The Experimental Film Remake and the Digital Archive Effect: *A Movie by Jen Proctor* and *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake*

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When we think of film remakes, what come to mind are likely Hollywood narratives reproduced with new stars, more special effects, and bigger budgets, whose producers hope to cash in on a tried and true formula "updated" to suit the tastes of contemporary audiences. Recently, however, a number of experimental filmmakers have chosen quite different sources to "update." Over the past few years filmmakers Jennifer Proctor and Perry Bard have returned to classics of experimental film to "remake" these provocative works in and for the digital era. Jennifer Proctor's *A Movie by Jen Proctor* (US, 2010) uses images from online file-sharing sites to mimic Bruce Conner's classic 1958 experimental film *A Movie,* while Perry Bard's *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* (ongoing since 2008) uses online interactive software to allow users worldwide to upload images and participate in a collective, daily remake of Dziga Vertov's seminal 1929 film *Man with a Movie Camera.* Given that experimental film often encourages the viewer to explore the very experience of viewing a film, these digitally based remakes of experimental films inevitably draw attention not only to how the world that is imaged within them has changed but also to how our experiences of that world through its reproduction as image have been altered by digital media.

The form of the remake allows us to see both similarity and difference as they emerge across time. As Laura Grindstaff has noted, writing about the more mainstream form of remake mentioned above, "The remake is . . . a rich site for critical analysis precisely because its derivative status, its very secondariness and duplicity forces a certain assessment of conventional notions of authorship, authenticity,

and originality. On the one hand, the existence of a remake only seems to confirm the fact that originality lies elsewhere—in the other, prior text. On the other hand, the remake helps expose originality as a relative, not absolute, concept."[1]

These two shot-for-shot remakes explicitly reveal the fact that their "origin" lies in an "other, prior text"; that is precisely their point. More significantly, however, I would argue that these two films in their "secondariness" point to the "relative" experience of watching similar images produced through different moving-image media, indicating the ways in which digital media technologies have altered the very conditions of knowledge about the world—both past and present—as it is obtained through images. By appropriating images either from digital archives in *A Movie by Jen Proctor* or into a digital work in *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake,* these filmmakers draw attention to the ways in which digital media have reshaped both our experience of watching a film—experimental and otherwise—and our experience of the world through its reproduction as images. In this essay, I argue that these two "remakes" offer an opportunity for us to think through the ways in which digital media produce a mediated experience of the world both similar to and different from the mediated experience of the world produced by filmic images.

A Movie by Jen Proctor

In 1958, Bruce Conner's *A Movie* radically disrupted notions of authorship while simultaneously drawing attention to the materiality of the filmic image and performing an incisive critique of the relationship between film images and the spectacle of human violence and destruction. Drawing on previously shot or "found" film footage from a variety of sources, including films commercially produced for the home market, Conner crafted a twelve-minute reflection of the contemporary cinematic unconscious, bringing together pieces of footage—of motorcycle accidents, women undressing, atomic explosions, and a charging elephant, to name only a few—that would likely never have found one another otherwise.[2] Fifty-two years later, experimental filmmaker Jennifer Proctor replicated Conner's film in and for the digital era in *A Movie by Jen Proctor* (2010). Using the same soundtrack—Ottorino Respighi's 1924 *Pines of Rome*—Proctor constructed a (nearly) shot-for-shot remake of *A Movie* using video images downloaded from the video-sharing sites YouTube and LiveLeak.[3] Juxtaposed against Conner's film, Proctor's remake reveals the play of similarities and differences between the contents and form of the specifically *filmic* archive—which includes films found in home movie collections and flea markets as well as in official archives—in 1958 and of the *digital* archive of images available on the Internet for appropriation in 2010.[4] Moreover, it simultaneously offers the opportunity

to reflect on the very different experiential effects documents derived from the *material* filmic archive and the *immaterial* digital archive offer as they are appropriated into experimental films.

Throughout its history, *A Movie* has provoked discussion and speculation about the effects it may have on the viewer. William Moritz and Beverly O'Neill describe the film as a polysemic exploration of the filmic medium, arguing that, "In the hands of another artist, *A Movie* might have become a didactic, apocalyptic message film, but Conner manages to open up his material to richer meanings, rather than pull in tight on a single denotation."[5] Other theorists have also seen within Conner's film the revolutionary potential for a new kind of spectatorship or a new relationship between film and viewer. Writing for the Walker Art Center's retrospective of Conner's work entitled *2000 BC: The Bruce Conner Story, Part II* (of which there was no part I), Bruce Jenkins writes that "It would be Conner's singular contribution to remove the viewer from the [experimental filmmaker Stan] Brahkagean paradigm—from a close encounter, that is, with the personal vision of the filmmaker—and from Hollywood's third-person, omniscient fictions as well. The result would be a completely novel viewing experience that might best be termed 'second-person film,' continually addressing itself to the experience of 'you,' the film viewer, through an active reworking of the already coded and manipulated cultural material of the movies."[6]

In contrast to Jenkins' notion of the second-person film, however, Jennifer Horne has argued that, despite or perhaps because of its parody of continuity editing, Conner's film suggests that the address of any film—including and especially that of *A Movie*—is impossible to locate. She writes,

> Against the haunting accompaniment of Respighi's 1923–24 composition, *Pines of Rome,* the action of one shot seems to set off a reaction in the one that follows, in the time-honored manner of Hollywood. On closer view, however, the frames retain their value as stock imagery. The spectator's desire for logic is repeatedly frustrated and rewarded as sequences are interrupted by countdown leaders and blank frames; at one point the "end of part four" appears on the screen, startling a viewer who had not realized there were any parts at all. The unsettling proposition that Conner makes with *A Movie* is that in its efforts to speak directly to its spectator, film must speak to no one in particular.[7]

While these theorists put forth different interpretations of the relationship *A Movie* establishes with the viewer, it is clear that the film poses questions about how the viewer may respond to this or similar gatherings of cinematic fragments.

