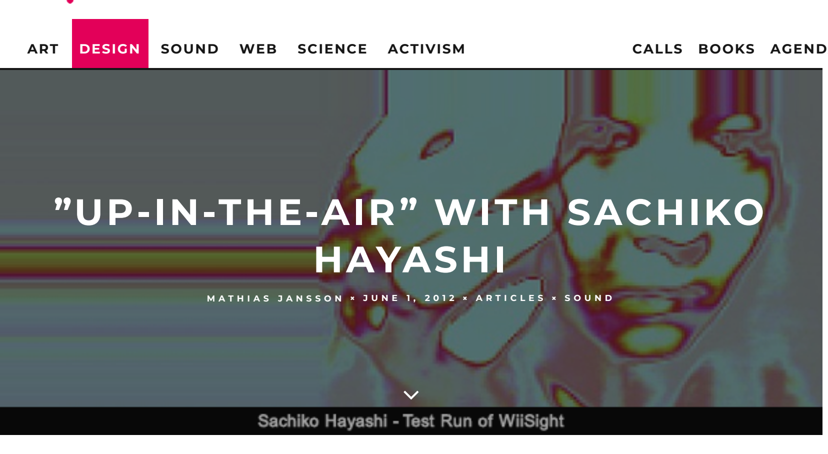


”UP-IN-THE-AIR” WITH SACHIKO HAYASHI

MATHIAS JANSSON × JUNE 1, 2012 × ARTICLES × SOUND

Sachiko Hayashi - Test Run of WiiSight

INTERVIEWS VIDEO ART VIRTUAL REALITY

> ***My constant attraction to areas of new art activities probably stems from this existence. I see freedom in the chaos of the unestablished. This attitude over the years has resulted in various categories of expressions, of which the use of video is one, sound another, net art yet another, as well as installation and audio-visual performance, since my focus has never been about what falls into what category but a question of my own existence.***

Sachiko Hayashi is a visual artist who primarily works in video and screen-based interactive media. She is originally from Tokyo and has lived in the US and UK, but is currently living in Sweden. Her video works, an investigation of temporal composition in subjective imagery, often in combination with audio-visual experimentation, have won wide recognition internationally over the years. In 1991 she founded MASH, an art duo, with EAM composer Magnus Alexanderson, to investigate various audio-moving image combinations, she was also the founder of **internet network DIAN** and since 2003 she is the chief editor of **“Hz”, a web journal by non-profit art organization Fylkingen** in Stockholm (http://www.fylkingen.se/).

Hayashi’s works exhibit an unique blend of aesthetic and conceptual foundation with the use of technology, as she consistently explores co-relation between image, sound, conceptualisation in art, and discourses in philosophy and other social disciplines.
She is best known for her net art that involves examination of human nature with high use of interactivity, in which not only the retrieved intricate picture of its subject becomes its focus but also our own reaction toward what is being revealed through interactivity.

Together with **HumLab** in Umeå (http://www.humlab.umu.se/), Sweden, she started in 2010 **Yoshikaze “Up-In-The-Air”** a residency program in **Second Life**. In this interview she elaborates her ideas about her own artistry and Second Life as a platform for artistic experiments.

Sachiko Hayashi - Flurry

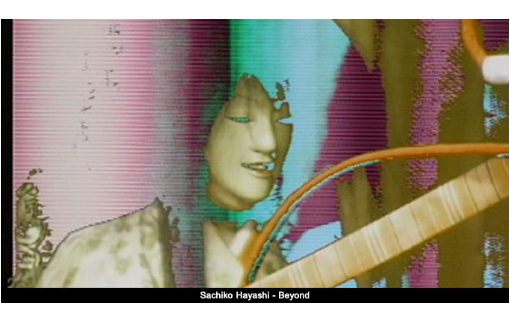
Mathias Jansson: Since the middle of 1990s you have been working with interactive media. What was it in the beginning that made you interested in interactive media, net.art etc?

Sachiko Hayashi: Spatial and temporal movement of impact and influence embodied in interactivity has always been fascinating to me. Just like a stone cast into a pond creates ripples in the water, one movement generates another, inducing change by triggering another phenomenon in both space and time.

