



PRELUDE

TO

NOTHING

INTRODUCTION

by David Fagin

Tonight is an opportunity to mark something, or rather the passing of something. In a few hours the final signals carrying analogue satellite television channels to Europe will be transmitted. Their 60,000 mile round trip, beamed up from Luxembourg and mirrored back to earth will mark the end of a slow atrophic demise for the system.

All satellite signals were once analogue; FM radio waves carrying audio and video 30,000 miles into space and back to earth. Real time video and audio was sent, quicker and to more people, the system effectively shrank the globe. The thirst for connection to more of the world, which analogue satellite made possible, is ironically also the reason for the system's demise. Satellite technology is now digitizing: television is chopped into ones and zeros, sent and reassembled in your home. Digital satellite television hosts more and varied information, is cheaper and ultimately has rendered the use of analogue quaint.

From its inception this technology was linked to a sense of the 'nation state', what it stands for and its connection to the international. Its history is punctuated by epic moments which seemingly shrank the globe. Our World in 1967 was the first global live television programme; 14 countries took the opportunity to showcase their cultural and scientific achievements to an unprecedented audience of 700 million viewers. On New Year's Eve 1984, Nam June Paik created Good Morning Mr Orwell, a 'global variety show', which saw live collaborations between artists in Seattle, New York and Paris. Events like these showed the awesome power of analogue satellite signals. The abandonment of analogue suggests a certain passivity in our relationship to technology, allowing situations to arise where a system can be simultaneously fully functional yet completely discarded.

When the end of analogue satellite broadcasting comes, the television set is to be the site of its death. Usually the site of content such as film and sport, which evoke a first person experience of narrative or events, the television is anthropomorphised and experienced in the third person. The set and the system become the ill-fated protagonist whose passing is witnessed by those present. For most of us, mortality is an unstable entity; we have little control over how and where we will cease to exist. We have, however, control and power over how we mark the death of others in time. The certainty of rituals such as funerals, wakes and vigils structure and therefore empower our relationship to death. Prelude to Nothing is such an event.

We will listen to music, we will watch dance and we will hear and see performance. We will watch television pictures delivered by analogue satellites signals until, when the time comes at 2AM, an arbitrary event out of our control will end our time together.

'If I am, death is not. If death is, I am not.' – Epicurus

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CADENCE OF A PRELUDE

by Patricia Garcia

On the 31st of December 1958, a crowd gathered to watch the last steam train depart from Harcourt Street Station in Dublin. That final departure meant the end of a means of transport that had deeply altered the world view: greater distances in a shorter interval, faster exchange of information, the steam train had contracted space and time. Before, other milestones had contributed to revolutionise the notion of distance: the first telescope, the telegraph, the telephone – all words containing the Greek *tele*, “far” – had expanded the physical location of the subject to wider realms that the eye previously could not meet. Also the arrival of the locomotive had expanded the physical confines accessible to the individual, but at the same time, paradoxically, it led to creating an image of the world that was smaller, embraceable, more interconnected. The steam train, gradually replaced by diesel engines, was one of the driving forces of what we now call Modernity.

December 1958 was a historical event in Ireland that some people did not want to miss. What was it that drove them there? Curiosity?, nostalgia? Perhaps just a desire to witness the moment. That crowd that turned up for the departure of the last steam train reminds how human beings are driven by this urge to trace the before and the after: this need to draw thresholds seems inherent to us. Our notion of time, artificial, socially constructed, would, without these thresholds, be unstructured and chaotic. This is probably why it is so important for us to divide this time-line into small compartments succeeding each other, which we have, also by convention, called moments.

Around these liminal moments, we have organised different celebrations in the form of social ceremonies, like New Years, funerals and birthdays, all of which function as mark-

ers, designating an intersection between the before and after – the nexus of two different planes. These rites of passage, long since a source of fascination for anthropologists, structure our sense of time, but also of space. Just as if we were conducted from one room to the other crossing thresholds, these ceremonies – historical, anthropological, personal or of whatever kind – accomplish a fundamental function: they articulate, they ascertain this urge we have for narrative; across these turning points, we invent links between what otherwise would be nothing but disjointed experiences.



It is said that the Greeks invented the deities of Hestia and Hermes to explain the concept of space. Hestia, personification of the hearth, expressed fixity and referential stability. Hermes, her counterpart, was the god of the threshold, the messenger who could cross boundaries and displace freely across them. Whereas Hestia stood for centrality, Hermes was movement. There was no Hermes without Hestia and vice versa: space was motion but always defined by a stable point through which the notions of

distance and orientation could be traced. No movement existed without centre; no space could be conceived without both movement as well as fixed position.

