
Liquidity Inc.
By Hito Steyerl
As part of The New Model
10.10 2015–10.1 2016

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“Be water, my friend” reads the initial phrase in Hito Steyerl’s *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), a video installation about the formless, floating, violent, and simultaneously vital water. In *Liquidity Inc.*, water gushes out of television screens and iPhone screen savers. It functions both as a liquid and as an inexhaustible metaphor: the liquefied form of capital, the dot-com bubble when it bursts.

Using montage as its idiom, *Liquidity Inc.* tells the story of Jacob Wood, a martial arts enthusiast who lost his job when Lehman Brothers went bankrupt during the 2008 financial crisis. Wood was born during the Vietnam War and came to the US as part of President Gerald Ford’s Operation Babylift, an extensive adoption program in which several thousands of homeless and orphaned children were adopted from Vietnam and brought to the United States. Wood’s story is interspersed with footage from boxing matches and weather disasters, Hito Steyerl’s own chat conversations, and images from an ocean and a horizon where the water seems to speak in its own typeface: “I am water. I’m not from here.”

The digital images evoke unexpected, elegant, and sometimes unpleasant associations. A recurring image depicts animated bodies that fall lifeless into the depth. Another, more surreal element is the weather report—or perhaps the State of the World report—where a person dressed in a black balaclava rebelliously comments on the trade winds. “Your emotions affect the weather,” says the anchor in front of a world map where all boundaries are defined and laid bare, revealing the collapsed states, the stateless, the plundered.

With *Liquidity Inc.*, Steyerl consolidates her position as a playful, connected, and urgent artist. The thirty minute video is equally a story about the lack of contours and about control, about Inc., Incorporation. About water as a company, and the company as a movement in water that infiltrates, washing across all bodies.

A Swedish translation is available at the reception.

Hito Steyerl is a filmmaker and writer with an interest in the instability of images, in how they are produced, wrapped, distributed, and consumed. With a unique precision, Steyerl examines the digital state and its relation to violence and capitalism. Steyerl teaches New Media at the University of Arts, Berlin. Notable exhibitions include her contribution to the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2015, dOCUMENTA 12, biennales in Shanghai, Gwangju, Taipei, and Berlin, Manifesta 5 as well as *In Dependence at 300m3 Art Space* (2007), as part of Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art. Among her publications are *Beyond Representation* (2012), *The Colour of Truth* (2008), and *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art* (2008). In 2006, Steyerl held a six-month studio residency at Iaspis in Stockholm.

The exhibition is realized with support from Goethe-Institut.

Liquidity Inc., 2014, 30 minutes, HD video file, single channel in architectural environment.

Director: Hito Steyerl; Technical Director: Kevan Jenson; Director of Photography: Kevan Jenson; Lighting Director: Tony Rudenko; Cast: Maximilian Brauer (Weather Underground), Esme Buden (Weather Underground), Maverick “The Soulcollector” Harvey (MMA Expert), Rage Ng (MMA Expert), Brian Kuan Wood (Weather Underground), Jacob Wood; Initial ramp design: Studio Miessen, Berlin.

Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Kreps, New York.

Liquidity Inc. is on view as the final part of The New Model, a project initiated by Tensta konsthall in 2011. The New Model's starting point is Palle Nielsen's The Model: A model for a qualitative society that was installed at Moderna Museet in 1968. By transforming Moderna Museet into an adventure playground for children, Nielsen—together with cultural journalist and author Gunilla Lundahl and a number of urban activists—wanted to provide them with the opportunity to “be themselves” and express their own reality. The Models' main themes and key issues were artistic research, the right to the city, the child as an active historical subject, and the critical use of the art institution. Participants in The New Model—Lars Bang Larsen, Magnus Bærtås, Ane Hjort Guttu, Dave Hullfish Bailey, and Hito Steyerl—have been invited to investigate the heritage from The Model in a number of projects, seminars, workshops and exhibitions (Steyerl's contribution is an already existing work).

Three commissions are part of The New Model: The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria) by Magnus Bærtås (2014); This Place is Every Place by Ane Hjort Guttu (2015) and School Section by Dave Hullfish Bailey (2015).

Thursdays and Fridays, 14:00
Guided tours of the exhibition

Friday 9.10, 18:30
**Public talk with Hito Steyerl and
director Maria Lind**

Wednesday 25.11, 19:00
**Showww, a new online platform for
digital art projects, invites you to a
conversation about the exhibition based
on notions such as post-internet art,
the significance of algorithms, and the
digital landscape.**

Thursday 10.12, 18:00
**Artist and writer Hans Carlsson hosts
a public reading group where texts by
and about Hito Steyerl is discussed.
Text will be announced later this fall. For
registration: info@tenstakonsthall.se**

**Special tours and discussions about
Liquidity Inc. with The News Agency—
a long-term initiative for young people
who are interested in journalism and
storytelling, Art Work in Focus—a local
network with artists based in Järva, and
Tensta Library's book club for young
people, which will connect the film's
themes with a selected book.**

**Local groups and schools who are
interested in a tour can contact
info@tenstakonsthall.se**

**Hito Steyerl in conversation
with Maria Lind**

Maria Lind

How would you describe *Liquidity Inc.* in relation to your other recent film installations?

Hito Steyerl

It is quite similar to my other installations: it is a projected single-channel video in an environment that is constructed.

ML

You have been interested in circulation, exchange, and movements of people, ideas, and capital already before, but it is more pronounced in this work.

