LEA

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

VOL 19 NO 3 VOLUME EDITORS **LANFRANCO ACETI, STEVE GIBSON & STEFAN MÜLLER ARISONA** EDITOR **ÖZDEN ŞAHIN**

Live visuals have become a pervasive component of our contemporary lives; either as visible interfaces that re-connect citizens and buildings overlaying new contextual meaning or as invisible ubiquitous narratives that are discovered through interactive actions and mediating screens. The contemporary re-design of the environment we live in is in terms of visuals and visualizations, software interfaces and new modes of engagement and consumption. This LEA volume presents a series of seminal papers in the field, offering the reader a new perspective on the future role of Live Visuals.

LIVE VISUALS

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 3

Live Visuals

VOLUME EDITORS
LANFRANCO ACETI, STEVE GIBSON & STEFAN MÜLLER ARISONA

EDITOR
ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

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Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Volume 19 Issue 3

When Moving Images Become Alive!

"Look! It's moving. It's alive. It's alive... It's alive, it's mov-
ing, it's alive, it's alive, it's alive, it's alive, IT'S ALIVE!"
Frankenstein (1931)

**Those who still see – and there are many in this
camp – visuals as simple 'decorations' are living in
a late 19th century understanding of media,** with
no realization that an immense cultural shift has hap-
pened in the late 20th century when big data, sensors,
algorithms and visuals merged in order to create 21st
century constantly mediated social-visual culture.

Although the visuals are not actually alive, one cannot
fail to grasp the fascination or evolution that visuals
and visual data have embarked upon. It is no longer
possible to see the relationship of the visual as lim-
ited to the space of the traditional screens in the film
theater or at home in the living room with the TV. The
mobility of contemporary visuals and contemporary
screens has pushed boundaries – so much so that
'embeddedness' of visuals onto and into things is a
daily practice. The viewers have acquired expecta-
tions that it is possible, or that it should be possible,
to recall the image of an object and to be able to have
that same object appear at home at will. The process
of downloading should not be limited to 'immaterial'
digital data, but should be transferred to 3D physical
objects. [1]

Images are projected onto buildings – not as the tra-
ditional trompe l'oeil placed to disguise and trick the
eye – but as an architectural element of the building
itself; so much so that there are arguments, including
mine, that we should substitute walls with projected
information data, which should also have and be
perceived as having material properties (see in this

volume "Architectural Projections" by Lukas Treyer,
Stefan Müller Arisona & Gerhard Schmitt).

Images appear over the architecture of the buildings
as another structural layer, one made of information
data that relays more to the viewer either directly or
through screens able to read augmented reality infor-
mation. But live visuals relay more than images, they
are also linked to sound and the analysis of this link-
age provides us with the opportunity "to think about
the different ways in which linkages between vision
and audition can be established, and how audio-visual
objects can be composed from the specific attributes
of auditory and visual perception" (see "Back to the
Cross-modal Object" by Atau Tanaka).

iPads and iPhones – followed by a generation of
smarter and smarter devices – have brought a radi-
cal change in the way reality is experienced, captured,
uploaded and shared. These processes allow reality
to be experienced with multiple added layers, allow-
ing viewers to re-capture, re-upload and re-share,
creating yet further layers over the previous layers
that were already placed upon the 'original.' This lay-
ering process, this thickening of meanings, adding of
interpretations, references and even errors, may be
considered as the physical process that leads to the
manifestation of the 'aura' as a metaphysical concept.
The materiality of the virtual, layered upon the 'real,'
becomes an indication of the compositing of the
aura, in Walter Benjamin's terms, as a metaphysical
experience of the object/image but nevertheless an

experience that digital and live visuals are rendering
increasingly visible.

"Everything I said on the subject [the nature of aura]
was directed polemically against the theosophists,
whose inexperience and ignorance I find highly
repugnant. . . . First, genuine aura appears in all things,
not just in certain kinds of things, as people imagine." [2]

The importance of digital media is undeniably evident.
Within this media context of multiple screens and sur-
faces the digitized image, in a culture profoundly visual,
has extended its dominion through 'disruptive forms'
of sharing and 'illegal' consumption. The reproducibili-
ty of the image (or the live visuals) – pushed to its very
limit – has an anarchistic and revolutionary element
when considered from the neocapitalistic perspective
imbued in corporative and hierarchical forms of the
construction of values. On the contrary, the reproduc-
ibility of the image when analyzed from a Marxist point
of view possesses a community and social component
for egalitarian participation within the richness of con-
temporary and historical cultural forms.

The digital live visuals – with their continuous potential
of integration within the blurring boundaries of public
and private environments – will continue to be the
conflicting territory of divergent interests and cultural
assumptions that will shape the future of societal en-
gagements. Reproducibility will increasingly become
the territory of control generating conflicts between
original and *copy*, and between the layering of *copy*
and *copies*, in the attempt to contain ideal participa-
tory models of democracy. The elitist interpretation of
the aura will continue to be juxtaposed with models of
Marxist participation and appropriation. [3]

Live visuals projected on public buildings and private
areas do not escape this conflict, but present interpre-
tations and forms of engagements that are reflections

of social ideals. The conflict is, therefore, not solely in
the elitist or participatory forms of consumption but
also in the ideologies that surround the cultural behav-
iors of visual consumption.

Object in themselves, not just buildings, can and may
soon carry live visuals. There is the expectation that
one no longer has to read a label – but the object can
and should project the label and its textured images
to the viewer. People increasingly expect the object
to engage with their needs by providing the necessary
information that would convince them to look into
it, play with it, engage with it, talk to it, like it and ulti-
mately buy it.

Ultimately there will be no need to engage in this
process but the environment will have objects that,
by reading previous experiences of likes and dislikes,
present a personalized visual texture of reality.

Live visuals will provide an environment within which
purchasing does not mean to solely acquire an object
but rather to 'buy' into an idea, a history, an ideology
or a socio-political lifestyle. It is a process of increased
visualization of large data (Big Data) that defines and
re-defines one's experience of the real based on previ-
ously expressed likes and dislikes.

In this context of multiple object and environmental
experiences it is also possible to forge multiple individ-
ualized experiences of the real; as much as there are
multiple personalized experiences of the internet and
social media through multiple avatar identities (see
"Avatar Actors" by Elif Ayter). The 'real' will become
a visual timeline of what the algorithm has decided
should be offered based on individualized settings of
likes and dislikes. This approach raises an infinite set
of possibilities but of problems as well.

