

## An Invention without a Future Greatest Hits of PXL THIS

Presented by PXL THIS Curator Gerry Fialka

Sunday, February 10, 2008, 7:00 pm — Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

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hi steve this is most important to have on program notes  
thanks, gerry

### McLuhan's Tetrad:

- 1) What does it enhance or intensify?
  - 2) What does it render obsolete or replace?
  - 3) What does it bring back that was previously obsolesced?
  - 4) What does it become when pressed to an extreme, what does it flip into?
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San Francisco Cinematheque proudly presents **AN INVENTION WITHOUT A FUTURE - PIXELVISION: ELECTRONIC FOLK ART**. Gerry Fialka will present the interactive workshop "Pixelvision: Electronic Folk Art" at 7pm, followed by a 8pm screening of BEST of PXL THIS 13-16, a 90 minute compilation of films made with the Fisher Price toy video camera from across the world. The irresistible irony of the PXL is that the camera's ease-of-use and affordability, which entirely democratizes movie-making, has inspired the creation of some of the most visionary, avant and luminous film of our time. This unique camcorder, which records sound and image directly onto audio cassettes, continues to empower artists.

### 20 YEARS OF PXL by Gerry Fialka

The 17<sup>th</sup> annual PXL THIS Film Festival is dedicated to **Andrew Bergman** and **Tommy Heidt**, both of whom have passed away. They helped inventor James Wickstead design the PXL 2000 toy video camcorder, which Fisher Price released from 1987 to 1989.

**Pixelvision: Electronic Folk Art: Gerry Fialka**, Director of the PXL THIS festival, presents an interactive workshop on the Fisher-Price PXL-2000 toy video camera. He explores the significance of this raw DIY moving image art tool through the percepts of Marshall McLuhan, George Seurat, Salvador Dali, James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Captain Beefheart, Robert Dobbs & more.

**James Wickstead** invented the plastic camcorder and **Fisher-Price** produced it from 1987 to 1989. It records picture and sound directly onto audio cassettes, which creates its grainy look. Another distinguishing feature is its "in-focus" capability from zero to infinity. The "in your face" attitude restores a certain human vitality to the overpowering sensory overload that bombards us daily. It illustrates Marshall McLuhan's percept that television is tactile - you can practically touch the dots, all 2,000 of them (as opposed to the 150,000 you normally see on TV).

[www.indiespace.com/pxlthis](http://www.indiespace.com/pxlthis)  
[www.venicewake.org](http://www.venicewake.org)

**Artists pursue childlike innocence in the creative process.** Starting off with a kids camera is a step towards achieving these youthful dreams. "Genius is childhood recalled at will." - Charles Baudelaire. "Ask questions a child would ask." - Albert Einstein. Pixelators combine instinct and accident in producing astonishing films.

### PXL THIS is based on the statements:

*"It is literally possible to do more with less" -Buckminster Fuller*

*"Film will only become art when its materials are as inexpensive as pencil and paper" -Jean Cocteau.*

**The festival celebrates** a tool for making moving image art.

**The longevity of PXL THIS and the ongoing discussion of its effects is rooted in the following ideas:**

**Bryan Konefsky** (filmmaker): "Pixelvision is the haiku of cinema: the minimum of means delivering the maximum of meaning. The PXL 2000 toy camera's limited image-quality forces moviemakers to focus on essentials, and thereby to produce a richly connotative cinematic experience. In fact, PXL may be the best instantiation of **Stan Brakhage's** luminous quote: 'The true meaning of cinema can be found between the frames.'"

**McLuhan**: "The gap is where the action is"

**Wyndham Lewis**: "Artists are engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because they are the only people who live in the present."

**McLuhan**: "I am not trying to attribute to my self the virtues of the great designer or musician. I am simply trying to be in the habit of perceiving the present as a task, as an area to be discerned, analyzed, coped with."

**Ezra Pound**: "The artist is the antennae of the race. Art acts like radar - an early alarm system, enabling us to discover the social and psychic effects, in time beforehand, to prepare to cope with them."

**Marcel Duchamp**: "I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste."

**Orson Welles** said that a movie studio is "the biggest electric train set a kid ever had." On the other end of the spectrum, the PXL-2000 video camera is the cheesiest failed toy ever -- a train crash in the playpen. Yet, in the hands of visionary video-makers, it has become an essential tool of cutting-edge creativity.

**Amy Taubin** of The Village Voice & NY Times on EGG THE ARTS SHOW, PBS: "Artists want to do things that break the rules of the mainstream. Just using this camera (the PXL 2000) is breaking a kind of rule about what an image should look like."

