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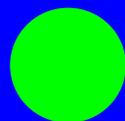


Vídeo e pintura:
movimentos paralelos.
Investigação artística sobre
a imagem-fluxo

Video and painting:
parallel movements.
Artistic research
into the unstable condition
of the image

Coord.
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Editorial	8
José Quaresma	

ENSAIOS ESSAYS

The Fallacy of Self-Referencing Images: The Use of Ambiguous Characters in Moving Images through the Form of Painting	14
Yu Yang	
Estratégia do <i>Phasma</i>: o 'culto' da encruzilhada imagem-temporalizada	37
José Pereira	
<i>Cerco</i>, caminhar o terreno e o arquivo como processo de criação e investigação artística	53
Bruno Ramos	
Espaço negativo – Intervalo – Tempo negativo	67
Rodrigo Miragaia	
So near and yet so far	98
Miguel Novais Rodrigues	
CV's	128

DIÁLOGOS DIALOGUES

Annette Arlander	131
Michael Schwab	142
Comissão Científica International Committee	145
Caracterização da RIACT Description of RIACT	169
Deontologia da RIACT e Condições de Submissão Publication Ethics and Submitting Directions	171
Meta-artigo Meta-paper	174
Chamada de Trabalhos Call for Papers	179

The Fallacy of Self-Referencing Images: The Use of Ambiguous Characters in Moving Images through the Form of Painting

INTRODUCTION

SOURCES AND CONTRADICTIONS OF THE SUBJECT

Art research is the connection between the two fields of art and academics.¹ In fact, the term itself is ambiguous, because an artist always conducts research during its work, and “tries to find the right material, the right subject, as she looks for information and techniques to use in her studio or atelier, or when she encounters something, changes something, or begins anew in the course of her work.”² However, “[a]rtistic research in the emphatic sense” which “unites the artistic and the academic in an enterprise” is a breakthrough not only for artistic creation but also for research on artistic development.³ According to Borgdorff’s definition, this type of research is “[the] research in and through art practice”⁴, and it can be found in *Practice as Research* (Barrett and Bolt, 2007), and *Handbook of The Arts in Qualitative Research* (Knowles and Cole, 2008). These studies seem very intuitive. Some authors will write “art-based” directly in the titles⁵ or will specify their practice types, such as “Choreography,” “Ethnodrama,” “Documentary,” or “Music lesson.”^{7 8 9 10} Given these existing works, I set out to study my previous art practice-theories. My practice itself comes from my research on the theories and results of other authors, and my subsequent theoretical research comes from my artistic practice. Therefore, this phenomenon is self-referential. Coincidentally, the subject of both my artistic practice and research is about self-referentiality of image.

1 Henk Borgdorff, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, 2012), 143.

2 Borgdorff, 143.

3 Borgdorff, 143-144.

4 Borgdorff, 144.

5 Shaun McNiff, “Art-Based Research,” in *Handbook of The Arts in Qualitative Research*, eds. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore: Sage Publications, 2008), 29-40.

6 Susan Finley, “Arts-Based Research,” eds. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole, 2008, 71-82.

7 Dianne Reid, “Cutting Choreography: Back and Forth Between 12 Stages and 27 Seconds,” in *Practice as Research*, eds. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 47-64.

8 Johnny Saldaña, “Ethnodrama and Ethnotheatre,” eds. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole, 2008, 195-208.

9 Claudia Mitchell and Susan Allnutt, “Photographs and/as Social Documentary,” eds. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole, 2008, 251-264.

10 Liora Bresler, “The Music Lesson,” eds. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole, 2008, 225-238.

My Ph.D. project aims to study the ambiguities brought about by the use of similar characters in films. My previous artistic practice likewise inspires this study. In 2017, together with my friends, I made a 20-minute short film called *Miss Tobaccó's Manuscript* as my postgraduate assignment at the Venice Academy of Fine Arts. This film centers around two characters whose relationship is full of ambiguous self-referentiality. The study of ambiguity runs through my artistic practice during my three years in Venice, as can be found in some of my sketches and a six-minute animation (*Siren and Zatoichi*), which I made between 2016 and 2017. To be precise, this animation opened up my exploration of the fallacy of self-referentiality. I was influenced by the techniques used by György Pálfi in *Final Cut: Ladies and Gentlemen*, which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2012. I used more than 30 film clips as the prototype for the rotoscoping and completed this work frame by frame. In this animation, the figure of Zatoichi comes from the character played by an actor in the *Zatoichi* series of films. The figure of Siren comes from characters in different films, in which the actresses' appearances are very different.

