Flicker-time and fabulation: from flickering images to crazy wipes

Bridget Crone

Introduction

A single flash! A cut of light! This essay explores the flicker or flicker-image as a flash of light that has the potential to disrupt the mechanics of vision. The most elemental of images, the flicker is at the very basis of both vision and mechanical image production; it is the flash of light that makes an image possible, and it is the continuous flickering of light across the eye (or lens) that connects visual perception with time perception through the operation of critical flicker frequency: the speed at which the brain joins those flashes of light together and thus perceives the movement of time. Yet when isolated or disaggregated from continuous movement, the flicker-image disrupts the smooth space of both image production and time perception. The flicker-image therefore refers to a correlation between analogue cinema practice in which a frame of film runs flickering through the projector and the physiological mechanics of image production in which flickering light is perceived by the brain. To think of images in this way is to understand images as single elements, as flashes of light, frames of film, individual pixels – individual units that are joined together. Image. Followed by image. Followed by image. Yet to insist on the flicker-image as a single flash of light – a "cut" or "point cut" as Gilles Deleuze does in his few pages of writing on experimental artists' film – is to isolate an image from the constant movement of images, and, in doing so, to break into the flow of time: interrupting, disrupting or re-routing time's movement (Deleuze 2005: 207).

Taking cue from Tony Conrad's 1966 film *The Flicker*, aspects of Manuel De Landa's films produced approximately ten years later, as well as Russell Hoban's novel, *Fremder* (1986), I will address the way in which radical editing techniques that cut or break the linear continuity of image movement offer the means for escape outside of existing space-time parameters. This escape from linear, chronological time is the time of the flicker; it is a time broken into a gazillion pieces, each with the potential for another as yet unknown or unmade relation. Each piece, each jump-cut, splice or broken edit, interrupts the flow of time as we know it and calls forth time anew. The particular form of time produced by the operations of the flicker-image

(the image cut from movement) has much in common with the time of Aion or the instant, as that which cuts into the linearity of chronological time. In this way, flicker-time takes us out of the "no-time" and "no-space" of our continuous present, and thus from the continuity of time that is dominated by demands for constant productivity and progress on the one hand, and an entropic, unending present, on the other, as Jonathan Crary observes in his book, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*: "A 24/7 world is a disenchanted one in its eradication of shadows and obscurity and of alternate temporalities" (Crary 2014: 19). The flicker-image is therefore a resistant technology that breaks and remakes the relationship between time and the image in order to both occult the world and produce it anew, and flicker-time is a "fabulated" space-time. Here fabulation suggests an estrangement that is rooted in conditions of the "real" (that occur in real life; IRL) yet also gestures towards a form of speculative thought: the telling of stories, the weaving together of forms of speculation – the might be, could be, possibly. Fabulation is thus at the heart of an art practice that provides the means to "project – into things, into reality, into the future and even into the sky." (Deleuze 1997: 118) And so, focussing our attention on the operation of the flicker as a single flash of light – a single flash that cuts or breaks into linear time and space – rather than a continuum of flashes, enables us to explore the way the flicker acts as a launch-pad that takes us out of time into a fabulated time an space. This is a time-space that couldn't possibly exist, might exist, probably doesn't exist, could perhaps exist through another understanding of time and space. As Deleuze suggests, it emerges through the telling of stories and invoking im/possibilities.

There are three distinct operations of the flicker that will be extrapolated through the work of Conrad, Hoban and De Landa. These are summarised, as firstly, an expansion of time and space; this is the case in Conrad's film where the operation of the flicker produces a journey into a world beyond the image, a world of psychedelic experience. Here the flicker acts as a launch pad for entering into another dimension. In contrast to Conrad's freedom *through* the flicker to a space outside of it, Hoban's novel, *Fremder* proposes that liberation might be found in the space between the flickering images that make up perception. In *Fremder*'s world, perception of so-called "reality" – a "reality" produced by the continuous flickering of light across the eyes – is controlled by a sinister organisation referred to as "The Corporation". Freedom therefore can only be found *outside* of the image. In a move that mirrors Crary's remarks made 25 years later, Hoban's novel proposes that in

order to resist control we must enter into the world of "shadows and obscurity" (Crary 2014: 19), and where Crary explores sleep as the last bastion of resistance to the demand for constant production, Hoban proposes that this is to be found by slipping into the space (the darkness) between images. Hoban's novel is remarkable not only for the manner in which it weaves together a philosophical questioning of the nature of time and reality, but also for the way in which it highlights the need for resistance (to the co-option of time and self by the sinister Corporation, who rule the universe) to a complete co-option of all time and space that so astutely foresees the crisis of neo-liberalism as a space-time with no outside.

