Archiving the Future: The Media Burn Independent Video Archive by Tim Ridlen

What has gone wrong with America is not a random variation of fate. It is the result of forces that have assumed control of the American sys-
tem. These forces are multinational monopoly and the media. Media monopolies control people by their control of information... And who can deny that we are a nation addicted to television and the constant flow of media? And not a few of us are fractured by this addiction. Now I ask you, my fellow Americans: Haven't you ever wanted to put your foot through your tele-
vision screen?

- Doug Hall as President John F. Kennedy

I originally came across Media Burn in an effort to find a history that I knew existed in Chicago. This was a history I had only seen in images, but sought to find in the flesh. What I found in the end was an archive. The Media Burn Independent Video Archive was started by Tom Weinberg, who also produced the video of the Art Farm happening. Media Burn (1975), quoted at the beginning of this text. In spirit, it's hard to separate the event orga-
nized by the art and architecture collective, Art Farm, from the web archive founded by Tom Weinberg. Although Media Burn, the event, occurred in San Francisco in 1975, and the Media Burn Independent Video Archive was officially launched from Chicago in 2006, both came with the promise to change fundamen-
tally the experience of the moving image. In the generation between the two, the images of history became animate and the potential to fulfill the promise of video technology came within reach.

Chop Lord, Doug Morris, and Curtis Schreier, and Uncle Buddie were the members of Art Farm for the event in the parking lot of Cow Palace where a modified Cadillac was driven through a fire. The event was coordinated by an internal message, as President John F. Kennedy (Doug Hall) articulated, was an expression of frustra-
tion with mass media. The art and architecture collective, Art Farm, was the first to articulate a solution to the problem of the moving image. The technology of television, if only through mass dis-
semination of an entirely different sort than that of broadcast television.

The potential of an archive such as Media Burn, then, is in the power of appropriation. This does not have to amount to a literal appropriation of the images held in the archive, but rather an appropriation of its function. Through dispersion, access, and control, per-
haps the archive could become a way to gen-
erate new meaning. The episode of the past can be recast as raw image. The technology of streaming video, which Media Burn has in a sense pioneered, is new ground for the moving image. There are a few websites with the dura-
tion and flexibility of Media Burn. Granted, it is not a free-for-all of moving images—there are other sites for that—but under certain terms, you can submit non-fiction videos to be held in the archive for free. So far, the site mostly appeals to those in Chicago, or with an interest in Chicago’s history, but with the potential for global contribution that niche can only expand. Without sounding overly zealous, I would like to say that now is the time to make good on the promise of video, if only through mass dis-
semination of an entirely different sort than that of broadcast television.

The categorical distinction lies in the laws that govern the digital world; most importantly, the impossibility of deterring digital copying. It is imperative to set new precedents for electronic video on the web, and Media Burn may or may not be doing that, yet. It is still uncertain how the website will function, despite the intended outcome. A major challenge is not only funding the operation, but also the immense amount of storage required for streaming such large amounts of video.

Media Burn does not just exist on the web. The tapes, many of which are not yet avail-
able online, are housed in a storefront loca-
tion on the northwest side of Chicago at 42/70 W. Irving Park. Of course, if you visit, as I did, there isn’t really a way to search the extensive amount of material. It is more to get a sense of the operation that one might visit Media Burn in person. There exist thousands of hours of video footage stacked tightly among towering shelves. Much of the initiative at Media Burn is to save the material, not only preserving the physical medium, but also to put it into the next form so it can continue to be seen. It is with this sentiment in mind that I stand by my observation: It is not the current form of the archive that will reframe our awareness of the world and its image, but rather how it is used in the time to come.

Stalking the Continuum by Adelheid Mers

finding Flusser

Gerlinde gave me the small pamphlet, the Benteli edition of “Krise der Linearität”, she had received it from Ulula, who had met Flusser in Plantal, sometime in terms of her thinking about New Media. On the last train home across town, the number one, I was able to read the entire thing. The next day I rendezvoused with Rüdiger and Müller, filled my big-wheel suitcase and took it all back to Chicago. He had been dead for years.

