

TELIC

SEPTEMBER 10 - OCTOBER 15, 2005

**VISCERAL
CINEMA
CHIEN:**

CURATED BY FIONA WHITTON

PRESENTED IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE CENTER FOR INTEGRATED MEDIA
AT THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE
OF THE ARTS

**SCOTT
SNIBBE**

photography:
cover Kris Snibbe
all others Scott Snibbe
except Depletion by Tavo Almos,
The Beall Center for Art and
Technology, UC Irvine, 2003

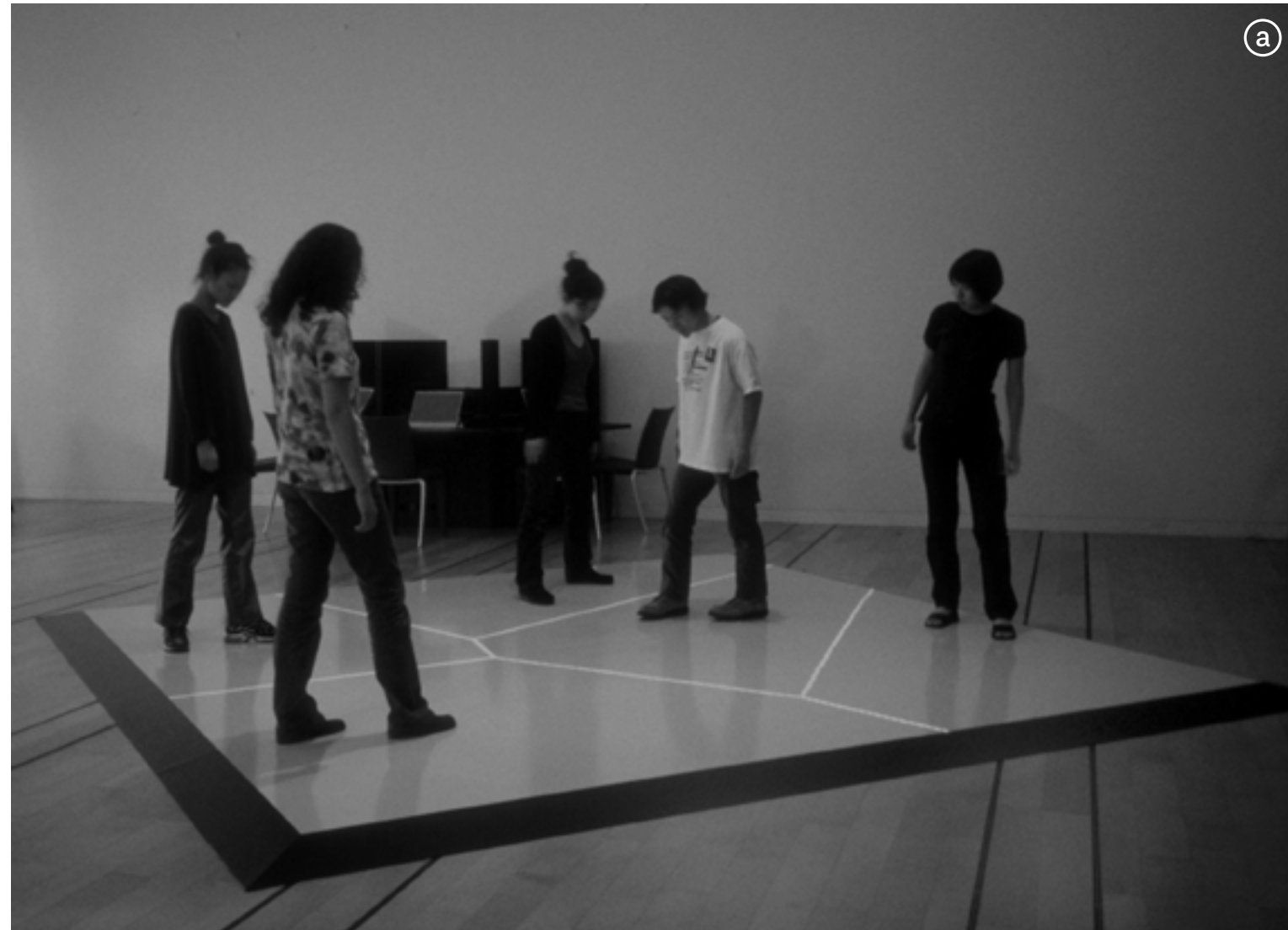
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for multi-disciplinary projects
and events.