The third operation of the flicker is to be found in Manuel De Landa's little known films from the mid to late 1970s, in which he uses radical editing techniques to produce a new relationship to time by completely severing the correlation between images and the continuities of time and space. To this end, De Landa's work attacks the *forced* conjoining of images that is imposed through continuity editing and enforced by capitalist institutions – a conjoining that De Landa proceeds to unpick one film at a time. De Landa takes on, and takes issue with, a single accepted film-editing technique in each of his films, proceeding to break apart the continuity produced through and by the use of that particular editing technique. In the case of his film, *Incontinence: A Diarrhetic Flow of Mismatches* (1973), De Landa takes apart sight-line matching; the result is near to absolute temporal and spatial confusion as the contiguities of space and their relationship to time, and chronological time's role in constructing spatial relations are completely disaggregated. It is worth reiterating the correlation that emerges in these works between the mechanics of vision and of image production and projection. In all three cases, image-movement is a constant and regulated *linear* movement that can be likened to the movement of frames of film through an analogue film projector and *also* to the projection of light across the eye that is then processed as image. Therefore Conrad, De Landa and Hoban's work acknowledges the potential of the flicker-image to re-forge our perceptual relationship with time (thus producing a form of time that is non-linear) and undermines or questions the shared certainties of this so-called "reality". This is to say, more explicitly, that the flicker-image harbours the potential for disobedience and resistance so that the forging of discontinuity is a resistant act that seeks to open up the possibilities for different inhabitations and understandings of time through its fabulation.

Flickering Jewels

A flash that breaks into and transports us out of time is what Tony Conrad sees when he first observes the myriad points of flickering light cast by the performer, Mario Montez's sequinned dress at a party held by the artist-filmmaker Jack Smith at the apartment that the three of them shared. It "created an incredibly luminous effect and froze Mario Montez when it was shone onto her" (MacDonald 2006: 65), Conrad recalls and his words create a vivid picture of an image snatched from movement and multiplied into an array of flickering points of light, each projecting and refracting their own polyphony of effects. Conrad's first encounter with Montez's flicker then led to experiments that involved Montez dancing in front of the beam of light emitted from a lensless projector. Again the image that Conrad paints of this is so evocative that it is easy to imagine being entranced by the magical array of lights emanating from Montez's sequins amidst other similarly glamorous invitees – particularly knowing the beauty and dream-like qualities of Smith's films such as *Flaming Creatures* (1963), which he had dedicated to the film star Maria Montez, Mario's namesake. Seeing the potential in Montez's flickering sequins, Conrad goes on to play with the frequency of light that shines upon Montez; "fiddling with the knobs" of the projector is the phrase used in one account although the origins of Conrad's subsequent film, *The Flicker,* have become somewhat mythologized (Shirley, 2009). In Smith's version of the story "Mario and the Flickering Jewel" ([i]), he himself also dangles a piece of green costume jewellery in front of the lens causing the light to "refract erratically from the green jewel, flickering violently across the room" (Shirley 2009). Yet what is clear is that for Conrad the flicker-image immediately opens the possibility for the expansion of experience through the flickering points of light, which he goes on to liken to journeying into another world or dimension.

Conrad has stated that his intention in making *The Flicker* was to create an event that the audience would understand as "going on – not just passing by" (MacDonald 2006: 70). This sense of event is partly enacted by a rather long seizure warning for epileptics, which is beautifully rendered in cursive-style handwriting and accompanied by a music hall style piano number, rather cheerful in mood – and referencing the use of such devices in early film screenings, which were often referred

to as the "flicks" and again highlighting the important role of flickering light. Interviewing Conrad, Scott MacDonald enquires whether the long duration of the warning is a deliberate gesture towards creating some kind of suspense at the start of the film. Conrad denies this, speaking of his concern to allow those who might fear having a fit time to leave the room but later admits that it was intended to create the space the screening as a space set apart from the everyday; a space to enter into as well as creating a sense of compliance, commitment and surrender in the viewer, as Conrad notes. And he further emphasises this sense of entering into another space-time, stating: "I wanted people to loose themselves and to understand they had lost themselves in that world" (MacDonald 2006: 66). Conrad's emphasis on the spatial dynamic of an event "taking place" highlights his intention to create a different temporal experience – "not just passing by" but entering into a distinct space-time which is not only produced by setting the space of the film screening apart from the everyday through the inclusion of the long credits but also, most importantly, through the operations of the flicker-image itself.