The first artwork which I wanted to show in public clearly indicated this fascination. The work, called ***Resonance***, was developed in 1989-90 and was an interactive sound installation. The work would consist of yellow plastic tubes of about 15 cm in diameter, with lights strategically placed to illuminate the tubes from their insides. About 15-20 of these plastic tubes would stand on the floor to create an artificial forest, inside which several sensors would be placed to register the movements of visitors. A small speaker would be assigned to each sensor, which, once activated, would trigger randomly-selected sounds and short sound compositions via a computer into its assigned speaker. It was an ambitious project, not only because I was a beginner but also because it would have involved a programmer, a sound artist/composer, and a lot of material and equipments, all of which were very costly back then. In the end, due to the lack of financial support, the project never became materialised.

This experience made me aware of the financial aspect of involvement of technology, an awareness which still persists in everything I do today. For example, I do programming for all my works. It isn’t that I like to code but that it has to do with the bitter experience that I could not secure the funding for a programmer in the above described project. The more you can do yourself, the less dependent you are when it comes to financing of projects, and the risk involved due to financial difficulties becomes less. That was the lesson I learned.

Net Art has been a part of this direction I have taken. In the middle of the ’90s I enrolled in a Master’s programme in UK which, among other things, taught me how to programme for CD-ROM projects. Because of the small scale of CD-ROM project management and its inexpensive nature, I could reignite my interest in interactivity. From there, to enter into the online arena when the Internet became truly available as a media platform was a natural progression.



Sachiko Hayashi - Beyond

Mathias Jansson: What main issues interest you as an artist?

Sachiko Hayashi: My answer to your question is both simple and complex at the same time. Art practice has always been for me a search to get to know myself in my own terms. Each of my works represents various aspect of that search. What I aspire to find in the end is my own adequate way to express who I am in my wholeness, wherein my personal experience, including racial, cultural, generational as well as individual, can be manifested in a crystallised manner as work of art.

Let me elaborate: As a non-white and non-Westerner and woman who has also spent more than half of her life abroad in the West, my experience is naturally different from those whose race, gender, culture and tradition are accepted as mainstream. Wherever I am, even in my own native country, I am a perpetual stranger finding myself on the periphery.

The perpetual peripheries (or the Other, to use the term from Postmodern philosophy) risk seeing themselves through the eyes of the center, perceiving oneself as how others like to perceive, i.e., defining oneself through the perspective not one’s own, even accepting and employing a language (social, academic, aesthetic, etc.) and its inner logic not one’s own even when that clearly leads to denying one’s own experience and at times even eradicating one’s own perspective. This condition for my own existence has led me to problematisation of self as well as questioning of definitions, categories, and even languages of genres.

My constant attraction to areas of new art activities probably stems from this existence. I see freedom in the chaos of the unestablished. This attitude over the years has resulted in various categories of expressions, of which the use of video is one, sound another, net art yet another, as well as installation and audio-visual performance, since my focus has never been about what falls into what category but a question of my own existence. In short, I am not a genre-oriented artist. I am more interested in the thread that binds my work together at a deeper level, not from the perspective of categories and genres.

Although one common denominator of all my works since the mid ’90s has been the use of technology, I believe it is safe to say I differ from many of the people who are interested in New Media. My felt attraction has always lain in the fluidity of the not-yet-established, its room for deviations and deflections, and never in the presumed moral high ground of novelty. In that sense, it is unfortunate for me that New Media has today become an area where worship of science and reminiscent Modernistic monism prevail predominantly; as where they see a future, I tend to see the past, and where they see a liberation, I tend to see the oppression.

Garrett Lynch poster Second Life residency

Mathias Jansson: The development of new media and technology has been very fast the last 20 years. How has it affected you as an artist when the tool kit is constantly changing? I mean if you where painting the canvas and the brush wouldn’t change over time, but computer programs, internet etc are constantly changing with new tools and formats? Perhaps this is the challenge for you as an artist?

Sachiko Hayashi: Technology, especially new technology, is always changing as you point out. Only until a decade ago even the platform (computer operating systems) was in constant development so a work created on one platform couldn’t be run when its operating system became obsolete. An application (authoring tool) goes out of circulation by a management decision of a company, and by the same token new applications and programming languages surface that are more adept to the need of the day. Furthermore a new arena can be created, and with it a set of new investigations can begin, as was the case with the Internet and its networked space.

