

**SHIFTING
CONNECTIONS**
an arts column by kathleen macqueen

March 20, 2015 · by Kathleen MacQueen

ALL THAT IS MARVELOUS: HITO STEYERL

HITO STEYERL

Artists Space
38 Greene Street
3rd Floor
New York, NY 10013

Artists Space Talks and Books
55 Walker Street
New York, NY 10013

8 March – 24 May 2015



Hito Steyerl, *Liquidity, Inc.*, 2014, HD video with sound, 30 mins, installation view from *Hito Steyerl*, Artists Space, 2015. Courtesy of the artist; Andrew Kreps, New York; and Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam.

Twenty years ago, Hal Foster asked in *The Return of the Real* (1995): “What is the place of criticism in a visual culture that is evermore *administered*—from an art world dominated by promotional players with scant need for criticism, to a media world of communication-and-entertainment corporations

with no interest whatsoever?” (xv). He continued by suggesting that “the few spaces once allowed for art criticism have narrowed dramatically, and critics have followed artists forced to exchange critical practice for economic survival” (xvi).

Did 20th-century culture ever produce its own Baudelaire? Did it even have the chance? Walter Benjamin died too early while Clement Greenberg’s argument was too narrow. What about the 21st? If we do have a writer/artist/thinker who reads culture with a keen, critical edge then I would bet (s)he doesn’t use prose poetry and the press as the means to characterize the zeitgeist of this era but, instead, filters ideas through tweets, a smart phone, and charismatic public lectures. I would wager, too, that (s)he has to hang upside down and manage it with dignity in order to be visible. And (s)he would scarcely be detached—looking on from a distance—but embedded in the very system (s)he antes.

(S)he would continue the pithy institutional critique of Hans Haacke to form logic between the disparate connections of industry, war, and cultural patronage. (S)he would use parables, sharpening the edge of Andrea Fraser’s gender politics, and intensifying Harun Farocki’s investigative politics of images. (S)he would green-screen fact over fiction, combine virtual reality with facts-on-the-ground documentation, overlay a floating circulation of images to simulate the lock-down of economic restraint and and counter-check failed revolutions; knock out invisibility with Dara Birnbaum-esque super kitsch.



Hito Steyerl, *In Free Fall*, 2010, HD video with sound, 30 mins, installation view from *Hito Steyerl*, Artists Space, 2015. Courtesy of the artist; Andrew Kreps, New York; and Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam.

21st-century Baudelairean tactics would feel like a Kamikazi assault coupled with the reassurance of Gestalt therapy. They would place no one above the fray but recognize (his) her own role in a circulation of images that are *lying in wait*, ready to catch us in their maelstrom. In her most recent publication *Senses of the Subject* (2015), Judith Butler avows: “I do not arrive in the world separate from a set of norms that are lying in wait for me, even as a pure potential, prior to my first wail. So

norms, conventions, institutional forms of power, are already acting prior to any action I may undertake, prior to being an “I” who thinks of itself from time to time as the seat or source of its own action” (6).

Hito Steyerl may just well be a 21st-century Baudelaire but on her own terms—welcoming influence, side-lining expectation. Hardly the dandy, she faces outward with the alacrity of a skilled warrior: intellectually, physically, and emotionally prepared. Turning inward, she recognizes the humiliation that is the consequence of an overly administered art world—the gatekeeper’s reward in exclusivity, the military-industrial complex bleeding into the visionary colonization of cultural outposts—yet, she confirms the right to be visible as *the source of one’s own action*. Deliberate and determined. Unrestrained, yet of-the-moment.

A survey of Hito Steyerl’s work is currently on view at Artists Space in two locations. Artists Space Books and Talks features three of Steyerl’s performance lectures upstairs in an installation reminiscent of barricades or bunkers while downstairs two early works – *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007) – screen consecutively, introducing thematic content that repeats throughout her later work. Artists Space Exhibitions is shaped into three distinct environments designed for the screening of *In Free Fall* (2010), *Guards* (2012), and *Liquidity, Inc.* (2014). These may be the best seats you’ve ever had for screening video—Baudelaire’s *modernity* becomes Steyerl’s *circulationism*—a world determined by the movement of images and ideas in “late capitalism’s social, cultural and financial imaginaries” but infiltrated by a subjectivity grounded in fact and bolstered by the insistence of dreams.[1]



A selection of the artist’s writings are available via the [Artists Space](#) site. Additionally, viewers can see the artist’s humorous take on visibility and surveillance – *HOW NOT TO BE SEEN A Fucking Didactic Educational .Mov File* (2013) in the Museum of Modern Art’s [Cut to Swipe](#) exhibition through May 25, 2015.

The videos are worth start-to-finish viewing – prepare to hang out all afternoon!



[1] Steyerl has, according to the exhibition announcement printed in conjunction with *Hito Steyerl*, March 8-May 24, 2015, “coined the term ‘circulationism’ in order to describe a state that is ‘not about the making of an image, but about post-producing, launching, and accelerating it.’”