

Encountering Film as Technology

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Abstract

This paper discusses an encounter with the video ¹ work *Blind Spot* (2003), by American artist Gary Hill. One of the aims of the paper is to develop a deeper understanding of the notion of encounter from the perspective of phenomenology. Provisionally, I consider encounter as an occasion that constitutes its own particular character in time and, as such, I approach my reading of Hill's work from a position of distance from his original installation setting. My encounter with *Blind Spot*, therefore, constitutes its own particular 'truth' at the time of my encounter. In raising questions concerned with encountering film as technology, I explore film theorist Vivian Sobchack's approach to the phenomenological organisation of what she terms 'instrument-mediated perception'. Further to this, and in contrast, I build a questioning of encounter via Heidegger's thinking around being-in-the-world in relation to the essence of technology, and ask how film encounter might open up an occasion for thinking about technology, being and Heidegger's understanding of 'poiesis'. In this way, this paper applies what I term a *transmodal* approach that explores *encounter as a way of revealing*, engaging the discursive fields of art, philosophy, and science.

¹ Which I will call, in a generic way, film hereafter.

Introduction

The key aim of this paper is the unearthing of a terrain that brings into question how film encounter happens: what it might *mean*. I approach this terrain by engaging with a film work, *Blind Spot*, by the contemporary video artist Gary Hill, in the twin contexts of, initially, a phenomenology of film encounter articulated by the American film theorist Vivian Sobchack, and then by examining the writing of Heidegger on technology as a mode of revealing. I begin with my reading of *Blind Spot*. How do I encounter this work? This takes place by means of time-based documentation (video trace), mediated by the relatively small scale of a personal computer screen. Jones raises issues of encounter and performance relative to the idea of *truth* and original context: "... while the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to the historical 'truth' of the performance" (1997, 11). I approach my viewing (reading) of *Blind Spot* in a similar vein. The reflective description of the work that I present serves as a context-forming milieu for my discussion of phenomenology and film.

Following this, I outline Sobchack's approach to what she describes as 'film experience'. Her approach calls on the work of the American techno-phenomenologist Idhe with respect to instrument-mediated perception, and the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, for his notion of *chiasm* in explaining the lived experience of film encounter. *Chiasm* outlines an idea related to human perception in its performative actioning within a world gestalt. For Merleau-Ponty, the flesh of the "lived body" (1968, 84) is a metaphor for the way that consciousness negotiates the "flesh of the world" (Ibid). The *lived body* engages all modes of sentient activity within a synoptic physical body in the formulation of human perception with other things and beings-in-the-world. Sobchack's reading of *chiasm* structures the encounter of a viewer in proximity to film, with the film projector, and film screen. This implicates the viewer in a participatory mode of engagement with technologies of cinematic apparatus in the formulation of human perception. She suggests a reciprocal correlation in an act of viewing, a reversible exchange engaged-in by both viewer and film. For Sobchack, this constitutes her discourse around what she terms film experience (1992).

The paper closes by approaching Heidegger's understanding of the essence of technology and being-in-the-world in relation to broader questions of art and technology as modes of revealing *being*. Key themes addressed here concern the centrality of the notion of Da-sein for Heidegger's thinking: "Da-sein is not an instance of being for the representational abstraction of being; rather, it is the site of the understanding of being" (1996, 7).² These ideas are considered alongside

² Da-sein translates from German literally as being there/there being and is generally used in German for what we in English understand as "existence." Heidegger uses the word in a special sense for approaching human beings as those particular beings who are open to a fundamental understanding of whatever is. In this Heidegger makes a distinction between beings that are in the world and the Being of those beings. Human beings, unlike other beings, organic or inorganic, are open not only to an understanding of things but also the Being of them. *Being and Time* (1996), opens the reader to the way that Da-sein is human

