Through the haze of a machine’s mind we may glimpse our collective imaginations (Blade Runner)

Ben Bogart

“Through the haze of a machine’s mind we may glimpse our collective imaginations (Blade Runner)” — 2017
(Detail of frame #6266)

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“Through the haze of a machine’s mind we may glimpse our collective imaginations (Blade Runner)” — 2017
(Detail of frame #97166)

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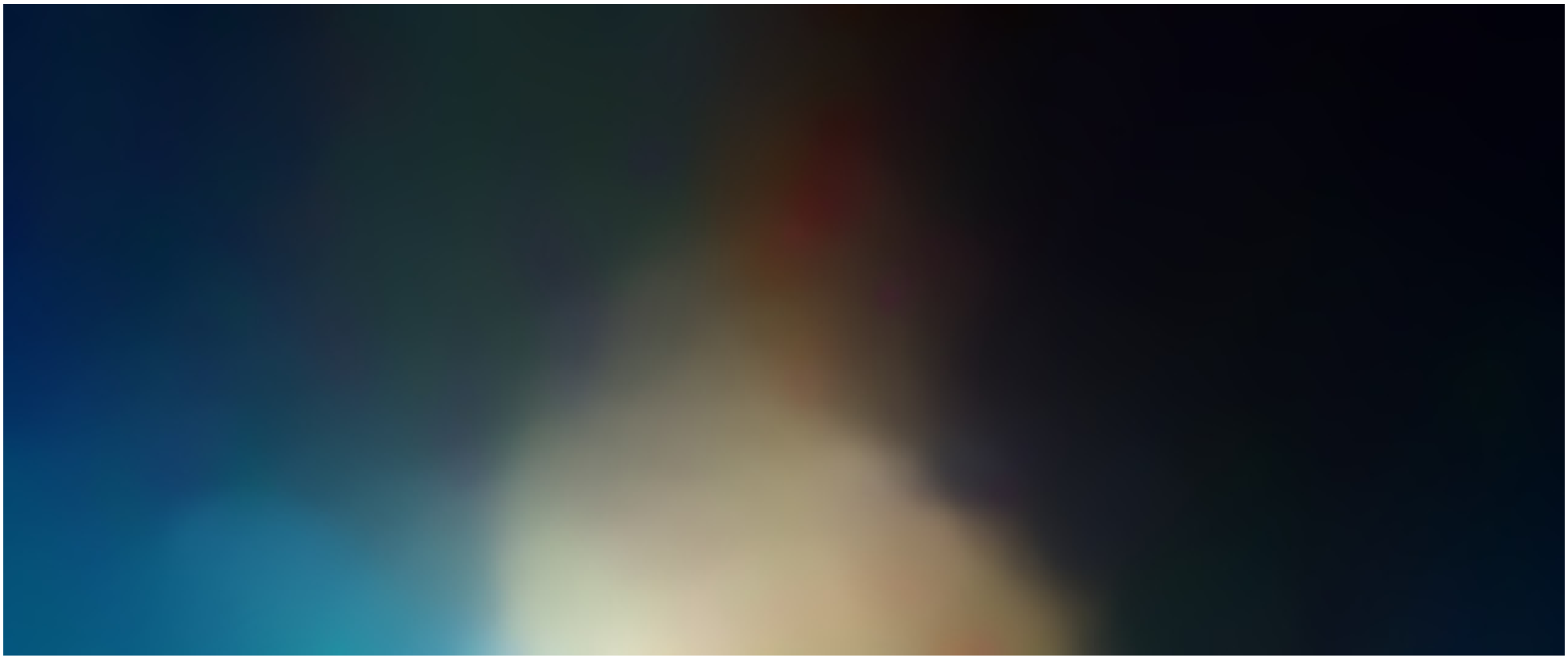

“Through the haze of a machine’s mind we may glimpse our collective imaginations (Blade Runner)” — 2017
(Detail of frame #37088)

“Through the haze of a machine’s mind we may glimpse our collective imaginations (Blade Runner)” is the result of a *machine subject* reorganizing the pixels and audio samples from Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* according to colour and spectral similarity. This destroys the composition of the original, but preserves underlying statistical properties. The resulting images are softly undulating colour fields while the sounds flow between constant drone and glitch complexity due to the process of self-organization. The structure of the work is an emergent result of the interaction between the machine’s subjectivity and the underlying structure of *Blade Runner*. The incremental evolution of each scene’s sound-scape and colour field are realizations of the machine’s learning process, enabled by a self-organizing machine learning algorithm. The slow ambient movement of the sound and image is punctuated by drastic changes occurring in the image and sound corresponding to the cuts between scenes in the original.

Artist Statement

I’m interested in images as traces of cognition that betray those mechanisms that allow us to generate internal representations of reality. Images allow us to reflect not only on how we attend to the world but also how we categorize and conceptualize every unique moment of embodied life. At the root of my artistic enquiry is an epistemological position where subjects and objects are considered mutually constructive. As subjects, we read into the world and ignore variation to focus on the abstract and quintessential aspects of objects. We classify by ignoring uniqueness and attending to sameness. This allows us to build the predictions and social norms that constitute the bulk of daily lived culture.

We build internal simulations of reality that mirror our constructed culture and facilitate perception. Cognition requires simulations to resist the constant barrage of independent reality, less we recoil into the abyss of constant flux, randomness and noise. This constant tension between objects and subjects is the very core of our nature. We believe we are in control, but independent reality always creeps into our minds, throwing our predictions off and subverting our expectations. We live under the constant illusion that what we *think* is what is *real*.

I use computational systems to examine this power struggle between subjects and objects. I build machines that manifest these very foundational processes that ignore variation in order to emphasize sameness. My machines categorize, organize and reduce the infinite complexity of sensory reality. In doing so they participate in a process of abstraction, breaking sensed reality into atomic particles that serve as the material from which new images are constructed. These ‘mental’ images are of the world—their mechanisms uncover underlying statistical truths about reality, but they are also of us—they are projections of bounded subjective understanding.

In some of my recent work, machines learn from cultural artifacts rather than sensory reality. These artifacts are cultural products through which we understand reality and ourselves. In deconstructing, categorizing, predicting and reconstructing cultural artifacts, I emphasize the tension between subjects and objects. The machine is both an alien subject attempting to understand our culture and a cultural object that manifests our understanding of ourselves.

Biography

Ben Bogart is a Vancouver-based interdisciplinary artist working with generative computational processes (including physical modelling, chaos, feedback systems, evolutionary computation, computer vision and machine learning) and has been inspired by knowledge in the natural sciences (quantum physics and cognitive neuroscience) in the service of an epistemological enquiry. Ben has produced processes, artifacts, texts, images and performances that have been presented at academic conferences and art festivals in Canada, the United States of America, the United Arab Emirates, Australia, Turkey, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Brazil, Hong Kong, Norway and Spain. He has been an artist in residence at the Banff Centre (Canada), the New Forms Festival (Canada) and at Videotage (Hong Kong). His research and practise have been funded by the Social Science and Research Council of Canada and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Links

http://www.ekran.org/ben/wp/2017/through-the-haze-of-a-machines-mind-we-may-glimpse-our-collective-imaginations-blade-runner-2017/

Exhibition History

2017, Art on the Screens, Celebration Square, Mississauga, Canada.