The Always-On Storyscape

Cinematic Subsumption, Pervasive Narrative, and Ambient Story Spaces

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Casual Distraction

This chapter introduces and explores the notion of pervasive story spaces that result from a confluence of several specific display and virtual production technologies. Pervasiveness, as I envision it here, relates to elements of narrative—primarily representations of space—that extend beyond some closed story structure and are persistent over time. The discussion here, however, begins with a short description of ambient video and more recent ambient ASMR productions. I then review **cinematic subsumption**, or the history of the commingling of physical and virtual space, to sketch the trajectory from contemporary immersive storytelling to the proposed ambient and pervasive narrative spaces. This effort details the potential of designed environments that subtly communicate story.

I argue that ambient video—often described as an eschewing of narrative for ambiance—when coupled with augmentative technologies becomes an ambient story space that provides a rich platform for a radical, pervasive form of storytelling. Storytelling and ambience are, of course, not mutually exclusive. The proliferation of visual technologies—including cell phone and drone footage, among others, both in physical and digi-

tal environments—creates a visual landscape that could enable contiguous long-term, quasi-passive exposition and even substantially different types of interactions with non-player characters. The result will potentially be a different type of transmedia storytelling.

The Birth of Ambient Music and Video

Any discussion of ambient audio and video must begin with two sources: Brian Eno's ambient music and, subsequently, Jim Bizzocchi's ambient video. Brian Eno is an American musician, producer, and composer. Throughout the 1970s, he explored minimalist and automatic music while engaging with artists such as Philip Glass, John Cage, and David Bowie and groups like Pink Floyd. Jim Dale, in a description of ambient music for the *Barbican*, highlights the fact that the entire genre can be traced back solely to Eno.[1] While there were earlier creative endeavors such as Erik Satie's "Musique D'ameublement," or furniture music, it is Eno who synthesizes previous experimentation and thus defines the parameters of this type of music.[2]

Dale further describes Eno's exploration as "a through-line here of experiment and chance, but also of expression as part of an environmental consciousness, understanding the architectures of everyday life."[3] Eno stated that the music must be as dismissible as it is interesting. As Eno conceived of it, ambient music was derived from minimalist and avant-garde efforts and was a purposeful de-emphasis of melody in favor of atmosphere.[4] He thus coined the term "ambient music" to describe automatic music that takes on an aspect of the environment and happens at

1. Jon Dale, "An Introduction to Ambient Music," *Barbican,* April 1, 2020, https://sites.barbican.org.uk/ambientmusic.
2. Mark Prendergast, *The Ambient Century from Mahler to Moby: The Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).
3. Dale, "An Introduction."
4. Prendergast, *Ambient Century*, 93–94.

a gradual pace.[5] The result of experimentation, such as running tracks of recorded sounds next to one another so that something new and automatic would result, would blur sound and music.[6] What was created could be set as a background and engaged with haphazardly or even not at all.

Jim Bizzocchi tells us that Brian Eno's exploration of ambient media included video painting that challenged the "rigid relationship between viewer and screen" that television and film had maintained since their inception.[7] Two decades after Eno, Jim Bizzocchi borrowed the same experimental ethos and applied it to video. Bizzocchi championed the rapidly evolving, high-definition video recording and display technology that could showcase ambient video artworks.[8] Much like ambient music, Bizzocchi's video pieces are designed with lengthy playtimes and to intentionally not always be the viewer's focus. He describes the rules defining ambient video structures as such:

- First, it must not require your attention at any time.
- Second, whenever you do look at it you are rewarded with something visually interesting.
- Finally, because ambient pieces are designed to play repeatedly in our homes, offices, and public spaces, they must continue to provide visual pleasure over repeated viewings.[9]

