

Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies

<http://con.sagepub.com/>

HD Aesthetics

Terry Flaxton

Convergence 2011 17: 113

DOI: 10.1177/1354856510394884

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://con.sagepub.com/content/17/2/113>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://con.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://con.sagepub.com/content/17/2/113.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - May 19, 2011

[What is This?](#)

HD Aesthetics

Terry Flaxton

Bristol University, UK

Convergence: The International
Journal of Research into
New Media Technologies
17(2) 113–123
© The Author(s) 2011
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1354856510394884
con.sagepub.com



Abstract

Professional expertise derived from developing and handling higher resolution technologies now challenges academic convention by seeking to reinscribe digital image making as a material process. In this article and an accompanying online resource, I propose to examine the technology behind High Definition (HD), identifying key areas of understanding to enable an enquiry into those aesthetics that might derive from the technical imperatives within the medium. (This article is accompanied by a series of online interviews entitled *A Verbatim History of the Aesthetics, Technology and Techniques of Digital Cinematography*. To access this please go to <http://www.flaxton.btinternet.co.uk/KTV.htm>. This resource seeks to circumscribe and circumlocute the wide variety of interests and usages of incoming digital media with specific relation to the effects of increased definition being offered by incoming digital technologies). Having discussed the aesthetics of HD I will then proceed to look at the consequent artistic and cultural implications. The article concludes by challenging the current academic position of the digital as being inherently immaterial.

Keywords

data handling, high definition, resolution

The Technologies, Aesthetics, Philosophy and Politics of High Definition Video¹

In April 2007 at the National Association of Broadcasters convention in Las Vegas, High Definition (HD) changed forever. Whereas previous HD cameras had cost half a million dollars, Jim Jannard, a sunglasses manufacturer from Canada, had managed to develop a new camera, called the 'Red One', retailing at \$17,500. This development signaled a change in the production of High Definition that was announced through its initial naming. The original title – 'High Definition' – was meant to signal a change from standard resolution digital video and align the new technology with film, giving it more of a sense of quest than analog or digital video, more of a sense of flight, a sense of the arcane, the hidden, thus producing something to aspire to and engendering a sense of being elite – very important for the Directors of Photography, those

Corresponding author:

Terry Flaxton, Department of Drama: Theatre Film and Television, Cantocks Close, Bristol BS8 1UP, UK
Email: flaxton@btinternet.com

captains of the ship heading towards the image horizon and in turn, evoking some of film's prior sense of mystery. Now we are the middle years of HD, where the original title is misleading mainly because it refers to a line structure that was pertinent to the analog age – 1920×1080 – which no longer pertains to the current aspirations for the medium.

A High Definition Image to Recall

I want to introduce an image that may be useful when thinking of HD: as the light falls at dusk and you are driving along, you might notice that the tail lights of the car in front of you seem much brighter than in daylight, and the traffic lights seem too bright and too colorful. The simple explanation for this phenomenon is that your brain is switching between two technologies in your eyes: the rods (inherited from our distant ancestors), which were evolved for the insect eye to detect movement, are numerous at around 120 million. Through them you see mainly in black and white. The second technology is much more sensitive to color: these are the cones, which are far less numerous at around 7 million.

Color is a phenomenon of mind and eye – what we now perceive as color, is shape and form rendered as experience. Visible light is electromagnetic radiation with wavelengths between 400 and 700 nanometers. It is remarkable that so many distinct causes of color should apply to a small band of electromagnetic radiation to which the eye is sensitive, a band less than one 'octave' wide in an electromagnetic spectrum of more than 80 octaves.

Human trichromatic color vision is a recent evolutionary novelty that first evolved in the common ancestor of the Old World primates. Placental mammals lost both the short and mid wavelength cones. Human red-green color blindness occurs because, despite our evolution, the two copies of the red and green opsin genes remain in close proximity on the x-chromosome. We have a weak link in our chain with regards to color. We are not four-cone tetrochromats; we have three and in some cases only two – in extremely rare cases we have one!