Similarly, the appearance of the actor playing Zatoichi also undergoes various changes as he ages. According to Pálfi's narrative approach, when the types of characters in the film are very fixed (e.g., the characters consist only of a hero and a heroine), then the differences between the characters do not hinder the development of the storyline. In other words, the viewer can automatically incorporate images of the same type into one role and relies on folk logic to effectively suture the context. It is this practice that spiked my interest in the subject of ambiguous characters. This choice of subject is not the result of reading the literature but instead comes from an intuition that came to me in making the animation. I initially wondered whether this might constitute "real" academic research before learning during my Ph.D. course the difference between "practice-theory" and "theory-practice" (I had previously believed this to be merely a matter of word order). Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone defend "practice-theory" in the book *Arts Based Research* (2012) and provide a framework to expand (or reform) the qualitative research field of the humanities by using art as a means to understand better

and rethink critical social issues.¹¹ In the research process, it is inevitable to “accompany these research modalities that interconnect artistic work, aesthetic pleasure, and argumentation,” and produce an oscillating method that is different from previous ones.¹² From this point of view, “guiding intuitions and chance inspirations are just as important for the motivation and dynamism of research as methodological prescriptions and discursive justifications.”¹³

QUESTIONS ABOUT RESEARCH

The formation of ambiguity can be understood as the subjectivity of narratives that makes viewers automatically suture together figures from different film clips. In this case, other figures all refer to a single character, causing nature to be located within a schism of identity. Another extreme example of this can be found in David Lynch’s *Lost Highway* (1997). In this film, Fred becomes Pete in prison, and Pete becomes Fred once again in the final scene. In this process, different figures (Fred and Pete) collectively refer to the “Fred” (as the husband) and complete a cycle in the changing process. This cycle is self-referential. Because of my interest in ambiguous characters, that is, the self-referential relationship between the character and the figure, I came up with the idea of making the short film *Miss Tobacco’s Manuscript*. In designing the script, I paid attention to several questions: 1) In addition to narration, what other image-related methods make the character self-referential? 2) How is the self-referentiality of static images presented in moving images? 3) What manifestations of self-referencing are unique to moving images?

11 José Quaresma, “A produção artística como investigação. Exigências em torno de uma tipologia de *Art Based Research*,” in *Research in the Arts. Between Serendipity and Sustainability*, coord. José Quaresma and Fernando Rosa Dias (Lisboa: CFUL, 2015), 141-156.

12 “*tratando-se de investigação em artes a partir da prática artística, não se entrevê nenhuma possibilidade de evitar a ambivalência dos métodos que acompanham estas modalidades de investigação que interligam trabalho artístico, prazer estético e argumentação...
Sucedem das tipologias... que se caracterizam pela ambivalência e que fazem uso de métodos oscilantes, pretende-se aqui explicitar os riscos e a fecundidade de uma modalidade muito radical...*” Quaresma, 142.

13 Borgdorff, 162.

SELF-REFERENCE IN PAINTING AND MOVING IMAGES

Žižek proposed the concept of an “interface effect” when analyzing Kieślowski’s films. The concept refers to the fact that “when the exchange of subjective and objective shots fails to produce the suturing effect,”¹⁴ the fantasy replaces the absent subject and appears in the scene. At this point, the perspective becomes ambiguous, and it is impossible to determine whether this is subjective or objective. Žižek discussed several methods for producing interface effects in films, which can be summarized into three main points:

1. The subjective perspective is transformed into an objective perspective.
2. There is a simultaneity of ontology and fantasy.
3. The fantasy replaces the absent subject.

Of these methods, the first is the optical illusion produced by motion shots. For example, in an elevator scene in the film *Cronaca di un Amore* (1950) by Michelangelo Antonioni, the subjective shots that should have been from the characters’ perspectives become objective shots, looking at the characters from another direction. Hero and heroine are standing on the steps outside of the elevator. In this shot, the hero is looking at the elevator off-screen, and the next shot switches to a perspective shot, in which the elevator is rising. But when the camera gradually zooms out, and the point of view moves upward, the viewer suddenly realizes that this point of view is that of the hero, but a third-person perspective. This subjective shot is transformed into an objective shot that must be in motion rather than stationary.