The notions of polysemy, second-person film, and a film that frustrates viewers' desire for logic or a coherent address resonate with experimental found

footage films—including *A Movie by Jen Proctor*—from later eras as well. However, John P. Bowles notes the specificity of Conner's films to the particular social and historical context in which they were made, suggesting that "It is the specific ways that Conner's assemblages combine objects of postwar American consumer culture to interrogate the interrelatedness of consumerism, the mass media, the military-industrial complex, and compulsory heterosexuality that makes them so compelling."[8] Indeed, *A Movie* emerged in response to a particular—and disturbing—moment in American history. Moreover, in terms of sheer amount, the film footage available to Conner for appropriation was greatly limited in comparison with the film and video footage that has become available since the invention and dissemination of digital media. Fifty-two years later, Proctor's remake of Conner's film reflects a very different social, historical, technological—and, hence, spectatorial—moment in which the Internet has become a prime source for appropriated sounds and images. While *A Movie by Jen Proctor* is also polysemic and invites an active (or perhaps frustrated) form of spectatorship, I would suggest that it is precisely in the gaps between the "then" of Conner's film and the "now" of Proctor's remake that the fascination of Proctor's film lies.[9]

One difference between "then" and "now" is that the distinction between "archival footage"—once understood as film footage stored in an official state or commercial archive and used for "documentary" purposes—and "found footage"—once understood as film footage found in a flea market, a trash can, or a home movie collection and deployed in experimental films—has lost its effectivity. When Conner made his films with projectionists' scraps and sequences cut from films sold for the home-viewing market, these images were clearly "found" as opposed to "archival" images culled from an official state or commercial archive. Moreover, Conner did not use his appropriated images in the service of documentary-style explanation but rather in the service of a work of avant-garde art. Thus, *A Movie* could be easily categorized as an experimental found footage film. However, with the advent of extensive unofficial archives—including private film and video collections as well as online archives of audiovisual documents—from which filmmakers are appropriating sounds and images, the distinction between "found" and "archival" footage no longer makes sense. It is often impossible to know from exactly where a given piece of footage used in a film derives. Moreover, the line between an expository compilation documentary and an experimental found footage film has been blurred by the circulation of the same images across both genres. Thus, I suggest that it is now more useful to define "archival footage" in terms of the *experience of* or *effect on* the spectator watching a particular kind of text, which I refer to as an "appropriation film," a category that includes both documentary and experimental films.

Indeed, when the spectator watching a given film becomes aware of certain

kinds of textual differences between *different* elements of the *same* film, that film produces for the viewer what I call the "archive effect."[10] The archive effect may, on the one hand, be produced by the spectator's phenomenological experience of a "temporal disparity" between different elements of the same text—e.g., footage of the same person at the moment of a film's production and at an earlier time. For instance, in Michael Apted's *Up* series (UK, 1963/1970/1977/1984/1991/1998/2005/2012), we see the same interview subjects at different ages. The newest footage of the interview subjects at 56 years old produces the footage of the same subjects at seven, twenty-one, twenty-eight, and so on as "archival." The archive effect may, on the other hand, also be produced by the spectator's phenomenological awareness of an "intentional disparity" between different elements of the same text, in which the spectator's perception of the "original" intended use of a piece of footage (which is, of course, ultimately unknowable but nevertheless imagined) contrasts with its current use. For instance, in Emile de Antonio's *Point of Order* (US, 1964), footage that reads as originally intended to simply document the McCarthy hearings is reedited into a scathing critique of McCarthy and his interrogation methods. In both cases, the experience of temporal and intentional disparity produces the footage in question as precisely "archival." The archive effect is, however, ultimately a matter of a given spectator's perception. If the spectator does not experience temporal or intentional disparity, the archive effect will not occur and the footage will not be produced as archival.

Conner's *A Movie,* like many experimental appropriation films, depends heavily on the production of an experience of intentional disparity. Indeed, Conner's film constantly produces a sense that each piece of film comes from a different source and that each was intended for a very different purpose than the one it serves in *A Movie.* Ethnographic footage of bare-breasted women carrying huge loads above their heads, snippets of Hollywood B-movie Westerns, documentary footage of car crashes, and many other images collide with one another, gesturing toward their diverse previous contexts of use but held together through Conner's skillful editing and the musical score. As Warren Bass puts it:

> Conner . . . often achieves his effects by working against the dominant impression of a shot. He does this by placing it in a context that denies the shot's original intent or by using black spaces, clear spaces and loops as a way of extending the duration of his images while respecting their integrity. Through these strategies, Conner brings out latent associative meanings (what Eisenstein would call overtonal meanings) while subverting or neutralizing the dominant meaning. Conner makes films that have many possible associative meanings at any one moment but no simple direct dominant meaning. His films are purposely ambiguous giving the audience freedom to think and bring their own

personal and possibly tangential associations into the fugue of sound/picture relationships.[11]

Thus, "latent associative meanings," seemingly in excess of the original producer's intentions, subvert the "dominant meaning" seemingly intended by the original producer of the images—thereby producing intentional disparity. At the same time, however, temporal disparity may also be in effect in the film. Moritz and O'Neill, for instance, write:

> During the opening portion [of *A Movie*], [Conner] constructs a series of mini-films, each beginning and ending with titles, some ascribed to Bruce Conner, and each parodying one common expectation that people have about the nature of movies. One shows an excerpt from a cowboy fiction film, another a snippet of a girlie-porno movie, another the technical identity of film itself (an emblematic use of leader), another a fragment of documentary or newsreel footage. Some are informed by ruthless satire, and all are distanced by *a certain datedness*. Thus, using these devices, Conner establishes a sense of critical perspective at the film's beginning.[12]

Along with experience of intentional disparity, it is the viewer's perception of fragments resurrected from a (slightly) earlier time that may produce such a "critical perspective"—and the archive effect.

