

Not I Video

The distance between the maker's hand, eye and camera is a compelling aspect of Jamie Jenkinson's iPhone videos. In contrast to the distance between the separate, semi-professional roles of the director, cameraman and production crew, which various artist-filmmakers have recently adopted, Jenkinson's videos are the work of one person that are made on the spot. At the same time, they are not made in the mode of the visionary filmmaker who works with a camera clamped to his eye. Rather than focusing, or extending, the eyesight of the maker, the camera is treated as if it were an almost independent device, outputting an unexpected signal.

Camcorders are often used with a flipped-out viewfinder, held at a distance of maybe a foot from the eye, but Jenkinson's videos seem mostly to be shot at arm's length. Given that the camera often sweeps back and forth across objects and surfaces at speed, there's little chance that he can see what he's shooting until after the fact. Despite the name and nature of the camera, the method of shooting undermines any affirmation of the 'I' (or 'i') in connection with the vision of the artist: the eye of the maker is missing from the dynamic of hand-camera-coordination.

Shooting with an iPhone could be construed as a gimmick. There was a spate of artists' videos that were made on mobile phone-cameras when they first arrived on the market, making a meal of the default compression codecs that produced low-resolution, pixelated imagery. In the age of increasingly ubiquitous high-definition imagery the early phone-camera gave one a ready-made alternative aesthetic. It is conceivable that the distorted graphic forms, which are the hallmark of Jenkinson's videos, could have been produced by another camera with similar sensor settings. The fact that they're shot on a mass-market consumer device is a significant and telling factor of the work however, because they disrupt a means of representation and subvert the scopic regime (the network of digital media that sell individuals the means of producing their own identities) that the technology reproduces.

In a small number of videos the camera is held fairly still before a subject that produces intriguing motion effects: rotating fan blades or flapping butterfly wings, for example, where the camera's scanning rate makes continuous motion intermittent. In most pieces the camera whips back and forth across surfaces and objects such as gates, fences, blinds, shutters, and plants on a windowsill, transforming them into unstable patterns of light and colour. The electronic vision technology can't keep pace with the fast motion and so produces distorted and discontinuous image streams.

In a number of pieces the subject matter is analogous with the rolling shutter and scanning signal of the video image. In *Bed Sheet* (2014) a striped bedsheet, when tracked by the camera, makes for a tumbling graphic pattern that calls to mind the video signal's scan lines. The same analogy is at play in *Paradise* (2014) the subject of which is a set of white blinds, though in this piece the camera spins so that the scanned lines also rotate. The affinity sought between technology and subject matter calls to mind some of the work of Nicky Hamlyn (who taught Jenkinson) especially his recent videos that involve moiré patterns.

Theoretically, the same point could be made inexhaustibly. Abstract imagery can be generated almost automatically; the intellectual/formal analogy that can be drawn between content and technology can be made over and over again with different examples. Jenkinson's pursuits emphatically avoid this fate where pieces involve a transformation of the material - where the work finds a form of poetic communion between the camera and object: *Plants on Windowsill III* (2014) mixes swathes and patches of green, yellow, brick pink, white and black in striking

combinations, interrupted by the curved forms of plant pot tops and the window ledge; in *Elmslie Point* (2014) and *Structure I* (2012) concrete and steel, a tower block and crane respectively, are twisted and bowed so that they are transformed into sine waves and figures of eight. In *Bend Gate* (2014) the black iron bars of a railing shift, multiply and swap places; and in *Shutter* (2013) a security fence is converted, through the moving camera, into a graphic pattern of hollow white lozenges and triangles on a shifting ground of yellow, turquoise and ochre. *Butterfly Garden* (2013) rearranges the hard, sharply defined silhouette of palm fronds into crisscrossed overlapped edges and apertures reminiscent of a view through the slits of a spinning zoetrope. The questions that Jenkinson's work prompts - about how video camera-vision works - aren't superseded by the alluring effects that they create. None of the pieces are reducible to an effect, but there are key pieces where the aesthetic investigation is particularly absorbing.

The role of the hand of the maker, implicit in most of Jenkinson's videos, is explicit and visible in a few pieces. In *Bendy Pencil* (2014) we see his hand jiggling a pencil, between fingers and thumb, the lag of the camera creating an image of the pencil that arcs. *Apple* (2012) involves a hand throwing an apple up towards the camera phone. The piece produces a curious illusion that makes the apple look as if it's being thrown from above the camera, and bouncing back into the hand; a dull reverberant 'clonk' sounds when the apple hits the camera's mic and the overexposed hit of colour turns the red and green to yellow-rimmed white.