So, there are two technologies – rods and cones – between which there is a physiological yet aesthetic borderland. Keeping this idea in mind, if we apply the potential misreadings of eye and mind not to color, but to our ability to recognize different resolutions, then a similar potential sensorial confusion is possible in the higher resolutions of which we are now capable. In my own experiments with capture and display, it is becoming apparent that a viewer experiences a sensation similar to the illusion that there is more color at dusk when a certain level of resolution is reached. At that borderline between the lower resolution and the higher resolution, a fluttering occurs as we engage in this step-change of resolution. I have found that at the lower level there is less engagement, as measured by the duration the audience is willing to linger with an image, and at the higher resolution there is more engagement. This is evidence of a switching between two states in the suspension of our disbelief – with high definition eliciting more visual fascination. What is really interesting to me, as an artist, is the boundary between the two states.

The Figures

After the invention of television, it took many years to be able to record the analog video image. This was finally accomplished through creating a scanned raster of lines and inscribing what information was present in each line. This was the strategy of analog video in its two main forms: PAL and NTSC. When computers began to take over, scanning became obsolete (having only been necessitated by the state of magnetic control of electron beams and glass technology at that time);

so a form of inscribing and recording the information that was independent of the scanned raster but was grid-like – digital in form and mode – took over. This became the now familiar grid of pixels that every camera sensor has. A sensor is like a frame of film in that it is exposed in one go, unlike a scanned image, which takes time. But there are many issues with the technology that make it unlike film (like needing to empty a CCD of charge, line by line, or a CMOS chip in one go – where CCD refers to a charge coupled device and CMOS refers to a complimentary metal-oxide-semiconductor). Each chip is constructed of many individual photosites that are single light sensitive areas. These then produce information, in the form of packets of data, which is in turn represented on screen by a changing luminosity and color identity via a pixel of display.

Digital video was the transforming technology that moved us closer to high definition technology. It had 720×576 pixels to emulate the 625-line system in analog video (in PAL at least). The earliest forms of High Definition were analog, but being on the cusp of the digital revolution, HD soon became digital. Also, the early European systems were being financially trounced by the Japanese and American systems and so the standard became 1920×1080 pixels.

Standard HD is known as having 2k resolution because it has a resolution of 1920×1080 pixels (1920 is near 2000). This has a 16:9 or 1.77:1 aspect ratio, which is common to LCD, LED and plasma television design. Cinema Style HD is termed as being Electronic Cinematography – it is also 2k but has 2048×1080 pixels (or sometimes 2048×1024). This has a 2:1 aspect ratio. The academy version of 2k has 2048×1536 pixels which is 4:3 aspect ratio. There are various definitions of the amounts of pixels in an electronic cinematographic image – agreements still have to be made as to exactly what numbers are involved. There is also one other important difference between Standard or HD resolutions (which are governed by proprietary formats) and Electronic Cinematography. Proprietary forms of HD are generally processed (or data reduced and processed in camera), whilst Electronic Cinematographic forms are processed mainly in the post-production house. Beyond these 2k formats, 4k is 4096×2160 pixels (2:1) or 4096×2304 (16:9), and 8k is 7680×4320 (16:9) – this last is the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, NHK's Super Hi-Vision. In conversations with leading designers in the form, I have established that far higher resolution than 8k are in development.

Currently, the highest form of 2k HD image capture requires recording onto hard discs – and not just any hard disc, but a Redundant Array of Independent Discs – a RAID (the exception is Sony's SR deck, which records data on tape). If you want to record 1920×1080 pixels uncompressed, then you need read and write speeds of *over* 440 Megabytes (Mb) per second. The average hard drive reads and writes at around 35 Mb – hence you need a few of these. To understand the idea of the RAID, imagine the following: If I throw you a ball, you might be able to catch it. If I manage to throw you 20 balls at the same time, you have no chance. If I throw 20 balls to you and another 19 friends – you have a chance of catching them. A RAID Array uses a group of discs to catch large amounts of data.