Our present views of space are very different. The above mentioned compression of time and space that the train symbolised has not ceased to accelerate. As we all know, telecommunications – again, that Greek prefix tele – have in the last decades profoundly altered our idea of physical location. That solid centre of reference embodied in the goddess Hestia seems to be unthinkable in an époque where technological advances integrate the point of departure into vast networks of multiple interconnected parts. Since human interaction now also takes place in a liquid, ephemeral, intangible domain, the notion of fixity is today as difficult to attain as that of permanent delimitation.



So it seems that nowadays there is hardly any time for thresholds. In this era of incessant innovations, we neither take nor have the time to be aware of these liminal moments between the 'new' and the rapidly replacing 'newer'.

Liminal, in a certain way, is the event taking place on the 29th of April 2012 in Dublin. Analogue transmission ceases for good, and as those who assembled to watch the last steam train go, so too on this occasion will a group of people gather to celebrate the countdown. If only one of the many threshold ceremonies that could be drawn in our densely space-time compressed world, what brings this group of people together is very simple: to see this signal degrade to its final point. The definite point marking the end of analogue transmission is as unique as the last steam train: it will only happen once and nevermore.

This moment could be seen as insignificant, and perhaps to many it is and will be. But the core of the event resides in the idea of 'moment' in itself. Beyond a fascination for this irreversible extinction, there is an impulse to create the space for a transition. Just as a cadence – a word deriving from the Latin word for fall – prepares the ear for the last note, a group of people has gathered to anticipate this coming fall and trace a sense of closure.

Their threshold ceremony marks a moment of time and in time, a moment which otherwise would go unnoticed. The idea of this celebration is to assemble a prelude for that which succeeds. This is however an unconventional prelude: on this occasion, it will not precede the beginning but the end. As the wave signal vanishes, this prelude will anticipate nothing else but a cadence to the piece.

Patricia Garcia.
Dublin, April 2012

ABOUT AN IMAGE-LESS IMAGE

by Tracy Hanna

TV static or 'snow' is an image with which we are all (currently) familiar. The turning off of analogue satellite transmissions marks the end of analogue television but it also marks the end of the need to manufacture the technology to receive these transmissions in television sets. It is the end of this technology (television antennas and analogue TV sets) that in turn will mark the dissolution of the snowy image. The end of this technology will not be as abrupt as the signals ceasing, it will slowly disappear as people replace their old television sets with newer models, sets that will not be capable of receiving a transmission via an analogue antenna. In the future screens will turn blue.

TV static is caused by electrical noise emitted by the mechanics of the device itself and by electromagnetic radio-wave noise present due to varying atmospheric sources that are inadvertently picked up by the antenna. It affects broadcasted television channels and also appears when no transmission is received as a random dot pattern - usually white on a black background.

This snowy image has served as a symbol of non-content, the empty space between, the loss of signal and negation of your viewing pleasure. In reality what this image actually presents to us is an abstracted mapping of the world that surrounds the device and us, in fact it even maps the universe and also time. Presenting within its image indicators of different aspects of physical space.

The varying sources of interfering noise have different proximities to the device. The closest happens internally within the television set: thermal noise is created by the inner

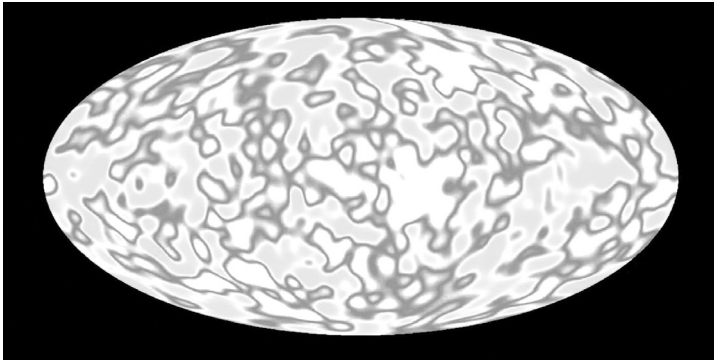
mechanics and this disrupts the signal. Most of the interference is produced by the first mechanism that the antenna is connected to - a transistor (a type of semi-conductor) used to amplify the signal. The thermal energy created by the receiver itself degrades its ability to receive. Part of the static image on screen is created by this energy, so part of the image can be thought to be a pseudo x-ray of the mechanical box.

Getting outside of the mechanics of the thing itself there are many sources of radio waves that interfere with the television signal. Electrical devices in your home are to blame for some of this, for instance turning on a light switch causes an electromagnetic radio wave to be transmitted. Every active electrical device in your home and near your home will do the same. The structure of the building itself will be echoed in the image as walls, ceilings and furniture will cause attenuation to the signal. This is a weakening of the broadcasted signal caused by the absorption, scattering and spreading in three dimensions; this will cause noise to appear.

