"SPLAT!"

FRAGMENTED SPACE IN EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA

A Thesis

Presented to

The Honors Tutorial College

Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation

from the Honors Tutorial College

with the degree of

Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film

by

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April 2016
This paper articulates the discovery of my thesis film *Splat!* before tracing and interweaving films that have inspired and illuminated the process. *Splat!* is a short film that was created by means of a video composite, or a layering of video to synthesize the depiction of a larger space. The three films and their filmmakers that I will primarily analyze, in tandem with my own film, fragment film space in ways that have informed *Splat!*’s trajectory. They are *Meshes of the Afternoon, Squeeze* and *Contact* made by Maya Deren, Mika Rottenberg and Robert Zemeckis, respectively. By the end of this paper, I hope to composite an analysis of the function of spatial fragmentation in film and how it has allowed *Splat!* to flourish.

Bubbles populate the world in *Splat!* After a mystical Bubblemaker in the sky blows a bubble from outer space into the hands of a couple driving along the road, their lives change for the worst. They end up in a car accident after the same Bubblemaker who gave them life, claps his hands to end theirs. In this world, each bubble is the origination of a human spirit. After the car crash, a bubble is popped on the surface of a puddle, which causes a Puddle Person to be born in the pothole among the accident’s wreckage. While stirred by the regurgitating agitation of its immediate surroundings, its existence is foreshadowed by a series of Bubble People that pop into existence in front of and on top of the Puddle Person. This pothole anomaly is given attention by a crew of lazy construction workers that ramble on about the Puddle Person and find themselves telling jokes and stories. Eventually, the Puddle boils in rage to produce its own bubble that returns to the Bubblemaker sucking bubbles out of thin air.
My process began with ideation last summer. This came in the form of daydreaming. In search of a story for my thesis project, I would give myself time where I would be physically still and let my mind wander where it may. Eventually the image of a person gasping in a puddle came. I remember the wheels of a bike passing through the Puddle Person. This left marks and an impression that eventually flattened out or ‘healed’ to a normal flattened state. The process of developing this image and unpacking it required a lot of patience, which, in the beginning, was a struggle. I would ponder the event and space of this Puddle Person. “Where are they? How did they get here? Who is riding over the puddle, where did they come from and where are they going?” Finding answers to these initial questions brought a huge range of specific interpretations of this story. What was always present in these initial interpretations was the sense of a higher plane from the plane at which the Puddle Person existed. Our main character looked up from below; others looked down from above. One of the initial interpretations was that the Puddle Person was actually a parade float that had deflated. The people skating over it were on ice skates holding strings that would cross as they skated around an ice rink where the parade float was being prepared. The parade float was an anthropomorphized balloon attempting to attain freedom through an opening in the ceiling.

While the mind brought several more interpretations, often with very specific details on extraneous content, the guiding force to solve this puddle puzzle was the image of the Puddle Person, the original image that stuck in my mind, and one that is still very vivid. This served as a mental safe haven, point of trajectory and a spring of
inspiration and creative content. Other details came in little fragments: the boiling, the bubbles that rose from the surface and infected the countryside with their bubbly content. Originally these bubbles were filled with a lot of ‘hot air’ and ash that would sprinkle inky blackness onto grass or wildlife whenever they popped.

Sometimes the project mandated me to get on the level of the puddle and see from that perspective, extremely low to the ground. “What do I see?” One answer was “I see the people coming that are about to trample me!” This dialogue helped create the Puddle’s emotional narrative for the project, which serves as the backbone for the story.

I enclosed all of these bits and pieces into a strung up story of this Puddle Person, the result of a car crash that was poked and prodded within a construction site. Initially, there was a lot of horizontal and vertical motion to the whole story and early script. The Puddle began as the result of a tremendous horizontal force: the force of a car crashing into a concrete barrier. There was then a vertical descent as the remains inside the bubble (the original cause of the Puddle’s conception) plummeted into a cavernous hole in the ground. As anger ensued, the Puddle Person traveled horizontally again with the horde of runners along a river, only to be met by an Olympic diver jumping off a bridge into the displaced Puddle, another vertical descent. This was partly inspired by theory I had read of American Filmmaker Maya Deren in an Experimental Film Tutorial I took with Ofer Eliaz two years ago:

“The distinction of poetry is its construction...The poetic construct arises from the fact...that it is a ‘vertical’ investigation of a situation, in that it probes the
ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned in a sense not with what is occurring, but with what it feels like or what it means (Maas).”

