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# Invisible Culture

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## Introduction: The Loop as a Temporal Form

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As a form, the loop contradicts the linear structure we typically associate with time. The common-sense formulation understands time as a progression forward from moment to moment to moment, with a clear division of past, present and future. Yet many theories contradict this apparent truism. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, for example, organize time into *chronos* and *aeon*. Greg Hainge, a contributor to this issue, writes that the latter continually and simultaneously divides the event into the already-there and the not-yet here, while failing to settle on either. This describes a loop folding back on itself, while not returning to its place of origin. Elsewhere, Jacques Derrida uses this failure of origins to structure a system of ethics grounded in an attempt to elude the eternal return of the same. While Deleuze, Guattari and Derrida insist on this failure in their use of the loop as a temporal form, Sigmund Freud understands time in terms of telos and its failure. In other words, absent a forward progression through, for example, mourning, the individual is doomed to circle back repeatedly to the lost object. Both formulations of the loop, one that either returns or does not return to its origins, are at work in this issue's articles.

In addition to work done within psychoanalysis and philosophy, use of the loop as a temporal form has surfaced repeatedly in various artforms, such as music, video art and film. In brief, the loop is an act of editing that involves the telling and retelling of a narrative. Thus,

as a form, the loop potentially sets in motion patterns that reconfigure the boundaries of space, time and perception within the work. As a form, the loop binds and separates, and refuses a single shape. There are manifold possibilities for its modeling: it could be a moebius strip, a figure eight, a succession of rings, or a cat's cradle. Intrinsic to the temporal quality of the loop is a deep, dreamy pulse that imbues even the weakest work that uses this structure with a persuasive power.

Philosophy and works of art are not the only sites where the loop emerges. Umberto Eco describes Italian viewing habits of popular film, where one enters a theatre at any point, then stays to see the film again from the moment where the audience member entered the narrative. <sup>1</sup> For Eco, film, like life, continually retraces events that have already occurred. The participant in a loop can let the (potentially) perpetual story unfold, either viewing the unresolvedness as an end in itself, or waiting for the cathartic moment to return again and again.

As the papers in this issue demonstrate, either as a closed cycle or a form that folds back on itself without returning to the beginning, the loop is a temporal form whose length may be chosen by the viewer, produce catharsis, evoke a dreamlike state, mimic everyday life, or all of the above. Spanning a broad range of tactics and subjects, they all bring the loop as a temporal form front and center. Miriam Bankovsky's essay begins the issue. She draws out the argument that Derrida can only ethically pay homage to Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy by *failing* to properly acknowledge it. This to pay homage to Levinas' description of the encounter between the Self and the unknown Other, where the self reaches out to the other in a gesture that welcomes the Other's absolute alterity. This intent can only be realized through the rhetorical structure of the loop, or as Bankovsky puts it, the circle that loses its way. In other words, to be truly ethical knowledge of the encounter cannot circle back on and be fully restituted to the Self.

Like Bankovsky, Greg Hainge argues that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the time of aeon depends

on a loop that does not return to its origins. For Hainge, most works of art, such as short, looped movies depend on beginnings and ends that are imperfectly fused together. Rather, Hainge argues, a better example of a Deleuzian/Guattarian loop can be found in Noto's (Carsten Nicolai) *Endless Loop Edition (2)*, a sonic work made up of a sonic work made up of two records, each ten inches in diameter, whose grooves are etched concentrically and whose discs have two holes into which to insert the turntable's spindle. The resulting aural effect presents difference itself while producing a constant tone. For Hainge, the drone music of Phil Nillblock takes Noto's project further into Deleuzian difference and repetition by fully enveloping the listener, removing him or her from the temporal coordinates of everyday life and immersing them in an aeonic relation to time.

A philosophically similar argument about a different object is framed in Jaimey Hamilton's examination of the art video loop. She asserts that the video loop's predetermined time length forces spectators to become aware of their own volition, by introducing new spectatorial habits into the exhibition space. In recent examples of this form, Paul Pfeiffer and Douglas Gordon rework commercial films such as *Risky Business* and *Psycho* into video loops. The resulting loops by Pfeiffer and Gordon, *The Pure Products go Crazy* and *24 Hour Psycho* respectively extract a fragment of the film and repeat it endlessly, and take the original film and extend it to twenty-four hours. Through this repetition and extension of the commercial footage, Hamilton argues, these works prompt the spectator to recognize his or her hypnotized state. Consequently, the flow of capitalism is diverted away from the usual channels of absolute repetition and into a Deleuzian form of difference and repetition.

Alanna Thain describes a temporal loop of the transformation of memory and paramnesia involving the stretching of time that is repeated even as it is experienced in David Lynch's *Lost Highway*. Thain emphasizes the use of a variety of technologies within

Lynch's diegesis such as answering machines and surveillance video that create a temporality within the film continually looping back on itself in a cycle of composition and decomposition. For Thain, this folding of time transforms both the viewer of the film and the character in the film into spectator and participant, and vice versa.

For Eric Sonstroem, the temporal form of the loop is a vital part of his consideration of the politics of public mourning. Beginning with Freud's distinction between healthy mourning and unhealthy melancholia in the individual's process of grief, as he points out, the opposite is true in public life. Through the use of symbols, such as monuments, as well as dates that can be returned to on an annual basis, Sonstroem argues that paradoxically, healthy public memory formation takes on the repetitive structure of melancholic mourning. How otherwise-marginalized groups originate their own structures of repetitive public mourning, using monuments of their own devising, forms the core of Sonstroem's article.

The issue concludes with an essay by André Gaudreault and Nicolas Dulac, who argue for a reconsideration of the notion of cinema of attractions, or as they phrase it, *cinématographie-attraction*. Their reformulation of the phrase, typically credited to Tom Gunning in English-language publications, is intended to distinguish their object of investigation from a form of filmic practice commonly held to have emerged in 1895. Instead, Gaudreault and Dulac stress the appearance of *cinématographie-attraction* through the toys and optical devices prevalent in the late 19th century, such as the phenakistoscope and the zoetrope. What defines these toys, they argue, is a series of technical limitations that result in circularity and repetition that blend together beginnings and ends, resulting in the refusal of narrative. What thus emerges is the pull of *attraction*, or a way of presenting a series of views to an audience that fascinate strictly based on their illusory power.

1. Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 64-65 ↑

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