

*What Cyan said
to Magenta about
Yellow (Notes from the
Apparatus on the Work
of Diana Thater)* Timothy Martin

This essay had been originally conceived as a lecture that was to be given in conjunction with the exhibition Stan Douglas & Diana Thater, shown in Witte de With from 10 September until 30 October 1994. Timothy Martin is an artist and writer.

1. Jacques Lacan quoted in Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 317.

Knowledge of El Greco's astigmatism, which is typically acquired well after an appreciation for the vertiginous compositions of his canvases, presents the viewer with an insoluble puzzle that becomes permanently entwined with the viewer's perception and judgment of the work. We are told that El Greco never overcame the defect of his vision, and this certainly must be true, astigmatism being a permanent spherical distortion of the cornea or lens that develops as the eyeballs grow. Instead, we are told, El Greco took over his astigmatism and used it, saw with it rather than in spite of it, and somehow this has implications for the peculiar signature of his "vision." If this indeed was the case, we must regard his vision separately from the generalized vision of mannerism. His astigmatic eyes are not just a metonym for stylistic affect, or a symbol of personal affliction, like August Strindberg's bleeding hands; they are a specialized machine. The factuality of El Greco's astigmatism and its (supposed) affirmation in the ocular distortions of his paintings, redefines his affliction as a literal apparatus, one that both "sees" and "projects" from the place of the viewing subject. By virtue of its deformity, the apparatus ceases to be a neutral term in the genesis of the image and cannot be taken for granted.

For all its factuality, however, we cannot actually find this apparatus, much less see with it and describe its function, and a materialist course of reduction will not lead us to it as it would to the paint and support of the canvas. Nor can we infer it formally; we can only imagine it through what we judge to be its affects, a judgment which is likely to be presumptuous if not utterly groundless: i.e., the spherical distortion of the painted image follows from the spherical distortion of the eye. Thus the factuality of the apparatus yields no material evidence or certainty of its function. And interpretation fares little better. Do we dare assume that the ectoplasmic clouds and garments depicted in *The Agony in the Garden* appear qualitatively similar because that is how El Greco literally perceived them, or that his bad eyesight forced him to substitute his understanding of fabrics for direct experience of distant and unfocusable atmospheric? We expect the apparatus to be evident in some form, but everything it might constitute as visual meaning is cast into doubt. Everything, that is, except that a distinctly other viewing subject – perhaps religiously ecstatic and visually impaired – has been proposed in place of our own accustomed point of view.

We can, however, stand in front of the painting and look at it for awhile. In so doing we may occupy the position of the distortional apparatus – albeit, with our own correctional one. The usual condition of transparency, the assumption of the other's eyes by our eyes, is interrupted by what we "know": that the painting is, in a sense, not for our eyes. We are presented with a kind of ontological doubling: one point of view occupied by two constituting subjects. Because we cannot see through this interruption, we move around it and enter a circuit of pursuit and reflection vis-à-vis the grounds of the subject – our own vertiginous swirl – which often seems like a process of splitting. Pursuing the astigmatic apparatus, we address what the image shows us and realize we cannot judge it formally, as that presumes we know what the apparatus does and can distinguish what it does from the formal traits of mannerism in general, which, it is safe to say, were not produced by an epidemic of defective eyeballs. When we eliminate this presumption and treat what the image shows us as phenomena, we realize we will eventually only affirm our own correctional apparatus and discover nothing new. The circuit becomes a knot of analysis and perception. Whenever we try to tether it to a secure starting point, which can be neither material nor phenomenal, we keep returning to the droning restatement of a historical fact: *El Greco had an astigmatism*. . . . The fact insists upon the actuality of the apparatus and the materiality of its effects – which seems quite reasonable – but it appears we can neither locate them nor trace a causal link between them without first translating the whole analysis into a kind of narrative.

