SPLIT SCREEN

SIMONE HINE & KYLE WEISE

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Split Screen assembles three video installations and a new single-channel work by Simone Hine. The works, made for disparate contexts between 2010 and 2016, are unified here by their internal disunity. Each work is fractured, out of joint, an effect emphasised by their arrangement at Metro Arts: as each work creeps into the next, aurally or visually, encouraging interrupted and distracted viewing. The ideal hermetically-sealed experience of each work, the frame, is inevitably and overtly undermined across the exhibition, doubling each individual work's existing concern with exploring, testing and rupturing the frame of the screen, as both a conceptual and material limit.

Primarily inhabiting performance and video installation, Hine's broader body of work has centred on the representation of women in classical cinema. Hine, playing the various characters in all of her works, multiplies herself between and within works: an endlessly malleable procession of screen personas. Specifically, her work tends to explore fleeting moments of popular moving-image narratives. Hine's works often bring to mind a background character, or an incidental scene, which is then stretched temporally and spatially. The selection of works in *Split Screen*, focused solely on video works that draw attention to the material borders of the screen, constructs a parallel between this dispersion of identities, constantly shifting and amalgamating across cinema history, and the increasing dispersion of the singular frame of cinema. Split across screens and devices, the cinematic frame becomes just one more window in a media environment in which spatial layering takes precedence over linear sequential ordering.[1]

Once More (2015), the first work encountered in *Split Screen*, produces an interplay between the sequential and the spatial via an ambivalent, and rather unexpected, merger of the production practices of popular entertainment with the conventions of performance art. *Once More* initially appears to have the prototypical form of the multichannel video art work: the loop. However, the work in fact eschews editing and instead uses elaborate physical staging and endurance performance to mimic the appearance of a short edited loop. Here, Hine has used five cameras to capture a continuous 107 minute performance, in which a throwaway scene from a hypothetical 1960s sitcom is continuously re-enacted.[2] Despite appearances, there are no edits: a theatrical lighting system darkens the set during interludes, while the chaos required to realise the work (incessant costume changes, prop preparation, and so on) is rendered invisible by the screens' borders. Subtle traces of the performance leave hints: remnants of the dropped vegetables accumulate on the floor, costuming and make-up become slightly distressed.

Once More moves us across the frames of its five screens to create a 'single' coherent scene. This is an effect directly inspired by the production practices of the mid-century sitcoms that the work refers to. Such sitcoms were, and often continue to be, recorded as 'multi-camera' productions: akin to a play they are taped before a live audience with multiple cameras capturing each take, and this footage is then edited together to create each scene.[3] As such *Once More*, essentially documentation of an endurance performance, plays with the conventions of popular media in both its content and form and in doing so emphasises the careful construction of more typically 'raw' performance documentation. Simultaneously, the work transposes the sequential organisation of sitcom editing onto a spatial organisation across screens, as is typical of gallery video installation, but also characteristic of an emerging media environment in which our perspective moves continually between multiple screens and devices.[4]

Surrounding *Once More* is an occasional yellow glow, emanating from the adjacent work, *Today, Tomorrow* (2016). These yellow lights are initially quite mysterious, illuminating a few Android devices casually place on the gallery floor and each displaying a short looped video sequence. The movement from television, *Once More*, to the smartphones and tablets of *Today, Tomorrow* mimics the historical movement, traced by Jonathan Crary, in which television paved the way for the contemporary attention economy, training viewers into compulsive and repetitive viewing and, with the introduction of the VCR and other peripherals, into habitual tasks and incessant open-ended management of screen 'interaction'.[5] The smartphone expands this and, as Ian Bogost notes, encourages a ceaseless state of attentive distraction. Requiring constant attention, such devices are incessantly stroked and updated, while pulling us into their 24/7, always-on cycles of 'hyperemployment'. A particularly notable feature of the smartphone is that it takes the reasonably coherent aesthetic of the desktop operating system and shatters this into tiny isolated, and often incompatible and incoherent, pieces: apps.[6] The tablets of *Today, Tomorrow*,

presenting disconnected and seemingly unrelated videos, gesture towards the discontinuity of the smartphone aesthetic. And this is further emphasised by the disorienting installation, as the devices are framed by an oddly angled wall awkwardly inserted into the gallery, while a bank of yellow lights intermittently bares down upon them.

