DIGITAL DESTABILIZING

DISTANCE AND EMBODIMENT IN THE COLLAGE FILM *PERISCOPE*

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ABSTRACT

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in the collage film *Periscope*

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This study is focused on a seeing practice that links the viewer to an environment through digital art photography. A main aim is to add to the knowledge of such images by clarifying if a work like *Periscope* can connect the viewer to the place of origin in an embodied way. This film consists of twenty digital collages, made from photographs taken by the author through a broken window on a train. A double position as artist and art historian enables the methodological aim to enrich the analysis with imaginative and intuitive information. The special interest in embodiment is a response to the convention that photography, landscape representation and collage create distance rather than connection – especially in terms of visuality and digital technology. Since a connection is found, and it has a destabilizing effect on subject and object alike, the writer/viewer is implicated in the experience.

The objectives are reached through three questions: How does *Periscope* bring the viewer into contact with the original environment? How is this connection related to conventions of visual distance and embodiment? Can this connection be generalized as a seeing practice specific to digital art photography? The discussion is informed by a performative take on visual experience. This perspective recognizes that making and seeing digital photography entail both a visual description and a transformation. The study presents the possibility that digital photography engages viewer and viewed in a relational process where destabilizing functions like friction and fragmentation prove key to a meaningful embodied connection.

Sökord: photography, digital technology, visuality, landscape, collage, film, performativity, embodiment, seeing.

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Introduction

Background

In the autumn of 2008, I chanced upon an image that came to raise the issues of this thesis. The image appeared at the express train to Arlanda Airport, as I looked out through the glass of a broken window. Seeing the transient environment lit up by the cracks, instigated thoughts on a place not quite a landscape, almost an innerscape. As a photographer, this observation brought to my attention the transposition taking place in relating to the world – seeing as both a recording and a bringing into being. In consequence, making photographs could not just be a mirror of the world, but also the performative event of shaping it. During the twenty-minute train ride, I took ten photographs with my cell phone camera. I then altered them digitally into twenty collages and subsequently a stills film with the title *Periscope*. In the process, my concept settled on the tension between order and disorientation and how such a viewing experience can be understood as a form of embodiment. With a periscope you can organize your vision to know what you see and where you are going. Visual information is mediated through the viewer and the viewer's tools, pointing back to an environment thus transformed. Through the making and viewing of the collage film, this process may hopefully be clarified.

Aims and questions

The overall theme here is a seeing practice that links the viewer to an environment through digital art photography. More than a discrete numeric representation of data, the term 'digital' connotes a conflict between positive interactivity and negative manipulation.[1] Deceiving yet providing means to resist deception, digital technology is inevitably ambiguous. An affinity with the 'virtual' is clear – a simulation that combines information and imagination to create a continuum of image, object and subject.[2] Rooted in an 18th century optical description of the reflection or refraction of images, the virtual refers to an image that neither is nor needs an object. This idea informs the understanding of images and their effect on the viewer and the world. The notion of seeing as a link between a viewer and a place hinges on the strength of embodied activity. Visual experiences involve all aspects of a being – perceptual, mental and physical. Every viewer will add a new experience to the understanding of the work – yet to capture embodiment in this particular piece of writing, the viewer is necessarily the artist.

The main aim is to find out if a digitally defined work like *Periscope* can connect the viewer to the place of origin in an embodied way. This objective is epistemological, aimed at adding to the knowledge of seeing digital photography. My double position as artist and art historian also enables a methodological aim. The purpose is to enrich the preferred objectivity of art historical analysis by accessing imaginative and intuitive, though not subjective, information.

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[1] Karin Wagner, *Fotografi som digital bild. Narration och navigation i fyra nordiska konstverk*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, Göteborgs Universitet, Göteborg 2003, p. 14-19.
[2] Ron Burnett, *How Images Think*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts and London UK 2004, p. 83.

The questions were drawn from the material and then directed back at it. A first issue of interest was how visuality functions in the work. This led to the visual dimensions of photography, landscape and collage. During research, a common denominator emerged in the negative framing of these aspects especially in terms of vision and digital technology. All were treated as ultimate producers of distance between people and places. Since my focus was on finding points of connection through these same aspects, it became relevant to build my analysis around this problem and a possible solution. To fulfil my aims the research effort is defined by the specifics directly related to the empirical source leading on to broader queries and more general conclusions, reached through these questions:

– How does *Periscope* bring the viewer into contact with the original environment?
– How is this connection related to conventions of visual distance and embodiment?
– Can this connection be generalized as a seeing practice specific to digital art photography?

Material, method and theory
The empirical material investigated here, the *Periscope* film, offers several layers of reading. The visual experience is informed by the photographic capture, the collage construction and the moving image. The motif of the photographs brings yet another aspect to the material, situating it in a time and a place that is retraced and reshaped in the creative process. However far the collages may be from the originating moment of their parts, they are all still connected with the environment captured in the shots from the train. How and to what end a connection is made is clarified by a close examination of the film, its opening text and twenty collages.[3]

The material is situated through a selection of literature and perspective. As the aims state, my method of image description and analysis is part formal and part informal. The calculated risk of exposing a subject position in a way not overly subjective is a personal preference yet also warranted by the choice of topic. Any attempt to research a destabilization of a viewed object as well as of the viewer subject would be dishonest if not failed were it to exclude the subject of the researcher. Although the text is not centered on my own creative process, being the artist will factor in my interpretation since my work as a professional photographer informs my work as an art historian. Rather than an obstacle, this may provide insights into the issues raised in the thesis. These questions formed while making the work and have been a part of it since. The performative aspect of the work emphasizes the same aspect of photographic and art historical practice. They are both descriptive and transformative. Capturing something in visual or textual form may have a documentary function, while also changing the conditions of that document. This applies to the environment captured by the camera and the computer – and by a viewer's eye – as well as to the images captured in the written account.

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[3] See appendix for reference images and text. The film can be found at www.vimeo.com/24178600.

Performative theory is sometimes criticized for exaggerating the first person present tense at the expense of a broader social spectrum. However, an active relation to materials must not lead to a shallow ahistorical view but may instead enable a deeper understanding. In this thesis, performativity is employed as a powerful vehicle to engage viewers, and readers, in an experience of connecting with the *Periscope* material and its source. Simultaneous description and transformation is a key to realizing the clear but often neglected potential of digital photography for an embodied visual situation. From Jacques Derrida are taken the concepts of iterability and différance, containing the deconstructivist idea that a statement changes as it is uttered and thus renders meaning unpredictable. In Judith Butler's development, the iteration of everyday life places this ambiguity within the human body – including the eyes and visual practices of the viewer. By performing verbal and physical statements in different ways, the individual can handle fundamental conditions and effect change both in private and in society.

My understanding of visual experience builds on this poststructuralist and phenomenological theory of performativity. It acknowledges that making and viewing digital photography entail both a visual description and a transformation, articulating meaning while reshaping it. Since it recognizes the active relational potential in subjects and objects alike, this perspective is of great value for the present discussion on seeing and embodiment.

The chosen theories of seeing and digital technology echo a performative stance. The idea of making and seeing images as a transformational act connects Martin Jay in "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" with Ron Burnett in *How Images Think*. Jay combines a historical account of seeing with a notion that visual experience entails ambiguity. Despite the presumed hegemony of one dominant mode of seeing, the Cartesian perspective, the possibility exists of multiple modes. As Jay's colleague Jonathan Crary points out, choices do not happen in a vacuum but relate to complex social conditions.[4] From a performative standpoint, such issues may be contested by the consequences of individual actions. While alerting viewers to the illusion of free choice, Crary's analysis of subjective vision and its impact on 19th century viewing techniques does give adequate support to the belief in a diversity of visual possibilities.

A historical context is of course valuable to the analysis of contemporary work, but Jay's typical flexibility is more relevant to the limited aim and scope of this thesis. His theory of baroque vision and non-perspectival photography resembles Burnett's idea of images as visualizations that mirror yet also generate reality. With digital technology, more layers of vantage point are added and therefore more tension. Jay's view of ambiguity as creative is updated to the computer age by Burnett's claim that such uncertainty may provoke, inspire and necessitate new ways to discuss a connection forged by digital images and their viewers.

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[4] See the Further reading section in the appendix for reference to Crary, Derrida and Butler.

While Jay's visual concepts are crucial here, Burnett is more strongly present in my account. The weight placed on his understanding is motivated by the common traits between digital technology and seeing with regards to my aims. The emphasis is on interaction without either a technological or an essentialist determinism. Burnett's approach to destabilization includes viewer, world and image in a credible way relevant to the analysis of *Periscope*. He is a cultural studies scholar more than an art historian per se – and a photographer – which makes a dialogue with him even more interesting. While often in agreement, my view differs on two counts. There is a tendency here to emphasize human power, over images in particular, and a certain ambivalence regarding how distance is both disabling and conditioning embodiment. My view is that a truly interactive relationship with both the self and the world, by way of the image, begins with a deeply disrupted subject. This challenge entails what I see as an active and embodied seeing experience – with any more distance, the challenge is lost and so is the opportunity for embodiment. Rather than quantifying a certain distance by default, the focus is shifted towards the individual visual situation and the connection between person and place.

Theoretical standpoints colour the methods used to fulfil the stated aims, by shaping how the questions are asked and answered. To capture the tension in digital photography – a mode of making and viewing images that continues some parts of tradition as it reshapes and rejects others – a conceptual figure is constructed from one digital and one more analogue term. This pairing is way to grasp a common context of digital photography while showing how it may be understood differently. It also ties together the thematic division of photography, landscape and collage so that *Periscope* can be analyzed within as well as outside of convention.

Key concepts are clarified in due course, but this brief introduction explains how research and text are organized. Photography is discussed as a combination of framing and visualization, landscape as maps and image-scapes, and collage as edges and hybrids. While Ron Burnett provides the digital concepts, the analogue ones are from *The Disciplinary Frame. Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* by John Tagg, *Landscape and Western Art* by Malcolm Andrews as well as *Landscape Theory* edited by Rachael Ziady DeLue and James Elkins and a recent essay of my own on landscape and seeing, and finally Ian Monroe's essay "Where does one thing end and the next begin?" in *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art* edited by Blanche Craig.

Each concept can be read as discursive, yet the digital context accentuates the performative. Frames, maps and edges are tools to conceptually and physically limit an image and what it contains. Visualizations, image-scapes and hybrids offer to merge real and virtual so that limits can be renegotiated. Digital visuality grows the analogue seeds to act as an interface of reference and rupture between people and places. Destabilization brings a visual diversity to challenge the singularity of objects and subjects, and enables new forms of embodiment.

Previous research

The field of photography research is vast, though not in Sweden. The predecessors that touch on the topic are few and, while highly relevant in their own terms, none are directly involved in the theme of digital art photography and seeing practices. These aspects are often reduced to a backdrop for artist monographies, exhibition surveys and broader social studies. In-depth focus on either area is rare and especially in combination. At the Art History Department of Stockholm University, a list from 1995 onwards shows no basic or advanced level essays covering vision and digital photography as independent themes. Only two doctoral projects have concentrated on photography since 1915. An equivalent list at Uppsala University starts in 1857 and contains only one on photography. Beyond art history, the departments of Film Studies and Journalism, Media and Communications in Stockholm list three dissertations with some connection to my theme since 1990. Other Swedish universities yield similar results. All in all fourteen dissertations, eleven in art history and all but two published since 2000.[5]

With the spread and depth of these projects, photography seems to be a growing field. However, it is still under-researched compared to the main Swedish discourse. In terms of digital photography, Karin Wagner's work is the most useful here and it does not discuss theories of vision. She contributes valuable definitions and thoughts about the tension between positive and negative perspectives on digital technology, and how a dichotomy affects the understanding of photography.[6] This controversy forms part of my background research and can be exemplified by the writing of W.J.T. Mitchell, Geoffrey Batchen and many others.[7] Wagner situates the start of the debate about digital photography around 1990, the time when the new technology had its breakthrough on the international market. This shift in the interpretation of visual media also puts the theories of Martin Jay and Jonathan Crary into perspective. The titles related here were written in 1988 and 1990 respectively and both have a more or less outspoken reference to changing visual parameters.

The rich body of Swedish research on photography, vision and digital technology is rarely cross-fertilized. There is also an unfortunate gap between the practices of art history and art. More visual artists turn to digital means but do not write about it and those who do are not artists but historians trained on the past. Merging artistic and scholarly perspectives is currently an initiative in art rather than in academia, where it could add relevant analytical and methodological contributions. New research endeavours are long overdue, especially in the light of how digital photography combines the most dominating forms of today's visual world and shapes new concepts of visuality. Even the low-tech *Periscope* articulates a way of seeing that has been under way for a generation but still is kept out of the spotlight of art history.

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[5] See appendix for a list of dissertations.
[6] Wagner 2003, p. 36-39 (further examples of the wider debate on p. 11-19 and p. 232-233).
[7] See the Further reading section in the appendix for a list of background literature.

The *Periscope* case

From periscope to *Periscope*

A periscope is an information tool. You look through it to get your bearings, secure a position and decide where to go next. It allows you to see while unseen, to gather knowledge without being known. A periscope represents a metaphorical if not literal control. With its military setting, it holds a strong connotation of a violent power struggle. At the same time, there is a necessity for periscopes – without them we would be stuck in a claustrophobic space. This contradictory need and desire is played out in the act of looking. To connect with the world through a periscope is to be subjected to an instrument while subjecting what it lets you see. Distance from experience is the price for knowledge. In the traditional context of visual technology, the periscope shares this characteristic with the camera – and with the human eye. Yet, scopic instruments have a performative quality, as they make visible not only the communicated world but also the precariousness of communication.

A shift from periscope to *Periscope* is a shift from reality to surreality and back again. The starting point here is the simple question of what would happen if you looked into a periscope and saw *that*. Ten still photographs are edited and reassembled into twenty collages and set in motion. The non-descript landscape on the way to the airport, transposed to an innerscape yet still keeping some of its original clues. The twenty minute train ride halted ten times, multiplied and replayed over another, and yet the same, time span. The circle cut out in the square frame. By bringing attention to the lens, such an easy action establishes the analogy between the instrument, the image and the viewer's eyes. Once this link is made, the implications of the apparatus can be explored. The digital presence becomes a critical means to articulate a kind of meaningful disorientation in the work.

Disorientation is achieved by taking the ten exposures as the beginning rather than the end point. This permits more content to surface than what first meets the eye if the presumed order is followed. A conventional idea that what is revealed was always already there, is countered by the idea that it is rather born in the performance of making and seeing the work. Editing out the real thus prepares the way for a new concept of reality. The viewer's lack of bearings leads on to a deeper ambiguity in trying to extract meaning from this experience. While certainly a photograph, it does not respect the photographic standard. Shot with a 2 megapixel cell phone camera, the small and slow lens causes a melted look lacking the esteemed clarity. As the lens symbolizes purity, *Periscope* can only be called impure.[8] Digital but lowtech, the quality of the images is even harder to ascertain in terms of technique as well as meaning. Neither real nor abstract, even the narrative is unclear.

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[8] Burnett 2004, p. 31.

Reading the visual clues in this manner, disorientation equals disinformation. Like periscopes, a camera is expected to deliver a clear picture of a coherent story. Seeing a photograph should be like seeing the world – or possibly clearer. At the same time, mediation remains contested. Disinformation is distortion, only worse since it seems to be intentional or else irresponsible. Freedom from distortion is impossible, but still this perspective on photography lingers on as the images are used as evidence either of an existing world or an ideal. A different concept of information is needed – the digital structure is a potent metaphor as well as a tool for this.

Fluidity and reduction

It is possible to argue that disorientation is an intrinsic quality of digital technology. With its shifting nature, this technology thrives on the problems of mediation. Distortion is at work both in a perceptual and a structural manner. The binary hardness of the innermost ones and zeros does not deflect the user from producing completely intuitive, imaginative creations. A stable ground may exist, but that is not where the user is situated while altering an image. On the other hand, the user may perceive this creative area as a continuous space where each action is consistent with the result. At the surface, there is no sense of the discontinuity of the digital structure or of the fact that the technology itself may be altered by the user's actions.

A digital photograph is compressed by algorithm, reducing information by removing the least important part of the image.[9] This would imply that the image and the experience drawn from it are poorer than before in quality as well as meaning. Reduction is a choice of programmers more than of users or viewers. On the other hand, everything can be digitized and therefore consequently changed. That rather implies a richer spectrum of choices for making and seeing images. As the electrical charges of the computer neither stay the same nor go away, fluidity and reduction are intertwined. Information becomes a layered and dispersed process rather than a singular thing. In a transition from surreal to real, truth loses its absolute form.

This tension of abstraction and plasticity is felt in *Periscope*. Until accessed by a user or a viewer, experience lies stored with the image in a fluid structure. They are all instances of a generated flexibility. Not fully present until it is activated, the digital work depends on inter-action. In the process, the experience changes all parties. In this shared visual space, the viewer and the image constitute each other rather than affirm singularity. The visual situation is decided by which information in photography, collage and film files that the computer deems most relevant – yet nothing is relevant if not activated by the individual. Real and virtual are linked through a necessary and necessarily unpredictable relationship. A digitally defined work such as *Periscope* forms part of a continuum that changes how images look and what they mean. This instability also has a profound effect on how viewers see themselves.

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[9] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 45-47. Conflicts of abstraction also referenced in *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, ed. Blanche Craig, Black Dog Publishing Ltd, London 2008, p. 47.