Kieślowski produced similar effects in *Blind Chance* (1987). He seamlessly transforms follow shots into point-of-view shots in his long takes, without any indication of the movement, and then zooms out from a first-person perspective into a third-person perspective. This method represents a break-away from editing and turns the change of perspective into a coherent behavior. The second and third methods are not entirely dependent on movement and are sometimes static. For example, in the full-

14 Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears* (London: BFI Pub., 2001), 39.

shot scene of a campaign speech in *Citizen Kane* (1941), Kane stands in front of a giant portrait of himself in a huge poster. Žižek likens this scene to a live broadcast on a big screen at a concert or a sporting event, where the star's body (ontology) and the image on the big screen (fantasy) are simultaneous. Another example of this technique can be found in the sixth episode of Kieślowski's *Dekalog* (1989), in a scene in which the heroine comes to the post office for the second time. As the heroine is talking to the employee at the counter, the camera faces the employee, but the heroine's face is reflected and magnified by a pane of glass. At this time, the reflected image and the voice-over are simultaneous, which means that the image from the ontology maintains simultaneity with the ontology. Moreover, this model also leads to the third form of interface effect; this reflected image replaces the talking subject (heroine) that should have appeared in the picture. Žižek refers to this method as the ultimate reverse shot¹⁵, i.e., the “condensation of shot and counter-shot into a single shot”¹⁶.

Although the three methods of presenting interface effects in these films involve different types of shots, their common point is obvious: they are all self-referential. First of all, the transformation of perspective from a subjective to an objective one implies that the gaze initially from the subject is transformed into the object's gaze. Second, the fantasy element means that the protagonist perceives the object through the image. This kind of image presents an “absent one” who is both the subject of the behavior being observed and the object of cognition at the same time. This kind of self-referentiality can find its roots in some paintings. For example, the subjective perspective is transformed into an objective one in Velázquez's famous oil painting *Las Meninas* (1656), in which the figures of Filipe IV and his queen are reflected in a mirror. This is similar to the earlier *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) by Jan van Eyck.

The difference is that the reflection in the *Arnolfini Portrait* comes from a convex mirror, reflecting everything in the room according to a strict

15 Slavoj Žižek, *The Friction of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI Pub., 2001), 52.

16 Žižek, 53.

perspective, including the image of the painter and the Arnolfini couple. In contrast, the flat mirror in *Las Meninas* only reflects the image of the royal couple. Filipe IV and his queen are the observers of the whole scene, and they are also the absent subjects outside of the frame (off-screen characters). Thus, the image of the absent subject in *Las Meninas* is reflected in the mirror and appears in the scene along with the object (the people observed by the king and his wife). This can be understood as follows: the picture itself is an interface, and the intuitive feeling it brings to the viewer is of an objective scene, but the reflection in the mirror (another interface) in the picture reminds the viewer that this perspective comes from the subjective view of the royal couple. Hence, the perspective in the convex mirror in *Arnolfini Portrait* cannot achieve the same effect because it restores all objective scenes.¹⁷

Fantasy replacing the subject appears in a significant number of paintings involving mirror reflections. In addition to the paintings mentioned above, another example is Parmigianino's *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1524). In Parmigianino's work, the picture itself presents the scene in perspective via a convex mirror, and the interface becomes the object itself (picture=convex mirror). Unlike Van Eyck's convex mirror, the perspective view in the mirror is no longer the objective scene but rather the observer itself. The character in the painting is self-referential and his fantasy from his subjective perspective. He observes himself as both the subject and object at the same time. This is a remarkable example of specular reflection in paintings. What makes the pictures so fascinating is the coalescence of the observer (subject), the observed (object), and the image (the fantasy on the interface); since the object itself is both the subject and the fantasy, it has a complicated and ambiguous relationship. This ambiguity means that the

17 “Finally, in *Las Meninas*, the mirror is facing the spectator, as in Van Eyck's picture. But in Velasquez the technique is more realistic in that the ‘rear-view’ mirror in which the royal couple appear is not convex, but flat. Whereas the reflexion in the Van Eyck reconstituted objects and people within a space that was condensed and distorted by the curvature of the mirror, Velasquez's picture spurns such playing with the laws of perspective. It projects on to the canvas the exact image of the King and Queen, who are standing in front of the picture.” Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 11.

referential relationship between the image and the ontology is transformed into a movement in images, just as in most of Maurits C. Escher's prints, in which a person or animal is constantly circulating within a contradictory space and sometimes changes into another figure in the process before eventually changing back into the original figure again. In the self-referencing framework, the painting is moving.

