces of two women intertwine.

Persona, Ingmar Bergman, 1966

In *a Flickering Light*, the performance by artist duo Sander Breure and Witte van Hulzen, has five characters: four actors, and the light of a screen. The light of the screen—of which the audience sees only the reflection—makes the muscles of the four actors react, contract and contort. Their faces smile, get scared, cry and admire. The facial expressions of the faces lit by the screen change from mask to mask. Are these masks a reaction to what they see on the screen? Or are they a ritualised expression of their feelings? They could also be read as an exposé of a canon of facial expressions, reminiscent of the series of frozen grimaces that Franz Xaver Messerschmidt sculpted between 1770 and 1783. At the end of his life, he obsessively studied himself in the mirror—like a kind of Narcissus—creating self portraits possessed by a spirit that visited him at night. All faces, if we do an exercise in abstraction and see them on a close-up, become masks. Masks evoke the Jungian archetypes, such as those Grotowski worked with in his “Poor Theater,”⁷ searching for the expression of a sharpened consciousness.

The addiction

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

A journey around the globe in a dystopian future where the moving image spectacle controls everything through futuristic screen technology, even dreams, even the visions of those who cannot see... “Video as a disease, as the fatal disease.”⁸

Until the End of the World, Wim Wenders, 1991

Today, everything seems to take place on a screen. Whereas before we asked ourselves if the tree in the forest had fallen, now it seems that whatever is not broadcast as an image does not exist. Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, people stare at a screen, because no space is free from screens, whether they are ours or someone else’s. As a new addiction of sorts, so-called “binge-watching” keeps the bodies limp while they consume fictional moving images for hours. The subjective individual dissolves in a mask that is addicted to the screen’s reflection. David Foster Wallace posed a question back in 1997: “If a movie is so good it would ruin you, would you still watch it?”⁹ It is easy to think that most people’s answer today would be: “Yes.”

7 Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1968.

8 “Questions à Wim Wenders”, *Cahiers du Cinema* 448, Paris, October 1991.

9 Foster Wallace, David, *Infinite Jest*, Back Bay Books, Columbus, 1997.

Possibly on the screen we cannot see:

“Recently, I understood. Why those images did not fascinate you like they fascinated me. To me, they were like the sun (the only mistake! the only mistake!) Bear in mind that I still believed in cameras that filmed, in filmed things, and in projectors that project...”
A camera that records with no one turning it on. A film whose image continues to move after the projector is off. The need to be blindfold in order not to be absorbed by the camera or the image.

Arrebato (“Rapture”), Iván Zulueta, 1979

Dreamers

Nowadays we cannot leave the cinema, where we used to watch 24 frames per second. The cinema is omnipresent, screens multiply: the TV, the computer, the phone and tablets; in the elevator, waiting in line at a government building, at the daily-menu restaurant; on the bus, the subway, the train and the plane. And each light particle on the surface of those screens updates 600 times per second. Immersed in this acceleration, a product of capitalism’s evolution, our bodies oscillate between a near frozen state of somnolence and a frantic activity that requires our attention, briefly yet constantly. Our bodies walk like zombies from one screen to another, as if part of an enchanted ballet in a musical film. And just like the first eye was a neurobiological evolution resulting from a light stimulus, the footprint of this digital continuum will have an effect on our neurobiological system, our perception and, thus, our capacity to generate critical thinking. In fact, it already does.

So, in what space and time are we now? Where is our perception produced and when does our thinking, and therefore our capacity for action, emerge? Is it in the virtual reality of the image on the screen? Or is it at the coordinates where our body—the organ-less body that Deleuze and Guattari announced as the space to escape normativity¹⁰—vibrates in a non-connected sphere?

Out of the screen

The screen has become the public space for relations. As an abstraction of a black cube, it could be read metaphorically as a box built with Euclidean perspective, a symbol of centralised and normativised western thought. Not only do screens multiply, they also replicate the same images across the world. Following Jalal Toufic¹¹ and Francesco “Bifo” Berardo¹², we

10 Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *Mil Mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*, Pre-Textos, Valencia, 1980.

11 Toufic, Jalal, *What Was I Thinking?*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2017.

12 Berardi, Franco “Bifo”, *Fenomenología del fin: sensibilidad y mutación conectiva*, Caja Negra, Buenos Aires, 2017.

can trace in the globalisation of digital information, and in the state of constant connectivity, the symptoms that characterise the contemporary subject: boredom and anxiety. Through them, we lose our relationship with the territory, with time and with the other. “Bifo” Berardo suggests a process to search for other ways of perception and relation that calls for collective action that is not just connective, but also conjunctive: “Morphogenesis (the creation and emergence of new forms) comes from the vibration of the Neuromagma¹³. The vibration exceeds the wired connectivity up to the point of breaking (disconnecting) the existing circuit. Forms emerge from the inter-action between the internal structure of connectivity and the external environment of the Neuromagma. Neuromagmatic machine can disrupt the connective structure, and arouse a vibratory dynamics in search of new semiotization, of new forms”¹⁴.

Much the same way, Alina Popa finds in the experience of losing perspective that occurs in the jungle a possibility to build new kinds of relationships. Taking as an example the links established in Amazonian thought between the organic and the inorganic, or between the present and the past, these relationships should enable new speculative ways that stem from one’s awareness of one’s own performativity: “A performative thought is one that feels and registers its own movements—as a result of its circumstances, of acts that are nonetheless untranslatable into the conceptual, though they drive it further through detour. Performative intelligence is driven by a loop where every entry might be another exit. If contemporary performance ‘exists at the vanishing point’¹⁵, the performative is a thought at the border, a thought that stays awake through its sleep, that sleeps through its waking.”¹⁶

In our contemporary world, the screen is always present, and it will be for the near future, at least. Let us think about the light of the screen as a signal of awareness, as if it were a flickering emergency light. The screen, as Deleuze puts it, is our brain. The perception of reality and the potentiality of thinking are linked to the moving image—and thus to the light of the device that projects it, as its main interface. The way it affects us neurobiologically, as “Bifo” Berardi points out, could also be the path to an expanded concept of experience and action, as the experimental filmmakers of the 60s foresaw. In the digital era, there is an addiction that drives the subjectivity to alienation and the bodies to remain asleep, paralysed. But there are ways not to be conditioned by it.

¹³ The author defines the term “Neuromagma” as “the continuous process of the global mind (...), a chaotic ebullience of inter-individual synaptic pathways: conjunctions, sudden proliferation of neurons escaping the existing connective pattern.”. Op. Cit. 12, p. 337.

¹⁴ Op. Cit. 12, p. 337.

¹⁵ Lepecki, Andre, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movements*, London & New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 126.

¹⁶ Popa, Alina, “X Horizon: The Black Box and the Amazonian Forest”, *Black Hyperbox*, Punch, Bucharest, 2016, p. 57.





Are you talking to anyone else right now?



Pull-to-refresh. Reading stupid news I already know about.

Sander Breure & Witte van Hulzen
In a Flickering Light, 2018

Curated by Marta Ramos-Yzquierdo
Performed by Karina Holla, Phi Nguyen,
Chandana Sarma, Anneke Sluiters
Costumes Merel van't Hullenaar
Light technician Maarten van der Glas
Translation by Gaizka Ramón
Graphic design by Alex Gifreu

In a Flickering Light premieres at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) on the 19th of November 2018, as part of LOOP Festival. 24th and 25th of November 2018 it is launched at Veem House for Performance during the Amsterdam Art Weekend.

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tegenboschvanvreden



“ Veem ”

“ House ”

“ for ”

“ Performance ”