Of course, some of these problems and confusions result from applying the terms of the cinematographic apparatus to a somewhat inhospitable example, and allowing those terms to exercise their reductive tendencies. But, to the extent that the choice of the example and the terms is problematic, it is also deliberate. The confusions that arise from the overemphasis on the apparatus are by no means exclusive to this example. They are part of a general confusion found in the optical model of the subject, which has for at least a half-millennium derived its sense by transposing material for subjective terms, the eye for the self, and of which the cinematographic apparatus is but one recent technical elaboration. When Jacques Lacan writes, "the subject is an apparatus" – a statement seized upon by film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry – it is implicit that the apparatus in question is fundamentally optical in character and that the subject is on some level reducible to it.¹ However, the confusion that arises when a reduction to the material apparatus and a reduction to the "apparatus" of perception are intermingled has special relevance to the subject of this text (the

2. The term "structural film" is usually attributed to P. Adams Sitney, whose book *Visionary Film* (Oxford University Press, 1974) includes a chapter on the films of Michael Snow, George Landow, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Ernie Gehr, Joyce Wieland, and others. The general term "structural" also applies to numerous video works of the first generation including those of Peter Campus and Dan Graham. While it may imply minimalist, deconstructive, and phenomenological methods and concerns, it is not intended to connote a direct philosophical affiliation with French "structuralism" per se, although a number of the artists were conversant with that movement.

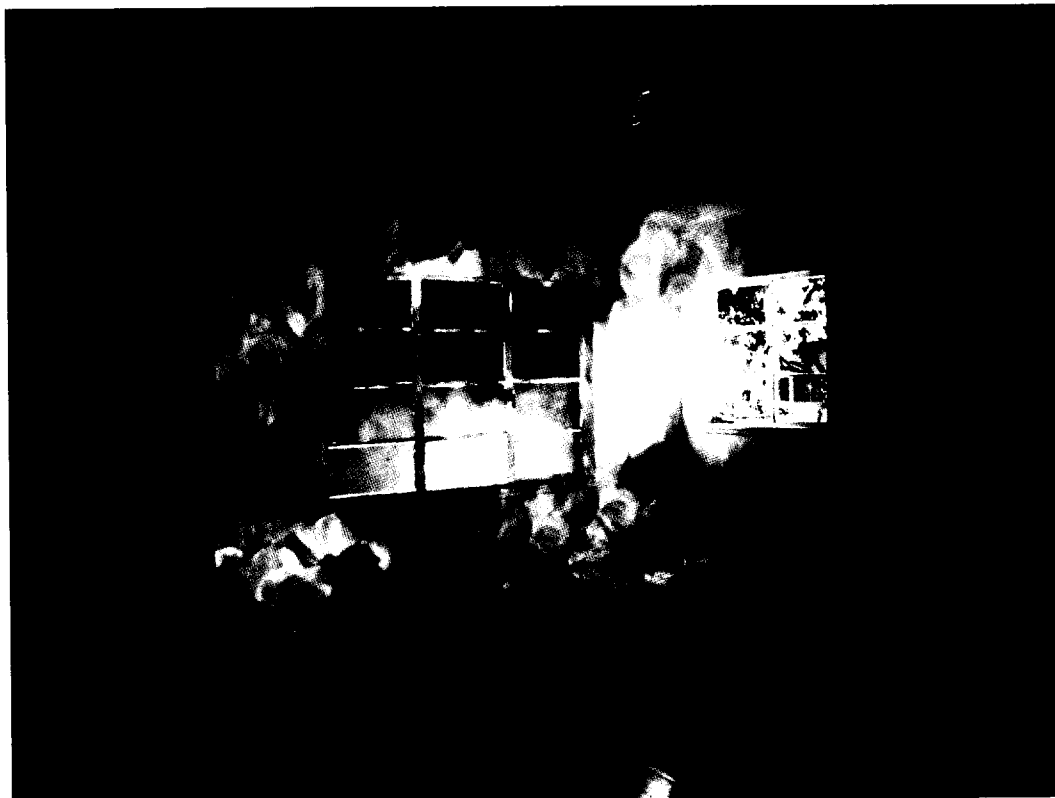
3. *Oo Fifi Part 1* was installed at 1301 (gallery) in Santa Monica, California as part of the group video exhibition *Into the Lapse*, 1992.

