Memories of Screen-based Reading. A Jumping Point.

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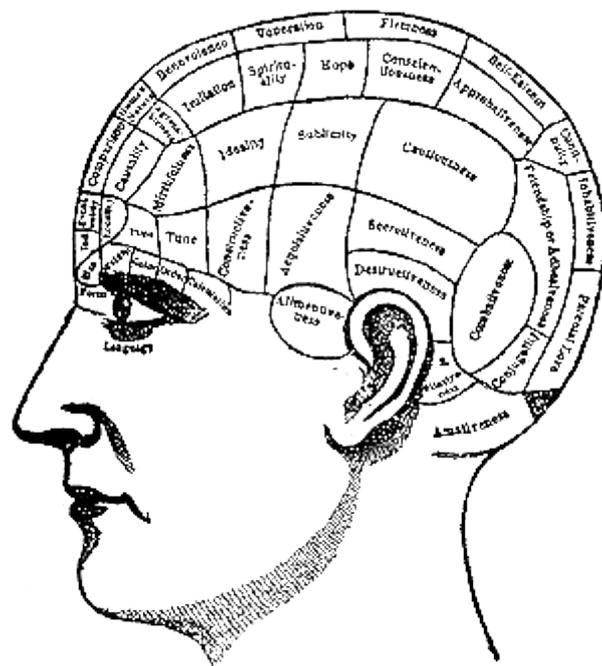
Narrative is temporal - it opens up a historical vista, a before and after, a beginning, a middle and an end. The relationship between this understanding of narrative, the construction of subjectivity, and the seductive, framing, holding nature of the single, frozen image is an issue that fascinates film theory and visual culture, and invigorates contemporary queries into temporality and the filmimage.

Video complexified the relationships that characterised film: relationships between a viewing subject, still images, and the passing of time that sutured the images into a stream of movement. Video works on a basis of continuity, streaming, a digital flow rather than the analog fort/da of the filmic flicker.

Now, new forms of screen-based reading ask us again to reconsider, reframe the relationship between subjectivity, temporality, narrative and image. What do I see as I surf the web? Do I abandon myself to the watery stream of joyous exploration, giving

myself over to the forces of nature, as the 'surfing' metaphor implies? How is my self, my time-based subjectivity, constructed through my browsing activity? What do I do as I

split from the text to a new txt, or maybe a whole .doc?

Or search in another universe, only to find an abandoned URL lurking in the back of my browser's memory?
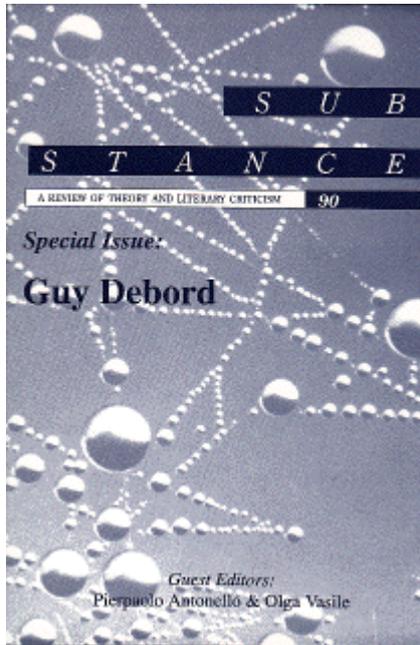
My memory becomes a finite reservoir - an image opens faster once I have seen it before, but appears again in the temporary void of 'loading' once the .tmp is purged. Webwork can allow me to traverse my 'conscious' browsing through the prosthesis of a new memory, my hard disk's strange capacities:

New machines allow for new mechanics of storytelling. You are able to create new image-based narratives of your own temporality and perception if you mine the traces of your Internet sessions. A random-access base of images which trigger memories, or obscure recognition, or total misrecognition can be created by a photoalbum program (mine is Multimedia Xplorer, from the front of a computer magazine). Point it toward your web-browser's disk-space, get it to create a vista of your recent web-surfs, and see what you have missed.

Surfing has similarities to the non/consumerist activity of Benjamin's flaneur and his stroll past shopping windows. In surfing, the assault of form, shape, text and pictorial

allusion allow for a distracted surveying as websites pass in front of our eyes. But once ripped (like MP3s) out of their page-contexts, the jpgs and gifs of these sites create a strange vision. Am I remembering the images from a week's worth of surfing as they appear on screen? What new connections, new readings emerge as the context of postmodern consumption and identity parade opens up to allow new observations to emerge?

A new history of my week appears on my screen whenever I trigger the deja-vu of an 'image/memory session'. I see my browsing in a new light, make new connections, and a new hypertext emerges as the wasteproducts of my 'official' search-based activity are brought up to the light.
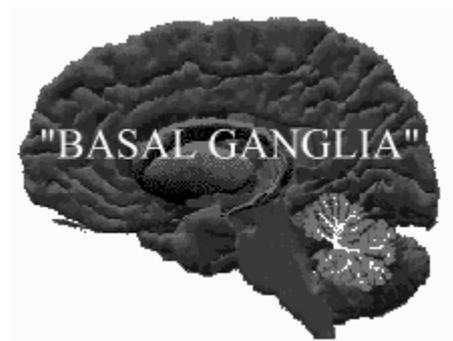
Reading the web at this cultural moment is still 'reading', without the full potential for identification opened up for us by classical film narrative. The 'reading' stays in the foreground as pages load, often slowly, crawl across the screen to the beat of my wrist. Currently, surfing the web isn't perceived as passive, it demands physical as well as psychological response in order to create a narrative.

Will the mouse in my hand become as naturalised as the reader's page-turning has become over the years of my adolescence? Will, on the other hand, the act of visiting the cinema, the acts surrounding the laid-back viewing in plush chairs, become a more and

more active act, creating a narrative which incorporates the visit, the parking, the pop-corn, the coke and the diegetic universe offered on screen into the textual experience? This might be the reception horizon of the Scream Horror film series and other highly self-reflective filmic texts. Elaborate textual and experiential fields surround the reception framework of underground film with its secret venues, its rituals and foregrounded conventions, similar in structure but different from the rituals surrounding mainstream and art house festivals.

Web-reading, web-viewing: rituals and genres mix and crossover from the intertexts surrounding cinema, TV and live performance. Seen the critical theory Foucault, Butler or Adorno trading cards and Hegel fan sites yet?

Did you jump>>>reboot>>>press the control>>>

Are you here to stay? Do you follow? Universes unfold around us. Some of these might take the form of web-rings that allow us to share the effects of narratives in new forms of TV fans' screen-based community. Other universes are created through webs that allow us to navigate the simultaneous layers of critical discourse in its thickness, that allow us to see critical activity as an intertwining weave in The Voice of the Shuttle.

New stories will be woven out of the multitude of strings weaving in the cyberwind, new books will emerge from all those pages stacked up in hyperspace, digital constructs out of electronic signals waiting to be called to us, journeys out of the flow ready to be surfed. New metaphors emerge as textuality moves on in a new era of the text/screen.

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Created in Dreamweaver, 2001