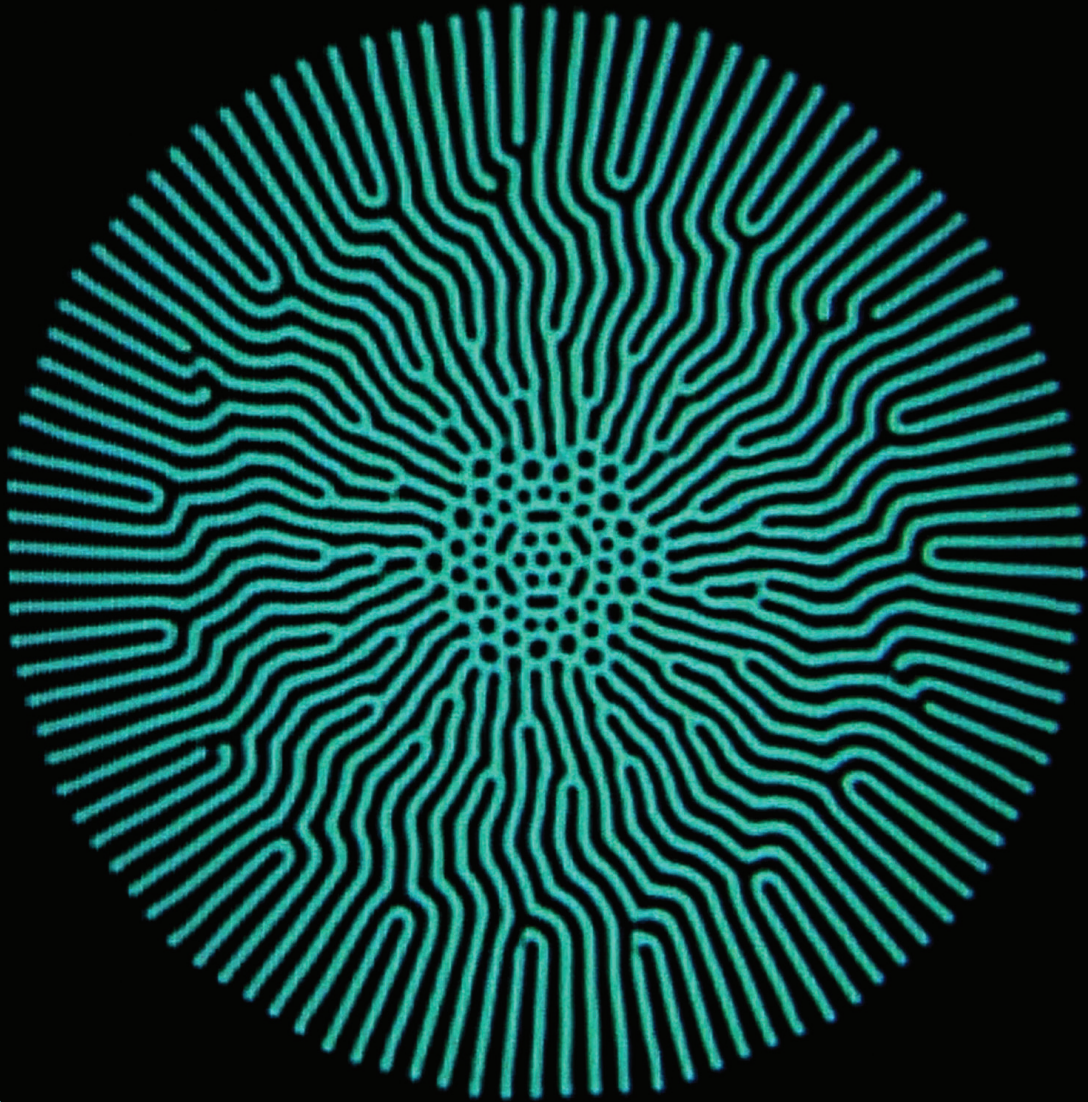


Ethan Turpin

Video Feedback: Pixel Behaviors



Bloom Projects

Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum

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ETHAN TURPIN: THE VIDEATED WUNDERKAMMER

By Peter Frank

The infinitized reflection has posed a perceptual meme in Western visual culture, at least since the design of mirrors in Versailles' hallways. On entering the realm of recorded motion, it showed up in some of the earliest video art. Nam June Paik's pioneering montages brim with dancing figures receding to jiggling, unstable points; Douglas Davis's video-performative studies include at least one where his tautological proposals are, literally, mirrored (as he points a live camera at a mirror and ultimately breaks the mirror with the camera). Video artists and their digital successors have also explored the quirks in their technologies, looking to see how glitches, or even normative behavior, in systems can warp and even re-set perception.

