Editor's Letter

In this issue *Elable* will be noting the image through the gaze of the noted Czech-born philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser. Since the early 1980s, Flusser has had a profound impact on how we understand images, specifically our relationship to them as both viewers and producers. In 1985 Flusser published his seminal text *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, which was pivotal in the development of a cultural analysis of the then emerging field of electronic media. In 2011, twenty-six years after its first publication, Flusser’s analysis stands as a potent and timely study of the potentials and pitfalls of the omnipresent ‘technical image’.

The world of 2011, whilst it retains many features common to 1985, has fundamentally shifted. A relevant marker in this shift is the current V&A exhibition *Postmodernism*. Presented as an exhibition of objects from 1970-1990, it provides a snapshot of what Hal Foster has described as a ‘political economy of design’. With Art now occupying second place behind Design, it comes as no surprise that the post-modern has been codified as a field of ornamental accessories, ready to decorate this late capitalist age. At the V&A, the post-modern is bracketed within a specific time frame, posing the idea that at some moment the world passed into some other post-post condition. But whether this is the liquid modernity of Bauman, or the super-modernity of Augé, all of them are eclipsed by the ‘technical universe’ proposed by Flusser as a cogent depiction of the inner black box workings of the contemporary cultural body.

In this issue, *Notes from the Studio* are supplied by three artists working with video, Valentina Bonizzi, Boris Gerrets and Kim Walker. Together Bonizzi, Gerrets and Walker open a way into thinking about the moving image in relation to time and the nature of narrative. For Gerrets it is the accidental scraper of footage that are captured after the ‘action’ has finished, the interruptive snippets of a world not mediated through intentional narratives, which break open a place that lies beyond the realm of the story. Gerrets approaches these melancholic fragments, which are usually discarded during editing, as a ‘volatile exit portal from the digital fog’ of Flusser’s black box of the camera. During her *Cooper Summer Residency 2011*, Bonizzi drew out the nature of an encounter with place and its bringing to being through the act of image making. Caught in the fluidity of history and how this constitutes a particular place, Bonizzi makes plain the fact that any image articulates only a specific duration, an image whether photographic or video can only make legible a sense of place that is contingent upon the moment of its capture on film. Kim Walker, also a participant in the *Cooper Summer Residency 2011* followed a similar path to Bonizzi. Taking as her site the mountain Schiehallion, Walker made a series of field recordings to frame or render into legibility an expanded sense of time and duration. Walker suggests that the sound of the site could have been waiting thousands of years for my arrival that day.

The work of Elizabeth Gossling, builds upon this intangibility or inconclusiveness of perceived duration. For *Under Consideration*, a large scale print by Gossling Hurricane Irene is used to develop an argument that questions the rhetoric of contemporary digital image making, specifically the proposed authority of the ‘technical image’ as an effective mode of representation. In John Dummett’s essay on Gossling’s practice, the contemporary image is revealed as a ventriloquist’s dummy, which occludes what is actually being represented. The image operates as a transcript of its own voice, a report on the technological and political ‘weather’ of which it materialises. This notion is brought to the fore in another *Under Consideration* essay by Clive Gillman, who explores the thoughts of filmmaker Peter Gidal in relation to the Turner Prize-nominated artist Hilary Lloyd. For Gillman, ‘you have to know you are watching a film to really watch a film’. In Lloyd’s practice, Gillman draws out the situation of the ‘mechanics of the medium’, specifically the foregrounding of the fixtures and fittings used to display images, through the name of their manufacturer, Unicol. In this ‘materiality of the image’ the ‘label’ of the technology assumes ascendance above all else.

And finally in this issue, in *What I’m reading now...* Steven Gartside addresses the various forms and reasons of reading. Drawing upon Schopenhauer, Nabokov and others Gartsade lays bare the different ways texts are encountered and used. Making the point that reading does not mean thinking, Gartsade presents us with a cutting ontology of the act of reading.

It seems fundamentally antibithetical and counter-intuitive to use words to reveal the life of the image, which is essentially the sub-text running through this issue of *Elable*. Why use words to pin down what lives in the realm of the visible, particularly when Flusser states that ‘Images beat texts because they are not so repulsive as massive rows of fat books.’

Sophia Yidong Hao

Sophia Yidong Hao is Curator of Exhibitions at VRC at UOCAD, University of Dundee.