As a shot-for-shot remake that mimics the structure of Conner's film, *A Movie by Jen Proctor* necessarily also depends on the viewer's perception of both intentional and temporal disparity. The diverse contents of the images as well as their varied quality suggest that they have come from a huge number of different filmmakers who are not Jennifer Proctor. Simultaneously, the very fact they were downloaded from the Internet opens a temporal gap (however short) between when they were uploaded and when Proctor appropriated them. For instance, in an early sequence in the film, Proctor inserts a series of video images of women taking off their stockings, shots that parallel a filmic image—most likely from a porn film from the 1940s or '50s—of a woman taking off her stockings that appears in Conner's film. The video images in Proctor's film show four different women engaged in this act—one clearly located on a brightly lit, gaudily colored stage set, another sitting on a bed leaning against a white wall, another sitting outside near a swimming pool, and the last in what looks like a motel room. This final woman wears a mask, suggesting that she may, in fact, be a man. These images seem connected only at the level of their content—women taking off their stockings—as if they all came up together in response to the same search term (which they probably did). Despite this denotative commonality, they seem

Figure 1. Four appropriated images from *A Movie by Jen Proctor,* each of a woman (or perhaps one man) taking off her stockings. These images "substitute" for the image of a single woman taking off her stockings in Bruce Conner's *A Movie.*

to come from completely different sources, and this recognition on the part of the viewer (if it occurs) produces a sense of intentional disparity between their original purposes (each posted online for some reason, however unclear) and the purpose to which they have been put in Proctor's film. At the same time, our recognition that Proctor searched for these images using a search engine places these images in a (slightly) past tense. They preexisted Proctor's searching for, finding, and repurposing of them.

Yet Proctor's explicit mimicry of Conner's film also opens up an additional experience of temporal disparity between the images in her remake and those in Conner's original. For viewers familiar with Conner's film, an awareness of the temporal disparity *between* the two films is also present throughout the viewing of Proctor's film.[13] Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely this experience of temporal disparity *between* the two films that enacts the broader difference between what I term the *material* archive effect and the *digital* archive effect. As viewers, we may recognize the difference between the material and digital sources of each set of appropriated images, which allows us to examine our disparate encounters—through the archival footage in each of these films—with the archive of each of these media forms. Archives, moreover, hold the promise of retaining a trace of "the real," and while both material and digital audiovisual archives offer us traces of "the real," our encounters with material and digital traces each produce a unique experience of difference between the archival document and our lived experience of the world these traces claim to represent. These encounters, then, point toward the specificity of the mediation at work. Conner and Proctor's appropriation films, placed side by side, unveil the specificity of their archival mediations. What follows is a comparison between the different experiential effects produced by each film.

At a general level, the contrasts between Conner's and Proctor's films illuminate some of the experiential differences between watching film and video images that have been "archived"—whether stored in an official archive, a film can in a family basement, or an online database—and then appropriated into a new text. However, the music and the denotative content of the images serves as a common baseline against which these differences may emerge. Writing about the soundtrack of Conner's film, Moritz and O'Neill note that

> The track for *A Movie,* Respighi's *Pines of Rome,* with its romantic, emotional dynamism, could easily destroy the potency and coherence of image; but instead Conner's judicious choice of sound excerpts enhances the drama inherent in each found scene. In the tightrope walking sequence, for example, the fear the acrobats will fall is allayed by the music's delicate, mysterious tones emphasizing the moment's truly magical and gravity-defying properties. Some

of the terrifying shots (a sinking ship, car crashes with drivers dismembered and mutilated, malaria victims pathetically shivering, Mussolini's body being hung up in a city square, a firing-squad execution, etc.) are given a sense of tragic dignity by the swell of the symphonic sound, but this feeling in turn is undercut by the interjection of absurd shots: a grotesque bicycle race or motorcycles plowing through mud.[14]

Proctor's use of *Pines of Rome* not only cues the viewer familiar with Conner's film to recall the original but also guarantees that the affective experience of the two films will bear some similarity regardless of the differences in imagery. In addition, the denotative content of the imagery in both films is very similar. Indeed, much of the pleasure of watching Proctor's film lies in marveling that the filmmaker was able to find parallel contemporary images for some of the more unexpected shots in *A Movie:* full-grown adults racing one another on tiny tricycles, water-skiers violently crashing after jumping a ramp, airplanes disintegrating in midair, a charging elephant, and so on.