**Holly Willis** (LA Weekly): "All the PXL THIS videos reflect festival organizer Gerry Fialka's commitment to the freedom produced by making art without financial constraints. PXL THIS is a welcome highlight in the Los Angeles media scene celebrating the rich lexicon available in a tool which might initially seem rather limiting. PXL THIS represents Fialka's dedication to showcasing unheard voices and supporting a truly democratic art form"

**J. Hoberman** (Premiere Magazine): "PXL is the ultimate people's video."

**Craig Baldwin**: "Gerry Fialka's PXL THIS festival snaps, crackles and pops off the screen with the funky, user-friendly energy of real first-person cinema. Goofy, gorgeous, and altogether groovy, his provocative program of pieces produced with the Fisher-Price PXL 2000 toy video camera is not only downright entertaining, but more, its blipping and buzzing black 'n' white picture-bits coalesce into a veritable inspiration to all those who cherish the playful, spontaneous gestures and low-cost of electronic folk art."

**Mary Beth Crain** (LA Weekly): "In past years, PXL THIS gave us some fascinating work...definitely an out-there experience. In the last few years, PXL videos have made it to such hallowed domains as the Whitney Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, Sundance, and the London Film Festival, where they have been admired for their characteristic spontaneity, highly personal perspective, visual uninhibitedness and raw, grainy truths."

**Paul Malcolm** (LA Weekly): "PXL THIS is worthy of praise...spellbinding. The shifting bricks of light and dark that form the Fisher-Price PXL 2000's picture lend themselves well to personal essays, creating an invigorating mesh of ambiguity and intimacy in every frame."

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**Steve Polta:** "Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I've attended the annual screenings of the PXL THIS toy camera festival at San Francisco's OTHER CINEMA. I have discovered several patterns of Pixelators that are similar to the pioneering video artists of the 60's. One, they reclaim film as a one-person project. Contrary to the popular belief that filmmaking must be collaborative, the solo vision is dominant and documented here. Two, in PXL-land, personal and deeply individualistic issues - frequently in the form of confessionals - are dominant. Pixelvision forms a quiet sub-genre within the larger category of the 'personal essay' film, an intimate art-world of privacy, whose entries frequently resemble message-in-a-bottle intimacies. These patterns show that expanding the vocabulary of moving image art is still possible - and, indeed, is growing."

**Keith Jeffries** (Ascalon Films): "I have participated in Gerry Fialka's interactive workshops at the Ann Arbor Film Festivals in 2006 and 2007. He is willing to enter in new discussions even if they go against his current views. Fialka's multilayered delivery of ideas encourages the search for new questions and new paradigms that extend beyond. He is well-informed, off-beat and articulate - one of the most fascinating people I've met at the AAFF."

**Janine Marchessault**, author of MARSHAL McLuhan: COSMIC MEDIA: "I am very impressed by Gerry Fialka's energy in bringing together groups of people to think about ideas. That is very much in the McLuhan spirit to create and foster interdisciplinary, living, educational projects in which people can talk about ideas. He creates forums that bring together a plurality of critical perspectives into one multivalent conversation."

**William Richert**, film director, *Winter Kills*: "Gerry Fialka is a cinema treasure, a champion of the rarely-seen, forgotten or neglected films that illuminate our times; a man who has devoted much of his life to the exploration of art and philosophy and human behavior as shown in the movies. For nearly four decades Gerry has introduced the startling works of unknown or rarely-seen filmmakers to audiences who enjoy the fascinating range of his questions and the surprising answers inspired by our urban impresario of the flicks, always a student of the art form he loves, from its depths to its heights."

**Ine Poppe**, Professor at the Willem de Kooning Art Academy, Amsterdam: "I showed my film *Hippies From Hell* at one of the most special venues in the world, 7 Dudley Cinema in Venice, CA. Curator Gerry Fialka is a wonderful host, able to create a joyful relaxing and concentrated atmosphere. During the Q&A he showed himself as a very eloquent critic asking deep and serious questions- always with humor, knowledge and full of energy."

Critic **Amy Taubin** wrote "Artists want to do things that break the rules of the mainstream. Just using this camera (the PXL2000) is breaking a kind of rule about what an image should look like."

**Jean Cocteau** declared, "What one should do with the young is to give them a portable camera and forbid them to observe any rules except those they invent for themselves as they go along. Let them write without being afraid of making mistakes." PXL THIS 17 brings together the latest work by past PXL masters and exciting new talents from near and far (New Zealand, UK, Canada) ranging in age from 4 (our youngest ever) to 59 years old.