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a

LARGE PHYSICAL INSTALLATIONS:

a. *Boundary Functions*, 1998

projector, video camera, pc computer, retro-reflective floor, custom software
dimensions: 14' x 14' x 16' (variable)

description: *Boundary Functions* projects lines dividing each person from every other as they stand on a raised square floor. As people move around the floor, the diagram dynamically changes to describe the personal space of each individual. The work reveals that personal space is defined only by our relation to others, and changes without our control.

b+c. *Blow Up*, 2005

aluminum, steel, commercial fan parts, motors, impellers, custom electronics and software

dimensions: 12' x 9' x 20' (variable)

commissioned by: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco)

description: When a viewer blows into *Blow Up*'s array of twelve small impellers, their breath is transmitted to twelve large fans which amplify their breath patterns into a room-sized field of wind. When this person stops blowing, the wall continues to play back the most recent breathing pattern, captured in an amplified loop, until someone inspires a new pattern.

NO MORE WALLS

Fiona Whitton _ Director, TELIC

Much of the work at Telic is less concerned with the art-object-on-a-wall than the tension-in-space created by an environmental or interactive experience. This work can be kinetic; it often addresses our visitors' senses of touch, hearing, and smell; it encourages viewers to move through the space, to spend time or to actively leave. It is a kind of production that is at once a product of its time and the reflection of an earlier one. Over 60 years ago, Frederick Kiesler created the fantastic Art of This Century gallery for Peggy Guggenheim, which was to coordinate architecture with surrealist art objects such that "there are no frames or borders between art, space, life... [T]he spectator recognizes his act of seeing... as a participation in the creative process no less essential and direct that the artist's own." This "correlation" between art, architecture, and viewer was an environmental creation that included mechanical-kinetic viewing systems, choreographed lighting and sound, and multifunctional furniture.

Even earlier, in Kiesler's experiments with display windows and theatrical staging, he incorporated light and motion in ways that demanded new forms of drama and related to a new kind of audience. It's this interest in spaces of performance and everyday life that makes Scott Snibbe's work so interesting for us. Where Kiesler's *Space Stage* of 1923 was inspired by dynamic forms from modernism's mass culture—from roller coasters to the circus—Snibbe's *Deep Walls* draws from video games and surveillance cameras. The former required a new kind of kinetic drama, the latter an interactive one where participant and viewer occupy the same stage.

Snibbe treats the gallery as a stage even more directly in floor projection works like *Boundary Functions* and *Near*, where the spaces between individuals are invested with diagrammatic meaning: separating lines and connecting arrows. These installations explore everyday social relations first by illustrating them, thus giving them form, and then by encouraging visitors to play with these forms through improvised bodily movement.

Designing an environment that produces these kinds of interactions is a peculiar challenge that draws from architecture, computer programming, and psychophysiology. It makes use of new materials and technology to give the visitor an almost tactile sense of interaction with immaterial systems that are based on camera vision and projected images. Snibbe's detailed instructions for constructing his installations even recall the drawings Kiesler made for the various viewing devices in *Art of This Century*.

