

**INTO THE VOID**  
JOSE DA SILVA

**End Notes:**

1. While digital technologies offer flexibility for reimagining time and space, these freedoms are also marked by the contrived technical processes required to generate them.
2. *The Wheel* (2007) Mad Men Season 1, Episode 13. Script by Matthew Weiner and Robin Veith.

Yves Klein's photomontage *Le saut dans la vide* (Leap into the Void) (1960), subtitled *Le peintre de l'espace se jette dans le vide!* (The Painter of Space Throws Himself into the Void!), was produced at a time when cosmonauts were escaping the earth's gravity and human spaceflight was poised to become a reality. Three years prior to the image's publication in the journal *Dimanche*, the first man-made satellite was launched into orbit and in the following year, the first manned flight was taken into outer space. Between these two historical moments, Klein's leap — a composite photograph of the artist's body springing off a tarpaulin and a residential street, simulating his taking flight from a second storey window — also appeared to assert the possibility of escaping spatial and temporal constraints.

It's not surprising that Sam Smith would be drawn to Klein, and to a work that proposed an indeterminate experience of the world by shifting the inherent verisimilitude of photography. In his videos and installations, Smith evokes the potential for limitless possibilities within the digital realm, harnessing the tools of digital filmmaking — in particular the use of blue and green screens for compositing effects — to imagine worlds that have become (or are mediated by) digital representation. While he draws on digital film's ability to imagine parallel universes and modes of teleportation, Smith doesn't simply replicate the tropes of science fiction. Rather, his work reveals and reflects on the inseparable relationship between seeing, the immaterial and the illusory paradoxes enabled by digital filmmaking.<sup>(1)</sup>

In *Into The Void* (2009) Smith pays homage to Klein and how his gesture might connect with video as a medium for reorientating time and space. The work features Smith surveying New York galleries in search of Klein's paintings and locations resembling the site of his leap. On encountering Klein's trademark colour International Klein Blue, Smith extends his arms toward the artist's singular aesthetic vision, seeking to draw the ability to recreate the leap from its commanding influence. In Smith's leap however, the artist hovers not only in space but also in time, suspended in the timeline of his video, as the movement of the city around him remains unaffected.

One of Smith's key interests is how vision is shaped by digital effects, in particular how their pervasiveness in contemporary visual culture prevents us from seeing the world without the possibilities afforded by digital post-production. In *Control Structure* (2008), the artist embodies two interchangeable experiences of perception (the human eye) and mediated experience (the camera lens). A geometric model head appears with a lens attachment protruding from one eye and an ectoplasmic substance oozes from the other's socket. While the disembodied head appears lifeless, the brain continues to function. An embedded screen features scenes of the artist controlling a hovering camera lens, disorientating digital corruption causes the artist's reception of the world to turn in on itself, and a film set with green screens opens up entryways into a parallel (digital) realm. The green screens here also point to life force inside the brain, a seed enabling potential growth, even when the body has been irrevocably changed.

In *Time Travel* (2009) Smith makes use of film and television sound bites that reference theories of relativity and the science of time travel. Here, he not only explores the possibility of video orchestrating movement through time and space, but also the time-travelling experience of film itself. Smith posits himself as the orator for the sampled dialogue, intercutting these scenes with images of cinema in daily life — the façade of a movie theatre, a film crew preparing an exterior street scene, a projector spooling in a dark room and the flickering light of a television emanating from the window of a residential home.

In a sample taken from the television series 'Mad Men', an advertising executive is heard pitching a campaign for Kodak's carousel slide projector: *This device isn't a space ship. It's a time machine. It goes backwards and forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again.*<sup>(2)</sup> As an artist working with digital technologies, Smith shares a similar desire to escape the spatial and temporal limitations of this world. He wants to be a time traveller, and finds that digital technologies offer him the freedom he needs.



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**Images:**

01. *Into The Void* 2009  
Single channel HD video, stereo, colour, 1080p, 16:9, 6.00 mins (video still)

02. *Control Structure* 2008. Hoop pine plywood, maple plywood, polyester resin, fiberglass, mortar, aggregate, polyurethane foam, silicone, LCD monitor 280 X 260 X 125cm

03. *Control Structure* 2008. Single channel HD video installation, stereo, colour, 1080p, 16:9, 4.30 mins loop (video still)

04. *Control Structure* 2008. Single channel HD video installation, stereo, colour, 1080p, 16:9, 4:30 mins loop (video still)

**Cover:**

*Into The Void* 2009  
Single channel HD video, stereo, colour, 1080p, 16:9, 5.55 mins (video still)



**NEXT  
WAVE**

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. *Into the Void* was commissioned by Next Wave for 'Next Wave Time Lapse' at Federation Square Melbourne. The artist would like to thank Robin Smith.

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03

