JOE HAMBLETON
(TORONTO)

Years ago I heard about a painting by Seurat. The work depicts a woman powdering herself (*Young Woman Powdering Herself*, 1890). I imagined the powder particles that puffed about and suffused the air rendered in the delimited "gesture" that characterizes the Pointillist school. Each "point" of paint application immediately assumes a particle. Here, form presents and expresses the subject perfectly, without remainder or excess. I pictured an exemplary moment of plenitude in art (and perhaps life too), where the mutual appropriation between form and content resolves in perfect alignment and expression.

Perhaps I got carried away, but I admit feeling rather disappointed after seeing a reproduction of the work. Something fell short and I cannot say what exactly. I somehow wondered if the very possibility of plenitude, the optimal expression where form perfectly aligns with content, should be indefinitely veiled from disclosure. That it should be sealed, encrypted as a promise of sort, and never actually made visible in the work.

...Behind The Fourth Wall

Joe Hambleton's work traces a consistent, even persistent trajectory since I first became acquainted with it a few years ago. Thematically, autobiographical material (memories of childhood experience, routines in daily life, monologues and reflections, etc.) provides the substrate. Conceptually, the material is always articulated in a complex structural manoeuvre through the application of media technology. In *I grew up in a Forest Glade* (2008), the artist reconstructed, through a graphic animation program, the suburban layout of the neighbourhood where he grew up in Windsor, Ontario. This multi-channel animated work presents a narrated visual walkthrough of Forest Glade. A voiceover recounts episodes of adolescence that are associated with specific landmarks in the animation. Visually and structurally, the work straddles something between a virtual computer game-like environment, the panel-to-panel layout of a graphic novel, and the schematic cartography of a board game. It is through these devices that experience and recollection are configured in a meandering sequence of spatial/ temporal dislocations.

Hambleton's latest work, *Behind The Forth Wall* (2013), traces the thread of autobiographical narration. Structurally, however, *Behind The Forth Wall* is an exercise in randomized permutation. The work consists of over two hundred carefully crafted video clips. Except for the recurring prologue and epilogue, a program randomly selects and arranges the clips to compose three individual acts. The process repeats at the end of each play. Thus, with each iteration the work assumes a new configuration, narration, and expression.

Framed by the cloistered, labyrinthine video game environment in the prologue and epilogue, the three acts of the work detour from scene to scene. Themes of missed opportunity, postponement, self-questioning, unrealized ambitions, and retarded movement knit circuitous narratives that seemingly lead nowhere. These include vintage footage of the artist as a little boy (the original film is damaged due to belated development), phantasmagoric images of the artist's childhood toys, footage of solitary meandering in the woods, and soliloquy that hints at thwarted desires. Like the epilogue in which the computer avatar (the artist?) is left to perish when he fails to ascend to a higher level of the game, these scenarios present a sentiment of aspiration and curtailment in life. They also hint at the conundrum to move forward, to "find a way out," or a solution of some sort. But the challenge is whether these life questions can be adequately answered in aesthetic form.

... and then

Over conversation, Hambleton told me the conceptual underpinnings of randomization. The vast number of possible permutations the artist claims, will produce a particular alignment of the clips that will deliver the "perfect expression" (not solution) of his life at this point. I think insofar as the validity of the claim goes, it should be regarded as a performative proposition (not an empirical one). Which means that such a claim needs not be proven. Rather, it can be validated on the premise of what it can accomplish.

The claim generates a paradox. Given the immense number of possible permutations, the idea of a "perfect expression" is at once prescribed and deferred by the program. Since nothing can take place outside of the program, the "perfect expression" must have already existed prior to being generated, though it may not yet be actualized in viewing. In this case, the disclosure of the "perfect expression" is a real possibility in time. And yet, assuming it did get generated and viewed at some point in time, the audience (including the artist) could not possibly recognize it. Among the vast array of permutations that are more or less similar, how would one possibly single out a qualitative distinction between the perfect and the less perfect iterations? One may be watching the "perfect expression" without knowing, due to the absence of criteria. Considered from within the horizon of human perception and cognition, the claim will always remain a meaningful postulate and a missed opportunity simultaneously. Yet, I think the merit of the work actually rides on this perceived paradox.

The efficacy of Hambleton's claim accomplishes a number of things. It posits the virtual existence of the "perfect expression," the moment of plenitude where form and content align perfectly in mutual appropriation, as a real possibility that cannot possibly happen. I appreciate this as a tactic to protect the promise of plenitude from disclosure, and consequently consumed and expired. The claim, a performative operation, is set up to seal the essential mystery and otherness of plenitude. It posits a perfect reference point that is forever out-of-reach and receding. It promises an impossible possibility in art and life.

Born in Hong Kong, **Yam Lau** is an artist based in Toronto. He teaches painting at York University.

Inspired by the cut-up technique popularized by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, Third Mind is a video series that utilizes randomization software to create and edit autobiographical video work. Third Mind consists of two video works: *Days of Future Past* and *Behind the Fourth Wall*, both intimately related to the artist's own past and process.

For *Days of Future Past* the artist used this cut-up technique to alter his process of filmmaking. Filmed from the inside of a car and accompanied by a narrative voice-over, the video carries the spectator through a deserted city while familiar objects strangely begin to appear within the frame. Through these appearances, the very mechanisms of recollection are evoked as the "story" simultaneously unfolds. Memories of the past accompany delusions of the future, allowing a realization of the present.

In *Behind the Fourth Wall*, videos representing the artist's past and present are randomly composed with his narrated memories and writings. Following an analysis of his previous video work, the artist determined his editing tendencies and scripted the software to imitate his own past work in reference to style, aesthetics, pacing, and shot selection. The end result is an experimental film that mimics his editing style while changing with each viewing.

"It is my attempt to find the perfect combination of image, dialogue and sound to represent a moment in my life. To utilize programming to take my work further than I am physically capable of. A work that is never finished, that may or may not find perfection, with or without my presence." – Hambleton.

Born in Windsor, **Joe Hambleton** now lives in Toronto where he works as an artist and educator. Through the medium of video, he creates work that reflects various aspects of his life. Through research and experimentation, he explores narrative devices found in popular media to continually alter his process of creation. His work has been shown across North America, Europe and Asia. He is a graduate of the University of Windsor and York University where he received his MFA in Visual Arts. He is currently teaching Digital Media and Art at York University and is represented by the Pari Nadimi Gallery.