Surveillance Spectacles:
The Big Art Group's *Flicker* and the Screened Body in Performance

Jason Farman

Caden Manson, the founder of The Big Art Group, terms their trilogy of performances as "Real Time Film"—pieces that stage split-second choreography with a technological *mise-en-scène* of digital cameras and screens. Manson and The Big Art Group brought their production of *Flicker*—the second installment in the Real Time Film trilogy—to Disney's REDCAT Theatre in Los Angeles in January of 2005. The piece, which premiered in the United States at Performance Space 122 in January 2002, sets up the dialogic relationship between fragmented bodies on the analogue stage and cohesive bodies staged through digital reproduction on three stage-front screens. The relationship between these two modes of stage production posits an embodied and situated performer (and audience member) in relationship to the voyeuristic tools of visual media and surveillance technologies. The technologies of Manson's Real Time Film capture bodies of differing genders and races—which remain distinct on the analogue stage—and sutures them together as a singular, cohesive body on the digital screen. *Flicker* thus blends bodies and technologies through a performance that fluctuates between two narratives and two genres on two opposing stages.

The narrative structure of *Flicker* begins with Jon (played by Jon Norman Schneider) returning from the hospital after a failed overdose. He attempts to reposition himself in the day-to-day life of his roommate Rebecca (played by Rebecca Sumner Burgos) while engaging in same-sex erotics with her on-again off-again boyfriend, Jeff. Jeff, who plays the voyeur, is never separate from his digital video camera (to which the audience is often privy). The erotics in which Jeff and Jon engage all center around the

voyeuristic fetishization of the camera and the recording of Jon's self-annihilation (and often the word-play that surrounds this self-mutilation). He records Jon's attempts to describe his failed suicide as well as his compulsion to cut himself. *Flicker* shifts into a second narrative that is a mock-horror movie in which a group of college-age friends are lost in the woods. As they try to cope with being lost, they soon realize that they are being pursued by a man in a ski mask with a knife. This staging of a frequently screened genre, which typically includes the mutilation of bodies, mirrors the voyeuristic impulses toward bodies in pain in the first narrative. In the end, the two narratives literally collide as the two groups are involved in a head-on car crash with each other.

Flicker's choreography between the various actors' bodies and the cameras that reproduce these movements on three stage-front screens creates a disjunction between the material stage that the actors inhabit and the digital screens that bracket the front of the stage. The three, stage-front, contiguous screens continue from wing to wing and are as high as the actors' shoulders. Atop each of the screens is a live-feed digital camera facing the actors though only capturing a portion of the stage. Since the camera only captures part of the stage, there is a gap on the material stage that the camera does not record. Though this gap exists only on the material stage, the screens appear to display a cohesive *mise-en-scène* through a seamless screen presentation. Throughout the performance, this "blank space" of the stage is occupied by several actors in order to "hide" their bodies from the camera and screen while still being able to affect the on-screen performance. The effect, successful through split-second choreography by the actors, is an alteration of the proximity of characters, of movements of bodies, and a dispersion of a single character onto several actors' bodies.

For example, one character, who slowly moves a knife toward another character, stands stage-left and moves the knife across the stage-left camera. As the image of the knife begins to disappear from the frame of the stage-left camera, another actor (standing in the stage's "blank space," thus off screen) brandishes a similar knife and continues the image of the knife in the stage-center camera. Likewise, when the knife finally reaches the third actor on the stage-right camera, it begins to cut the other on-stage character who stands on the complete opposite side of the material stage yet is in proximity to the stage-left character on the digital projection of their performance. The action of the material performance taking place behind the screens (as opposed to the digital performance projected *on* the screens) allows for "Real Time Film" in which a character who is 50 feet away from his attacker on the material stage is actually cut by the movement of the attacker's knife on the digital projection. The visual technologies coupled with the precise movements of the actors make it appear onscreen as if the characters are only a few feet apart. Similarly, when one character, stage-right, reaches out for another character who is standing stage-left, the actor's arm, as it leaves the frame of the stage-right camera, is carried on by another actor's arm, until a third actor at the stage-left camera finally completes the first actor's movements through displaying only the portion of the arm needed to complete the reach from stage-right to stage-left. Often, these second and third actors, who only reveal a portion of their arm on the screen, are either different in race, gender, or both, from the actor who initiated the reach. The end result often creates an arm that is fragmented racially and not gender specific yet is a seamless arm enacting a reach from stage-right to stage-left.

