

# Search and Deploy

## Jacob Korczynski

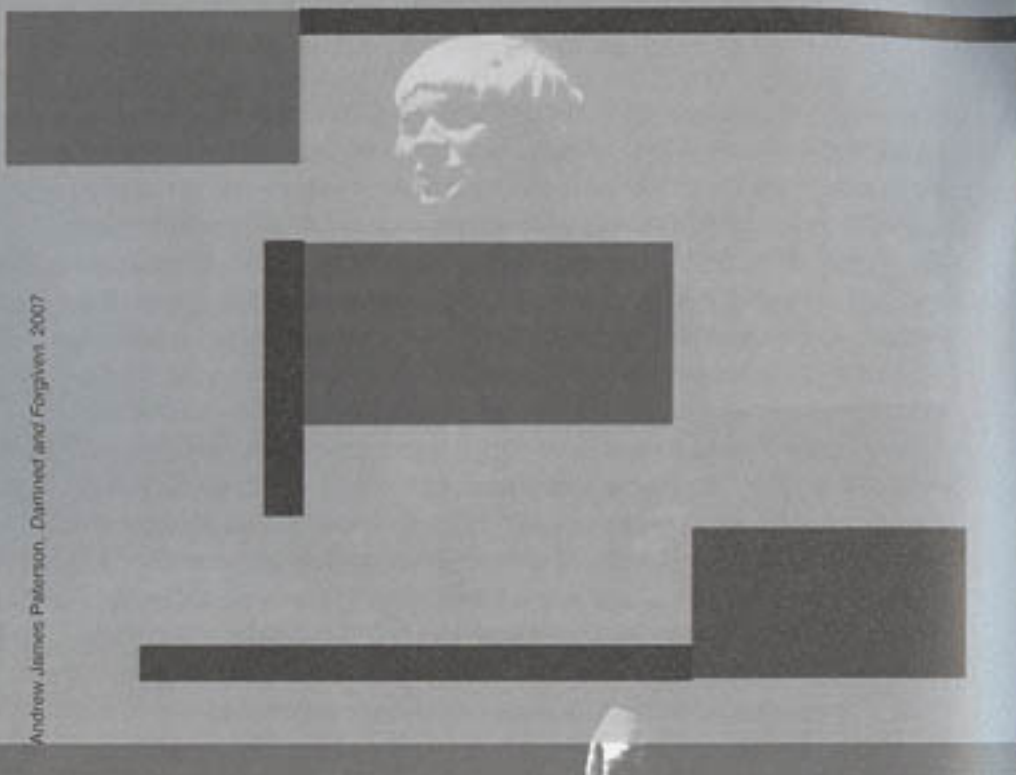


“You have helped me, you have kept a record of what I was, you have shown me myself.”

These words emerge from the dense collage of *Hell* (1984), exemplifying video's historical role as a mirror held up to the actions and the image of the artist. Her tape presents the viewer with what she identifies as a modern hell, one where animation negotiates an excess of information storage and retrieval, a conception of hell that has proved remarkably prescient: twenty years later artists have continued to employ animation as a discontinuous intervention into the moving image, an interface with which to reflect upon video's dissolution of boundaries between public and private and the ensuing fragmented status of the self. *Hell's* digital effects animate a fluid image archive of both found-footage gleaned primarily from television sources, as well as documentation of performances directed and executed by Lister. The contemporary tapes of *Search and Deploy* (by Robert Hamilton, Andrew James Paterson and Jowita Kepa) circulate in the aftermath of the era introduced in the pioneering animation experiment of *Hell*, an era marked by video's increasing malleability and its insertion into private and public realms through the introduction of the video camcorder and VCR into the home, which began to dissolve the previous boundaries between the roles of film and video. “The VCR was developed to continue television's mission to distribute cinema into the home. Video became synonymous with home movie consumption. Portapaks evolved into camcorders, personal video instruments for recording everyday life and shaping behaviour through feedback.”<sup>1</sup>

In “Essay on Video, Architecture and Television,” Dan Graham makes an important distinction between the moving images of film and video. He asserts that video, with its ability to be a document of continuous duration, is able to function as a present time medium. Film, in contrast, is a medium that presents the past in a constructed form of disjunctions.<sup>2</sup> In early video, artists (including Graham) examined the possibilities of real-time in contrast to the narrative montage of film. In its transition from film to video, animation retains the characteristics of the older medium, foregrounding a temporally mediated and process-based model. “Animation, unruliest of art forms, currently eludes description and classification boundaries, thanks to digital imagery's blurring the distinctions between film and animation. During its century-plus history, animation — now an inescapable part of nearly every communication mode — has continually absorbed, hybridized, mutated, and melded...”<sup>3</sup>