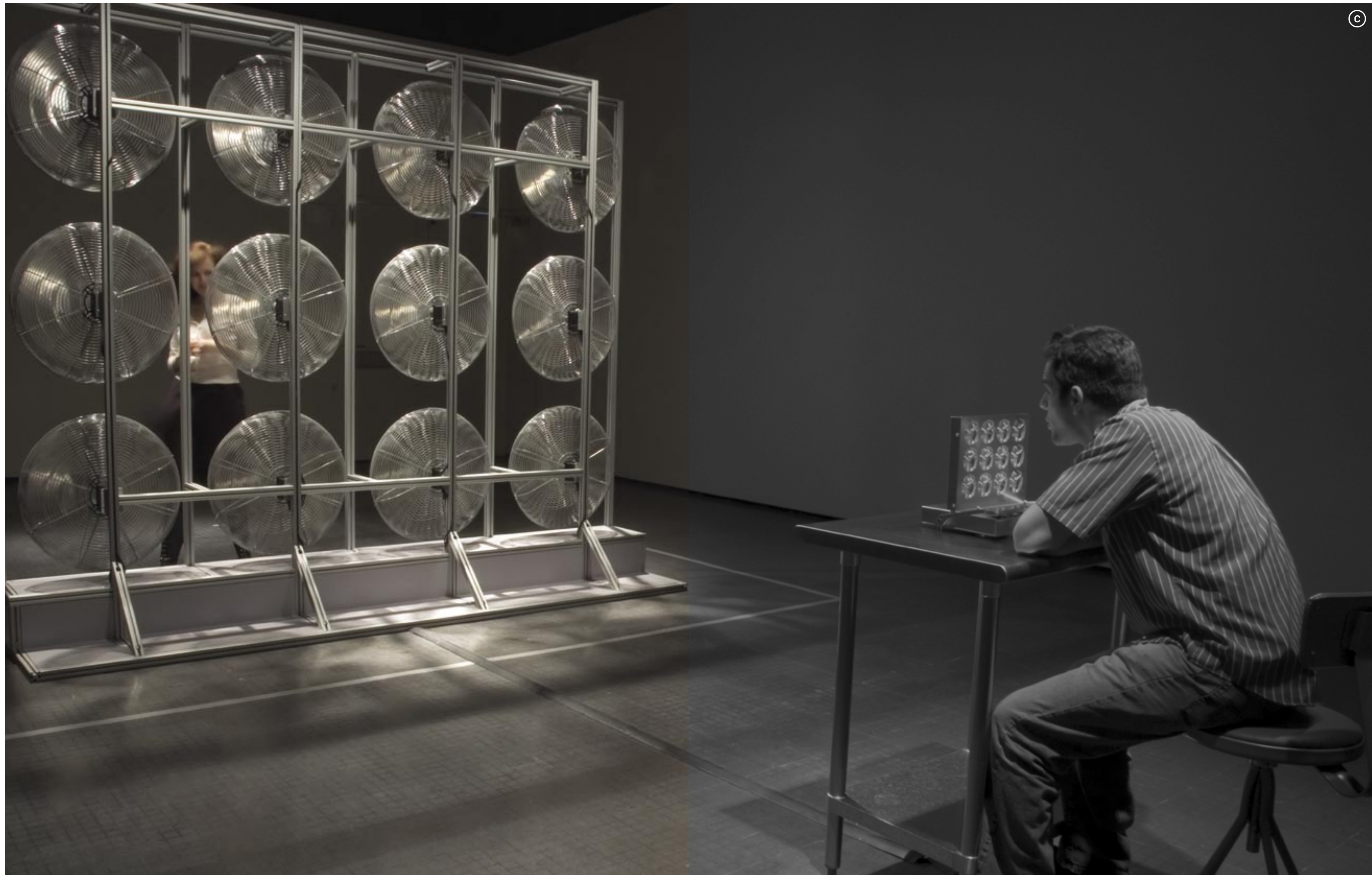
Visceral Cinema: Chien—Snibbe's latest work referencing the surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel—might even have found its place in the Art of This Century gallery. In what might be a spark of Kiesler's aspiration in *The Universal Theater*—that is, to integrate the audience into an encompassing relationship with the production—viewers of *Visceral Cinema* can use their silhouettes to participate in moments from experimental film history.

Recently, interactive media art has become increasingly institutionalized in universities, festivals, and museums, often pinning its *raison d'être* on the infinitely malleable term "interactivity." Hopefully, we will not allow the history and complexity of this term to be diluted—by privileging the relationship between a person and a machine—for the sake of making a discipline. For Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics," as well as for Kiesler and Snibbe, interactivity is something that happens between people in a space. And, as Kiesler (the self-described "non-architect") theorized decades ago, it suggests a radical cross-pollination of ideas, disciplines, and media that necessarily escapes any genre.

