

Self-Service Broadcasting: *reenacttv.net*

Phil Ellis

The interface can be interrogated in terms of the potential for active participatory audiences to evolve at the site(s) of new television. Further, it can be examined how this evolution is closely aligned to technological developments and tools that might engender 'free cooperation' and then collaboration, 'emancipating the spectator' (Rancière), and creating agency and empowerment.

Inherent in a convergent culture, the possibilities multiply for active participants to act as both 'semionauts' and tactical media practitioners to exploit the political tensions between empowered viewer/users and the needs of the broadcast industry to 'monetise' the viral *feedback*, exemplified in such tactics as the mash-ups of remediated broadcast. David Joselet suggests that through the act of *feedback*, as producers and viewers of the ubiquitous media of new television, we can "learn the system and counter it – make *noise*" (171). He sees this as a viral act in a potentially open circuit, reminiscent of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* (or alienation effect) in terms of its political activation of the receiver where, in relation to the political point, (s)he is "conscious of the social situation that gives rise to it and desirous of acting in order to transform it" (Rancière, 8). Where Brecht's theatre audience is akin to the new television audience is in the availability for activation – the former through the removal of the fourth wall and the latter through the recognition of user production in the interfaces of new television. Rancière proposes a Brechtian media exchange "without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs" (4). This has further potential as an open circuit if the work itself adheres to Umberto Eco's principles of the *Open Work*, where "every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself" (4).

Mash-ups and similar acts of resistance can be seen as key acts of agency and affect (Gray 2008) and a new type of 'flow' sited at the intersection between the DIY tools such as Wirecast, Ustream, Stickam etc and prosumer culture.

Such a bricolage of ideas of collaborative/cooperative, open, networked, viral participatory flows are the structural and thematic underpinning of the forthcoming *reenacttv.net* arts practice contextualized by this area of new television as self-service broadcasting. *reenacttv.net* harnesses the collaborative nature of webcam chatsites to reenact early television experiments and seeks to interrogate the public interface of new television and opportunities for self-service broadcasting; specifically the reenactment of *The Man with the Flower in his Mouth* by John Logie Baird with the BBC in 1930. The reenactment will facilitate active engagement with the material of the play through the residents and workers of Long Acre London, Baird's studio from where the play was first broadcast, as well as the participatory audience – opening a dialogic relationship between past and present technologies and conditions as fully participatory authors and actors.

In the spirit of a 'free cooperative open work', the user is free to create whatever flow they choose to create with the work, hence the authorship of this artwork is problematised. The artwork can be articulated as part of "growing online participation and content provision" and the artist can be described as what Trebor Scholz calls a "*cultural context provider*, who is not chiefly concerned with contributing content to her own projects. Instead, she establishes configurations into which she invites others... a catalyst of performative online acts". The work has therefore created a toolbox of interpretive possibilities for creative acts in the reenactment, opening a space for the audience that potentially "transforms them into active participants in a shared world" (Rancière, 11).

The dialogic process between participants and contemporary and historical television systems, in terms of technologies and uses (the political and social implications of the user-producer), aligned with their modes of distribution and reception, allow for a critique of the contemporary position of broadcasting through the process of reenactment.

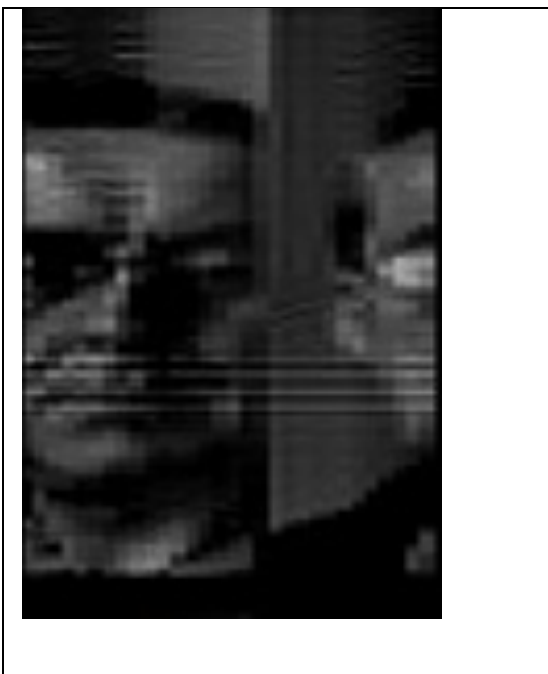


Figure 1. Webcam image processed through collaborator Gary Millard's 30 line emulation software. This will be used for the reenactment from 133 Long Acre