Some of the German titles are: “Kommunikologie”, “Medienkultur”, “Nachtgeschichten”, “Bodenlos”, “Ins Universum der technischen Bilder”, “Die Geschichte des Teufels”, “Die Schrift”, “Krise der Linearität” (Silvia loaned me a copy of the out-of-print “Gestern”, when I returned the following year and visited the archive). There are also many texts in Portuguese, and some in French. In French, Flusser became well known in terms of her thinking about New Media. On the last train home across town, the number one, I was able to read the entire thing. The next day I rendezvoused with Rüdiger and Müller, filled my big-wheel suitcase and took it all back to Chicago. He had been dead for years.

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supersedes habits and truths. “Exile and Creativity” describes how to be uprooted forces one to transform an elite techno-image into a popular techno-image, but the emphasis he places on diagrams.
an inner dialectic. They are intended to mediate between human beings and the objective world (to bridge the abyss of alienation), but they also block the path between the world of objects and the subjective world. They prevent us from being united in front of the object-world of present- ing them, and so they increase the alienation they were supposed to alleviate. What follows is that humans don’t use the images as orientations in the world, but vice versa: They use their experiences with the world to get oriented in images. They no longer use the images as normative, but treat the world in function of the images. Such a reversal of the ontological position of images is called >>dolal<><, and the resulting mode of action is called >>imagical<<.

The motivations of the inventors of linear writing may, somewhat anachronistically, be phrased like this: this inscription is an ontologi- cally doubtful stance, the resulting images are connotative, and they are subject to the inner dialectic inherent in all mediation. But it is inevi- table that the first time images are written down to a solid substance they are initiated. Particularly for the purpose of critique the linear writing was invented. One can see, in this (admittedly somewhat modernizing) phrasing, the invention of linear writing has to be seen as the word of the gnom of future, Western culture.

In this phrasing all linear writing appears as a description of images, a description of the imagi- nation based on a new mode of thought. What characterizes this new, critical manner of think- ing is the fact that it is not structured in a two- dimensional, planar way like the imagination, but one-dimensionally, line-like. Critique of images is basically a transcode from plane to line. The new thinking that becomes a contender with the invention of linear writing is poiser by one dimension than pictorial thought, it is more >>abstract<<, which means: removed by an additional step from the objective world. That only becomes entirely clear when phonetic signs (letters) are used in writing.

If one regards the intervening development of visual language as a process going outside, so to say, it is not apparent why one should forge such a strong connection between writing and speaking. The downfall of the code of images in the West is this: To read first learn the language it has been recorded in, and what one cannot say, one cannot write either. That means: The alphanumeric code forces writing to speak to submitting to speech, and if the code becomes dominant, all remaining modes of thought become impover- ished (except for those that can intrude into the code, thanks to numbers). This can be con- firmed in a comparison with extra-Western codes (especially those of the Far East).

When observing the development of writ- ing towards the alphabet from the inside (that means: as a writing being), it becomes inevi- table. The objective of linear writing is to cri- tique the imagination. The method used is the transcoding of images into lines. Since prehisto- rical times we have possessed a code, spoken language, which fulfills this task. Images have always been criticized as they were conjured up, they were transcended from their planar existence into the line of discourse and thus became telosizable. This conjugating of the imagi- nation and the world until the very moment it is written down to a solid substance up to the moment of the invention: the alphabet: back then, one spoke, without clearly articulating. With an almost closed mouth (>>mythical<<).

That means: The code of the spoken language could have possibly been even more connota- tive than the code of the images. The alphabet was invented to denote the speaking code (to symbolize the speaking being, >>articulate-linear<<) and to rehash it into an effec- tive tool for a critique of the imagination. That means: The alphabet was invented to clearly articulate language (to de-mythologize it) and then to use language to critique the imagi- nation (to de-magize the images). Initially, the alphabet teaches us to speak clearly and only then it teaches us to critique our imagination. It teaches us to think un-mythically and to act un-magically.