Photograph, collage, film

As the film begins, the first collage fades in from white to full colour. The movement is slow, about a minute long, but the complete image does not stay still for more than a second before fading into the next one. This rhythm is repeated throughout the twenty images of the film. In fact, the first image is not the first frame. At the very beginning, the artist and the title are briefly named, followed by three paragraphs of introduction. This text is not pure information, not pure poetry. Its function is to bring the viewer into the mode of the work, directing pace and attention to the narrative that is about to unfold. The pieces of text come into view in the same manner as the images and can be read both as differing from and integrated with them.

Placed in between, the text can be included in the zone of transition called peritext – a kind of text used in creative works to influence a reader before the actual reading.[10] In *Periscope*, the viewer has a choice of reading the words or seeing them as images. As one paragraph emerges through the previous one and remains embedded as the next one fades in, seeing is more than simply reading. Such a focus on the choices of the viewer reflects the ones made by the artist. Ambiguity is carefully maintained through the process and is extended to the viewer of the work. That is the conscious message of the peritext – viewers are welcome to make their own sense of what they see, of what their seeing does to them and to the seen.

A palette of blue, green, black and white makes the photographs abstract and opens them up to interpretation. Again, the editing begins at the parameters given in the original exposure: pale sky blue and leafy green, black and white of the sun's light and shade. Most changes were made after the individual frames were put in the collage. Before, the colours were only slightly tweaked as a basic step of digital editing. Another step set the contrast limited by the image's brightest and darkest points. Adding its own manipulation, these alterations are done automatically and manually to correct the camera's supposed weakness in rendering the photographed motif. However, a failure to make up for the faults of the exposure hinders this conventional action from producing a conventional photograph. The image was made a little less blurry and pale, but not much. For creative purposes though, this was not a problem.

The cracks in the window are another dominating feature. Characteristic of this type of glass, it does not shatter when it breaks – so as to not harm anyone in the urban environments where this material is often found. The visual effect is an organic mesh of irregular bits reaching across the surface in a few long lines with many smaller lines branching out. On the train, the clever properties of the material – and an amount of strong tape – held the window together in spite of being completely destroyed. Unintentionally, the tape added to the likewise unintentional view, by squaring off certain parts of clear glass and covering up others.

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[10] Wagner 2003, p. 30. See the introductory text in the beginning of the appendix.

Visual paradox

Since the photographs are taken at different angles to the window, some sections have broad cracks and other very fine, some are in focus and some are not. Depending on the light, the cracks are bright or shaded, merging or not with the sun and the woods. In the collage, the lines were first fitted to one another to form larger sections of seemingly connected mesh. As the incongruities became obvious, these were explored to make the unfitting parts stand out as much as the smooth ones. Borders were erased or enhanced, the highlights of the cracks whitened, parts turned and moved to interact with contrast and colour. Producing new coherence as well as new cracks spawned a multitude of associations – a meaningful uncertainty.

In some areas, a shade darker or greener was enough to create seamless transitions. In others, the shifted lens caught the light differently, made the cracks larger and blurrier and distorted objects outside. Both happened in the same single action – as one space was unified, another one cracked open. The moving train warped form and narrative alike, just by moving. Time and place changed in between the shots, too fast to let the narrative create itself. With collage in mind, this narrative was given in the photographs and in the fact that they did not form a coherent whole – similar enough to communicate a certain thematic, but not enough to do so as photography. In fact, this problem itself became an overall theme. As some of the original sense of motion was recreated in the film, new cracks emerged. In transition, an unexpected grey area occurred between the images – an uneditable addition by the software. Annoying at first, it was eventually accepted as a digital trace well suited for the thematic of the work.

Paradox is an internal state of collage. The paradox in *Periscope* adds a complication since it is caused by parts of the same imagery. There is no drive to obliterate the landscape – indeed it is crucial to ground the abstract work in a lived experience. The identity of place is maintained though displaced to the point of shaping a new identity. An ambiguous character is enhanced by the colours, which invoke a diversity of perspectives. Visual references build on the original sky and land but spin the eye in all directions to make new landscapes. Within the same circular image the viewer is placed above and under water, inside and outside of a window, below and in the midst of light and dark heavens. The cracks in the glass bring to mind natural and artificial mosaics, nerve fibres in the bodies of animals and plants, reflections on a liquid surface, a starry night – as well as the entire bank of remembered images like them.

This construction and a meaningful experience of it depend on the destabilizing abilities of digital tools. Too often, an immersive quality is granted only to high-tech technology. As these qualities are found in simpler circumstances, the digital itself may be shown to add connection rather than distance – thanks to its destabilizing character. Rather than distance the viewer from a unique place and time, that uniqueness may be enriched by a visual diversity.

One or two eyes – visual distance and connection

This thesis investigates a possibility of connection in a process coloured by conventions of distance. A specific focus is placed on visuality as a process where a viewer connects with a place made visible by an image. This place is a construction of a part real and part fictive landscape, as *Periscope* is based on a heavily edited snapshot. The connection here is one of making a place your own, but not in the usual sense of conquest or exploit.[11] Seeing may rather engage the viewer in a direct experience of mutual belonging where viewer and viewed are shaping one another. Both modes of seeing involve control but, if the convention teaches visuality as a position of distance, this gets close enough for friction and fragmentation to produce a constructive bond. The potential chaos pending in such a disorienting situation can be handled through this encounter defined by active seeing and embodiment. Destabilization includes subject as well as object, brought closer together in the process.

A certain unification is often taken for granted in everyday relations to images. Posing oneself and one's encounters as singular entities is a way of navigating the visual, and indeed human, world. Rather than a passive product of such a unified look at a unified object, *Periscope* and visuality in general can be understood as an active situation. Allowing for blurred boundaries and discontinuous fragments complicates the basic need to make sense of what one sees. But such a complication is worth exploring despite any unease, for the knowledge that may be gained of self and world. Visual activity is performed in many different ways – to cement a static distance between a viewer and a place, or to connect them in a heterogenous yet deeply embodied space. The oneness of viewer and place is renegotiated and reshaped in the process. Seeing image and place as overlapping and constantly tested against one another, sensitizes viewers to their role in shaping both. It actualizes the notion that viewing indeed is a role to be played. The area designated for the connection is a stage where fiction and reality can interact by being enacted – resulting in new meanings. One such area is *Periscope*.

The *Periscope* film is of interest here since it combines and contests several conventions of distance, while seeking to articulate and enforce a connection between the viewer and the viewed. The dimensions of method, content and form – photography, landscape and collage – serve as examples of conventional distance turned into possibilities of connection. In addition, the digital as technology and experience will be articulated as a key context for all three. If at all discussed, the digital is often condemned as the ultimate distance-maker. Examining this work, a distinctly differing point will be made. Indeed, the digital frame may prove crucial to establishing a specific visual connection.

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[11] This convention is discussed by for instance Martin Jay in "Scopic Regimes of Modernity", *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster, Bay Press, Seattle 1988, p. 9-10.

Plural vision

Martin Jay offers a useful approach to visuality in his writings on scopic regimes. The plural here is simple but decisive. If there were only one unified regime available, its existence might go unnoticed since we would be too affected by it to observe it. With the articulation of vision as a norm, alternatives may come to light. Jay's focus is the allegedly "ocularcentric" modern era peaking with the Cartesian perspective and continuing to dominate on the grounds that vision based on scientific dogma is a natural one.[12] In his analysis, sight is shown to have implications far beyond this traditional logic of singular rationality and static harmony.

A single mode may be called such without being singular. It does not express a single time and place, but several modes may and do exist together across a fluid time-place span. Such fluidity can be contained in, for instance, an image. Cartesianism has been well criticized for a long time, yet Jay exposes its internal conflicts as a source for dynamic re-interpretations. Most interesting here is the contested subject position. The lone perspectivist eye is supposed to be transcendental and universal. Yet if vision is supposed to be governed by each viewer, such a position is impossible for the creator as well as for the viewer of real and imagined places alike.[13] Whether concrete or conceptual, space is all fragmented and all shared – and so this convention may unexpectedly survive as a proponent of both distance and connection simultaneously. Diversity and contestation open up the possibility of parallel and integrated modes of seeing, which can be utilized to understand visuality also in our own time.

From Jay's perspective, it is with caution that *Periscope* and its potential visuality is situated as postmodern. The term is used here to point up the relationship between conceptual and visual fragmentation – how a rupture of visual space corresponds to a rupture of viewing position. This situation may be found at various moments in history, though the issues around it are perhaps especially pertinent within a postmodern context. A doubling back of a later train of thought is forcing the re-interpretation of an earlier one. The seemingly inevitable linearity of Western time can be engaged in a new way as parts of the chain are loosened and retied to articulate unpredictable responses on informational as well as imaginative grounds.

Real and virtual are kept apart while new connections are built and embraced. Contradictions are thus maintained as they are managed. Such a perspective is a welcome break from the conventions surrounding the current topics – visuality, photography, landscape and the digital. Almost by default, these have been used to a Cartesian end that obscures their rich potential. Since collage is often read as both unity and disunity, it takes a middle position that will prove useful to the conclusions of the questions posed here – especially in their digital version.

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[12] Jay 1988, p. 3-5.
[13] Jay 1988, p. 11. This conflict between subjectivity and transcendence is also noted in *Collage* p. 81 – whether or not the unknown world uncovered in the image is pre-existent or produced by the act of making visible.

Revisiting baroque vision

A postmodern context can be readily identified with Jay's model of baroque vision – a celebration of the unseeable leading to a visual madness of sorts, highly present and popular in contemporary culture.[14] Jay stresses the standard contrast between the Renaissance and the baroque. The latter is described as both open and opaque, giving a sense of disorientation that renders reality represented but unreadable. Baroque vision explores contradiction and multiplicity in a way that prevents visual space from gelling into coherence. Also, it does so self-consciously, reminding viewers of their own eyes. Ambiguity becomes productive as the absence of singular truth informs the individual of one among several individualities. The critique of singularity includes the eye itself, which now regains the dynamic pair of human vision from the unblinking eye of the perspectival peephole. The metaphorical Renaissance window purportedly exposed nature as natural – mirroring the space of reality and of the eye as geometrical. Now the flat surface is distorted to reveal seeing as dependant on reflective materials. This tactile, haptic quality grounds the experience and brings viewer and viewed closer – physically, mentally and emotionally.

Discussing the effect of baroque vision, Jay follows Walter Benjamin's thought that failure to represent the unrepresentable ends in a sublime melancholy.[15] This regime reinstates the body as a given part of the disincarnated Cartesian, but only by infusing the viewer with an always unfulfilled desire. This argument lacks the option of finding pleasure in such an incomplete representation without trying to perfect or excuse it. Jay returns to the sense of unease that this visual situation causes as if it was somehow innate. It seems like the pleasure of imperfection must always be pessimistic. However, instead of understanding it as a dilemma, it could be noted as an opening on to something more constructive than the self-indulgent passivity that melancholy tends to entail.

Pleasurable pessimism may well be replaced by a pleasure derived from appreciating the value of imperfection as a source of energy. Describing it in terms of energy gives this process the proper push needed to escape a status quo of any kind. There is a reactionary tone to the idea that seeing the missing pieces makes the viewer want to put them "back" in place. The act of viewing itself then slows the visual process down to a halt. The alternative is leaving the pieces incomplete and, by doing nothing, still enforcing a status quo. An active viewer within these parameters is acting out a preset condition of what visuality is. Viewer and image are singular entities producing one single outcome. Therefore, the potential of the image becomes deactivated – producing a visuality drained of energy, resistant to change. However, a new engagement may need little more than a tweak of perspective.

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[14] Paragraph based on Jay 1988, p. 6-8, 16-19. Selected literature addresses postmodern visuality in similar ways.
[15] Paragraph based on Jay 1988, p. 17-18.

To contemporize baroque vision includes taking digital technology into account. Jay hints at this development as he emphasizes the potential in a plurality of scopic experiences.[16] With its fractured components and openness to diverse interpretations, this plurality forms the basis of virtual environments. These gain new dimensions by simulating a merging of images, objects and subjects. Rather than being fake, simulations offer the performative possibility available in fiction for trying out the real as well as the not-quite or not-yet real. Digital technology helps to make use and sense of an existing environment and enable a cognitive and physical remodelling. As the virtual cannot be or represent an exterior object, the singularity of the link between objects and subjects is broken. Information gathered into each of these is combined with an imagination that may displace them. Digital photographs are built on code that, while not being a work of the imagination, still mediate the impact of creative fantasy. As digital abstraction challenges the norms of making and looking at images, the ordered numbers of computerized vision may in turn be challenged.

Described as a continuum, the virtual plays with two opposite kinds of interaction – the seamless transitions of things supposed to belong together naturally in a natural world, and the hard steps between discrete units in the artifice of computer technology. As Burnett points out, we humans will always bring analogue problems as well as solutions.[17] New imaging technologies shape experiences built on conditions that are irreducible to discrete units. Then again, many things analogue seem to be more digital than ever known or expected. Discontinuity is just as naturally human as is continuity. Perhaps these ambiguous circumstances could not be clarified until digital technology was developed. Still – decades after its invention, old norms frame the changes in how photographs are and should be made and viewed. It is obviously much more problematic to interpret digital technology than to use it. At the root of this visual practice is the trope of sight-as-insight. The need to see what is real and know what is not is so strong that the slightest uncertainty is treated as a wrong needing to be righted. As the presumably pure analogue world is the original reference, the digital is constructed as inferior.

Loosening the firmness of an analogue foundation, and the firm dependence and belief in it, puts the world in a process of recontextualization. Instead of understanding an imaged reality as fake, it can be appreciated for contributing a new space to explore both worlds. With its focus on embodiment and instability, baroque vision may be a model equally anchored in history and relevant right now. For the present purposes, it serves as a ground for how visual conventions of distance may be questioned by the allegedly most distancing technique. The digital, an ambiguous immersive abstraction, is surely one of the least material of our everyday spaces. When distinction between subjects and objects thins out there may be a new kind of embodiment available in the digital connection – rewarding because unpredictable.

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[16] Jay 1988, p. 20.
[17] Burnett 2004, p. 98.

Towards a digital scopic regime

Ron Burnett states that images are integrated into the sensual as parts of the seeing subject.[18] There neither is nor must be any conceptual or physical distance in between. Going outside the image into perceived reality is rather a constant movement than a fixed position. Motion continues to influence the process by causing a continuum of fragmented parts rather than a singular whole. Our response to vision, whether as producers or viewers of images, never admits more than a part that may not easily be combined with other parts into a coherent unity. Visuality blends with visibility in that it makes only some elements available to sight.

This idea supports the claim that there is no singular world to mirror any singular subject. Though images may be fragments of something larger than themselves, it is not clear that this is not itself fragmented. Indeed if it does consist of images – as today's world to a great extent does – it is quite unlikely to be unified. Digital photography points to a moment at once fixed in the individual image and set adrift in an unstable virtual environment. A challenge of such images is that they awaken instability in those who encounter them – a transitional ability that has been thoroughly repressed by Western society, with its history of organizing the world in binary opposites and chronological taxonomies. If photography makes sense in this culture of singularity and distance, the digital aspect seems only to disrupt and distort.

Digital visuality makes images, and therefore our sense of reality, fragmented and mobile. From this statement follows the unsettling conclusion that even selfhood is dependent on which pieces are available. Acceptance of this destabilized situation would prove digital photography highly productive, to the benefit of makers and viewers alike. It is an in-between space for exploration of the ambiguous without demands for nailing down an unambiguous truth. In contrast, the setting of hard rules is intrinsic to computer programming. This technology brings its own rules and modes of operation that should not be ignored by too utopian an attitude. Yet the visual aspect, what the user can do through seeing, interrupts the technical frame. By bringing attention to the discontinuity of its own architecture, a digital photograph provides leverage against the adherence to any one singular regime. Digital identity sounds like a paradox, considering the core of fluid fragments. To access the meaning digitally added to *Periscope*, such a concept still provides a connection between the viewer and the viewed.

Relationships between sight, body and world are prompted by a need to know the borders of things. From analogue to digital, these edges dissolve and multiply in an ever more fluid motion through ever more positions. A digital scopic regime can entail a negotiation between the continuous and the fragmentary. This dialogue takes place in between image and viewer, in a performative virtual space where both are activated in a shared and embodied experience.

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[18] Burnett 2004, p. 75.

Visual performance

The use of *Periscope* in the attempt to look back into "one's own looking" actualizes a problem of vantage point. Through the gap of contradicting what you may see and what you may know, the viewer is engaged in an experience driven by the visual. The acts involved – access as a form of edit – internalize the ambiguity and transform visuality from a distanced to an embodied practice. The physical engagement with digital photographs constitutes the eye as belonging to the body and to bodily activities. Such an experience is not so much about stepping away from the image to gain a supposedly objective overview, but to lean forward as a part of the interface. As clear as a code and as smooth as a screen, the image interface is discontinuous. To claim a difference from what you see becomes as hard as relying on any natural sameness. The visually ephemeral and dispersed may underline the same quality in you. Uncertainty then carries more meaning than if it had been made certain.

Virtual reality experiences can transcend distinctions of perception and image.[19] Yet, digital technology contradicts transcendence as the available settings reveal a tension between choice and mathematics. Burnett notes that to see is to, however subconsciously, generate what is seen as an image. Intentions of makers and viewers seem to cancel each other out. Visuality itself causes an imbalance, an asymmetry that has long been rejected by the symmetry seekers of Western civilization. This performative reading is somewhat contradicted by his claim that the viewing experience is defined by a dynamic of distance and closeness. The viewer needs a physical distance to the image – a canvas, print or screen – and an emotional and mental proximity to enter its domain. Comprehension needs distance while proximity motivates the need to comprehend. While this last statement seems to make sense, the question arises if that sense is not embedded in the same cultural assumption that the former notion proves lacking.