Earlier films and videos that come to mind here include Joan Jonas's *Vertical Hold* (1972), Woody Vasulka's *Vocabulary* (1973) and Wojciech Bruszewski's *Matchbox* (1975). The opening of Jonas's *Vertical Hold* has a sharp percussive sound, apparently emanating from the video monitor being struck, as the vertical hold setting sends the picture rolling down the screen on a repeat cycle. *Vocabulary* is one in a number of pieces by Woody and Steina Vasulka that uses various means to bend and contort the video signal. This particular piece incorporates an image of a protruding, feeling hand to suggest the room for three-dimensional, tactile space in the context of an image plane that is otherwise completely redefined. Bruszewski's film involves a shot of a hand holding a matchbox and tapping it on a table, a shot of a windowsill, and a dull sound that synchs, at first, with the matchbox coming down. As the two shots are repeated the sound slowly shifts its relative position, only coming back into synch at the conclusion of the film. None of these pieces involves the hand of the maker as an affirmation of the ego of the artist, in the manner associated with, for example, the myth of self-expression that Stan Brakhage perpetuated. The image of the hand in action is encompassed in processes, which are always at the fore.

The correspondence between action, gesture and expression in Brakhage's somatic camera films, and likewise his hand-painted films, take a cue from the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock. The saving grace of Pollock's paintings is the fact that the definitive actions inscribed in the surface of, say, *One: Number 31* (1950) are multiple, overlapping and at certain points indistinguishable. Brakhage's films often have multiple superimposed layers, but in contrast to the surface of a painting, the reference points of gestures, actions and marks in or on a film are only projections. Being transitory, a material reference is harder to point to.

The question of the degree to which one identifies with a filmmaker's actions recurs again and again in the context of writing by Peter Gidal. His own films seek to undermine identification with the filmmaker's actions through the use of repeated gestures, and repeat takes, suggesting the absence of an original defining action. Another filmmaker who finds a different way out of the same problem is Jennifer

Nightingale, whose pinhole films share a superficial similarity with Jenkinson's videos. Since 2001 Nightingale has been making a series of pinhole films in which she has replaced the lens of a camera with a pinhole. An early film in the series was made by using a pinhole covering the aperture of a Super 8 cartridge, winding the film through the cartridge with a hairpin. For subsequent 16 mm films she used a hand-cranked camera, while the most recent pieces have been made with a 400ft 16mm magazine and pinhole lens.

The similarity with Jenkinson's videos is in the slippage and mis-registration of imagery as a result of the gestures that the film transcribes. The difference between the two practices concerns specific actions and how they use their technologies. Jenkinson's pieces usually involve one uninterrupted take, which starts and ends with the action of his arm movements, recorded at 25 frames per second. Nightingale's hand-winding of the film, through a magazine that otherwise remains more or less stable, produces an intermittent and inconsistent means of recording. It's only in projection that a stable timebase of 24 frames per second is imposed; there are no frames on the filmstrip itself. Nightingale's work suggest a very direct means of recording a filmmaker's gestures, but transcribed in projection the film itself is extraordinarily abstract: a light-object experienced in time rather than a straightforward record of the pro-filmic event.

As in filmmaking, video needn't involve a camera either. The colour bars used by broadcast technicians, generated from a synthetic electronic signal in a voltage that corresponds to graded steps, are a prime example. Computer-generated graphics are likewise generated as if from nowhere. In so far as 'video', from the Latin 'I see', is still a fitting term to describe abstract time-based screen space, as opposed to footage of video-camera recordings, the act of seeing might be conceived as a matter of what the audience is up to, as much as the eye or vision of the maker. But a work that affirms the ego of the viewer is as troubling a proposition as a work that rests on assertions concerning the vision of the artist. The culture industry rests on the capacity that film and video technology has to encourage the viewer's identification; a sway that runs through cinema, television and advertising.

In this light, a video work that looks to undermine identification isn't a matter of swapping representational, camera-recorded imagery for pared abstraction. As relevant to video as it was to film, there's a line of Peter Gidal's that runs: 'empty screen' is no less signficatory than 'carefree smile'. Processes involving abstract forms are something I've been working through myself in a number of pieces, always with the sense that too easily identifiable forms and planes are something to work against. The nature of viewing involves orientating one's self in terms of recognisable patterns and stable objects of perception, which we latch on to. Art ought to contest that process. With film and video the impression of a stable object is a false impression in any case, because the picture plane is only ever a temporary surface, even when it's constantly refreshed.

None of the film and video-makers mentioned here fit the mould of the visionary artist, whose work represents an expressive, highly subjective stance. Nor have they flirted with the trappings of narrative structure and aesthetics of presence that run through so much recent work by British 'moving image artists'. The 'moving image' is a term their work takes to task in fact: more often than not the impression of movement is counterintuitive or contradictory; processes seldom produce stable images and they are certainly not conceived in terms of their being 'moving' or affective. They also undermine the value currently ascribed to the term 'artist' I would argue. The work that I have referred to here isn't about the artist, nor does it

represent the artist's commentary on contemporary culture. The activity of the viewer is the thing, and even then the aim is to undermine assumptions.