The Actor's Cohesive Digital Body

In the performance of *Flicker,* a cohesive body (singular) does not exist on the actual but only on the virtual stage space of the screen. The actor/character is fragmented on the live stage. The actors encounter various modes of the body—or what Don Ihde calls the zones of bodily significance[1]—that are constructed in relationship to the camera, the screen, and the bodies of the other actors on the live stage. An example of this is seen as Amy (Amy Miley) runs through the woods to escape her pursuer and runs in place with her back turned to the stage-right camera. As she runs in place, she looks back at the camera (and apparently at her pursuer, as an off-stage actor playing the slasher figurer brandishes a knife on-camera) and continues her run onto the center-stage camera. However, it is not Amy Miley who continues the run of the character "Amy" but anther actor in a red wig and outfit similar to Amy Miley. As this actor moves to the stage-left camera, yet another actor in a blonde wig takes over the flight of "Amy." On the live stage, the character of Amy is fragmented among three actors and the cohesion of the action of Amy (however seamless or obvious the transitions may be) only takes place on the mediated stage. The second and third actors that carry the action over to the other cameras are different in race *and* gender from Amy—a difference which is notably marked on the analogue stage.

A cohesive body on the digital stage must be obtained through a proprioceptive convening of body with digital media as that which not only alters but also completes the body (which, at base, can be read as a system of codes and texts). Thus this performance moves past the ideas of "technology as prosthetic device" to a performance in which the body is totally incomplete without the technology. It is not simply an extension—it is a

completion. Proprioception is a term that I find particularly applicable to this study, especially in the way it locates the body in a specific space. The proprioceptive body is informed of its particular locale and relational spatiality, thus avoiding any gestures towards the subject as a purely interior being. The proprioceptive body is in the world, as Merleau-Ponty argued for, and can navigate this world as a body in space and a body that is space.

Proprioception is constantly at play in the actors' relationships to the stage technology in *Flicker*. Caden Manson emphasizes the importance of the actors' role in the analogue-digital relationships of the performance: "The real technology of the piece are the live performers. They are the ones in control. The cameras are stationary and are turned one before the show and turned off after the show. The performers are the ones making the digital illusion. They make it look like the piece is edited with zoom, dolly shots, and quick cuts—not the cameras."[2] Though analyses of "the body" in the digital age has primarily looked at two modes of embodiment—that of the body being altered by the code and that of the body *being* code—*Flicker* stages both of these modes while simultaneously desiring to invert them through privileging the analogue choreography of the actors.

The staging of *Flicker* presents the actor (and the audience) with a body that coheres through becoming a system of information (reduced to code through its production through the digital media of the camera, the projector, and the sound design emanating from the Macintosh computer of sound designer Jemma Nelson). The bodies on the material stage are fragmented and constantly referencing the screen (since the split-second choreography requires the material bodies to be constantly aware of their

own proprioception in relationship to the virtual objects on the stage). The actor thus

proprioceptively locates the material body as always in reference to the virtual stage as a

site of completion (of both body and action). Manson, however, privileges the analogue,

material bodies and their fragmentation over the digital body produced by the analogue.