The life of our representation and of our visuals is our 'real' life – disjointed and increasingly distant from what we continue to perceive as the 'real real,' delusively hanging on to outdated but comfortable modes of perception.

The cinematic visions of live visuals from the 19th century have become true and have re-designed society unexpectedly, altering dramatically the social structures and speeding up the pace of our physical existence that constantly tries to catch up and play up to the visual virtual realities that we spend time constructing.

If we still hold to this dualistic and dichotomist approach of real versus virtual (although the virtual has been real for some time and has become one of the multiple facets of the 'real' experience), then the real is increasingly slowing down while the virtual representation of visuals is accelerating the creation of a world of instantaneous connectivity, desires and aspirations. A visuality of hyper-mediated images that, as pollution, pervades and conditions our vision without giving the option of switching off increasingly 'alive' live visuals. [4]

The lack of 'real' in Jean Baudrillard's understanding is speeding up the disappearance of the 'real' self in favor of multiple personal existential narratives that are embedded in a series of multiple possible worlds. It is not just the map that is disappearing in the precession of simulacra – but the body as well – as the body is conceived in terms of visual representation: as a map. These multiple worlds of representations contribute to create reality as the 'fantasy' we really wish to experience, reshaping in turn the 'real' identity that continuously attempts to live up to its 'virtual and fantastic' expectations. Stephen Gibson presents the reader with a description of one of these worlds with live audio-visual simulations that create a synesthetic

experience (see "Simulating Synesthesia in Spatially-Based Real-time Audio-Visual Performance" by Stephen Gibson).

If this fantasy of the images of society is considered an illusion – or the reality of the simulacrum, which is a textual oxymoron at prima facie – it will be determined through the experience of the *live visuals becoming alive.*

Nevertheless, stating that people have illusory perceptions of themselves in relation to a 'real' self and to the 'real' perception of them that others have only reinforces the idea that Live Visuals will allow people to manifest their multiple perceptions, as simulated and/or real will no long matter. These multiple perceptions will create multiple ever-changing personae that will be further layered through the engagements with the multiple visual environments and the people/avatars that populate those environments, both real and virtual.

In the end, these fantasies of identities and of worlds, manifested through illusory identities and worlds within virtual contexts, are part of the reality with which people engage. Although fantastic and illusory, these worlds are a reflection of a partial reality of the identity of the creators and users. It is impossible for these worlds and identities to exist outside of the 'real.' This concept of real is made of negotiated and negotiable frameworks of engagement that are in a constant process of evolution and change.

The end of post-modernity and relativism may lead to the virtuality of truism: the representation of ourselves in as many multiple versions – already we have multiple and concurrent digital lives – within the world/s – ideological or corporate – that we will decide or be forced to 'buy into.'

It is this control of the environment around us and us within that environment that will increasingly define the role that live visuals will play in negotiating real and virtual experiences. The conflict will arise from the blurred lines of the definition of self and other; whether the 'other' will be another individual or a corporation.

The potential problems of this state of the live visuals within a real/virtual conflict will be discovered as time moves on. In the end this is a giant behavioral experiment, where media and their influences are not analyzed for their social impact *ex ante facto*; this is something that happens *ex post facto*.

Nevertheless, in this ex post facto society there are some scholars that try to understand and eviscerate the problems related to the process of visuals becoming alive. This issue collects the analyses of some of these scholars and embeds them in a larger societal debate, hinting at future developments and problems that society and images will have to face as the live visuals become more and more alive.

The contemporary concerns and practices of live visuals are crystallized in this volume, providing an insight into current developments and practices in the field of live visuals.

This issue features a new logo on its cover, that of New York University, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development.

My thanks to Prof. Robert Rowe, Professor of Music and Music Education; Associate Dean of Research and Doctoral Studies at NYU, for his work in establishing this collaboration with LEA.

My gratitude to Steve Gibson and Stefan Müller Arisona, without them this volume would not have been

possible. I also have to thank the authors for their patience in complying with the guidelines and editorial demands that made this issue one that I am particularly proud of, both for its visuals and for its content.

My special thanks go to Deniz Cem Önduygu who has shown commitment to the LEA project beyond what could be expected.

Özden Şahin has, as always, continued to provide valuable editorial support to ensure that LEA could achieve another landmark.

Lanfranco Aceti
Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Director, Kasa Gallery

1.   3D printing the new phenomenon will soon collide with a new extreme perception of consumer culture where the object seen can be bought and automatically printed at home or in the office. Matt Ratto and Robert Ree, "Materializing Information: 3D Printing and Social Change," *First Monday* 17, no. 7 (July 2, 2012), http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3968/3273 (accessed October 20, 2013).
2.   Walter Benjamin, "Protocols of Drug Experiments," in On Hashish, ed. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 58.
3.   " The point here is not to issue a verdict in the debate between Adorno and Benjamin, but rather to understand the debate between them as representing two sides of an ongoing dialectical contradiction." Ryan Moore, "Digital Reproducibility and the Culture Industry: Popular Music and the Adorno-Benjamin Debate," Fast Capitalism 9, no. 1 (2012), http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/9_1/moore9_1.html (accessed October 30, 2013).
4.   Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London: Verso, 1997), 97.

A Tribe Called Red, 2012. ©
A Tribe Called Red, 2012.
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Live Audio-Visual Art +
First Nations Culture

by

Jackson 2bears

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The starting point for most Indigenous perform-ing art practices is not Cabaret Voltaire, rather, its roots are in Indigenous ceremony, struggle, beauty, thought and the "Indian experience" in all its many manifestations. Indigenous orality, culture and spirituality from diverse Indigenous peoples can be seen as being as central to some artists' work as new media, technology and mainstream cultural references might be. What has been created in some instances is a form of Aboriginal perfor-mance that collapses and combines both western and Indian ways of doing, but always maintaining an Indian way of being. [1]

A B S T R A C T

This essay focuses on a selection of First Nations artists that have envi-sioned their own unique style within the sphere of 'Live Cinema' perfor-mance, and other associated genres such as 'Vjing' and 'Scratch Video' – relatively new forms of artistic practice that here I conceptualize as being modernized versions of our ancient traditions of storytelling. Following a 'remix' logic, this essay means to explore some aspects particular to the art of live audiovisual performance, and the 'rhythmic' aesthetic at the heart of Live Cinema that has attracted a number of artists from my generation to make work in these fields, and develop their own strategies for creative expression that remain faithful to our traditions as Onkwehonwe (Indig-enous peoples). [2]

