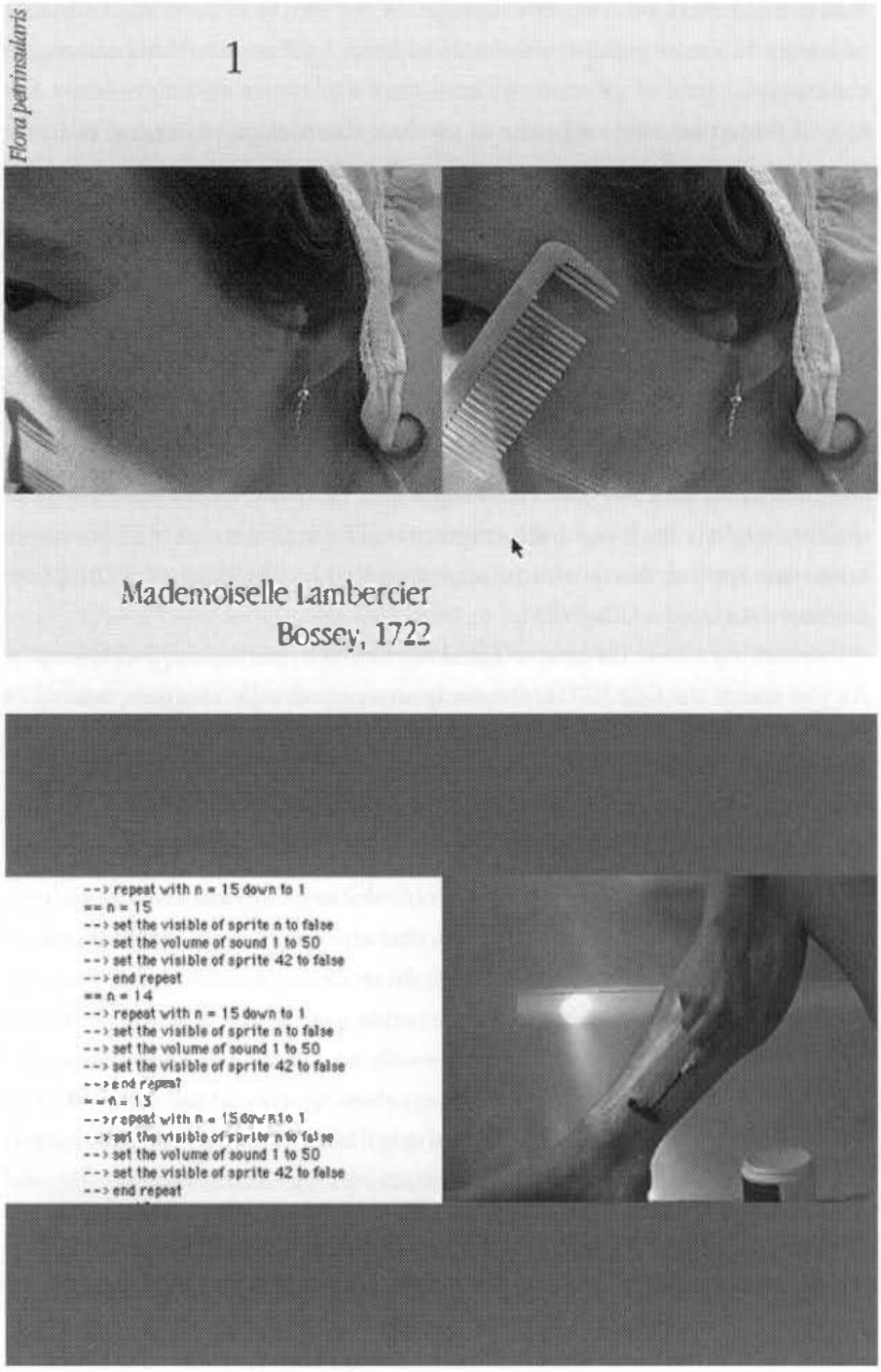
read as a comment on cinematic realism. What are the minimum conditions necessary to create the impression of reality? As Boissier demonstrates, in the case of a field of grass, or a close-up of a plant or a stream, just a few looped frames become sufficient to produce the illusion of life and of linear time.