It is against this parallel sonic and denotative backdrop that differences in era and medium begin to emerge. One of the first and most immediate visual differences between the two films is that the appropriated film images in *A Movie* are all black and white, while nearly all of the video images in *A Movie by Jen Proctor* are color, pointing to the fact that digital video—unlike film—has, from its beginning, been primarily a color medium. While watching black and white film emphasizes the difference between the film image—its materiality as celluloid—and our lived experience of the world, digital video ostensibly replicates our experience of color in the "real world." I would argue, however, that the perceptible digitality of the appropriated images in Proctor's film in fact works against this sense of continuity with the lived world. Indeed, both Conner's film and Proctor's film point to the gaps between image and referent but do so with different effects. This is suggested by several other contrasting qualities that mark a difference between the filmic and digital images as well as their relation to the lived world in these two films.[15]

To begin with, while many of the images in Conner's film bear traces of dirt and scratches, the images in Proctor's film are absolutely "clean." Although the former have clearly been stored somewhere in the material world and therefore display the marks that physical contact with the prints has left, the latter do not display such marks because, presumably, they have been stored exclusively in the digital realm. In fact, there is no trace of the material world on these images except for—in cases in which the digital image reads as an indexical image of the "real" world—the contents of the images themselves. For instance, one of the places in which the materiality of the images in Conner's film contrasts most

Figure 2. In *A Movie by Jen Proctor,* digitally-generated images and effects replace similar filmic images from Conner's *A Movie.*

visibly with the digitality of the images in Proctor's film is in the use of projection countdowns and titles in the first sequence. At the beginning of *A Movie,* the titles "Bruce Conner" and "A Movie" are repeatedly shown, accompanied by bits of leader that include numbered countdowns, titles, leader marked at some earlier point by projections, and titles that—despite the fact the film has just begun—say "End of Part Four" or "The End." Many of these images clearly show signs of use and wear in the form of marks, scratches, and punch-holes. Proctor's film replicates the denotative contents of these images, but not the qualities. In this case, the titles and countdown numbers are completely "clean," digitally generated, and therefore immune to worldly wear. There is no scratch, no projectionist's mark; in other words, there is no direct trace of the material world on these images. Instead, the countdown numbers are smooth and seamless, loaded with visual effects that clearly betray their digital origin. To the title "Jen Proctor" is added an animated "star effect" so that the title seems to "sparkle" in a blatantly artificial manner. Moreover, instead of simple images of numbers, we are presented with numbers surrounded by moving graphics of clocks, eyeballs, and graphically simulated filmstrips. The words "End of Part Two" fly onto the screen from either side over a graphic image of what looks like the Grim Reaper. In this smooth, clean, and impenetrable world of the digital, material contingency is eliminated. These images and effects come from an elsewhere that exists only within the computer.[16] Paradoxically, the inscription of the "real" produced by the dirt and scratches on film, which briefly obscures parts of the images in Conner's film, produces a certain haptic reality effect, a sense that we could physically touch this film image in a way that the video images in Proctor's film can never be touched.

This pattern of contrast between dirtiness and cleanness is not limited, however, to the "title sequence" of each film; rather, it occurs throughout the films. For example, in a later section, three slightly blurred black-and-white images of an unmarked blimp in Conner's film are marred by scratches and contrast dramatically with the sharp, clean color images of three blimps in Proctor's film—one unmarked, another labeled Metlife, and the third labeled "Who is Ron Paul? Google Ron Paul." In addition to the shift toward increased commercialism reflected in these latter blimps, the difference between the filmic and digital images of the blimps also reflects the untouchability of digital images. Indeed, while the images appropriated by Proctor are in color and are much more "clean" than those appropriated by Conner, the very lack of markings signifies the immateriality of the digital images and thus their distance from "the real." Thus, the contrast between the "dirtiness" and "cleanness" produced as these different kinds of images are appropriated and become "archival" is one factor in the differential experiences of the material archive effect and the digital archive effect.

Figure 3. Appropriated from the digital archive, the images in *A Movie by Jen Proctor* begin to blur the lines between indexical video imagery and purely iconic digital imagery generated for a videogame.

In addition, while the scratching and material degradation of the filmic images in Conner's film emphasizes the materiality of the filmstrip, the visibility of the digital compression of the images in Proctor's film emphasizes the digital nature of the representations. Both degradation and compression work against our sense of their continuity with the lived world. A filmic image—made up of light-sensitive silver on an acetate substrate—is, in fact, no more "like" its referent than a digital image; however, I would suggest that the dirt, scratches, and other marks on the images in Conner's film gesture toward the images' material status in a way that the digital images do not. Looking at these projected images, we may experience a sense of "peering through" the tactile debris to the "real," even if this experience is fundamentally misleading. In contrast, many of the images in Proctor's film show signs of pixelation due to digital compression. As Peter Lunenfeld notes, "In most commercial systems, image compression is a vital component of

Figure 4. Indexical video images of what appears to be a real firing squad intercut with images of similar violence from a videogame.

digital imaging, in order to keep file sizes, transfer rates, and archiving manageable. With each compression and expansion, the digital image suffers at least its own mutation and degradation, just as does its analog predecessor. Uncompressing digital images does not reproduce them, it rewrites them. Networked environments promise to worsen, not lessen, this situation, due to the need to compress images before sending them out, only to unstuff—and thereby rewrite—them at the other end."[17]

Thus, even though both analog and digital formats degrade, the compression of digital files as they are archived and transferred through networked environments involves a "rewriting" of the very code that allows the image to appear. Moreover, at an experiential level, while both the dirt and scratches in Conner's film and the compression in Proctor's point to the mediated nature of the images—to their difference from "the real"—the pixelation does not allow for

a sense of "seeing through." On the contrary, pixelation transforms the image itself into a set of colored squares, so that the referent seems to be partially dissolved rather than partially obscured. At a certain point, the line between pixelated images of the real and "realistic" images from video games becomes potentially indistinguishable, blurring the boundaries between iconic and indexical images— a blurring that does not occur at any point in Conner's film.