Ambient video is intended to be something with which one can casually interact. Examples used in Bizzocchi's ambient artwork are natural vistas that make the display technology operate as a virtual picture window of sorts. For instance, his piece *Winterscape* (2007) presents a snowy, white landscape that slowly reveals a solitary tree. The background shifts and transforms to present a hillside and then sharp crags of a mountain peak. The sound of the wind is mixed with the soft humming of wooden instruments. The effect is a subtle, almost imperceptible change over time and

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Jim Bizzocchi, "The Aesthetics of the Ambient Video Experience," *The Fibreculture Journal* 11 (2008).
8. Ibid.
9. Jim Bizzocchi, "What is Ambient Video?," *Ambient Video,* June 2012, https://ambientvideo.org.

a sense of peacefulness. Bizzocchi's other works include similar natural scenery that seemingly flood the frame and blend over time. In other pieces, the imagery shifts so subtly it appears we are looking out onto a nearby landscape or a detail of that scene.

Bizzocchi's works have been presented primarily in film festivals, gallery settings, and conferences. They are hand-crafted compositions of fictional scenes;[10] the films blend and flow from one scene to another. The natural environment is both an object of study and a scenographic background. While there is change over time, there is no conflict, no typical narrative arc. The ambient videos provide a quiet, contemplative respite from overwhelming, hyperkinetic media. This slow and unobtrusive visual poetry is the radical nature of this work.[11]

Lo-fi Chillhop and Ambient ASMR Video

By 2016, the popular cooptation of both Eno's and Bizzocchi's works, I would argue, comes with the fusion into animated lo-fi, hip hop, or ambient YouTube videos. Lo-fi is a sort of DIY music that often features repetitive drum tracks and piano jazz chords accompanying simple animations. Lo-fi hip hop or *chillhop* videos provide hours of music intended for casual interaction. The music is typically accompanied by short looping animation often in a Japanese anime style with characters reading, studying, or just relaxing and watching a natural landscape or city scene. Some animations forgo the character and instead focus on a locale or environment.

Concurrent with lo-fi chillhop videos is the rise of the Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) videos. ASMR videos are often recorded with binaural equipment that produces an intense, three-dimensional soundtrack. ASMR sounds are said to produce a *frisson* or pleasant tingling effect on the listener's scalp. More importantly, ambient ASMR

10. Jim Bizzocchi, interview with the author, 2022. Bizzocchi talked about how his ambient work is exploring the poetry of video. This is not intended as mass, commercial media.
11. Very few recent films explicitly acquiesce to their poetic nature and subtle pacing. Abbas Kiarostami's *24 Frames* (2017) is one such film that works in an explicitly similar manner to Bizzocchi's ambient works. The film is a series of 24 scenes made from digitally enhanced still images. It's not clear if Kiarostami had seen Bizzocchi's video work, but the works share a similar visual language.

chill videos forgo the anime-inspired imagery for representations of virtual locations. Ambient chill videos are typically based on a theme or even an era. Popular genres are the Cyberpunk and Victorian eras but there is seemingly every variation imaginable, from Elfin Coffee Shops and Ottoman Courtyard Gardens to Indian Maharaja Palaces. Seasonal ambient videos present bright cherry blossoms in full bloom or quiet anime-style scenes of waving fields of grass. Christmas ambiance videos typically play on nostalgia and put the listener in a small-town coffee shop or nestle them away in a cozy room next to a fireplace and a resplendent Christmas tree while a snowstorm rages outside a virtual window.

Ambient ASMR chill videos build upon the lo-fi chillhop movement by providing hints of story and have become a way for artists and musicians to produce something on YouTube with broad appeal but little effort or production time. The emphasis on the sound and visual design of these ambient videos are slightly more interactive than static chillhop. It is interesting, then, that the ambient movement continues in this manner. The ambient chill videos rely on several key qualities:

- A detailed visual representation of a fictional space, often rendered using 3D modeling tools
- Sounds that provide some context to time and space, happening off-frame
- Other humans should be alluded to but never fully visible
- The animation should loop occasionally but not enough that the loop becomes apparent