**Bucky Fuller:** "Much of the most exciting and important part about tomorrow is not the technology or the automation at all, but that man is going to come into entirely new relationships with his fellow men. He will retain much more in his everyday relations of what we term the naiveté and idealism of the child. This will be completely justified and not exploited or exploitable in any way. I think then that the way to see what tomorrow is going to look like is just to look at our children."

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**Chris Chang** (Film Comment 9-07): "Mike Kelley said 'an adolescent is a dysfunctional adult, and art is dysfunctional reality' and keeping with this line of thinking, an artist could be perceived as a permanent adolescent which is about as close to eternal life as anybody can ever get."

In the NY Times article "Unblinking Eye, Visual Diary: Warhol's Films," **Manohla Dargis** seems to be describing Pixelvision: "These home movies work short and dauntingly long, silent and sound, scripted and improvised, often in black and white, still as death and alive to its moment. Awkward, beautiful, raw, spellbinding, radical – they are films like few others, in part because, first and foremost, they are also sublime art....Warhol seems to grab hold of time and hold it still, capturing the moth moments before it fluttered too close to the flame....Warhol explained that Pop artists 'did images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in a split second – comics, picnic tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles – all the great modern things that the Abstract Expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all.'...Yet in Warhol's films the illusions of Hollywood, with its seamless narratives and industrial imperatives, are self-consciously replaced by other illusions, notably those pertaining to identity."

**Charles Gentry, Curator of Film & Video Art, Flint Institute Of Arts:** "In the spirit of Andy Warhol's experimental films, the PXL THIS Festival inspires independent artists to create, explore, and discover the magic of cinema."

"Dig Infinity" proclaimed **Lord Buckley**, who has influenced PXL THIS. He subverted comedy from within, much like what PXL THIS has accomplished for 17 years. It is a genuine **fake film festival** with no entry fees, and no competition. PXL THIS deconstructs the post-post modern "tainted toy" and flips it into its opposite – recalling the Rodgers & Hart musical "Babes In Arms" as a template for kids, but really for adults.

**Sarah Silverman:** "If you look too closely at the TV, all you see are dots."

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## THE HISTORY OF PXL THIS

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**PXL THIS** is the name of a festival that features videos produced using the PXL 2000, a toy camera. This unique plastic video camcorder records sound and images directly onto audiocassettes. The PXL 2000 was available from 1987 to 1989 from the toy company, Fisher-Price. James Wickstead Design Associates, inventors of the technology, plan to have a new and improved version back in the stores soon. The picture is comprised of 2,000 "pixels" as opposed to the 150,000 pixels seen on the average TV screen, which makes for a very grainy but appealing quality. Filmmaker Spike Stewart is enthralled with this black and white dot matrix picture (Pixelvision) and says, "There's sort of a nouveau-Gothic image you'd see in a movie from the twenties or thirties, which you don't see anymore." Another amazing feature is its "in-focus" capability from zero to infinity. Designed to be the "lightest, least expensive (under \$100) and easiest to use camcorder on the market," it empowered independent artists while the 10 to 16-year-old targeted consumers probably rejected it.

PXL THIS by Gerry Fialka, 310-306-7330 pfsuzy@aol.com 2006

**Gerry Fialka** started the PXL THIS film festival in 1991 to celebrate moving image art made with the PXL 2000 Fisher Price toy video camera. The annual fest provides a forum for the community to share the viewing experience. It operates on an all-volunteer basis, using as little as 5 dollars per year for minor expenses like postage. This reflects the fact that many Pixelators can make art with very little money. PXL THIS has created, as **Grace Lee Boggs** says, "a movement of connectedness rather than consumerism, of Being rather than of Having." Film as an art form has been swindled by capitalism, and as **Craig Baldwin** proclaims, "It is our job to reswindle it back." PXL's affordability democratizes movie-making.

Pixelvision evokes **Thelonius Monk's** method of hearing the overtones, yet leaving them out of the final composition. Since the viewer is seeing less visual information, they are more involved, causing transformative participation by filling in what is missing. As well, Pixelators embrace the technical limitations to their advantage in the creative process. It is possible to utilize a weakness and incorporate it into a strength. John Cassavetes' strength drew from his weakness - he embraced all that actors did, especially if they did it wrong, by accident or in defiance of his own plan. "Carefully make plans, then do the opposite" - McLuhan.