While a vertical investigation remains placed in the moment, a horizontal approach is more akin to narrative or plot. Shakespeare is successful because monologues allow deep character development in “vertical” pockets along a horizontal trajectory (Maas). This approach to filmmaking helped inspire the story of the Puddle Person. After the car crash, there is stasis, a sort of vertical rumination with the Puddle Person as it gains the energy to boil in rage and move on. This horizontal and vertical trajectory translated literally into the first draft of the script. At some point, I realized that all this vertical and horizontal movement of the Puddle Person was too confusing on screen and was better as inspiration. It did not align with the original conception of the Puddle as a static entity whose anger was partly inspired by the lack of movement altogether.

This discovery made a lot of sense for me, as one who finds that staying in one place too long can make my skin crawl. Long car rides, working at a computer and boring classes in which I can’t stand up periodically. In order to keep the energy and juices flowing I must keep active! Something that also helps my creative energy to stay sharp is to have other outputs when ideation for Splat! would convulsed to absolute zero. Drawing, playing the piano, painting and building furniture are ways that I am allowed for half hazardous creations that creak and burst from their seams. This is really important to have outputs where there are no rules, very little
premeditated thought and rapid assembly of integral parts. It is essential that these processes integrate mistakes in the procedure: rambling piano that incorporates accidental notes into the overall tone, or bookcases that are extremely delicate and hastily put together. What attracts me to this form of creative activity is that with practice the creations become gestural, concentrated expressions of movement and life. Practice in these other mediums really bolstered the film. The main title that reads “Spalt!” was a painting that I approached with a small camera. The footage was then manipulated and processed so that the ‘batman font’ would be colorful and isolated from the background. I was able to include recordings of myself playing the piano in addition to an improvisation jam that became the film’s score. After these types of media are practiced, going back to Splat! was a breeze, but it still required a lot of patience to empty the mind of all the little rules I have collected about the world being created, and elongate a creative process that could still be gestural and could come in an almost stream of conscious way.

At a certain point, the script was finished. It was then dispensed, never to be looked at again! I went into the shooting process with it all in my head as a vague exercise that reaffirmed the central idea. Still Splat!’s premise was in constant flux. What led the capture of the film was an inert trust that we could find the story wherever we went. This allowed for new combinations of different elements and interpretations we would never have known initially. The script functioned as a jumping off point to give me a sense of the energy to absorb from the people in front of camera. The most successful film shoots reached a place that felt like the same type
of enthusiasm as all the other shoots. For example, what began as a shoot to capture a marathon runner against the green screen turned into a wreathing, chain-pulling battle against no one. What began as a the capture of a crash victim turned into the character dressing as an old woman with a cane to scream “get off my lawn!” into the camera and hobble about. What began as a shoot to bounce on a trampoline turned into characters unleashing their anger punching it like a punching bag. All of these examples represent an accumulated outpouring of energy that came in different forms but seemed to liberate the subject into action in a very similar way! The less I instructed and the more people went wild in front of the camera, the more fun they had and the better the results!

As we went into production, creating a non-exhaustive environment for capture was very important for me. Typically film shoots absorb entire days, often lasting 12 hours with a dozen crewmembers. This makes committing to the friends’ filmmaking process a heavy commitment and also a real drag. In order to capture Splat! in a way that maintained energy over the lengthy production process, it was necessary to have minimal crew, hardly any expenses and to shoot in bursts. Most of this film was shot with me as the only person around the camera. This was nice because I did not have to explain instinctive choices or when to do something as the action was changing in front of the camera. This helped create more of an intimate environment to express. Shooting with the construction characters, which inhabit the center of the story, was a really unique situation because most of the time, we had no idea what to do. What was awesome was that they naturally rambled well with each other. Their ease of
chatter allowed for a dialogue that was not written in the original script, but worked very well to help guide the Puddle’s progression throughout the film.

Out on a country road several miles out of town, we set up a phony construction fence and I walked away to set up a camera near our cars. The recording started from afar, and slowly approached with a tripod from various angles. Eventually I got very close, by this time they were laughing and telling stories while leaning against our construction cones and shovels. This is exactly what the world’s laziest construction crew would do! “All right let’s do some work,” I said. They scrambled around looking for gear. When they asked me what to do, I would tell them “I don’t know” then they would argue amongst themselves about who should do what job, an exchange I recorded discretely. Perfect! “I don’t know” or simply remaining silent is the best response to most questions. Characters will take this to mean that they can offer insight, interpretation or just go for it. Because we were not casting actors to be characters but rather characters to be actors, the film set allowed for their actions to align perfectly with their natural disposition.