Steven Neale describes how early film demonstrated its authenticity by representing moving nature: "What was lacking [in photographs] was the wind, the very index of real, natural movement. Hence the obsessive contemporary fascination, not just with movement, not just with scale, but also with waves and sea spray, with smoke and spray."[31] What for early cinema was its biggest pride and achievement—a faithful documentation of nature's movement—becomes for Boissier a subject of ironic and melancholic simulation. As the few frames are looped over and over, we see blades of grass shifting slightly back and forth, rhythmically responding to the blowing of nonexistent wind that is almost approximated by the noise of a computer reading data from a CD-ROM.

Something else is being simulated here as well, perhaps unintentionally. As you watch the CD-ROM, the computer periodically staggers, unable to maintain a consistent data rate. As a result, the images on the screen move in uneven bursts, slowing and speeding up with humanlike irregularity. It is as though they are brought to life not by a digital machine but by a human operator cranking the handle of the Zootrope a century and a half ago. . . .

If *Flora petrinsularis* uses the loop to comment on cinema's visual realism, *The Databank of the Everyday* suggests that the loop can be a new narrative form appropriate for the computer age. In an ironic manifesto that parodies their avant-garde precursors from the earlier part of the century, Bookchin reminds us that the loop gave birth not only to cinema but also to computer programming. Programming involves altering the linear flow of data through control structures, such as "if/then" and "repeat/while"; the loop is the most elementary of these control structures. Bookchin writes:

> As digital media replaces [*sic*] film and photography, it is only logical that the computer program's loop should replace photography's frozen moment and cinema's linear narrative. The Databank champions the loop as a new form of digital storytelling; there is no true beginning or end, only a series of the loops with their endless repetitions, halted by a user's selection or a power shortage.[32]



Flora petrinsularis: the repetitive image.
Jean-Louis Boissier and the ZKM.

The Databank of the Everyday: the loop as action and as code.
Courtesy of Natalie Bookchin.

The computer program's loop makes its first "screen debut" in one particularly effective image from *The Databank of the Everyday.* The screen is divided into two frames, one showing a video loop of a woman shaving her leg, the other a loop of a computer program in execution. Program statements repeating over and over mirror the woman's arm methodically moving back and forth. This image represents one of the first attempts in computer art to apply a Brechtian strategy; that is, to show the mechanisms by which the computer produces its illusions as a part of the artwork. Stripped of its usual interface, the computer turns out to be another version of Ford's factory, with a loop as its conveyer belt.

Like Boissier, Bookchin explores alternatives to cinematic montage, in her case replacing its traditional sequential mode with a spatial one. Ford's assembly line relied on the separation of the production process into a set of repetitive, sequential, and simple activities. The same principle made computer programming possible: a computer program breaks a task into a series of elemental operations to be executed one at a time. Cinema followed this principle as well: it replaced all other modes of narration with a sequential narrative, an assembly line of shots that appear on the screen one at a time. A sequential narrative turned out to be particularly incompatible with a spatialized narrative that played a prominent role in European visual culture for centuries. From Giotto's fresco cycle at the Scrovegni Chapel (1305–1306) in Padua to Gustave Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* (1850), artists presented a multitude of separate events (which sometimes were even separated by time) within a single composition. In contrast to cinema's narrative, here all the "shots" were accessible to a viewer at once.

Cinema has elaborated complex techniques of montage between different images replacing each other in time, but the possibility of what can be called "spatial montage" between simultaneously coexisting images was not explored. *The Databank of the Everyday* begins to explore this direction, thus opening up again the tradition of spatialized narrative suppressed by cinema. In one section we are presented with a sequence of pairs of short clips of everyday actions that function as antonyms—for instance, opening and closing a door, or pressing Up and Down buttons in an elevator. In another section the user can choreograph a number of miniature actions appearing in small windows positioned throughout the screen.

from Jennifer Ford, "Pranksters Saboteurs." *Black Book*, 2000

PRANKSTER SABOTEURS

RTMark takes hacking to another level.

Überpranksters or ski-masked saboteurs? Agents for the anti-corporate activist group RTMark (pronounced "artmark") tend to keep a low and hazy profile. They've funded nearly 25 acts of "creative subversion" since the organization formed in 1991, from well-executed witticisms and practical jokes to full-on aggression against corporate America. Most recently, they made headlines for launching two pointed political parodies—Web sites masquerading as the official sources for the WTO (www.gatt.org) and presidential candidate George W Bush (www.gwbush.com).