The tapes in *Search and Deploy* use animation to navigate the ambiguous intersections of private and public that video blurs. The temporal disjunctions of animation cut across distinctions between film and video, and its constructed form opens entire archives to be accessed and put into action, rendering all source material, whether found or fabricated, malleable. With the exception of video's real-time experiments and other performative strategies, animation is essentially a two-step process, marked by the time-delay between the artist's identification and accumulation of source material, and their activation of it. The artists in *Search and Deploy* explore the discontinuity of animation in order to assert multiple presences of a self and that self's image now fragmented between private and public image realms. Starting with Lister's use of television's early industrial effects, the elasticity of the video's digital image is extended by Hamilton to the still photograph, by Paterson to the personal computer, and by Kepa to the material manifestations of the tape itself. To identify and engage the multiple applications of the digital video image is to search; to order such images via animation is to deploy.

The transitional conditions of the moving image and the shifting role of video in relation to film during the era of *Hell* are foregrounded at the outset of Lister's tape. Following the opening sequence that features a series of hand-held shots which captures the passengers traveling in an unidentified New York City subway line, Lister exits the subterranean depths as the camera continues to accumulate its footage. The artist emerges to capture the sidewalk traffic underneath the bright lights of cinema marquees of a 42nd Street then in decline, suggesting the dominant position occupied by video from this era onward. At the midpoint of *Hell* Lister reveals a critical self-reflexivity in one of the work's key sequences, foregrounding the apparatus of her image making. A man who has appeared earlier in the tape directly addressing the camera sits before an early television effects console, the kind the artist accessed through commercial broadcasters in order to animate the images of *Hell*. Where elsewhere Lister superimposes text upon empty frames or abstract images to provide a counterpoint to the voiceover narration that guides the viewer, here the word V-I-O-L-E-N-C-E is spelled across the frame covering the image of the man at the console. While the presence of the word at this junction in *Hell* anticipates the appropriated news footage that unpacks the tragic tale of a murdered family about to unfold in Lister's collage of found footage, the viewer cannot help but consider the dominance of the text upon the image as the artist's reflection upon animation as an active attack upon the autonomy of the image. As the anchor of *Search and Deploy*, *Hell* introduces animation as the struggle with, and between, images whose final form is far from inevitable.

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In contrast to a restless revision of the moving image in *Hell*, Robert Hamilton's *Fiets (Bicycles)* (2004) foregrounds the serialized discontinuity of the discrete frame. A series of still photographs produced by the artist are assembled into a continuous visual document of time, place and memory, and accompanied by an audio montage appropriated from narrative films. *Fiets (Bicycles)* extends Hamilton's earlier animation and time-lapse experiments, which include the limited range of still images generated by Nintendo Game Boy cameras and Web Cams. Primarily documenting the travel of both cyclists and pedestrians on a street during a single afternoon in Amsterdam, Hamilton maintains the graphic continuity of linear movement: the image mutates across the frame, and the human forms passing through the frame are retained through the compiled presence of multiple figures. Extending animation's negotiation between past and present, the found sound in *Fiets (Bicycles)* suggests the condition of being situated between two sites simultaneously, while ultimately occupying neither. The tension of audio and visual discontinuity emerges as the first images of Hamilton's tape accumulate. As the geography of Amsterdam is established through images of the city's empty cobblestone streets and famous canals, a voice amongst the drifting audio collage assembled from feature films explains that, "Over here is ranch house, and right over here is the corral..." while another voice responds that "Texas must be a wonderful place...". As *Fiets (Bicycles)* continues the sound of marching drums begin to build a beat of battle, culminating in the dense cacophony of warfare as the inhabitants of the frame are assembled to their greatest density. Suddenly, the people disappear, the street empties and the fragile voice of Clint Eastwood whispers, "...death will come haunting...". Suggesting the international parasitic military presence of the United States through the narratives of violence manifest in the moving image, Hamilton extends the discontinuity of animation to the fractured visual experience of war, inviting the viewer to contemplate the ongoing occupation of Iraq only cognizable through the incomplete pictures assembled, indeed, animated from outside the immediate boundaries of the conflict.

In *Damned and Forgiven* (2007) Andrew James Paterson extends the investigation of sound and image found in Hamilton's tape. Here, an audio track accompanied from the video documentation of one of the artist's infamous monologue performances establishes the temporal continuity. Additionally, Paterson alternatively superimposes images from two different sources upon the performance documentation: a series of his colour-field compositions and a sequence of still images including his own snapshots, as well as found popular and pornographic images pulled from a personal archive that he has opened to the viewer.

