

AHRC CREATIVE FELLOWSHIP  
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High Definition Imaging: An Investigation into the Actual, the  
Virtual and the Hyper Real

### Research Questions

Digital media technology is now everywhere, from the cinema to the living room, from the classroom to the shopping precinct. Large media corporations, whose success depends on introducing new commodities into the world, have waiting in the wings a new range of high definition equipment. This higher resolution equipment is fundamentally four to five times the resolution of preceding technology, which means that a viewer can no longer see the line structure inherent in the video image when projected on a cinema screen. This simple change means that the digital realm is now working at high enough quality to supersede old chemical technologies like 35mm film - and at the same time its accessibility means that it too will seep deeply into the life of every citizen. For the first time high quality image technologies and accessibility will be combined.

The aim of this project is to investigate - in practice and in theory - what is happening to the audience gaze as it shifts from the analogue to the digital to the higher resolution. This impending change has focused my artistic and technical concerns into the following fundamental question:

- How will High Definition Imaging affect the nature of art and entertainment from the point of view of both practitioners and audiences?

This question elicits the following associated questions:

- In what ways will High Definition Imaging change the work that is produced in the convergence of live art and visual technologies?
- In what ways will High Definition Imaging affect the design of exhibition spaces and our experiences of them ?

### Aims and Objectives

The aim of the fellowship is to create new knowledge about the aesthetics and techniques of high definition through a production led process. Production will occur in dialogue with practitioners and educationalists. With these aims in mind, my objectives are to produce a series of installation pieces, as well as a series of articles which I aim to develop into a book on the history surrounding the concept of an image making medium that is *higher in resolution* and therefore in some ways *better than* its predecessors. The discussion here will concentrate on how emerging technologies shape, as much as they are shaped by, our views of the world.

Being a cinematographer by trade I will wherever possible work through moving image and sound to complement text. As I research the book, I shall engage in a series of recorded interviews with artists and cinematographer/practitioners which will be gathered together and *could* form the basis of web and DVD resources.

### Research Context

At the centre of the project is the aim to bring the industrial, the academic and the theoretical together through practical and creative investigations. There are two interrelated contextual fields:

The first is the technical field of the development of High Resolution Imaging technologies which is conducted in specialist industry R&D contexts that have little contact with 'end users'. The key point now is the arrival of digital technology to drive the advancement of High Definition Video. These developments are enthusiastically embraced by film and television industry technocrats, it is for instance reported that Japanese engineers have been testing out a prototype of ultra high definition video (UHDV) which has 16 times greater image resolution than today's best standard HDTV. Footage has been projected on a 4 x 7 metre screen for public demonstration and the public were astonished. The visual effect of the footage of traveling down a road was so realistic, that some viewers even experienced nausea.

There are echoes of the Lumiere Brothers' apocryphal experiments capturing the image of a train approaching a platform and people leaving the theatre in fear. We are yet again at the beginning of a sea change in our imaging technologies. This technological moment thus connects us with the revival of Gunning's 'cinema of attractions' as a model for understanding cinema. This implication leads us into a second contextual field of theoretical research which takes

Benjamin's *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* as a starting point and develops through McLuhan's *Understanding Media* to a series of key works such as Jonathan Crary (1990) *Techniques of the Observer*, Lev Manovich (2001) *The Language of New Media*, Bolter J and Grusin R (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, and Brian Winston's (1998) *Media, Technology and Society: A History: From the Telegraph to the Internet*. Here research questions focus on the historic claims to realism (and now hyperrealism) connected to each new wave of imaging technology and to how these claims relate to the ownership and dissemination of technologies.

However, there are no coherent practitioner led research projects into high definition Video underway in UK HEIs.

### Research Methods

My research methods are drawn from my professional background. Having had professional experience at the highest levels of operation, combined with a career as an artist I am uniquely placed to make this exploration. My methodological contention is that technical investigations have to be performed in the medium itself, using the form to inquire into itself, to speak in its own language side by side with the written word.