This space that is created by the operations of the flicker image is produced through a double movement of expansion and contraction at once – contraction into the image as a point of light that is cut from movement, on the one hand, and, on the other, the expansion outside of the image into another dimension. Thus we are transported away from the image via its excessive effects into a hallucinogenic experience of multiplying images and after-images, and at the same time the world contracts to the experience of the single points of light, not light, light, not light. Here the "cut" refers to interruptions and breaks that contrast to the continuity of film in which images are propelled through their relationship to each other. Here, the flicker-image can be considered both in the instant of its illumination — that is the little events of the individual flashes — and in relation to the *incorporeal* optical effects that the flicker-image produces. In this way, it is the *freezing* of Montez in the light of the projector and the visible breaking of the image into a series of tiny individual points of light of that is of the most interest to the development of the flicker-image.

To articulate the flicker-image as a "point" is to highlight its interruptive and disruptive aspect and to further emphasise the image that arrests or holds out against movement itself. This means that rather than considering the image as always connected and in movement, or as a form of montage in which the dynamics between images produce meaning, as in Deleuze's movement-image, the flicker-image acts

more like a singular point in time. It is a moment of projection that occurs in time but disrupts the ongoing, linear movement of time. Here the flicker-image operates as a kind of insistent point-like *now* that is inserted between the past and future. It is a *now* that is defined by its impossible limits rather than duration, and which breaks into the present which is fleeting and almost ungraspable: a point or prick in the movement of time rather than space, a single flicker of light, a single point of light appearing fleetingly upon a screen and crucially opening up a space that we might enter into. Yet at the same time, this singular image projected in the instant is expansive, producing a series of effects that emanate outwards from the point itself. We can visualise this as the psychedelic flashing of light that results from a strobe for example, where each point or flicker of light produces a doubling or tripling of the image. It is this multiplication of the effects of the flicker-image that is so fascinating especially considered in relation to Montez's sequins and, later, Conrad's film. This is because there is a possibility of transportation in and away from this single point of light towards what Conrad calls the "experiential excess" of the flickering light, an excess that transports, that produces other worlds. As Conrad has stated: "I've always thought of *The Flicker* as a bizarre science fiction movie, as a space that you can enter … and go floating off into some weird dimension and then come back." (MacDonald 2006: 66)

The question of perception and its limits is inherent to the composition of *The Flicker* and connects the film with early 20th Century experiments in neurology particularly those concerning the treatment and diagnosis of epilepsy, and most particularly Conrad's interest in the visions experienced by epileptics during a fit. Therefore while *The Flicker* draws upon parallels with musical composition and mathematics, the experiment with patterning and repetition – and the *disruption* of these patterns – that is explored in the film, is also a crucial aspect of this neurological research. As W Grey Walter points out in his book, *The Living Brain* (1953), which was influential to Conrad's work, there is a "synchronisation between the flicker an the brain rhythms." (Walter 1961: 92) And in the book, Walter describes how the scientists made a type of flicker-film themselves by projecting light through a turning wheel. The compositional structure of *The Flicker* speaks directly to the correlations between the mechanics of film and of visual perception by addressing the frequency at which the eye can detect light, which differs according to the structure of the eye, the type of light falling upon the eye (colour, black and white, moving or still) and the

point upon the eye that the light falls (frequency differs across the eye). This is seen most obviously in Conrad's piecing together of single frames within the overall movement of images, and his consideration of the role of rhythm, patterning and repetition in the processes of perception.

After his initial experiments with Smith and Montez, Conrad goes on to work on what becomes *The Flicker* on his own, and while the basis of the film seems so simple, so basic to film, and the image, itself – that movement between light and darkness, between white and black and black and white film frames – its planning and execution were complex and diagrammatic. Beginning from questions of composition, harmony and rhythm, Conrad, who was also a musician, ponders upon the "frequencies [of image movement] you would have to use in order to get flicker" and he pursues this question in a highly systematic way, working through calculations of frame rate, film speed, and, finally, through an intensive editing process that involves splicing hundreds of pieces of black and white film. The initial problem that Conrad recounts in the making of the film is the question of how to shoot white frames. He recalls that Jonas Mekas brought him a number of rolls of old negative film, and that shooting the black frames was simply a matter of covering the camera lens. However, exposing for the white frames so as only to get "projected light" proved more difficult than simply removing the lens of the camera as hoped. Finally, on a borrowed 16mm Bolex camera, Conrad succeeded in shooting 47 variations of black and white frames. Ten copies of this film were subsequently printed, which Conrad then cut and spliced into the final film, which contains 500 splices. Working with the constraints of 24 frames per second, the projection speed of a 16mm projector dividing the film strip into variations that will produce between three to 12 flickers per second depending upon the length of blocks of black and white frames used. *The Flicker* therefore develops through a mathematical structure (which highlights music's indebtedness to mathematics) in order to determine and to experiment with the limits of vision – that question of how many flickers of light per second the eye can see.