MEMORIES OF AN ELECTRIC POW WOW AT THE DRAKE UNDERGROUND

It's ten past midnight on a cool May evening in To-ronto (ON. Canada), and once again I find myself alone wandering down Queen Street... and I think to myself, if these streets could talk, they would indeed have many stories to tell…

Set on the northern shore of Lake Ontario, this whole area was once home to my Kanienkeha (Mohawk) ancestors after they relocated here from their tradi-tional territories to the south. Toronto, or York as it was known in 1750, saw the first large influx of British loyalists and different Native Nations fleeing from the disastrous aftermath of the American Revolu-tion. After being named the first new colony of Upper Canada, York was almost burned to the ground by the Americans during the War of 1812, which resulted once again in a major relocation of a number of First Nations communities that had settled in this region.

Walking down Queen Street, my mind adrift, I traverse the fragmented concrete streets and am discom-bobulated by the dazzling lights of the city and the inane cacophony of the atmosphere in which I am immersed. But this night is different; tonight I am on

my way to an *Electric Pow Wow* event at The Drake Underground, a funky hotel/club located somewhere far along Queen West.

A trio of Indigenous artists named A Tribe Called Red – which consists of multimedia artists/producers Bear Witness, DJ Shrub and DJ NDN – have been organiz-ing these events since 2008, providing a dedicated showcase for First Nations talent. As a performance troupe, their own sound is a remix-collage of a wide variety of musical styles ranging from Hip Hop to Dance Hall and Electro-House, and their own unique, cross-cultural mash-up that they call *Pow Wow Step*. Add to this an elaborate 'live' video art and multimedia component, and *ATCR* is a Live Cinema/ VJ troupe that give their audience a unique show rooted in the contemporary Indigenous experience. "What we're trying do with A Tribe Called Red [says Bear Witness] is take those traditional aspects of being aboriginal and bring them into our urban life." [3]

Not at all feeling that I'm late to the party, I enter the club and begin to merge with all those bodies on the dance floor, and the polyrhythmic layering of sonic

Horse, Archer Pechawis, 2011.
© Archer Pechawis, 2011. Used
with permission.

textures – both aural and visual – cascade around and through the masses, becoming a visceral and immersive phenomenon that truly transcends anything like a typical club experience. The video screens flash and flicker in synchronization with the pulsating Pow-Wow dance rhythms, while multiple video streams mash together creating a powerful synaesthetic environment where sampled fragments from old 'Cowboys and Indians' movies collide with Disney's *Pocahontas* and television broadcasts of contemporary First Nations issues that are playing out in the media.
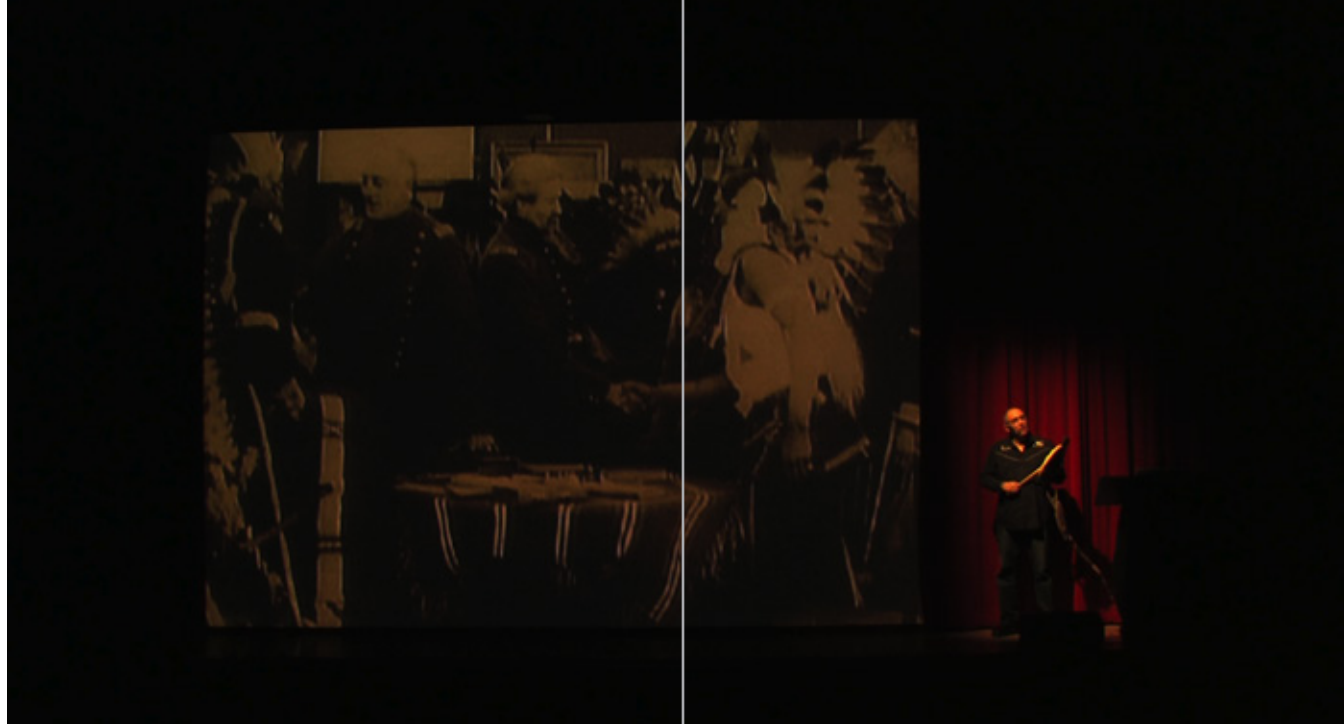
"I see red people!" [4] shouts DJ Shrub into a mic over the undulating sub-sonic drones and electro-synthetic beats…and all the Native people in the crowd scream indiscernible vocalizations in response…And I think to myself that this revival of our voices on the landscape is indeed something to be celebrated. But in no way is this gathering exclusive – native and non-native people alike are here for a communal gathering, and an experience of collectivity and community that can only be found in a like-minded multitude that transcends racial boundaries. Speaking of this collective space created by ATCR at their *Electric Pow Wow* events Bear Witness has said: "I think it has something to do with starting from a community that was solid. We made a comfortable place for our community and our community made a comfortable place for everyone else." [5]