- The title of this essay is taken from an early piece of writing by Frederick Kiesler called "Manifesto on Tensionism," originally in the April 1925 edition of *De Stijl*.
- Kiesler. "Notes on Designing the Gallery." 1942.



b



NARRATIVE WORKS:

d. Visceral Cinema: Chien, 2005

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retro-reflective screen, custom software

Dimensions: 11' x 6' x 20' (variable)

description: Visceral Cinema: Chien re-imagines the surrealist masterpiece *Un Chien Andalou*, by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. The work combines key moments from the film with viewers' shadows to form interactive projections. All of the action occurs in silhouette. Initially, viewers see a large video projection of a man pulling a grand piano towards the viewer. When viewers walk between the projector and the projection, their shadows affect the projected man's actions. If a viewer moves between the man and the piano, the piano is pushed back, causing the man to strain harder and lose ground. If a viewer intersects the man, the man dissolves into ants at their point of intersection, and the ants gradually overtake the entire screen.

d



MOSAICS:

e. Deep Walls, 2003

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retroreflective screen, custom software

dimensions: 80" x 60" x 15" (variable)

description: Deep Walls creates a projected cabinet of cinematic memories. Within each small rectangular box, one of the last sixteen recorded events is played back in silhouette. Recordings are created by viewers when they walk in front of the projection—recording begins as soon as the first person enters the screen and finishes as soon as the last person leaves.

f. Cause and Effect, 2004

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retroreflective screen, custom software

dimensions: 8' x 6' x 20' (variable)

description: Viewers move in front of a screen displacing small recordings of prior events. In the recordings only the viewers are shown, giving a sense of autonomy to actions which were determined through interaction with the prior recordings. "Cause and effect" is a common translation for the Buddhist term Karma, which dictates that all human experiences are the result of their own prior actions.

THE VISIONARY CINEMA

OF SCOTT SNIBBE

Tom Leeser _ Director, Center for Integrated Media at the California Institute of the Arts

"We so often find ourselves at complicated crossroads which lead to other crossroads, to ever more fantastic labyrinths. Somehow we must choose a path. In other words, by tracing apparent causes (which are really no more than accidents), we can travel dizzily back in time, back through history—all the way back, in fact to the original protozoa."

- Luis Buñuel "My Last Sigh", 1982

Scott Snibbe's vision grows out of cinema, the "original protozoa" art form of the twentieth century and reflects the medium's avant-garde traditions of Buñuel, Frampton and Brackage. However his work veers away from a pure cinema and allows us to peer into the potential of the moving image, one that retains a spectre of the past while embodying the qualities and technology of the future.

The contemporary mechanics that underlie Snibbe's work conjure up an ancestral cinema from the nineteenth century's fin-de-siècle when the moving image apparatus itself was the subject (and object) of experimentation and invention. As a contemporary artist, Snibbe uses light, the primal source of cinema, to create visual histories that are projected as phantasms across his screen. Through his process Snibbe inverts the light from a positive to a negative, allowing the histories to be told via the trope of the silhouette.

At first glance the screen seems to serve its traditional function, simply hosting the silhouettes on its surface, but over time our assumptions are subverted and we recognize that there is a contradicting quality abiding in the work. There is something going on here that goes beyond the mundane projections of light and shadow. As we probe the work, the enigma arises from his installation strategy.

The layout of the installation forces the viewer to walk in front of the projector and break one of cinema's most time honored social taboos. Snibbe's digital cinema captures our reflected light, exploiting a technique of vérité in its most raw form. There is also a little anarchism hiding out in his motivation, as he encourages his audience to misbehave and play in front of the seemingly passive projection apparatus. As we interrupt the projector's beam and transgress its normally sanctified space, we realize that Snibbe's apparatus is hardly passive. He is using a camera and computer to capture our movements; an algorithm to manipulate them in real time; and the projector to display them as silhouettes. We become co-conspirators in his interactive design as we discover the artist's motivation and our relationship to his scheme.