Montez's flickering sequins enabled Conrad to recognise the expansive effects of the flicker. As Conrad has noted, this is a moment of expansion and contraction at once, as, on the one hand, time is reduced to the instant of flickering light and, on the other, a new experience of time and space opens up. This can be understand as the intensity of experience that Conrad asks the viewer to enter into through the space of

the film, but also most importantly it is the breaking and remaking of time that takes the viewer on a journey from the myriad of individual flickering points of light in Montez's dress or Conrad's film to a new experience of time and space. Here the points of light act as a form of transportation by contracting time to the instant of illumination and then expanding it into other visuals effects. This is a space that might be called hallucinogenic, that might be attributed to a form of image referred to as a noosign (an image that exists only in our head) or likened to what Deleuze refers to as the Crystal Image of Time – a place in which the actual and virtual are drawn close together and time dominates (Deleuze 2005: 95-121). The domination of time over image-movement highlights another more mechanical aspect of the flicker that is suggested by Conrad's experimentation with projection speed and the inter-spacing of the film-frames. Here there is a direct link to neurological research in which the pace of the flickering light is observed acting to stimulate brain activity such that the experience of time is altered relative to the speeds of flickering light (or images). It is therefore the rhythm and speed of the points or flashes of light and crucially the distance between these flashes measured by the duration of darkness between them that produces this sense of time passing.

Flicker Time and Crazy Wipes

Excavating the relationship between flickering light, brain activity and the experience of time enables an opening up of the limits of chronological time that results in a time that is dependent upon the speed and frequency of flickering light; what we might term, flicker-time. Early neurological studies, such as those discussed by W Grey Walter (and read by Conrad), note a connection between the flickering of the eyelids, the stimulation of light and brain activity and the perception of time. And indeed, Walter reports in experiments to alter the rhythm or frequency of this flickering light: "Sometimes the sense of time is lost or disturbed. One subject said he had been 'pushed sideways in time – yesterday was at one side, instead of behind, and tomorrow was off the port bow'" (Walter 1961: 98). Here the disaggregation of time from its usual linear arrangement hints towards what might be recognised as a form of time-travel. René Thoreau Bruckner addresses this possibility in the essay "Travels in Flicker-Time (Madre!)", proposing that the flicker enables a form of time travel by

extending upon the neuro-scientific notion of critical flicker frequency to understand the moment in which the mind gives way to the breakdown of chronological time – or gets 'pushed sideways in time' (Walter 1961: 98). We also see this concept explored in Hoban's novel, *Fremder,* through the notion of the flicker-drive – the (fictional) means of travelling through vast distances of time and space by manipulating the brain of surgically conditioned people, called flicker-heads.

If we recognised that chronological time is, first and foremost, time arranged spatially and dominated by a linear trajectory or progression, the flicker is the breaking up of this ordered forwards movement. In this way, the flicker is then the repeated transmission of light broken up and constantly interrupted by moments of darkness, such that time is experienced not as duration nor as linear movement but as the "palpitation" of points of light (Bruckner) or the "pulses of cognition" that are inherent to the individual's ability to "self organise time perception" (Vimal and Davia 2008: 108). Thus consciousness is not experienced as continuous but as a series of successive pulses. In a scientific report on the relationship between phenomenal or experienced time and quantum or measurable time, Ram Lakhan Pandey Vimal and Christopher James Davia note that yoga practitioners develop a higher critical fusion frequency than others, which further highlights the mutability of our experience of time. Therefore these "pulses of cognition" point to the suggestion that time is relative and manipulable, and that consciousness itself might not be constant.