In *Video Feedback: Pixel Behaviors*, Ethan Turpin employs outmoded but still viable standard-definition video technology dating back some twenty years. Linking it in a feedback loop (that is, a live camera aimed at its own display) to more contemporary, mid-definition projector technology, Turpin has unlocked a "cellular automaton" effect, a pattern-generation mechanism that occurs naturally given the right conditions. The work, projected into a darkened closed-off chamber is accompanied by *Roundabout Wunderkammer*, a selection of biologically

occurring shapes that echoes the patterns seen both in the video installation and in live feedback on a small CRT monitor placed amidst the specimens.

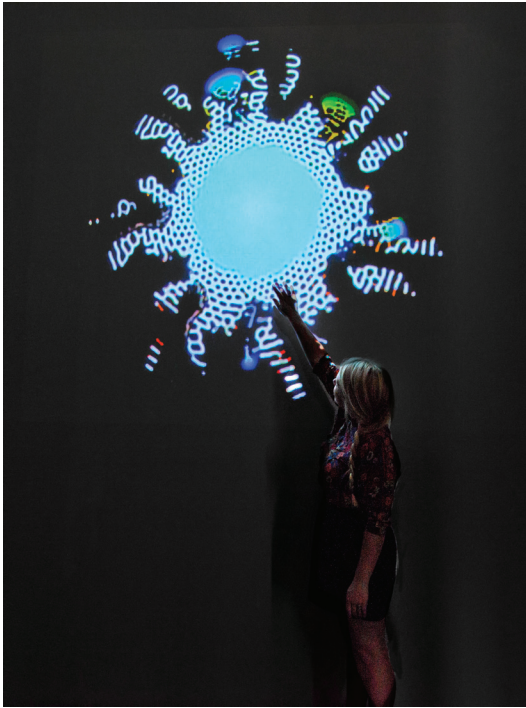
In a way, this pairing of electronic and natural elements created its own conceptual feedback, mirroring and thus amplifying the more readily evident optical-pattern loop in the darkened room. The "video feedback," after all, is entirely "natural," but on a level yet more fundamental than that manifested by the animal, vegetable, and mineral examples Turpin selected from the lending collection of the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.

One can even infer an ecological critique in the parallel Turpin established between mechanically produced and naturally occurring forms. A key circumstance in the video feedback loop is the interference introduced into the pattern by any interjected form. Given the nature of the installation, those interjections tend to be parts of visitors' own bodies, waved arms, wagged heads, undulated torsi, and other elements of improvised choreography. The radiating shapes already resulting from the video feedback respond with peculiar sensitivity, absorbing silhouetted limbs and bodies into their own pattern-logic and diverting into alternate structures, every bit as active and persistent as the original but punched through with the silhouettes' blackened passages. This, Turpin hints, parallels the human impact on nature: if we want and need a steady, coherent natural realm, we must coordinate with that realm rather than impose ourselves carelessly upon it.

For all its technological and resulting optical marvel, then, *Video Feedback: Pixel Behaviors* is invested with extra-perceptual, extra-mechanical resonance, certainly when juxtaposed with an anchoring display like *Roundabout Wunderkammer*. Ethan Turpin does not fancy himself a latter-day moralist, but, as shown in his manipulated stereo-optic images (his so-called "stereocollisions"), he evinces an extra-aesthetic consciousness, one tuned to the relationship of man to nature. *Video Feedback* is itself a Wunderkammer of unlikely visual marvel; but, in his roundabout way, Turpin has extracted from it a useful lesson in more than just physics.

Los Angeles

July 2013



Cover:

Video Feedbackterria #6, 2010, Video still, 1920 x 1080 pixels, Courtesy the artist. Photo: Ethan Turpin.

Inside left:

An ancient ammonite fossil in *Video Feedback: Pixel Behaviors 2*, 2012, Installation, 10 x 24 x 32 in., Courtesy Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Photo: Ethan Turpin.

Inside right top:

A viewer interacts with video feedback patterns in *Video Feedback: Pixel Behaviors 2*, 2012, Video installation, 12 x 12 x 12 ft., Courtesy the artist. Photo: Wayne McCall.

Inside right bottom:

Video Feedback: Pixel Behaviors 2 (detail), 2012, Video installation, 12 x 12 x 12 ft., Courtesy the artist. Photo Wayne McCall.

Back:

Roundabout Wunderkammer, 2012, Video installation, 6 x 8 x 1.5 ft., Courtesy the Artist and Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Photo: Wayne McCall.





BLOOM PROJECTS, in the Charles Bloom Foundation Gallery and the Glass Box Window Gallery, is a project space devoted specifically to the exhibition of an individual artist. This series acts as a laboratory, encouraging artists to move beyond their studio practice to present recently commissioned or existing work in a new context. Named **Bloom**, in honor of the Charles Bloom Foundation Gallery, the word also connotes a creative development or a process of maturing that fulfills our mission to cultivate the artists of our time.

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