The production of the digital body on the screen can be read as simply an illusion created

through mere 2-dimentional tricks of the analogue bodies on the digital screen. The

creation of the digital body is perhaps a plenary gestalt phenomenon. As Ihde notes,

"Our perceptions occur as a plenary gestalt in relation to an experienced

environment….It is also the claim here that our whole-body perceptions are sensorily

synthesized in our interactions with a 'world.'"[3] Thus, the perception of a "whole body"

on the screen, though actually produced by several fragmented bodies, is gained through

a specific focus on the screen which sets it as the figure in this figure/ground relationship

between the analogue/material stage and bodies and the digital/virtual screened

performance. Ihde argues that our "ability to perceptually focus" does not eliminate other

sensory data, but pushes it to the background: "In this case the very ability to focus helps

to enhance the quasi-illusion of a pure visual phenomenon by subduing the other sensory

dimensions."[4]

Manson's privileging of the analogue assumes a certain passivity on the part of

the digital media, especially the cameras atop the screens. These "stationary" cameras,

which are "turned one before the show and turned off after the show" by the stage crew

are far more active in creating the *mise-en-scène* of the performance than simply being

passive receivers of visual information. Firstly, both Jeff's camera and the screen

cameras are continually auto-focusing on the actors and objects in its field of vision.

When an actor is at stage-rear, he or she remains in focus. The actor does not have to hit a certain mark in order to be in focus. The camera is actively involved in the figure/ground creation of the performance by creating focal objects on the screen through its ability to auto-focus.

Since the cameras and the projectors are digital, they play another importantly active role in the creation of the performance: they transform images into information and translate that information for display on the stage-front screens. The result is a body comprised of code and of information that is proprioceptively read by the actors as they interact with the cameras and with the other actors on the stage. Though this performance could legitimately be done with analogue cameras (as Manson says, "When we first started, we used hi-8...which I prefer because they have better color and better light sensibility"[5]) the digital cameras are more effective through their ability to highlight the tension between the analogue and the digital and thus the tension between bodily signification and digital information. Here, in the space between the analogue and the digital, the materiality of the body confronts the virtuality of the computer code.

The Situated Audience and the Staged Body

The staging of *Flicker* presents a dialogic relationship between the digital and the analogue. Though these two modes of performance can be read separately, analyzing their dialogic relationship offers a path to a new reading of bodies on the stage. As we have seen, the actor proprioceptively engages both the material body and its virtual representation on the digital screen. The audience also engages this phenomenology.

One of the best examples of this is a scene in which Jon is seduced by Willie (Willie Mullins), a sadist who cuts Jon across his chest (with intention to do more as the entire room is covered in plastic). Jeff is seen outside of the window recording the entire event. Voyeurism is an important trope of the performance as seen not only in Jeff's ubiquitous video camera but also in the stage design which privileges the image from the three video cameras on top of each of the screens. The audiences' voyeurism is highlighted in the distance between the actor and the stage. The audience has become Jeff who sits outside looking in on the actions taking place. The screens operate as a singular window into the actions on stage—actions that the audience cannot view as whole, coherent actions except through the employment of voyeuristic tools. The actions themselves are the product of voyeurism, produced by the effects of the camera and the digital projection.

The audiences' sense of the body is thus gained through this visual perception of the contiguous nature of the three screens as a singular window into the performance. This phenomenology is constantly troubled by the fragmented action of the actors behind the screens on the material stage. The semiotic link between what takes place on the material stage and what takes place on the virtual stage of the screens requires not simply a phenomenological experience of the body but a simultaneous semiotic reading of various signs and multiple referents. Though the audience is initially confronted with three huge contiguous screens that present one performance, they are simultaneously invited to look *past* the screens at another performance. The tension comes when an audience member is faced with the decision to engage in a type of figure/ground perception and make one of the performances (either the digital or the analogue) the dominant "figure" in relationship to the distant and unfocused "ground." The

performance solicits this tension and even makes it the fulcrum of the entire piece by constantly displaying its techniques: the illusion of the knife moving across all three screens is exposed by the actors and the stage design. Nothing is hidden. Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* plays a key role in the direction of *Flicker* and the Big Art Group's work as a whole.