Bruckner postulates that it is the operation of critical flicker frequency that is at work in time travel as the ability to control the disruption of linear, spatially well-organised (chronological) time. He gives two examples to support his case for time travel in this manner. Firstly, he cites the 12th Century Fable of the Wolf and the Animals in which a wolf circumvents his two-year ban on hunting by speeding up time through the opening and closely of his eyelids to evoke the darkness of night and the brightness of a new day with each successive blink. "The Wolf's trick, his invention, is a device for moving things along by blinking, producing for himself a proto-cinematic, flickering picture", Bruckner notes (Bruckner 2008: 63). Secondly, Bruckner addresses H. G. Wells' novella *The Time Machine*, in which the protagonist, simply referred to as the Time Traveller invents a machine that allows him to travel through time and space. Well's novella, published shortly after the Lumière Brothers first revealed their cinematograph and RW Paul demonstrated his theatrograph, can be seen to refer directly to the invention of these cinematographic devices that transport

the viewer / operator out of the present in a way that is akin to jumping through time and space. In both examples, Bruckner suggests that time travel is the result of a "merging of glimpses" — the wolf rapidly opening and closing his eyes to speed up time, and the Time-Traveller in Wells' novella travelling through the operation of critical flicker frequency. What is significant in this "merging of glimpses" is the breaking down of a continuity of smooth image-movement to individual glimpses or pulses; these are akin to what I have referred to elsewhere as flashes, points or flickers of light. Here, the chronological trajectory of time is disrupted and replaced, not by an extended present, but with a non-linear version of time dominated by a succession of accelerated instants, glimpses, flickers, points, flashes of light. And there is again a correlation between the mechanics of visual perception and that of film projection.

In Hoban's novel *Fremder*, transportation through time and space via the image produces a world of flicker space, a world that is produced through the alternative "stilling" and movement of (frozen) images. Fremder, the novel's protagonist, is known as a flickerhead or a deepspacer — travelling via the flickering image. These journeys, which exceed what is possible in a regular human lifetime, are made possible by the implanting of an oscillator in Fremder's head. This enables Fremder's projection through time and space through what is termed, in the novel, "the jump" — the instant of projection into another space-time. This is fast-forward on a massive scale and echoes Bruckner's notion of time-travel through altering the speed of critical flicker frequency: speeding through time, driven by the flicker, flicker, flicker. In the novel, the flicker-drive transports deep-spacers through the galaxy, travel is simply the effects of speeding up or slowing down the rate of the flicker to enable the flickerhead's jump through time and space. However, in a sinister twist, the oscillation of the flicker is co-opted into the smooth space of Corporation control. This is a world that flickers constantly, a world in which the world pulse rate (WPR) governs the appearance of things and freedom itself might lie outside of this flickering appearance of a world. As Fremder's mother, Helen Gorn suggests, or hopes, it is perhaps not the flickering of images that provides the real disruption to the smooth co-joined space of the horizontal plane (the Corporation's absolute control in the novel) but, rather, the obverse space that is opened up by the appearance of the flicker — that is, the space *between* the appearance of images, *between* the flickering points of light and through the disentanglement of their relationship to time.[ii] Gorn, has been obsessed with the question of escape, and she experiments with the idea of

escaping in the gap between the images, that is, escaping between the pulses of the world appearing. While Gorn ultimately fails in her endeavour (she is unable to escape the totality of Corporation control), her research is useful for us because it suggests that rather than focussing upon the appearance of images — the moment of illumination or flicker — we could, instead, consider what lies outside of the image: what lies outside of the frame of the visible? Therefore rather than the point of light and its relative speed of transmission and reception, it is perhaps the surrounding points of not-light, or not-image, that provide a real rupture or disruption to the continuing flow and appearances of the image.

Both Hoban's novel and Bruckner's postulations on time travel and critical flicker frequency tie the experience of time to the mechanics of perception so that time might be slowed down or sped up, or even frozen, yet these interruptions are still predicated upon an idea of chronological time, time that moves forward or backwards in a linear manner – easy to envisage as a strip of film running through a film projector either fast forwards or in reverse. Particularly in Bruckner's example, time travel is analogous to the action of fast-forwarding through images to get through time more quickly. Contrary to this, Fremder also speaks of the "jump" as the act of being launched into an entirely non-contiguous time and space. This could be seen to link with another film technology or in this case, technique, that is the use of the jump-cut in film-editing where time is advanced – or jumped forward – through the use of a non-continuous but still linked shot. De Landa takes this even further in his film work through the violent refutation of continuity editing techniques that seek to question and ultimately *break* the relationship between image-movement and continuous, chronological time. Through his use of radical editing techniques in films such as *Incontinence: A Diarrhetic Flow of Mismatches* (1978), De Landa creates a disjunction between image and the narrative movement of time by using editing techniques that will destroy the link between image and image, image and reaction or response, and the spatialisation of time.