The Present, Yet Far Future

NHK, or the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, recently conducted an experiment through linking a prototype 8k camera to 18 one-hour data recorders. The subject of the test was a car ride lasting 3 minutes. In order to capture it, the SR data recorders ran so fast that they went through one hour's worth of recording during the three-minute shoot – all 18 of them. The resolution of the projected image was immense: imagine the normal computer display set at around 1280×1024 pixels – then imagine a screen of some 27 ft long with the resolution proportionately more detailed. This

technological moment had echoes of the Lumière brothers' screening in January 1896 of a train arriving in a station. At the NHK screening, the Japanese audience were reported to have found the experience so overpowering that many of them experienced nausea. So now we can place a computer image on a screen of cinema proportions with equivalent resolution or more resolution – so, imagine what it would look like – in fact what it would *feel* like, if the density of pixels were then displayed across that screen – the possibilities of deep engagement and belief in the experience seem to have led to a physiological reaction. Since this experiment, Super-Hi Vision has been streamed live between Tokyo and Osaka – but of course that act required a high amount of compression.

Technology and Compression

Any serious understanding of High Definition technologies requires a basic understanding of 'compression'. Light is focused through a lens onto a charged coupled device or sensor, which then emits electrical impulses and thence data. Very early on in video production, a question arose for designers when far more data than was recordable was originated through this process. It was from this problem that the idea of throwing 'unnecessary' data away took hold. This method continues today: a contemporary HD camera, like the Sony HD750 or HD900, doesn't record 500 of its 1920 pixels – it just throws them away. The problem seen by some manufacturers is that too much data has been generated and so compression appears necessary and in the worst case, information must be thrown away. Another strategy that commercial producers utilize is that of adopting the idea of GoP (Group of Pictures) structures to compress images – and this practice underpins not only low-level HD recording in camera, but transmission of images over the internet. The first and last frame in a group of pictures contains all the information, each succeeding picture only contains the changes in the information. If a person is photographed against a background, there is no need to resend the background information again and again – only the information about head, mouth and eye movements. You can see the affects of GoP structure effects when you watch the blocky artifacts in DVD or Blu-ray, or HD transmission occurring – there is a regular beating in the change of the blocks. HDV and P2 cameras use this system to record images and it is often criticized for being unable to handle motion well. Clearly the shorter the GoP structure, the better this system will handle motion.

But other manufacturers lead by Red, Arri, Panavision and now joined by Sony and Panasonic too, realize – mostly through pressure by the cinematographic community – that we must keep all of the data in order to describe properly what is in front of the lens.

An accumulation of data is a representation of the original and all representations have levels of veracity. Most of today's HD cameras use a software technology based on Jean Baptiste Fourier's Discrete Cosine Transforms (DCTs), which breaks up the image data into tiles, so that each can be treated independently. Recently though, we have seen the arrival of Fourier's Wavelet Transforms. These theories were in place by 1807 but not truly understood until about 15 years ago. Wavelets have helped prise open a Pandora's box. Here is a description by the astrophysicist Amara Grapps (1995):

Wavelets are mathematical functions that cut up data into different frequency components, and then study each component with a resolution matched to its scale. They have advantages over traditional Fourier methods in analyzing physical situations where the signal contains discontinuities and sharp spikes. Wavelets were developed independently in the fields of mathematics, quantum physics,

electrical engineering, and seismic geology. Interchanges between these fields during the last ten years have led to many new wavelet applications such as image compression, turbulence, human vision, radar, and earthquake prediction.

Discrete Cosine Transforms are a sort of ‘one-size-fits-all’ response to data – a thuggish response requiring intensive computation. This is in contrast to Wavelet Transforms, which interrogate the data coming through them and find the best response from within their algorithm. In effect they intelligently address the data to get the best out of it, while using less computational power. As one Director of Photography put it on the Cinematographers Mailing List: ‘ummm, wavelets good, DCT bad.’

Contemporary cameras and post-production systems have been designed with DCTs in mind, and the manufacture of the relevant devices, cameras, proprietary editing and storage systems has been designed and marketed to recoup the large amounts of costly research that has been expended by big corporations. It is simply not in the interests of the bigger corporations to switch over to the new, more elegant technology – yet. The pressure exerted by the maverick Red Corporation has already had telling results on corporations like Sony, who are now marketing their flagship camera: the F35. Arriflex have leapt forward and marketed their data camera, Alexa’ which is grabbing market share too.