ASMR and lo-fi chillhop videos occupy a strange place in current online video culture. They are intended to be played primarily as background sound. This type of media has increased in popularity, perhaps due to the pandemic, because it can provide an odd sense of connectivity along with background noise and mood music.[12] *The New York Times* author Eliza Brooke describes how the ambient ASMR provided a themed connection

12. Eliza Brooke, "The Soothing, Digital Rooms of YouTube," *The New York Times,* February 16, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/style/ambience-videos-asmr-youtube.html.

back to work environments during the pandemic lockdowns.[13] This popular version of ambient video additionally provides a meditative virtual space or anti-anxiety alternative reality. For the remote worker or isolated college student, these videos create an atmosphere without the distraction of a narrative and the spoken word. The contemporary, popular version of the ambient video serves a purpose like Bizzocchi's and Eno's. The difference, I would argue, is that the viewer is rarely rewarded for engaging with the work. Bizzocchi's background as a cinematographer is apparent; his work is as skillfully edited as it is beautifully photographed. Significantly, Bizzocchi was creating videos that would take full advantage of higher quality displays.

Bizzocchi's work came at a pivotal moment when televisual technologies were developing rapidly towards thinner, higher-resolution displays. When he wrote "The Aesthetics of the Ambient Video Experience" in 2008, the first LCD televisions had only been on the market for two years. Those displays were not yet high-definition and tended to not have the svelte profile of contemporary televisions. What Bizzocchi saw, however, was a time that had yet to arrive when high-definition, large-scale display technology would be widely available. The optimal sort of ambient system requires ultra-high-definition imagery of at least 4K resolution. In fact, it was not until the recent introduction of OLED and micro-LED panels that larger displays provided the type of increased resolution and color replication that the captivating imagery of Bizzocchi's ambient work really requires. In that sense, ambient video, as predicted by Bizzocchi, was truly ahead of its time. Several other technologies could quickly bring changes renewing an interest in the ambient systems: room-size displays, dynamic imagery driven by game engines, and augmented reality equipment. These disparate innovations are part of the long history of our desire to enter the image and the logical extensions of the built environment that foment that expectation.

13. Ibid.

A Brief History of Cinematic Subsumption

For over 100 years, the intertwined history of filmic story spaces and the built environment has been evolving. Dave Gottwald and I have outlined a sequence of spatial regimes that link key historical moments when cinematic imagery and the built environment "collide and collude."[14] We have described how film sets beget the theme park model and then, similarly, interactive digital games borrow not only from animation and film but the theme park as well. Additionally, we define how the complexity of digital games leads to the production of the game engine: a sophisticated software tool that allows for real-time interactive models, textures, lighting, and physics. I will elaborate below.

Cinematic subsumption is the "promulgation of story-based, immersive visions of space."[15] I, along with Gottwald, have argued that set design for films, theming, and video games have altered our expectations for the built environment. Gottwald and I have thus outlined a series of spatial regimes that describe our relationship with filmic imagery: architectonic, filmic, thematic, electronic, holistic, and emic. To further elaborate, we begin with the **architectonic regime** that describes the entirety of the built environment prior to cinema. What is significant is that architecture, for much of history, is considered a rational, programmatic organization of space that has been designed primarily through abstracted drawings.[16] Architectural design, once built, is fundamentally a realized interpretation of that drawing, that image.

14. Dave Gottwald and Gregory Turner-Rahman, "Toward a Taxonomy of Contemporary Spatial Regimes: From the Architectonic to the Holistic," *The International Journal of Architectonic, Spatial, and Environmental Design* 15, no. 1 (May 2021): 109–27, https://doi.org/10.18848/2325-1662/cgp/v15i01/109-127.
15. Dave Gottwald and Gregory Turner-Rahman, "The End of Architecture: Theme Parks, Video Games, and the Built Environment in Cinematic Mode," *The International Journal of the Constructed Environment* 10, no. 2 (April 2019): 41–60, https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8587/cgp/v10i02/41-60.
16. Dave Gottwald and Gregory Turner-Rahman, "Omnull Space: Methods and Modes of Post-Architectonic, Screen-Based Augmented Reality," *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Conference on The Constructed Environment*, 2022, https://youtu.be/BMxZJyPCdR0.