Heidegger's understanding of *poiesis*. *Poiesis* is a process of making that involves a creative temporal relation that implicates a *bringing forth* into 'unconcealment' that which is concealed. It is a mode of disclosure of Being; it is an occurrence of the kind that creates a richness out of something that is already there. It is action, it unconceals the 'truth' of Da-sein's project and this involves thinking about being-in-the-world as something more than what it may seem.³

Encountering my self

Blind Spot is an audio visual digital artwork filmed in Belsunce, near central Marseilles. It was originally a smaller component of a larger installation work titled *Accordians (The Belsunce Recordings, 2001)*. As I have intimated above, what we might call the 'truth' of my encounter with *Blind Spot* is not directly mediated by its distance from its original inclusion in *Accordians*. How do I encounter *Blind Spot*? A man and a woman step out of a doorway onto a side street. The film flickers as if a strobe light flashes across the screen, causing my eyes to adjust to the flickering light. The sound of the accompanying street noise appears to be synchronised with the flicker as it vascillates between on and off. The emptiness of the sound is emphasised as each black moment of time drops a silence over my encounter.

being already fundamentally in the world with other beings as openness-to-Being. Da-sein is not a thing separate from Being but an openness to Being that discloses my-worlding via its fundamental relation to things that are at hand, close by and useful. Heidegger's understanding of world and worlding does not refer to a world objectively present to a conscious subject. He draws attention to the term world in a more verbal sense. World's finitude is Da-sein's horizon of disclosure. Therefore, a temporal relation constitutes my world-forming with things that are (material objects, plants, animals, humans) in relation to Da-sein's project, which means what Da-sein is up to in its being-in-the-world, how it projects its possibility to be. Da-sein's project is fundamentally concerned with the disclosure (or unconcealing) of truth as "Aletheia" as the showing of or disclosure, not simply of the whatness of beings but the thatness, the Being of beings. This notion of truth is to be opposed to truth as verification, or correctness, as measurable ratio or rational deduction, or as propositional determination. An openness to Being is a mode of letting be; it is a going along with rather than a meddling with or standing over and against a situation or other beings. My world-forming, my being-in-the-world, is therefore constituted by a relation to the truth of Da-sein's project, which is my own most possibility to be. For more see Heidegger, M. (1995). *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by N. W. William McNeill. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

³ The term, *poiesis* stems from the Greek, 'to make', but not in the modern sense of production as making. For more see Sinclair, M. (2006). *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art: Poiesis in Being*.



Figure 1. Gary Hill, 2003, *Blind Spot*. Images courtesy of the artist.

The point of view of the camera travels along behind the couple, following them as they walk down the street. The movements of the man are singled out filmically. He turns to face the camera and realises that he is being filmed. The intermittent

flickering appears to be getting longer as the actions of the man on screen get shorter. He responds with a definitive gesture, raising his middle finger defiantly at the camera, alerting the viewer to his and (our) illegal capture.⁴ Hill draws out this closing moment, extending it into twelve minutes of film duration. This induces a kind of 'non-time'. And, as such, an encounter with *Blind Spot* confronts the viewer with its temporal affect. I mean 'affect' in contrast to 'effect' which suggests causality rather than passions, something that can be intellectualised rather than bodily felt. It is as if this affect of a 'non-time', although rationally unfathomable for me, still holds more profound meaning. I ask myself: how is it that this affect of 'non-time' appears to resonate on a level that I can't explain correctly, rationally, as something I may simply verify and account-for?

As I have just emphasised, I am confronted with the temporal affect of *Blind Spot*. *I am aware of the sensation that I am somehow thrust ahead of myself. At the same moment, I encounter a past passing.* It is as if there is a wave of time that builds increasingly in intensity and, as it builds by degrees to a heightened pitch, the *affect* becomes actually unbearable for this viewer. I ask myself: what is going on with the temporal situation in such an encounter with Hill's practice? How is it that time can appear to build in intensity? And what is the character of this time that builds? I can identify that there is something going on that doesn't appear to fit *in my body*. It is an embodiment that is my existence, yet it does not coincide with me. This encounter isn't easy; this situation is unexpected. It demands more of me. The unexpected in the situation prompts an uncomfortable meeting (of myself with myself), and it is like a confrontation of adversaries. I ask myself: what is the *temporal character* of this confrontation with the unexpected?