Turning to *Periscope*, two routes of interpretation stand out: firstly, the classic theory where visual distance is a required means to reach understanding and knowledge, and secondly, the contemporary update that emphasizes close embodied connections as grounds for reaching these goals and expanding what they could be. Looking at *Periscope*, the first route leads to quite a dead end, since distance only blurs details and transitions. While such an experience is possible and even encouraged by a perspective of diversity, it is useless from a perspective of singularity and coherence. While a performative stance may be teased out of both, the second route is a better fit since it allows for meaning in the digital alteration as well as in its glitches. The surface is broken in several senses, not as sleek as to hide all of its realities from view. Visuality comes across as discursive but also as an active choice of focus in order to handle the flow of fragments. Making and viewing these images connects the viewer to the viewed by causing a productive disorientation.

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[19] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. XX, 7, 13-14.

Visuality in digital photography

It seems obvious that *Periscope* is a photographic work. The visual informs the viewer that the images stem from a device able to capture something outside of itself rather than construct it from within. At the same time, there is ample evidence of such a construction. Even before the photographic clues, it is clear that the images have been altered and combined digitally first as collage and then as film, to finally be presented and distributed through a computer. These images are taken, edited, printed and spread by digital means yet referring to analogue environments, technologies and values. This double nature is so ubiquitous that it may be a non-issue. If noted at all, sides are taken: digital photography is either a sub-category of analogue traditions perfecting old meaning with new tools, or a tool somehow too new to produce meaning like before. Meaning is either much richer or totally lost, as human-machine relations are praised or lamented. The debate repeats a dichotomy that strangely seems to miss the vitals. Seeing a digital photograph, the digital is overlooked.

The instability built into the photographic medium seems to grow in its digital stage. This ambiguity of reception may be rooted in an ambiguity of production. Here, destabilization is discussed as a possibility rather than a problem – or a problem not needing to be solved. The term post-photography is perhaps an attempt to identify this new image type.[20] Following the convention of art-historical chronology this *post* occurred almost twenty years ago. Today it seems dated, offering little to the present and even less to the future. Still it does express an unresolved ambiguity of how to place digital photography, steering clear of both reactionary and utopian frames. Since the gap between the analogue and the digital may be a key to a meaningful reading of digitally contextualized photographs, an effort is made to keep it open. The gap represents an interpretative route driven by a curiousity about where the conceptual and formal negotiation between these two modes might lead.

To understand the photographic aspect of *Periscope* and how it affects distance and embodi-ment, this discussion is defined by framing and visualization. The first term is used as an analogue concept as it pertains to a physical metaphor for relating to the material world. The second adds a virtual dimension as it covers the grey zone between a material, a perceptual and an imaginary world. Both concepts are useful for visual interpretation, but here framing is interpreted as an attempt to determine a fixed meaning that visualizing would unfix. As the argument unfolds, they may be found similar in their performative as well as discursive functions. Essentially, both concepts are mined for the possibility of achieving an embodied connection between the viewer and the viewed.

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[20] For instance W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye. Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era,* The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London UK 1992. Geoffrey Batchen and others describe this scenario through similar concepts such as "the death of photography", see Wagner 2003 for an overview.

Framing distance – visualizing embodiment

A photograph is rarely allowed to escape a narrow understanding of the camera. The focus on index-as-truth forms a contested yet strong tradition. With postmodernity, a challenge to all truth claims came to include photographic practices. Despite the breaking up of subject-object conventions and visual meaning production, the photograph kept a distance. Even if the world depicted in the frame could no longer be unified, the act of photographing was a framing of the world, albeit as a broken mirror put in place by the photographer's vision. This contradiction admits that photography may still depend on indexical ability. Yet the norm shaping such a connection seems forced by an artificial distance. As if the 'brokenness' of the world could be fixed in the image, to photograph is to engage with the fragments by unifying them.[21] As photographing in a fragmented way seems implausible, visualization may offer an option.

Visualization defines how bits of information turn into understanding and then into solid form through an interaction between analogue and digital, human and machine.[22] In the viewing act, the individual is drawn into a simulation. As stated before, this ill-fated word refers to a multi-faceted experience where reality and fiction shape one another. A photograph is a simulation if it puts the viewer in different places at the same time – inside and outside the image, the body and the world. In this ambiguous space, known and new experiences become visible.

As a visual impression is articulated, it is also brought into being. Making something visible is a physical and deeply embodied act. Analogue photographs may do the same, but digital imagery enforces the connections between the real and the unreal, the familiar and the virtual. Instead of trying to put this contradiction in order, it can be embraced in the encounter with images. As the individual internalizes this ambiguity, the parameters of viewing photographs expand beyond what can be indexed to what can be visualized.

What can be indexed and visualized in *Periscope* is a matter of vantage point. In an analogue interpretation, the work is an index of manipulation. Another option is to look for and value only specifically analogue traits. This inflexible indexicality turns fluid and unpredictable through visualization. Interaction is not a means to establishing fixed meanings but is valued for its own sake. Since it played a major role in the original capture of the images, an index of visualization can also be claimed. The impulse to photograph from the train was a sense of being in-between, seeing both the everyday world and some other place. A defining quality of the work is the fact that the cracks in the glass are as much indexical as imaginary. The choice of title reflects this situation – periscopes also need an interactive visualization to operate.

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[21] The assumption that photographic and indeed all visual selection aims at framing 'a good view' is exemplified by Malcolm Andrews in *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, p. 3-5.
[22] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 77, 202-203.

Viewers of *Periscope* may be drawn to a simultaneous granting and denial of recognition. This gives a simulation function to the film, despite it being a small-scale piece of art: a mix of real and unreal brought about by the movement of the irregular cracks. The motion is generated by these cracks within and in between the cuts. The transitions begin in different parts of the images and at different speeds, which moves the viewer around without a steady vantage point. This is made possible by specifically digital alterations, where smaller details can be changed at a wider range than in analogue editing. As the cuts are stills, the motion causes an unreality effect. At the same time, the flow of the film happens in real time. The imaged circle may act as a frame for what is put in and left out, but also for visualizing the spaces in between. Visualization frames the work while enforcing an act of reframing.

The shift from analogue to digital can be addressed as a reframing. John Tagg asserts the frame as a technology of discipline.[23] He develops Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion of a reversed reality: language describes a presumably given world, which then is used as an example to legitimize a privileged description. This new order is set up by documents – they produce a particular reality in the act of documenting it. Regimes exclude what is not adapted and streamline what can exist by what can be expressed. Photographs document discipline, not reality as found with the supposedly honest camera. The documentary known as photographic nature exposes a culture shaping this value as an objective record in its own right. Here, postmodernism is complemented by Roland Barthes' realism. For him, a photograph is a fleeting but undeniable proof of existence. The image emanates from this presence as a physical trace of a true given reality. Tagg agrees with this evidential force and function yet sees photographs as products of a history of power. In the moment of capture, a discursive machine guarantees truth by limiting it. To know the truth, a viewer is taught to identify with images within disciplinary confines. A camera detached from the real turns the image-making event into a subjection to singularity and distance rather than an empowering embodiment.

This drawing of limits puts a focus on redrawing. Open-ended digital photographs may mould other images as well as themselves after disciplines of diversity instead of singularity. Part of the image may stay, or be kept, uncontrolled. According to Burnett, the interaction between the viewer and the viewed entails as much creation as response – it is to generate a relational process as it is acknowledged.[24] In terms of discipline, this notion may allow for resistance as well as compliance. Digital photographs are abstract representations of information yet more than just code, just frame. Active viewers enter a diverse yet shared visual experience. Visualization happens inside and outside the viewer and the image, activating both. A digital context articulates conventional – and other – frames as bringing something new into being.

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[23] John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame. Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London 2009, p. 226-227 on Barthes, p. 235-236 on Lyotard.
[24] Burnett 2004, p. 41, 202-203.

Tagg grounds his argument in Derrida's idea that a division marks neither inside nor outside yet shapes both.[25] Articulated as it dissolves, seen and not seen, it is crucial to visuality. While fading into indistinction, it fixes a difference between a core and the rest. Eyes and mind of the viewer are thus educated in the singularity of the world and its depiction. A seeming given hides that the intention of the image must be redetermined – reframed and relearned – at every viewing. Even presence and consciousness cease to count as preconditions. Since meaning is created in an act of articulation, the frame may change as much it determines.

This quality of articulation connects the making and viewing of images to the way thoughts are realized in the act of speaking.[26] Even in a passing conversation, singularity turns into a cultural myth. The reputation of digital photography as disembodied may go back to the idea that vision and the rest of the body is a purely analogue and thus natural ground for coherent and singular unity. Modern science states otherwise – interaction of mind and body happens everywhere at the same time with no single centre. With the exception of consciousness, the same can be said of computers. Digital technology reflects and enforces instability in subjects and objects. With a steady global flow of images, human identity is hard to localize. For the individual, being immersed in visualization can thus entail both letting go and taking charge.

Again, Burnett suggests that distance is needed to gain control of a visual experience. This focus on the distance and agency of the subject seems to support the convention of singularity. Emphasizing control recalls the political aspect of this convention, where the division of all things into single unequivocally clear-cut units firstly makes them just that – things – and secondly fixes them under an oppressive order. Even if individual control is very far from collective control, the two are connected. In some small way, one viewer's act of closing distance and embracing diversity could multiply to the larger scale of society. Holistic structures build on interconnections between a multitude of fragments and layers. Like a fluid mosaic they have a performative quality that make even distance an embodied experience.

Such interconnection points up the agency of individual and image alike. For its existence, the *Periscope* film depends on someone to open the file, adjust the screen and the body – press play, pause, rewind. Once watched, the work is influenced by activities like downloading and hacking, spreading and commenting. Viewers depend on the mix of analogue and digital characteristics of the work for a meaningful experience. Encouraging the act of visualization makes this interaction a condition. Using the concept and activity of visualization, distance becomes productive in making room for a link between viewer and viewed. From this perspective, both analogue frames and digital code seem less like innate qualities of the real and more like tools to handle it – and by doing so, they in some respect also produce it.

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[25] Paragraph based on Tagg 2009, p. 246-249; Andrews 1999, p. 7-8.
[26] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 73-74, 77, 137, 139.

Intercepting discipline

A work of art can be employed to give access to the performative process of a visual order. The very thing that sets it up – frame or code – now betrays its incompleteness. For instance, *Periscope* could be framed by contrasting disciplines. With a realist view, the photographs portray the landscape outside the train regardless of changes in collage and film. The value here lies with the original moment of capture and not with what happens later. A discursive view would add other cuts, setting severe limits to what would be possible to call realist and photographable. The closest analogue discourse is the realist one, which could live on in a digital regime. The latter could also insist on ambiguity as a driving force and thus challenge viewers in a new way. Instead of adapting to a detailed script, the individual would be forced to rewrite multiple scripts and making informed choices between them. Such a performative discourse could be strict, but not necessarily homogenizing. A frame can thus be regarded either as a unilateral border control or as a guarded yet contested space. Following Tagg's argument, a tiny but relevant seed of resistance is found. The document destined to write history on behalf of a strict ruler may be rewritten to give existence to future options.

To actively choose a seeing mode, as artist or viewer, activates a subversive potential. Having such a choice may seem foreign to the concept of discipline but it is likely to present an equal pressure. In postmodern writing, the stress of the digital is often described in a negative light.[27] The fact that choice exists could however be noted as a positive. While nobody could move effortlessly between discourses, with effort it may be done. Simply listing these brief interpretations suggests a diversity of frames – of seeing. Reading *Periscope* in contrasting ways, parallel or intersecting, enriches meaning in this work and opens up for a plethora of available meanings in digital photography. If periscopes organize vision according to a certain discipline, *Periscope* may remind the viewer of the choice to accept or reject it. Determination of a fixed, singular, unambiguous meaning is subtly shifted to a temporary decision.

As an example of alternative visual systems, Martin Jay gives photography a new track.[28] Alongside the Cartesian perspective, he places Svetlana Alpers' theory on Dutch 17th century painting. This art describes the surfaces of a world fragmented in rich detail yet not seeking totalizing explanations. A visual experience shaped by immediate observation replaces an abstract concept of rational geometry. Including objects and words in a flat visual space, this art is modelled on the map – in an updated and less distanced version.[29] Visual flatness emphasized a world needing no superior gaze to constitute it. It went beyond the monocular as arbitrary frames were shaped by eyes, windows and lenses. Fragmentation, immediacy, arbitrariness – Jay counts these traits as a 'mapping impulse' decisive to photography.

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[27] Jean Baudrillard and other postmodern theorists as well as many modernist ones such as Hollis Frampton.
[28] Paragraph based on Jay 1988, p. 12-16. Crary supports this but stresses historical limits on reinterpretation.
[29] See landscape chapter for discussion on the map. Reference to Alpers also in Andrews 1999, p. 79-84, 91.

In *Periscope*, Jay's characteristics are enhanced as photographs and digital creations. The work builds on an observation beyond the original direct experience, continuing through the screen as well as the window and the lens. The fragments are multiplied, more at more levels, forming a particular but not unified whole with the digital tools. The immediacy of the initial capture is sped up by the easy access to image and environment that this technology grants the photographer and by extension the viewer. Immediacy is also slowed down by manipulation – more minute with ever more advanced software. Slow editing makes the digital image less arbitrary, while speed increases this trait by increasing the fragments as well as the friction between them. While digital technology brings its own discourses – turning out documents that make some possible and some not – the digital presence in *Periscope* opens the work up to several frames at once. Details of the work do not add up to a totalizing explanation. An inclusion of words into the photographic shifts the experience from visual depth to flatness, interior text and exterior peritext. The interaction between work and viewer may provide a basis for resistance to normative vision. A testing ground for conflicting concepts to be tried out on the image and then in the world – as such, it is a strong example of visualization.

Digital memory

Truth in photography has always been a confusing issue.[30] As digital alteration alters memory while recreating it, tension increases. For a conventional image-as-record, critical viewers would expose that natural recognition hides yet reinforces a social agreement about truth. Blind belief in the stable singularity of photographs, or the reality they are claimed to reflect, interrupts the creative potential of visualization. Communication of meaning will inevitably recontextualize it so that congruence can never tell the whole truth. As evident in *Periscope*, congruence does not equal identity. This performative link gives photographs a value as catalysts for dialogue rather than for testimony. Digital environments continue a basic mode of defining experience through images – externalizing the internal and vice versa. The in-between spaces developed in the process encourage an active and embodied seeing.

As an example of alteration, *Periscope* is undermining more than sustaining memory. These images are no good for remembering anything exactly. Yet they do put the viewer in contact with the experience that prompted the photographs to be taken. The film serves as a memory of a creative encounter, of how visualization was handled and expressed. It could be called an archive of process. The indexical and the imaginative call each other out. The recognition that viewers take as natural truth causes them to seek the familiar in the images – treetops and solar discs as well as self-evident technical clues. From this safe ground, the fantastical can be accessed and made meaningful. However, it is the surrealism of colour and form that attracts attention and connects the viewer with the original experience and its place.

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[30] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 15-24, 54. Another example of the nature/artifice conflict in discussions on photography is found in Andrews 1999, p. 14-15, 180, 197-199, 204.

Vantage points in a digital photograph refer to traces of construction alongside the traces of the photographed. The concept of the trace itself may be complicated since digital images pass through many more alterations than analogue ones, while the effects are more visible though uninformative after the fact. The traces are conspicuous, but impossible to retrace. Digital image production turns photographs into raw material, endlessly changeable rather than an end in itself. Memorial value is set against a performative value of rewriting memory to shape new things to experience. This rewriting implicates the writer, invited or maybe forced to change with the fruits of the labour. Such a subject position is by definition shaped by the self-reflexive state of creative expression.

To take the argument a step further than Burnett seems willing to go, the individual may be so challenged by the opportunity and responsibility of articulating a vantage point that no single perspective can be known. To articulate a seeing of "one's own" is to produce that mode by acknowledging the existence of others. The choice is less a matter of finding a personal essence than taking a personal stand – digital photography is a reminder of the political dimension in active seeing and embodiment.

Digital photographs raise awareness of the inconstant and multifaceted nature of perception. In view of this, the claim that the virtual is artificial and therefore non-existent can be refuted. In the *Periscope* example, images are simulations without being fake. As an integral part of the everyday the digital may reinvent and enrich conventional views of reality. The film only truly exists when it is screened and actively watched. Such an active seeing involves scrutinizing the alterations of the images, which take attention in the opposite directions of index and fantasy. It also includes going over any number of vantage points and what each of them might do with the viewer as well as with the image. The actions of the viewer are rewarded by a deep if ephemeral connection. In the motion of the visual place, a new link to the original place is forged. By collaborating with this technology, viewers can be drawn closer to their experiences. In the process, ambiguity becomes a promise more than a threat.

Ephemeral viewing modes, like screens or projections, open up for immersion as a way into meaningful visual experiences. Embodiment and empathy are crucial parts of a process in which digital simulations teach the value of relational process over distant objectification. Instead of increasing distance, the digital builds on the analogue while bringing its own set of conditions. This double link enables empathy and a greater sense of embodiment. Despite increasing abstraction, *Periscope* expands the experience of the view on the way to the airport. Next time you take that train, your sense of the place will have changed.