This process allowed for an open shooting environment in which the characters and I would recreate and wander around our original conception of the scene or character. Often these would go into unique directions I had never thought and would border on what felt like the capture of a documentary film. The green screen greatly helped with this adventure. It afforded us the flexibility to dream up the world, flip it around and spin it on its shoulders. Sometimes I would get the thought of a shot that I must catch before characters leaved, often those shots were ones that had previously
appeared in the script writing process. Most other times shots were a result of the character playing in front of a rolling camera and seizing the moment to capture their direction or interpretation of their character. Much of the results of these shoots were unplanned but they worked because it felt right at the moment of creation. Here are some of the project’s guiding principles: allow the character to figure it out themselves, give initial instructions but encourage alternative methods for acquisition, follow more than lead and give time to areas reached that no one expected. The most important principle was to be aware when enough was enough. This could be sensed based on waning energy levels by people in front of the camera. What made Splat! a blast to shoot was that we would stop when it started getting boring or tiring.

It was sometimes very difficult to detect which direction to go when much of the film is created through a passive sense of orientation. Excitement on my end would result in poor capture of content (shaky, frantic camera) or a blind eagerness that captured footage unnecessarily. For example, I got word that my brother, Nathan, was running in a marathon in Cleveland. Because runners at the time were a major element of the script, I concluded that I must capture the race! With two cameras and two friends, we rented a van and recorded the worst footage for this project. The original vision was the Boston Marathon trampling a puddle atop pavement. What we got was a strung out series of runners on trails. The event was too real and difficult to bring into the world of Splat! While this footage will certainly never be used for the project, this step in the wrong direction was necessary for me to get a grasp of how to approach the film and gave me a better sense of the parameters of this project. We are
not in the business of capturing reality here, with *Splat!* Real runners, real
competition, it is all too boring.

This was a step in the process where I realized that green screen was nearly the
only path for this project. The green screen’s social setting largely contributed to a
liberating peak of excitement captured and shown in *Splat!* It afforded us an infinite
space of possibilities that may have not been possible had the production be routed in
a concrete setting at capture. What filming against a green screen brings to a film
shoot is an intensified or altered sense of reality and context. When a person performs
against a green screen, the green functions as a stand in for something else as it is
made transparent in post-production. On set, this has a bizarre effect that is fun to
capture if done intentionally: the fragmentation of social space.

When the character is conscious of the illusory presence of the green screen
behind them, this can liberate their sense of the physical space they occupy and have a
great impact on the mental space they occupy during the performance. People swim in
midair, fly on the ground and fight empty space under the social illusion that they
perform these activities in a context, though, fundamentally, the physical context
exists in their own imagination! Freed from a present sense of reality, the awareness
of their surroundings is an outward projection their inner imagination.

Green screen and *Splat!’s* method of video compositing allowed for a few
ways to combine images in a composite. The first was by drawing a mask, which is
essentially the same as cutting a shape into a video. Masks can be altered so that they
move and flex as time progresses. In this way, I have made masks around the Puddle
Person’s face that move to compensate for the shifting facial features. The mask cuts off the hairline, but when the head moved a little, I keyframed the mask and allow it to morph as the scene progressed. The other way to create a composite of video layers is to make transparent a color in a video layer by means of keying. This is primarily used for green screens, where, because green is not a color of the human body; it is a large, even color behind the subject that can be identified easily. However, keying is not limited to the green screen. In Splat! I used it several times to affect human faces which gives the appearance of either the erosion of skin tones, or a blend into the background of another video. This came in use for the Puddle; especially when I wanted it to look like the face was the surface of this water. Another way of compositing is to simply affect the opacity or size of an image. This is the most basic but evident in major motion pictures when two people are placed on either side of the screen during a phone call or the like.

The affect the use of video compositing has in the final video is to fragment space within the frame itself. With video compositing, this fragmentation is perceived and experienced by the audience immediately because each composited frame is an amalgamation of simultaneous spaces captured asynchronously. This combination of multiple spaces affects the composite in two ways. Firstly, it can bring into question the perceiver’s ocular relation to the subject matter, and secondly it affects our understanding of haptic spaces.