In *Incontinence* any sense of linear time, the groundedness of being-in-time, is completely ruptured, as time is cut up into a series of pieces that seem to be randomly pasted together. De Landa's approach focuses upon a single form of editing — in this case, sight-line matching — and through the use of repetition, he exaggerates and subverts the construction of a unified space and time to the point of the ridiculous, thus defying the homogenising possibilities of the technique and returning the "life"

and "energy" to what he calls, "film's wet body" suggesting film's own slippery mutability (Halter 2011). The result, for the viewer, is a nauseating sense not of groundlessness but of being forcefully and constantly *ungrounded* from any stable connection with time and space: the notion of the "jump" therefore seems highly appropriate to explain this experience – although in film editing, the jump cut does involve a sense of connection often through continuity of subject or only vary slight variations of camera angle. *Incontinence*, however, violently disrupts the spatialisation of time through the mis-use of matching techniques — that is, through emphasis on image-to-image movement. Refusing the spatialisation of time by breaking the cause-effect relationship that links action in the present to that of the immediate future such as site line matching in which the protagonist looks out of the frame in the direction of the next scene thus producing continuity from one scene to the next. The fact that this film is composed from scenes from the well-known play and film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (Edward Albee, 1966) means that an even greater sense of narrative confusion and structural incontinence is achieved. Recognisable scenes from the play are enacted repeatedly — with actors switching roles and locations, dialogue is fragmented as so on, during each replay of the same scene undoing the expectations of gender, role and script. This fragmentation emphasises time as a series of ruptured moments.

De Landa works through a repertoire of "crazy wipes", pixellated transitions and other "fancy optical transitions" in his films in order to create this discontinuous space-time (Rosenbaum 2009). Mapping De Landa's use of these editing techniques is to understand the manner in which he approaches frames of film (he was working with 8mm then mostly 16mm film and later video) as singular units to be pieced together in no predetermined order, and film itself as a mutable form to be freed from the constraints of an enforced linearity. Many of the effects that De Landa uses, particularly in the early work, involve hand-painted wipes, effects that are drawn onto the film strip and which create the sense of De Landa himself reaching into the space between images (or between frames) or of entering into the spaces between the flickering reality that Fremder experiences. *Incontinence*, for example, is organised into eight separate scenes taking pieces of dialogue from Albee's play, dialogue that is repeated within each scene (as mentioned previously). The disruption to the continuity editing technique of sight-line matching is also played out through the breaking up of space and time within each scene and in the transition between scenes through the

action taking place such as shifting gender roles, replay, reversal and mirroring of space (people drop in and out of the frame from above and below, they speak to interlocutors in a previous or an ensuing scene and so on), and through intervention into the film strip itself in the form of the removal of frames (creating a flickering effect), as well as the use of De Landa's "crazy wipes" (vertical, horizontal and diagonal transitions across frames).

Slippery Pixels and Flicker-Points: Final Fabulations and the GIF

To exit time's flow, to disrupt the continuous movement of time through a flicker of light or through the imperceptible shadows between flickering images is an impossibility for many of us in our current psycho-physical form; it is therefore what I would term, a type of fabulation – a possible-impossible. Fabulation is a term often associated with literary analysis to describes forms of narrative and their relationship to time, yet here, I evoke, the term "fabulation" as an operation of possibility that is not yet possible, an action that is intimately bound up with time itself – an action that projects *out of* time. In this essay, fabulation is bound up within the technical operation of the flicker to create a new time and space, and in this way the flicker-image enables a time and space that exceeds and evades the possibilities available to it and to us, and that calls forth a new understanding of time and the image that is not simply bound by the limits of "real" or already existing. Yet fabulation and by association, the flicker or flicker-image, is bound up with questions of "political meaning" (Bogue 2010: 14 quoting Deleuze); in questioning the possibilities for an escape *through* time is to evoke the form of control that is inherent to state of constant production and "the ends of sleep" that Crary invokes in the title of his book, and to find a time that resists or at least disrupts the entropic space of time's flow.