The pedagogical function of alphabetical writ- ing is an extensive process, bigraphically as well as historically. The gesture of stringing letters expresses a specific way of thinking, but then refers back to this way of thinking and reinforces it: The more texts one writes (and reads), the more textually one thinks, and the more one thinks textually, the more one writes textually. Writing and writing has an effect on brain functions: Neurophysiology is beginning to localize cen- ters of writing and functions of writing in the brain, and then it processes the acquired information differently from the brain of alphabatical. (Unfortunately, the problem of cultural conditioning of inher- ent traits has to be excluded here.)

Conversely, it is imperative to quickly juxtapose the mental revolution that followed the alphabet. The material world is no longer viewed as a circumstance, but as a bundle of linear processes. That means that time no longer circles above to order everything, but it now follows the sequence of the intervals. The world of objects is no longer sconic, but histori- cally. Every situation becomes the result of causes and the result of causes. Nothing in the world repeats anymore, but each moment is unique.

The mood of the eternal return of the same (the magic mood) is replaced by the dramatic mood of linear progress (and it is sec- ondary, if this progress is seen as a fall from a perfect original situation or as a rise to utopian situations) Differently said: the alphabetic cri- tique of the imagination leads to a linear, causal mode of thought (>>demagical<<). Sketched here is histo- rical consciousness.

It further needs to be said that the close con- nection between alphabetic thought and the alphanumeric code had the distinctive result that the rules of thought were initially posited as equal to the rules of writing (>>orthography<<) and then to the rules of language (>>logic<<). That finally had to propel historical thinking into an attitude of pan-logic: all that is, is logic<<.

That means: The rules of language are first projected into images, and then are projected through into the world of objects, only to be retrieved as laws of nature. From this perspective, the famous >>rationalizatio intel- legendi<< appears as a retrieval of the alphabetic script from the described objects.

This closing of the circle of writing (of enlight- enment altogether), this post-Hegelian critique of natural science and of its technology, is only a young phenomenon that already indicates the crisis of linearity. In the preceding, 3500 year evolution of alphabetical writing (in the pre- dictable, predictable) this contemporary crisis is not palpable.

At the beginning of history (around 1500 B.C., when the alphabet was invented) texts proceeded against images, to narrate them and to thus explain them away. (Only acces- sible to a small class of literati at that time, the historical consciousness engaged in opposition against the magico-mythical consciousness of the masses.) But the images fought back against this attack and illustrated the texts which tried them with the images. The text and the image strengthened both: the magico- mythical and the historical consciousness. Thus the images became increasingly >>histori- cal<<, the texts more >>imagery<<. (This dialectic is exempted particularly well in the development of medieval Christianity: the heathen images became more Christian, and the Christian text became more >>imagery<<. One may claim that until the inven- tion of the printing press the >>text/image<< dialectic drove Western history.

With the availability of the printing press, texts became cheaper and so historical conscious- ness became increasingly common. Images were expelled from the everyday into enclaves that were sanctified by aura, and nothing with- stood the inner dynamic of the line of text any longer. Natural science and technology could no longer develop in isolation from the images, and the magico-mythical consciousness that had been repressed into the subliminal realm had to bow to the successes of this progress so that a new kind of organization actually did lead to better pony hunting than an un-critiqued one. The enlightenment of thinking (and the associated action) that had become possible thanks to the invention of the alphabet appeared to be finally, victorious, and it seemed to conquer the whole planet earth, beyond the West.