In a composite, a camera has captured images separately, for example a clear blue sky and a person swimming in a pool. Sometimes these images are made with
different focal lengths, focus marks, vertical heights of capture, apertures and even
different frame rates. In Splat! we were able to achieve the effect of someone floating
through the air by filming with a flying camera then layering on top the image of a
man swimming in a pool. Removing the light blue from the pool, we were able to
isolate the subject while retaining the texture of the surface of the water. Eventually
this shot was colored gold and made to look like he was travelling to the sky in a gold
bubble with a video layer of a looping bubble on top.

When these video layers are viewed together in a composite, the result is often
disjointed and it is often immediately identifiable that green screen or a video layer is
being used. For Splat! it brought a handmade quality to the film, like a film by George
Melies, and positioned it in a new world, where space-time is bent and cut up to bits.
Splat!’s composites are immediately identifiable as such because we are accustomed
to viewing the world from a single source, the eyes. But, when videos from different
viewing angles and places are combined this has the obvious effect of originating from
separate sources. And when considering this fragmented frame haptically, the
audience is placed within a fragmented space of three dimensions.

In her text Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film, Giuliana
Bruno accuses cinema as having a tradition of “ocularcentrism” (16) and “the place of
cinema within this habitable spatiovisual configuration often has been overlooked in
critical studies” (2). She views film as landscaping, a carving out of space in a
representation that is never static (19). With a haptic understanding of film, “the fixed
optical geometry that informed the old cinematic voyeur becomes the moving vessel
of a film voyageuse” (6). She calls film a “spectorial voyage through an architectural field” (56). As an audience experiences a film, they voyage with the author through the spaces on screen.

The camera and sound instruments are objects that perceive from a distinct location in space. Thus, if combined and duplicated in a video composite, film can articulate a sense of occupying multiple locations and vantage points simultaneously in a way that other mediums cannot. Multiple layers of source material obscure the location of the perceiver to assume a reality in which the viewer has multiple positions of perception. In fact, the compositing image composites the viewer’s location into a space approaching omnipresence! It is godly in that it diversifies the origination of the

Figure 1. William of Tyre. Reconstruction of the temple of Jerusalem.
viewer into spaces and times impossible in traditional physical space. The composite is overlaid onto another image; this creates a similar type of graphical perspective that is collectively divergent. Video composites create new conceptions of reality by revitalizing the illusory spatial perspectives of art of antiquity.

In Figure 1, we see a spatial perspective that does not align with how we see space recede typically. In proper one-point perspective drawings, horizontal lines recede towards the horizon and a vanishing point. For *Reconstruction of the temple of Jerusalem*, there is no common perspective that binds the objects represented in the picture. For example, the workers on the left of the image appear to be half the size of the worker conversing on the right side of the image. The buildings in the upper portion of the image have depth lines that recede in all different directions. This image presents the false pulling of depth lines into what resembles depth by simply making the represented object smaller as we get farther away from the subject of attention. While artists in the first millennium grew aware that objects farther away should be depicted as smaller, like we see in Figure 1, it wasn't until much later around the 15th century that convergent perspective was used as the accurate way to represent spatial depth (Pile 93). *Reconstruction* has multiple vanishing points, where sections of the painting adhere to different convergence points than others. Perhaps unintentionally, this painting thereby allows for the perspective to be multiple across a large surface. This situates the image in a place outside of that which we are familiar. Video compositing can achieve this affect intentionally.
In consideration of the affect and implication video compositing (and oblique perspective drawings like Figure 1) has on off screen space, there is a lack of context to inform the viewer. Having multiple perspectives in a given image dissociates the sense of off-screen space so that it is not inherently predictable by the viewing audience. Whereas in a non-composited photograph that exhibits a spatial orientation, one can assemble and guess what the space beyond the edges of the frame might exist as and what may occupy it. This dissociation of spatial context of off screen space forms the object of art/the image to be the Only. What is on the surface is everything.

While video compositing can create a sense that the composite is entire art object without any off screen space, we see a similar intentional assemblage of spaces within modern art pieces like *Gold Marilyn Monroe* by Andy Warhol. Decontextualized in a field of gold, this gaudy silkscreen of Ms. Monroe pays tribute to the celebrity after her death. The image itself is reminiscent of Byzantine iconography, which extensively uses gold leaf to honor depictions of saints and moments in scripture (Harris). By resizing Marilyn’s photograph so that it only occupies a small portion at the painting’s center, Warhol has dislocated her image spatially so that there is essentially no off screen

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Figure 2. Warhol, Andy. *Gold Marilyn Monroe*. 