To go a further distance away from the home (or location of the receiving device) we find other sources of radio waves that cause interference. These are caused by transmissions such as mobile telecommunication signals, radio communication, radio broadcasting, radar and GPS navigation systems, satellite communication, and other such technologies. These cause a combined disruption to the television signal adding, to the snowy image, a reflective survey of communicative technologies and their relative transmitting devices located on and above Earth.

Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMB) is responsible for part of the static image. This is a low-level microwave radiation that exists uniformly throughout the Universe even permeating the room in which you are sit-

ting or standing in. CMB is cooled down residue radiation from the creation of the universe, a relic of the Big Bang. The fact that the temperature of this radiation is nearly exactly uniform across the known universe means that time is also uniform - that every part of the universe has expanded and cooled and aged at the same rate. It is evidence that time as we know it on Earth is the same as on another planet a million light years away. So the static image, in a way, ties us spatially and temporally to the rest of known existence. If somehow a planet millions of light years away had evolved life and that life had developed a similar technology then they would see the same image. Through the static image on our television screen we are provided with a little bit of proof that space is symmetrical, i.e. time and the laws of physics are universal throughout the cosmos.



Through imaging the CMB we can grasp at a history of the universe; there are very, very miniscule deviations in temperature in patches. It is these small irregularities that supply data to study a history of the formation of galaxies and other astronomical bodies. This radiation has been pictured by NASA's Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) Satellite. The image of TV static is the bastard cousin of COBE's far superior image.

So what is TV static? A fuzzy image created by heat from the beginning of the universe, a strange random map of local electrical objects, and a voice from within the machine itself. And such a known vision to us all, what a loss, but maybe this text does a slight disservice to the static. Maybe it should just pass away, trickle out of vision. It was an annoyance at best to most and for it now to be forgotten could be no harm. To many it stood for non-content and only caused frustration.

The image on screen is formed by a travelling invisibility that in one form or another has literally passed through every inch of known space. It is an erratic visual frenzy that contains a mess of data – but we know what this mess contains and therefore no matter how noisy we consider this signal to be the fact remains that this image presents a spatial mapping of human and extra-terrestrial space.

Goodbye to this.

WHICH OF THESE TV HEAD-ACHES DO YOU WANT TO STOP—IN JUST 45 SECONDS!

	STREAKS caused by cars, trains, subways, cash registers, electrical appliances	F A D E D PICTURE due to weak, static ridden signals can be	
can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.		can be CLARIFIED by TELERON before it reaches your set.	
	WEAK PICTURE—TELERON CLARIFIES weak signal. Helps to hold picture bright and steady.		B O R E R EFFECT caused by doctor's diathermy machines, hospital machines,
can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.		can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.	
	WAVY LINES caused by "Hams," FM broadcast stations, other TV sets, antennas,		
can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.		can be BLOCKED OUT by TELERON before it reaches your set.	

A Tomb (in its Silence)

By Ruth Clinton and Niamh Moriarty

A reading from the book of *Ten Thousand Wonderful Things*: “One Sunday, the people of a village in England were coming out of church on a thick cloudy day, when they saw the anchor of a ship hooked to one of the tombstones; the cable, which was tightly stretched, hanging down from the air. The people were astonished, and while they were consulting about it, suddenly they saw the rope move as though someone laboured to pull up the anchor. The anchor, however, still held fast by the stone, and a great noise was suddenly heard in the air, like the shouting of sailors. Presently a sailor was seen sliding down the cable for the purpose of unfixing the anchor; and when he had just loosened it, the villagers seized hold of him, and while in their hands he quickly died, just as though he had been drowned. About an hour after, the sailors above, hearing no more of their comrade, cut the cable and sailed away.”

This parable is an analogue of the analogue that we come together this evening to mourn. We bid farewell to a satellite signal as it makes its final voyage through the sky. For the last time it streams through an ocean of aetheric fluid: a wave amongst other electromagnetic waves that swell above us, around us, through us. Like the groove on a record, every point on the analogue signal is significant and has the ability to describe interstitial states, forming a continuous flow of rich information. In an effort to inhabit this stream of consciousness, we will move along by associations and affinities. Floating in an intertextual dimension like that between stations half-tuned, we orbit the object of our commemoration: a signal, a waveform, a rope in the aether; cut.