Through our actions and interactions with the elements of the installation, the viewer sheds the passive observing role and becomes an active performer entering into a digital vaudeville of sorts. By encountering the work in this way we develop a sense of agency that allows us to be an active part of his creative process. Snibbe provides us with this agency so that we can begin to deconstruct traditional cinematic illusions and see our own observations and actions as mere confabulation². As we observe ourselves, we become immersed in Snibbe's arcade-like environment

allowing us to interpret the work from two different views: reflection and paradox.

By violating the cinematic space, we enter into the installation and begin to see characteristics we would normally associate with sculpture. The sculptor Robert Morris and his late nineteen sixties minimalist white cubes comes to mind as we navigate the space of the projector and screen³. Morris was concerned with the visual experience as the viewer's body encountered the relationship between the sculptural object and its space. In *Deep Walls*, Snibbe composes a similar gestalt as Morris, allowing the movements of the viewer to provoke perceptual tensions between multiple spaces that are contained within the overall boundaries of the installation. The installation utilizes an interior space which is rendered as two dimensional figures displayed on the screen in the form of digitally manipulated shadows. There is an exterior space that is three dimensional and defined by the cultural and physical boundaries of the screen and the projector. We perceive yet a third space, an inbetween space that contains the light source of the projector. By analyzing the way Snibbe presents space and light, we begin to entertain multiple readings of his work similar to Anthony McCall's nineteen seventies film installation "Line Describing a Cone."

By playing with the work we also see embedded meanings that lie simultaneously both in the installation's physical apparatus (light, projector, screen, computer and image) and the interactive creative process. A situational context emerges to form the basis of the work rendering the author as a diminished authority and empowering the viewer through the role of active collaborator.

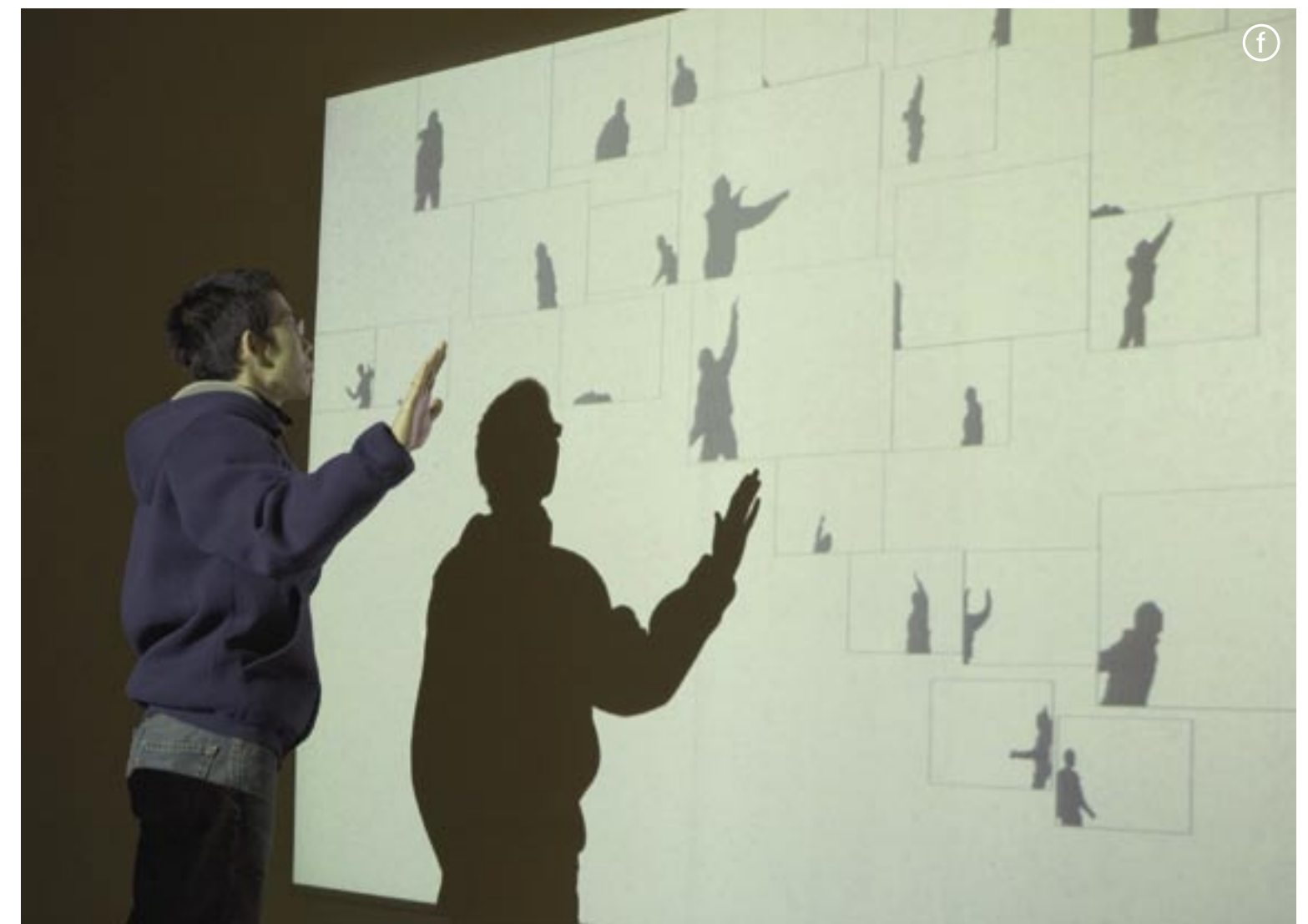
Film critic and cultural theorist Paul Arthur refers to a process of shifting metaphor from an "idealized imagination" to a "material metaphor" when discussing the work of Structural Filmmakers from 1967 through 1972.⁴ Snibbe expands upon Arthur's definition of material metaphor deriving meaning not only through a process of visual perception but also by viewer activity and interaction. Snibbe's art synthesizes the two-dimensional moving image and the three-dimensional aspects of sculpture with the intervention of performance. The work liberates us from the confines of traditional linear interpretations through the timeless nature of his interactive design.