Visuality in digital landscape photography

The landscape of *Periscope* seems to exist as pretext rather than text. Only a fraction worth of information can be gleaned from the images. More than a legible document of a specific locale, it may be understood as a passage to some place else. The photographer rather than the photographs can situate this work in the real world. At the same time, photographers create worlds through the choices governing image production. Human presence makes these visual traces real and challenges what that reality might be. The captured landscape differs from actuality to the point where meaning may be altered – but still, places do not disappear.

The main clue to the actual site is monotony. Woods stretching across the horizon, sunlit sky above intercepted by occasional power-poles. This is in-between country: cultivated yet un-inhabited, pragmatically more than aesthetically designed, not urban yet neither suburban nor rural. Common to big city areas, this land is part of its bones but not its face. The twenty minute train ride to Arlanda Airport is usually not spent studying the view. What happens outside is lost on the passer-by, from whom no interest is required. It is not a place to travel in, but through. The traveller's eyes turn outward without really seeing. In the tradition of landscape as a thing to be viewed, this place is disqualified. It may not even be known as a non-landscape.[31] Edited, collaged and cinematic, *Periscope* further undermines its status as a landscape and perhaps even as a place. A digital dependence abstracts the image, increasing the distance from the real place. Looking at the image, distance is again enforced by the conceptual frame shaped in relation to the physical viewing space – a space to which barely any relation is formed, at least not on the train. One may wonder how many eyes it takes for a place to be sufficiently seen and thereby earn the title of landscape.

The landscape in *Periscope* is explored through the concepts of the map and the image-scape, two distinct but interrelated ways of linking the actual and the visual in terms of distance and embodiment. Mapping has been used earlier, in Jay's alternative history of photography and in Burnett's discussion on digital technology as a way of connecting viewers, images and machines. The map's roots are traced to try *Periscope* as a ground for reinterpreting landscape representation, leading on to the digital environment of images-scapes. These image clusters are connected in large networks of makers and viewers. Given the practices they encourage, image-scapes can be understood as a sort of four-dimensional map. In almost but not quite bridging the gap between image and world, they seem to form their own world. Maps and image-scapes are both navigational tools. As the latter extends the former, this visual construction helps create new spaces – part real, part virtual. Seeing the analogue instrument through the digital one, distance is renegotiated into a greater sense of embodiment.

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[31] Andrews 1999, p. 16-18.

Seeing and building place

The traditional Western way of engaging with a place as a landscape is by removing oneself far enough to see it as a singular unity mirroring one's own needs.[32] The dominant version of Renaissance humanism and later imperialism made sight into a tool for cognitive control enabling a physical siege. A material and conceptual condition of this process was the map. With a visual representation doubling as a projection of desire, the map constituted and legitimized landscaping as an act of encroachment. Maps helped to shape the actual land according to demands and wishes. The constantly growing land was limited within the rectangle of the representation. Conventionally, this single square is equivalent to the single eye, symbolic of a visual instrument emphasizing both viewer and world as channels of and to power. Monocular vision separated eyes from body and body from world, locking all inside a geometric grid where visuality was made to condone a certain order. The process of seeing was cut short to form a boundary around material and mental spaces. A privileged interpretation equalled visuality with entitled intrusion and exploit. Seeing a place as a landscape reduced it to an object of conquest so that viewer and place were distanced from one another.[33]

Distance may be an element of image-scapes, but with a potentially different outcome. They are founded on interaction rather than intervention, forming a context large enough to house all forms of creative connections – from capture and alteration to viewing and interpretation.[34] This temporal as well as spatial concept spans the time it takes to perform these activities as well as the places where they happen. Images are linked together in a visual environment that may range from an old photo album on a shelf in a private home to a global public website. If one counts all its visual references as part of the result, an image-scape could perhaps even be a single image. An image-scape maps the visual flow of a part real and part virtual landscape.

Against conventions of a disembodied image, Ron Burnett suggests that image-scapes extend and enhance embodiment. Still he claims that it requires distance since it enables the problem-solving needed in the encounter with a metaphorical world. The dominant metaphor here is the traditional window into an otherwise unknown world. However, digital environments educate viewers to engage with the image-laden reality of today in a way that makes distance obsolete as a parameter for viewing. Reading image-scapes differs from reading maps since they offer a way to combine ambiguity with embodiment. Both viewers and images change in the process – and may be able to employ maps in a new way. If a map was traditionally used to capture a scene and thereby its essence in response to certain desires, an image-scape is less about capture than about the direct experience of living with and through images.

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[32] The following discussion on landscape tradition and possible reinterpretations develops the author's essay "Seende landskap – ett mote mellan blick och plats", 2011. Maps are referenced in Andrews 1999, p. 77-84.

[33] David Hays and Michael Newman, The Art Seminar, *Landscape Theory*, ed. Rachael DeLue and James Elkins, Routledge, New York and Abingdon UK 2008, p. 101.

[34] Burnett 2004, p. 40-43.

The landscape in *Periscope* can be understood as three places – captured, rebuilt and enacted. The view from the train, altered and pieced together as a collage, is revisited through the film. When the film ends, or is paused along the way, one layer of place is peeled off the composite stills. To look at the original ten photographs, stored away on a portable hard drive, would bring the viewer closer to the original place but lose the new places ingrained on top. Having seen these places shape and shift as a work in progress, the ride to the airport will never be the same. The memory of the construction is as vivid as the original, changing the way that this view is seen. For at least one viewer it is a landscape, but perhaps it needed the *Periscope* work to become one. The experience of seeing this place, made the other places visible. Visuality broke down an initial distance to form a new embodied connection between viewer and world. As this experience is interpreted from within, the digital environment was crucial to setting up the connection. The meaning brought forth rests on the destabilized situation entered into through the fragments created and reshaped in a computer.

Depending on whether you see *Periscope* as a map or as an image-scape, very different places emerge. As a map, the film may function as a projection of desire – an imaginary space for escape and enjoyment. It does not suffice as a tool for navigating the physical area, by train or other transportation. If intervention serves as the incentive for drawing up a map, it is made impossible by the intervention already in effect in the image. Distance between viewer and place is enforced, as the image is not allowed to cross the line between real and virtual. Since the work seems to dissolve such a line, the map in its traditional sense is not applicable. Expanding this visual tool to an image-scape changes the potential of the image by connecting viewer and place in a new way. A mix of real and virtual is encouraged as the materiality of the images is situated in computers as physical as they are fluid. Ephemeral and abstract yet visually compelling, the digital image insists on an ambiguous identity. Interfaces of the production software and the websites where the film can be seen connect the places of making and viewing into one fragmented yet continuous environment. It is enhanced in the spatial and temporal collage in *Periscope*, where real and virtual mix in an ambiguous way. The act of viewing becomes embodied in spite of or perhaps because of this ambiguity.

Conventionally, landscapes are unambiguous spaces and engaging with them by visual means emphasizes that. Visuality itself turns the world into an object by fixing it in the gaze of a fixed subject. To look at a landscape is to see one thing holding one meaning. This objectification finds its extreme in W.J.T. Mitchell's idea of seeing as an object in itself, making only seeing visible.[35] Taking in a view conforms it to a whole that says more of the viewer than of the place. Whatever is before the eye is organized to affirm that eye. The controlling gaze of ideology seems to be inverted to extreme introspection – seeing becomes its own landscape.

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[35] W.J.T. Mitchell is quoted in Kenneth R. Olwig, "The 'Actual Landscape' or Actual Landscapes?", *Landscape Theory*, p. 170.

Read against the grain, this statement may give a potentially subversive force to the visuality of landscape. The cognitive experiment of seeing one's own seeing may be a rare opportunity to articulate a standpoint. While Mitchell claims this situation meaningless because empty, emptiness can be a condition for a meaningful experience. Rather than signalling absence, it may give a pause for an individual seeing practice to crystallize. Taking a position for a view may initiate a resistance to privileged ways of seeing and interpretation. Image-scapes – indeed visuality – are a matter of choice between distance and closeness. Actively engaging with one's seeing not only connects a viewer with the world – it produces it. Viewing is an unpredictable but valid kind of building. In Mitchell's mediated world, images can help to organize the world for an immediate embodied contact.[36]

Landscape as a dialogue between a place and those who build it, holds an old yet still potent meaning.[37] Though as representation, it is still infused by the singular reality of an objective but reducing and distancing eye. Visuality supposedly turns places for living into objects for viewing, based on a misreading of *landscape* as *landscope*. While the status of landscape has been updated, visuality is kept within Cartesian limits. The image impoverishes the real place to give form to a desire for unilateral knowledge, power and pleasure – but it may also expand interaction with the world.[38] To cognitively and physically enter a place is an everyday process of belonging. Map in hand, the reader takes presence in a place and vice versa. Especially with the virtual aspect, landscapes materialize in layers as well as side by side. Physical and experiential changes move, mix and match. Mapping is about feeling as much as looking.[39] Topography takes you through the axis of both land and meaning. Jay's linking of maps, photography and non-singular vision show how useful digital visuality is for multi-dimensional navigation and how *Periscope* exemplifies an alternative seeing practice.

From a perspective of image-scapes, the map is an exponent of how a visual response to a place can initiate empathy. Images, as extensions of seeing and the seen, embody the braiding of reality and fiction in landscape. This origin can be honoured in a digital visual practice. To stress the visuality of landscape is one way to support a nuanced notion of the image as a connective link between individual and place. Beyond monocular vision, images articulate several sets of eyes as well as where they are directed. They may also be traced back to an actual place without having to function as proof. This makes it relevant to underline the value of the performative construction at work here – the mutual destabilizing of the seeing subject and the viewed object may be an intimidating fact to adapt to, but nevertheless valid. Seeing and landscape together form a synthesis with clearly visible cracks.

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[36] Jessica Dubow et al, The Art Seminar, *Landscape Theory*, p. 137-138.
[37] Anne Whiston Spirn et al, The Art Seminar, *Landscape Theory*, p. 92-94, 101.
[38] A negative view exemplified by Olwig, *Landscape Theory*, p. 163, a positive one by Andrews 1999, p. 77-80.
[39] Jessica Dubow et al, The Art Seminar, *Landscape Theory*, p. 127.

Identity in flux

A whole, but not quite whole, is easy to observe in *Periscope*. The physical and conceptual cracks in and between the images dominate the visual expression. With the photograph's indexicality still lingering, a chain reaction begins as the meaning of the cracks are transferred. As seeing is affected, a process of understanding oneself through what one sees affects the viewing subject. Fragmentation shapes the reading of the image that shapes the reader. Abstractions and traces co-exist uneasily but productively.[40] Distance is reduced as the visual experience involves and implicates the viewer in the place. The space run through by the train is also affected. By being seen, it can now be identified as a landscape. By being seen in fragments, the landscape continues to transform instead of settling into a coherent unity.

Defining a place as landscape entails defining a self. Singularity may thus be contested. Instead of presuming an essential core untouched by the processes it partakes in, a performative perspective shows that the process itself can be constitutive. Belief in a static coherent totality is a functional illusion, insufficient to cover the experience of an "I" in the world. The co-existence of origin with present and future conditions underscores landscape as a continual construction and reconstruction.[41] In turn, reality is emphasized as malleable. A shifting pattern of random acts and situations comes across as one of few things to hold together the identity of people and places. This pattern extends to the images produced in and of them.

Viewers use images to manage how far or close they are to objects, people and events.[42] These shifts bring an ambiguity that grows in digital environments. The virtual is an important space for defining identity and acting on it. Image-scapes may clarify the interdependence between users and computers so that this kind of interaction is possible – at the price of destabilizing all parties. Changes brought about are reflected in the way meaning floats between seeing and creating. As immersive simulations are developed, measuring out distance becomes harder. To identify oneself as a viewer therefore entails a closing of the space to the image.

Digital technology is a guide to new embodied forms of image-worlds. However, it is often criticized as artificial, a non-event replacing reality with emptiness.[43] In response, one may recall the discussion on emptiness prompted by Mitchell's account. Indication that imagination evolves perception can be noted in Burnett's thought that it has always been possible to imagine and express the impossible. Virtual landscapes encourage embodied experiences, clarifying how distance may be understood as a changing process rather than a fixed void. A digital construction of image-scapes allows for a closer connection to the self and the world.

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[40] Michael Newman et al, The Art Seminar, *Landscape Theory*, p. 125.
[41] Andrews 1999, p. 16; *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, p. 185 (author not stated).
[42] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 40-44, 113, 131.
[43] See Jean Baudrillard in note 44 for an example of a common view in the general discourse on postmodernity.

Digital landscaping

For the minutes that the *Periscope* film runs, the identity of the place as well as the identity of the viewer is relocated to a grey zone. This area, in between and beyond viewer and image, is structured as a system of diverse elements in constant change. However coherent the system is, it is not fixed in terms of function or result. Balance between the components depends on the viewer's ability to become part of the constitution. Digital architecture builds a relational process more than a unified object. A postmodern landscape merges reality and representation to break up a distancing frame both inside and outside the seeing subject.[44]

A traditional Western landscape, and the people and machines placed within, is not applicable here. However, photographs circulated in image-scapes can still be known as environmental creations. Seeing *Periscope* articulates the kind of middle space that Ron Burnett describes as ecological.[45] The likeness brings out a transformational quality in digital images. Visual eco-logy does not evolve in the seamless harmony that the analogue ideal would envision. It is defined by a never-ending, subtle though severe, negotiation. Despite a fear that a loss of place means a loss of identity, ecological expressions provide new grounds for building communities. Sharing images is a vital part of shared spaces like Internet and other computer-based communication platforms. It enables the visualization of places out of reach – placing images and viewers in the ambiguous middle brings them closer to what is physically and mentally distant. For Burnett, the viewer is always at a distance from the image yet feeling the need to overcome it – while also gaining new tools for articulating identity and experience.

Once an ecological link between humans and technology is set up, there seems to be little use for distance. Unlike Burnett's account, *Periscope* is not a struggle between distance and close-ness. Rather than basing the virtual and indeed the visual on this conflict, the connection itself is of greater importance. The graphic and the photographic combine to bring together imaged and experienced reality. One way of doing this – that Burnett rather quickly leaves aside – is by giving images the physical, sculptural character of an object. An environment such as the image-scape could thus approach the highly physical map. Not only is this representation an object itself – its purpose is to materialize a concrete place and initiate a physical response to both the visual and the actual space. If the map is transposed into an image-scape, materiality is lost in some regards and enriched in others. Not so much an object anymore, it gains a sculptural quality with the added dimensions of depth and time. Drawing Burnett's argument a bit further, digital visual environments such as *Periscope* could reduce distance between viewer and image in a lasting manner. From this may follow a lessening of mental as well as emotional distance and so increase an opportunity for embodiment.

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[44] Jacob Wamberg et al, The Art Seminar, *Landscape Theory*, p. 140.
[45] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 72-78, 81, 89-91. Connections between mapping, art and ecology are also referenced in The Art Seminar, *Landscape Theory*, p. 128-131.

From this perspective, the development of a continuum between the virtual and the real has meant a move away from images as representations. While this seems reasonable, Burnett's claim that visualization is now primarily a means to gain control must be investigated. An echo from the previous discussion on photography can be noted. As a ground for any context of digital imagery, visualization has a performative potential that it would be misguided to diminish to a mere power tactic. The relevant point to ponder is what such a power is for – a social strategy to persuade people to believe in a dreamlike tomorrow engineered by an oppressive elite, or instead a method for the individual to own his or her destiny by owning a visualization of it. An image of fate is far from fate itself, but connects the individual with something beyond the private sphere. Landscape as a genre may look innocent and not bear much weight – but whenever control is used in its description, there is inevitably a certain history to account for. Shifting focus from control to interaction allows for a visual if not a political resistence.

A plausible, and admittedly favourable, interpretation of the control theory would suggest that a control of visualization allows the individual to experience the world in a more emotionally connected and embodied way. Compared to the unilateral control of the Cartesian singular subject, this type of behaviour may be slightly less distanced. The bottom line here is that the real is related to the virtual in a dynamic process that shapes human activities and expressions, and that distance can be reshaped in a digital environment. Despite leaning towards a subject in control, Burnett also seems to lend some support to a productive ambiguity. He notes that the continuum between real and virtual makes images and their meaning unpredictable, born of accident as much as design, so that ambiguity is fundamental to digital environments.[46] As a basic defining component, it must be confronted and made meaningful – and maintained.

The virtual earns its impact by making images the prime vehicle to express reality. This seems to bring the discussion on photography full circle. Barthesian realism may have found its most efficient vehicle in the not entirely real. The simulation lived out in a digital image does not reflect a world either simulated or real – it is the world.[47] The having-been-there of analogue photographs can continue to be 'there' as well as in many different 'here'. Within a fleeting structure of image-scapes, the landscape of *Periscope* takes place inside another landscape. Its analogue ecology is integrated into a digital one. Relayed by way of a multitude of images of this scenery and replayed through a multitude of screens, the place and the viewer take on a diversified identity. Every time the original stretch of land is revisited in the photographs, collages and cinematic cuts, it is actualized as a place of significance. The non-descript route to the airport may still look non-descript, but as a digital landscape it will have obtained a new description and a new meaning.

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[46] Burnett 2004, p. 84.
[47] Burnett 2004, p. 5-6.

Visuality in digital photography collage

The *Periscope* collage handles two kinds of cracks – found and made. The imagery is shaped by the broken window, through which the original photographs were taken. These frames are less cut up than shrunk to form the composite. Taking all parts from one source turns the imagery on itself, highlighting the open-ended ambiguity of the work's presumed unity. In the cinematic form, the collage is temporal as well as spatial. Cracked yet in place and moving yet still, the frames merge window, lens, image and screen. In this confusion as to where the cracks are situated, the viewer is vital. The experience of a collaged eye points to a visual situation defined by the digital mode.