The Contemporary Argument about HD Image Control

Currently, film directors of photography (DPs) are still brought in to light HD productions, but they are often unfamiliar with the technology, and so electronically trained people are brought in to hold their hands; the common ground between the two is the attitude that ‘preserving data is all’. At a recent meeting of the British Society of Cinematographers, there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth as film oriented DPs stressed their concern over the lack of dependability of the production chains that eventuate in an image. It was argued that it is currently possible to send your data through the same equipment at two different facilities in the same city and obtain different colorations of that image. It has taken 100 years within film to obtain a dependability in the chain of production, and of course the ability of a cinematographer to get that little bit extra, that indefinable advantage in their image making is what adds value to their reputation – however, at the moment, the terrain of HD production is almost feared because that control has yet to be realized.

Within contemporary cinematographic aesthetics, whether in film, analog or digital video, or electronic cinematography, there are a series of tactics to ‘say something’ with light. These tactics, if listed, become mundane: a warm look for safety and comfort, blue for threat and alienation – and so on. There are DPs like Vittorio Storaro, who shot *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, USA, 1979), who step outside of these prosaic color values. Whereas Storaro worked with color and light and the physiology of light enmeshed with the psychology, Conrad Hall (*American Beauty*, Sam Mendes, USA, 1999; and *Day of the Locust*, John Schlesinger, USA, 1975) worked in another area. His inventiveness and commitment was to the *photographic* within the cinematic arts. As Hall traversed the boundaries of contemporary wisdom about what constitutes good exposure, he influenced a whole generation of DPs. Hall knew that the still image captures something that cinematography rarely does; he was therefore concerned with finding ‘the photographic moment’ amidst the flow of images. He tried to find the extraordinary within the ordinary. In this quest, Hall pushed film exposure to the limit; this kind of treatment would be ruinous to HD because it does not enjoy the exposure of highlights as film does. It is only now, several decades after its invention, that High Definition is beginning to match film in terms of exposure latitude.

On a Ridley Scott set in 1983, as he shot the famous 1984 Apple Mac commercial, I was shooting the ‘making of’ material for Apple on NTSC betacam video. At that time, it was not possible to see what kind of images you were obtaining via the medium of film. For that reason the cinematographer, through experience, would be one of the only persons on the set who knew roughly what they would be getting on film. As we were viewing back our video rushes on our production monitor, checking focus and exposure, I became aware that about 20 people were standing behind us, quietly looking over our shoulders. Usually the film rushes would come back the next day to be viewed by the more select in the hierarchy. The two groups stared at each other – two alien tribes at war – film and video. But, this was a film crew that had never before seen what it had been shooting at the same time as shooting it. One of them grinned in pleasure at seeing our footage and suddenly, like the German and British troops in the World War One downing of their rifles on Christmas day and playing football together, we were friends. From then on they stopped being hostile to us, even sometimes offering to move lights to let us have some illumination – bearing in mind that lights are sacrosanct in film.

So, historically, in the clash between film and video, the film users were seen as artists and craftsmen and video users were seen as being artless – video was obtainable and without atmosphere, film was arcane, it was a quest in itself, it had kudos.

Achieving the Filmic Look

In film production, because film stock and lenses have become so sharp, in order to impose an atmosphere, cinematographers have had to constantly distort the color standards and definitions of film stock. ‘Atmosphere’, like popcorn, shares a quality that allows the easy suspension of disbelief. If film manufacturers say that development should occur at such and such a temperature, then heating up or cooling down the developer is a means by which the color, grain or exposure may be changed.

Here is the rub for HD: to get a *look* from a clinically clean medium you have to distress the image and therefore lose data, and as we’ve established, DPs really do not want to distress an image that is already distressed by being compressed. If you do work on the image in camera, as the traditional film DP has tended to, then you limit how much data is recorded – you have to work in the color matrix. If you crush the blacks to get a look you automatically reduce the data that is output into the image display. So current HD practice is to do very little in camera, so that every bit of data is carried back into post-production, where the work on the image – the grading – can begin. But I contend that when you really look at images produced like this, you will see a thin patina *over* the image and the ‘look’ itself is not inherent *within* the image. I have spent 30 years shooting video, as well as film, and I know it is possible to generate the look within the image. It is my contention that simply to light well and to leave everything to post-production processes is an abrogation of the DPs responsibility as a creative artist.