The **filmic regime** arrives with several advancements in motion pictures: better film stock, better lenses, and, most importantly, camera movements that require more elaborate set pieces. In the 1920s, those sets called for more substantial building methods in lieu of the theater flat construction, thus, film studios sought and hired more architects. More important, however, is that there was the use of hyperbolic, set-like buildings and referential styles in some of the actual architecture of that period, such as the Van de Kamp windmills or the more common Spanish style homes that can still be found in Los Angeles today. This architecture is more elaborate set piece than historically informed building. By the 1950s there were several projects where movie-set-like buildings replaced traditional architecture with themed spaces.

The **thematic regime** is highlighted by two key developments: Disneyland and Las Vegas. The former is Walt Disney's attempt to place his guests within a movie-like environment, even going so far as to fire the architecture firm he originally secured to design his showcase theme park. He instead hired art directors to go beyond mere buildings to create unique experiences that instead place theme park visitors within a facsimile of the cinematic image. Similarly, Las Vegas's themed environments showcase experiences that focus visitors on the entertainment and gambling spaces by also borrowing the language of the filmic regime.

The **electronic regime** utilized the language of both the filmic and thematic regimes. Throughout the 1980s and 90s there was an exploration of electronic games' immersivity relying on structure, presentation, and functionality. Structure pertains to a game's coding while presentation refers to the graphical display. The functionality relates to the game parameters built into the dynamics of the virtual environment.[17] The push for more immersive gameplay led to the first-person shooter genre that requires elaborate digital environments, including three-dimensional representations of game spaces, with the player acting as a sort of camera. By the end of the 1990s, game environments included the use of sophisticated physics, lighting, and textures. Game design firms coded

17. Dominic Arsenault and Pierre-Marc Coté, "Reverse-Engineering Graphical Innovation: An Introduction to Graphical Regimes," *Game: The Italian Journal of Game Studies* 2 (2013).

game engines that could easily manage all aspects of gameplay and environmental effects. Those same game engines, in turn, could be used for any type of game, and thus they became severed from the original game franchises to which they were connected.

In the **holistic regime**, the game engine comes full circle and is used in filmmaking and the visualization of architectural products. The Unreal engine, for example, allows creators to quickly sculpt and composite scenes for games or films that are photoreal. Movie studios thus developed virtual production studios like ILM's StageCraft which uses warehouse-sized micro-LED panels surrounding actors in a soundstage. Mixed with practical sets, StageCraft creates a vivid, virtual environment for actors and eliminates the need for green screens—the featureless, fluorescent green soundstages. Footage from green screens could be edited digitally and the green color replaced with digital scenes. StageCraft instead provides a large, high-definition virtual set that, when combined with practical sets, creates a hyperreal space that can be easily manipulated and moved around the actors.

The **emic regime** has yet to arrive. Gottwald and I foresee a time when the use of virtual spaces—in unison with physical environments filled with different screens, including virtual and augmented reality goggles—will create a flexible, virtual landscape that will expand our experiences through rich interactions and various types of storytelling. In the next section, I will elaborate on these technologies and that trajectory towards the always-on storyspace.