For reasons that unfortunately cannot be dis- cussed here, the alphabet soon proved to be a code not entirely adequate for the critique of the imagination. But then we can see >>atomistic<< thinking sooner or later had to fall victim to >>atomistic<< thinking. For example, it is imperative to quickly sketch the development of mediaeval Christianity: the >>imaginary<<, the texts more >>illuminat- ing<<. One may claim that up until the inven- tion of the printing press, texts became cheaper and so historical conscious- ness became increasingly common. Images were expelled from the everyday into enclaves that were sanctified by aura, and nothing with- stood the inner dynamic of the line of text any longer. Natural science and technology could no longer develop in isolation from the images, and the magico-mythical consciousness that had been repressed into the subliminal realm had to bow to the successes of this progress so that a new kind of organization actually did lead to better pony hunting than an un-critiqued one. The enlightenment of thinking (and the associated action) that had become possible thanks to the invention of the alphabet appeared to be finally, victorious, and it seemed to conquer the whole planet earth, beyond the West.

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Important in assessing the revolt of numbers against letters is the observation that numeri- cal thought (entirely counter to its name) does not reject the images, but it puts them into a heap, it pulls apart into point elements and then throws those elements into a heap. An algorithm is not an enumerative, but an initially broken up and then re-composed into a whole. An algorithm, who is mathematically trained can discern a number of circumstances from the structure of an algorithm, all connected to each other by a common structure. Numerical thought, as it is currently emerging from literal thought, is a for- mal, entirely abstract thought: It is zero-dimen- sional and so a step further removed from the world of objects. The second step is the most possible abstraction as it is reached in math- ematical thought as intuited in the stream of literal thinking throughout history. Algorithms are the question of the world of objects. For a while now, mathematical, calculating thought has been breaking out from within the alphamnemonic code, is claiming independence, and it is turning against linear thought, to ana- lyze it, and (surprisingly, but certainly not unex- pectedly) to lead to a new form of imagination. In other words, it begins to no longer encode itself in numbers, but in differently character- ized point symbols, and it is opposing those new codes to the texts. This recording of cal- culation thought is most clearly visible in its first emergence in the form of >>imaginary<<. (This is for that reason must be given closer scrutiny.)

The camera is a contraption that takes in light and captures it on molecules of a chemical compound. The reactions thus initiated result in a negative copy of the objects from which the light originated. This can also be shown in an artificial way: A machine with a lens that catches information, calculates it in bits, stor- es it in a memory, and computes it in such a way that it can be called up as images. The image is a machine that permits the description as a process. >><</Herkletas<<<<<<<<. The photogra- phic operation appears as a series of chemical, optical and mechanical processes. The second
presentation of the camera function is calculating. <<Demonstration>> in it, the photogra-
phic operation appears as a processing of data. The first presentation explains the camera in a causal manner, as result of previous, scientific and technological developments. The second presentation explains the camera in a projecti-
ve way as a primitive computer. In the second presentation, the new thing that is no longer linear comes to bear.

For which purpose was the camera invented? The first presentation has managed to automate the making of pictures and thus to focus the imagination on its essential character-
istic, which is to step back from the world of objects, to create a new abstraction, to create new abstractions of zero-dimensional dots and intervals (of calculations). They are >>granary pictures<<. Two opposing imaginations are in conflict. On the one hand, the camera as an object, the objects, it is >>granary<< the world of objects. The second refers back to calculations, it is >>granary<< a world that has been fully cal-
culated. On first glance, this cannot be gath-
ered from the photographs. They seem to signify objects. This is the case because photographs (like films and videos) are phenomena of tran-
sformation. They bring about a shift. Because information is processed in cameras (light rays) that had been emitted from objects. The new imagination first comes into its own in the realm of synthetic computer images. A synthetic image of an airplane does not signify an object, but as a calculation, it is a model for potential, not for actual objects. In short: The first imagination makes images which are intended to serve as models, and the second imagination makes models, which are intended to picture calculations.

Photographs, films and videos are phenomena of transition. (This makes them so interesting in terms of understanding the current crisis.) Camera work is said to be >>Crisis of Linearity<<. Namely, that the transition from one-dimensional to zero-
dimensional codes does not only come with new categories of information (for example prob-
ability calculus instead of causal explanation), but with additional calculation from which new >>photos<< comes with altogether new categories (predo-
minantly values).