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Szabados 15
space to ponder. *Gold Marilyn Monroe* is the Only in this piece of art, which retains a superficiality present in the majority of Warhol’s work.

Superficiality in cinema and video composites can be further contorted with the use of sound. Sound suggests the space inhabited by the audience while viewing the on screen. Spatial relationships of the viewer’s vantage point are given clarification by the sonic space reimagined within the theater space. Filmmaker and theorist Maya Deren provides an alternative approach to the application of sound and dialogue within a poetic film that can further fragment and abstract/empower an image:

“The way the words are used in films mostly derives from the theatrical tradition in which what you see makes the sound you hear. And so, in that sense, they would be redundant in film if they were used as a further projection from the image. However, if they were brought in on a different level, not issuing from the image, which should be complete in itself, but as another dimension relating to it, then it is the two things together that make the poem. It's almost as if you were standing at a window and looking out into the street and there are children playing hopscotch. That’s your visual experience. Behind you in the room are women discussing hats or something, and that's your auditory experience. You stand at the place where these two come together by virtue of your presence. What relates these two moments is your position in relation to the two of them. They don't know about each other, and so you stand by the window and have a sense of afternoon, which is neither the
children in the street, nor the women talking behind you, but a curious
combination of both, and that is your resultant image” (Maas).

When creating Splat! the visuals dominated my brain power. It was not until we
started planning the construction crew scene that occurs around the Puddle Person that
the purpose of sound came into perspective. I like Maya Deren’s view that the image
should be complete in itself and that when sound issues from the visuals, there is a
redundancy that makes the experience of cinema inactive.

Josh Baron, “New York” Jim, and Steve Antle, three people who composed the
Construction Crew had a natural discourse that was really entertaining. We recorded
them speaking while on set at the construction site. The audio from the film shoot was
inadequate for a number of reasons including the improper placement of the
microphone, microphone-handling noises, or boring dialogue. On set, their
conversations revolved around stories of places where they have lived. We decided to
rerecord their dialogue in studio. This gave us a very intimate environment where we
could focus more on content. I tried not to direct where their stories would go and
would simply smile or laugh when I found something funny. By their natural
rambling and my reactions, they developed a dialogue that consisted primarily of jokes
and a few stories. The audio from this studio ADR session was much more
appropriate for the Puddle Person, as the Puddle is a despicable site of tepid waste.
Having the pairing of these jokes as the auditory context around the Puddle while the
film views it’s emotional adaptation created the combination that Deren describes in
the previous quotation. In Splat! the surface of the pothole acts as Deren’s window
through which we view the emotional content of the Puddle Person, Deren’s example of children playing in the street.

Interestingly enough, most of Deren’s films are silent. Her visuals are intended to be unaccompanied or diluted by sound. Exceptions include a minimalist soundtrack added to Meshes nine years after it was complete, Meditation on Violence in which she composed a music collage with flute/drums and The Very Eye of Night, which was a collaboration with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet School (Haslem). The idea of applying a poetic construction of sound, which would accompany the visuals on a different level, was something she never formally approached outside of a musical score.

Meshes of the Afternoon was made by Maya Deren in 1943, and traces a circular narrative around a woman who ventures out of her house in pursuit of a lover who shape-shifts into a cloaked, mirror-faced specter holding a flower in hand. The film keeps up with Deren as she traverses spaces of the house that shift and reconnect to link the outside and inside with multiple rooms in impossible ways. She finds that everything in her house has been displaced, as if someone left in a hurry. As the film continues, she becomes trapped in a loop of past experiences, entrances and exits from the same building and memories. She sees images of herself occupying places and performing activities that she had done earlier in the film. Continuously enticed by the Specter/lover, she finds objects such as keys, knives, phones, and mirrors reappear in unusual places. The film is structured as if she is walking through the jumbled past, trying to get out. With an innovative use of camera movement and camera angle, film
space is contorted to give the sense that the main character is falling through a rolling, reassembled house. Deren reenters the house and meets two other Derens seated at a table. They try to pick up a key, vanishes from their hands. When the Deren we have been following picks up the key with a blackened hand, it changes into a knife. She then marches to a Deren sleeping in the living room armchair. The film ends with the killer Deren morphing into her lover, who leads her upstairs, away from a bloodied Deren reclining in the living room (Deren).