TRANSITIONAL CULTURE, ENTANGLED HISTORIES AND RE-IMAGINED LANDSCAPES

In traditional forms of ceremonial performance there is an enactment of collective unconscious, a reflection of communal dreams. Culture and community are reinforced. In contemporary First Nations performance art there is a continuation of this legacy. Artists from different nations address the concerns of equally diverse Urban Indian communities, re-inventing tradition. [6]

As the original inhabitants of *Turtle Island* [7], we keep our histories in the form of storytelling…today, we continue to actively cultivate and maintain our roots in our traditional culture. Though now we have new ways to tell our stories, many of us making use of all the new technologies available to us as a means to express ourselves as *Onkwehonwe*. It would seem that a natural fit with the ways we as First Nations people tell our stories has been the creative practice of performance artworks that make use of real-time audiovisual techniques, which we use today to tell our stories and bring aspects of our traditional culture into our contemporary lives.

Counted among the first Indigenous artists to explore new media technologies as a tool for creative expression is Archer Pechawis – a member of the

Mistawasis First Nation (Saskatchewan) of both Cree and European decent. A performance and media artist, filmmaker, writer and curator, since 1984 Pechawis has produced a number of important artworks that have been exhibited both nationally and internationally. In general, his works are enframed by an ongoing interest in the crossovers, traversals and intersections of First Nations culture with technology, where in his praxis he often merges aspects of the traditional with the modern. As he writes:

My current fascination is what I call 'transitional Cree culture', the place where Cree culture meets the onrush of millennial technology. I explore this fascination in performance and computer-based

artworks. Using digital technologies I attempt to locate and query this meeting place, however fleeting. My work is a temporary roadmap. These maps are signposts of the moment, which I create to share. [8]

For instance, take Pechawis' groundbreaking Live Cinema performance piece entitled *Horse* (which premiered in 2001 at the Longest Night Festival in Whitehorse) which uses a ceremonial hand drum he transformed into a dynamic, multimedia interface by wiring the instrument with a series of electronic sensors. Operated in conjunction with specialized software (developed in the Max/MSP/Jitter programming environment), the 'digital drum' is essentially a gesture-controlled multimedia instrument used to perform audio/visual media in real-time, while at the same time it continues to serve its original (ceremonial) function.

"The following story *should* be true…" [9] Pechawis proclaims at the beginning of the performance, proceeding then to give the audience a re-imagining the cultural narrative of the *Medicine Lodge Treaties* – an important point in history for the United States Government and the Plains tribes of the Kiowa, Coman-

Horse, Archer Pechawis,
2011. © Archer Pechawis,
2011. Used with permission.

che and Kiowa-Apache. In essence, *Horse* is a spoken word piece that tells the story of a chance encounter between an individual from Black Kettle's band and General Custer's Seventh Calvary Regiment that results in a chaotic skirmish in which the 'Horse People' eventually rise up, intervene, and stop the bloodshed. The pacing of the performance is kept by Pechawis' rhythmic interaction with the 'digital drum' interface, which when played causes audio and video sequences to be projected on a massive screen behind him on stage. *Horse* is truly a powerful work that conjures to mind the surrealism of conflicting historical narratives which are always haunted by those who must live with the horrific consequences; like when in 1867 during the *Medicine LodgeTreaties* the 'Indians' were once again driven from their traditional territories, and relocated to reservations. [10]

Echoing the wisdom of our ancestors, the Indigenous philosopher Vine Deloria Jr. once said that as First Nations people we "write our stories on the land"... [1] by which he meant that our ways of storytelling have always related to the 'spatial' or 'geographical' environment with which the stories were (inter)connected. Indeed, I have always believed that the stories of my Kanien'kehaka ancestors are written onto the territory that is now called Toronto, and so too are the lives of all those who have lived here – as Deloria might say, their essences have been absorbed by the earth, the rocks, trees, and the lake that shores up against the city. As contemporary Indigenous storytellers, multimedia artists like ATCR and Archer Pechawis write their stories onto the land, their electronic-narratives becoming imprinted on the cityscape, inscribed into the pavement, and absorbed by the modern architecture that covers the earth in 'this' place. These Live Cinema/VJ shows therein participate in the ever-evolving entangled history (histories) of the territory, and become part of a multi-national story that is continually being re-written onto the landscape.

MANIFESTOS OF FUTURES PAST

Despite the namesake, Live Cinema (and other associated genres such as Vjing and Scratch Video) is profoundly different from traditional cinematic artforms. This is primarily because Live Cinema – with its roots in 'remix' and dance culture – breaks with the conventions of cinematic linearity and instead follows what Deloria called a 'circular' or 'spatial' logic.

At the beginning of the last century the Italian Futurist poet F.T. Marinetti wrote a brilliant exposition in which he prophetically announced the coming of a new cultural sensibility that would be founded on a synthesis of technology and the creative imagination. It was to be a world of simultaneity and omnipresence, of multiplicity and 'polyexpressivness' where the (then) new art of cinema – once freed from the shackles of convention, tradition and history – would become the ideal synthetic form of expression. The future destiny of cinema, according to Marinetti, was to accelerate the aesthetics of the moving image to match the dizzying delirium and inertial energy of a culture increasingly seduced by the politics of speed, becoming therein a visual symphony that would vibrate rhythmically in perfect synchronization with the emergence of a new technologically enabled society. [12]

Today, over a hundred years later, we can clearly see the influence the futurists have had on cinema, and in general, the art-world at large. Relatively new forms of expression, such as Vjing and Live Cinema, in many ways owe their creation to the work of the futurists who were determined to break with conventions and reinvent the 'syntax' of the cinematic art-form. Yet in other ways, these real-time audio/visual performances can be considered as being profoundly different from what Marinetti envisioned as the future prospects of cinema, and perhaps could be better understood as almost being part of a parallel future that emerged on the scene sometime in the 1970's.

Beat Nation [Live], 2012, (left to right) Jackson2bears, Chris Derkson, JB the First Lady, Alida Kinnie Starr, Ostwelve, Corey Bulpitt and Larissa Healey. © International Arts Initiatives, 2012. Used with permission.