An analysis of this performance could easily fall into the trap of privileging the visual as the dominant mode of experience and analysis. However, other key modes of production contribute in large part to the split-second choreography of the actors and the subsequent experience by the audience: Jemma Nelson's sound design on the Macintosh computer and the play with notions of narrative structure. Throughout the performance, the actors' bodies are in sync with the sound emanating from the Mac. Ambient screeches and noises accompany the split-second choreography of the actors and mark scene shifts and narrative changes. The action of the bodies is realized in the sound design and thus the action is not a purely visual experience by the actors or the audience. Ihde, whose analysis of perception is "derived from a phenomenology that holds to the primacy of an actional body/environmental relativity,"[6] astutely notes: "Phenomenology holds that I never have a simple or isolated visual experience. My experience of some object that is seen is simultaneously and constantly also an experience that is structured by all the senses. It takes some deliberate constructive manipulation or device to produce the illusory abstraction that could be called vision by itself."[7] The trouble with privileging the visual is that such analyses often *begin* with the visual and *assume* the spectator. We begin with a subject in many phenomenological theories. The incorporation of the aural elements brings the spectator out of the "pure point-of-view"

into a whole-body perception or a plenary gestalt.[8] There is no omniscient spectator in the performance, but merely situated perspectives. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty says, "I am conscious of my body *via* the world….through the medium of my body. I am already outside myself, in the world." He goes on to say, "Truth does not 'inhabit the inner man,' or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself."[9]

The aural elements of the performance, which position the audience member as a situated spectator *in* the "world," proprioceptively link the audience to the actors in that each must negotiate with the screen that acts as a window—or more precisely, a hinge—between them. The audience, through whole-body perception, recognizes the ways it is situated, as does the actor who must constantly be aware of his or her own proprioception in relationship to the camera and the screen. Through being proprioceptively situated, the audience must experience *and* read the relationship between performer and audience as a whole-body experience and as a semiotically read text of systems of information being scripted through information technologies. This simultaneity of phenomenology and a post-structuralist reading of the body's inscriptions is what I term a proprioceptive-semiotic body.

Proprioceptive-Semiotic Bodies on the Digital Stage

Though we have focused predominantly on the proprioceptive modes of corporeality, it is vital to insert the body-as-surface into our understandings of "embodiment" and the subject: the body-as-surface is a body which is able to be simultaneously created with the space it inhabits (as we will see in the subsequent

chapter) as well as a body on which inscriptions can be written and read. This is the body of phenomenology converging with the inscribed body-as-text in a world of stimuli and signs.

Proprioceptive-semiotic bodies are inherent in most analyses of the posthuman age. The body is currently read as a system of genetic information and as a system of sensorial information interpreted through the body's organs. In *Flicker*, the body is seen not only as existing within these categories, but also extending into the digital age in which the body is expressed through binary code on the screen through its digital projection. Here, the text of the computer code collides with the code of the sensorial and genetically founded body: body as text, code, and sensual-social information. These categories culminate in the way the body is screened in the performance and thus the camera/screen relationship delineates the space in which the proprioceptive-semiotic body emerges.

Flicker offers many moments in which this convergence can be clearly seen. Let us return to the moment of the three actors' *singular* arm reaching across all three screens. As the first actor's arm begins to cross over the field of vision of the first camera, a second actor must be accurately located in relation to both the camera and the first actor: he or she must be "off-screen" yet poised in the same manner as the first actor. This is proprioception at work on the material stage. As the second actor's arm begins to continue the reach of the first actor—and even before this action is in motion—there is *difference* at play. The stage itself, besides being a space in which the actors are proprioceptively located, is a locale of signs and signifiers. It is a tightly scripted play on difference (and *différance*). The space between the cameras, the screens, and the material

stage create several moments of difference, namely in the gaps created between each camera. These cavities, which operate as an analogue aporia or impassable space for the digital, both exist and disappear. These spaces are the space between visuality and invisibility, between the whole and the part, between embodiment and the floating signifier of the synecdochical hand. It is the space of pure difference. What takes place on the material stage, post-structurally speaking, is as Jacques Derrida writes, the "abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archia*."[10] There is no privileged body on the material stage—each body is incomplete and fragmented.