By contrast, when I visit the cinema or watch TVNZ, which is to say, encounter in its average everydayness the production of audio-visual mediums, or when I come up against a pro-filmic mode of film practice, I am not usually as *consciously aware* of my physiological discomfort in quite the same way as I am with Hill's work.⁵ How does Hill's practice compare to orthodox Hollywood film? Pro-filmic practice tends to employ methods that are geared towards making the cinematic apparatus inconspicuous to the viewer. The illusion of movement is directed at supporting (at all cost some might say) a phenomenological and psychological layer of human 'consciousness', thereby imbuing moving images with a fabricated 'reality' of human perspective (Hamlyn 2003). It also contemporaneously facilitates a concealing of the mechanisms of the camera, the projector and the screen, effectively making them invisible to the viewer. Therefore, I use the term pro-filmic to describe the homogenisation of viewer encounter through pro-filmic technique. In contrast, the flicker in Hill's practice reveals the cinematic apparatus for a viewer. How does

⁴ The presence of the viewer is also implicated by the on-screen action of the man in a kind of voyeuristic double bind. However, for the purpose of this paper I will not take this discussion any further.

⁵ For more on pro-filmic film see Hamlyn, N. (2003). *Film Art Phenomena*. My 'discomfort' may yet be palpably real with respect to the media content ("hate the film, why do they still fund TVNZ?") but, crucially, the modes of their composition do not induce an uncanny encounter with myself.

having the apparatus revealed to a viewer affect the framing of our question of encounter?

Affect again

Hill discusses the production of *Blind Spot* in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist.⁶ He explains that this point of contact, where glance meets glance, performs like a kind of “magnetic pull and repulsion” in the work, suggesting that in a way this video “appears almost scripted out...the time is divided into a slower space where the distance between one and zero, you kept dividing this in half. You’re getting closer but you are getting further away...a kind of base division of time” (Hill 2003). The moment of recognition between what Hill calls a ‘personage’ and the scopic drive of his practice is elongated in a temporal variance that shifts between anticipation and delay. Meanwhile, *my* encounter manifests like something squirming around in my skin. I feel itchy. I want to move on. It even irritates me that I am becoming irritated. I ask myself: why do I experience this rising sense of bodily *unease*, this *agitation*? I ask in response (at least the adversaries are talking!): is it my body that recognises this sense of discomfort, this *unbearableness* or does this phenomenon spring from somewhere else? What is the essence of this *discomfort*? And why is this *affect* seemingly so profound? It would appear that the temporal modality experienced by a viewer on contact with Hill’s work extends out as extrinsic modification of the existent. The *moment* somehow becomes an unreachable eternity, actually *unbearable*, while the memory of this affect still resonates with me long after the encounter itself. How is it that the durationality (as qualification of duration itself) of this encounter continues past the moment as it passes, and as it were, *beyond the moment of this encounter* with this video work? How can film encounter draw upon a moment of pastness?

When I was a child I would practice holding my breath underwater. Each time I held on longer I would tend to gasp more desperately at the surface to catch it. As Hill’s black blocks of time extend out, I feel as if I am thrust ahead of myself, enveloped. It is *like* the memory of that instant, just before holding on too long, I would teeter on the edge of the impossibility of my coming back. This memory draws up my past yet resonates deeply with me now. It is not memory as in remembering or forgetting my phone number, nor childhood recollections of a factually knowable existence. This memory opens a body to an instant, not of time’s continuity, but of time’s *rupture*. A disjuncture of time that appears suddenly out of step can resonate for most of us. One could say it implicates a ‘community of pastness’ that might be drawn up in instances of encounter. In a broader sense, this concerns something quite other than the conscious mind of an individual subject. Hill’s methods appear to encourage a specific way of encounter between viewer and screen. There is something about the way that I am *attuned* to my encounter with *Blind Spot*: not so much how I understand it but how it affects me, puts me in a mood that qualifies understanding. My temporal relationship with the film appears to move beyond the expectation and anticipation of this self as intentional consciousness, to somehow pose this self and

