Flash Splash
Eli Schwanz
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Origins

Three fluid horizontal lines appear on a gray-black backdrop: one of reds, one of greens, one of blues. These RGB lines reform themselves, in sync with each other, into abstract shapes before returning to their initial position. (The approximate shapes of each transformation: puddle—wave—geyser—eruption). Then the whole sequence repeats itself, and in so doing, defines itself as a loop.

The viscous mobility of these lines is rendered not only by their mutations, but also by the flicker effect overlaying the video; by the gradient of hue in each line that stretches from orange to pink, from lime to forest green, from purple to royal blue; and by the restless shuddering of these abstract forms. The three horizontal gels that break the blackness behind them seem to take on a certain primordial sentience, or at least a minimum of dynamic life, like the first Protista emerging after the Big Bang. Against the backdrop of a void infused by static, the three lines enact a struggle or a dance between the orderly stillness of form at rest and the chaotic growth of form in upward motion, breaking from itself.

Proliferations

In one segment of the lines' looped lifespan, a drop of colour falls from one line to the next. In this gesture, the lines are shown to ultimately not be separate; they are joined by mixture, by an

RGB harmony of substances in which the three become one. The cyclical nature of the piece is expressed not only in the parallel balletic motions of the three lines, but in their mutual union, their essential interconnectedness. As in any loop, the three lines display both changeability and stasis: the viewer comes to understand that transformation and rest will each follow the other. Then, at [0:20], the first triad shifts to the right of the screen—to make room for more of itself. *Flash Splash* adds iterations of the first loop onto the screen until slowly half the screen is filled with the three lines looping. Each copied loop of the original is located at a different position on the screen, in a distinct size, and occasionally turned to the side by 90 degrees. No copy is synchronized with the original; they follow the same sequence as the first loop but the video screen unfurls into chaos through the dissymmetry of the temporality and size of their identical loops. One loop, which appears to the left of the screen at half the original loop's size, gives the screen an odd optical illusion of depth; a 3D tunnel is forged in the black grid between the loops. Halfway through the video, this stilted mosaic comes to a climax and the scene decrescendos: one by one, each looped unit disappears back into the blown-out blackness from which it sprung.

Hermeneutics

For any attentive audience, Eli Schwanz's *Flash Splash* brings up the wide-open question of hermeneutics (which is the art & science of interpretation). The first phase of this question: *should such a work be interpreted?* If your answer to this is a staunch *no*, then you will take your experience of this video—with the moods it evoked, the calm or mess it instilled, the beauty it brought—and go home with it, leaving it untouched by the faculties of comprehension that would threaten to make it something it is not.

But if the answer is *yes*, then the corollary question of *how do we interpret abstract colour & shape* comes into view. Below I offer two interpretations pulled from a possible infinity of them: just as the lines mark the empty space behind them, so do our ideas and perceptions mark the work itself.

Play. As the piece unfolds into a quilt made of its repetition, the viewer gets the sense of an exploration of contingency. It is not that you feel the artist's hand has moved randomly; the piece is not reminiscent of Dada or fluxus art, which hands the reins of control over to the object almost entirely. Here, the artist chooses the placements, enlargements and rotations of a set

object—he is limited by the thing itself, but can modify its scope and geography. Schwanz's choice of the kindergarten onomatopoeia word *splash* in the title and the bright pastel colours of the lines reinforce this sense of play, akin to a child moulding from his repertoire of clay, where the thrill of imagination in the artist is bounded by the limitations of form and materiality. Freedom of the artist—and the freedom of the forms themselves, straining to become other than what they are—is shown to be freedom only within certain constraints.

Genesis/Endings The language that arises from *Flash Splash* is one of generation and dissolution. Nothing about this piece is dramatic; the pulse of the loop unfolds after its own logic, at its own set pace. *Flash Splash* strikes you intuitively as having cosmological resonance; it is, in its own minor way, a retelling of Beginning and End, with its middle narrative a complex interplay between repetition and difference, between evolution into disorder and cooldown into simplicity, between the rigour of the loop and the spontaneity of the loops' overlap. But because the video *is itself* played on loop, neither its end nor its beginning are *proper* to itself; the viewer's experience of *Flash Splash* begins when they enter the room, and ends when they exit it. Each Beginning and each End is made by the viewer themselves; in this artwork which is a maze of loops, this experience is what cannot be repeated.

The loop, lasting three minutes and forty-one seconds, finally closes where it began: in a state of shaky quiescence, the three lines nearly still but still trembling. *Flash Splash* functions both as a singular and infinite object which can only be encountered for what it is, and as an invitation for a meditation upon the object which spins away on the experience of the work, particular to each viewer, and the squiggling thought-lines of its audience.

– Fan Wu