Original electronic imaging was analog in form – as was film – yet the formulation of the capturing of an image was different from film. Film has wide latitude – one can make an intelligent ‘mistake’ and rework the material and formulate a sense of ‘atmosphere’ within the image. This is commonly known as ‘the Look’. Analog video is clean and clinical, and you have to get the exposure right – in the early days, if you didn’t get exposure correct, then you didn’t get focus. Color itself was grafted onto an already set formulation of image capture. I shot one of the first features, generated on video and transferred to film for theatrical distribution; this was Birmingham Film and Video Workshop’s production *Out of Order* (Jonnie Turpie, Birmingham

Film and Video Workshop/Channel 4/BFI, 1987), and I approached the task by imagining video as being like a reversal stock – with very little latitude for mistakes in exposure. Nevertheless, what had I to lose? I tried various color experiments – for instance, at that time creating a white balance that was off-white was not generally done. I discovered that not only could you tip the white balance towards the corrective areas of color (blue and orange, cold and warm), you could also tip the balance of color into any complimentary area – for instance, corrupting the look toward the purple to induce green and any variation to be found around the color wheel. The transfer to film was adequate, but when compared to today’s digital transfer techniques, it was not good in terms of color.

With the advent of Electronic Cinematography (as distinct from High Definition video, which is an extension of digital video) something very important has happened with image capture. In both photochemical and electronic cinematography, until the image is developed, the image resides in latent form in both *the silver halides* and the *unrendered data*. Development – the bringing forth of an image in film – is similar to the rendering of an image in the digital and electronic domain, and importantly, color is within the bit-depth of electronic data and is therefore an integral part of its material form. This developing practical understanding in the professional realm is counter to arguments that circulate within media theory. For instance, *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (Lister et al., 2003: 13–21, 35–44) claims there is an essential virtuality to new media where the precise immateriality of digital media is stressed over and over again. However, industrial and professional expertise now challenges academic convention by seeking to reinscribe digital image making as a material process.

Artists and Resolution

In my own practice I have often been inspired by the simple act of making work with such wonderful technology. This technology functions faster than the eye or mind. Even analog video takes one 64 millionth of a second to ‘write’ a line.

Duration is to consciousness as light is to the eye. (Bill Viola, in *Youngblood*: 2003)

In this statement Viola is proposing that the presence of light is what caused the eye to evolve, and in turn, that consciousness evolved to deal with things that were more than momentary. He is proposing that in a medium where time is an essential factor, waiting reveals so much more.

Viola’s roots lie in both the symbolism of Renaissance painting and the Buddhist proposition of Dependant Origination – that everything can only arise in relation to everything else. My own roots grow out of the moment that I realized that all things record an image through duration: from a lowly rock which, if left shadowed long enough, records an image; to paper that has a leaf left on it in bright sunlight; to celluloid that holds a coating; to tubes, chips and sensors that react to light.

Early Days

My first encounter with video tape was in 1976 with 2-inch analog quadruplex, where one took a razor blade and cut it, just like film, then spliced it together to make an edit. Then rerecording came along, and we set up machines to record the next bit of video in line – thus creating an edit and also consequently, image deterioration.

Around 1982 I was managing a video facility in London’s Soho called Videomakers. The owner of the studio was the son of an electronics inventor and watched while we tried to accomplish a simple dissolve between one image to another for a piece of work I was making. Unable to contain

his excitement, he told us that his father had successfully harnessed a computer to ‘revolve’ a still image. He explained that with a little bit of development the image could be refreshed 12 times per second – so, by doubling and then interlacing by splitting the image into odd and even lines, a whole second of video and henceforth a moving TV image could be revolved. In this case, through a sole inventor and not a corporation, we groped our way through the late analog age and into the early neo-digital. Our main concern was how to adjust our thinking processes to cope with the new paradigm: the fact that with a digital event, one had something that could be infinitely manipulated, and therefore one could systematize the process – thus giving rise to ‘the operations’ as Lev Manovich (2002) has termed them.

Though every video artist has enjoyed the accidents that have come about through stressing the parameters of low definition equipment, HD offers a different kind of unveiling of form: image capture can be achieved without *necessarily* stressing the media. This then prompts questions about the aesthetics of HD. Given that a primary ingredient of the artist’s palette is to find surprises within the medium itself, what new strategies can the artist or practitioner use to unveil a deeper insight into content? Though McLuhan tells us this should not be so, could the message HD delivers be the beginnings of transparency?