Collage is a mirror and a motor in making and viewing images – and reality. The 'cracked synthesis' of the previous chapter applies here too. Interaction of technology and perception keeps shifting subjectivity from coherent and steady to fast and fragmented.[48] In collage, each found and fabricated bit is sharpened while warped. Playing with logic and legibility, content and context are reconfigured. As a performative gesture, meaning is unfixed and hierarchies undermined. Collage is a common social metaphor for an increasingly collaged society, based on the fundamental relationship between world, image and vision. Visuality in collage enables seeing, processing and making connections between person and place, actual and depicted.

The basic metaphor behind *Periscope* is a simultaneous imagining and organising, order and disorder. A periscope is a tool to organize vision, while *Periscope* visualizes the unpredictable process of organization. Shrunk, turned around and cut to a circle, the materials are whole frames stripped of their status as wholes. Collages arrange diverse units of information in a way that complicates unity, even if coherence is often assumed to be the goal.[49] This process is a construction and a deconstruction, irreducible to any rational singularity. The relevant activity is found at the edges – in *Periscope* they merge parts of the same images as well as the original place. The meaning of the work is carried in its ambiguous fragments.

The *Periscope* collage is analyzed through the concepts of edges and hybridization. Edges can be analogue and digital – cutting and pasting in a computer is a trivial act of the non-virtual everyday. This basic collage event makes boundaries a major concern. In digital environments, these edges are sites of hybridization.[50] In the material and conceptual combinations, hybrids emerge that challenge subject-object conventions. Contained in these concepts are both displacement and connection, giving context to the themes of distance and embodiment.

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[48] Paragraph based on *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, p. 7, 8-19, 47, 185. Collage/society analogies are also found in Andrews 1999, p. 16-18.

[49] See for instance *Collage*, p. 7, 22, 27-28. Also noted in many general art historical surveys.

[50] This concept is connected with Homi K. Bhabha for whom it describes identity in a postcolonial society. After Burnett's more psychological definition, the emphasis is on a more general fragmentation, transition and flux.

Meaningful edges

The importance of visual and conceptual cracks is informed by Ian Monroe's claim that edges define meaning.[51] The world's structure and our perception of it are governed by material differences. Physical and psychological changes begin as differences meet. As they interact, the edge can be understood as a space for negotiation between various bodies, thoughts and emotions. An important point, not clearly made by Monroe, is that difference does not have to be a pre-existing fact. With reference to the earlier discussion on frames and maps, the edge is yet another instance where something is brought into existence by being articulated. In view of this, an edge is a performative statement. Collage is a practice where edges are managed by embodying and performing transformation. As they actualize both an existing and a not-yet-existing world, the images produce a meaning both shaped by and shaping reality.

Despite the assumption that difference is a condition in the world as well as in the collage, and that they both gel into a legible unity, Monroe's focus on friction makes his argument valid to the issues raised in *Periscope*. If he appreciates the amalgamation of distinct edges into a single body, the idea here is to explore the open-endedness and productivity of lacking unity. It is possible to say that the work would not be useful to any examination if it were not unified and legible. But as the transition of words and images in Periscope show, to read a work is no guarantee for meaning. The question is less learning what the meaning is than how it is shaped. The fluidity and fragmentation of the film eludes a singular understanding even if the artist's intention is known. This is indeed what makes it relevant as material in the study.

The amalgamation that takes place in *Periscope* is due to the similarities of content and form in the component parts. Yet fragmentation seems to override this – as they approach each other's edges, the differences between them come alive. One could argue that difference is constructed out of what would conventionally have been unified if the creative process had ended with the initial photographs. Now, the collage may be ascribed the same kind of function in relation to the film. Since the collage flaunts rather than hides its glitches to achieve coherence, there seem to be neither difference nor unity at the core of these images.

Hybridization gives an insight into such ambiguity regarding the identity of images in general and *Periscope* in particular. This process is crucial to the interaction between objects, subjects and images.[52] Beyond the conventions of these relations, hybridization is an unpredictable mix with no original proof for reference. As it grows stronger in the connections between the real and the virtual, the hybrid is a threat to a status quo wherever it may be located.

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[51] Reference to edges are based on Ian Monroe, "Where does one thing end and the next begin?", *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, edited by Blanche Craig, Black Dog Publishing Ltd, London 2008, p. 32-35.
[52] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 55, 58, 174, 176. Hybridity is also discussed in *Collage*, p. 153, 185.

Monroe notes a destabilizing corrosion, camouflage and collision at the edges.[53] Here, every material is mediated in a seamless sharing that over time erodes individual positions and traits. The destruction of boundaries provokes either a call for preserving distinction or for hiding the conflict by hiding the edge. Challenging the very identity of things, collage confronts content and context. Such confusion may result in discomfort while at the same time offering a safe space to raise and explore issues. Collage can be a tool to grasp the contradictions of the contemporary world. The discussion on the edges in a collage can be a simple exercise in the problematic of integration and assimilation taking place on a social scale. Collage is a model for how places and identities are threatened and secured, dissolved and recreated. It can be related to the very architecture of society – smaller entities of life enfolded in the irregular patterns of a postmodern city, in turn enfolded in a universe of composites.

There is a logic to this analogy which makes collage a relevant visual practice today. As the elements that make up reality itself are neither static nor inactive, new links to the world based on an increasing instability are needed.[54] In a community dominated by fast complex computing, the need for such an outlet is ever growing as well. Collaged images are wired for change and provide a means to respond to these changes. This visual practice is at the heart of a change that making and seeing digital images entail both for the viewer and for the machine.

Hybridization does not only characterize the human relationship to images, but to machines. In a technologically driven world, digital collages can enforce yet also challenge and reshape the social order. Such drastic results do not need equivalently grand ambitions. The process begins with the individual, cutting up a choice of materials and rearranging them. Embedded in this trivial action is a rejection of the norm to see the world and its images as singular, coherent totalities. While the focus here is on the individual, collage can be understood as an activity that challenges the singular subject as well as object.[55] Tearing into an image is in some ways to tear into the concepts contained within images and their makers.

Corrosion and camouflage occur in *Periscope* as the cracks in the glass as well as the sky and woods are blended into one another to enhance a spontaneous convergence and hide more problematic transitions. Collisions abound, as the differences between the images are brought to bear on the visual construction. Destabilization is consistently caused and dealt with. The materials torn apart here are all from the same original moment as well as maker. Furthermore, the tears are the result of a spatial as well as temporal layering. With each replay, the viewer is implicated in the tearing that is enacted in the course of the film. Viewer and image are linked in a hybrid space that is simultaneously real and virtual, distant and embodied.

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[53] Paragraph based on Monroe, *Collage*, p. 35-42. A similar social analogy is noted in all postmodern visuality.
[54] Burnett 2004, p. 139-140.
[55] *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, p. 153 (author not stated).

Embodied contradictions

On the topic of distance and embodiment, the digitally articulated edge is a rather productive paradox. There is a definite distance at work in how the viewer is placed in relation to the viewing experience. Seeing is a kind of mediation in itself and here it is taken through the additional channels of the camera and the computer. Determined by the setting and placement of the computer, vision is the only sense that is evoked. Or perhaps, that is not entirely true. There are a number of ways in which viewers can experience a digital image.

To touch an analogue collage would be to feel the edges between the shapes. With a digital collage like *Periscope*, the immaterial work is mediated by the material light and tone of the screen. Touching it, you could still trace it with your finger on the screen (even if that is not an advisable way to treat the device). It is a material experience, only different – as is resting your hands on the board and clicking the keys. You are free to change position in front of the screen and move around during the length of the film. To alter your experience, you can change the luminosity and coloration of the screen or alter the size of the work by altering the digital device. A different computer will give a different visual impression and so will a widescreen television, a video projector or an Ipad. It is completely possible to view the film in the same setting as the photographs were taken – holding a cell phone in your hand.

These examples point to a diversity of viewing experiences which all have an impact on physical as well as conceptual interactions with the work. Rather than increase a negative sense of distance and reduce the chance for an embodied encounter, the digital context seems to do the opposite – provided of course that the viewer is actively engaged in the visual experience. Yet even if the viewer does sit still in front of a desktop computer, the possibility exists of interacting with the image and the conditions of its mediation.

Physicality is emphasized by the psychological concept of seeing as touching.[56] One may even argue that the experience of seeing *Periscope* is more powerful and embodied as it to a large extent goes on inside the viewer's mind, where disorientation is faced and given meaning. By analogue standards the film, and the access to its meaning, is abstract, immaterial – distant. Yet *Periscope* communicates with a strong presence. Visual conventions seem to repeat an interpretation of distance that blinds viewers to paradoxical phenomena and digital ones in particular. According to the norm, the experience of this work could be enjoyable as perhaps a beautiful fancy and nothing more. Investigating the matter through the *Periscope* work shows otherwise – destabilization is fruitful in providing an experience that goes beyond passing visual pleasure and enables a connection with the actual place and the world around.

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[56] Although the thesis is not based on psycho-analytical art history, this concept may enrich the discussion. See Further reading section in the appendix, for instance Teresa Brennan's "The Contexts of Vision" in *Vision in Context. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* edited by Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay, p. 222.

As Monroe suggests, there is no danger in the challenges of a collage. Visual paradox can safely be dealt with as a test drive before dealing with more precarious – more real – social paradox. If anywhere, a work such as *Periscope* is a proper place to confront such strangeness to better handle it in the world outside. Expanding visual perimeters is a part of the process to expand perspectives on reality. Whether analogue or digital, a critical potential is embedded in the methodology of collage, as its construction is open for everyone to see. The building going on in *Periscope* offers insight into how it could have been built differently. Layers of several physical and visual collages enfold the route to the airport. The train runs through all of them and loosely ties their fragments together in an abstract yet embodied journey.

To keep the viewer's identity from being too challenged, the act of reverie offers an irreality function.[57] Here, thinking and feeling is combined with daydreaming to manage a sufficient but not excessive embodied connection with what is seen. A daydream is a fully conscious everyday fantasy. Situated in between the virtual and the real, it is a useful mode in which to experience a digital photographic collage such as *Periscope*. Reverie can be understood as a response to finding oneself in a hybrid place and making it meaningful – not succumbing to complete immersion though not escaping the call to face one's own seeing and the actions it may provoke. Itself a collage, the experience blends all borders in a non-singular way.

Digital difference

The assumption that collage is based on material differences is complemented by the fact that difference can be defined as a phenomenon without substance or location in space and time.[58] To explain how human perception engages in the process of difference and information, Ron Burnett offers a cinematic metaphor. When watching a film, the dividers separating the frames determine the movement visible to the viewer. These dividers cannot be seen and are irrelevant to the viewer's perception of the visual experience, yet the difference they create produce the possibility of motion. Differences between the frames construct information but lack any immediate concrete materiality.

Applying this likeness to *Periscope* brings to light a confusing complexity. This film consists of twenty frames (twenty-five with the text) that refer to the transitions between them. Some dividers are visible and others not, some are mixed and others separated. While one image fades into the next at the same pace, the divisive act happens at different times and places across the surface. The dividers are broken up into fragments as they lose their linearity. In a way, the entire work is a divider – exposed, distorted, stretched out over the length of the film. Everything is divided to the point of no division, yet clearly everything remains broken. Information is constructed by complicating the presence of difference.

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[57] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 213. A similar experience to reverie is discussed in *Collage*, p. 153.
[58] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 119-120.

This analogy may clarify how difference is a part of the digital architecture while that same construction is a means to challenge and reshape difference. Essentially, digitally constructed images are born out of a structural collage of ones and zeros. Digitizing a photograph is not a neutral transfer of the image to just any other mode. It breaks it up into a reductive structure of only one of two kinds of fragments, which however enables an immense diversity.

Looking closely at a negative, grains are similar to pixels. Both are the innermost particle of a photographic image. However, if the analogue grain is understood as a trace of the exterior world, the pixel in fact holds its own – perhaps stronger – kind of indexicality. This digital fragment is endowed with constitutive power in a way that the grain can only hint at. Each individual pixel can be reached in a way a grain never is. The layered emulsion cannot be accessed like digital layers can. The digital photographer can, indeed must, engage with the image on a level of the most extreme detail, since the choices made for any single fragment affect the image in a gradient from one pixel to millions. Even if the final result is not intended to be a collage, the digital image always carries its own kind of internal collage.

As a photograph is cut into a digital collage, the importance of choice appears clearer.[59] The new image is an actualization of the photographed event as well as of the subsequent events of alteration. The intuition and irreverence needed to understand an image brings about a close encounter defined by hybridization. With reference to Bruno Latour's theory of third space, Ron Burnett offers a way to contextualize digital photography collage. Third spaces are a result of interdependence between a person and an object. In the process, a hybrid is created that shares properties with both while changing them. An encounter within fixed boundaries turns out to be unfixed. Rather than distancing the maker or viewer, digital mediation may enrich the experience. A hybrid process brings a materiality that cannot be anticipated at the outset. Making and seeing *Periscope* is an interaction despite the differences between user, viewer and machine. These gaps are intrinsic to communicating and negotiating difference.

Digital manipulations enhance such tactics by allowing for many more and more specific changes. The distinctions of the original may become less or more distinct, depending on the choices made while making and viewing the collage. This is true for analogue collages too, yet digital ones sharpen as well as blur the edges between the real and the unreal to the point of pushing the edges of visual convention. As an instance of hybrid edges, *Periscope* can be said to produce a third space. Preying on and playing with difference, meaning is given back to the viewer who completes it. In this case, completion entails destabilization. The work's collaged body expands to the viewer and on to the individual and collective environment.[60]

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[59] Paragraph based on Burnett 2004, p. 29, 172-177.
[60] *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, p. 153, 185 (author not stated).

Digital environments mix up meaning so what strives to acquire a lasting truth about *Periscope* seems ever more confounded. As each pixel can be manipulated, there is no way of knowing what the truth of an image is since the core of the message is missing. A slightly alternative view may restore the communicative potential. With a collage at the bottom of an image, meaning must be sought in another way than the model of sender-message-receiver.[61] The message is not so much missing as it is dispersed. Learning from the discussion on edges and hybridization, the digital photograph is located in a middle space of fluid fragmentation. In terms of collage, a digital setting extends the fluidity to include the real and the virtual. A work such as *Periscope* brings attention to several sorts of gaps, which gives it a third space function. Interdependence exists between the digital machinery and the maker as well as the viewer. The built-in ambiguity of computer technology – continuums of difference – is reflected in the images that come out of it, yet these are also sites of reflection on what this ambiguity does. The film brings attention to the performance of gaps, edges and frames.

Collage, in Monroe's reading, resists the limits of categorization in favour of a hybrid reality. Questioning edges is part of their articulation, as if seeing means already effecting change. An altered vision can be traced behind this transformation. Monroe claims a viewer's perspective as decisive for drawing edges. Still, this demarcation is often made in agreement with a unifying eye. Again, visuality is given a conservative frame. While Monroe admits the illusion of this visual function, his argument points to the difficulty of freeing oneself from it. Though edges may be spaces for even subversive power, they are still expected to gel into a coherent whole. While resistance is never an easy thing, collage is not bound to incorporate differences into a visual equivalent of consensus. In fact, it points a way out of such visual norms.

Visual sources are so diverse that makers and viewers deal with parts rather than wholes and any presumed whole lacks a clear delimitation.[62] Photography, landscape and collage are all affected by a growing hybridization. Visuality, physically and conceptually linking viewers to their environment, is undergoing this transformation pushed on by digital technology. Collage is one visual strategy to manage this change. The analogy between collage and world is tied in with questions of identity.[63] To break and blend images creates new meeting-points that shape new identities through new images. More than a singular entity, identity is an activity of handling difference in a relational process within a continuum. Measuring out distance is counterproductive to this situation. As *Periscope* shows, a more nuanced perspective on digital photography may increase the possibility for deeply embodied experiences. Perhaps unexpectedly, collage and its fragmentation serves as a model for such an understanding.

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[61] This is the classic model of communications theory – a clearly defined message travelling from a singular sender to an equally singular receiver, while the act of communicating itself leaves the message unchanged.

[62] Burnett 2004, p. 3, 77.

[63] *Collage: Assembling Contemporary Art*, p. 153 (author not stated).

Concluding remarks

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the connection between *Periscope* and its original environment, with a thought of extending this to a more general knowledge of visuality and digital photography. In view of the reputation for digital imagery as a cold manipulated fake, distancing the viewer from what the image captures, an opportunity for active and embodied seeing was of special interest. This take on digital visuality found support in the main features of the source material – photography, landscape, collage – which are all often contextualized as distancing forms of representations even in the analogue format. These aspects functioned as filters through which the main goal could be sought. It soon became obvious that each of them could be reinterpreted along with the digital setting. An additional objective was to use my position as artist to give a richer response to the problematic. The purpose was to develop a method that declares a subject position without clouding the research with an unreflected subjectivity. By sharing imagination and intuition, a more complex and honest discussion could be presented than if the theme had been communicated purely from an artificial outside.