These morphing sequences and all of the continuity jumps that distort the film space are all achieved between shots. Aside from a few shots where we see multiple Derens within the same shot (made as an early form of video compositing), fragmentation occurs by presenting traditional spaces in unconventional ways with the camera and body movement. What links our voyage through this dreamlike milieu, is the human body. If Meshes did not have this nexus, the film would exist as pure abstraction. For example, in the killer’s march from the table to the armchair, Deren armed with a knife rises from the table. Across the cut to a different angle, the motion of the rise is continued in a different location, outside among thickets. She takes a step and her foot crashes against the sand. Another step finds her on a lump of dirt. She steps through thick grass and bare concrete before meeting her victim in the armchair. This progression connects these multiple spaces through a continuity of spatial cues that relates specifically to the body. Connecting these places within a death walk give another meaning. It is as if she is stepping through an evolution of human space from primordial shores to a constructed space of human modernity.
Eternal death links all of these places, as a cyclical process that will and does strike again. However if not connected by continuity of the body’s movement, the sequence would be simply a montage before the killing (Deren).

In *Squeeze*, an epic short film that revolves around the origin of women’s labor in the modern era, filmmaker Mika Rottenberg fragments film space in a much different way from Deren. While Deren’s character links the spaces of a rolling, reassembled house, Rottenberg fragments space by reassembling film sets (film space) and that operate disjointedly, rolling around each other. She also connects these spaces to real world locations to contextualize her imaginary world played out in *Squeeze*. Disclosure of the spaces *Squeeze* occupies is not joined by spatial continuity connected to the body, like in *Meshes* even though Rottenberg’s characters in *Squeeze* are repeatedly seen performing in similar spaces. The voyager’s presence throughout the film is connected by work, a fundamental activity that, in Rottenberg’s vision, all humans engage in. Work in *Squeeze* is a spatial nexus and collaborative activity that brings fragmented bodies together.

The film is an installation video, which presents the inner workings of a beauty machine that keeps alive the exterior labor of women all around the world. Presented as a video loop within a furnished gallery space that acts as an extension of the film space itself, *Squeeze* is formally an exploration of real space and fictional space and where the lines blend for the observer. The non-looping video begins within sweatshop where the overhead panels are stained with dripping air-conditioner condensation; the walls protrude tongues, rumps and human hands. These fragmented
human protrusions are the worksites of a crew of maintenance workers within the series of rooms presented in the film. Laborers massage the hands that poke through the wall and spritz the thirsty tongues. The spatial relationships of these labor rooms change as the rooms themselves shift like tiles in a jig-saw puzzle, in phases relating to the oscillation of a ‘celestial woman’ whose unspoken will translates into movement at the clenching of a fist (Rottenberg).

The film initially illuminates the activities in these interconnected spaces so that the audience is both progressively informed as to their changing locational relationships and their individual functions. Along with the activities where laborers interact with other humans, there is another objective at hand: the production of a unit of Squeeze: a sampling of beauty products mashed up in giant cube, which we never see entirely in the video. To make this product, women chop lettuce on huge conveyor belts and mix in blush and latex provided from other operation rooms. All of these elements and activities translate into the creation of an art object, which is worked on by laborers in the shifting working spaces. Eventually, there is the disclosure of the world in which the film’s fragmented humans originate. We see workers in a large open field harvesting lettuce. The film follows the documentation of the process of this activity. Then, the workers plummet their hands into holes in the ground in order to get a massage from the women within the working sweatshop space. Here, the intersection of these fragmented spaces occurs to create the connection of a spatial relationship that can only exist within the world of the film! It is as if the shifting
workshop presented in the beginning of the video functions as the heart of women’s labor across the world (Hudson).

I found inspirational the way Rottenberg blends documentary with an experimental fantasy in a way that attributes abstraction as the origination of reality. With *Splat!* I tried to join spaces and activity that in their creation were not fantastic in a way to create a fantastic alternative universe. Rottenberg’s videos typically revolve around the diversity of the labor experience, while being joined spatially by either morphing objects like dough in a dough production film *Dough* or collective activity as in *Squeeze*. *Splat!* follows the path of a bubble from the Bubblemaker in the Sky, to its transubstantiation as a puddle in a construction site, until it’s eventual return to the sky’s Bubblemaker at the end of the film. Using the bubble as a spatial suture was learned from the films of Rottenberg.