Your House as a Set

The purpose of outlining cinematic subsumption is to describe the significant ways we have tied our physical environments to filmic imagery. Films, theme parks, and electronic games do not cease to exist, of course, but their attributes and supporting technologies get (re)combined to provide new storytelling opportunities and ultimately newer media.[18] It is

18. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003).

foolhardy to predict what will come of the emic regime, but we can be certain that our interactions with one another will continue to happen within rich representations available to us in a variety of screens. Virtual and augmented reality technologies are only part of this rapidly developing system of integrated imagery. With VR and AR systems will come significant advances such as eye-tracking, high-dynamic range lighting, greater resolution with adaptive focus, and higher refresh rates that will better replicate natural vision and make headsets less cumbersome. Yet, virtual production and other examples of interactive imagery, such as large digital dashboards and in-store displays, point toward the incorporation of even larger-scale, higher-definition imagery that does not require wearing something over one's eyes. Walls are now giving way to larger televisions and, with the increase in quality, virtual and augmented reality headsets will work in unison to provide sophisticated parallax and visual effects. The efficiency of both will be such that it may be that our displays remain on for long periods of time, providing a constant flow of information and imagery.

Our screens will serve multiple purposes. Gottwald and I have outlined **omnull** displays as a logical extension of the ever-increasing, large-scale, high-definition televisions.[19] We foresee a time when the omnull display will envelop entire rooms and will give way to more spatialized presentations, such as an open connection to another location. They present large collections—bulletin boards or even bookshelves—that spatially store information and links to other resources. But instantly, omnull systems can become windows to other spaces rendered in the game engine, or those spaces could be live feeds from actual sources such as drone footage, action-cams, cell phones, and even doorbell camera feeds. From security footage to fictional spaces that engage us, large-scale displays will be presented as part of a broader, literal informational landscape. Regardless, what is presented will be an endless barrage of ultra-high-definition imagery filling the viewer's visual field.

19. Gottwald and Turner-Rahman, "Omnull Space."

Large-scale displays will alter the way we think about the spaces in our homes. We will have life-size imagery with which to interact. Walls can literally be presenting anything in ultra-high-definition clarity. What is represented will range from long-term static imagery to interactive environments that shift in viewpoint according to our movement. Motion sensors will monitor our interactions and will provide a different, more active presentation to engage the viewer.

Rooms will then become sets. Several recent Microsoft experiments have given us indications of what this could look like. The IllumiRoom was a concept using projected imagery that augmented Xbox console game graphics beyond what is presented on a television screen.[20] The imagery fills the entire visual field of the player with every surface mapped by a Kinect sensor. In various modes, the focus is always on the gameplay, but the scenery is projected around the player onto the surfaces of the objects in the room. The result goes beyond the presentation of the game environments by providing additional lighting, special effects, and interactive opportunities.

IllumiRoom and a similar project, RoomAlive, map game spaces over existing furniture and architectural features.[21] The result mimics earlier virtual environments such as CAVEs (Cave Automatic Virtual Environment). Developed in the early 1990s, CAVE systems are immersive, virtual reality spaces that also use projected imagery. CAVE systems are still in use today, and the projection systems are being replaced by larger mini-LED displays. CAVE-like systems, along with smaller and more comfortable virtual and augmented reality headsets, could become more common in our homes. And with them will come the need for newer imagery and entertainment. The always-on informational landscape becomes a type of distraction. Walter Benjamin outlined two types of distraction: "pas-

20. Brett R. Jones, Hrvoje Benko, Eyal Ofek, and Andrew D. Wilson, "IllumiRoom: Peripheral Projected Illusions for Interactive Experiences," *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 2013, https://doi.org/10.1145/2470654.2466112.
21. Brett Jones, Rajinder Sodhi, Michael Murdock, Ravish Mehra, Hrvoje Benko, Andrew Wilson, Eyal Ofek, Blair MacIntyre, Nikunj Raghuvanshi, and Lior Shapira, "RoomAlive," *Proceedings of the 27th Annual ACM Symposium on User Interface Software and Technology*, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1145/2642918.2647383.

sive" and "active."[22] Benjamin describes film as an active distraction and architecture as a passive one.[23] We willfully engage with film as a distraction; architecture exists as a backdrop. The confluence of architecture and media environment—a constant flow of filmic imagery—makes ambient video work as passive distraction.