⁶ On Point of View: An Anthology of Moving Image. (2003). NY: New Museum and Bick Productions.

world as temporally modified, as openness to the 'there' or locality of its being. I feel like I am thrust beyond myself, like things don't quite fit, and it is my irritation as I am forced to wait for what seems like an interminable amount of time for this expectation to come to fruition that somehow prompts something else to emerge out of this encounter.

Synoptic Positions and Participatory Exchanges

In her book *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992), Sobchack outlines her phenomenological approach to film encounter. She applies the notion of 'cinematic apparatus', a term common in film theory, to describe the technological instruments and methods used in film construction, production and projection. In this, she is concerned with different perspectives on how technology is implicated in the phenomenon of film viewing. She formulates her discourse around film experience in relation to Idhe's theory of 'instrument-mediated perception', and Merleau-Ponty's theory of 'chiasm'. For Sobchack, there is a reciprocal, correlated structure between, on the one hand, human perception as an *embodiment relation* and, on the other hand, what she terms the *body of the film*. Idhe's theory of instrument-mediated perception introduces the notions of 'intentionality' and 'consciousness' to an embodied way of discussing film encounter. Intentionality is vital to phenomenology; it alerts us to the way that consciousness is directed towards things and states *in the action* of formulating human perception.

Sobchack outlines a phenomenological theory of embodied vision that involves a cinematic apparatus relative to instrument-mediated perception. This view places emphasis on technology as an enabling instrumental source that resonates with the lived experience (consciousness) of the viewer:

...the film experience calls for a communication model of instrument-mediation—a model that can describe the double perception and the reversible structure of cinematic instrumentality which enable instrument-mediated perception to be communicated to and exist as instrument-mediated expression. This is a technological mediation that is able to reverse itself so that "what is inside is also outside." (1992, 173)

In his book, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Merleau-Ponty outlines his thinking related to human perception in its performative actioning within a world *gestalt*. He contends:

If we can show that flesh is an ultimate notion, that is the compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relationship with the visible of itself, that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the invisible, can traverse, can animate other bodies as well as my own. (1968, 140)

In relation to questions of what is it to see and encounter, Merleau-Ponty argues for "flesh as an ultimate notion" (1968, 140). He indicates the intertwining action of chiasmas the 'lived-body' of the 'flesh of the world.' His "compound of two substances" (Ibid) implicates how the term *chiasm* activates an in-between momentum, an 'entre-deux'. Although this implicates a subject/object binary, neither

is one or the other but both of each other at all times. He suggests a ‘breaking open’ in the mechanics of the *chiasm*, using the term ‘dehiscence’ to describe a continual opening out onto the horizon of perception. When perception is almost realised, it subsequently folds back inside the flesh of the lived body in a perpetually *performed* act that can be visualised in terms of a Möbius strip. The Möbius strip is a mathematical equation that forms a loop with a single twist in it. If one follows the strip around its circumference it becomes apparent that it is one sided. The *chiasm* is thus implicated as an action of doubling, like being both sides of the same coin, or two hands of the same body touching (Merleau-Ponty 1968). The *chiasm* is *performed*, perpetually moving back and forth between the visible and the invisible, so that “what is inside is also outside.” For Merleau-Ponty visibility is folded back into invisibility, add infinitum, creating a perceptive field and a perceptive field implicates a form of consciousness.