The third film up for analysis *Contact*, directed by Robert Zemeckis, uses fragmentation of space as a plot device that affects the narrative/“horizontal” development of a major Hollywood film. In *Contact*, Jody Foster plays Ellie who is confronted with the duty to venture into a monolithic gyroscope constructed under instructions from radio signals sent by extraterrestrial life. The film follows the story of the scientist as she discovers the radio transmissions, interprets their meaning and builds this gyroscope, as large as the George Washington Monument. *Contact* reaches its narrative precipice when Ellie falls through the construction into a portal at its center. What follows is a reality-bending experience where she transcends the confines of her space shuttle in a quest to meet these alien life forms (*Contact*). The
audience engages in Ellie’s voyage that experiences the collapse of the physical laws of our world. Gravity dissolves and the understanding of self and other blends as she travels through a wormhole into a mystical beach of her memory. The scene on this beach was shot largely on the blue screen (“Contact”), and, interestingly enough, the space in the final film is a rearticulating of the character’s emotional and mental space on her outward vicinity, much like how Splat!’s green screen functioned on set as a social space.

Zemeckis character Ellie achieves this fragmentation of space as an encounter with the divine/extraterrestrial that has linked her reality within the space capsule with the spatial context of her memory. While Contact devotes two hours to the development of a horizontal investigation of the plot before this vertical investigation within fragmented space, the films of Maya Deren and Mika Rottenberg attain this poetic fullness within the context of a 15 runtime. Unlike Deren’s and Rottenberg’s films, what binds Contact’s journey through fragmented space, is the narrative backstory. This spatial remolding serves as a thematic device that gives greater meaning to the film and serves to contextualize abstract or even religious experience.

Fragmentation of space in film can be used to achieve interesting effects on the audience. When a movie is played, a fictional universe is voyaged. Fragmenting the traditional conception of time/space thereby pushes the world displayed into a greater contrast from what we perceive as reality. What is neat is that fragmentation of space in film can accurately depict a phenomenon inherent to human life. Our memories, our stories exist in our minds as summaries cobbled together bits of sensory
information processed through a conscious being. Every night we sleep; our space-time fragments, distorts until it combines with that of the next day. Fragmentation is also the foundation of human memory. Without fragmentation it is unlikely that brains of our size could remember everything! Mental activity in time is a lot like volume. A day has a limited amount of time (or space) that limits the instantaneous potential of any human activity. As our precepts and concepts evolve, we naturally dispense of human mental activity that has been collected in the past. In a new way of thinking, called intuition by author Richard Maurice Bucke (Bucke), or trance by Maya Deren (Jackson), we can combine mental concepts together like we combine sensory perceptions into mental concepts in order to fragment the wealth of attention a human mind can dedicate. Intuition lets the mind not get bogged down with the accumulated concepts that have already been assembled. In this way, the fragmentation of perceptions and conceptions make ‘space’ for new connections and opportunity for novel activity (Bucke).

In contrast to Deren’s, Rottenberg’s and Zemeckis’ films, Splat!’s fragmentation of space occurs within the frame itself. While simply staring at the ground, Splat! witnesses the vertical exploration of a moving world in the sonic presence of roving cars and jackhammers, the evolution of overheard conversations, and the blistering annoyance of a party of Bubble People that poke and prod the Puddle. The Puddle Person lives within a world of transience, that flexes and contorts to the convolution of time. All the while, the Puddle Person remains fixed, riding an emotional roller coaster on the rails of this external change. Like the nexuses that join
space of the aforementioned films, what brings these diverse spaces, people and experiences together in *Splat!* is the spiraling momentum initiated at the beginning of the film (with a splash of water onto the green screen by the author) and continued through the entire film. *Splat!* attempts to create a system in which energy is not lost, but transformed from the movement of a bubble, to the emotional acrobatics of the Puddle Person. While the film comes to a standstill at the advent of the Puddle Person, much like my process of ideating and production *Splat!*, it is a static body that illuminates the moving mind and spirit, apparent in the film as Bubble People.

The tools of cinema are time and space. Playing with these constructions allow artists to exercise the full potential of filmmaking.
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