This in its turn creates an environment that is different from traditional media; in traditional media the depth of knowledge and skills are somewhat constant, whereas the areas that embody new technology are much more unstable, often with the effect that the quest for the new is being given the first priority in the face of changing technology. In short, technocentrism, in the sense evaluation of work is based on the newest and most complicated technological inventiveness, is a common feature of New Media. And the feeling of keeping oneself a jour with the new can be annoyingly stressful, constantly leaving one the impression of never being able to devote sufficient time to deepen and solidify one’s aesthetic ground, let alone one’s skills.

This condition inevitably creates certain problematics specific to New Media; application of new technology can overshadow artistic expressions, and the tendency exists to invite works that are more on the verge of technological and design development. It is also true that a work based on the topic of the day (new trend in technology) would not survive the test of time as art. One such example is Laser Art, to which a chapter of **Frank Popper’s book on Electronic Art is dedicated**. While laser has become a wide-spread common medium for large scale spectacles, the practitioners who saw its potential in artistic endeavour are today largely forgotten. Pursuit of new technology can make you a pioneer but the question is “pioneer of what.” On the other hand, the early days of cinema are filled with examples of films which we today perceive to be nothing more than recorded theatre plays. Positioned on the opposite pole from McLuhan and nowhere even close to Benjamin, those works are indicative of the shadow of the old medium in a new medium, old aesthetics disguised in new clothes.

The challenge I face as an artist using new technology is probably best summarised in the two above examples. The question I constantly ask myself is where I stand between the two poles of extremes.

Private Video

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Mathias Jansson: You are also involved in the Swedish organisation Fylkingen. What kind of organisation is Fylkingen?

Sachiko Hayashi: **Fylkingen** is a not-for-profit artist-run organisation in Stockholm. Established in 1933 as a chamber music society, it soon expanded its arena to include various intermedia art forms. Today its almost 80 years’ history witnesses its dynamic drive to introduce and promote yet-to-be-established art forms in Sweden in the way there is no counterpart in the country. The examples of this include **EAM (Electro-Acoustic Music)** since the ’50s, Video Art since the ’70s (including the revival of Video Art in the ’80s), Happenings in the ’60s and Performance Art in the ’70s, and Sound Art and Electronica in the ’90s. As such, it has always served as the cutting-edge interface between Sweden and abroad. The names of the artists who have been introduced in Sweden by Fylkingen include **Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, David Tudor, Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, La Monte Young, Pauline Oliveros**, and in recent years, **Merzbow, Stelarc**, etc. The list is almost literally endless.

The members of the organisation also reflect this unique status. The history of Fylkingen is highly entangled in the history of Swedish art history, as it has been a cradle and home for the country’s leading composers, musicians, dancers, and pioneers of various fields (experimental cinema, experimental poetry in the form of text-sound composition, performance art, video art, sound art, improvised music, etc.), who pushed the boundaries in their respective fields.

Some notable examples are **Bengt Hambraeus (EAM composer), Karl-Erik Welin (composer/pianist), Folke Rabe (composer), Åke Hodell (text-sound composer), Margareta Åsberg (dancer), Sten Hanson (text-sound composer/performance artist) and Carl Michael von Hausswolff (electronica/sound artist)**, to name only a few. Close associates include Måndagsgruppen (the most influential music association in Sweden in the ’40s), **Öyvind Fahlström, Pistol Teatern** (experimental theatre which introduced happenings in Sweden in the ’60s), **Pontus Hultén and Moderna Muséet, Tekniska Muséet, Swedish Radio**, etc. Fylkingen was also instrumental in bringing Elektronmusikstudion (EMS/Electronic Music Studio) in Stockholm into existence.

The Mundane Impressionable - video series, year of production: 2003-2007, total running time: c 11min.
Sachiko Hayashi 2007

Mathias Jansson: Fylkingen is publishing an on-line Journal “Hz”, for which you are the editor. What is the focus for Hz-journal?

