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You're In The Gone, Gone Picture and Beyond

By Gary Meyer

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Most of us see in 3D. We can look around, above, and below. We take it for granted and it is generally not a thrill ride.

But offer us a pair of 3D glasses, a VR rig or some kind of created immersive environment to take us to places we have not been, other worlds or to be in the middle of action scenes and many of us are willing to pay a premium for the enhanced experience—at least once. And then the novelty wears off and we go back to traditional ways of viewing.



Vicki Bennett looks at us

There have been immersive experiences for centuries. I would argue that the cave drawings of prehistoric people thirty-thousand years ago were immersive experiences for those who encountered them—then

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and now– as Werner Herzog explored in his film [Cave of Forgotten Dreams](#) (ironically, filmed in 3D after he said he had no use for the medium until he entered these caves).



MyMovies_International
Cave of Forgotten

There were Victorian theatrics and **séances**; since the invention of photography and the moving image people have experimented with ways to draw us into environments, surrounding us with the real, the super real and the surreal. (In a previous series of three articles, “[Going Deep Into Immersive Cinema](#),” I gave a history and overview of such experiments. Another piece, [The Encounter](#), deals with immersive sound.)

This week I saw a total surround cinema experience that I will never forget.

Gone, Gone Beyond (as [reviewed by Steve Segal here](#)), goes beyond the traditional 360° shows like those many saw at Disneyland and the

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current trend of shows about artists. It plays at San Francisco's [Gray Area](#) through Friday, May 27.

I walked into a room with calming candles on the screens everywhere. People are talking as they find seats but as the lights dim the chatter also goes down offering a few minutes to let go of all that has come before in our day.

But soon we seem to be speeding out of dozens of doorways with fleeting images, some recognizable and others a mystery on either side. As I follow the images along the walls to the opposite end I am now moving in the opposite direction through these portals that will take the audience on a journey.



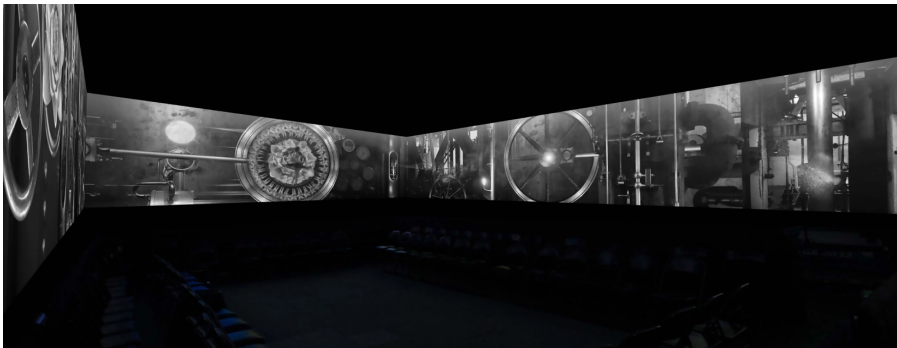
Julie Andrews sings "The Hills Are Alive..." in the sweeping aerial opening of Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music*. seamlessly integrated into the unexpected helicopter attacks from Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, every few moments bringing new surprises in this unimaginably perfect mixture. (An inside joke? [Julie Andrews has explained](#) how a helicopter with cameraman hanging onto the side repeatedly swept over her to get the shot) **You can watch a single screen version of the *Sound of Music*/*Apocalypse Now* segment [here](#).**

Frenetic sequences like breaking mirrors reflecting Orson Welles, Rita Hayworth and Everett Sloan in a mashup with other mirror clips disorients us or Charlton Heston in one corner orchestrating the action around the rest of the room. And then we are transported to moments of quiet with beautiful landscapes, stunning gently curved architecture, sunsets or night skies.

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A sequence of not-quite cyberpunk machinery has details — I look closely and will never think of [Busby Berkeley dance numbers](#) in the same way.



I become surrounded by whirling dancers who keep multiplying, soon becoming a unique kind of dervish rainfall.



Eyes are looking back at us.

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A [Zoetrope](#) appears in the sky and as it floats closer the audience is suddenly inside the pre-cinema toy looking out and we see the flickering images of gorillas at the start of *2001: A Space Odyssey* whose attention is distracted by Charlton Heston (again) with Dr. Cornelius and Dr. Zira (Is it another inside joke that both the Kubrick film and *Planet of the Apes* were both released in 1968?)



There is a lot humor, obvious, subtle, or personal but I am overwhelmed and surely missed much of it the first time. I laughed aloud a few times but mostly was smiling with the pleasure from a little over an hour experiencing the unexpected and yet never quite getting enough of each segment.

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In my ideal world I would recommend seeing *Gone, Gone Beyond* at least three times.

The first one you will be recognizing movies and music from your pop culture past. Bennett suggests, “The nostalgia element, that could be just your memory of when you first experienced, or first heard a piece of music, or first saw it – and that’s great, but what I like about that is your memory may only be creating something in the moment. Apparently every time we have a memory we’re making it anew. And they’re pretty unreliable anyway, memories. Also your experience of something changes, like for instance, if you’re listening to a piece of music and something really extreme happens, your new association with that piece of music will be different to what you had before that happened. So your experience of these archives will change with your experience of life. That’s great. If I am working with this stuff, originally your experience might be the Hollywood movie, or seeing it in the cinema, remembering something from the 70s or from growing up. But if I dislocate and associate it with something else, it’s just as likely that a future association will be with what I put with it, as in the same way as when people make mash up music, which is a simple version of what I do. I changed the original association, but also if you hadn’t heard the original, if you’d only heard the mashup, and then you heard the original – Then that goes to show that the flow of time isn’t always forwards. Because my association with matchups is discovering the originals for the first time through the mash ups. So time doesn’t go forward, it’s all over the place.”