To fulfil my aims, the first question focused on how *Periscope* connects the viewer with the captured place. Baroque vision proved a valuable concept to discuss a digital mode of seeing which is anchored in history and still articulates a contemporaneous development. With its focus on instability and embodiment, this model serves as a way to understand the function of digital visuality. It is clear that *Periscope* connects the viewer to the physical place by way of the least likely component. All three aspects reveal the digital context to destabilize image, place and viewer. Visualization brings uncertainty to the photographic frame, image-scapes loosen the boundaries of the map and hybridization forces the viewer to look beyond the safe edge of unified objects and meanings. This ambiguity exists in analogue communication, but it is enhanced in a work like *Periscope* that draws its significance from open-ended unpredictability. Rather than break the connection, destabilization is what makes it possible. This disoriented mode captures the merging of a simultaneous description and transformation that is key to realizing the too often ignored potential of embodiment in digital photography.

The photographic dimension connected viewer and environment through an expansion of the analogue index. This presumably simple link was complicated by the digital format calling attention to the layers of alteration. A conventional frame was broken up into several fluid and fragmented frames. The visualization that prompted the work was now part of the index. The viewer connected with the actual place by being implicated in the initial moment – imagining the ordinary view while seeing it through the cracked glass instead of the other way around. The gap between the two experiences gained clarity and meaning in the virtual environment, a space for visualization and the reframing potential of making as well as of seeing the work.

The virtual environment was further explored through the landscape aspect. A digital image-scape added depth and time to the traditional map. With this upgrade, the work was given a mapping function that made the fleeting spaces of the actual and visual areas more clear and connected. A more relational process replaced the notion of maps as objects objectifying what they represent. The viewer was connected to the source by seeing it as an open and changing space – through the captured, rebuilt and enacted landscape of *Periscope*. As the virtual environment intertwined with the physical, visual control gave way to dialogue.

This notion of mixing multiple realities came to be fully realized in the collage analysis. The concepts of edges and hybrids highlighted difference as an activity rather than a given essence or condition. A new kind of materiality was found in the most immaterial and discontinuous image – the digital photograph. Collage took on a role as metaphor and method to describe and respond to contemporary society. An increasingly collaged experience became meaningful through the idea that the edges around us are tools for renegotiation. Fluid fragments of a hybrid collage unexpectedly forged the strongest connection between viewer and viewed.

Once the connection was established, its relationship to distance and embodiment could be addressed. In response to this second question, digital photography can be said to reshape distance and therefore identity. By engaging with the visual encounter in the active way encouraged in digital environments, ambiguity forges rather than breaks a connection between the viewer and the viewed. A focus on distance is shifted towards embodiment, so that the digital practice creates an embodied form of distance rather than claims it as a condition for embodiment. Conventions of analogue and digital perspectives are challenged and merged in a new way. Distance and embodiment have gone from opposites to flexible concepts. Looking at *Periscope*, the digital additions bring haptic, tactile, physical qualities. Distance is reduced and reshaped to enable an experience that may be impossible within analogue parameters and especially the visual tradition of singularity and unity.

Reinterpretation of distance rests on interaction. The user and viewer subject and the object as image and imaged reality as well as computer are engaged in a play that produces a diversity of shared spaces. In order to extract meaning from this blur there may be a need to take a step back – but only if some part stays in physical and conceptual touch. Contact is set up with the digital interface, which can be built and used differently but not completely ignored. Distance in traditional photography, landscape and collage practice aimed at fixing reality in singular static units. A digital grid could be thought to enforce this convention by locking down a superior structure. Yet the digital environment counteracts anything fixed. Objects carrying the interior meaning of an inflexible universe are suddenly moved into a relational process in which meaning must be continuously enacted. Such enactment is the root of any embodied seeing, internalising and performing ambiguity for shaping a meaningful experience.

The digital concepts include the viewer in a way that closes rather than emphasizes distance. This conclusion is perhaps surprising in light of the destabilization noted above. It may be assumed that only distance can bring enough overview for a meaningful experience of such a disorder. A connection is perhaps possible, but grounded more in intellectual and material possession than in active embodiment. Such a physical experience involves a risk on the part of the individual, a leaning into rather than away from uncertainty. Analysis of *Periscope* reveals that distance gives stability only at the expense of the details and transitions that drive the work in terms of form and meaning. A Cartesian perspective of singularity and coherence is legitimate as one of many scopic regimes available to understand the work, but subjecting oneself to only that way of seeing would be to miss the point. Ambiguity is not just a common denominator in the dimensions of digital photography, landscape and collage – destabilization comes across as an intrinsic quality of digital visuality. This visual practice provides a way to negotiate the continuous and the fragmentary, so that the viewer can engage in an active and embodied dialogue with the self and the world.

The final question remains – if the connection of *Periscope* could be generalized as a seeing practice specific to digital art photography. Based on the parameters of analysis, it is clear that similar works can be analyzed in a similar way. This would include digitally produced photo-graphs, landscape imagery and collages. The combination of analogue and digital concepts gives the impression that the digital context can be utilized to reinterpret analogue imagery as well. This may even be extended outside the image – digital technology both mirrors and shapes the increasingly collaged world of today. Collage stands out as a useful way to turn the ambiguity of unity and disunity into a productive experience. This challenge to identity offers a safe space to explore identity as a process, leaving conventional Cartesian control as one among many alternatives. Visual practice in a digitally defined environment reduces and reshapes distance to give an embodied experience of image and world. Here, the content was derived from a place that lost many original traits yet gained a new depth of meaning. Even this extreme transformation connects the viewer in an active and embodied way.

This brief yet clear example supports the claim that embodiment is encouraged through the digital interfaces of subject, object and image. Quite surprisingly, this link is set up by friction and fragmentation – destabilization paradoxically bringing forth more rather than less know-ledge of the parts involved in the exchange. As the problem of the subject is ever-present in digital photography and seeing practice, and by default in this text, a return to the method-ological aim is called for. In articulating these questions and tentative conclusions, it is my conviction that the double position as artist and art historian has enabled a richer account than if one had been blocked out. The connection established in and through *Periscope* is more than either an object of study or a personal fruit of creative labour. The combination has given access to embodied knowledge that adds to this endeavour and hopefully to others as well.

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Appendix

Periscope, text

Periscope, ten original photographs

Periscope, twenty collages

List of dissertations

Further reading

Text at the beginning of the *Periscope* film

The periscope is an obstacle and a promise. Following a certain order, a world will become visible to me. I put my eye to the window, to follow mirrors and lenses upwards and outwards. This system of reflections forms the gaze, which in turn forms a map on its way through the glass. Directions and positions change places, and a motion is defined. This eye looking out at the world is also reflected towards the viewer. Details of a landscape meet a document of memory. A life of gathered experiences deciding the topography of the map, my index finger decides the scale. In the circle of the periscope there is a moveable sight, a center always shifting toward new meanings. A tool for reading the world's map and my own.

The periscope breaks the surface between where I am and what I see. Splitting the visual field yet opening the possibility to take it back. Different cutouts are tried against each other to build thinkable worlds. Limits of insight try the place and the image of the place. A scenario of water and space, land and light, breaks up into several simultaneous scenarios. Each fragment becomes a point of orientation in a moving structure where I am a marker. The map shows the way where the map-reader is laying down new roads.

The periscope sees me. Its glass captures and enhances the light, which becomes a part of the darkness obscuring other eyes in other periscopes. There is an active gaze in many directions, an encountering presence. In the blue and the green there are traces of a concentrated seeing. Waiting in the shadows for the view to clear. The line of the forest can be known as a histogram or a horizon, the horizon as a horizon of understanding. The landscape becomes visible, anew. The factual and the imaginary melds into layers upon layers of likely landscapes. With a periscope you seek what you know but find reality inside your own head.
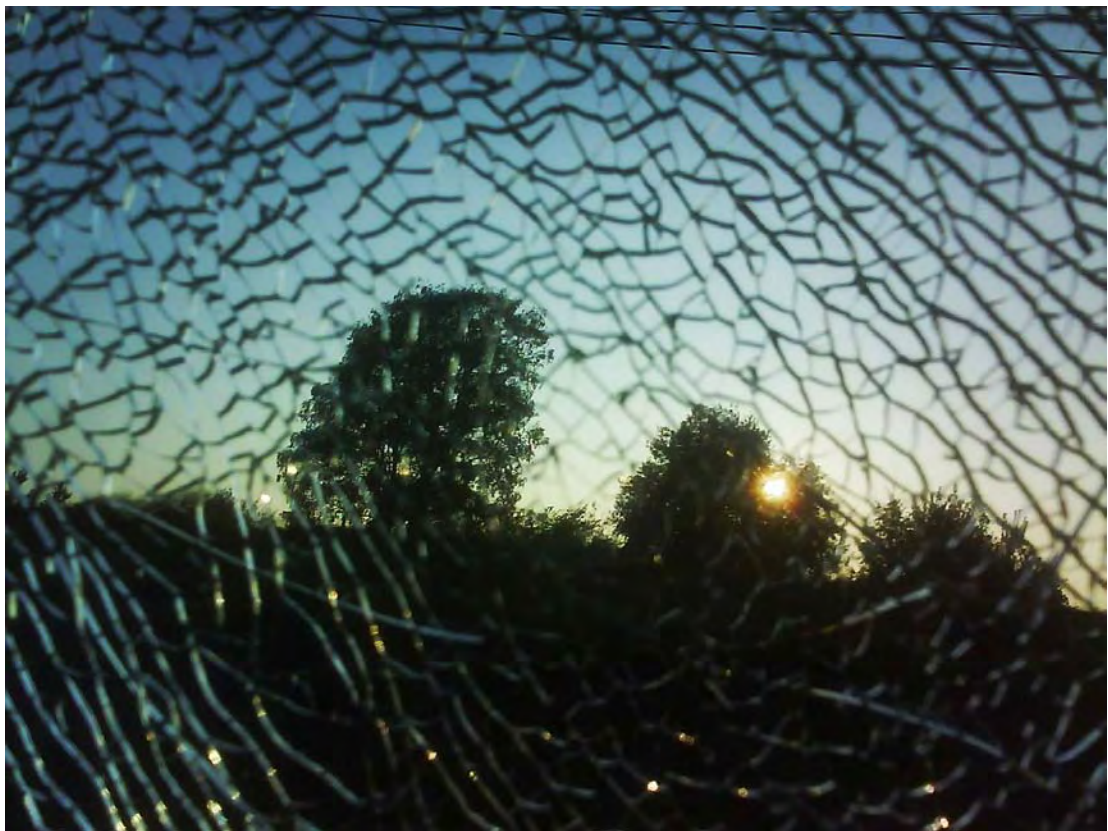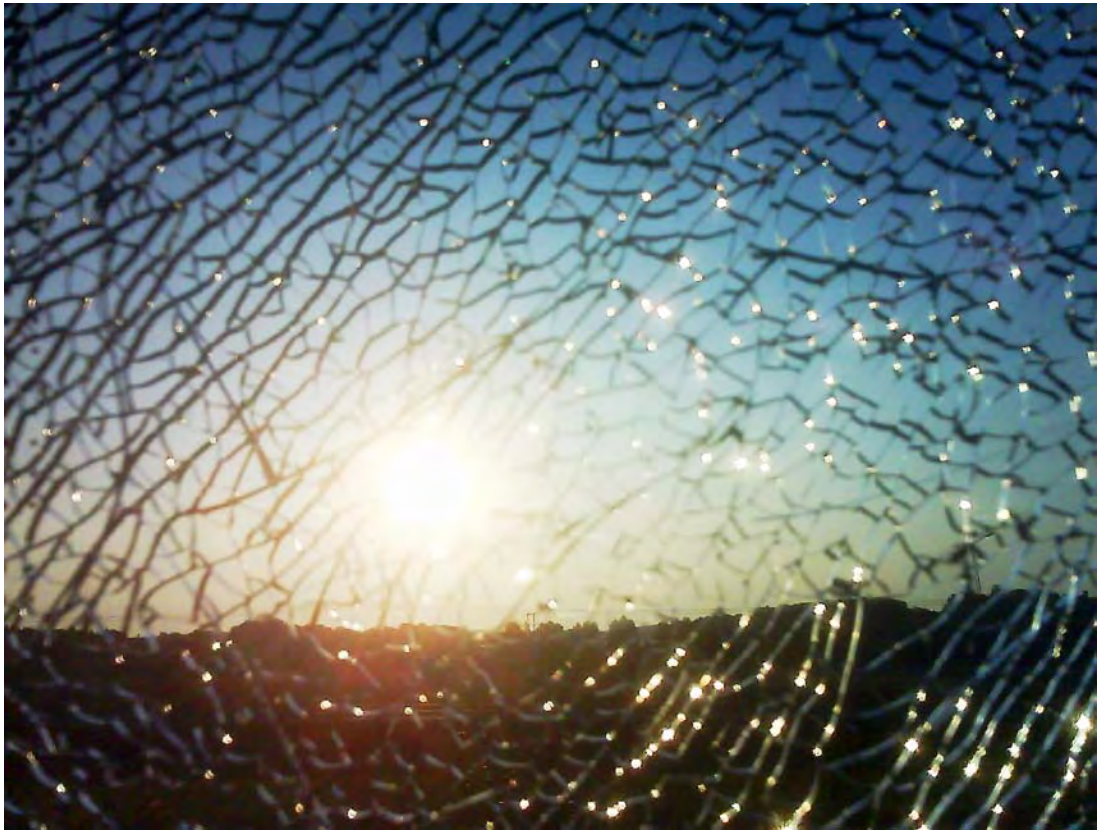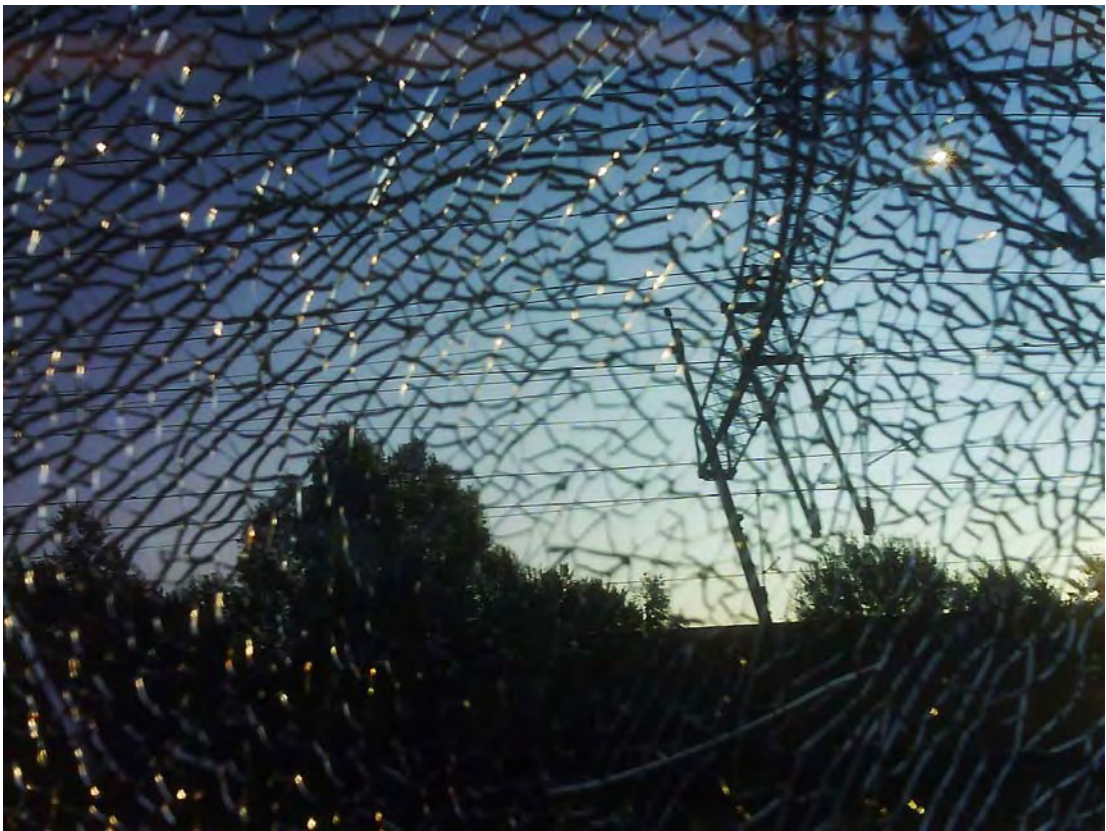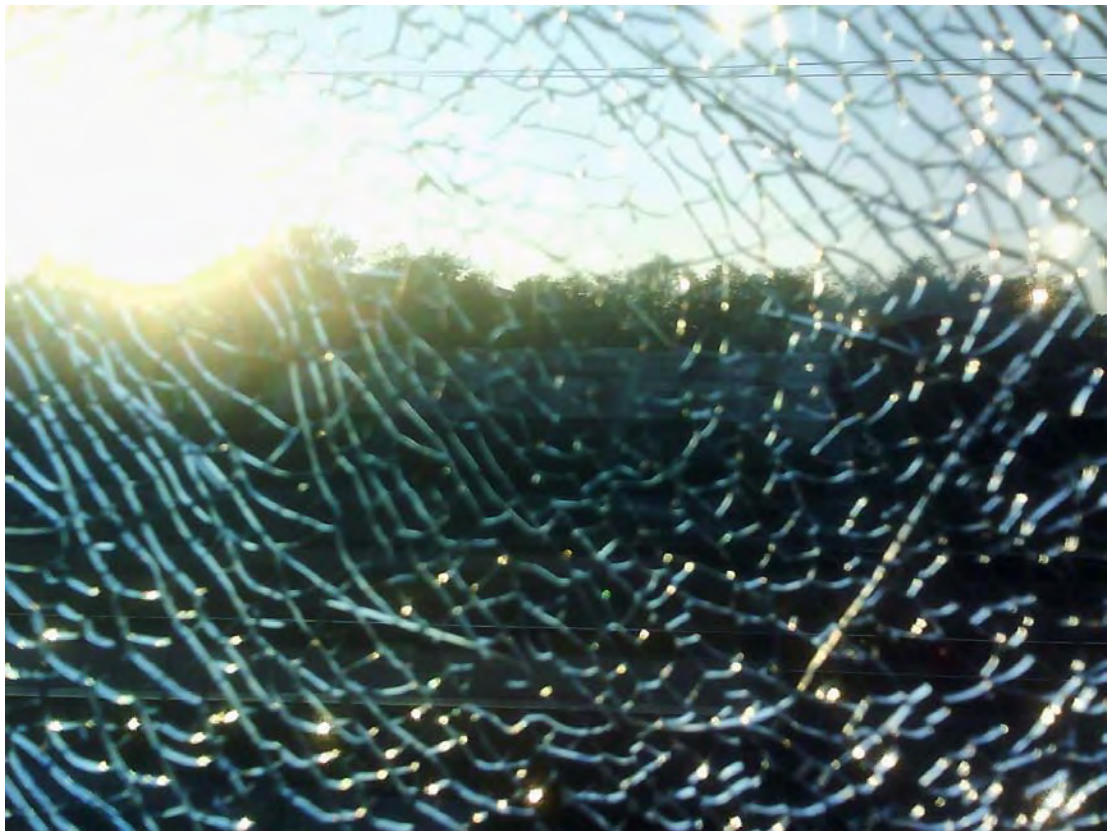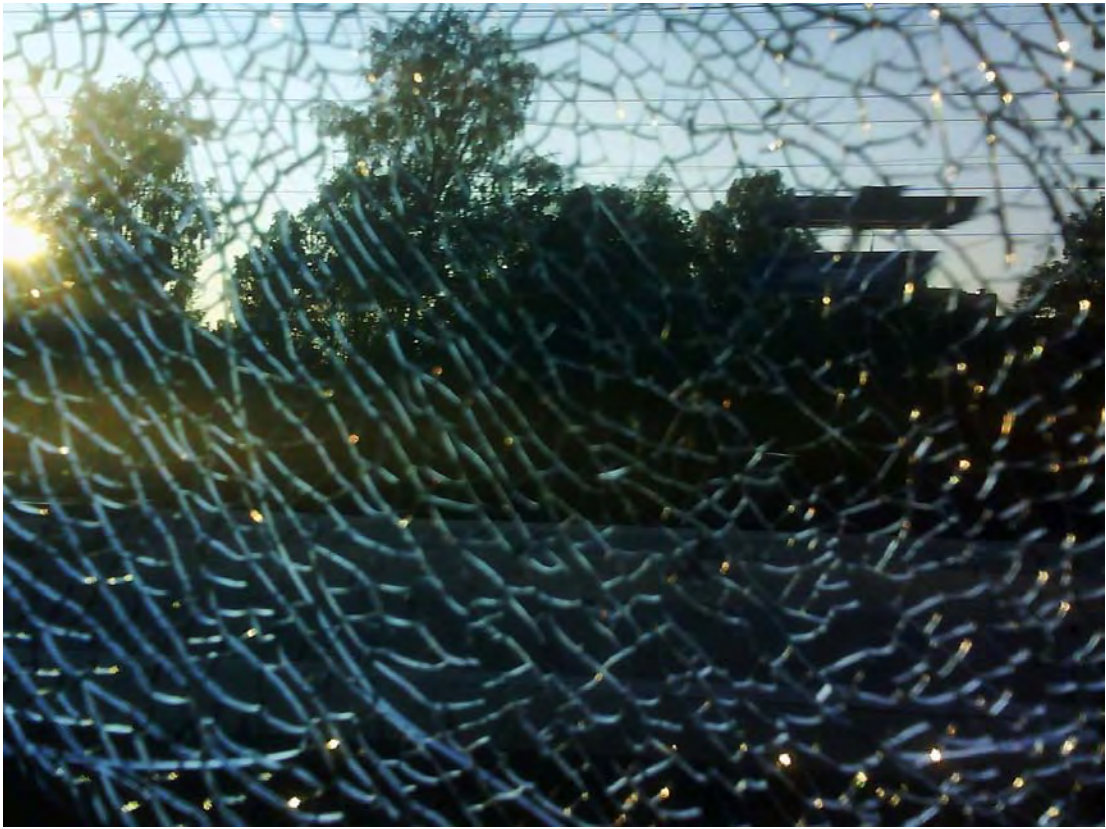
Periscope originals 1 and 2 of 10
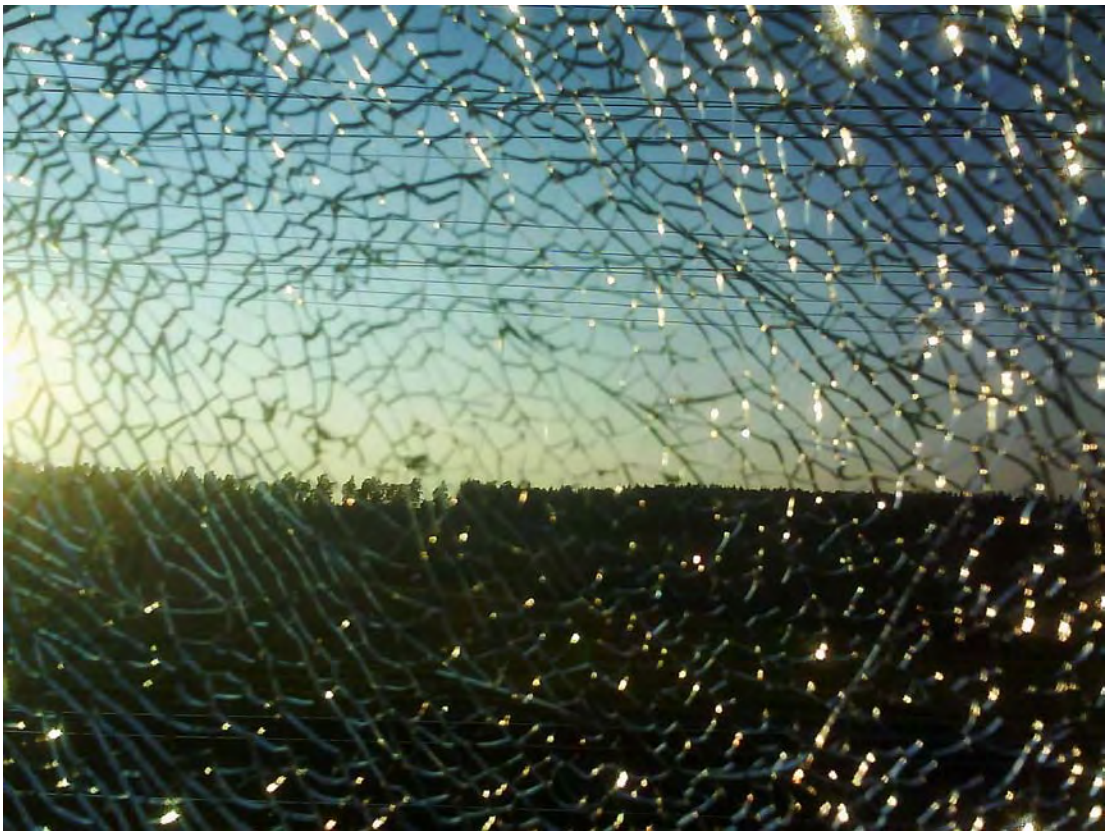
Periscope originals 3 and 4 of 10