Sachiko Hayashi: “Hz-journal”, published by Fylkingen, started as a non-online journal in the ’90s by the initiative of **Carl Michael von Hausswolff and Bo Rydberg**. The intention was to replace and revive Fylkingen Bulletin, which emerged in 1966 as Fylkingen’s journal for its members. In *2000 Hz* was moved to the online platform by **Kent Tandkred and Thomas Liljenberg**. From 2003 I have been involved as a co-editor (Issue 2, with Thomas Liljenberg) and as the editor-in-chief (from Issue 3). From the Issue 3, the journal has been managed on the basis of international open calls and has become what Hz-journal is today. My intention with “Hz-journal” is that it be a journal for the practitioners of art forms that often fall outside traditional art categories. The journal is intended to serve as a forum for various non-traditional art practitioners to share thoughts and ideas that originate from the pursuit of non-traditional and nonconventional art practices.

This first priority is complemented with articles by theoreticians, critics, and curators, whose fields of main interest correspond to the above position. It is also my intention that Hzjournal as a journal with focus on “sharing” give room for in-depth texts by resisting reporting journalism, reviews, art criticism or texts with political intentions. As such, Hz-journal has been able to not only publish texts of a more philosophical nature but also reprint an MA thesis, a book chapter, as well as earlier published milestone texts, such as **Kim Cascone**‘s “The Aesthetics of Failure:’Post-Digital’ Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music,” **Pauline Oliveros**‘ “Quantum Improvisation: The Cybernetic Improvisation,” and **Roy Ascott**‘s “Moistmedia, Technoetics and three VRs.”

Pyewacket Kazyanenko - Yoshikaze Artist in Residence on HUMlab SL Island

Mathias Jansson: Togehether with HumLab you have taken the initiative to a Second Life residency programme. Can youtell me about the background to the program?

Sachiko Hayashi: Since 2010, HUMlab at Umeå University in Sweden and I have been running a virtual artist residency named **Yoshikaze “Up-In-The-Air” Residency** on HUMlab sim in Second Life (hereafter SL). HUMlab is a meeting place in RL (i.e. Real Life, as opposed to SL) for researchers and students at Umeå Univeristy, whose main purpose is to bring together various academic disciplines of humanities that involve new technology. **HUMlab sim in Second Life**, owned by HUMlab, consists of activities that reflect the **RL HUMlab**, including researches into virtual language-training, virtual religions, virtual museology, etc. Yoshikaze’s artist residency is part of this SL HUMlab sim activity.

I am the curator of the programme and have been responsible for outlining the residency, selecting artists, and coordinating communications between our artists and HUMlab. PhD candidate at Umeå University James Barrett is the sim manager as well as the representative from HUMlab in the Yoshikaze management. At the end of each residency we offer a 5-day-long RL exhibition at HUMlab, for which HUMlab’s art director **Carl-Erik Engqvist** also shares responsibility with Jim and me. All the financial decisions are taken by the **HUMlab director Patrik Svensson**.

The residency programme was born out of my experience of having been involved in **Tagging Art’s “Virtual Moves” project**. In 2007 with the funding from the Danish Art Council, Tagging Art in Copenhagen selected 9 artists to make works of art in Second Life. I was one of the selected artists and found myself having to look for a virtual space for the purpose of building my work. This experience made me aware of the need of virtual studio space for artists in SL.

I became acquainted with HUMlab in 2006 when **James Barrett and Patrik Svensson** invited me to give a lecture. Upon my request, they also assisted me with availability of their virtual space in SL for my part in the Tagging Art’s “Virtual Moves” exhibition at the National Gallery, Copenhagen, in 2008. Soon thereafter I managed to secure a part of HUMlab sim for the Second Life group **Avatar Orchestra Metaverse (AOM)**, who was in need of a rehearsal location and of which I was a member at the time. When AOM a little later found another home in SL, the spot became redundant and inactive. Some time later with the agreement of the sim manager and the HUMlab director, I decided to reactivate the spot by experimenting with the idea of virtual residency.

Mathias Jansson: What are the conditions for the residency program and how many artists has so far used the program?

Sachiko Hayashi: We are currently into our 7th resident artist, **Pyewacket Kazyanenko**, who, in addition to her own SL art practice, has assisted **Stelarc** in SL. Early this year we also had a special presentation by **KristineSchomaker** about her two previous SL projects, both of which were made outside our residency programme. If we include her presentation, Pyewacket Kazyanenko is our 8th artist to present her/his work at HUMlab.