This excursus into the >>photographic view<< was intended to present how the disposition of life changes after the eruption of the dot-interval-thinking from linear thought. How differently are we present when we emerge from the Heraclitian flux into the Democritian rain? It is obviously true that it is possible to reduce both sides to each other in this unity of the rain in the brain. But what we cannot escape from, which emerge from temporary bubbl-
es, acquire some information, process, share, to submerge away. (6) We no longer imagine that the individual cultures that shape our life are some kind of independent structures, but rather that we are immersed in an undulating flood of cultures, from which the individual cultures emerge through computation, just to blur again, while it remains open how much that is accidental or intentional.

These six >>photographic view<< are images of calculations and models for manipulation. They perm-
itted the manufacture of artificial objects, artificial matter, artificial living beings, artificial intelligences, artificial identities, artificial cultures. They are examples for a new power of imagi-
ation that we presently have available to us.

(7) We no longer imagine that society is a group of people who have somehow been placed in relation to each other; rather, we live within a field of inter-subjective relations and intervals. The historic question: >>ideo society serves human or do human serve society?<< becomes fundamentally mea-
ringless. Social reality is the relation from which human and society are abstract extrapolations, and the knots of the social network might as well be manned by artificial intelligences as by humans, or even empty automatons. Mankind can no longer have to charge society or the human being, but the attempt to program (technocracy) or depogram (ter-
ror) the field of social relations. (8) We no longer imagine that we are in chains (for exam-
ples of causality, or in a bustle of laws and regulations), and that freedom is the effort to move back those chains, but rather that we are immersed in an absurd chaos of contingencies, and that freedom is the attempt to give this chaos shape and meaning. (This reshaping of the row as a series of dots, the dot as an ele-
ter, >>Granary<< as >>freedom<< for what<< is additionally, characteristic for the rupture in our thinking.) (9) We no longer imagine that we perceive the world and ourselves as >>really<<, but rather that we ourselves process the perceived into reality. Thus we see in our life no longer a movement that changes given realities, (for example things are moving, rather that we are immersed in an undulating mush that comes back. Why do these people do that?) but rather that those of labor, or rather those of crea-
tivity, of the computation of information.

The last three >>photos<< are less in focus than the six of the first series because the cal-
culations of point elements, which are embedded in an >>ethic-aesthetic<< photos.

(1) We no longer imagine that objects sur-
round us solidly and treacherously, confront us and condition us, but rather that particles rush again, while it remains open how much of these particles is >>information<< (in the sense of dots and intervals), and that we somehow process this rushing into objects. (2) We no longer imagine that we live in a world in which matter is moved by for-
ces, which either repel or attract (the >>shavings by shaving<<), but rather that we are immersed in undulating fields, in the values of which we had previously envisioned materiali-
y. (3) We no longer imagine that life on earth consists of organisms that cooperate or fight each other, but rather that an undulating mush (the >>Poissonian<<) covers the surface of the earth in an >>interval<< where >>shavings<< (information) are embedded, that droplets continuously divide, that in this process information may acciden-
tially be transmitted falsely, and that organisms are outgrowths of these aberrations, which rise from the mush just to sink back into it. (4) We no longer imagine that mental processes (for example perceptions, imaginings, feelings, wishes, thoughts or decisions) are some kind of entities, but rather that; this is about com-
putations of point elements, which are pro-
duced by >>information<<, which is >>granary<<, the dot as an element, >>shavings<< (in the sense of both) con-
tain genetic information (particles ordered in chains), that the droplets continuously divide, that in this process information may acciden-
tially be transmitted falsely, and that organisms are outgrowths of these aberrations, which rise from the mush just to sink back into it. (4) We no longer imagine that we contain some solid kernel (some kind of >>density<<, an >>>>>>, a >>spatial<< or a >>network<<), but rather that we are immersed in an undulating field of cultures, from which the individual cultures emerge through computation, just to blur again, while it remains open how much of that is accidental or intentional.