From this point of view, self-referentiality in painting has the characteristics of moving images. In contrast, self-referentiality in films uses shots to complete the compossibility of the subject, object, and fantasy in another way. Deleuze discusses the "continuum" when analyzing the shots in Alain Resnais' works. Deleuze believes that short montages and wide or tracking shots do not constitute two completely different types of shot¹⁸; instead, he argues, the former connects every slice of time, while the latter presents a whole picture of time. If each of the different shots of a montage is regarded as a static image, then the entire montage is an action of piecing together every part of the scene. Thus, a wide shot or a tracking shot can be regarded as a direct representation of a painting scene.

In other words, self-referencing is itself a process of movement, and the film just uses the path of a shot (via moving or editing) to gradually unfold the superimposed sheets of time. When a scene is thoroughly presented, the viewer finds that a moving image ultimately presents the time and space of a static painting. For example, in a scene in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, set inside Andy's villa, Pete is standing in the lobby, and pornography is projected onto the wall. Here Alice is playing a role while the real Alice is walking down the stairs. In this scene, Pete is the observer (subject), his subjective perspective is watching the pornographic film (fantasy) on the wall, and Pete sees that Alice (object) is coming down the stairs. Alice in the porn film and Alice in reality refer to each other and coexist in the same space simultaneously. Is this not the exact same structure that can be found in *Las Meninas*? The Spanish royal couple is standing in a hall, there is an unobservable "canvas" inside the scene on which Velázquez is painting

18 Gill Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 120-121.

(logically, the figure on the “canvas” must be the king and queen), and the mirror on the distant wall reflects the image of the couple. They coexist in the same space. The absent observer, the image on the canvas (which the viewer cannot see), and the image reflected in the mirror all coexist within the same space. The only difference between the two works is that, as a moving image, *Lost Highway* can switch the observer (subject) perspective at any time, so Pete can first be the observer and then the observed when the shot switches to Alice’s perspective, however, similarly, Velázquez is also in the painting that includes the royal couple, and he stands there observing them (although the canvas blocks part of his body). Thus, it can be seen that self-referencing in images involves motion, whether it be in paintings or moving images.

Furthermore, at the same time that self-referentiality occurs, the fantasy refers not only to the “absent one” but also to the uncertain ontology of the “absent one.” The interface effect embodies the transformation of the subject to the object, but a fallacy is produced in this process due to the lack of context. This self-referential fallacy, based on the relationship between characters, can be summarised as follows: a character in reality generates another character, and the generated character cannot in turn affect the original character in reality; otherwise the viewer will be unable to judge the boundary between reality and fiction, that is, they will fall into chaos. This resembles Zhuangzi’s famous paradox of the ancient Butterfly Dream: Did I dream of becoming a butterfly, or did a butterfly dream of becoming me?¹⁹

A classic case can be found in Kieślowski’s *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991), in which Weronika from Poland is very similar to Véronique from France. They have the same figure, the same talent, and even the same disease. As the author provides no context, we have no way of knowing whether the connection between the two characters is due to consanguinity

19 “Once Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn’t know he was Zhuang Zhou. Suddenly he woke up, and there he was, solid and unmistakably Zhuang Zhou. But he didn’t know if he were Zhuang Zhou who had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuang Zhou. Between Zhuang Zhou and a butterfly, there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.” Zhuangzi (369-268 BC), trans. Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 18.

or coincidence. In the film, the death of Polish Weronika mysteriously causes French Véronique to make a decision that leads to a fork in her life. The only contact between the two women occurs by accident when Véronique happens to be traveling to Poland. Before leaving hurriedly, she was spotted by Weronika, although she did not see Weronika at that time. The next key moment in the plot is the sudden death of Weronika. According to a nineteenth-century legend, when a person sees his/her doppelganger, it means he or she is about to die.²⁰ Žižek used electronic entanglement to describe the relationship between the two Véroniques; two electrons still affect each other even when they are far apart, but they would annihilate one another should they meet.²¹