This is particularly significant in Proctor's film when pixelated but indexical images of the "real" are juxtaposed with pixelated images that are iconic but not indexical. In several instances, Proctor inserts images appropriated from video game gameplay into a sequence of more obviously indexical imagery. In Conner's film, soon after the initial "title sequence" (although titles continue to reappear throughout), we see a series of images from Hollywood Western cowboy chase scenes, intercut with an image of an elephant running and then a series of vehicular crashes of various kinds from various points of view. In Proctor's film, we witness a range of approximations and intensifications. First, in place of the cowboys and Indians, we see color images of dogs running alongside cars, a cow running down the middle of a well-manicured street, a goat pulling a race kart, an elephant running through a group of trees, a car being chased down a freeway by several police cars, and then races involving various kinds of vehicles. Next, we are confronted by a series of racing shots—of trucks, cars, motorcycles, and even a tank—many of them from the point of view of the racing vehicles themselves. The camera then cuts to a shot from a first-person, car-racing video game, which is followed by more indexical point-of-view shots taken from racing vehicles. Finally, the sequence ends with a series of vehicles (with human beings on or inside them) crashing and flying through the air.

Like Conner's film, Proctor's film points to the human fascination with speed and motion, as well as the visual parallels between different forms of technologically enhanced human motion. However, by inserting the first-person point-of-view shots alongside the shot from the first-person car-racing video game, Proctor's film also points to a blurring between the indexical and the iconic, the first person and third person, and an overall de-realization of the image due to both the ever-increasing realism of video game imagery and to the pixelation of indexical video images as they are compressed for transmission. This is also true in a later set of images in Proctor's film, in which we see a video game simulation of a firing squad, followed by the indexical image of an apparently real firing squad raising their weapons, followed by an image from a first-person shooter video game in which a man writhing in flames (which is eerily reminiscent of the famous image of the monk Thích Quảng Đức, who set himself on fire in Saigon in 1963 to protest the persecution of monks by US ally Ngô Đình Diệm). These images are parallel to indexical images of an execution by firing squad and dead bodies being

Figure 5. In *A Movie by Jen Proctor* images of the attacks on the World Trade Center replace images of nuclear explosions in Conner's film.

strung up by their feet in front of a crowd in Conner's film. However, by switching back and forth between "real" violence and "simulated" violence, Proctor's film points to the ways in which we are increasingly encouraged to treat violence against other human beings as "play." Moreover, at the level of form, when every file is digital and compressed as it circulates through the digital archive, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell the difference between a literally deadly crash and its thrilling simulation, an actual execution and its ludic corollary.

Both *A Movie* and *A Movie by Jen Proctor* point toward the inherent and transformative qualities of the two mediums—cinematic and digital—through which we may attempt to experience "the past." Conner's film emphasizes the materiality of cinematic images, drawing attention to both the filmstrip itself and the conventions of editing. Proctor's film similarly acknowledges the ways in which the specificities of digital technology—digital video and digital archiving— alter our relationship to the referents. However, the contrast between these two films points to the fact that we have entered a different era of mediation. Our relationship with the past, through the lens of the appropriated image, has been altered. Thus, while all of the images in each film are likely to produce the archive effect, they may also simultaneously produce an awareness of the different kinds of archives from which they have been appropriated: the material film archive or the immaterial digital archive. Whether stored in an official archive or a home movie collection, images that pass through material archives bear the trace of the physical world that may, in fact, increase their aura of "authenticity." Images that pass through digital archives, however, bear the traces not of the physical world but of digital technologies. Thus, while the passage of filmic and digital images through different kinds of archives each give rise to an experience of mediation as these images are appropriated, the material and digital archive effects signal a

shift in our relationship with the past through its image, even if that relationship continues to shift and has yet to be fully theorized.

In addition to these experiential differences in watching *A Movie* and *A Movie by Jen Proctor,* however, a comparison between the content of the "original" and the "remake" also points to the ways in which the world—as its image has been produced, archived, and made available for appropriation—has both changed and remained the same since 1958. Indeed, the quality that seems to remain most constant across the material and digital archive is a fascination with motion, speed, death, and destruction. In Conner's film, this takes the form of a series of increasingly violent crashes, submarines shooting missiles, and planes dropping bombs, culminating in the documentation of nuclear bomb blasts. In Proctor's film, despite the very different geopolitical context represented, the violence seems only to have intensified or perhaps been replaced by equivalent acts of violence. In place of Theodore Roosevelt silently pontificating, we see George H. W. Bush doing the same. This is followed by a series of images of huge, glittering skyscrapers being dynamited and producing enormous clouds of debris, images of fighter jets dropping bombs, and what looks like the "shock and awe" campaign in the early days of the Iraq War. The images of the airplane hitting the second tower of the World Trade Center and of the burning towers crashing down seem to stand in for the images of nuclear war as the war on terror has replaced (at least rhetorically) the fear of nuclear warfare. Images of residents during Hurricane Katrina also function as a reminder that human beings are not in control of nature. Nuclear fusion and natural disasters (in conjunction with human error or failure), even as we may often have held them at bay, overwhelm both our bodies and our comprehension.

Thus, while the archives and media technologies in which images are stored have changed, the contrast between Conner's and Proctor's films reveals that the human tendencies to both create and record disaster fill both the material and digital archives. Technologies of representation may change but our drive to destroy ourselves and the world around us apparently has not. While Proctor's film produces many moments of pleasure at the parallels between the "then" of Conner's film and its own "now," the parallels between the atomic bomb explosions and the September 11 attacks are much more likely to produce dismay at the fact that, while so much has changed, our urge to harm one other and ourselves persists. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki may in our minds belong to another era, a "then" for which we no longer feel directly responsible, but the September 11 attacks, the Iraq War, and Hurricane Katrina cannot be held at the same distance. As a remake of Bruce Conner's film, *A Movie by Jen Proctor* denies the "progress" through the technology on which its very substance depends. Indeed, it suggests that, even as digital media make images of the real infinitely

more accessible, our ability to cope with—or even recognize—the realities behind them seems to have diminished.

Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake

The ways in which *A Movie by Jen Proctor* reflects a changed relationship between ourselves and the past engendered by digital media may be further illuminated by an exploration of the functioning of the archive effect in another experimental "remake": Perry Bard's online project entitled *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake.*[18] This online work is a collaboration by a potentially unlimited number of filmmakers around the world. On Bard's website, Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera,* a 1929 film that showcases not only the then emergent Soviet Union but also the potential of the cinematic medium itself (and what Vertov called the "kino-eye") through its foregrounding of camera techniques and effects, has been broken down shot by shot.[19] Participants in the project, who potentially include anyone with a video camera and an Internet connection, are encouraged to shoot a video image that is in some way parallel to an image in Vertov's film and then upload it to the website. The website then produces a split-screen film with Vertov's images on the left side of the frame and the parallel, uploaded images on the right side of the frame. A new split-screen film is produced every day as participants upload new images to the site. Whereas in Proctor's film part of the archive effect depends on the difference between the viewer's experience of *A Movie by Jen Proctor* and the viewer's *memory* of the experience of Conner's film, in *The Global Remake,* the split-screen format allows for the experience of temporal and intentional disparity between original and remake *within* the moment of viewing the work itself on Bard's website. Moreover, in contrast to Proctor's film, in which the archive effect is produced within a closed system, the archive effect in Bard's work is constantly reconstituted. As Erika Suderburg elegantly describes the piece, "No screening can ever be identical; its linearity is upended by the possibility of the space of the moving image that is not just three-dimensional but hyper-dimensional (hyper textual) with layers cascading unseen behind every shot, potentially accessed at the next screening and the next. The work becomes a site that can be revisited and reworked alongside the steady invitation of the original work, which continues to unspool in the left-hand frame as its database restlessly reconfigures."[20]

Thus, *The Global Remake* is perpetually changing; however, the presence of Vertov's images, as well as the contemporary soundtrack created by Steve Baun, remains the same from one version to the next.

As a result of this perpetual reconstitution, the functioning of temporal and intentional disparity in the film is exceptionally complex. The temporal and

intentional substrate of similarity against which disparities may continuously emerge in the work is provided by Vertov's footage. However, the primary intentional disparity in the piece is produced not in the contrast between Vertov's original intentions and those of the many participating filmmakers but, rather, in the contrast between Vertov's intentions and the intentionality of the work itself. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that the software used to create *The Global Remake* has its own "intentionality," which is not precisely coincident with Bard's. Seth Feldman notes that "the software that powers this project (written by John Weir—now open source) puts the process of uploading shots entirely in the hands of the contributor, making it, in digital parlance 'crowdsourced.' Contributors choose the shots they are matching. Bard refrains from exercising any curatorial power over whether a given uploaded shot is appropriate, or whether it is placed correctly or not next to Vertov's original. In cases where more than one image is submitted for each shot, the software displays the variants in a daily rotation."[21]

The intentions of the "crowd" are thus—at least partially—subsumed not to Bard's intentions but to the website's own intentionality (even if the website was Bard's idea). Suderburg further describes the experience of the participant in (who is also a viewer of) the work as follows:

> The upload interface has metered every shot, categorized each section and laid out a fastidious template online that documents each shot and gives instructions for uploading your own re-make side by side with the original frames. You can enter your shot into the database, indexically attached to a specific sequence, and watch the overlapping uploads that merge into multiple versions of the re-made film. . . . If no one has uploaded material, the original will play alone in the left frame with a blank black void to its right. This space serves as an invitation to every viewer to remake herself as maker.[22]

This participatory structure is important in that, in contrast to the images in Proctor's film, whose producers are presumably oblivious to Proctor's appropriation and repurposing of them, there is little to no intentional disparity between the images uploaded by different users and *The Global Remake.* The contemporary images in the work come from disparate geographical and authorial sources, but, unlike the people whose images—unbeknownst to their producers—participate in Proctor's film, the people whose images we see in Bard's piece have consciously chosen to participate in the work, actively uploading these images specifically for the purpose of adding them to Bard's film. Indeed, we can assume that, for the most part, the contemporary images were shot specifically for *The Global Remake* since they have to "match" an image from Vertov's film. The intentions

Figure 6. *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* includes Vertov's images alongside images uploaded by online remake participants.

Figure 7. The "then" and "now" of Vertov's film and Bard's interactive, collaborative online project produce the archive effect in a specifically digital (con)text.
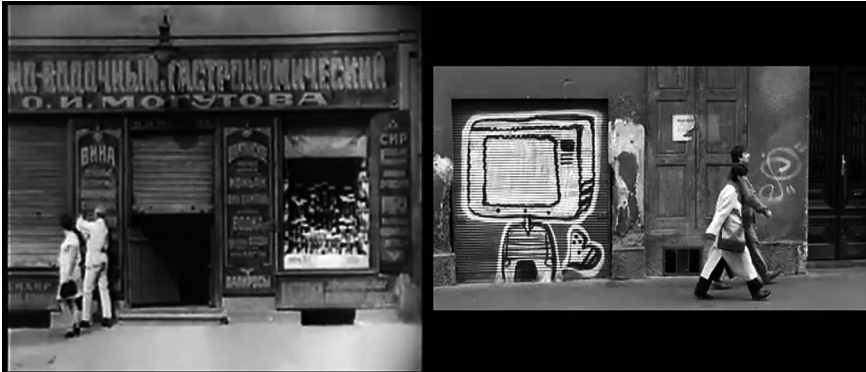

Figure 8. A street scene from Vertov's film juxtaposed with a contemporary street scene in Bard's remake.

of a potentially infinite number of filmmakers—literally across the globe as the title indicates—are "synchronized" via the "fastidious template" of the website interface. Thus, the only actual appropriated (and hence, archival) footage is that of Vertov. His original intentions for the images (or our projection thereof) are contrasted with the collective intentionality of the work itself.