Sobchack’s reading of *chiasm* structures the encounter of a viewer in proximity to film, with the film projector and film screen. One could suggest that when read from Sobchack’s approach, the *affect* that resonates in an encounter with *Blind Spot* involves the participation and production of cinematic experience, *in* a viewer. It indicates a centralised conscious subject within a perceptual field.⁷ A *synoptic* position implies an upright human body in relation to a horizontal plane of perception. In addition, this verticality structures a type of sensory ‘pecking-order’ within the human body where sight resonates at the *highest* level, with the remaining senses falling into (or out of) place below. *Chiasm* activates sensory perception in a way that levels out this hierarchy. More specifically, when *chiasm* is applied to film encounter, it activates a horizontal exchange between our sense of sight and our sense of touch that implies a *haptic affect*.⁸ As Merleau-Ponty suggests: “The look, we said, envelopes, palpates, espouses the visible things” (1968, 133). I ask myself: what is the significance of this *haptic affect*, an itchiness that squirms around in my skin in my encounter with *Blind Spot*? It is like a wave of time that builds in intensity, a time ahead of myself, a presencing that comes forth. How am I to think about being-in-the-world in relation to the phenomenon of a presencing that comes forth?

Instrument-mediated perception: approaching technology and film

Could an *instrumental* structure of technology and film encounter help to uncover a way for thinking being-in-the-world in Heidegger’s understanding of ‘poiesis’? We approach Sobchack’s work with this question in mind. In *Address of the Eye*, Sobchack references Idhe’s instrument-mediated perception, discussed in his book, *Experimental Phenomenology* (1979). She argues that although Idhe’s unidirectional model outlines a perception drawn from an intentional act toward its

⁷ Krauss discusses Gestalt psychology and the notion of human perception as a type of mirror image reflected back to the perceiver via a world Gestalt. She states that, “it is the centering of the conscious subject through the experience of the Gestalt itself as centrally organized image that is continually mapped onto this perceptual field” (1997, 89). For more see Bois, Y. A. & Krauss, R. E. (1997). *Formless: A User’s Guide*.

⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of this idea of a horizontalisation of the sensory system of the human body, see synaesthesia in Sobchack, V. (2004). *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image*.

intended object, it does not account for how film experience may “serve as a conduit from one perception to another” (1992, 172-173). However, she explains that Idhe’s work is useful in helping to elucidate the complex nature of film experience and ‘intentional correlation’ of artist-camera and projector-viewer. In outlining a number of complex correlative models involving human perception and machines, Sobchack identifies how the filmmaker’s intention for the film, along with the camera and the projector, fall into a kind of *inconspicuousness* in film experience, what I previously discussed in the context of the pro-filmic. She stresses that although the technologies of cinematic apparatus may appear to disappear for the viewer as *if* total, this is never *actually* total. The camera ‘captures’ what the filmmaker ‘intends’ by attenuating a world via its machinery (which we metonymically signify as ‘lens’). The ‘lens’ has a similar synoptic machinic-‘physiology’ to the human body. Yet, crucially, it is different to the human body’s visual capabilities. Therefore, she suggests that when film is projected onto a screen for a viewer there is always a latent *echo-focus* of the camera in film experience.

The apparatus falls into what appears to be inconspicuousness because the intentionality of viewer and film are together focused on the thing that is on the screen as meaningful and discernible ‘content’, while the projector projects the film over an audience from an invisible position behind them. Furthermore, Sobchack insists that the phenomenon of film experience is an instrument-mediated perception enabled by the projector, “as an extension of the spectator’s being” (1992, 177). She suggests that the area of light at the end of the projection becomes the site of *haptic affect* that sees as a distance-sense, thereby extending the viewer’s being-in-the-world as it touches and is touched by the body of the film in a *chiasmatic exchange*:

...it is the “flesh,” the lived-body as the original incarnation of my intentionality, that is normative in my evaluation of the paucity or richness of my perceptual experience of phenomena when mediated by machinery and instrumentation...Although I can see through or according to a machine or instrument, I cannot see like or as a machine; I cannot see except against the ground of my human lived-body and I cannot see unintentionally. (1992, 182-183)