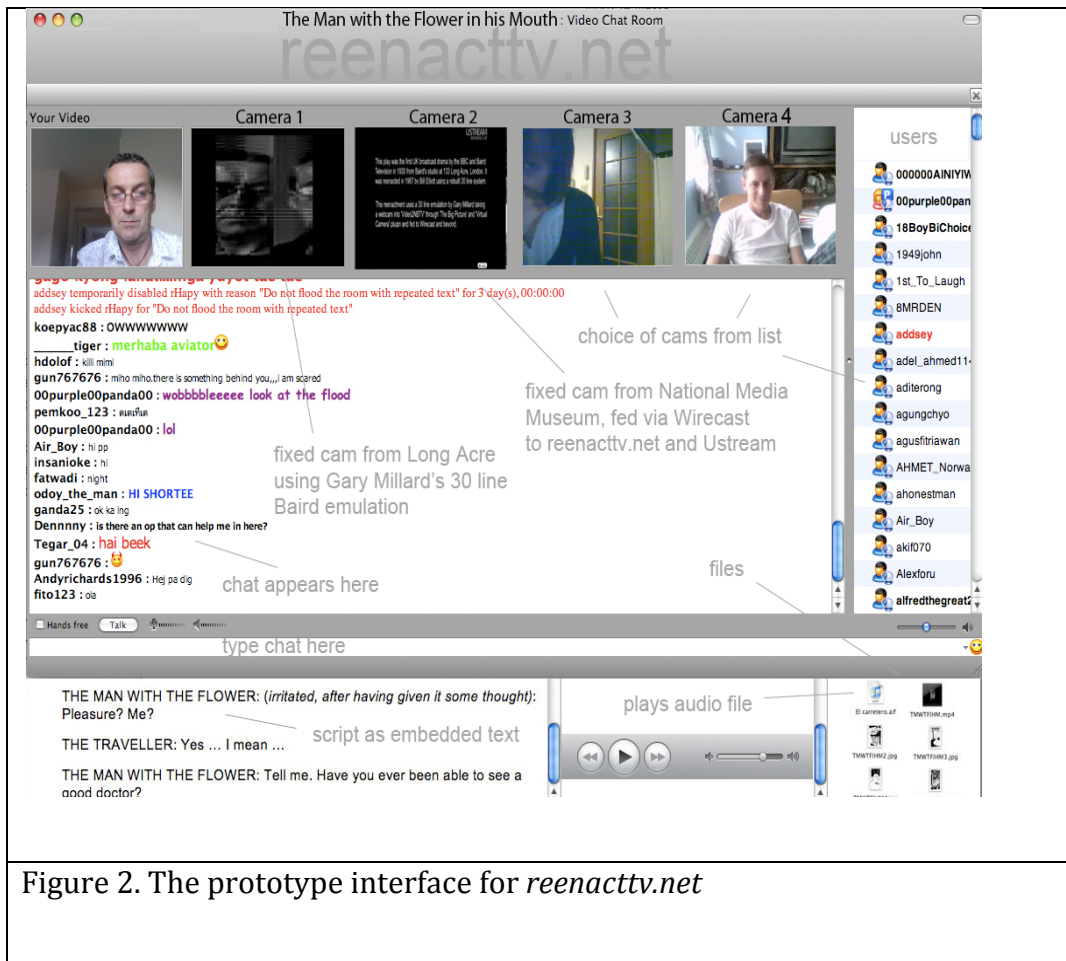


Figure 2. The prototype interface for *reenacttv.net*

Works cited:

Gray, Jonathan. *Television Entertainment*. London & New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Joselet, David. *Feedback: Television against Democracy*. Cambridge Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2007. Print.

Millard, Gary. *Early Television Techniques*. 2010
 <<http://users.tpg.com.au/users/gmillard/nbtv/nbtv.htm>>.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London, New York: Verso, 2009. Print.

Scholz, Trebor. "The Participatory Challenge". In *Curating immateriality*. Krysa, Joasia. (Ed). New York: Autonomedia, 2006. Print.