video-projection work of Diana Thater) because it recalls the segment of experimental film history, known generally in America as "structural film," which is to a significant degree reappraised in Thater's work.² Considering Thater's employment of a kind of "defective" optical apparatus and distorted image, the leap to El Greco's astigmatism is not all that great – although it requires rigid distinctions between artistic media to be loosened or put aside, as will many of the points made in this text. In Thater's work one often finds a dividing or multiplying of the place of the subject, keyed in part on the distortion of recognizable images. One also encounters a collision of materialist and phenomenological "reductions" of the medium – virtually encapsulating two dominant and interwoven threads of structural film and video – although this collision ultimately leads to collapse. The terms of both analytics (image-as-material and image-as-perception) are called into question and held accountable to a broader, more heterogeneous definition of the site of spectatorship.

In 1991, while taking part in an artist-in-residence program sponsored by the Claude Monet Foundation, Thater videotaped a series of solo walks through the garden at Giverny. These camera studies, covering three consecutive seasons of the garden, were edited into a feature-length videotape for the two-part projection installation, *Oo Fifi: Five Days in Claude Monet's Garden* (1992). A number of Thater's recurrent strategies and themes are succinctly demonstrated in this work and warrant some description. In Part One,³ the video projector is placed diagonally on the floor of the gallery with the image frame covering the opposite wall, corner, and adjacent wall, as well as two exterior windows. The window panes are covered respectively with semi-opaque and fully transparent grey theatrical gels, allowing the room to be partially illuminated by natural light and offering, in one window, a clear view of the vegetation outside: a window on the world sharply contrasting that of the projected image. As is often the case, Thater alters the projected image not with an electronic video processor – the weapon of choice for much technophilic video art – but with a screwdriver and some elbow grease. The red, green, and blue projector lenses are taken out of normal calibration, separating – or multiplying – the image into three otherwise identical monochromes. While they illuminate the surface of the wall, drawing attention to its physical detail and materiality, the three proximate moving images are themselves too far out of registration for the most part to be resolved as "intentional objects" or scenes by the viewer, and remain *derealized*. Thus a rift between the "screen," the thing-in-the-image, and the technical apparatus that would constitute it is forcibly maintained, shifting the gaze of thingness in the work away from the image, back to the site and to the video apparatus itself.

Diana Thater

Oo Fifi Part 1
installation view at 1301,
Santa Monica, September
1992



4. The two parts of *Oo Fifi* were originally intended to be shown as a single work, but had to be separated due to spatial limitations. *Part 2* was installed at Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Santa Monica, California, as part of the group exhibition *Very, Very, Very*, 1992.

5. According to Bertram Lewin, the dream screen is the surface on which a dream appears to be projected. Lewin further hypothesizes, after Freud, that the dream screen is the dream's hallucinatory representation of the mother's breast on which the child used to fall asleep after nursing. Baudry makes the connection between Lewin's dream screen and the cinematographic apparatus. See Baudry, *op. cit.*, note 1, pp. 310-311.

6. Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso Editions, 1982), p. 197.

Oo Fifi Part 2, installed separately from *Part One*, was a technical inversion of it, although a similar set of terms was present.⁴ An array of three separate projectors running from the same tape source, each with one lens turned on (one red, one green, one blue), project a composite image on an adjacent pair of interior walls. The three monochromes are aligned at the center and within a small area of exact pixel convergence produce a black-and-white image. But, because they are projected from different angles, the images progressively drift out of registration as one moves from the center to the edge, creating a vortex of image and color coherence. The picture – imagine impressionism suddenly drugged with futurism's love of speed – doesn't end with its distortions, however. Besides the blur and irresolution on the side of the image, the distortions produce a distinct sense of flux and ulteriority on the part of the viewing subject, keyed on the three separate horizons created by the projector array. This is at first a haunting effect not readily traceable to the condition of the image itself. The vortex gives the impression of spatial depth that pulls the viewer into the image, particularly when the camera is panning or moving through the garden. Combined with the bucolic allure of the scenery, which is more resolvable here than in *Part One*, it offers a familiar invitation to cinematic *juissance* or, as Baudry has called it, "archaic satisfaction:" the pleasure of a secret garden.