The Balinese have no word for art; they do everything as well as they can. PXL can reduce the art-making process to its simplest incarnation, much like a child's hand puppet shadow show on the bedroom wall. Since the PXL camera was intended for children, it enables one to pursue that often-desired childlike innocence in the creative process, that yearning for youthful dreams. Through Fialka's study of **FINNEGANS WAKE** ([jesgrew.org/wake/](http://jesgrew.org/wake/)), he uncovers a connection with PXL and **James Joyce**, who often realized epiphanies out of the ordinary, common, everyday occurrences. Mistakes are portals of discovery. PXL THIS is percept plunder for the recent future.

As a **genuine fake reality performance artist**, Fialka fosters the playfulness of this tool and the exploration of media archaeology. While questioning the belief in one's own blooming world, self criticism and humor are essential elements of PXL THIS. The audience feedback is very important. One observation detailed how the Pixelator trying to be profound often comes off silly, but the silly Pixelator can often come off being profound. Another questioned, "With all the advanced digital technology, couldn't they fix the PXL picture?"

**GERRY FIALKA**, film curator, writer, lecturer, and media ecologist has conducted interactive workshops from UCLA to MIT, from the Ann Arbor Film Festival to Culver City High School. Fialka gave two major lectures at The 2001 North America **James Joyce** Conference at UC Berkeley. His public interview series **MESS** (Media Ecology Super Sessions), with the likes of **Mike Kelley**, **Alexis Smith**, **Abraham Polonsky**, **Mary Woronov**, **Paul Krassner**, **Ann Magnuson**, **Heather Woodbury**, **Norman Klein**, **Chris Kraus**, **P. Adams Sitney**, **Hunter Drohojowska-Philp**, **Kristine McKenna**, **John Sinclair**, Firesign Theatre's **Phil Proctor** among many others, began in 1997 and continues at different LA venues including Beyond Baroque. Fialka's interviews have been published in books by **Mike Kelley** and **Sylvere Lotringer**. His **MARSHALL McLUHAN-FINNEGANS WAKE Reading Club** ([www.venicewake.org](http://www.venicewake.org)) has explored media and literature at the Venice Public Library since 1995. His **PXL THIS** film festival [www.indiespace.com/pxlthis](http://www.indiespace.com/pxlthis) has celebrated the

PXL 2000 toy camera since 1991. Film Threat's **Chris Gore** deemed PXL THIS one of the ten best video festivals. Fialka's **DOCUMENTAL** series (at the Unurban in Santa Monica ([www.myspace.com/sevendudleycinema](http://www.myspace.com/sevendudleycinema))) started at **Midnight Special**, the oldest political bookstore in the world, ran for 8 years, and was praised as "L.A.'s pre-eminent documentary and experimental film showcase...the holy grail"-LA WEEKLY. In RES magazine, **Holly Willis** declared Gerry Fialka the "Los Angeles-based independent media hero." In the Independent Film & Video Monthly, Willis proclaimed Fialka an "exemplary devotee of cinema. Thanks to Fialka's penchant for the weird and wild, L.A. gets to see material we wouldn't otherwise." The LA TIMES calls Fialka "the multi-media Renaissance man." His 7 **DUDLEY CINEMA** series ([www.81x.com/7dudley/cinema](http://www.81x.com/7dudley/cinema)) continues the tradition of DOCUMENTAL at **Sponto Gallery** in Venice, where the beats used to read poetry (Venice West Cafe). Fialka has worked for **Frank Zappa** (for nearly ten years as an archivist), **George Carlin** and **Filmex**. He has interviewed the likes of **Carla Bley**, **Horace Silver**, **Jon Hendricks**, **Annie Ross**, **George Clinton**, **Amiri Baraka**, **Paul Plimley**, **Oscar Brown Jr.**, **Ben Watson**, **Grace Lee Boggs**, and **Craig Baldwin** among others for **AMASS** magazine, **LA Jazz Scene**, **Jazz News**, **Bird**, **Flipside**, and PACIFICA's **KPFK** radio.

Established in 1991, **Clap Off They Glass Productions** supports independent video-making by sponsoring the annual PXL THIS Festival, which is the oldest of its kind in the world. Even with no corporate sponsors, no color brochures, no big shot movie director board members, no ticketmaster access, PXL THIS has been featured on PBS, IFC and NPR, and most recently screened at MIT. PXL THIS spans many genres: documentary, poetry, drama, art, music, political activism, cinema povera, comedy and the avant-garde. The unique Fisher-Price toy camcorder PXL 2000, which records sound and image directly onto audio cassettes, continues to empower artists. This failed toy was only made in the US from 1987 to 1989. The magical PXL 2000 restores a certain humanity to the overpowering technology of video.