Thus, like *A Movie by Jen Proctor, The Global Remake* produces a specifically *digital* archive effect. Unlike Proctor's film, however, which follows a preestablished cinematic format but appropriates its documents from digital archives like YouTube and LiveLeak, the digital aspect of *The Global Remake* is located not only in half of its source material but also in its participatory, interactive, and constantly shifting structure that collates the efforts of many filmmakers into a new, inherently digital film every day. Indeed, in contrast to the *digital archive* effect (produced by films drawing from the digital archive online) produced by *A Movie by Jen Proctor,* Bard's film may produce more precisely a *digital* archive effect (placing filmic archival documents within a digital framework).

Moreover, given that the very premise of Bard's piece is made possible by digital media, a textual context that could not have been anticipated—at least not fully—in Vertov's time, the "then" of an earlier cinematic moment is thus juxtaposed within the work against the "now" of the era of interactive digital media. In addition to the juxtaposition of Vertov's and the remake's own intentions, which produce part of the archive effect in *The Global Remake,* much of the fascination of the work lies also, as in *A Movie by Jen Proctor,* in the experience of temporal disparity. In Bard's work, temporal disparity is constituted primarily through the split screen, in which the "then" of Vertov's filmmaking and the "now" of the website's constantly updated film are ceaselessly juxtaposed. Describing the experience of the viewer rather than of the participant watching *The Global Remake,* Feldman notes that "the viewer sees two concurrent sets of images on a single screen: Vertov's original film and the remake of it that has been constructed on the Internet. The viewer's visual experience also includes a third set of images, i.e., comprised of a counterpoint between the first two. What we are watching then is the 1929 work, already a masterpiece of dialectical montage, in juxtaposition to a stream of images responding to it. The effect is a kind of second layer montage, somewhat akin to Roland Barthes' second layer of semiotic meaning."[23]

This "visual experience" of a "third set of images" is precisely the experience of the archive effect. Moreover, this "counterpoint" emphasizes not only the intentional disparities described above but also the temporal disparities between Vertov's 1929 images and those of the anonymous contemporary contributors.

Feldman provides a preliminary morphology for understanding the relationship set up between Vertov's original images and the newly added images that

in some way "mimic" the original. One relationship is that of "simple replica-tion," in which the contemporary filmmaker attempts to recreate an image as denotatively similar to Vertov's as possible.[24] For instance, Vertov's image of an empty auditorium may be accompanied by an image of a more modern but visually similar empty auditorium. Another relationship Feldman identifies is "quotation of movement," which can refer to movement within the frame—such as a man climbing a ladder juxtaposed against a man climbing stairs—or to camera movement—for instance, the camera mounted on a moving vehicle in each image. A third relationship Feldman notes is "chronological juxtaposition: modern replacement for Vertov's image," such as two images, each of a building that is physically similar to the other in terms of its shape, which were nevertheless clearly built and filmed in different eras. This chronological juxtaposition may also take the form of a contrast of technologies from "then" and "now"—for instance, an image of a man reading a newspaper juxtaposed against that of a man reading his computer screen.[25] Although "chronological juxtaposition" may produce the most blatant—and tongue-in-cheek—contrast between Vertov's "then" and our "now," the other two also produce temporal disparity against the backdrop of their similar, denotative content. As in *A Movie by Jen Proctor,* part of the pleasure of *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake* is seeing the differences time has made, even as the substrate—the original film by Vertov—bears many similarities to our present.

Not surprisingly, many of the differences between the newly uploaded images in *The Global Remake* and Vertov's own images are similar to those between Conner's and Proctor's images. In *The Global Remake,* the images on the right-hand screen are mostly in color while those on the left are black and white.[26] The digital images are also completely "clean," which exposes their own lack of material existence. As in Proctor's film, the digital images are pixelated due to the process of transfer. Interestingly, however, in this case, Vertov's filmic images are *also* pixelated because they, too, have been transformed into digital files. Thus, the distinction between filmic and digital imagery is blurred due to the online digital interface.

I would argue, however, that it is the transformed technologies used to create *The Global Remake* that produce the most powerful sense of "then" and "now." Suderburg has noted the connection between Vertov's vision of "kinoks," with their camera-eyes collectively assembling a greater truth about their society. She writes,

> Kinoks would have come from anywhere, were trained in the field, and became contributors who in turn went on to train the succeeding generations until a new visual order was established in the fabric of everyday life. . . . Kinoks would

make the film-thing together and in making it together fabricate a moving image—a living evolutionary process built on an armature, a series of modular "bloks" that ultimately could be re-used indefinitely without removing them from either their efficacy or their morphing truths. Truths made truer than truth. Never one to claim veracity in documentary ethics as foundational, Vertov and company, as true constructivist workers[,] strove to manufacture a composite closer to experience and ethically devoted to the future Communist society.[27]