The sea above the sky is alive with phosphorescence, a phenomenon once attributed to the presence of electricity. Writing in 1785, one Dr Buchanan describes the sea as having a “milk-white colour, and upon it were floating a multitude of luminous bodies greatly resembling that combination of stars known as the Milky Way”. With these incandescent beacons to light the way, let us take an astronomical journey along the crest of the waveform coming in from Astra 19 East. Electromagnetic signals travel well through the night sky, unimpeded by the sun’s interference and aided by increased reflectivity in the dark ionosphere. I imagine this blackness as a great cloud of iron particles that gather in a magnetic field over the city, intermittently repelled and dispersed by the beams of the moon or the streetlights. Through the darkness, we will follow the current *upstream*, and therefore back in time, to the first ever wireless transmission of a message over the sea. In 1897, Guglielmo Marconi sent the words: ‘Are you ready’, 8.7 miles across the Bristol Channel from Lavernock Point to Flat Holm Island. Though the message was sent using *analogue* radio technology, the words were expressed in Morse code: a *digital* method of communicating information, in that the signal is either present or absent; on or off. As though it contains a premonition of its own future incarnation, analogue satellite television’s final moment is a digital one. And when the transmission moves from here to nowhere; one to zero; the stillness permeating the airwaves will echo the two minute silence that was observed by all wireless stations upon the death of Marconi in 1937. His work, as well as having implications for the advancement of televisual broadcasting, was significant in the development of another means of seeing from a distance: radio telescope, or the detection of celestial phenomena using Hertzian waves. And by way of the extra-terrestrial, we come to another analogy for the switch-off in the form of the lunar

Edmund Fillingham King, *Ten Thousand Wonderful Things*,
(London: Routledge, 1859),

p. 81

Ibid. p.418

or solar eclipse. New technology overshadows the old, and will eventually obscure it from view altogether. It seems fitting then that the magnitude of an eclipse is measured in terms of twelve 'digits'. If the moon, for example, is half covered by the shadow of the earth it is said to be a 'six-digit eclipse'. The number of this evening's digital eclipse then, must surely be a twelve. This figure lends an extra dimension of finality to proceedings, as it stands for other times of ending: the twelfth hour on a clock; the twelfth month of the year. Now, teetering on the brink we, like Janus, Roman god of gateways, gaze in two directions and into two different worlds: the here and the hereafter. Associated with time, change and transitions, Janus might be said to inhabit the same kind of in-between spaces as are expressed along the continuous wave of an analogue signal. These interstices lend richness and nuance to the quality of the message that is not found in digital transmission, which breaks information down into ones and zeros and reassembles it at the receiving end. But it is not just the subtlety of analogue that we mourn; it is the chaotic and disruptive presence of noise, whose crackle does not plague the digital. Noise may be understood as any arbitrary addition to a signal that interferes with the message being transmitted, for example, the fuzz of a bad telephone connection. Electromagnetic currents that have been around the universe since the Big Bang have become the interference heard on a radio or seen on a television set. But now, with the move to digital, all such interference is effectively eliminated, and so it is to noise that we wave goodbye. Radio space takes on spectral connotations; its potentially infinite waves imagined as vast necropolises whose deceased speak to us through the noise found between stations. And it is to these halls of the dead that the last bit of noise from analogue satellite must go; its ghost, perhaps, dustily scattered across the airwaves like so many stars in the sky. Will it be possible,

I wonder, to make contact with this noise in the future? To open and to cross a channel, as Marconi did in Bristol, if only to hear an echo in the abyss; or, as Gregory Whitehead wrote: "the electrified white noise cry of whole communities suspended on the brink of extinction. A primal scream that is also a death rattle". This final cry might be said to resonate with the keening of the mythical Echo, who was doomed to utter only reflections of what she heard. Her passionate love for Narcissus being rejected, she became stricken with grief and anxiety, and wailed herself away into nothing but a disembodied voice and a pile of ossified bones. Pieces of quartz, when struck against one another, emit a faint glow called triboluminescence: a result of the electrons in the crystals being temporarily dislodged and agitated. Likewise, I picture the sparks of Echo's stony bones rubbing together to be like the crackle of distant noise, caused by the random vibrations of atomic particles. As Marconi maintained, sounds don't fully die; they only fade and scatter through the atmosphere. Tonight the signal is cut off and its remains left to dissipate. And we, as a community of viewers, linger for a few moments before dispersing ourselves; gazing at our reflections in the blank screen of the television like Narcissus, to whom I shall give the last words:

"Death is not heavy for me, but the end of my sorrows. I wish that my beloved could live longer, but now we two die with one heart, and in the same breath".

Gregory Whitehead, 'Radio Play is No Place',
in Allen S. Weiss [Ed.] *Experimental Sound & Radio*,
(London: MIT Press),
pp. 89-94

Ovid, *The Essential Metamorphoses*,
trans. Stanley Lombardo,
(Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc. 2011)
p. 59

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**The LAB
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2012**