Self-referencing in paintings and moving images is either manifested as an interface effect or as a quantum fallacy. As far as the interface effect is concerned, the fallacy is no longer a one-way relationship, such as an “absent one” being embodied in the form of fantasy on the interface; instead, two similar characters influence or transform each other. Another related case can be found in *Lost Highway* when Fred mutates into Pete in prison. This change and the relationship between the two Véroniques discussed above can be understood as entangled electron-positron pairs. Fred becomes Pete and then returns as Fred again. It is a form of John Wheeler’s one-electron universe postulate, according to which there are no two electrons but a single entity moving backwards and forwards in time. This resembles Francis Bacon’s *Pope* series of works, created between the 1950s and 1970s, based on Velázquez’s *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1650). While these works all contain variations, the schemata is derived from Velázquez’s painting. For these variations, Bacon calls “orders of sensation,” “levels of feeling,” “areas of sensation,” or “shifting sequences”²². Deleuze further explained it by proposing that these works have “simultaneity,” where different levels or

20 Marek Haltof, *The Cinema of Krzysztof Kieślowski: Variations on Destiny and Chance* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), 118.

21 Žižek, 83-84.

22 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 36.

orders coexist.²³ In *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991, 2017), Lynch created two scenes: the Red Lodge and the Glass Box. The prototype of these scenes may be related to Bacon. In an interview in 2012, he mentioned that he had visited Bacon's paintings in 1966, saying that he had been very excited at the time.²⁴ By comparing schemata, the similarities to be found are not only between the Red Lodge and the set in the *Seated Figure* (1961), but also the Glass Box and the white cubic frame, which repeatedly appears in Bacon's series of works. Both Lynch's scenes and Bacon's works contain ambiguous figures, and some of them seem to be in pain (distorted their faces in the dark).

From the above cases, we can provide a general summary of the types of self-referential images used in paintings and films:

Space: The interface produces the fantasy of the absent and the resulting series of ambiguities surrounding the perspective of the "absent one."

Time: Linear time is abandoned in favor of circular or quantum time. This results in a series of ambiguities involving simultaneity, compossibility, or identity.

The above came from my exploration of relevant knowledge when I was doing art research. One advantage of Žižek's theory is that he uses popular culture to explain philosophical concepts to make them easier to understand. From another perspective, when I tried to present concepts in art research, in fact, the concepts have been lost from the appearance of my works. Therefore, in my artistic practice, the concept is no longer important, even if some methods do come from my understanding of the concept.²⁵

THE PRACTICE OF SELF-REFERENCING IN *MISS TOBACCO'S MANUSCRIPT*

In my works, I mainly try to explore the ambiguity of characters. When designing the structure of the short film *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*,

23 Deleuze, 2003, 37.

24 Shira Wolfe, "Spot The Reference: Art-related Easter Eggs in David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*," Magazine *Artland*, ARTLAND, October 30, 2020, access date November 06, 2021, <https://magazine.artland.com/art-related-references-in-david-lynchs-twin-peaks/>

25 Regarding "art's epistemic character," refer to Borgdorff's brief account of the development of non-conceptual knowledge of art. See Borgdorff, 151-154.

I referred to the Möbius strip structure commonly used by many authors in their self-referential works, and created two roles: a female writer and a male artist. The overall plot is as follows: The male artist wakes up with a hangover, and his impression of the previous night becomes blurred. As he gradually sobers up, his impression of the previous night's experience seems to span a long period of time. As he starts trying to remember the lady he met that night, his memories become jumbled. He cannot even be sure whether they actually met in reality. He just recalls her identity and that she mentioned that she was writing a novel. As he saw the content of her manuscript, he decides to pursue this scene in his memory to look for clues. In the end, it emerges that all of the many events he recalls happening were merely elements of the plot in the female writer's manuscript. As the writer's work has reached a bottleneck, she decides to delete the role of the artist.

From the perspective of the narrative framework, this is a typical cyclical structure, similar to Fred's experience in *Lost Highway*. At the beginning of the film, Fred hears a message from someone over his intercom: "Dick Laurent is dead." Later, he experiences becoming Pete and then returning to himself, and it is "himself" in his final form who goes to the door of his house and tells someone inside over the intercom: "Dick Laurent is dead."