1. "Hamlet on the Holodeck" by Janet Murray, 1997, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass. pages 110 and 126

2. "Is the Visual World a Grand Illusion?", by Alva Noë, Journal of Consciousness Studies, 9, No. 5-6, pgs. 1-12

3. "Notes on Sculpture" by Robert Morris in "Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology" Edited by Gregory Battcock, EP Dutton & Co., 1968

4. "A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film since 1965", by Paul Arthur, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, page 80



WORKS FROM THE SCREEN SERIES:

g. Compliant, 2002

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retroreflective screen, custom software

dimensions: 12' x 6' x 20' (variable)

description: Compliant creates a projected screen of "soft light". As visitors walk into the projection, the rectangular screen is deformed and shifts away from them. The physical bodies of the viewers become the dominant force in the relationship with the screen, distorting it, pushing it out of its alignment, or completely chasing it out of view.

h. Concentration, 2003

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retroreflective screen, custom software

dimensions: 80" x 60" x 15' (variable)

description: As viewers walk into the field of this projected screen, the light of the screen immediately collapses around one of their silhouettes. When people's bodies or their shadows touch, the light expands from one person to another. The screen's glow can be transferred from person to person by reaching with their shadow into the core of another person's body.

i. Impression, 2003

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retroreflective screen, custom software

dimensions: 12' x 6' x 20' (variable)

description: As visitors move into Impression's projected rectangle, the profile of their shadow displaces the screen horizontally, so that one side of their silhouette is formed in light along the opposite edge of the screen. In this way, the screen absorbs the forms of the bodies that push against it – like clay it holds an impression.