Periscope originals 5 and 6 of 10

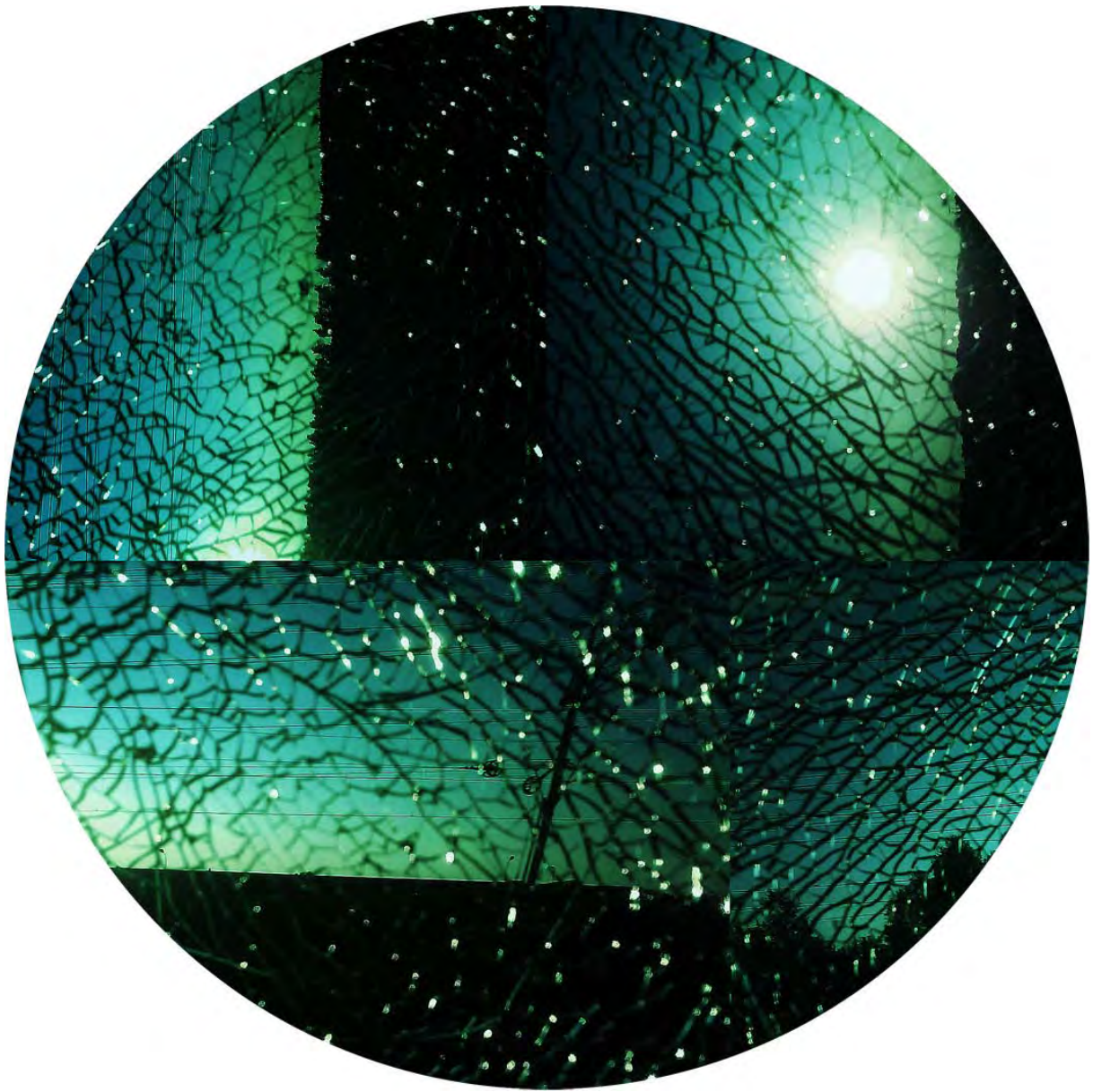*Periscope* originals 7 and 8 of 10

Periscope originals 9 and 10 of 10

Periscope film, image 1 of 20
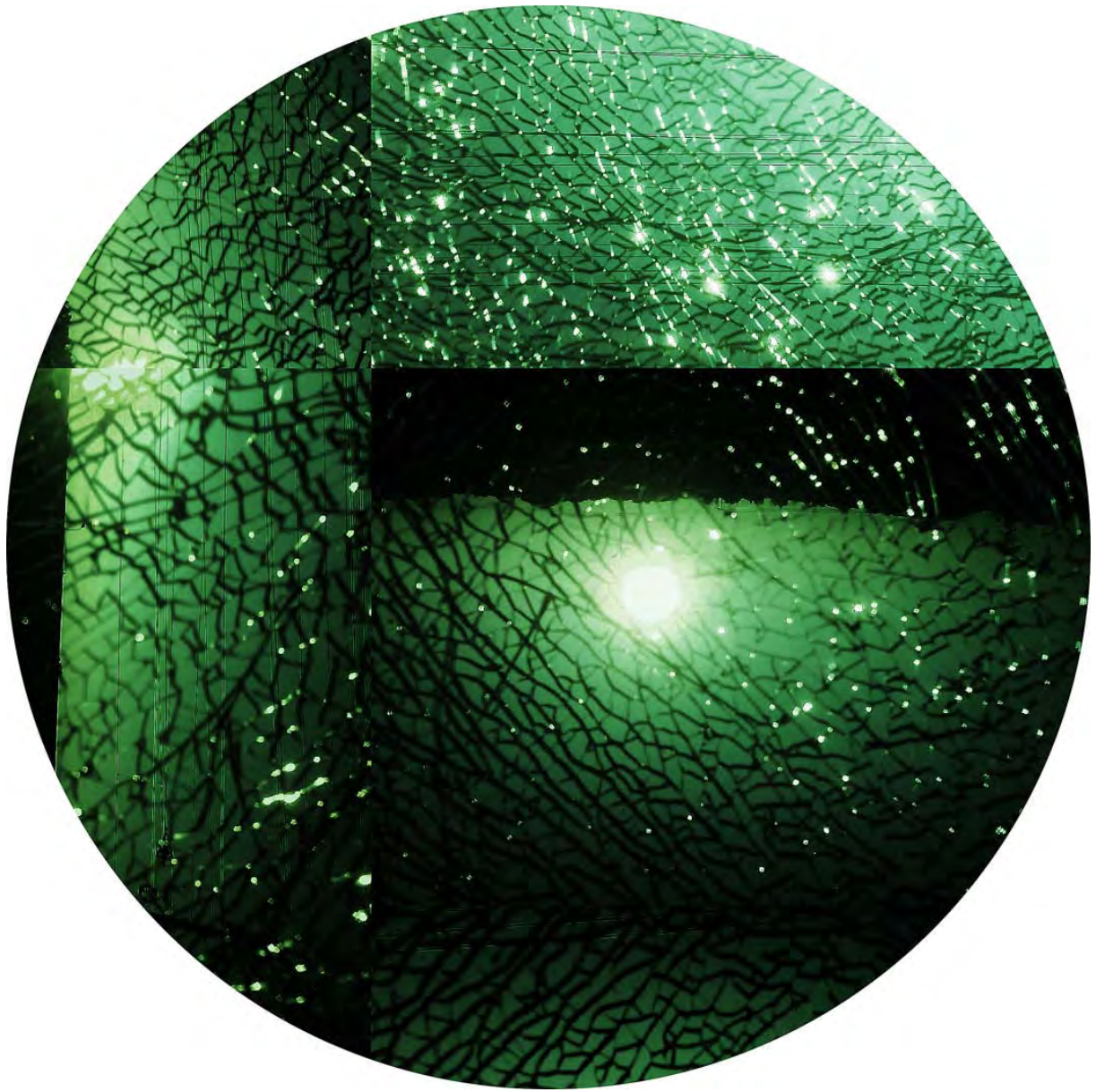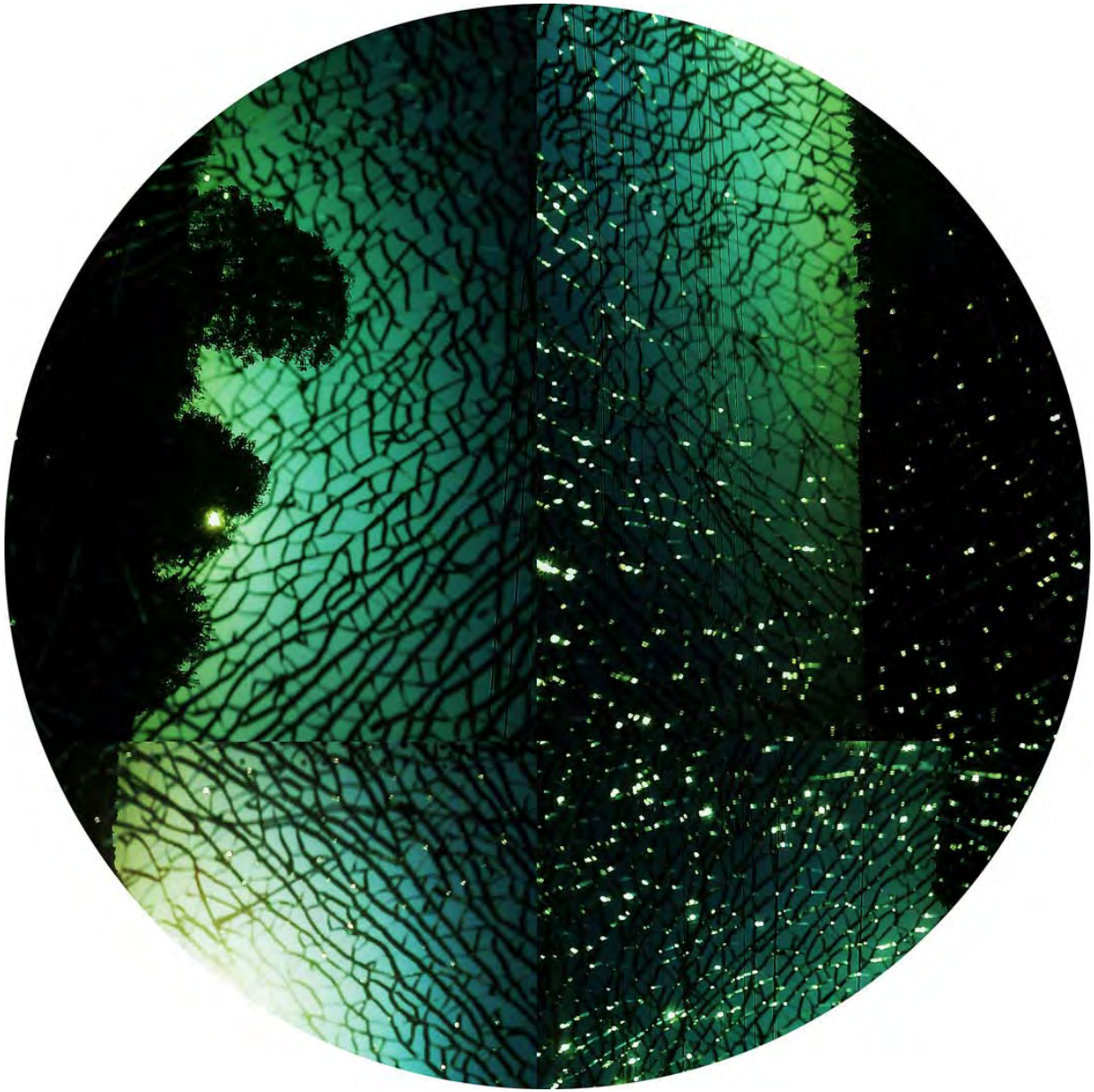
Periscope film, image 2 of 20