The conditions for cinematic viewership and fantasy have often been characterized in these general (infantile) terms: a state of bodily immobility (immaturity, undifferentiation) combined with an acute absorption with the visual (fixation upon the breast or *dream screen*).⁵ Under these conditions, the cinematic hallucination may attain the status of the more-than-real, the real of the dream image, or of a fully empowered second consciousness. This, of course, is resisted in Thater's installations with what one might view from a cinematic perspective as degrees of unpleasure, that is, distraction from the dream. What Thater's work gives with one hand, it soon takes away with the other. As in *Oo Fifi Part 1*, the image does not deliver the flower, but a heady phantasm encoded with the conditions of its receivership and production. The work may in a sense be absorbed with the visual – no soundtrack, no conventional narrative – but it is never fixated solely upon the screen or confined to a darkened chamber – no womb-with-a-view – thereby immobilizing the viewer. Freedom of visual egress and bodily mobility are fundamental determinants of Thater's work.

In *Oo Fifi Part 2*, for example, as the three diverging horizons register their inclination toward as many ulterior subjects, the viewer may mentally follow their lead and indulge a sense of being multiple or divided, or of being permeated by the image's multiplicity. Physical mobility contributes to this, although quite differently than the effect of the image horizons. Walking midway between the projectors and the wall the viewer's body casts shadows that never quite block the projected image, because there is always a projector or combination of projectors that remain unobstructed. The shadows, diverging in three directions, appear only as shifts of color in the image, equivocating more than attesting to the solidity of the viewer's body. While the body, triplicated, is permeated by the image or subsumed in it, the image itself is relatively immune to bodily intervention. It snatches the shadow for itself, depriving the body of a clear optical affirmation. Thus a dual phantasm of bodily desolidification and ulteriority unite in confounding the place of the subject and, by the same means, substantiate the autonomy of the image as a technological (unnatural) entity – an effect which occurs in most of Thater's projection works.

It is impossible to internalize or mystify these subject-effects for very long – to be multiple, divided, permeated, etc. – because every mark of difference that triggers them also signifies, diagrams, and rationalizes their genesis. As with film historian P. Adams Sitney's classic definition of the structural film, Thater's work always "insists upon its shape," and keeps insisting upon it. If one interrogates with but the tiniest effort the subject-effects of the diverging horizons and image-permeated shadows of *Oo Fifi Part 2*, the apparatus – the three-headed witness on the floor – confesses immediately and with almost disconcerting sincerity. The three divisions of the subject correspond tautologically to the array of three "eyes," cones of light, and vanishing points of the equipment on the floor. In an instant the sense of the term "apparatus" switches from Lacan and Baudry to the Sony Corporation, and the phenomenal artwork yields to the material one. With the structure of the work so completely disclosed and the link between the subject-effect and the mechanical apparatus so matter-of-fact, the apparent reduction of the former to the latter appears at first quite analytical and convincing, if not conclusive – which it never could be and, as we shall see, it never pretends to be. Convincing, that is, in its evocation of a prior discourse. In terms of the video apparatus, it echoes succinctly the materialist strain of filmic modernism, which Peter Wollen characterized as: "the reduction of [cinematic codes] to their material – optical, photo-chemical – substrate ('material support') to the exclusion of any semantic dimension other than reference back to the material of the signifier itself."⁶