The project will use both practical and academic methods for its investigation.

1 The creation of installations for public exhibition made with High Definition equipment. This work will be characterised by a blurring of the lines between actual and virtual, performance and audience. These installations are conceived of as a cumulative series of experiments each of which will test out the exhibition and performative potentialities of high definition imaging. In observing the effect of the work on the audience I am trying to create fertile material to assist in theorising the work. Whilst previously exhibiting *The Dinner Party*, I noticed the appearance of an accidental moment when some members of the interacting "audience" caught sight of a monitor showing the output of a security camera that happened to be trained on the room. I noticed that the audience became fascinated with the surveillance of the acts of others (and therefore themselves) while engaged with the work. Here I can sense a further layer of performativity and aim to look more deeply into the nature of audience response. By producing a series of related works within the same landscape, I aim to give myself multiple, yet subtly different, opportunities to observe audience response, and thereby formulate a deeper theoretical understanding.

All installations will be initially exhibited in the UoB Department of Drama.

2 The practical aspects of the research project will be conducted in dialogue with artists, cinematographers and academics. To this end the second major outcome will be *White Cities* a book on the advent of an incoming technology that in itself is more highly resolved than those of previous technologies and promises that the images made with this technology will deliver something other than the image content. Even the term for this new area of exploration has an exciting edge. 'High' is an adjective that alludes to flight, to the province of creatures that have access to something we do not have. It alludes to the idea of the inner sanctum, the place where only the chosen may go, to a place of secrets revealed... and Definition when used as a noun is concerned with articulation, description, the defining characteristics of an object. Taken together the two words promise much. For me this is a defining moment in the digital age. High definition imaging is the driving force in the onward development, the onward unveiling of digital technology.

To gather the material for this book I will conduct interviews (audio and video) with key practitioners, who will describe their ongoing creative and technical activity. The outcome of this part of the research could be published on the web or as a documentary DVD to be packaged with the book. The material will also will be lodged with the AHDS, and of course University of Bristol will hold a copy. In addition I have had conversations with the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and they would be willing to take the raw unedited footage from my interviews as the basis for a resource on the subject of contemporary uses of HD.

Indicative contributors from my own network of colleagues will include the following:

**Geoff Boyle**, President and Founder of the Cinematographers Mailing List

**Robert Cahen**, French Video Artist of many years standing.

**Steven Poster**, President of American Society of Cinematographers - known primarily for shooting Donnie Darko

**Bill Viola**, Video artist who uses high definition material in much of his work

**Scott Billups**, Videographer, collaborator with David Lynch and Author of *Digital Moviemaking* - the most comprehensive and important review of High Definition yet published

I will also introduce the research project in Year One with public seminars in London and Bristol; write three articles for the Journal of Media Practice and hold a final dissemination event at the project's conclusion.

I have been a working professional principally as a cinematographer for 25 years. I have also taught during that period, trying always to take back information from the professional realm to the educational realm. Equally I have consistently made artworks for public consumption over the same period.

In November 2005 there was a retrospective of my work at the INVIDEO International Video Art Festival in Milan 2005. AICE, the organising group, wish to archive my work in Milan. In Spring 2007, there will be a retrospective of my work at Video Les Beaux Jours, in association with the Strasbourg Museum of Modern Art, who also wish to archive my work. I am also depositing the archive at the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection at Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design.

A more recent area of development has been my involvement with the documentation of performance (particularly in a historical context), and through my work with Professor Martin White on *The Chamber of Demonstrations*, an AHRC-funded research project, I have had the opportunity to author a one of the first educational HD DVDs. I look forward to collaborating further with Professor White and others on developing methodologies for documenting performance using High Definition technology. Furthermore we hope to disseminate this work more widely by making it available as a web resource (contingent on further funding being available). My presence in the UoB Department of Drama will allow a free and creative exchange of information and ideas which will take these projects further.

This project facilitates the onward development of this trajectory in a summative form.