It seems that, for Sobchack, being-in-the-world is lived experience chiasmatically encounterable as lived-body and intentional consciousness. She suggests that in film experience there is *acommon existential eye* where both filmmaker and camera become an enabling existential source of cinematic perception, asserting: “This enabling subject and eye can be located as such in a reflective and reflexive activity performed both by the film and/or the spectator” (1992, 202). This describes the reciprocal *action* involved in film viewing as an embodied relation of both the filmmaker and camera, as well as spectator and projector as: “author of that expression of the film that they *together* enable and enact in the contingency of their particular conjunction” (Ibid). She argues for film experience as both the perception and the expression of the film viewer and the film, commenting that:

Respectively mediated by instruments that are not the same instruments although their intentional object is the same object, two intentional acts engage and address each other in a complex and reversible structure. That

is, through the respective mediation of the camera and projector (mechanisms that intervene in acts of perception and expression, both duplicating and reversing them), the film maker and the spectator are brought into direct perceptual engagement with each other, and into direct engagement with a world that is their mutual intentional object. (1992, 173)

Thus Sobchack describes phenomenologically how viewers watch an intended world as another sees it, but at the same time express an experience that is their own 'unique' way of "seeing as mine [emphasis added]" (1992, 194).

Technology as a way of revealing

Heidegger's thinking around the essence of technology as a *way of revealing* raises the issue that it is not the *I/eye of lived experience* that is in question at all. Rather, we need to consider the disclosure of Da-sein as a relation to temporality that opens up a *way of revealing* in film encounter. In contrast to Sobchack's discussion around an instrumental structuring of film experience and technology, in his essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', Heidegger draws us away from an understanding of technology as either instrumental or a means to an end. He suggests, rather, that the *essence* of technology is "nothing technological" (1977, 35). We do not essentially understand technology by examining and understanding those beings that we categorise as technology, such as camera lenses, projectors and celluloid film or videotape. From Aristotle we learn that *techne* is one of the names given to the disclosing of beings in that they are. In this sense, technology is essentially a mode of revealing before it is an instrument or means to some end. Heidegger characterises the epoch of modernity, the epoch inaugurated with Cartesian subjectivity, as the epoch of technicity, where the essence of technology shows beings (Nature) as stockpile (standing-reserve) for production. Human beings are also a resource for producing (labour power). Whatever is, as standing-reserve, is 'enframed' (Ge-stell)⁹ in a disclosure of our relation to Being as a *challenging* of whatever is for the sake of producing. In contradistinction to this, Heidegger alerts us to a relation of beings to Being, disclosed in *poiesis*, equally as a making or producing; although fundamentally a producing of a disclosing of an openness to Being. Our Da-sein as such, is implicated in this action, not as a challenging-forth but as a *bringing* forth in a letting-be of what is.

Circumspection a kind of looking

My 'world-forming' encounter with *Blind Spot* resonates in a temporality that opens the eye of the artist, the camera, the projector: all the myriad inner-worldly things that my Da-sein projects, within this time of seeing and revealing. Curiously, it is the things that are at hand in their usefulness, that are usually 'there' in their inconspicuousness. For example, instead of noticing the thing that I use as I use it, this thing falls into a kind of inconspicuous for the sake of my project. Like the way the keyboard that I am tapping on right now seems to slip into a kind of non-thereness for

⁹ Heidegger uses the German word Ge-stell stemming from stellen [to set upon] in the sense of producing and presenting. For more see his essay, 'The Question Concerning Technology' in Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.

me while typing. Heidegger calls this occurrence of handy things that fall into forgetfulness in their use 'ready-to-handness', this is a kind of looking he calls 'circumspection.' In contrast, when we focus on handy things as a type of 'truth' as correctness to what the thing is in a literal sense, Heidegger calls this 'present-at-handness.' In our everyday activities we often overlook the fact that human Da-sein usually exists in the 'ready-to-handness' of handy things. My encounter with *Blind Spot*, via the mechanism of a small computer screen, is not concerned with the materiality or workings of the computer as such. But, if the computer stops working, it's relevance changes from something 'ready-to-hand' to something that is 'present-at-hand.'