In the process of researching methods of self-referentiality in *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, besides narrative structure, I also explored fantasies about the "absent one" to express this fallacy. Rather than present the interface medium used by Kieślowski, as in such cases as the heroine's face reflected in glass in *Dekalog*, the doctor's body shape reflected in Julie's full-screen pupil in *Three Colours: Blue* (1993), or in a huge street poster of Valentine and her shipwrecked face on television screen in *Three Colours: Red* (1994).

Instead, I preferred to focus on the use of a fixed camera to render the picture as a static image. I drew on David Lynch's technique in *Twin Peaks*, where a person's shape appears and disappears in an instant, a technique inspired by Francis Bacon's schemata, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the image of the female writer – previously absent from the artist's memory – instantly appears in his living room. In the following scenes, when the female writer tears up her draft, the image of the artist's role she has created also disappears (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. From the perspective of the artist. With the appearance of female figures, the scene changed from color to B&W; Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:04:03-00:04:09, 2017.

Figure 2. Indirect subjective view (description) from the female writer. With the appearance of female figures, the scene changed from B&W to color; Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:17:11-00:17:48, 2017.

This technique no longer relies on a tangible interface, such as a screen, mirror, or picture, but on nothingness of space. The same is true with the pornographic film projected on the wall in *Lost Highway*. The wall is not actually an interface that can generate images, but a blankness that provides the necessary space for the image. This is closer to the techniques used in modern paintings, which no longer try to create spaces that simulate reality on the canvas, but, instead, use the nothingness in the frame itself as an interface. So, in *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, the figure of the female writer emerges from out of nowhere into the space of the artist's living room, in a blurred form due to the dim lighting. This scene itself serves as a reference to René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une Pipe* (1929)²⁶. That is, the image itself cannot represent the essence, and the fallacy of self-referentiality appears.

26 Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte's painting *La Trahison des Images* (1929). The painting shows an image of a pipe, but below the pipe, Magritte wrote 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe'.

In terms of expressing the ambiguity of characters, it is not enough to use the image technique alone. It is also necessary to solve the problem of quantum time; that is, the moving backwards and forwards in time appear to be simultaneous. This often appears in films in the form of “lie flashbacks”; that is, the viewer’s first reaction is to perceive the events being shown as a flashback, but it later materialises as a false memory. In Deleuze’s *Time-Image*, this is referred to as a “direct time image”, whereby the past, present, and future are impossible and are superimposed together. At this point, the role is the coalescence of multiple sheets of the past. To explain this by means of a simple example, in *Ulysses’ Gaze* (1995), the Greek producer A, after experiencing different events in multiple flashbacks, eventually becomes the A who is lying in tears on his lover’s body in the fog. At this point, A is no longer the A who was looking for a film. Furthermore, each time A enters a new Balkan country in his different flashbacks, he is no longer the A of before. A different female character appears in each of his experiences, all played by the same actress. This also implies that A is no longer the same A in quantum time as it moves backward and forward.

In *Miss Tobacco’s Manuscript*, I used the form of “sheets of the past” to transform the memories represented by flashbacks into false narratives. Thus, I combined the “artist’s memories” and the “artist’s search for clues in reality” into one scene. In this scene, the fantasy of the absent female writer is constantly fading away, which at the same time reminds the viewer that this is both “a memory” and “not a memory”. Therefore, in this short film, I try to embody the fallacy of self-referentiality as the fantasy of the “absent one” appearing in memories or fiction, using a fixed shot to make the scene itself an interface, just as Parmigianino does in *Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*, only in this case, the interface is the screen. Hence, nothing=screen=interface, which can be further expressed as fantasy-interface=image-screen. I used this technique in three scenes: 1) the image of a lady appearing in the living room; 2) the portrait of a man changing like slides; and 3) the image of a man shaking and disappearing after being disturbed (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).



Figure 3. Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, screenshots between 00:08:47-00:09:45, 2017.

These scenes “jump out of” the storyline, and consist of a series of static images alone to present the “interface=screen” effect. The presence of the “absent one” is ambiguous (there is no context to explain which character is real and which is fictional), so the fallacy of self-referentiality completes the coalescence of multiple ambiguities here.

In making the short film, I tried to eliminate mimesis as much as possible, and to introduce ambiguity through images. Furthermore, what I call simulation is a simulation of linear time (reality). Is cross-editing not simply an attempt to restore the synchronicity of multiple events in reality? There are parallels here to the perspective methods used in painting to simulate the synchronicity of different events in a scene.