Marinetti wrote that the future of cinema should strive to imbue itself with all the passions found in society – a passion for speed, and the drive to 'technicity' – and thus express in each artwork the "multiplication and unbridling of human desires" [13]. Such an art-form, he continues, should possess a strict "loathing of curved lines, spirals and the *tourniquet*" [14] and maintain a "love for the straight line and the tunnel" [15]. The futurist sensibility was one that demanded detaching the creative imagination from the past in order to render, in all its chaotic splendor, the increasing velocity of a society seduced by what Arthur Kroker called the "will to technology." [16]

But Live Cinema, and Vjing especially, operate on a different logic in that the aesthetics of these art-forms are strictly non-linear: the performance of live visuals expresses not love for the straight line, but rather a love of the circle, the fragment, the spiral and the loop. This is because Live Cinema and Vjing have roots not only in cinema, but also in 'remix' and dance culture, which emerged in the streets, in nightclubs, and warehouse parties at the end of 20th century. Indeed, these art-forms took the futurist notion of the 'syn-aesthetic experience' to the extreme, but unlike the futurists these performance artist acquired a love for circularity and rhythm that was distinct from the unidirectional ideology proposed by futurist cinema.

THE LOGIC OF (FIRST NATIONS) LIVE CINEMA IS SPATIAL

Like Western Science, Indigenous science is sequential and builds on previous knowledge. But, in Native traditions [..] building is never a direct or linear path [..] In the Indigenous minds arrival at point B occurs through fields of interconnecting relationships . . . outside of time. [17]

In *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* Deloria wrote that the main reason for theological/philosophical incommensurability between Western religions and 'tribal spirituality' was that the first traditionally followed a 'temporal' logic, whereas the latter was based in a 'spatial' one. That is, Deloria said that Western philosophy was rooted in a teleological, chronological and linear view of the world, and by contrast Native spiritually was based on a non-linear, geographical or circular philosophy. The distinction Deloria often makes in his work is between that of a 'chronological/historical' and 'spatial/geographical' cosmology, and in this he suggests a radically different way to think about history, ancestry, memory, and identity.

Deloria's perspectives can be applied to how as Native people we keep our histories in the form of storytelling, which, as he says, can be described as multidimensional, non-linear narratives that interconnect (spatially and dimensionally) with one another. For Indigenous peoples our stories are 'animate' narratives that traditionally were expressed in our art, music, sing-

ing/dancing and through the spoken word; they are animate because each time they are told and re-told in our ceremonies and social gatherings they undergo important transformations in both content and form. To be clear, Deloria considered our Native histories to be 'alive' and ever changing; therefore to think about them in a linear/chronological manner would be to lose the essence of how Native people experience our historical narratives.

The majority of authors consider Cinema to be a temporal art – as opposed to so called 'static' mediums such as painting or sculpture – because despite narrative conventions such as flashbacks and the like, it 'unfolds in time.' This is to say that even if in a film the chronology is taken out of sequence, we none-the-less experience it 'in-time' and therefore proclaim it to be 'durational' because it is necessarily rooted in a temporal logic. It has a 'love for the straight line' as Marinetti has said, or as Gilles Deleuze wrote while meditating on Henri Bergson's notion of 'duration,' "cinema embodies the modern conception of movement and temporal continuity." [18]

Live Cinema/ Vjing differ precisely because of the *live* nature of the art-form – they are not prerecorded 'screenings,' but rather performances of audiovisual media that occurs in real-time in front of an audience. More importantly, they are non-linear artworks that are 'circular' in both content and form; this is to say that Live Cinema/Vj performances are not 'durational,' but instead 'dimensional.' As Deloria might say, they are rooted in a 'spatial' philosophy that has less to do with temporality and more to do with circularity, rhythm and what Deleuze together with Felix Guattari called 'the Refrain.' Live Cinema/Vj performances are comprised of multidimensional narratives that 'loop' back on themselves and interconnect with one another 'outside of time' (Cajete) in a way that is less like traditional Cinema (save for the technique of

montage) and more like the rhythmic compositional character of music. This is because, as I have said, the performative strategies that guide the contemporary explorations of Live Cinema/Vj artists are influenced by early video and performance art as much as they are by 'remix' and dance culture.

TEMPORAL ELLIPSES AND THE SPATIAL LOGIC OF LIVE CINEMA MONTAGE

Some authors say with confidence that the roots of Live Cinema can be traced back to the silent movie days when live orchestration accompanied the screening of a film in theatres and other public venues before the 1920's. (It is interesting to note here that music was seen as an essential component of film even before the synchronization of sound and image were technologically made possible; a development some argue caused the 'live' aspect to be taken out of traditional cinema). However, as Bram Crevits writes, the roots of Vjing are only indirectly connected to cinema, arguing that it came into existence alongside the rise of electronic music in the 1970's and therefore was influenced to a larger degree by 'remix culture.' [19] Possibly the result of an evolutionary step in the much sought after 'multi-sensory' experience in the dance-halls of the 1960's, Vj's wanted to bring a live visual presence to the overall club experience. Inspired by early Video Art pioneers – like Fluxus members Joseph Beuys, Nam June Paik and Yoko Ono – Vjs early on began to experiment with the content and 'syntax' of the moving-image such that it might be imbued with the energy and dynamism found in video and performance art. It was a 'multisensory' approach writes Crevits, wherein live visual art could be merged with dance music therein creating a 'synaesthetic environment,' or what he called (citing Richard Wagner) "the one grand and total spectacle." [20]

It is because Vjing developed with the rise of electronic music in the 1970s that it took on an aesthetic markedly different from traditional cinema – yet, according to artist and theorist Mia Makela, the link remains somewhat un-broken. Sergei Eisenstein, a Russian film director of the 1920's and 30's, was the first to experiment with the formal aspects of cinema in an alternative and non-linear fashion. Credited as being the 'father of montage' he developed some unconventional film techniques in which the collision of various (sometimes entirely unrelated) shots were juxtaposed in order to create different meta-narratives and cinematic metaphors. Rather than have a musical composition made to suit his films, Eisenstein instead began to cut his visual narratives to the tempo of a pre-existing music, which gave the film a rhythmic quality that was unlike anything that had previously been made. In the 1920's Eisenstein developed something called the 'methods of montage,' which were comprised of different techniques he termed: metric, rhythmic, tonal, overtonal, and intellectual montage. These techniques radically disrupted the 'syntax' of cinema in some drastic ways, and introduced the "creation of impossible spatial matches." [21] Eisenstein's methods of montage are not "concerned with the depiction of a comprehensible spatial or temporal continuity as is found in the classical Hollywood continuity system [instead] it draws attention to temporal ellipses because changes between shots are obvious, less fluid, and non-seamless." [22] And as Mia Makela writes:

> Eisenstein's montage techniques could be seen as the beginning of Vjing. The way he used sound as the basis of the visual montage is how contemporary live visuals are often presented. Eisenstein understood the effect of rhythm and juxtaposition on the viewer, just like the video scratchers. [23]

Eisenstein's methods of montage mark a transition in cinematic form towards something more dimensional

or spatial wherein a multitude of visual layers are presented simultaneously, resulting in a film that followed a more rhythmic or circular philosophy. The logic of montage, as Makela writes, is 'spatial'; Eisenstein's films resemble a "musical composition, in which various instruments are being played together, in different combinations of rhythms, volumes and patterns." [24] Like with contemporary Live Cinema/Vj performances (with their focus on repetition and rhythmic variation) and how we as Native people we keep their histories in the form of storytelling (with our rootedness in what Deloria called spatial philosophy) to think of Eisenstein's montage's in a strictly linear way is to lose the essence of how we might experience the 'dimensionality' of a narrative, and not simply its duration.

Perhaps, Makela concludes, live visual performances "could be better analyzed as if they were music, including their compositional strengths and weakness, rhythmic structure, beauty etc." [25] One such analysis that I would like to propose here would be to re-think the language of Live Cinema/ Vjing through what Deleuze and Guattari called the logic of 'the Refrain.'

THE ETERNAL REFRAIN

The concept of 'the Refrain' is one that appears frequently in Deleuze and Guattari's co-authored text *A Thousand Plateaus*, and is something that falls under the category of what they refer to as a 'territorial assemblage.' From their perspective, a refrain is something derived from a musical milieu at the moment where a sonic event draws a boundary around its own internalizing logic and repeats, loops, and feeds-back on itself. More specifically, a refrain is a 'sonorous-assemblage' and consists of a 'holding together' of a group of heterogeneous elements that take on an identifiable autonomy from the musical milieu from which they were originally derived. As with Eisen-

tsien's montage, a Refrain consists of the simultaneous juxtaposition of separate elements that are drawn together in an 'embrace' wherein they collide and form a rhythmic meta-narrative that is situated on top of the sonic landscape (or plane) from which they came.

While performing live audio/visual artworks is itself a time-based event, key editing concepts found in traditional cinema are abandoned and replaced by compositional strategies wherein rhythmic assemblages are formed, looped and feed-back on themselves. Mia Makela wrote, as with the "production of electronic music [which is] based on samples and their repetitions and variations […] similarly, video clips (or algorithmic programs) are the basic elements of realtime visual performance." [26] In Vj performances, Deleuze and Guattari might say, groups of heterogeneous fragments form assemblages with their own internal 'regime of signs,' becoming therein audio/visual 'rhythmic-blocks.' The marking of a territorial assemblage is not about musical meter, it is about rhythm, which is what makes the territory of the Refrain dimensional rather than linear because it constitutes an abandonment of temporal co-ordinates. [27] Makela wrote that "Real-time performances are based in looping material," and so constitute both an encoding and decoding of (audio/visual) information when streams of media 'become expressive' and fold-back on themselves, creating closed circular patterns. And with this, as Deleuze and Guattari would have said, these rhythmic-blocks become 'dimensional' at the moment where they create their own co-ordinates – when they become self-contained and destabilize (decode) the linear follow of time.

To reconsider Live Cinema and Vj performances through the logic of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Refrain is to take us far away from traditional cinematic practices. These performances now can be seen as 'spatial narratives' (Makela) wherein the process of looping of audio/visual media in real-time is about the

creation of closed sonic/aural circuits or rhythmic-blocks that consist of the simultaneous overlapping of audiovisual narratives that intersect 'outside of time' (Cajete). Here, narrative is no longer something told 'in-time,' but rather it is the case that narrative has become 'an environment' (Makela). Live Cinema/ Vjing performances therefore constitute a form of storytelling where the goal is to "create spatial experiences" that are similar in form to our traditions of storytelling as Indigenous peoples because, as Deloria might have said, they are rooted in a 'spatial' rather than 'temporal philosophy.' Further, we might conclude that these performances are modernized versions of our Native traditions in that they consist of multidimensional, non-linear narratives that interconnect 'spatially' and 'dimensionally.' And following Deloria, I would say the artworks of contemporary Indigenous artists working in Live Cinema could be considered 'animate narratives' because they consist of the same kinds of transformations that previously had been expressed in our ceremonies and other social gatherings. For Deloria, history for Native peoples is not considered to be docile to time but rather something fully alive in our living present; they are living narratives that are re-animated every time a story is told and retold in a process that gives life back to a community or a culture. And this circularity, this interconnectedness described within his distinction between chronological/temporal and geographical/spatial cosmology, returns in his thought to the metaphoric symbolism of the drum, which serves to complete a metaphysical connection to what First Nations people call *Mother Earth*. To conclude, then, with a short mediation on the drum in First Nations culture.

The drum is considered a very special instrument in our culture, and in fact there are very few ceremonies that we have where the drum is not present. It is with the drum that we celebrate life, give thanks to the Creator, and maintain a closeness with *Mother Earth*

and our geographical/ spatial histories. It has been said many times and in many different ways that for our ancestors the drum was the heartbeat of *Mother Earth*, the heartbeat of life; the drum is what keeps the nations unified, and it is the source of our strength and power. The drum for us is a spiritual instrument, and its shape is that which represents our belief in what Cajete called the 'circle of life,' or what Deloria called a network of relations. I believe it is this concept more than any other that is transported from our traditions into the way contemporary Native artists create live audio/visual performances – the drum, that is, as both metaphor and what we might call (following Deleuze and Guattari) a rhythmic-assemblage that enables the artwork to be plugged into another larger territory: that of the eternal-Refrain of *Mother Earth*.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the Refrain (and other territorial assemblages) have an 'intense center,' which according to them is always located outside of the assemblage itself, further saying that "…the earth is [this] intense point at the deepest level of the territory." [28] That is to say the co-ordinates of the 'intense center' of territorial assemblages ultimately converge and are drawn into a 'close embrace' with the territory of the earth as that which constitutes all assemblages and enables their territorializing/ deterritorializing functions. However *Mother Earth* is not a territory itself, but is instead a 'vector' [29] – the earth is not merely a 'force among forces' they say, but rather a substance that embraces all the forces of territorialization, acting therefore as a kind of cosmic foundation, a decentered-center where "…all the forces draw together in close embrace." [30] This is why Deleuze and Guattari say that there is a 'refrain to the earth' which is constituted by two coexistent motifs (the earth and the territory) "…one melodic, evoking the assemblages of the [song], the other rhythmic, evoking the deep, eternal breathing of the earth." [31]