j. Depletion, 2003

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retroreflective screen, custom software

dimensions: 80" x 60" x 15' (variable)

exhibition history: Beall Center (Los Angeles), 2003

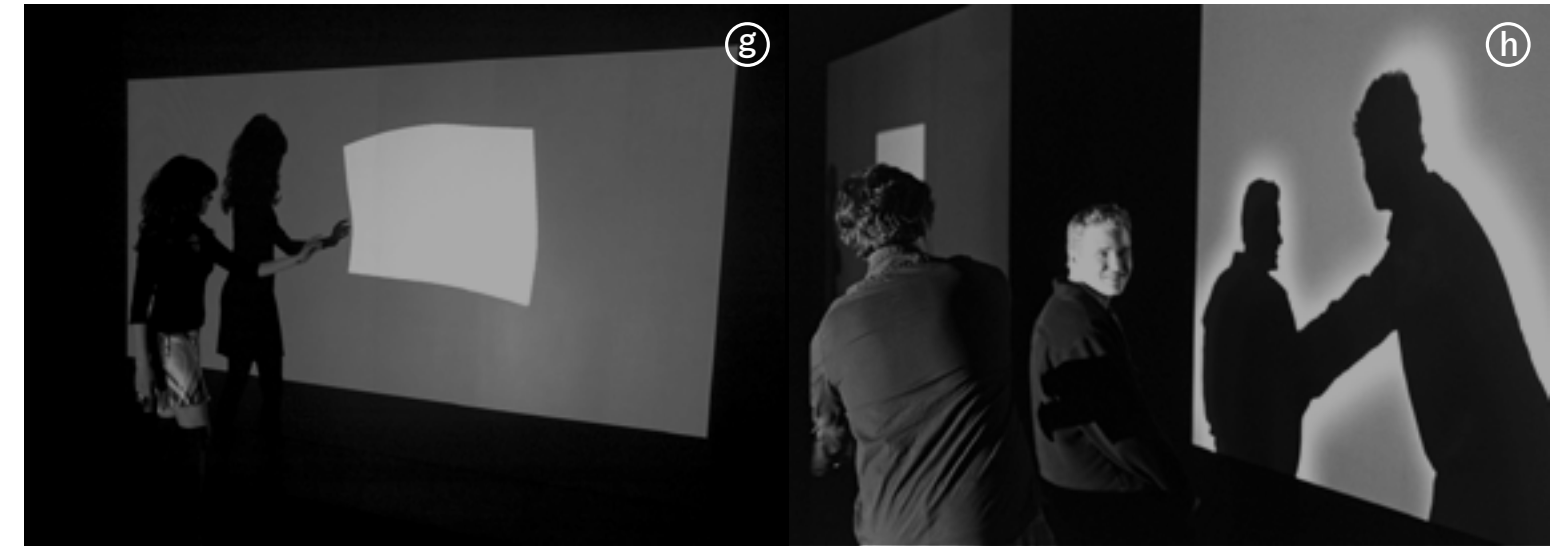
description: As bodies enter Depletion's projected field their shadows eat away at the light itself. Wherever they move, the screen ceases to exist. The work suggests the frailty of immaterial projection – film fades, videotape warps, bulbs burn out, and electronics short circuit. As they remove light, viewers create full-body "motion paintings" with this work, in a manner similar to the works of early abstract expressionists.

k. Shadow Bag, 2005

computer, projector, video camera, video capture card, retroreflective screen, custom software

dimensions: 8' x 5' x 20' (variable)

description: A viewer's shadow is captured and re-projected onto a screen with unpredictable variation. Sometimes there is no response; sometimes the shadow follows; sometimes the shadow is their own and other times prior viewers. When a viewer intersects a replayed shadow it occasionally collapses, suggesting the Jungian notion of the body's shadow as a "bag" that holds all of our psychic detritus.



REFLECTIONS OF OUR SELVES

—THE ART OF SCOTT SNIBBE

Christiane Paul _ Adjunct Curator of New Media Arts, Whitney Museum of American Art

Plato's famous *Allegory of the Cave* describes the existential predicament of a group of prisoners trapped in a cave: a gigantic fire at the cave's entrance separates the prisoners from the outside world while a wall in front of them provides the 'screen' for the only image of reality they know—the shadow play created by the people moving behind them, in front of the fire. Plato's story essentially is one of enlightenment, of the ability to grasp the invisible truths underlying the apparent surface and reflections of the world surrounding us.