Early film was characterised a peculiar case of the simulating of synchronous occurrences. *Life of an American Fireman* (1902) is considered the first film with narrative significance, although there is some controversy regarding the time when the two current versions were produced. Both portray two separate scenes, but one version uses cross-editing²⁷. Regardless of which version is the original, from the perspective of technique and purpose alone, the cross-editing perfectly achieves the synchronisation

27 David Bordwell. *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 129.

of different spaces at the same time, with the events making up the daily life of a fireman portrayed as taking place at the same time of day as the goings-on in the quiet apartment across the street. Up until the moment when a fire breaks out, the acceleration of the frequency of editing gradually transforms the two spaces into one space. At the end of the film, the two scenes combine into one, as the process of fighting the fire is presented. Here, the version without cross-editing shows the two scenes in different spaces in parallel, while the version that uses cross-editing simulates the sequence in linear time, shows the synchronization of every cut of two events.

While I do employ cross-editing in my short films, I treated it as a close-to-static scene to complete the meta-suture. I try to break free from the shackles of synchronisation by using the mutual transformation of roles to reflect the temporality of a cycle. Moreover, the departure from linear time means that the context is no longer important, and the fallacy of self-referentiality arises naturally. It is as if, out of context, any version of *Life of an American Fireman* will appear ambiguous. Without the context, the image no longer expresses the ultimate meaning through expressive behavior. At this time, the real simulation is no longer important, just like modern painting, the picture no longer uses perspective to imitate reality; instead, the picture itself becomes the plane, i.e., there is a return to the picture=interface. Therefore, regardless of whether the self-referencing is portrayed in the image in terms of space or time, the two are ultimately the same- How to set up the interface and produce fantasies.



Figure 4. Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:06:14 (top left), 00:06:33 (top right), 00:06:45 (bottom left), 00:06:47 (bottom right).

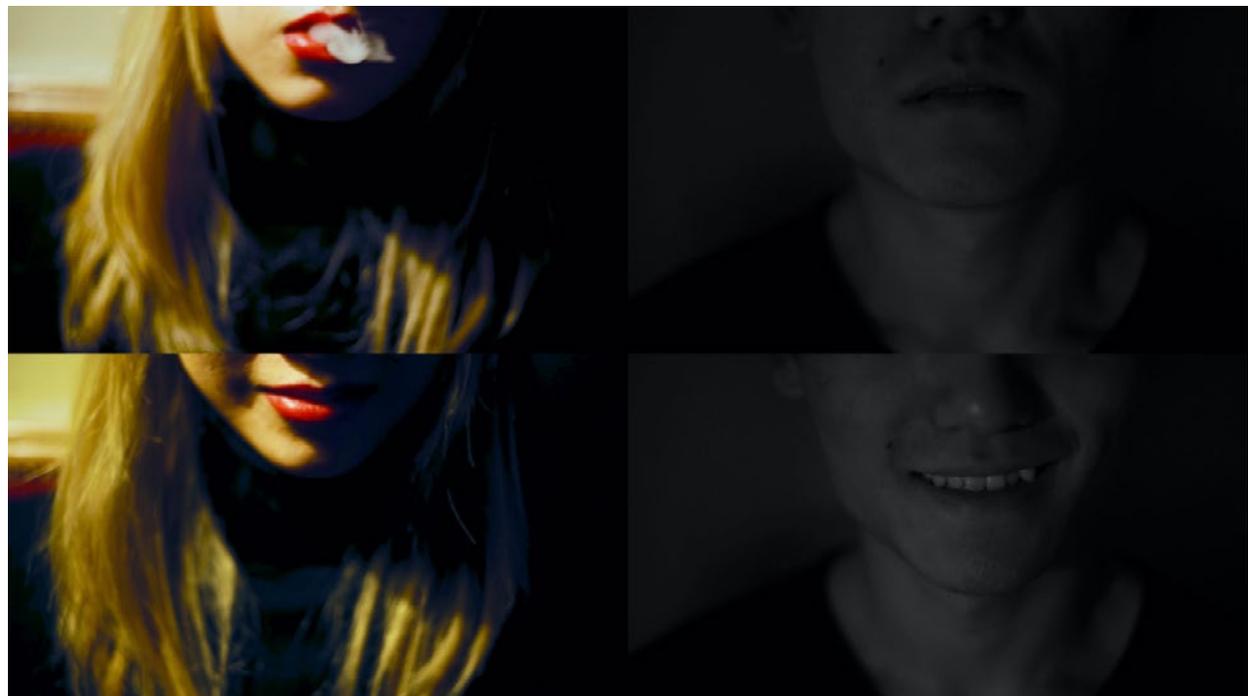


Figure 5. Include Fig.10, the cross-editing synchronizes the behavior of the man with the lady in his memory. Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:07:01 (top left), 00:07:06 (top right), 00:07:15 (bottom left), 00:07:22 (bottom right).