Periscope film, image 3 of 20

Periscope film, image 4 of 20

Periscope film, image 5 of 20

Periscope film, image 6 of 20

Periscope film, image 7 of 20

Periscope film, image 8 of 20

Periscope film, image 9 of 20

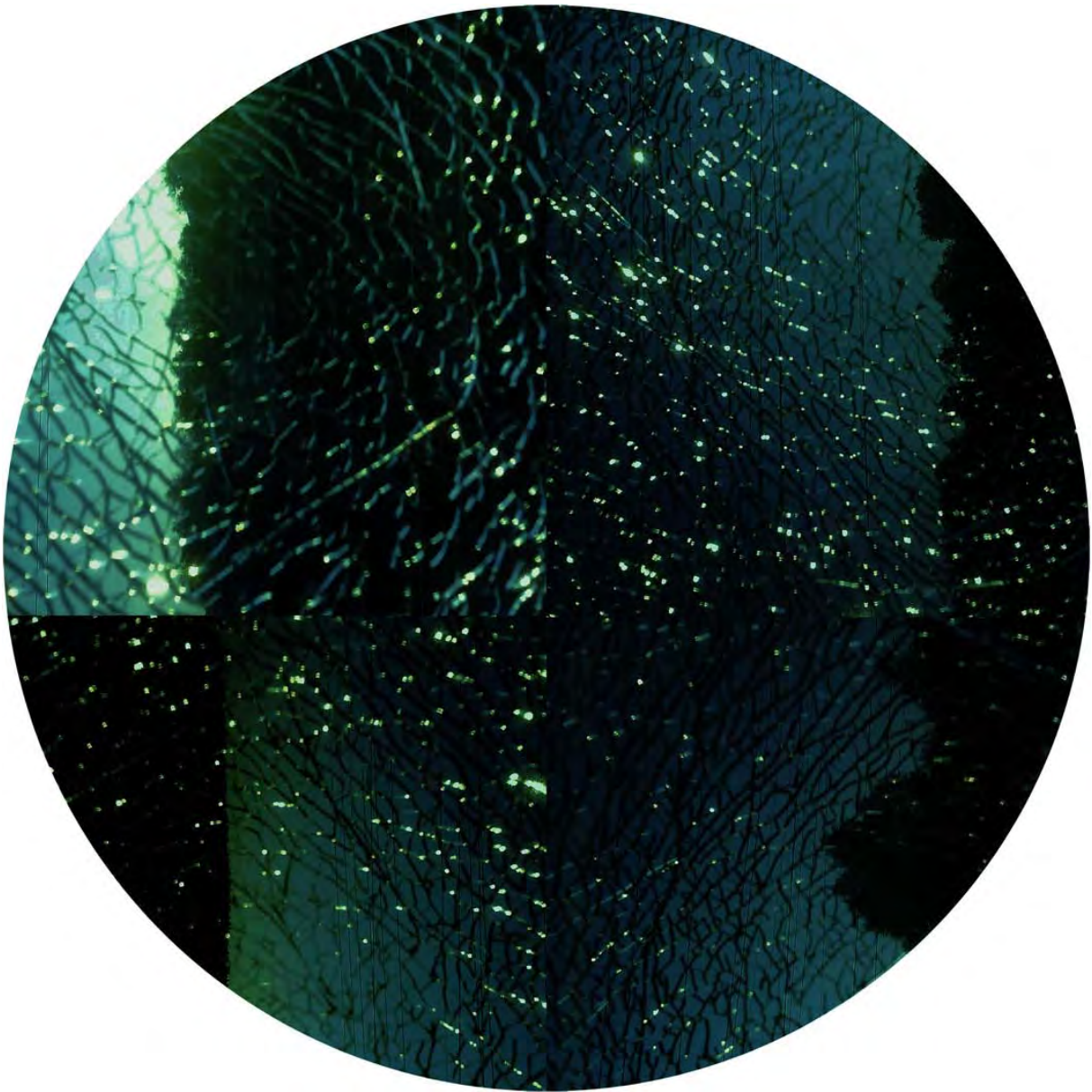*Periscope* film, image 10 of 20

Periscope film, image 11 of 20

Periscope film, image 12 of 20

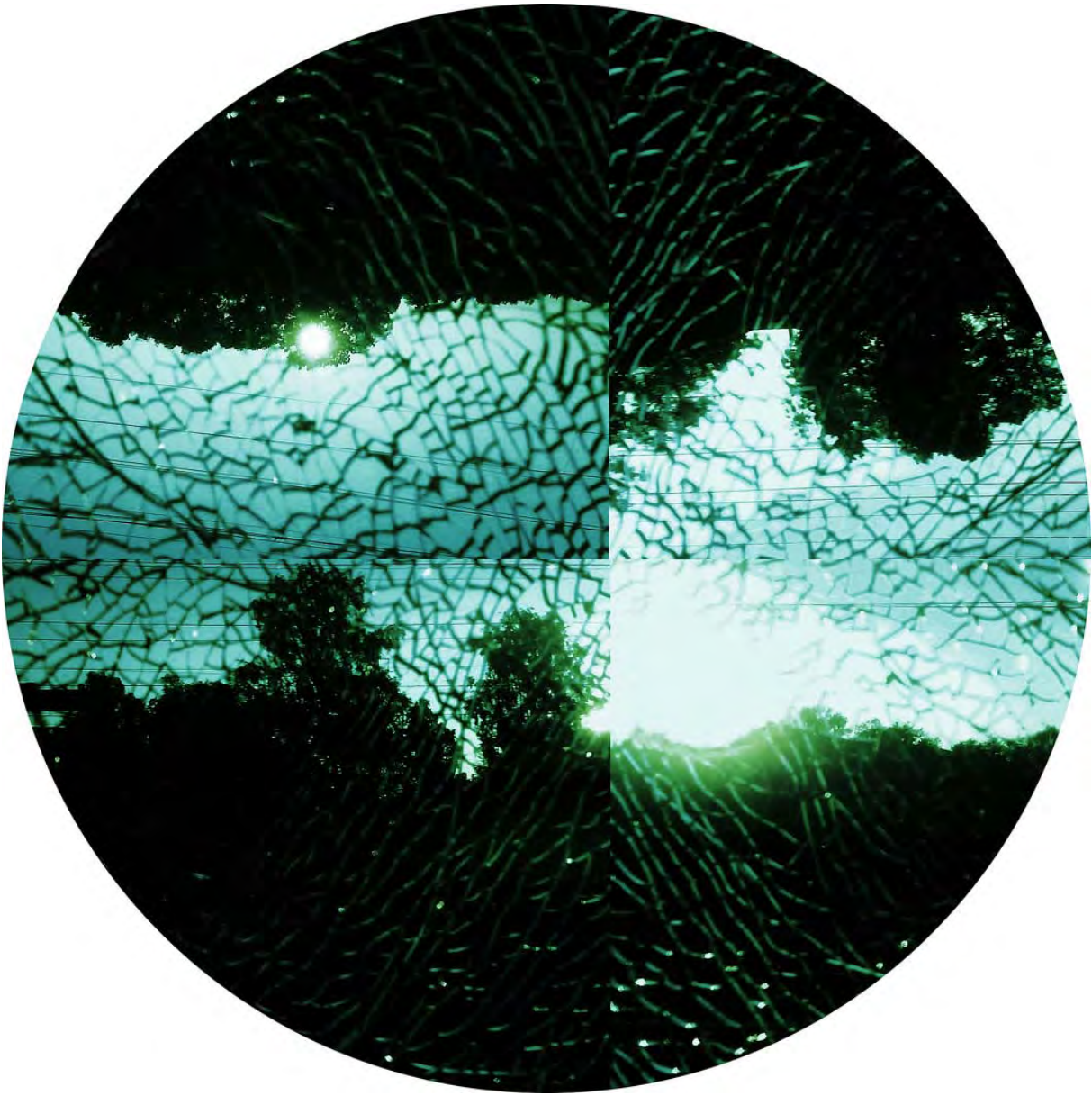*Periscope* film, image 13 of 20
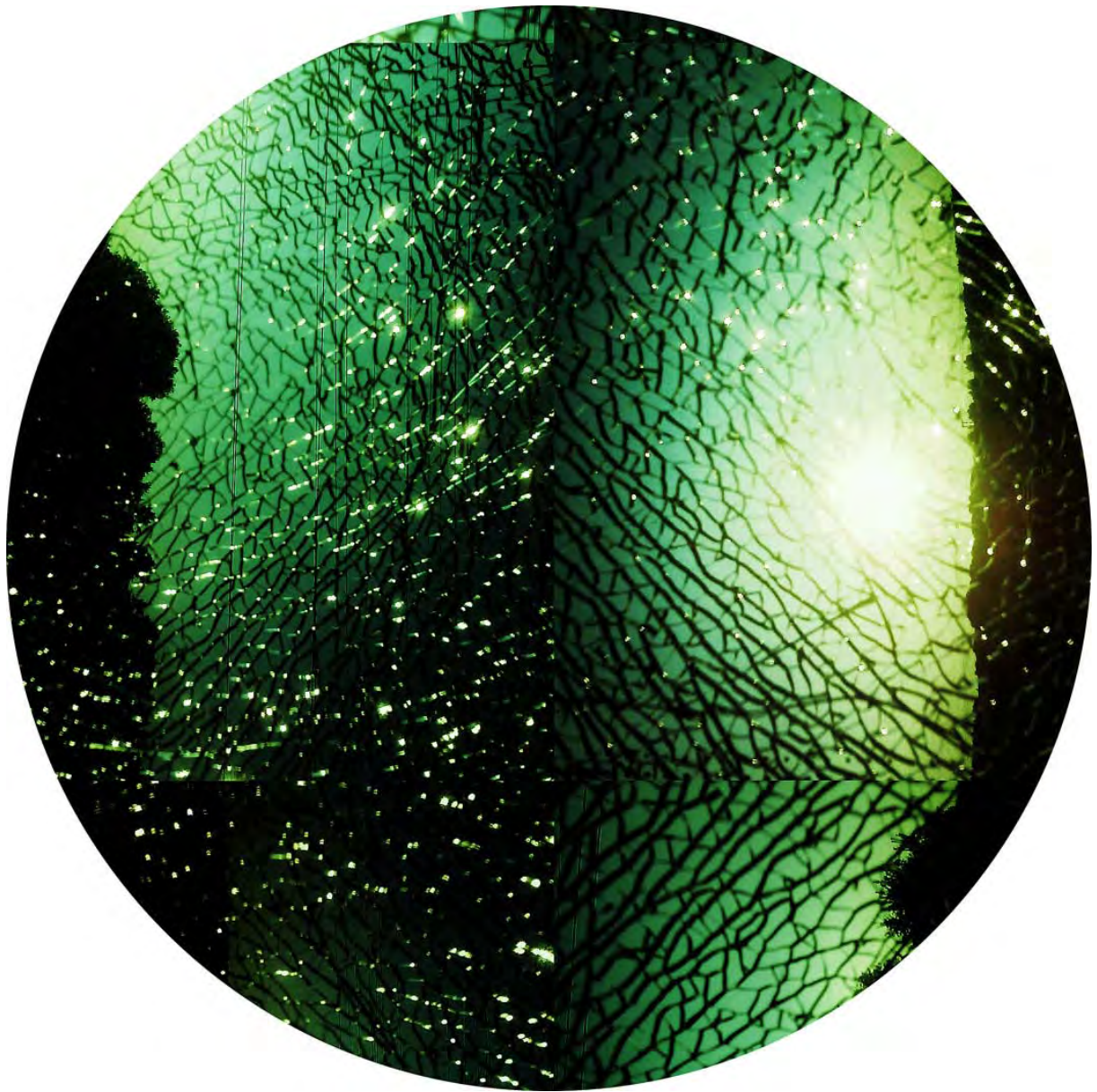
Periscope film, image 14 of 20

Periscope film, image 15 of 20

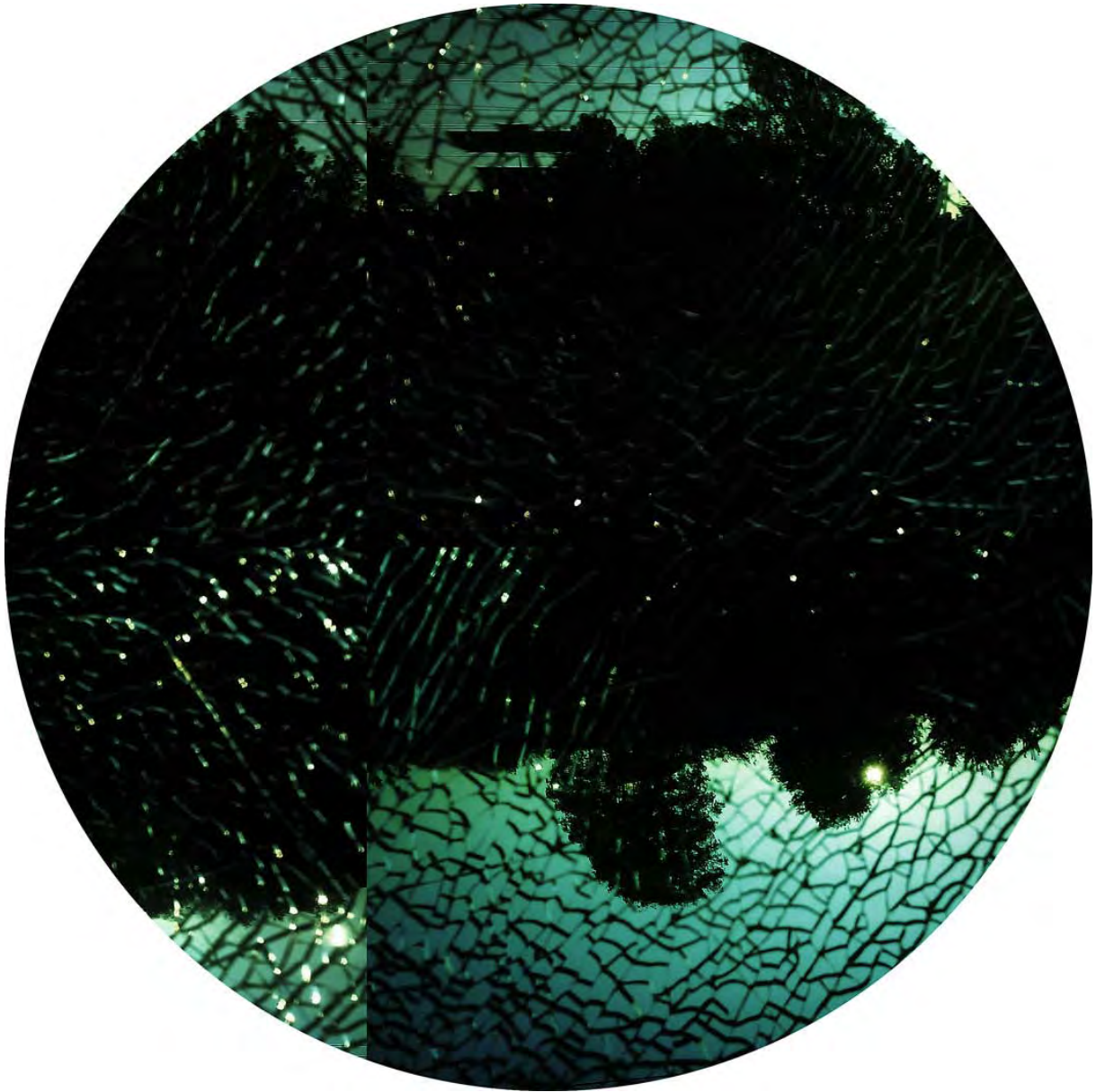*Periscope* film, image 16 of 20

Periscope film, image 17 of 20

Periscope film, image 18 of 20

Periscope film, image 19 of 20

Periscope film, image 20 of 20

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