7. See David James, *Allegories of Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 278-279.

As there is no optical substrate to the video image, nothing on the order of the image to be viewed on the magnetic tape itself, Thater's attention to the three color components of the video image and the three lenses of the projector would seem to adequately reference the material of the signifier: red, green, and blue light. Yet, this is not an ideological reduction in Thater's work as it was for ultra-reductionist filmmakers like Peter Gidal, whose "structural/materialist" project resurrected medium-specific essentialism as a political (Marxist) as well as logical imperative.⁷ Thater's project is never reducible to its reductions. An image is always attached to the carrier of the apparatus and, by virtue of its direct implications for the place of the subject, has destinations completely contrary to the course of materialist reduction. There is no significance to why the images are separated into red, green, and blue other than this: in the artist's words, "to see the way projectors see." In this simple statement Thater's indifference to dialectical mandates is made plain by virtue of a willful confusion: it conflates the projector's "sight" with the seeing subject. (Granted, this would be a familiar paradox were the apparatus a camera.) Presupposing at best a kind of reversible circuit of heterogeneous terms, and most certainly not a *dialectical* reduction, Thater's reduction-to-apparatus analytic deliberately leads us to impossibilities not unlike seeing the way El Greco sees or taking over an astigmatism with normal vision.

The reversible circuit is not complete within the schema of the video projection itself, however, but extends outside it. Thater subjects her "reductionist" terms to a kind of public hanging – in *Oo Fifi Part 2*, *Abbyss of Light* (1993), and other works – by covering the windows of the exhibition space with translucent gels of the "essential" video colors or their compliments: cyan, magenta, and yellow. In *Oo Fifi Part 2*, the window gels take the configuration of a color bar test pattern. The result is an overextension of the apparatus theme to the point of absurdity: the evocation of a building-sized video projector which one may both view as a model and occupy as a subject merely by taking a stroll. From the interior, the view one has of the outside world is colored by the window lens and becomes an "image." The color in turn ceases to be an *essence* and becomes a *quality* of image, just as the colored light spilling in through the window becomes a quality of the interior – the shift from essence to quality being one general clue to where the circuit reverses. At this stage, the apparatus theme is reconfigured as a somewhat magical aesthetic, worthy of "California light and space" artists such as James Turrell, that is, with a strictly sensory connotation given the notion of structural openness. But, like Daniel Buren's stripes, Thater's window gels have a tendency to

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Up to the Lintel, Bliss
installation at Bliss House,
Pasadena, August 1992



8. *Up to the Lintel* was installed at Bliss, an artist-run (and occupied) exhibition space in Pasadena, California, 1992. The installation took over virtually the entire house and grounds during its open hours from 6 p.m. to midnight.

become an institution-level code as well, a code in which the reductive analytics signified by the colors are framed as a past and faded romance – yellow, the jaundiced hue, being particularly well-suited to this effect. Even if the gels are read as declarations, as public banners flying the colors of Thater's work, or as a color code advertising free-access to a usually cloistered type of art (banners celebrating video *glasnost*), they ultimately cease to signify anything foundational at all and become a kind of visual speech act: a term with no fixed meaning, only the meaning given to it by its performance and context. This serves to open the structure of the work even further and bring yet another dimension of contingency and extensity to bear upon the apparatus theme.

In *Up to the Lintel* (1992), for example, the color code is again separated from its material origin in the video apparatus and takes the form of an ersatz color bar test pattern projected onto the windows of a suburban house in Pasadena, California.⁸ In this guise – with a good measure of irony – it performs as a signifier of the phantasm. Using five projectors placed on the floors of the front room and attic, illuminating their exterior windows and a portion of the walls around them, Thater projected five separate tapes back onto the same locations in the house where they had originally been recorded (attic tape projected onto the attic wall, etc.). The projections, running unedited in real time, correspond to what a passerby on the street would see through the windows of the house if the interior were illuminated, except the interior view (in the projected image) is obstructed by large vertical color bars and can be seen only through the gaps between them. The color bars are not electronically superimposed on the interior scene, however; they are literally part of it, and composed of material comparable to it: standard-sized construction lumber and paint. Thater simply set four-inch square sections of painted lumber in front of the lens, turned the camera on, and *voilà*: color bars, foreground; house interior, background. The trick readily discloses itself. Despite being somewhat blurred, the color bars are noticeably dimensional, tangible, even perspectival. We may at first be tempted by the frontality of the color bars to regard the background scene (of domestic realism, including the comings and goings of the occupant) as existing in a state of mediation by the apparatus-code, and therefore to regard the reality of the apparatus as prior to that of the scene, but ultimately the reverse seems more to the point. The ersatz color bars have by inference derealized the apparatus; they have been turned into a model or (in narrative terms) a character portraying the apparatus. And in this performance it is the only character wearing a costume.