This difference is translated onto the screens as embodied difference—both literally and theoretically. The play of signs and signifiers is seen in the reach that is carried on and completed by actors of different gender and race than that of the first actor. This digital embodiment of difference is read on the screen—as a reading and interpretation of "a body" that is deferred across the space of the screen—and simultaneously read on the material bodies of the actors, which are literally *different* from each other in race and gender. These bodies are not merely in a spatially performed relationship to one another but are also in a semiotic relationship of différance. The cohesion of the arm is read as a process of deferred interpretation (until all actors have created a singular arm across all three screens) in conjunction with the process of recognizing the situated actor's difference to the actor who continues the reach across the next screen. Derrida's notion of the "supplement" is appropriate here:

> One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which
>
> replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its

absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. The movement

of signification adds something which results in the fact that there is always more,

but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious

function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified.[11]

However, one might argue that this supplementation and play on difference might

disappear as the arm completes its reach as *one* arm (and thus the deferral of embodied

meaning finds its ultimate syntax in the ways the body "concludes" in the final arm). It is

a whole and in some senses returns to its initiator: the arms of the second and third

screens are read as synecdoche of the "transcendental signifier" of the first actor.

At this juncture it is vital to ask the question: are there embodied subjects on this

stage? If so, who occupies the position of subject? If not, what are the consequences for

the bodies that are not typically associated as being in power? In other words, if there is

a cohesive body created on the digital stage, does that body become a *particular* body, an

embodied subject? Mark Poster, in his chapter "The Digital Subject and Cultural

Theory," discusses how several theorists have used Foucault's theories to signal the "end

of the subject" and how such a requiem has come at a critical moment for the

disempowered:

> Foucault does not wish somehow to erase the subject but to make the construction
>
> of the subject the center of a historical problematic….[Nancy] Hartsock's
>
> complaint that theories of the death of the author disempower dominated groups
>
> was echoed again and again as a defense against the perception of depoliticization
>
> in the works like Foucault's "What is an Author?" Here, for instance, is Nancy
>
> Miller, who adds to the motif a particular gender allusion: "Only those who have

it can play with not having it."…Some critics countered this defense of the subject by arguing that subordinated subject positions ought not to strive to occupy the place and take on the subject position of the ruling group. Pointing to the danger of such a move, Luce Irigaray and other feminists contend that "any theory of the subject will always have been appropriated by the masculine."[12]

This arm, through its completion in the realm of the technological, can be read as returning to the assumed initiator and thus appropriated by the masculine. This appropriation thus erases any true difference the performance may seem to offer. Many feminist media theorists have read the realm of the technological as a realm dominated by patriarchal and masculinist discourses. This particularly applies to *Flicker*'s use of the technology of the camera. In her book, *The Domain Matrix,* Sue-Ellen Case discusses "the power relations of the Gaze in narrative cinema" and the ways they are "homologous to operations of spectatorship in the theater." The Gaze set forth by the technology of the camera and the screen began to be critically read through the ways the "power relations in the visual were necessarily conjoined with a mechanical apparatus for seeing."[13] Does the arm of the African-American actor, which becomes the synecdochical middle-camera arm, simply dissolve into its "referent" of the white actor's arm that initiated the reach? Or, in other terms, does the arm of the character often associated with being disempowered dissolve into the technological Gaze of the camera and screen? Perhaps it does not matter who initiated the reach. Perhaps the cohesion of the digital arm is merely a gesture of the technology that displays it. If such is the case, Irigaray's claims of masculine appropriation have been clearly staged in this piece. The camera operates as the disembodied voyeur, always altering but never being altered. Elaine Scarry, in her

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book *The Body in Pain*, that intense embodiment in relationship to a disembodied voyeur

is typically the condition of the disempowered:

> In discussions of power, it is conventionally the case that those with power are
>
> said to be "represented" whereas those without power are "without
>
> representation."…But to have no body is to have no limits on one's extension out
>
> into the world; conversely, to have a body, a body made emphatic by being
>
> continually altered through various forms of creation, instruction (e.g. bodily
>
> cleansing), and wounding, is to have one's sphere of extension contracted down to
>
> the small circle of one's immediate physical presence. Consequently, to be
>
> intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and…is almost
>
> always the condition of those without power.[14]

Such a reading depends significantly on the privileging of the digital performance as the

primary performance (merely supported by the analogue) and the dominance of the

media over the bodies. Perhaps the dominance of the screen(s) at stage front clearly

marks such dominance. Though a reading of the screen as a hinge of the performance,

rather than being the dominant purveyor of the performance (which supports an analysis

of the performance which incorporates proprioceptive-semiotic bodies), seems to me to

offer a deeper analysis, I cannot ignore the possible implications of the Gaze of the

machine. The Big Art Group provokes these implications through the tensions created

between the analogue and the digital spaces of performance and the situated position of

the audience in relationship to the screen and the actor as co-spectator with the visual

technology of the digital cameras.

Surveillance, Staged

The emergence of proprioceptive-semiotic bodies can be compared to the ways surveillance is used to delineate the space of the embodied subject in this performance (a subject position I do not want to evacuate, but rather wish to trouble as that which does not precede proprioceptive-semiotic bodies). The three stationary cameras above the screens as well as Jeff's camera all highlight the ways surveillance technologies frame bodies. These technologies, by privileging the screen representation of the body as opposed to the material body on the stage, seek to interpellate the actor as a subject only in relationship to the space of surveillance. Outside of the frame of surveillance, the actor only exists as a fragment and can never obtain cohesion. Thus *Flicker* stages a spectacle of the surveilled body.

The terms "surveillance" and "spectacle"—which I seek to position in a reciprocal relationship—are often read in a contradictory relationship with each other. As Foucault defines the panoptic, there is a sense of invisibility that is essential to the subject's understanding of the gaze—the observer must never be seen yet the subject of the gaze must be aware of the possibility of being observed at all times. The Panopticon is a place where "each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication."[15] Thus situated, the subject is confined by a state of "conscious and permanent visibility" while under Bentham's plan for the Panopticon, the power behind the gaze should always remain to some degree visible while always unverifiable. "Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the

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tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate

must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that

he may always be so."[16]

Thus seeing and the being seen are dislocated and unassociated—visibility itself

becomes both central to the process and yet always elusive. It is defined only on the side

of the one who gazes and cannot be gazed upon. Thus "spectacle"—if applied to the

process of surveillance—is never of surveillance itself, but of the object of surveillance.

Foucault writes:

> In a society in which the principal elements are no longer the community and
>
> public life, but, on the one hand, private individuals and, on the other, the state,
>
> relations can be regulated only in a form that is the exact reverse of the
>
> spectacle….Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance….We are
>
> neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine,
>
> invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of
>
> its mechanism.[17]

Foucault's analysis of surveillance, when extended into the era of screenic surveillance

technologies, must be altered to allow for surveillance to be read in conjunction with

spectacle. *Flicker* functions as a performance of the spectacle of surveillance in its

performance of excessive visibility. Such spectacles of surveillance call on the ways the

excessively visible body on the screen serves, as Lili Berko writes, as a "means of

marking boundaries, of articulating identity and difference." Unlike the prisoner of

Foucault's Panopticon, the performed surveillance of *Flicker* employs "a performative

aesthetic which demands an audience to witness and in a sense to certify the performance (presence)."[18]