As we have seen, the flicker-image is exercised in three ways in the work of Conrad, Hoban and De Landa. This is firstly through the image that cuts or freezes motion and in doing so produces a polyphony of effects that take you "floating off into some weird dimension" as Conrad suggests in relation to his film, *The Flicker*. Second is the opening up of a space outside of image-to-image dynamics, a space between images, as we have seen in Hoban's narrative. Here our attention is drawn to the normalisation, or standardisation, of time through what is referred to in the novel

as the WPR and the possibilities for the organisation of time outside of this standardisation. It is the potential for slowing down or speeding up the flickering of images in order to travel through time or escape through the gaps between "flickering reality". The capacity to remake the temporal relationship between images as De Landa does in his work, is the third operation of the flicker-image that we have addressed. It is the question of fabulation, however, – the flicker-image as a kind of fabulation, occupying that space in between what is and what could be – that differentiates the flicker-image from other attempts to identify a contemporary format for thinking about images and their operations such as Patricia Pister's neuro-image and Steven Shaviro's notion of post-continuity. Pister's neuro-image is largely read through narrative and thematic devices within cinema, and Shaviro's post-continuity identifies a particular prevalent non-continuous editing device, aesthetic and structural form in films such as *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2013). (Shaviro's non-continuity is of course coherent with the discordant editing used by De Landa in his films.) The flicker-image is indebted to these strategies, and as Pisters and Shaviro suggest it is important that we find a way for understanding the operations of the image within our contemporary context. Yet the flicker-image is an impossible image rather than simply a reading of the current symptoms of an image; it is therefore productive, doing something in the world. It is an image that we might inhabit, travel through and with, an image that produces the possibility of another space-time outside the expanding space of control that is characterised by Crary as "duration without breaks" and "beyond clock time" (Crary 2014: 8); it is "an illuminated world without shadow." (Crary 2014: 9)

We live amidst an accumulation of now-times – live broadcasts, snapchats, insta-everything trapping us in an ever-expanding present – the "illumination" and "duration without breaks" of which Crary speaks. This is a present that is governed by the linear logic of accumulation of "now" and "next", of moving forward and going nowhere. What then would be a contemporary equivalent for the flicker-image that updates the mostly analogue technology (both human and machine) of the flicker to the digital? And could the flicker-image with its focus upon a space-time of "points" and "cuts" offer any potential for resistance today in a world that is saturated by a constant present? Born as a marketing device at control central, the GIF is a hybrid format composed of a series of still images put into motion. The GIF's composition and the fact that it can be broken down – *slowed* down – to reveal it constituent parts

(single still images) opens up possibilities for escape into the "black between images" or the spaces between a controlled "reality" as that proposed by Hoban in his novel *Fremder*. (Hoban 2003: 9) Crucial here too is the element of time and its relationship to the image, because in order to be coherent as a moving image the GIF requires a consistent run speed therefore to slow down the run speed is to open up the spaces between the individual images from which the GIF is composed and thus undoing the smooth continuity between images. Perhaps, then, entering into the space-time of the GIF – if such a world were possible – would be to enter into the discordant space of the stuttering freeze-frame (of VHS technologies) and other flicker-images in which time and time perception is remade in a way that contrasts with the constant movement and seamless flow of images.

Could the GIF offer an additional operation for the flicker-image, for the way in which it offers alternative space-time that differs from the constantly expansionist attitude of the corporate (Corporation, in Hoban's novel) production of images? For example, in a recent article, neuro-scientists have reported that the rate at which the human eye can process flickers of light is much higher than previously thought – operating at a rate of up to 500hz in relation to certain forms of image display. HD screens have been working at progressively higher and higher speeds (currently operating at average speeds of 120hz), yet the demand for a higher and higher flicker fusion rates (also known as "refresh rates") to avoid "the flicker" suggests a process of adaption and cooption across all fronts – flesh, image and digital. Similarly GIFs, which were initially imbued with a "poor" aesthetic through their commonality and accessibility (akin to what Hito Steyerl has termed the "poor image"), have become increasingly finessed – a process that has involved closing the gap between the single still images that make up the GIF and thus removing the potential for flicker and further co-opting spaces of resistance… Within contemporary imaging technologies the so-called intrusion of a flicker at the edge of a screen or through variegated transmission rates is termed an *artefact*. This term immediately reinforces the alternative space-time of the flicker-image, if we were to think of the flicker as this undermining of the smooth spaces of control, by introducing a more complex temporality; *artefact* suggesting the intrusion of a lag, a past time or an alter-time into the endless expansionist present of corporate control. Therefore, while much digital technology works on the gathering of pixels (also flashes of light) always at faster and faster speeds and smoother accumulations, the flicker-image (whether GIFs, freeze-

frame or single film-frame repeated) provides us with an alternate space-time – a time that we might enter into and occupied through flicker-points and their multiplying effects, or through the opening of the dark-matter between flickering-points.