The other side of this wall, whose open ends betray a tangle of cables and equipment, presents a three-channel video focused on a single female protagonist, played by Hine. The work is filled with impressionistic generic nods to contemporary Hollywood thrillers, offering fragments and traces of an absent narrative. Here, the significance of the yellow lights illuminating the gallery becomes clear, as they mimic the colour palette of one of the video sequences: a long tracking shot, moving slowly through an empty, featureless motorway tunnel. Via the synchronisation of this lighting with the video, *Today, Tomorrow* expands this screen image beyond the screen and onto the larger architectural space of the gallery and, in particular, onto the space of the Android tablets, creating an equivalence between the devices, the motorway and the gallery as spaces of endless circulation seemingly devoid of history or resolution.[7]

The final video installation, *While the Moon Watches* (2010), presents a large projection of an unmoving moon, clouds passing quickly across its face. The image is one uncannily familiar, as an almost inevitable shot, a generic marker in horror and thrillers, where it often represents time passing and foreshadows ominous events. Here though, instead of fleeting, the shot is endless. It is in motion yet conceptually frozen, as it is removed from narrative and from the context of a sequence of shots. The moon is left to inhabit the space, a spatial feature rather than part of a sequential edit of images. Underneath this image sits a bank of CRT monitors, recalling another generic marker, the CCTV control room, showing a woman walking, passing from screen to screen. The character, again played by Hine, is occasionally startled by the illumination of a motion-activated street light, before continuing on her endlessly looping journey. The connection to surveillance is emphasised by the complete stillness of each screen, exhibiting a single shot, detached and unmoving. Outside of a single moment of temporal synchronicity, the editing occurs between the screens, sliced together through their physical adjacency, rather than the sequential edit, they construct an impossible architecture. While the obsolete materiality of the bulky Sony cube CRT monitors, common to both commercial applications (video wall advertising, surveillance, broadcasting, etc) and video art in the 1980s and 1990s, accentuates the entanglement of video art with industrial technical histories.

Cut (2016), a single-channel work, returns us to the sequenced image presenting an arrangement of short still shots placing the video in an Art Deco apartment. The primary image of the work, the hand of an unseen figure cutting flowers, gestures towards the physical cut of film-editing. Yet something is askew here. Occasionally, as the scissors slice the flower stalks, another image, almost imperceptibly, interrupts the slow and deliberate sequence of black and white shots. This fractional colour insert, offering a glimpse of the sequence being filmed by Hine, splits the rhythm of the video and draws us back to the frames of image-making and of the material screen. Of course, this figure behind the camera is just another character, another construction.

Multiplying identities across the dispersed screens of the exhibition, *Split Screen* considers the dislocated and distracted gaze of contemporary moving images. Simultaneously, against discourses of the free-floating 'placelessness' of contemporary media, the works emphasise the materiality of the screen and insist upon the importance of the physical history of the screen and its place in the everyday.

[1] This trajectory, from the singular to the multiple in visual culture, is traced by Anne Friedberg and Lev Manovich, among others.

[2] The length of the work was determined by the recording capacity of the media cards in the video cameras.

[3] This contrasts with 'single camera' productions, in which temporally dispersed takes recorded by a single camera are edited together, as is usual in cinema and many dramatic television productions.

[4] The Nintendo WiiU is a particularly overt example of this, in which the game controller contains a screen that potentially augments the action on the main monitor to which the console is attached, thus forcing the user to continually shift their gaze between the two screens. This is an enforced movement that simply mimics the way many people now watch television screens, constantly distracted by handheld devices.

[5] Jonathan Crary. *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep.* London: Verso, 2013. p.79-86.

[6] Ian Bogost. *The Geek's Chihuahua: Living with Apple.* Forerunners: Ideas First. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

[7] For a more detailed analysis of *Today, Tomorrow.*, with a specific focus on its relationship to the ideological construction of the gallery space, see my catalogue essay "Gallery Work." *Simone Hine: Today, Tomorrow.* Melbourne: Screen Space, 2016.

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