

Interview for *Histories of Internet Art* (2002)

Q. What was the first movie you remember watching?

A. I don't remember the first movie I saw but the first film that made a tremendous impression on me was Tarkovsky's "Mirror."

Q. In the Little Movies intro you mention that cinema is being reborn on the computer. In an interview we did with Mark Napier he mentioned that the computer is too much of a utilitarian tool for him, and that he is awaiting the escape of the internet into the "real" world. Do you feel that the desktop is merely a pit stop for cinema?

A. The recent decades saw a real exposition of a variety of new forms of cinema, both in terms of the look, the cinematic language and the physical apparatus: from IMAX and location-based motion rides to interactive cinematic narratives of computer games to various animation / graphic design / video / typography hybrids in music videos, Flash animations, etc. Given this I don't think desktop is just a pit stop for some "essential" cinema that needs its own unique apparatus. Of course, desktop itself is just stage in the development of computing, on its way to be replaced by smaller PDA-type devices, large flat screens, etc. Like a virus, cinema seems to be able to find its way in all of these machines; they are all legitimate ways to distribute cinema.

Q. Watching a film on a computer screen seems more like television sometimes because of the screen size, the scan light, and because the pc lacks the physical community of a movie theatre. Why do you think new media has embraced a filmic approach even more than a television aesthetic?

A. Indeed, while information interfaces embraced some of the conventions of TV culture (the metaphor of channels; VCR-like controls used in various software media players), visually desktop cinema seems to aspire not to TV but to cinema: think, for instance, of camera moves, special effects, and the opening sequences of computer games. In part this has to do with the fact that cinema is much more prestigious in our culture than TV: everybody aspires to be a film director, rather than a TV director. In addition, until now cinema look represented the ultimate in visual illusionism, something that other media, including computers, tried to emulate.

Q. In *The Language of New Media*, you talk about Eisenstein's montage as the root of frames in net cinema, and Len Lye and Brakhage's painting on film as being the precursor to today's video editing software that includes paint features. Have there been any cinematic precedents to the web's use of multi

media, that is, when a site has separate audio, film, text - all relating to the same piece? What about interactivity in cinema history?

A. Regarding Web's use of multimedia, I would say that cinema was the original multimedia, combining iconic images, music, voice, text and sometimes graphics (think of Godard's films from the 1960s). To me this is one of the main reasons why it makes sense to think of new media in relation to cinema: throughout its history cinema already worked out many sophisticated techniques of how to combine various media in a single multimedia piece.

Regarding your second question about interactivity in cinema: during cinema's first decade, a projectionist would select which short films he would show and in which sequence. So we can say that early cinema was interactive (although this is of course the most simplistic type of interactivity). In terms of more recent cinema, many people thought that "Run, Lora, Run" was influenced by interactive narratives of computer games in that it showed three different scenarios which started from the same promise - as though you are playing a computer game and choosing a particular path through all the possible narratives possible.

Q. Have there been any works of net art that have approached or embodied your macrocinema concept?

A. Olia Lialina's classic Web work "my boyfriend came back from the war..." came pretty close. As I wrote about in my *The Language of New Media*, "As the narrative activates different parts of the screen, montage in time gives way to montage in space. Put differently, we can say that montage acquires a new spatial dimension. In addition to montage dimensions already explored by cinema (differences in images' content, composition, movement) we now have a new dimension: the position of the images in space in relation to each other. In addition, as images do not replace each other (as in cinema) but remain on the screen throughout the movie, each new image is juxtaposed not just with one image which preceded it, but with all the other images present on the screen." Another work that I thought was a real breakthrough was text.ure by io360 (1999). As in Olia's work, here the screen was also broken into a number of frames that were all "wired" to each other; that is, an action in one of the frames made information in other frames change as well.

Q. Seen any good films lately?

A. I am going to see the new Mike Figgis film in two weeks and I hope it is at least as good as his "Timecode" which I loved on all levels - as an exploration of a new cinematic language, as an intimate portrait of contemporary life, and as a successful attempt to deal with one of the key problems of visual arts and media today: how to represent a telecommunication society defined as much by a cell phone conversation as by a personal physical interaction.