Using his performance and persona as source material, the artist initiates a dialogic encounter with his ongoing interdisciplinary practice, revealing an uneasy and uncertain negotiation of the private and public. The colour-field compositions and found images initially appear to suppress the images of Paterson's performance due to their continuous, slow cycle of superimposition, but as the tape progresses, the tempo of the images increases until their split-second presence culminates in a flicker. Formally an extension of a broader archival impulse that animation initiates, in *Damned and Forgiven* Paterson situates flicker as a sub-genre of animation, historically tied to film, where each component frame is emphasized as a discrete unit. Absorbed by the inclusive image field of contemporary video, flicker sheds its medium-specificity, but retains its essential role, revealing the material and technological source of the media in which it is produced. And, here, animation is asserted when the fractured flow of images channels rapidly through the electronic signal of video, revealing a self intentionally divided by the artist.

Jowita Kepa closes *Search and Deploy* by revisiting the representational ambiguity of archival images, a strategy introduced by Ardele Lister in *Hell*. Breaking through a burst of static, an image of a young woman cuts across the empty, imageless field. Prominently centred in the frame, she is unidentified and alone, drifting through the anonymity of a crowd. Alongside the image that moves from distortion to decipherability, the melancholy audio opening of *[/]* (2003) evokes the transfer of history and loss that is present throughout the other tapes in the programme. From a song slowed to the point of complete obscurity the viewer can discern "I don't trust myself, anymore...", before Kepa jars the viewer with the repetition of a frozen frame and accelerates through an oblique narrative of passion and murder. The actions of both Kepa and her possible screen surrogate position the viewer within an instant that is activated as quickly as it ends. With *[/]*, Kepa unpacks the tension between the found and the fabricated, reanimating oblique images that may or may not have been transferred from the now archival cinema absorbed by video. Narrative causality is disjointed through ellipses and repetition, facilitated by the artist's instant access to the image via digital video, which is able to supersede temporal linearity. Kepa renders the source of her material unknowable, and it is not only the self that appears fractured, but also the context and origin of the images that remains unsettled, not trusted anymore. The phonetic title of the tape foregrounds the searing violence that the artist presents via content (forceful and frenzied moments) and form (cutting through the tape and its linear sequence of images), eliciting a connection to the operation to search and destroy from which the project title is derived.



However, the title of this final tape also denotes a middle ground, or a porous site, indicative of the hybrid space that animation negotiates encompassing film/video, public/private, past/present. To probe and bring into action, to locate and animate, to search and deploy.

#### EndNotes

- 1 Tom Sherman, "Three Texts on Video," *Canadian Art*, Spring 2005, 58.
- 2 Dan Graham, "Essay on Video, Architecture and Television" in *Video-Architecture-Television: Writings on Video and Video Works, 1970-1978*, edited by Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1979), 62.
- 3 John Canemaker, "Plus Ça Change ..." in *Animations*, edited by Klaus Biesenbach (Berlin: KW - Institute for Contemporary Art; New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2003), 20.

## PROGRAMME

### Ardele Lister, *Hell* (1984), 17:00

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the hell of today, the hell of information storage and retrieval." From this introduction, Lister proceeds to enumerate the sins of our modern technological world. *Hell*, one of the first art works created in digital media, features a computerized nether world, replete with souls stored on disk and tortured with digital effects. It represented the U.S. in video at the Biannual International in Medellin in 1988.

### Robert Hamilton, *Fiets (Bicycles)* (2004), 3:28

*Fiets* is an animated short composed of hundreds of individual photos of people riding bicycles and walking along a street in Amsterdam. The accompanying soundtrack includes audio from various movies; one in particular is *The Beguiling* starring Clint Eastwood. *Fiets* reflects on the diverse range of people who momentarily existed on a specific bike lane in Amsterdam June 15th, 2003, between 1 and 5 pm.

### Andrew James Paterson, *Damned and Forgiven* (2007), 4:00

*Damned and Forgiven* is both an adaptation and an abstraction of a performative fragment. The basic layer of this four minute videotape consists of a documented performance made in 2006. The two layers of images superimposed onto the performative base are composed of both original and unoriginal images - frequently abstract but sometimes concrete and even pornographic. The still images layered on top of the performance are initially roughly one second in duration but eventually increase their tempo into a single-frame editing mode. *Damned and Forgiven* references classic "flicker films", and more than flirts with animation.

### Jowita Kepa, *[/]* (2003), 1:00

*[/]* is sixty seconds of anxious noise ripping and slashing through the frame, as an irreparable mental state reaches a destructive pitch. The eruptive speed of the image finally exhausts and culminates in a nullified, vacant tone.