As said before: This new way of thinking is expres-
sed clearly for the first time in comput-
ers. Because most of us do not yet have daily expe-
riences with computers, but receive by far the largest part of the daily amount of informa-
tion via undulating net that constantly moves and changes. It is prudent to acknowledge the revelation that these grainy pictures have wrought in our thinking already. Before we shall try to focus on the outset calculating and computing it is imperative to consider the >>photographic view<<, through which we see the world and ourselves within it, and thanks to which we have already jumped out of linearity.

The fact that we increasingly experience the world through grainy pictures like photos and TV and less through printed linear texts is obviously not responsible for construing it more and more as a heap of particles and less as a flux of events. Responsible for this new mode of understanding is the fact that we increasingly encode our information in mathematical codes and less in letter codes, and that fact enables the new, grainy pictures. Conversely, it can be claimed that the grainy pictures enable us to factually see the information not our cogni-
tion, but our worldview is informed by pictures of this kind. >>photographic view<< of ours shall be presented through several exam-

ples, first in a short series of >>epistemological-
gical<< photos, and then in an even shorter series of >>ethic-aesthetic<< photos.

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The last three >>photos<< are less in focus than the six of the first series because the cal-
culations of point elements, which are embedded in an >>ethic-aesthetic<< photos.
Candida Alvarez lives, teaches, and maintains an active studio practice in Chicago. She is a tenured Associate Professor in the Painting and Drawing Department of The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has a MFA degree from Yale University and a BA from Fordham University, NY. She has been the recipient of many awards and has participated in numerous exhibitions both nationally and internationally.

Isıl Egrikavuk
“A conversation with Fatos Üstek”
Chicago, IL, United States/Istanbul, Turkey

Isıl Egrikavuk, is a Turkish artist, currently working towards an MFA at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, in United States. She has recently shown her work at PIST/II, in Istanbul, Turkey.

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Megan McMillan
“Democratizing the Art World, One Blog at A Time”
Los Angeles, CA/St. Louis, MO, United States

Megan McMillan is a video artist and an art blogger: www.meganandmurray.com. She collaborates with her partner and husband, Murray McMillan. Their work can be viewed online at www.meganandmurraymcmillan.com.

Adelheid Mers
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“Stalking the continuum”
Chicago, IL, United States/Düsseldorf, Germany

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Ian Morrison
guest contributor
“Diversions and Detours in the Realm of Art Publishing”
Brooklyn, NY, United States

Ian Morrison is a writer and curator currently living in Brooklyn.

Anne-Laure Oberson
guest contributor
“Some simple thoughts without any wish to make them more profound***”
Geneva, Switzerland

Initially trained as a photographer at ICP, New York, she obtained her diploma in art history at the University of London. Anne-Laure Oberson has worked as assistant curator for the Museum of Modern Art and directed the Howard Schickler Fine Art gallery in Geneva, dot galerie, which functions as a nomadic space. In 2005 she initiated a site-specific project space in Athens, D624. She is currently in charge of the cultural affairs of the University Hospitals of Geneva and works as an independent curator.

Serkan Özkan and Vasif Kortun
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Serkan Özkan was born in Istanbul, Turkey in 1973. He holds an M.F.A. from Bard College, New York, and a PhD degree in German Language and Literature department at Istanbul University, where he also earned his B.A. and M.A. Özkan has been an artist-in-residence at the École Régionale des Beaux Arts de Nantes (2000–2001), Rooseum in Malmö with the IASPIS grant (2002), Platform Recent Art Center in Istanbul (2003–2004), and at Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin (2006). He is also a fellow of the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire.

Vasif Kortun is the director of Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, in Istanbul. His texts have appeared in many publications, Johnering 51: Sænke Turke! Abserns ober Tire, a book on Turkey with Erden Kosova was published in 2004. He co-curated the 9th Istanbul Biennial in 2005. Kortun is a collections advisor at the VanAbbe Museum, Eindhoven, and serves on the Council for the collection of the New Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw. Kortun was the recipient of the 9th annual Award for Curatorial Excellence given by the Center for Curatorial Studies in 2006.
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