Human Da-sein and 'an openness to Being'

In *Being and Time* (1927) Heidegger discusses the meaning of Being in the disclosure of the Being of human being (Da-sein). In his later essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', his understanding shifts to a disclosure of Being in Being's giving of the 'there' of Da-sein's openness, as the "event of appropriation."¹⁰ In this sense, his essay suggests a fundamental disclosure of Being that cannot be construed as determined by human will. Hence, Heidegger's discussion of handy things alerts us to ways of revealing the primordial structures by which Da-sein is in its world, though when he states that, "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological" (1977, 4), he explains it in these terms: "The unconcealment of the unconcealed has already come to pass whenever it calls man forth into modes of revealing allotted to him" (1977, 19). John Lechte concurs, "The Greeks experienced this call through a sense of wonder in the face of the world" (2003, 28). Heidegger calls this *call*, a 'destining' that human Da-sein is already ordered into (1996). If unconcealing is no mere handiwork of man (Heidegger in Stassen 2003, 289), how are we to approach Sobchack's structuring of instrument-mediated perception? If there is a greater purpose afoot in encountering film than mere lived experience, how does a *chiasmatic* reading of film experience compare?

If we read my encounter of *Blind Spot* from Sobchack's approach, it would suggest a complex juncture where the reciprocal looking of Hill's camera and 'personage' are subjected contemporaneously by the film viewer, who witnesses this event in a performative glance that occurs in an instant. Yet Hill manages to draw out the durationality of the encounter *in* the same moment that it passes. I wonder about Sobchack's understanding of film experience, and her understanding of being-in-the-world as I try to relate my interpretation to a questioning of my encounter with Hill's video work. Sobchack suggests that instrument-mediated perception in film experience has an affinity with Heidegger's understanding of technology as "*nothing technological* [emphasis added]." However, she argues:

...the film's material existence may be necessarily in its immanent celluloid, chemical emulsions, and mechanisms of cinematography and projection, but its material existence insufficiently in its transcendence of its technological origins and dependencies...not as some objective mechanism...not

¹⁰ For more see a discussion of Ereignis in Heidegger, M. (2003). Four Seminars.

experienced and understood as an enabling and extensional prosthetic device like a telephone or microscope. Rather, the film is experienced and understood for what it is: a visible and centered visual activity coming into being in significant relation to the objects, the world, and the others it intentionally takes up and expresses in embodied vision. (1992, 171)

I wonder how the experience of film encounter is different to any other experience. There is something niggling at me, this rising sense of *discomfort*, as I encounter Hill's film. I ask myself: with Sobchack's perspective in mind, how does a *chiasmatic intentional embodiment relation* with the cinematic apparatus foster an ongoing discussion of film encounter? Does this approach merely serve to describe a sensorial embellishment of *lived experience* that oscillates between cause and effect? The mention of 'intentionality' suggests a conscious subject encountering a world of objects, rather than an ontological disclosure of being-in-the-world. Intentionality implies a mediation of being and world (consciousness), and although Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'flesh' and 'the lived body' activates a Möbian-like structure of beings and other beings as beings-in-a-world, it still tends to leave Sobchack's term of film experience enclosed within a rather circular argument.

Instrumentality, the essence of technology and the I/eye

Heidegger points out that since Descartes, and all science since Galileo, an understanding of technology has been dominated by the instrumentality of human being as subject-who-knows a world of objects to be known:

What mathematics makes accessible in beings constitutes their being... (Being = constant objective presence) ... The idea of being as constant objective presence... blocks the possibility of bringing to view attitudes of Dasein in a way which is ontologically appropriate. But thus the road is completely blocked to seeing the founded character of all sensuous and intellectual apprehension, and to understanding them as a possibility of being-in-the-world. (1996, 89-91)