The key question to this analysis of surveillance is "How is the surveilled body being read?" Also, we must ask, "Who is reading and who has the right to read the surveilled body?" The proliferation of various surveillance technologies, as exemplified by the stationary cameras and Jeff's home movie camera, interpellates the individual under the gaze of the panoptic as an "included body," implicated (or privileged) by the gaze of the panoptic as one who is also a potential viewer. Thus, these surveillance technologies screen the bodies of what is termed by theorists such as Ètienne Balibar as the body of the "citizen subject." Jon can—and does—turn the camera against Jeff. At the same time, Jeff (the performance's panoptic viewer) is also being surveilled by the stationary cameras throughout his surveillance of Jon. The included bodies of the "citizens" operate within the frame of surveillance and are defined by it while simultaneously creating that frame within the hegemonic power structures. The reproduction of hegemonic power structures through the act of surveillance is done by understanding exactly *who* is allowed to be a subject of surveillance. This subject, who is defined by multiplicity (both viewed and viewer simultaneously), is constantly implicated in the process of surveillance. They are "included" in this process—surveillance is for them a mode of embodiment in the postmodern late-capitalist landscape. Berko cites Dick Hebdige's theories of subculture in connection with the hegemonic framing of the surveillance society:

> Subculture forms in the space between surveillance and the evasion of
> surveillance….Neither simply a resistance against some external order nor

straight forward conformity with the parent culture. It is both a declaration of

independence, of "otherness," of alien intent, a refusal of anonymity or

subordinate status, it is an insubordination. And, at the same time, it is also a

confirmation of the fact of powerlessness, a celebration of impotence."[19]

By performing the framing and interpellation of the subject under the gaze of the

panoptic, Big Art Group's *Flicker* operates within Hebdige's notion of subcultural

performance. Such performances scrutinize the socio-cultural hypervisuality and

recontextualize the hegemonic hermeneutics of surveillance.

Bodies in Pain

Bodies in pain, demonstrated in the sadomasochistic cutting of Jon in *Flicker*,

operate as a key example of the shift in theorization of corporeality. Though cutting is

experienced phenomenologically though the body, it is also accompanied with several

social inscriptions on the body. Cutting is experienced as a destruction of the body and

as an inscription of social texts. The cutter must contend with both experiences and thus

being a body in the world is simply not a phenomenological experience but also a

semiotic one: a reading of the body's inscriptions and readings of the world-as-text along

side a reading of the body's sensorial and proprioceptive encounters.

The spectator plays a key role in the ways these encounters of bodies in pain

become performative. In *Flicker*, it is Jeff who sits outside filming Jon being cut.

Ultimately, what is at stake in each of these performances is the status of bodies in digital

performance and the digital age as a whole. Are these bodies erased through digital

technology or instead reinscribed with a clearer understanding of the modes of bodily

significance in *all* performances? As Lisa Nakamura argues, the significance inscribed on bodies in the analogue world typically carries over into the digital world. Thus the racist and sexist inscriptions do not disappear with the advent of digital technologies that may tout a certain level of freedom from such inscriptions. What performances like *Flicker* stage are the ways these bodies get inscribed and the audiences' participation in such inscriptions. Through the way the digital stage highlights the spatial relationships between performer and spectator—through either the emphasis on its mediated nature or through attempts to bridge the gap between audience and performer by making the technologies inconspicuous—the audience is proprioceptively situated as a witness to the modes of bodily significance being inscribed in these performances. And thus the ethics of digital spectatorship is to occupy the position of "spectator-user"—a term that deliberately invokes interactivity—in a mediated environment, distinguishing the ways the media and performance signify the modes of embodiment and the status of multiple bodies in this unique performance space.

NOTES

[1] Ihde, Don. *Bodies in Technology.* 2002, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., xi.

[2] Caden Manson, e-mail to author, June 12, 2005.

[3] Ihde, 38.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Caden Manson, e-mail to author, June 12, 2005.

[6] Ihde, 44.

[7] Ihde, 38.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Primacy of Perception*. New York: New York Humanities Press, 1962, x-xi.

[10] Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, 286.

[11] Ibid., 289.

[12] Poster, Mark. *What's the Matter with the Internet?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 70-72.

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