To return to Viola: ‘Duration is to consciousness as light is to the eye.’ But High Definition can deliver not just duration but articulation. So we might now remember how increased resolutions could affect how and what we see and therefore reformulate his observation like this: ‘Definition is to consciousness – as luminosity is to the eye.’

Art and Compression

In 1987, John Wyver carried Walter Benjamin’s 1936 ideas forward, with the help of Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio, in his program *L’objet d’art à l’âge électronique* broadcast on the satellite station La Sept. He asked: ‘Can a reproduction carry any of the authenticity of the original?’ At that time the world was concerned with analog representations, which decay in their passage from copy to copy, from medium to medium. If one proceeded with digital compression using Fourier’s earlier mathematics, then Benjamin’s question might unveil a buried insight: *To copy is to decrease*. With digital copying this might still ring true – not only because things are changed and lessened in the act of copying – but because there is a sense in which the representation itself is simply a borg, a copy without feeling, without the ‘true’ sense of the original.

Over 20 years later, the spirit of the question still stands. Where is meaning, significance and value in the digital domain, given that the medium of reproduction and the medium of origination reside together in the same realm? Has the idea that things can be ‘derivative’ become defunct? Is not everything both derivative and original at the same time? Is the idea of an ‘original’ anachronistic?

Technologies, Aesthetics and Art Converging towards the Post-digital

As there is a blurring of the lines between form and content, so there is between software, hardware and that nether region of firmware, which tells hardware to *be* something – rather than *do* something. Now, through a combination of the use of the internet and digital media, a new kind of aesthetic is becoming available. Herman Hesse predicted postmodernism and its bastard digital child ‘convergence’ in his 1943 work *The Glass Bead Game*. In the game itself, one might take a bar of Mozart and place it next to a brushstroke by Matisse, a line of poetry by Omar Khayyám and

a silk screen by Warhol and so create a new work of art. Here, derivation is all; in fact it has been canonized. Hesse proposes the notion that authenticity is not only present in the copy but that the two are one and the same – that the artwork’s weight accumulates with the weight of the addition of other copies and their imbued authenticity and all combine together into new, authentic works of art. In pursuit of this *aesthetic conglomerate*, the actions of the new technologies *and the way the technology is being innovated* has, itself, become a developing aesthetic. This aesthetic is a sign or mark of what is becoming to be known as ‘post-digital’, as it is more concerned with the property of being human, than of being digital.

Resolution-Revolution

To return to where I began, on 31 August 2007, when Jim Jannard and the Red delivered their first complement of 25 Red cameras to a selected few, they set the world alight with their offer of cheap and high level wavelet technology and made it available faster than any previous technological advance of this order. The introduction of 4k was a moment of industrial reorganization. This new technology allows new people, who previously would not have had the opportunity, to enter into the industry at a high level. This shift in the industrial hierarchy is part of a cyclical phenomenon that comes in waves about every five years. Overtly it looks like a change in technology; covertly it’s a change in employment functions. In the end, 4k is as relevant as everything that follows it – 8k, 16k, 32k, 128k – up to the data rate of the dominant hemisphere of a moderately intelligent person at 1GB per second (see Stump and Billups interview, *A Verbatim History of the Aesthetics, Technology and Techniques of Digital Cinematography*).

Crucially though, this development of User Generated Technology came out of an individualist trend that has somehow remained alive through late capitalism: About five years ago, Jeff Krienes, a Director of Photography in California, was experimenting with a friend from Thomson Grass Valley on a prototype HD Camera. They had become fed up with the slowing of technical innovation emerging from the big corporations; so they tried to create a camera that fulfilled not only their needs, but their aspirations. They made an aluminum case that contained some electronics and a few chips, had a fitting on the front to take a 35 mm lens and, on top, the stripped down carcasses of 20 early iPods to RAID record the high data output. This camera had nearly the same specifications of the Red camera. Though Red may look like the trailblazers, they are in fact the inheritors of a user generated, YouTube-like attitude to the production of technology.