An insistently architectural work, *Lintel* has a way of collapsing the bulk of its referentiality back upon the site itself. Indeed, the whole scheme has an architect's temporal sense to it. Walking up from street, through the room full of whirring projectors and *activity*, and down the darkened hall into the rear room where an illuminated model of the house sits on the floor, one gets a sense of moving backwards in time, through the "before/during/after" stages of architectural genesis. In the world of the architect, the "during" stage is one of contingency and unpleasure – terror would better describe it – and such is the case with *Lintel*. The foundation of the work, the confluence of the site and the projected images, is always shifting in the projection rooms. One gathers that a question of structure is at hand, but which structure? Although the scene being projected leads directly to the place in which it is situated, and the image has a real referent to which it may secure itself, both occur simultaneously and obscure the distinction. To bastardize the philosopher Henri Bergson and Gertrude Stein in a single platitude: In the "during" room, *there is no there there*. That is, everything in the projection rooms is caught up in movement and time, both cinematic and diurnal. The color bar, for example, is unquestionably "there" in the cinematic sense. Unlike the flower in *Oo Fifi*, it has been delivered as an "intentional object." But, to the extent that it is passing for something else, something not made of wood and paint, it is the most phantasmal thing in the house.

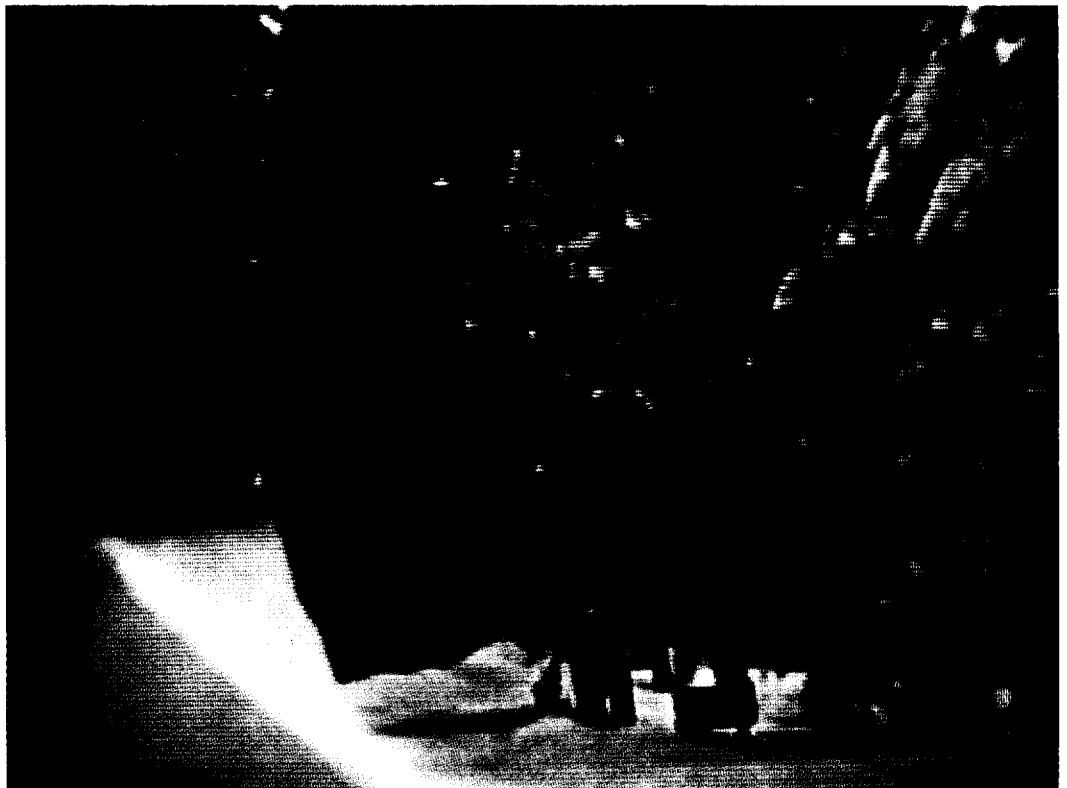
Gaston Bachelard said, "consciousness is *housed*," and a good deal of experimental film and video, including that of the structural camp, has concurred and added this somewhat agoraphobic amendment: "... in a darkened chamber." (Thus upholding, under the pretense of uncommon insight, no less than a half-millennium of common sense instead.) Thater's *Up to the Lintel*, like Dan Graham's *Alteration of a Suburban House* (1978) before it, may go along with Bachelard, but adds a quite different amendment. It suggests that Consciousness would benefit by getting out of the house every once in awhile. As the projection rooms are the only occupiable places in and around the house that are *illuminated* – given the installation was open only during the evening – the darkened chamber would no more be the immanent domain of consciousness than the street, the front lawn, or the porch. One stands "outside the house" even in the room containing the illuminated model. The implication appears to be that an ethos of movement, of *passing through*, is of value here, and by repeatedly passing through one acquires a right of passage: through areas in which