He argues that when science equates Being with objective presence, this blocks the possibility of a richer way of thinking about being-in-the-world. Thus, with Descartes, our understanding of being-in-the-world is transformed into objective lived experience. Heidegger states, "...how far removed is Descartes from the beginning of Greek thinking, just how different is the interpretation of man that represents him as subject?" (1977, 147).¹¹ I suggest that Sobchack's approach to film experience places an emphasis on objective presence in this instrumental way. Furthermore, her notion of film encounter as an intentional act of the filmmaker, projector and spectator serves to highlight this sense of instrumentality that, in fact, misconstrues Heidegger's understanding of 'nothing technological'. If we read the I/eye that encounters Hill's work from Sobchack's perspective, it is structured within a subject/object binary; it is experiencing technology as an instrumental *enabling*

¹¹ For more see Heidegger's essay, 'The Age of the World Picture' in Heidegger, M. (1977). *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.

existential source of encounter. Does this keep the way to ‘an openness to Being’ clear in film encounter?

I appear to have reached an impasse. Perhaps it is not so much the differing factuality of states and things that surround instrument-mediated perception and lived experience that are at stake in an attempt to unravel notions of *poiesis* and a *presencing that comes forth*. I would argue that, although a line of questioning of viewer as subject and film as object, albeit intertwined in a reversible and embodied exchange, does appear to intensify the conscious lived experience of a viewer in film encounter, Sobchack locates her discourse within a metaphysics of presence and representation. Although a metaphysics of representation is a common way (the most common way) to describe and get a sense of the factuality involved in film encounter per se, when Sobchack states that an encounter with a film is an, “*author of that expression of the film that they together enable and enact* [emphasis added]” (1992), I believe that she is failing to engage in the possibility of a more fundamental way of thinking about being-in-the-world. What, then, is the ontological disclosure that unravels the time that encounters a film? Hill’s work does indeed actively engage the viewer in an embodied response. One could say a rich response. But does Sobchack’s approach sustain a more rigorous questioning of film encounter, and the essence of technology in relation to what the significance of *poiesis* is to being-in-the-world?

Affect attunement and the being there that encounters a film

In conclusion, I want to return to Hill’s comments on his use of the black interstitial frame in *Blind Spot*. Essentially, each block of black time is extended out:

its almost more of a kind of space which opens up the time of thinking and the time of seeing...continually always arriving toward some point that never arrives...moves from almost the idiomatic frame of scene to a kind of photographic point which is adjacent to a non-scene, just a blankness of something that makes you kind of reflective upon the whole process of seeing itself. (Hill 2003)

My encounter with Hill’s work involves *temporal affects*. This “*opens up the time of thinking and the time of seeing* [emphasis added].” The intensity of *affect* described earlier in this paper surfaces again at this juncture and it is like a *Blind Spot* that nevertheless, sees, that ‘retina’-hole-in-time that opens my ec-static temporality to being. My encounter with *Blind Spot* implicates an *itchiness*, a temporal mood. For Heidegger it is our attunement to our being-in-the-world that determines mood or *affect*:

...the world already disclosed lets inner-worldly things be encountered. This prior disclosedness of the world which belongs to being-in is also constituted by attunement. Letting something be encountered is primarily circumspective, not just a sensation or staring out at something. Letting things be encountered in a circumspect heedful way has...the character of being affected or moved. (1996, 129)

Heidegger stresses the importance of not falling prey to the idea of the senses as lived experience, but rather suggests that it is the very fact that all mood is already grounded in *attunement* that makes mood possible at all. Every understanding has its attunement; every attunement it's understanding. In *attunement*, Da-sein understands—ever understanding its *attunement*. An encounter with Hill's video work is *affected by attunement*. It opens up an ontological disclosure of an *openness to Being*. My 'world-forming', my being-in-the-world, is thereby constituted by a relation to the truth of Da-sein's project. It is in this way that *attunement* draws near an occasion for thinking about being-in-the-world in the sense of *poiesis*.

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- Figure 1. Gary Hill, 2003, *Blind Spot*. Images courtesy of the artist. 4

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