The residency is purely virtual, i.e., the artist holds a residency within SL accessing our SL space from his/ her RL resident place. The residency is normally between 1-3 months; the length is usually chosen by the artist to best suit his/her project. The residency can be used to create a specific work of art or to explore a specific subject matter relevant to his/her art practice. At the end of the residency, we provide a five-daylong RL show at HUMlab with the work(s) produced during the residency. At the opening of the show, we request the presence of the artist via the Internet, either by Skype video or in SL, to give us an artist-talk or a presentation, alternatively an SL performance. The equipments available for our shows are seven fixed 57″ screens, two fixed 63″ screens, one fixed 70″ screen, one portable 50″ screen and one 63″ portable screen; each of these monitors can be connected to computers. In addition, we use one super 176″ multitouch screen for the presentation. During the course of residency, the artist is encouraged to document his/her progress on our blog and vimeo sites.

Two aspects of the outer structure of the residency (blog and RL exhibition) are drawn from my involvement in the above-described Tagging Art project. The curators of Tagging Art, **Annette Finnsdottir, Anne Holmfred, Iben Bentzen, and Ida Grøn**, took many new challenges upon themselves for the “Virtual Moves” exhibition, among them documentation in the form of blog entries by each involved artist about the inner-working-process of building an artwork in a virtual sphere, and exploration of issues of RL display of SL art with involvement of general public uninitiated in the Second Life interface, the two issues which are seldom being addressed.

My criteria for selecting our artists have been 1) the artist has produced a significant body of work in Second Life and/or 2) the artist can carry out her/his project independently with his/her own set of inquiries in relation to his/her SL art practice. It has been my intention from the day one that the residency programme should not reflect my personal preference and taste; instead it be a place that shows diversity of perspectives that exist in the pursuit of SL/virtual art activities. Part of the strength of the Yoshikaze residency can be found in this unauthoritarian aesthetic neutrality, creating diverseness of residencies as well as their end results.

Sachiko Hayashi “3” from Series of Stills for elector-acoustic music concerts
(digital computer graphics for projection, 2004, Sweden)

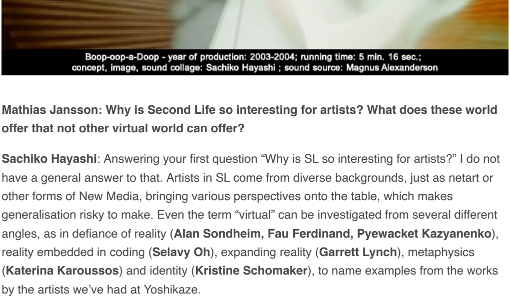
Mathias Jansson: Do you like to mention some examples from the Yoshikaze residency programme?

Sachiko Hayashi: **Selavy Oh’s *Construct***, which is a virtual installation consisting of 75 cubes, each of which she added to the construction on each day of her 75-day-long residency. Applying a different coding script to the content of each cube, the 75 cubes and their behind-the-scene-codings are containers of her residence days as in the form of a diary. *Construct* has received much attention, attracting comments, interviews, and articles about the work, amongst which was a presentation of the work by **Lori Landay** at the **MIT conference Media in Transition 7.**

Juria Yoshikawa, a.k.a. Lance Sheilds and Garrett Lynch each explored the parallel worlds of existence between RL and SL. Prior to enrolling in the Yoshikaze residency, **Lance Shields a**s the female avatar **Juria Yoshikawa** has actively produced large-scale immersive installations that surround visiting avatars. His work for the residency would depart from that history by integrating the elements of his daily life around the issue of son-father relationship into Juria’s work. Though unfinished due to his workload in RL, this work, presented by his SL female persona Juria as her creation, would have created an intriguing sphere of interchange and discord between his real and virtual life.

The interplay of correspondence/discorrespondence between the two worlds was also the focus of **Garrett Lynch**. With identity and place as his central theme, Garrett investigated into our notion of “real,” by placing his avatar and his dual self Garrett Lynch (IRL) in various places and sceneries, at times by stretching SL’s boundary into Google Earth and at other times by building augmented reality devices for his avatar in SL. He finished his residency with a technically advanced mixed-reality performance, incorporating both elements of visual and audio as real-time mixed-reality components (as opposed to the more common form of real-time audio mixed-reality) with access via Second Life (as opposed to access in RL, which is more commonly done).