9. See Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *op. cit.*, note 1, p. 295.

others have become mired by ownership – such as the cranial boudoirs *so de rigueur* in art that sets out to deal with consciousness. The advantage, of course – when passing through is not *just* passing through – is how close you can get to your enemies.

Although the end is perhaps the appropriate place to deal with supplements, a worthy supplement is sometimes an enlightening place to begin. There are numerous supplemental elements in Thater's practice, such as the architectural models and window gels which, as we have seen, often act as primary markers as well. The shifting role of the color code from fundament to supplement and back initiates the critical movement of the reduction-to-apparatus theme from an analytic to a kind of narrative. A similar movement occurs vis-à-vis narrative proper in the supplemental indexes Thater compiles upon completion of each work. In the form of a standard book index – single word entries and short phrases set in alphabetical order – they collect a series of related and unrelated, leftover, and stream-of-consciousness ideas pertaining to the work. By Thater's description, the indexes also construct "false narratives" for the videotapes, which are otherwise devoid of conventional narrative lines. These narratives are usually quite cryptic in their index form, but occasionally emerge full-blown around certain key words and recognizable proper names. The most basic form of the narrative is not so much a plot line or story as it is a nascent subject: a character with a name and both a figurative and literal point of view – given the assumption of a camera/projector apparatus. Thus the supplemental index brings a fundamental narrative apparatus for the constitution of subject (the character) to bear on a demonstrably non-narrative apparatus in which subject is constituted (and deconstituted) strictly by optical and mechanical means. On the one hand, this would appear to defeat the purpose of separating the two apparatus in the first place; on the other, it reverses the reduction analytic and asks what kind of meaning can be reconstructed out of the diverging – and already reduced – mechanisms of subject constitution. If the index and the projection are given equal consideration – as opposed to reading one through the other – it seems that the two apparatus must inevitably conflate on the screen, as the terms of the cinematographic apparatus set down by Baudry and others – that the "reality" mimed by cinema is first of all that of a "self" – directly correspond to the first-person and third-person omniscient narratives (if one characterizes them optically). In both cases one identifies less with what is represented, the "spectacle" itself, than with what stages it, what obliges one to "see" what it sees.⁹ The history of structural film and video suggests this is no less the case when narrative and cinema are reduced

Diana Thater
The Bad Infinite
detail from video tapes
projected in the installation



10. A consideration of the gender perspective is warranted here. What Shelley has to say about male-dominated romanticism and Thater has to say about male-dominated structural film and video may be viewed as another allegory of *The Bad Infinite*.

to skeletal configurations – as they are in the index and the projection – than it is in (what Alain Robbe-Grillet sarcastically termed) “nineteenth-century cinema” and its literary counterparts.