Jim Bizzocchi presaged this moment of always-on media spaces when he created and began writing about ambient video. His more recent experiments in generative ambient video further his vision.[24] The notion that ambient systems could compile and present unique, generative representations expands his original work immensely. But the legacy of the ambient video artwork, along with the popular outshoots such as ambient chill videos, shows there is significant demand for longer-form pieces. Unlike the ambient YouTube counterparts, Bizzocchi's work perhaps offers a more compelling vision of a production that can engage viewers but also can be left as background imagery. Bizzocchi's work similarly showcases the thoughtful construction of each sequence. What Bizzocchi reveals is not a documentary, however, or looping animation. It is far more compelling than netcam footage from a fixed camera presenting a raw live feed. Bizzocchi's generative work would provide a model for the persistence of the imagery on an always-on display. Artworks will take on a new importance as a subtly transforming backdrop. Ambient videos will define the mood and meaning of a moment or space. Each room with a similar display becomes a set of sorts, and that space can be engaged with or remain a passive distraction.

22. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).
23. Oliver Beasley, "In Search of Distraction: Representing Benjamin's Everyday Experience of Architecture" (Master's thesis, University of Westminster, 2015), 3–4.
24. Arne Eigenfeldt and Jim Bizzocchi, "Ambient Landscapes," *Proceedings of the 6th Conference on Computation, Communication, Aesthetics & X,* 2018, https://2018.xcoax.org/pdf/xCoAx2018-Eigenfeldt.pdf.

The always-on informational landscape is not a fantastic construct. Consider that the average American is watching a screen for 10.4 hours a day.[25] Regardless of where one is in the world today, they are surrounded by multiple screens, each vying for their attention. While the amount of time one spends on phones and in front of the television varies, it is rare to be without some sort of electronic display. In the contemporary American home, there is at least one television and most likely a desktop or laptop computer screen. Larger, persistent displays will require interesting programs and imagery.

The popularity of ambient chill hop and ASMR videos[26] shows the need for a diversity of long-form programming. Popular long-form videos tend to be marketed as study music. The visuals are subdued, and the music is unobtrusive. Ambient ASMR videos provide a glimpse at what might happen if there was just a hint of narrative unfolding over time: there is rarely, if ever, a traditional narrative arc. Any "story" is loosely crafted, and it is primarily conveyed through ambient sound, but there are hints of what pervasive storytelling in this format might look like.

Additional works, such as Norwegian "slow TV" program "Bergensbanen Minute by Minute – train journey across Southern Norway" which presents the 7-hour train journey from Bergen to Oslo along the Bergen train line, also challenge our notions of television storytelling. Train journeys do have a narrative arc—albeit a slow, mostly conflict-free story—but one with a clear start, middle, and, of course, denouement. Yet this long-form television program encourages an alternative type of interaction. It is difficult to imagine anyone sitting down to watch the entire journey from beginning to end, thus the storytelling, at some point, becomes ambient. This type of programming has more in common with Andy Warhol's 8-hour epic *Empire* than it does with most television storytelling. *Empire*

25. Rebecca Moody, "Screen Time Statistics: Average Screen Time in US vs. the Rest of the World," *Comparitech*, March 21, 2022, https://www.comparitech.com/tv-streaming/screen-time-statistics/.
26. *College Music*, a "lo-fi hip hop" music channel, currently has 1.25 million subscribers, and *Miracle Forest*, an ambient ASMR site, hosts 200,000 subscribers.

is an art film that shows the Empire State Building and the passing of time. For the film, Warhol set up a static view that frames the Empire State Building and films it in real-time; clearly, *Empire* was not created for mass consumption or for presentation in the home environment.

Slow TV and ambient video both present the potential of pervasive narratives where a story continues whether the viewer is engaged or not. That story can unfold at varying speeds and can include moments of intended interaction or can remain solely as background. The imagery will continue regardless until, with the use of sensors, movement is detected when someone engages with the display. Once the viewer looks away, the story ceases to happen. The spaces presented in displays will then act as windows that show actual spaces or they may present an artificial feed from elsewhere in the world. The window outlook shifts according to your location in a virtual space, as modeled in the game engine, and in this model, the viewer becomes the player in a game environment, becoming the camera in the virtual production soundstage. The home then acts as a hybrid living environment and set.