For me personally, the most memorable artist-in-residence in our two-year-history has been **Katerina Karoussos**, who, during her two-and-half-months’ residency at Yoshikaze, conducted a methodical stepby- step inquiry into our understanding (noesis) of the virtual. As part of her **PhD research at Planetary Collegium**, her residency was never about producing work of art for a show case but an opportunity to delve into the depth of her theme, the findings of which she shared in the form of blog entries, vimeo documentations, and a presentation. She engaged the benefits of her time as our artist-in-residence in the way no other form than a residency would have been able to provide. In that sense, she stood out and still stands out in her uniqueness.



Boop-oop-a-Doop - year of production: 2003-2004; running time: 5 min. 16 sec.;
concept, image, sound collage: Sachiko Hayashi ; sound source: Magnus Alexanderson

Mathias Jansson: Why is Second Life so interesting for artists? What does these world offer that not other virtual world can offer?

Sachiko Hayashi: Answering your first question “Why is SL so interesting for artists?” I do not have a general answer to that. Artists in SL come from diverse backgrounds, just as netart or other forms of New Media, bringing various perspectives onto the table, which makes generalisation risky to make. Even the term “virtual” can be investigated from several different angles, as in defiance of reality (**Alan Sondheim, Fau Ferdinand, Pyewacket Kazyanenko**), reality embedded in coding (**Selavy Oh**), expanding reality (**Garrett Lynch**), metaphysics (**Katerina Karoussos**) and identity (**Kristine Schomaker**), to name examples from the works by the artists we’ve had at Yoshikaze.

Speaking solely from my own experience, though I do not consider myself as an SL artist and most of my current activities fall outside SL, three engaging SL characteristics can be mentioned as below:

1) SL’s “blank canvas” (that is to say metaphorically), which offers no pre-determined rules to

follow. SL differs from online games in the aspect there is no game to play. Combined with it are SL's internal 3D authoring tool and scripting language which enable creation and modification of one's objects and environment, making SL an independent desktop with its own authoring tools. It is a common practice for SL artists to combine this freedom with SL's built-in virtual features that disengage physical laws, such as flying and transportation (annulment of gravity) and walk-through/touch-through and deformation of objects (collapse of atoms), etc., all of which is considered to be a sign of virtuality in its opposition to what is natural and real in our physical world.

2) SL's networked space, which denies geographical limitation. For example aforementioned **Avatar Orchestra Metaverse (AOM)** is a group of composers and musicians who acknowledge this environment as a crucial component of their collaborative creativity. Except for two geographical pockets (Regensburg in Germany and Vancouver/Victoria in British Columbia of Canada), the people involved in the group live far away from each other; the members are spread over 8 different countries, including all the different time zones in USA, and most of them have never met the other members in RL. Despite this circumstance, they compose together, build their own virtual instruments together, rehearse together and give concerts in SL regularly.

Alan Sondheim - HUMlab Yoshikaze Up-in-the-air Residency

3) SL's use of avatar, who becomes the artist who paints SL's "blank canvas." A work of art in Second Life is created via the use of an avatar, an approach that distinguishes SL from external 3D authoring tools. Although SL can support external files for animation, avatar formation, etc., the files have to be uploaded to SL to be integrated by an avatar. This mode of self-representation presents a unique juncture which both merges and dissociates artist/the creator in RL and avatar/the creator in SL. In some artists this conjuncture manifests in gender bending (**Gazira Babeli, SaveMe Oh, Selavy Oh, Juria Yoshikawa, Pyewacket Kazyanenko**) which draws a clear line between oneself and one's artist persona as in roleplaying, whereas in others (**Garrett Lynch and Kristine Schomaker**) this dualism has been made into their central theme. My latest work *Experimentation #1,* a RL audio-visual performance integrating SL in part, also partially addresses this issue.

http://www.e-garde.net/

http://yoshikaze.blogspot.se/

http://blog.humlab.umu.se/

MATHIAS JANSSON
ART CRITIC AND RESEARCHER

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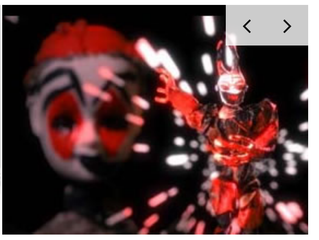

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