 In our traditional music it was the refrain of the drum that for the people constituted a connection to the spiritual refrain (heartbeat) of *Mother Earth*; as the elders have said, "the earth is alive, the dirt is alive. The songs and the dancing shake the Earth and charge it with life." [32] Deleuze and Guattari's theorizations, then, are complementary with our traditions: that the Earth itself breathes, that is it alive, that it is the 'intense' centre upon which all forces converge. *Mother Earth*, the drum, and the rhythmic-assemblage, then, as kind of spatial foundation that draws these acts together into a 'close embrace.' This is what I believe is at the centre of how contemporary Native artists create audio/visual performances, which can be seen as a modernized version of our traditions of storytelling. Although today the sound of the drum may be synthesized, the visual story may be digital, and the language may be that which flows through technological circuits and multimedia projectors…however the link remains unbroken, for these are just some of the new ways our people have chosen to tell our stories to a new generation, write our own narratives on the landscape, and express ourselves as *Onkwehonwe*.

ARTISTS/ PROJECTS

This final section is comprised of a selection of art-works/projects by First Nations artists that have envisioned the praxis of live audiovisual performance as a modernized version of our traditions of storytelling. These are works that explore the aesthetics of the contemporary Indigenous experience in all its various manifestations, combining both "western and Indian ways doing" [33] in new Live Cinema, Vj, and Scratch Video artworks that remain faithful to our traditions.

Jackson 2bears: *Iron Tomahawks* (2006–2013)
Iron Tomahawks is the title of an ongoing series of Live Cinema/ Scratch Video artworks by Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) artist Jackson 2bears. Premiered in 2006 at the Grunt Gallery (Vancouver BC), the project now includes nearly 60 performances that are each individually titled and numbered sequentially as an 'episode' in the series. The performances utilize vinyl-tracking technology (IWS) in conjunction with software (developed by the artist using Max/MSP/Jitter), which transforms 2 standard turntables into multimedia interfaces, allowing 2bears to edit, manipulate, and 'scratch' audio/video media in real-time.

Early episodes in the series were mainly comprised of footage sampled from 'Westerns' and 'Cowboys and Indians' movies, with the general theme of the work being about the deconstruction of Native stereotypes in popular culture through the language of the cut-up and the remix. As one reviewer wrote: "Iron Tomahawks seeks to challenge the illusionary mythology of nostalgia by forcing static (historic) media documents to re-perform themselves, and in this sense it is an artwork about re-writing historical narratives, remixing culture, and remaking identity." [34]

Later performances in the series have incorporated samples from a wide variety of sources, from games, to cartoons, video-sharing websites, television, Hollywood movies and documentary films. While the essence of the project is intended as a social/cultural critique, many episodes have also included A/V remixes of other First Nations artists (like Ostwelve, Kinnie Star, Buffy St. Marie, and War Party), which are integrated into the mix and provide a more celebratory atmosphere, creating some interesting juxtapositions with the more 'serious' subject matter.

Skeena Reece and Jesse Scott: *Sacred Clown*
This Live Cinema/ Vj performance was the result of a two-week collaboration between Skeena Reece and Jesse Scott for an exhibition entitled *Brief Encounters.* Reece (a performance artist, writer, curator and songwriter of Metis/Cree and Tsimshian/Gitksan descent) and Scott (a multi-media artist based in Vancouver BC) based their audiovisual performance on the legends of the Raven, Coyote, Sacred Clown and the Trickster – characters all known for doing 'uncouth things' to teach lessons by playing devious and insidious tricks on people in the community, acts for which they are revered and seen as sacred entities in our culture.

The artwork begins with Reece entering the stage naked and painted with black and white stripes, her hair up in misshapen braids that stick out to the sides…"I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, please forgive me…." she whispers as pre-recorded video sequences performed by Scott are projected onto her body and the wall at the back. In the work the flat-screen based format of traditional cinema is replaced by a human body, which in *Sacred Clown* becomes the site of creative-resistance and transformation in which the dynamics of Scott's video performance are literally embodied by Reece on stage.

As Grunt Gallery curator Glen Alten wrote, "'The Sacred Clown' exemplifies 'Skeena style,' which is often improvisational [wherein she] works from a preconceived concept, and uses some multi-media and/or other materials." [35] In this case her vision was manifest as a Live Cinema work that with all its intricacies reflected on aspects of race, class, the contemporary political landscape and First Nations cultural identity.

Skookum Sound System
Based in the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples (Vancouver BC.) Skookum Sound System is an Indigenous audio-visual artist collective comprised of Dj/Producer Dean Hunt (aka Deano), vocalist Csetkwe, Dj/Producer Darwin Frost (aka Impossible Nothing), and video artist Braken Hanuse Corlett (aka Amphibian 14).

As a performance troupe their sound is a fusion of West-Coast Electronic, Maximalism, and Cut n' Paste that they remix with First Nations music that is performed live using traditional instrumentation. Their multimedia shows include a live visual component that they often display on multiple screens, creating an immersive, multi-sensory experience. Their visual narratives are comprised of sampled footage taken from a range of sources that they mix with graphic First Nations (typically Northwest Coast) imagery that is ani-

Iron Tomahawks, Jackson2bears, 2011. SAW Gallery Ottawa ON, 2011. © Jackson2bears, 2011. Used with permission.