The conflating of the two apparatus creates a monstrosity in *The Bad Infinite* (1993). The projection scheme is quite like *Oo Fifi Part 2*, except the three projectors are stacked atop one another (running one lens each) and the source material is edited from a walk through snow-bound Sequoia National Forest. The camera technique, however, is radically different. Thater mounted three cameras onto a single length of lumber, one several feet behind the other, carrying it horizontally during the walk in such a fashion that the same scene was shot, but from three slightly different points of view. The first camera captured the scene (through a staggering, wandering eye); the second, the scene and the first camera; the third, the scene and the other two cameras. The tapes were each assigned a projector, thus splitting the overall image into three separate views, each with its own identifying color. As in *Oo Fifi*, a splitting of the subject occurs, only more confoundingly, because it is keyed on a distinctly first-person point of view, the most naturalized and persuasive of ocular subject markers. And because the projectors are stacked together, the configuration of the apparatus in the room produces no immediate analogue of the subject-effect. The viewing subject is lost in a phantasm which neither permits it to integrate its selves, nor to console them with reason.

Scanning the index for *The Bad Infinite* yields a number of potential subjects, the most insistent of which may be constructed by this series of entries: “camera; deformity; Mary Shelley; monster ...” The multiphrenic camera-subject of the projection is thus permitted to seize and be seized by a new identity, that of Frankenstein’s monster wandering through a frozen landscape. The “false narrative” stabilizes the subject-effect through characterization, but in this newly-acquired stability the subject takes a proper name synonymous with biological monstrosity. Between the index and the projection the viewer is given an interesting choice. One can be divided and in a sense deconstituted as a whole subject, or one can be unified as a (monstrous) subject of parts – and both alternatives are not without their charms. However, if the index and the projection are taken together, there is no real choice to be made – although there is a perception of one – as the two constitutions of subject desire something from each other and soon become inseparable. In this sense, *The Bad Infinite* becomes an allegory of cinematic investiture, and raises a serious question about Thater’s work. In reconvening the optical and narrative apparatus, whether through overlay or simple juxtaposition, is Thater simply remaking cinema by other means, a cinema in which there is “some assembly required” and some questions asked? The answer is in part yes, but not simply. Viewed as a model of Thater’s practice, *The Bad Infinite* reconstructs – in principle more than in specific form – prior structural (vs. semiotic) deconstructions of cinema, that is, it constructs a “cinema” out of techniques that previously took it apart. It constructs “cinema” in a fashion that doesn’t permit the place of the subject to remain ideological, that is, unconsciously obedient to a fixed model of relation. And it constructs “it” as a demon and a machine, not an ideal second consciousness.

The allegory buried in *The Bad Infinite* is not solely on the side of the subject, however. If we associate Thater’s image with the arctic passage of Mary Shelley’s story, we realize the monster is not just a “nascent subject;” it is a subject headed for oblivion. Although Lord Byron would have denied it, *Frankenstein* may be regarded as an allegorical (and prophetic) history of romanticism, which, to make two long stories short, charts the transformation of the innocent into the tyrant, and sketches the “proto-fascism” latent in the model of the Byronic hero.¹⁰ In Thater’s work, the suspicion of romantic innocence would appear to surface in several ways analogous to Shelley’s allegory. Treatment of the landscape as a sign of the spiritual, the transcendent, or the ideal is anathema to Thater’s practice. The nature-image is always blatantly mediated and destabilized, and it is addressed not as sign, but as movement and duration, as a constant passing-through of the subject. It is a state of confusion then, like Schiller’s sublime, that identifies the nature-image. In Thater’s mirror, cinema is alternately regressive and tyrannical, but so is anti-cinema. The reductionist strain of structural film and video – in particular, the apparatus analytic – is recapitulated, but its illusions of finality are put out to pasture, as it were. As *The Bad Infinite* shows, neither the monster-image nor the monster-narrative is reducible to a common machine, yet both are co-creative of one nonetheless – one we get uncomfortably close to. Lest we eliminate a whole dimension of possible meaning – like that posed by El Greco’s astigmatism – just because we are interested in material questions, we had better get used to *thinking* about some things inclusively that, for structural, political, or esthetic reasons, we prefer to keep apart.