Figure 6. When the dominance is in the woman, she is in sync with the man in her novel. Yu Yang dir., Yili Zhang photog. *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*, 00:17:05 (top left), 00:17:08 (top right), 00:17:11 (bottom left), 00:17:13 (bottom right).

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion of the three parts of the film, my research findings on the ambiguous role triggered by the fallacy of self-referencing can be summarised as follows:

In the first stage of my process, I came across Pálfi's artistic re-creation method by chance when editing existing works. I decided to imitate the method without knowing what the results would be from the production process. As Borgdorff quoted Pakes's point of view:

“In any research study that pretends to make a difference, it is important to realise that it is hard to determine at the outset whether it will ultimately result in an original contribution. It is an inherent quality of research that ‘one does not know exactly what one does not know.’”²⁸

I found that when two moving images with no narrative relationship are cross-edited, the voice-over (sound effects and soundtrack) can become the connection. On the basis of this discovery, I began to think about the connections between the two roles that remain even after leaving the context.

In the second stage, I continued to study the relationship between two characters out of context, drawing new inspiration from several films, such as the works of Kieślowski, Theo Angelopoulos, and David Lynch. One of the themes explored in these works concerns the identities of the characters (sometimes there is just one character and sometimes there are two similar characters). Hence, I decided to examine this issue further by creating *Miss Tobacco's Manuscript*.

The third stage happened, when, during my production work, I came into contact with interface theory, I turned to study interface issues. This research enabled me to understand that self-referencing can create ambiguous identities. I compared the interface effect in paintings with the interface effect in films, and found similarities between the two, in that they

28 Anna Pakes, “Original Embodied Knowledge: The Epistemology of the New in Dance Practice as Research,” *Research in Dance Education*, 4, no. 2 (2003): 127-149. Cited in Borgdorff, 162.

both involve the creation of a fantasy about an “absent one” inside the space, thereby creating an atmosphere of ambiguity. This atmosphere ultimately leads to the fallacy of multiple self-referentiality, that is, multiple interfaces, which can be summarised as interfaces in interfaces or as two interfaces (screen and virtual interface) combined into one.

On the basis of my third discovery, the fourth stage took me to accidentally discover the issue behind the interface: time. Knowing how to express the sheets of time is the key to understanding the interface effect and ambiguous roles. It can be summarised as follows: the issue of character identity is embodied in similarity, which has two forms: 1) ontology and the “fantasy on the interface”; and 2) two similar beings. Ontology and its fantasy try to break the “impossibility” of the sheets of time, while two “similar beings” reflect the simultaneity of time’s moving forward and backward.

In fact, from the second stage to the fourth stage beyond, I tried to do an “original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding.”²⁹ However, when it comes to knowledge and understanding, the relationship between focal and tacit knowledge has an unexpected effect on me. This relationship has different concepts: “Sometimes the emphasis lies on propositional knowledge, sometimes on knowledge as skill, and sometimes on ‘understanding’ as a form of knowledge in which theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, and acquaintance may intersect.”³⁰ As a result, the knowledge and methods brought by art have been transformed into “practical knowledge” subjectively by me. Perhaps my epistemology has not been fully occupied by those who are “literature that indoctrinates the ‘scientificity’ of the ‘object’ and the methods used to be sufficiently explored and internalized.”³¹

This process of moving from practice to theory to research the process itself represents a kind of meta-research. Moreover, examining this sample when studying self-referentiality constitutes a form of self-referential behaviour, and prompts self-research in future studies. This research action

29 Borgdorff, 162.

30 Borgdorff, 163.

31 Quaresma, 142.

itself breaks away from the scientificity of object and method, and provides inspiration and aesthetic pleasure and argumentation. And, lastly, this research – with all of its contradictions – is the very epitome of controversial art research.

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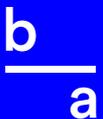
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