My goal in this essay is the liberation of time from constant linear movement, and, in doing so, opens up the fabulous renditions of space-time that are at work in Conrad and De Landa's films and Hoban's novel. This is the flicker – Light. Not-light. Light. Not-light – as a single point, a cut, a flash of light that breaks into the rhythmic transmission of light as it falls upon our eyes. It is the flash that breaks the pattern of looped repetition that is at the heart of the mechanics of vision. Light. Not-light. Light. Not-light. It is this single flash rather than a continuum of flashes that has the potential to undo the mechanics of vision and of visioning in which both the production and transmission of images is conceived through continuing movement – the pattern of relations that binds image to image, and the flicker of an eye-lid to perception. The flicker isolates the image from continuous movement, cuts or breaks into the continual forward movement of time. To recast the flicker as a single point of light, a cut, a flash of light that disrupts to rhythmic transmission of light as it falls upon our eyes is to mess with time and time perception. And to ask where freedom from time's movement might lie.

REFERENCES

Bogue, Ronald (2010), *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bruckner, René Thoreau. "Travels in Flicker-Time (Madre!)" in *Spectator* 28:2, Fall 2008.

Crary, Jonathan (2014), *24/7*. London and New York: Verso.

Davis, James and Hsieh, Yi-Hsuan and Lee, Hung-Chi (2015), "Humans perceive flicker artefacts at 500hz" in *Scientific Reports* 5, Article number: 7861, 2015.

Deleuze, Gilles (1997), *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, Gilles (2005), *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London and New York: Continuum.

Halter, Ed . "Abstract Machines: Nonlinear dynamics and the films of Manuel DeLanda", *Moving Image Source*, March 2011. Accessed via: http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/abstract-machines-20110304 Last Accessed 13 February 2013.

Hoban, Russell (2003), *Fremder*. London: Bloomsbury.

Kulbelka, Peter. Talk at the British Film Institute, London, April 9, 2013.

MacDonald, Scott (2006), "Tony Conrad: On the Sixties". *A Critical Cinema 5: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London, England: University of California Press.

Metzinger, Thomas (2003), *Being No One*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: MIT Press.

Pisters, Patricia (2015), "Temporal Explorations in Cosmic Consciousness: Intra-Agental Tanglements and the Neuro-Image". *Cultural Studies Review*, volume 21 no. 2 September 2015, pp. 120-144.

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Manuel De Landa", in *Film: The Front Line* (Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1983). Accessed via: http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=16037 Last accessed August 29, 2016.

Sellars, John (2007), "Aion and Chronos: Deleuze and the Stoic Theory of Time". *Collapse*, 2007, 3, pp. 177-205.

Shirley, David (2009), "Jack Smith, Les Evening Gowns Damnées and Silent Shadows on Cinemaroc Island (Table of Elements 1997)" in *The Brooklyn Rail*, May 7 1997.

Vimal, Ram Lakhan Pandey and Davia, Christopher James (2008), "How long is a piece of time? Phenomenal Time and Quantum Coherence, Towards a Solution". *Quantum Biosystems*, 2008, 2, pp. 102-151.

Walter, W. Grey (1961), *The Living Brain*, Middlesex, England and Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books.

ARTWORKS
Tony Conrad, *The Flicker* (1966)
30 minutes, 16mm film, black and white, sound.

Manuel De Landa, *Incontinence*: *A Diarrhetic Flow of Mismatches* (1973)
18 minutes, 16mm film, colour, sound.

i Included in volume 2 of the CD collection of Smith's work *56 Ludlow Street 1962-4* but also recounted by Conrad in interview with MacDonald (MacDonald 2006)

ii Despite, the multi-temporalities and the inter-galactic travel that occurs in the novel, *Fremder*, there is an over-riding sense of the containability of time and space. Although written before the advent of HD digital technologies, this rendering of time and space as smooth and containable (despite time travel), is reminiscent of the flatness of the HD image in which there is no space outside of the frame but instead, a continuing stream of image-code. The hyper-reality of the HD image is the result of a process of constant augmentation — the perfect of code and coding — into an ever-more seamless presence of images — a hyper horizontal state perhaps.