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Films featured in past PXL THIS festivals are archived and available for viewing at the **Academy Film Archive** in Hollywood. For viewing appointments and information, please call (310) 247-3016 x 387, or visit the archive's web site at [www.oscars.org/filmarchive](http://www.oscars.org/filmarchive).

**PXL THIS 17** screens at **Other Cinema** on May 24, 2008. 992 Valencia in San Francisco.

**THE EVENING'S PROGRAM: BEST OF PXL THIS 13-16** (90 minute compilation of 14 PXL shorts from across the world compiled from the PXL THIS film festivals from 2003 to 2006)

1-**SOUVENIR** (Stephen Rose, 5m) "plays like Guy Maddin directing a Charlie Kaufman script inside a snow globe" - LA Times. "Proof that you don't need fancy electronic gizmos to make a film. The makers used a Fisher-Price PXL 2000 toy camera to make this lovely and poignant look at existence and loneliness." - Santa Fe Film Festival.

2-**GESTURES** (L.M. Sabo, 2m) "chronicles U.S. involvement in Iraq with short bits of text accompanied by appropriate hand gestures - thumbs up and down, an okay sign, the finger and so on; short and punchy, the piece artfully captures five years of misguided policy in two minutes" - LA Weekly.

3-**HELEN POSSERT: A WWII ROSIE** (Michael Possert, 6m) "has the unmediated authenticity of something photographed through one of the bomb sights its subject assembled" - SF Weekly.

4-**SOMNIGRAPHIC TRACES OF THE OTHERWISE UNDOCUMENTED FRIEDKIN INSTITUTE FOR SLEEP DISORDER RESEARCH** (Struan Ashby & Roy Parkhurst, 15m, from New Zealand) "offers glimpses into the dream states of several patients as a way to test the aesthetic limits of the camera. In the opening sequence of this fake documentary, a person suffering from hallucinations following a drug overdose witnesses lovely abstract patterns of shimmering light and dark, while another patient, with hydrophilic compulsion, enjoys watery dreams with undulating colors and blurred figures. A patient who has "violent tendencies" endures horrific dreams filled with high-contrast images of worms, bodies and knives, and a melancholic dream featuring birds in chiaroscuro silhouettes and other classically nostalgic images. Ashby and Parkhurst achieve extraordinarily beautiful images using multiple visual styles, and it's a pleasure to see the PXL camera's many abilities displayed in one video" - LA Weekly.

5-**I'M IN THE MOOD** (Bryan Konefsky, 5m) uses a dual-projection technique to present a colorful portrait of Ann Arbor, Michigan's legendary street performer, Shaky Jake, as he serenades pedestrians.

6-**ABOUT FLOWERS** (Juniper Woodbury, 4m) Always an audience favorite, this eight-year-old's detailed lesson from a "bee's-eye view" is an example of the PXL-2000 camera finding its way back into the hands of the consumers for which it was originally intended.

7-**SLEEP** (Doug Ing, 4m) PXL pioneer explores the past time's past-time.

8-**DOUBLE-DUTY INTERROBANG** (Gerry Fialka, 10m) Robert Dobbs reswindles Menippean memory with new punctuation.

9-**FISH** (Joe Frese, 5m) poignant pondering as aquatic pets reflect.

10-**PXL MANIFESTO** (Ross Craig, 5m) "hilarious sendup of Denmark's self-righteous and purity-demanding Dogme 95 movement (no color! hand-held camera!)" - SF Weekly.

11-**BABBLEFESTO #2** (Steve Craig, 4m) The LA Weekly proclaimed it "packs one hell of a kick" by combining automated customer service messages and structuralist cinema.

12-**A STAKE TO THE HEART: THE LAST PXL MOVIE** (Ross Craig, 3m): an engrossing cut and paste mashup.

13-**RUGRAT** (Lisa Marr, 6m) " a meditation on William Randolph Heart's passionate, if short-lived, interest in Navajo's weaving as the signature motif for his retreat at San Simeon, the fragmentation inflicted by the PXL process on the geometric patterning of the Indian blankets serves nicely as a metaphor for the fickle newspaper mogul's wandering field of attention." -LA Weekly.

14-**ZERO** (Eli Elliott, 15m): multi-form, semi-autobiographical piece deeply probes a farcical appointment with the artist's comic