The (deceptive) nature of the surface and the reflection also play a central role in Scott Snibbe's art. At the core of his work are the complex relationships between reality and representation, our bodies and their shadows (as imprint and trace of physical presence), the self and the other. Snibbe's projects question the qualities of temporality, movement, space, and light and reconfigure conventions of perception. If one would update Plato's allegory for our media age, one might replace the cave with a movie theater, the fire with a projector, and the wall in front of the prisoners with a screen. The origins of cinema in moving silhouettes and shadow projection, as well as surrealist films are one of the obvious influences that can be traced in Snibbe's work.

Snibbe's Screen series—consisting of the works *Shadow*, *Impression*, *Depletion*, *Compliant*, *Concentration* and *Shy*—questions the cinematic status of the screen as a mere surface for image projection and turns it into a (re) active player in the representational game. Rather than simply being re-presented on the screen, the viewer's shadow is being recorded and played back by the screen (*Shadow*), changes the screen's rectangular outline (*Compliant*), or erases it or "paints" across it (*Depletion*, *Impression*).

The Screen series explores relationships between bodies, light, and shadow by reconfiguring cinematic conventions and allowing us to experience the nature of the image in new ways: while re-presentation is still inextricably bound to the process of recording, projecting, and doubling, every aspect of the representational process becomes a reconfigurable, seemingly active entity. However, Snibbe's projects are not necessarily cinematic in the original sense, but owe as much to the subtle interventions and manipulations of light undertaken by artists such as James Turrell.

A more detailed investigation of the shadow as double and imprint unfolds in the projects *Deep Walls* and *Cause and Effect*, which both create a temporary collective memory of viewers' shadows by recording them over time and arranging them on a grid of small screens. Together, the screens form a record of shared presence in space. While *Deep Walls* emphasizes the function of the cinematic loop—each of the accumulated little shadow films has a precise and different duration—*Cause and Effect* subtly underscores causality by letting the individual screens displace each other and showing the effects of each participant's actions on the assemblage of other shadow recordings.

The relationship between the self and the other, be it another person or 'that which resides outside ourselves,' is another prominent narrative in Scott Snibbe's work and surfaces in different manifestations. Snibbe's *Boundary Functions*, for example, visualizes the usually invisible relationships between individuals in physical space by demarcating the space occupied by people in a gallery as lines on the floor that adjust to their movements. Using analytical methods from biology and mathematics, Snibbe's software detects and demarcates the usually invisible limits that

and Snibbe's project, meaning unfolds only through a mediating function, a representation.

Snibbe's recent *Visceral Cinema* series marks a departure from his previous explorations of representation in that it more explicitly investigates narrative. In *Chien*—based on a scene from Buñuel and Dalí's surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou*—the viewer's shadow becomes a character in the narrative and influences its course according to parameters set by the artist. In the more elaborate *Shadow and Substance* (*Mary Baker Eddy*), the participant interacts with scenes from the life of Christian Science's founder, Mary Baker Eddy. The connectedness of body and mind that is central to Christian Science is echoed in the effects of the viewer's silhouette, which is both immaterial and bound to the physicality of the body.

Recording, translation, and amplification—all of which are a form of mediation—emerge as key elements in Scott Snibbe's body of work. While digital technology never moves to the foreground of the artwork, it is nevertheless its essence: through the use of technology and software as artistic medium, Snibbe investigates humanistic and social concerns. The custom software and hardware that he develops is not primarily a tool but forces the medium to reveal its mechanisms as well as its social and aesthetic agenda. His projects point to the multiple translations, visualizations, and interpretations that any set of (digital) data enables—often in the context of individuality and personal 'marks,' such as our shadow or breath. At the same time, Snibbe's works radically question familiar notions of interfaces, expanding their functionality and revealing their social impact. Scott Snibbe's works are reflections of our selves that explore both the effects of our mediated bodies and the process of mediation itself.

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