Suderburg positions *The Global Remake* as a realization of Vertov's imaginary cinematic utopia, equating the participants in *The Global Remake* with Vertov's kinoks. And, indeed, many of the images that have been uploaded to *The Global Remake* seem to revel in and celebrate new digital technology in a manner similar to Vertov's own film's celebration of mechanical invention. Although the juxtaposition between Vertov's "then" and our "now" inevitably evokes a certain degree of nostalgia for the lost "then," I would suggest that some of the hope of that era has been appropriated into *The Global Remake* as well. Despite the fact that Soviet Communism transformed into totalitarianism and Vertov was shamed under Stalinism for his "formalist" experimentation, in digital media, the seeds that Vertov planted seem to be on the cusp of fruition.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I would argue that the temporal disparity between a technological "then" and "now" is the stake of both of these experimental film remakes. By revealing, through the format of the remake and the experience of the archive effect, both similarity and difference across time and technological evolution, they offer us a glimpse of both what has been gained and what lost in the shift to digital media, as well as in the general passage of time. Both of these films attempt to visualize the present in relation to the past, to find points that "match" so that we may locate ourselves in the "now" in contrast to a "then." *A Movie by Jen Proctor,* mimicking the unavoidably pessimistic bent of Conner's *A Movie* while commenting also on the specificities of digital media, may be read as a dystopian vision of technological development, digital or otherwise—as an unending move toward ever-greater destruction and dehumanization. In contrast, *Man with a Movie Camera: The Global Remake,* mimicking Vertov's optimistic vision, may be seen as a utopian version of technology as hope for greater human connection through collective media practice. Taken together and in relation to their source materials, these films link the present to the past to put forth tentative visions of our media future. Which one will prevail remains to be seen.

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NOTES

1. Laura Grindstaff, "A Pygmalion Tale Retold: Remaking *La Femme Nikita," Camera Obscura 47,* vol. 16, no. 2 (2001): 134.

2. Bruce Jenkins, "Explosion in a Film Factory: The Cinema of Bruce Conner," in *2000 BC: The Bruce Conner Story, Part II* (Minneapolis: The Walker Art Center, 2000), 188.

3. Jennifer Proctor, Program notes, The 2010 Festival of (In)appropriation, Los Angeles Filmforum, September 19, 2010.

4. I use the term "archive" here not to refer to particular archival institutions but rather as the complete repository of extant sounds and images potentially available for appropriation into new works.

5. William Moritz and Beverly O'Neill, "Some Notes on the Films of Bruce Conner," *Film Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 39–40.

6. Jenkins, 187.

7. Jennifer Horne, "Guilt by Association," *Afterimage* 27, no. 5 (March 2000): 13.

8. John P. Bowles, "The Bruce Conner Story Continues," *Art Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring, 2000): 106.

9. Of course, if the viewer is not familiar with Conner's film, the experience of Proctor's film will be radically different, perhaps more akin to seeing Conner's film at the time of its release.

10. For a more extensive theorization of the archive effect, see Jaimie Baron, "The Archive Effect: Archival Footage as an Experience of Reception," *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* 6, no. 2 (forthcoming Winter 2012).

11. Warren Bass, "The Past Restructured: Bruce Conner and Others," *Journal of the University Film Association* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 22.

12. Moritz and O'Neill, 39. (Emphasis mine.)

13. In my formulation, a temporal disparity between two different films does not produce the archive effect per se since the archive effect is produced between different *elements* of the *same film.* However, for those familiar with Conner's film, the temporal disparity between the two films becomes the backdrop against which Proctor's film is read.

14. Moritz and O'Neill, 39.

15. My analysis draws a comparison specifically between the experience of watching Conner's *A Movie* projected on film and the experience of watching *A Movie by Jen Proctor* from a digital source. Conner's estate has not released *A Movie* on DVD, suggesting that the copyright

holders wish his film to be viewed exclusively on celluloid. However, *A Movie* can be found online at the Hong Kong-based website tudou.com (www.tudou.com/programs/view/3-9tCeFX0Eo/). Ironically, for the purposes of writing this essay, I was forced to rely on this digitized version of the film and my memory of seeing the print projected. Although the digitized version of *A Movie* threatens to undo my argument, it also simultaneously points to the very experiential differences that I am attempting to articulate. The online version of *A Movie* could itself be considered a kind of "remake," since its experiential effects are so different from the projected celluloid original. However, Proctor's film raises many other interesting questions that the digitized version of *A Movie* does not.

16. Moreover, these digital images of film projectionist cues serve no purpose at all—except, perhaps, as a vestigial reminder of the filmic medium that has been superseded by the digital.

17. Peter Lunenfeld, *Snap to Grid: A User's Guide to Arts, Media, and Cultures* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 59.

18. This online project can be viewed at http://dziga.perrybard.net/. Accessed on April 7, 2011.

19. Erika Suderburg and Seth Feldman have each written at length about the connections between Vertov's Constructivist theories of cinema and the theoretical underpinnings of Bard's project. See Erika Suderburg, "Database, Anarchéologie, the Commons, Kino-eye and Mash: How Bard, Kaufman, Svilova & Vertov Continue the Revolution," in *Resolution 3: Global Video Praxis,* ed. Ming-Yuen S. Ma and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press) and Seth Feldman, "On the Internet, Nobody Knows You're a Constructivist: Perry Bard's *The Man With the Movie Camera: The Global Remake,*" *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media,* No. 52 (Summer 2010), www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/FeldmanVertov/index.html. Accessed on April 7, 2011.

20. Suderburg, "Database, Anarchéologie."

21. Feldman, "Constructivist."

22. Erika Suderburg, "Database, Anarchéologie," 5–6.

23. Feldman, "Constructivist."

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. It is also worth noting that a significant number of uploaded "matching" images in *The Global Remake* are, in fact, still images. This may point to the fact that digital files are all fundamentally made of the same code and may be stored on the same hard drive so that the line between the archive of digital moving images and of digital still images is less meaningful to participants than the line between the archive of filmic moving images and photographs, which must be stored differently.

27. Suderburg, 3.