At the beginning of digital video, whilst data was generated at low levels via proprietary formats it was possible to regard its limited presence as being immaterial – now we have to think again. In wanting as much detailed information to be retained as possible, Directors of Photography are expressing the desire for verisimilitude with the real world. This attitude must also prompt the reinvestigation of the academic trope of thinking of digital information as being immaterial. Many data labs have now grown up around the world to handle the tsunami of data being generated by the attitude of DPs towards their craft. A major argument for the digital as being material resides in the fact that people are employed in its handling – like any other material – its commodification is a sign of its existence.

So, from the early sole inventors in Fourier’s time, we have just been through a long period where corporations, from the late analog to the neo-digital age have controlled the means of innovation. But on entry to the meso-digital age, access to high-level technical innovation is now again available to the individual – and this apparent individual engagement with technology (besides

being the apogee of the celebration of the geek within) is a hallmark of the web 2.0 era, and this trend is currently centering on the production of High Definition Technology.

The commonality of information available through the web is also allowing a commonality of aspiration so that the User, and now the Doer, is also the Maker and the Knower of their own world. As we make the transition between old and new states, a fluttering is occurring, a switching between the two states in the suspension of our disbelief. Through these changes, the definition of the self is expanding – the idea of what an individual is, is being redefined as it is being up-rezzed to a higher level of definition.

Notes

1. Though this article has its own specificities, it should be read within the growing understanding of what the digital realm is becoming and this can be aided by viewing a series of online interviews entitled *A Verbatim History of the Aesthetics, Technology and Techniques of Digital Cinematography* (Stump and Billups, 2007–2012)

Film history between 1890 and 1915 is fairly devoid of verbatim reports from the practitioners and designers of the medium. It seemed to me that the development of HD would occur in a mirror period 100 years later between 1990 and 2015 and I wanted to make sure that this absence of original voices did not happen again. This resulted in the ‘Verbatim History’ project, which was part funded by an AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship, and also supported by the University of Bristol, Arts Council England, Watershed Arts Centre and South West Screen.

Whilst making this ongoing resource I have become aware of various disabling predilections within current digital thinking. For instance: ideas around pervasive media have been developed with a low resolution approach to the world partially due to the available technology which placed a lower demand on the computational resources that were available. Of course higher resolutions demand higher processing and rendering levels and in the beginning people were more interested in making the idea of pervasive media function to be too worried about at what level it worked.

Like notions of remediation within incoming media that seek to describe incoming media in terms of the medium that already exists, early forms of technology within a medium are less efficient and less powerful than later versions and therefore aspiration tends toward lower expectations. Yet on looking deeper at the notion of the pervasive, one can see that it points toward a time when higher resolutions will be required. If you are living within a world where gesture can stimulate digital events you will want to make a small gesture with a hand rather than expend energy on waving your whole arm around. This is simply a question of resolution, and that in turn is a question of processing, compression and latency.

The ‘Verbatim History’, though ostensibly concerned with ideas of image resolution, is actually about the development of the digital domain in general.

References

- Graps AL (1995) An introduction to wavelets. *IEEE Computational Sciences and Engineering* 2(2) summer: 50–61. Available online. URL (accessed 29 November 2010): <http://www.amara.com/IEEEwave/IEEEwavelet.html>
- Lister M, Dovey J, Giddings S and Grant I (2003) *New Media: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Manovich L (2002) *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Stump D and Billups S (2007–2012) *A Verbatim History of the Aesthetics, Technology and Techniques of Digital Cinematography*. URL (accessed 29 November 2010): <http://www.flaxton.btinternet.co.uk/KTV.htm>

Youngblood G (2003) Metaphysical structuralism. *The Vasulka Archive*. URL (accessed 29 November 2010): <http://www.vasulka.org/archive/Publications/FormattedPublications/Viola.pdf>

Biography

Terry Flaxton is a Senior AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellow at Bristol University, UK, after having spent three years as an AHRC Creative Research Fellow also at Bristol. From 1980 to the present he has practiced cinematography in the British film and television industry whilst continuously maintaining a practice as a visual artist. He has taught at various universities during this time. Currently his KTF focuses on the south west of the UK but he also has a brief to disseminate his research nationally.