HS

My latest works were all about actual physical phenomena. This one is about water, the following one, *Factory of the Sun (2015)*, is about light, and the previous one, *How Not to be Seen: A Fucking Diactic Educational .MOV File (2013)*, is about the conditions of visibility altogether. *In Free Fall (2010)* was about gravity. I have been trying to ground all sorts of phenomena in the realm of physics.

ML

In Free Fall was made up of small parts that you made as commissions for different organizations and institutions. It was made step by step, in chapters as it were. I have always liked your modular production, how you dealt with the situation when you wanted to produce a larger work but the conditions for making it in one go that were not really in place.

HS

There was funding, but it was scattered, and this is the reason why it was modular. For *Liquidity Inc.* there was no funding whatsoever. This also explains why I had more time to make it than usual and also why I didn't want to break it down into modules, since there was no reason to do that. The film I am making now is exactly structured according to the modular principle again; it has

three parts that I am working on in smaller chunks. The new work is about outsourced 3D rendering in Ukraine.

ML

Your work is dense with various references, both historical and contemporary. How do you conduct research?

HS

I don't really know. I am just trying to put together various parts without there being first research and then a result, which gets transformed into some surplus. The research just goes on until the very end and mostly beyond too.

ML

Would you do specialized reading, targeting particular issues or phenomena? For example, with *Liquidity Inc.*, did you have a look into something particular in relation to that film, or was it more circumstantial?

HS

I certainly did, but I just don't remember what it was. But in this case the protagonist was so strong that perhaps he brought most of the context along.

ML

You often engage with online images and cultures at large, and you are frequently quoted in relation to so-called post-Internet art. What parts of these discussions do you find interesting, if any?

HS

Any discussion about the impact of and being embedded in media in contemporary life is interesting. However, I don't know what kind of discussions you are exactly referring to.

ML

I am, for example, thinking of the *Lunch Bytes Conference* that both of us attended at *Haus Der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin in March, where there was a certain focus on so-called post-Internet art, meaning art which strongly relates to and is embedded in online and digital culture.

HS

That was something that was overdue and was waiting to happen for the past ten years but didn't occur. Then it occurred, burned out, and now is waiting to be advanced and rearticulated beyond a couple of Western cities and a couple of Photoshop presets.

ML

When I got to know your work almost fifteen years ago it had a strong and critical relationship to documentary practices in a wide sense. How do you think about this today, in the wake of the digital explosion?

HS

I am still thinking about the documentary as before, just in a much wider context. Most of the documentary images today are not just invisible but inaccessible to the human senses, because they are made by machines for machines. This is the main realm of the documentary today: it consists of energy that is not available to human perception. How does one deal with that, and how does one deal with documentaries that are, in effect, posthuman? This is not sci-fi, but the vast majority of all data relating to something real is not made to be perceived by humans, not even through special interfaces. It's machines chatting, handshaking, bots blaring, high frequency trades conducted via shortened fiber optic cables, metadata skimmed off your phone to threat model your patterns of life. What is our relationship to these images, and what is their relationship to reality? This can be shifting all the time and much more so than with so-called indexical images.

ML

In the last few years you have elaborated on free zones and various other areas of legal exceptions. Could you say more about this interest of yours and where it has taken you?

HS

The political order we grew up with, the Cold War post-Westphalian order, is now crumbling. Sometimes more, sometimes also less, so it is interesting to look at

models that have succeeded or that are in place already. To look at postnational zones of various kinds opens a speculation about contemporary and possible future spatial, temporal, and political organization. This line of thought has been going on for me for so many years, at least since the 1980s and writer Hakim Bey's ideas, but now also of course with the work of architect Keller Easterling, theorists Benjamin Bratton and Jussi Parikka, design duo Metahaven, and many more.

ML

In addition to constantly making new works, you are a professor in Berlin and a prolific writer. How did these practices inform each other, or not?

HS

I don't have an answer to that. At the moment I am really trying to create as much work as possible, because it is possible now. This might change again. There are many things I do on so many levels, but, in addition to all of this, I don't have time and space to think about how all this works. Maybe it doesn't.

ML

But you keep on doing your teaching and you keep on writing?

HS

Yes, of course.

ML

Do you mostly write when you are invited or by yourself so to speak?

HS

I think it is a combination, but by now I usually start writing and then it fits into something.

ML

What are you writing about at the moment?

HS

I am writing a text that starts with an anecdote about a tank. There are people inside the tank and there is a lot going on, and you realize someone is trying to start the engine, but then you notice that the tank is on a pedestal and that

it is a memorial. And then the people drive the tank away and go to war with it. That's fascinating. I think this text will be called History Sucks. We have perhaps reached a point where history has become a sort of detention facility where people keep going in circles. The old narratives are being repeated and still have a strong impact on people's imagination. Just think of Zombie Marxism, or, on a much more potent level, WWII narratives in the current Ukraine/Russia conflict. There is, on one hand, not enough history around in forms of truthful accounts of what happened, but there is so much historical bullshit going on, and it is important to find out how to get rid of all this nonsense.

ML

The tank is a brilliant Cold War metaphor. It is interesting to note that you are interested in other ways of organizing things and in things in general that are different from the established order.

HS

There is this quote by philosopher Walter Benjamin that I have been thinking about over and over, about the tradition of the oppressed that one needs to rescue. But I realize more and more how the tradition of the oppressed is turning into the oppression by traditions. So at the moment I am working on the future, and only the future.

Maria Lind is director at Tensta konsthall and co-edited **The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art (2008)** with Hito Steyerl.

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