RTMark's mission is to end corporate abuse of the democratic process through creative sabotage, or "cultural hacking." Agents have spliced movies with educational footage and rigged ATM machines with signs reading: "Nothing for beggars on Fridays." In a pointed critique of sampling and copyright infringement, RTMark subsidized the production of a thirteen-track CD called *Deconstructing Beck*, which, among other things, cut the first two-and-a-half minutes of the song "Jackass" (from *Odelay*) into 2,500 reshuffled pieces. RTMark supporters around the world snuck into museums to replace audio tour tapes with snippets of socially progressive talk. They launched a campaign called "Barbie Liberation," swapping voice boxes between talking Barbies and GI Joe action figures. When the e-commerce giant eToy tried to shut down etoys.com, the site of a Swiss performance art collective, RTMark waged an Internet sit-in that successfully stunted legal proceedings. And it may be coincidence, but the massive data jam big commercial Web sites experienced in February had an air of RTMark's handiwork to it.

RTMark went online (www.rtmark.com) in 1997, and operations have run bigger, faster, and better ever since. The site functions in both English and Spanish, and channels money from donors to workers looking to complete sabotage projects. Such projects are organized into eight "mutual funds" (the most popular at the moment is the Frontier Fund, which addresses the effects of global trade on indigenous cultures). You can go to the site and join impromptu think tanks (anonymous mailing lists set up to foster communication about each fund), or chat with RTMark workers and donors about how each project is going. You just can't pry into the organization itself.

"We're a diverse group of individuals," says RTMark spokesperson Candid Lucia, who, like many of the group's administrators, uses an assumed name that changes repeatedly over a series of conversations. "[We're] mostly professionals, mostly with dull lives [and] rather unglamorous and banal day jobs." With six white-collar professional administrators scattered across the country (Lucia is based in New York), RTMark is a vaguely small, no-paperwork operation that, according to Lucia, could close shop in five minutes and literally disappear, should the need arise.

For all their shadowboxing and intrigue, RTMark has attracted much publicity. When George W Bush learned of their activities, he set Internet regulators loose and suggested that "there ought to be limits to freedom." Corporate executives call their projects the work of Satan's Temp Agency, and members of the press pursue their agents like sleuths. And any obscurity they may have had was blown open by the protests in Seattle. WTO Director Mike Moore lashed out at RTMark's copycat site on the front page of the WTO's real Web site, prompting the international media to clamor for a glimpse of RTMark's masterpiece.

"Our site was intended to provide in-depth information about the WTO," says Lucia. "We expected them to make a link to our site."

This is a pretty cheery and benign response from a group renounced as rogue and anarchic. Of course, touting a motto like "dead persons tell no lies" doesn't help, but at what point is an organization like RTMark lumped in with the rest of the anarchist groups who have been fighting against big business and the excesses of global capitalism for years?

As 56-year-old anarchist writer John Zerzan admits, "There are so many different ways of looking at anarchy. I kinda wonder what they mean by it. It's so elastic a term."

RTMark shares a few ideologies with Zerzan, including the view that property damage is a "nonviolent" activity. But the similarities seem to end there. RTMark's agents work from within the system, while Zerzan and his colleagues keep a safe, solid distance. Zerzan, who is a sort of demigod among young West Coast anarchists, is skeptical of technology, while RTMark makes the most of it. Where Zerzan finds fault with an irresponsible public, RTMark seeks out reckless corporations. "We have great regard for the founding laws and democratic principles of our country," says Lucia. Furthermore, few of RTMark's projects are ostensibly political—only in those cases where big-name corporate products like George W Bush or the WTO interfere with free process.

Yet both organizations are surging in popularity. Zerzan believes the young anarchists he sees in and around Eugene, Oregon, are disillusioned by a warping American Dream that amounts to working at McDonald's and watching the WWF. They're looking for answers.

RTMark agrees, but with a surprisingly idealistic twist. "People are sick of corporate greed and corruption," says Lucia. "If they weren't informed they'd be at the mall shopping or watching TV."

Granted, RTMark may still tell you to fuck off, but at least you can expect an eloquent reason why.

—Jennifer Ford

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