The second time you are past that stage and can just marvel at what is around you, how the picture and sound never stand still and everywhere you look there is something different. And the third viewing is to watch the audience in the foreground as they respond with a myriad of facial reactions and emotions. You still won’t see it all.

I found it fascinating to look over at the filmmakers who were watching with us. Chairs line all four sides of the room and some people sit on the floor in the center. If you could bring a small swivel seat that might be the best way to look around but it is easy enough to look over your shoulders as your eyes sweep across the panoramas. Keep looking everywhere. If you have sensitive ears there are free earplugs at the front table. Pick up a pair just in case.

Some might think this is like [Circarama \(1955\)](#) at Disneyland and World's Fairs in the 1960s or the current immersive [artist shows](#) (Klimt, three different Van Gogh shows, Frida Kahlo, Banksy, Picasso, Dali, Monet, etc) and [non artist specific sites](#), but I assure you that is not the case. Those all have a specific subject or theme while *Gone, Gone Beyond* take us—well, beyond.

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For years Naut Humon, founder of San Francisco-based [RML CineChamber](#) has been asking Vicki Bennett to create a film for his 10 screen / 8 speaker theater with its seamless wraparound projection and

sound that puts the viewer in the middle of the journey. She finally agreed and the project has been a work in progress since an earlier version premiered in San Francisco in 2017 with the final piece touring Europe in 2021 before having a run at the London Barbican. Thus far the only U.S. showings have been in San Francisco. Museums across the country should be clamoring for *Gone, Gone Beyond* after their success with Christian Marclay's *The Clock*, a very different form of film collage presented on a single screen over 24 hours.

Bennett explains, "The work's title and underlying concepts come from the Heart Sutra, a key Buddhist text, describing how all phenomena are empty in form yet ultimately interconnected. The last lines of the Heart Sutra say 'gate gate pāragate pārasamgate bodhi svāhā', which means "gone, gone beyond, gone beyond that a bit more, and then beyond that a bit further". This reflects perfectly the action of going beyond the frame to where there are no edges to the narrative – just emptiness.

In this 360° format, time and space becomes elasticated, with the use of collaged video furthering the reflection on how information comes to us as fragments and that nothing is fixed. A new narrative-thread is woven in the mind of each viewer every time the work is seen, limited only to that exact time and space – just as the Heart Sutra reminds us that the only constant is change, and everything is related with no fixed source."

According to her [biography](#) artist Vicki Bennett has been working across the field of audio-visual collage, repurposing pre-existing footage to craft audio and video collages with an equally dark and witty take on popular culture since 1991. She sees sampling and collage as folk art sourced from the palette of contemporary media and technology, with all of the sharing and cross-referencing incumbent to a populist form. Embedded in her work is the premise that all is interconnected and that claiming ownership of an "original" or isolated concept is both preposterous and redundant.

People Like Us (Bennett) have previously shown work at Tate Modern, Whitechapel Gallery, The Barbican, Centro de Cultura Digital, V&A, Sydney Opera House, Royal Albert Hall, Pompidou Centre, Venice Biennale, Maxxi and Sonar, and performed radio sessions for John Peel and Mixing It. The ongoing sound art radio show 'DO or DIY' on WFMU has had over a million "listen again" downloads. since 2003. The People Like Us back catalogue is available for free download hosted by UbuWeb.

Vicki Bennett explains her work in the 58 minute documentary ***Nothing Can Turn Into A Void – An Art Apart: People Like Us***

Gregory Scharpen interviews [Vicki Bennett](#)/People Like Us on KALX-FM

Wire Magazine Cover Story

Websites: [People Like Us](#) and *[Gone, Gone Beyond](#)*

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Gary Meyer started his first theater in the family barn when he was twelve-years-old. He directed a monster movie there and wanted to show it on the set. The hayloft became *The Above-the-Ground Theatre*, first screening dozens of 8mm

silent films with music arranged from his parents' record collection and then acquired 16mm sound projectors, presenting over 250 films along with live productions, concerts, lectures, workshops and the publication of a literary/arts/satire zine, "Nort!" and a film newsletter, "Ciné."

Meyer saw all of the ultra widescreen Cinerama films when they came out and wanted to try his own experiments, creating multimedia surroundings for live theater, producing light shows for rock concerts, projecting on the sides of buildings, and onto low clouds (resulting in the sheriff's office getting calls about aliens in the sky). A visit to [Expo '67](#) in Montreal exposed him to an array of expanded cinema concepts inspiring a college thesis proposing a fully immersive cinema experience where the viewer is floating in a sphere fully surrounded by image, sound, motion, mist, wind, smells, temperature shifts, etc. After studying film and journalism at SFSU he calls his first job as a booker for United Artists Theatres "grad school" that prepared him to co-found Landmark Theatres in 1975. It was the first national arthouse chain in the U.S. focused on creative marketing strategies to build loyal audiences for non-Hollywood fare. After the sale of Landmark, he consulted on many projects including Sundance Cinemas and the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Rose Cinemas, created several film festivals including the [Dockers Classically Independent Film Festival](#) and [Tube Film Festival for the X Games](#), and resurrected the 1926 Balboa Theatre in San Francisco. Meyer joined the Telluride Film Festival in 1998, becoming a Festival Co-Director in 2007-2014. He founded the online magazine, [EatDrinkFilms.com](#) in April 2014.

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