Informational displays can become a part of the story. Various media, including drone footage, cell phone pictures, and live feeds, could augment the always-on story space. Electronic game environments could consume any space, providing players with the opportunity to monitor interactions. Game spaces might appear through virtual windows that can be expanded to open a portal into that fictional world. Or, perhaps, we could have narratives that continue after a primary episode airs and provide additional information about that story—we could see the characters going about their daily lives. Perhaps the viewer is entrusted to accompany others on a stake-out, or maybe we see a hallway in a haunted estate home or the guest wing during the night of a murder in a mystery movie.

The always-on display might extend beyond the omnull room and reach out to the viewer through our other screens. For instance, characters could text viewers, enticing them to return to the story. Those text messages and images on our phones might come from characters in the story, or perhaps the phone becomes a remote control with which we fly a helicopter in the search for a missing character. Regardless, the ambi-

ent aspect of the presentation will assure a constant connection to story worlds. "Blade Runner Blues – Rain 8 Hours"[27] is a meditative ambient video based on the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* (1982) and its soundtrack by Vangelis. It presents a single scene showing the hero, Deckard, standing at a balcony overlooking a rain-soaked cyberpunk cityscape. The soundtrack repeats and is augmented by the never-ending patter of heavy rainfall. The video has some 2 million views; a shorter one-hour version has just over 1 million views. Elements from the *Blade Runner* franchise are remixed in this production, but this is clearly in the vein of the other ASMR videos. There is no narrative to speak of, but the potential for expanded game and movie properties is clear.

Conclusion

Cinematic subsumption is a concept that explains the connectivity between our image worlds and our physical reality. As visual creatures, our interactions with those worlds happen primarily through screens. Our one-hundred-plus years of interacting with filmic imagery and our desire to be enveloped by virtual spaces comes to fruition in a long procession of developments, including themed spaces and electronic games. When faced with isolation during the pandemic, ambient virtual worlds became the substitute for everyday social spaces and work environments. But, more importantly perhaps, was the use of popular ambient spaces to counter the demands of email and video conferencing.

Ambient video and music, by their very design, are set as background and can be interacted with at leisure. The popular evolution of the ambient video—lo-fi chill or hip hop and ASMR videos—serve as unobtrusive media, providing a calming soundtrack and limited animation scenes with which one can engage with at their convenience. The ambient ASMR genre has evolved to provide fantastic scenes that transport more viewers to fictional spaces. The popularity of these videos—like other long-form or slow television—reveals a need for a different type of media that can be tied back to the work of ambient video pioneer, Jim Bizzocchi. Bizzocchi's

27. Cole Phelps, "Blade Runner Blues - 8 Hours," 2019, https://youtu.be/ypJHCm0Omao.

earlier ambient video used filmed footage of natural environments that were skillfully edited into slow changing sequences. The radical nature of ambient video is that it can move from active to passive distraction, or it can provide a rich, compelling interaction.

The varieties of ambient production, when combined with larger displays including wall-size televisions, could provide compelling, open stories that work in the same manner as ambient video. These stories might rely on sensors to ascertain when viewers are more engaged and, when it senses they are not, become more ambient imagery. Displays will function as informational landscapes and ambient imagery will work alongside and with presented data. Our spaces will provide both active and passive distraction. The opportunity, then, is to create persistent narratives that both allude to and extend stories. The larger formats of the coming display technology and AR/VR systems will mean that our domestic spaces will become more set-like. Regardless, ambient media in larger, high-definition formats will act as meditative, augmented reality and respite from chaotic and frenetic media.

An Ambient ASMR Playlist

For a curated selection of ambient ASMR videos, please visit https://tinyurl.com/yr9rdhv5.

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