

The last VCRs were manufactured in July of 2016. We are only decades, maybe even years, from a world where the ability to engage with media trapped within a VHS cassette will be lost.

Soon, haunted tapes like the one in *The Ring* will be totally unplayable. We won't even have the option to commune with our ghosts. We will lose our hauntings and discover a terrifying silence so deep and so profound we shall yearn to hear someone whisper "seven days."

A common phrase in the media preservation scene goes "Digitization is not preservation." Watching a VHS tape could never be reduced to the simple reproduction of static, digitized viewership.

Viewing a VHS tape is a tactile process complete with adjusting tracking, unspooling and re-spooling tape, and trying to fish out a jam with a pencil without destroying either the tape or the VCR.

There is a physical presence to VHS that can not be reproduced by digitization.

All media is physical media. Even shot-on-digital films still trace back to hard drives, servers, and the physical infrastructure of the internet. Even the most advanced digital filmic technologies are still beholden to their oldest physical ghosts.

Cinema is no mere teleology. We are not constantly advancing to new and better forms. 4k digital is not meaningfully better—as an artistic medium—than VHS.

Would you tell a painter to surrender their brushes in favor of an iPad or a drummer to give up their sticks in favor of a sample pack?

We have been tricked into believing that VHS is outdated. Swindled into an objectivism in 4k. VHS did enable an eruption of proletarian cinema, but it was never low art.

Tony Conrad's *The Language of Less* exhibit explodes this concept outward. Conrad created art pieces called "Yellow Movies." These were paintings on massive canvases that would slowly yellow over time. Replicating and playing with the core ideas of how a frame of film works.

Using tools available at a discount hardware store and with a graphic fidelity lower than VHS, Conrad played with the sacred artifice of film. Conrad's "Yellow Movie" functions exactly as the tape in *The Ring*—The power of cinema is in what it transmits to the viewer—regardless of form.

Any home could display one of Conrad's Yellow Movies—any home could play Samara's VHS tape. The work of filmmakers, critics, artists, and audience defines the shape of film.

Our eyes are the cinema and each and every scene we look upon is a seance with the psychogeographic ghosts with whom we divine meaning.

Those very images capture the soul regardless of the classist value we assign to a piece of physical film. We're trapped in an endless loop of throwing away VHS tapes, then DVDs, and and soon come Blu-rays as the latest mode of graphic fidelity emerges.

We throw these relics away as if each and everyone one of them isn't the grave marker of the emotional and psychic ghosts of human labor.

The only way to end this cycle of haunting violence is to copy the tape. To share this spirit and dilute its potency over countless viewings, screenings, and copies.

Film preservation efforts like archive.org, torrenting sites, and library archives stem the bleeding, but our filmic ghosts deserve so much more. In fact, they demand it.

Samara knows a grim lesson that we are learning: allowing our media to be erased shrivels and withers the soul.

The tragic passing of Michael Snow earlier this month only makes this more apparent, all media is physical, spiritual—haunted. Snow's experimental films were a love letter to form and were just as occupied with the devices that create and reproduce the moving image as *The Ring*.

Snow's movie *Wavelength* is a 45-minute long zoom shot with only hints at narrative. It wants you straining for wonder, hungry for meaning. *The Ring* is a feature-length meditation on a dying medium. It wants you afraid of both what the presence of media can do to your body and what the absence of media can do to the soul.

Ser's exhibit *Hall* at the Swiss Institute likewise restores soul to body in pieces of media that now burst through the cracks of refuse with a second, somehow more expressive life.

So much of life is capricious, but in art we can dictate a small fragment of the boundaries between life and death

Snow, Conrad, Ser, and Verbinski are all experimentalists striving in their own directions. To deny the potential of one is an attempt at leveling the possibility of all.

We have before us tonight a blossom grown of thousands of years of human psychic activity. The weight of dead generations whispers “seven days” in the ears of the living.

As always, the proverbial phone is in our hands and only by our hands can this call from beyond be answered.

As artists, critics—and especially as workers who have built the raw materials of our media—it is through the labor of answering these supernatural calls that life transforms into living.

Thank you.