EYELID MOVIES

by Travis Diehl

*Tonight, however, he could not entertain himself with
psychedelic eyelid movies. Nothing came but warm
darkness, punctuated by flashes as distant and vague
as reports from another continent. —Greg Bear,* Blood Music

Imagine a softly mutating history, a tightly coiled molecular code for
BUSH or TREE, then stunt, starve, prune—affect the code into a minia-
turized expression: the bonsai. But the bonsai couldn't care less about
aesthetics. But the artist, whose conscious effort may or may not align
with her intent as she runs her mind along the contours of history, affects
& shapes, clips off strands of code, translates idea into form. The artist
unpots & replants a bonsai in a courtyard & renders the tree an artwork.

But the artist's attention cycles inwards, too; her artwork suggests her
own biography. Drawing, sculpture, photography, video, concept are the
trailing forms of the events bracketing the place & time of this exhibi-
tion. But the history expressed here is contiguous with our own; her
long, coiling & uncoiling thoughts are full of pockets & studs, receptions
& transmissions. When the artist makes a video of a set shaped like a
Maoist village or a lens factory in German Qingdao, this compressed
footage is a translucent, vignetted clip of data from a shared code. The
artist's China is our same China.

The artist makes a clear cubic balloon & channels a deflated memory of
Minimalism. Meanwhile, contemporaneous with Judd & Bell & Haacke is
Mao's Cultural Revolution. The artist frames her mother's memories of a
far-off place & time in a video she titles *The fallacy of misplaced concrete-*

ness. Imagine history as a tightly coiled code: chains of events; or, sequential positions of matter & energy; or immanent repositions. & imagine that for us the code not only softly mutates but sometimes violently & willfully quakes into place. History, for us, like a skein of data passed through memory, is as mutable as it is material. The artist shoots a fractured & poetic travelogue about a time & place she has never visited & creates that time & place.

But art is an imprecise cypher of history; artworks depict the tension between facts & their expression. The artist sweeps across history, elaborating fictions with fictions, compressing information & abstracting ideas into images. Shakiness & low fidelity suggest the materiality of video; but imagine this translation as a record of loss. Directed at history, a video camera registers mostly the simple outline of an ontological search: the artist's attention.

As if to protest the inadequacy of vision, past present & future, the artist's expression of history takes increasingly alien forms. When the artist draws *The sound of the universe*, her synesthetic rendering abstracts a distorted scrap of science, itself an incomplete picture of an ultimate (universal) material-ity, into an aesthetic protocol: a framed drawing in an exhibition. Elsewhere, the artist visualizes a device driver as something like an artist's graph of a black hole. She produces an abstract image out of data & the protocol prints itself.

But we are suspicious of the way abstraction masks as it summarizes; rulers abuse their subjects in the abstract; events across the ocean take the shape of parables & lose their urgency. But our memory does not respect such borders. Humming through our biology is a solipsistic yearning; yet we insist that facts underlie our memories. In our abstraction of history—or of the irreducible units of history—into a coiled & colliding sequence, aesthetics lies immanent with truth; the visual permeates the concrete; abstrac-tion finds material form. As we journey deeper into our own psychedelic eyelid movies, the phosphene patterns in the dark express an underlying biological code, a genetic history, a chemical fact: evidence that something of our origins remains.

Imagine that we can program our own movies. Imagine abstraction as the residue of attention & of consciousness that does not simply transcribe but actively splices shared memory. Imagine art that expresses the underlying code in a form that returns to the code changed. Unlike a video, unlike the bonsai, humans learn; our data codes not for outcomes but for possibilities. A tree fills its container, while the artist abstracts the tree.

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