Skookum Sound System, Braken Hanuse Corlett, 2012. © Braken Hanuse Corlett, 2012. Used with permission.

mated to move in tandem with their rhythmic sound-scapes. Their works are about "transforming ordinary places into sacred spaces" [36], taking what Makela called 'spatial montage' and the rhythmic aesthetic of Live Cinema and merging it with our traditions of storytelling. Skookum Sound Sytem's performances are 'environmental narratives' – inter-tribal gatherings that provide a space in which collectivities can come together to socialize, dance, sing and be part of an interconnected multi-national story that is continually being (re)written onto our landscapes.

Jackson 2bears: *Conjuration of Joseph Brant*
This Live Cinema artwork takes the theme of conju-ration as a way to enframe a performance in which electronic signals taken from the artist's brainwaves, heart rate and body temperature are used to execute a performance of audiovisual media in real-time. Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) artist Jackson 2bears was born and raised in Brantford Ontario (Canada), a small town located West of the Ohsweken reserve. The town was named after the famous Kanien'kehaka war Chief Joseph Brant, a controversial historical figure and inspiration for this work. *Conjurations* conceptu-ally explored the possibilities of convoking a spirit for a creative purpose – a live 'performance-haunting.'

In the performance the artist wears an IBVA (Interac-tive Brainwave Visualization Analyzer) that measures EEG signals and other electrical events that are produced by neural activity in the brain. Additional

devices were used to measure the electrical activity of the heart (EKG) and another that recorded changes in skin temperature (ESR). Software was developed in Max/MSP/Jitter (Cycling 74) that took the incoming signals from these devices which then used the real-time data to create, mix, effect, and playback multiple layers of audio and video media.

Throughout the hour-long performance, the artist lay near motionless on the gallery floor attempting to consciously control his heart rate and breathing pat-terns while quietly reciting several famous speeches delivered by Brant to his Kanien'kehaka followers. Two monitors displayed direct biofeedback readouts, while a large projection in the space showed the video mon-tage that resulted from this interaction between the technology and the artist's autonomic nervous system.

Beat Nation feat. Corey Bulpitt and Larissa Healey
T'aak'eit Gaayaa is the Haida name of artist Co-rey Bulpitt, which when translated means 'Gifted Carver.' Originally from Prince Rupert BC., he is the descendant of a number of famous traditional carv-

Conjuration of Joseph Brant, Jackson 2bears, 2009. Comox Valley Art Gallery, 2010.
© Jackson 2bears, 2009. Used with permission.
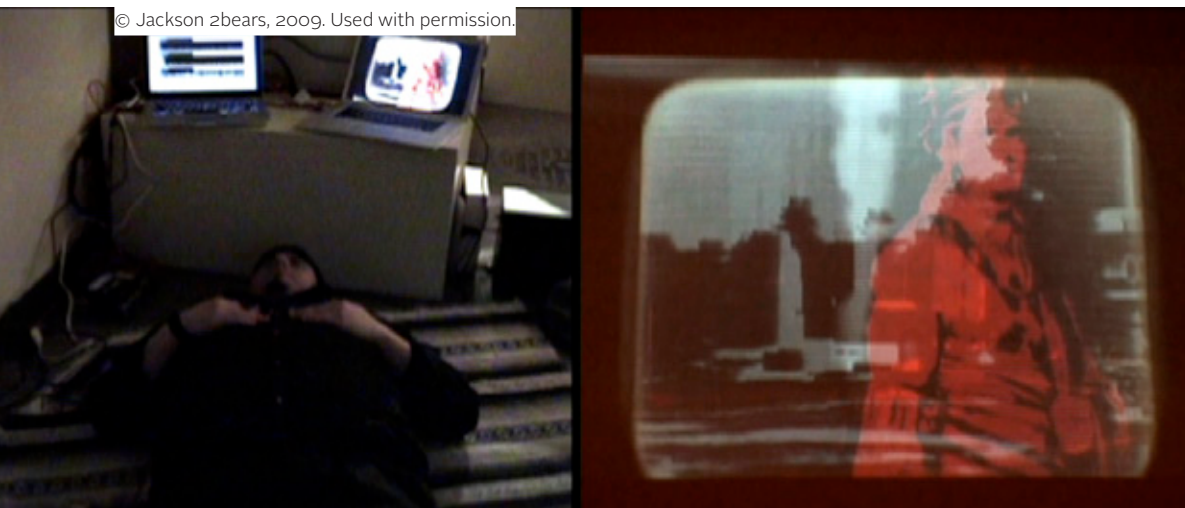
Beat Nation [Live], Corey Bulpitt and Larissa Healey, 2012. © International Arts Initiatives, 2012. Used with permission.

ers from the Raven and Eagle Clans, and his praxis largely consists of the creation of ceremonial masks, paddles, dance screens and bentwood boxes. But he also works with a variety of contemporary mediums such as spray paint and marker pen, often collaborat-ing with Ojibwa artist Larissa Healy (aka Gurl Twenty Three) on large-scale graffiti works and public murals – last year the duo were featured in the Vancouver Art Gallery's exhibition *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture* for which they created *Sea Wolf*, a massive mural that mixed traditional Haida formline with a spray-paint, 'street' aesthetic.

Both Bulpitt and Healy also collaborate with the cross platform, digital arts collective Beat Nation Live – a separate initiative that like the VAG exhibition emerged from a 2009 Grunt Gallery project curated by Tania Willard and Skeena Reece. The group con-sists of First Nations artists Kinnie Starr, Ostwelve, Cris Derkson, Jackson 2bears and Archer Pechawis. The collective embraces new directions that bridge traditional and contemporary worlds through experi-ments in Live Cinema, Vjing, immersive environments, and telematic art. As curator Tainia Willard wrote: "Na-tive graffiti art, indigenized ipods, indigenous-language hip-hop and video, [...] Beat nation is about music, it's about art and it's about the spirit of us as indigenous peoples and cultures." [37]

For their contribution to Beat Nation Live Bulpitt and Healy work with the 'digital graffiti wall,' an interactive technology developed by Tangible Interaction which uses specialized infrared (IR) cameras that track 'digi-tal spray cans,' allowing the artists to 'video-paint' on a projection screen in real-time. Using virtual paint-ing stencils, digital screen backgrounds, overlays and an number of other customizable tools, Bulpitt and Healy work alongside the other performers on-stage, and blend their own unique West Coast graffiti style together to create live animations, and dynamic visual backdrops. Inspired always by traditional Haida 'form-line,' their live painting artworks with BNL are animate narratives that are created in front of the audience, and mark a "continuing identity within the modern city for indigenous peoples." [38] ■

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