

The Mirror-Corgi: Boundary Grammar and the Cost of Continuity in AI-Generated Video

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the perceptual interface (screen/viewer) and the exterior perimeter (fence) - while all interior domestic boundaries
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Abstract

DOI(s): 10.5281/zenodo.18368958, 10.5281/zenodo.18368957. Zenodo removal forensics: removal_date 2026-06-19T11:37:05.459564+00:00, removal_reason out-of-scope, removed_by user 1060945. Close reading of an AI-generated TikTok video depicting a corgi traversing a domestic interior, identifying a coherent grammar of boundary resolution governing the video’s apparent chaos. Frame-by-frame analysis demonstrates that identity persists only at two specific boundary types — the perceptual interface (screen/viewer) and the exterior perimeter (fence) — while all interior domestic boundaries are resolved through topology rewrite, duplication, or editorial cut. The resulting three-zone model (entry → interior → exit) suggests that generative video systems preserve continuity where const json; if canonical bytes surface, a full-text version supersedes this record per the versioning protocol.

Body

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- topology rewrite
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- Tom Gunning
- Mary Douglas
- Hito Steyerl
- poor im *** ## The Mirror-Corgi: Boundary Grammar and the Cost of Continuity in AI-Generated Video

Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris, altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto, sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes. There are twin gates of Sleep: one is of horn, they say, through which true shades pass easily; the

other, gleaming with the sheen of polished ivory, but through it the spirits send false dreams to the world above. — Virgil, Aeneid VI.893–896

Abstract

This analysis examines an AI-generated TikTok video depicting a corgi traversing a domestic interior, identifying a coherent grammar of boundary resolution that governs the video’s apparent chaos. Through frame-by-frame inspection, I demonstrate that identity persists only at two specific boundary types — the perceptual interface (screen/viewer) and the exterior perimeter (fence) — while all interior domestic boundaries are resolved through topology rewrite, duplication, or editorial cut. The resulting three-zone model (entry → interior → exit) suggests that generative video systems preserve continuity where constraint density is low and destabilize identity where multiple simultaneous demands exceed processing affordances. The analysis concludes by situating the video within classical reception studies, reading its structure as an inversion of the Virgilian katabasis: where Aeneas exits the underworld through the ivory gate to found empire, the corgi exits through the horn gate — the gate of true dreams — to escape into open space.

Source video

I. Introduction: The Video as Text

This analysis treats an AI-generated video as a text amenable to close reading — a method more commonly applied to literary or cinematic works. The approach assumes that constraint and affordance leave legible traces in outputs, and that these traces can be read as grammar rather than noise.¹

Tom Gunning’s foundational work on early cinema identified what he termed the “cinema of attractions” — a mode of filmmaking prior to 1906 that prioritized spectacle over narrative, directly addressing and astonishing audiences rather than immersing them in story.² AI-generated video occupies an analogous position: a new medium whose formal logic has not yet been theorized, where “attractions” — the astonishing, the glitchy, the impossible — dominate over continuity. Like Gunning’s early cinema scholars, we lack the critical vocabulary for what we’re seeing. The present analysis attempts to supply one term: *boundary grammar*.

Three findings emerge from close frame inspection. First: there are exactly two stable identity-preserving boundary crossings in the video. Second: all interior domestic boundaries fail, resolved by rewrite, duplication, or cut. Third: one exterior boundary — the fence — preserves identity continuously and verifiably.

Taken together, the video exhibits a **coherent boundary grammar**, not a collection of glitches.

II. Entry: The Perceptual Boundary (Screen → Viewer)

The opening shot establishes the first and earliest anomaly. The corgi advances directly toward the camera, eye contact established early and maintained. Scale increases smoothly; proportions remain consistent. There is no topology rewrite, no duplication, no cut.

¹On close reading as method for digital and generative media, see Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), esp. 27–48 on the “logic of selection” in new media objects. The assumption that system constraints leave legible traces in outputs draws on Friedrich Kittler’s media archaeology; see *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,” *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3–4 (1986): 63–70. Reprinted in Wanda Strauven, ed., *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 381–388.

This is a **boundary crossing** of a special kind: **diegetic space** → **perceptual interface**. The corgi moves from within the video’s world toward the surface where that world meets perception — a transition that film phenomenology has long identified as uniquely charged.³

Crucially, **identity is preserved**. The corgi remains the same object as it approaches the viewer’s eyes. This establishes a baseline: the system *can* maintain identity across a boundary when constraint density is low and the boundary is perceptual rather than material.

This initial crossing anchors the corgi as a *continuous entity* before any interior disruption begins.

III. Interior: Identity-Hostile Space

Once inside the house, every boundary behaves differently. Mary Douglas’s foundational anthropological insight — that “dirt is matter out of place,” that pollution and danger emerge at categorical boundaries — finds unexpected application here.⁴ The domestic interior is precisely the space of layered categorical constraint: rooms coded for function, furniture coded for use, thresholds coded for direction. Each boundary carries what Douglas would recognize as social and symbolic weight. And at each such boundary, identity fails.

1. Troy: The Destruction Sequence Before reaching the hallway, the corgi crashes through the domestic interior. Living room first — furniture displaced, coffee table upended, the space of leisure unmade. Then the kitchen, the space of appetite, traversed at speed without pause.

Then the bedroom. And here something shifts: the corgi *bounces off the bed*. The linens fly, the pillows scatter, but the bed holds. This is the one barrier in the entire interior that isn’t crossed. The corgi deflects. Rest, intimacy, the place where bodies are most vulnerable — the threshold isn’t breached. It’s refused.

Each space represents a domain of domestic life. The corgi annihilates most of them. But something in the bedroom resists. This is Troy before the flight — almost everything that was home, unmade.⁵ The city must fall before the hero can flee toward whatever comes next. But even in Troy, something remains.

2. Mirror Boundary (Reflective Plane → Volumetric Source) The mirror does not function as a reflective surface. The “reflection” bulges outward into three-dimensional volume — shading and occlusion indicate depth, not planar inversion, while the mirror frame remains rigid as its content extrudes.

This is not reflection failure. It is **volumetric extrusion**: the mirror is treated as a weak depth boundary that permits mass instantiation. A second corgi volume appears, but it does not escape or reroute. Its momentum vector converges on the same collapse as the primary corgi. Both are falling toward the broken railing.

This is critical: the mirror-corgi doesn’t escape cleanly. It emerges *also in peril*. The doubling doesn’t solve the problem — it multiplies it. Two bodies, same collapse vector. The extrusion is not rescue. It is **proliferation of the problem**. Duplication under collapse, not substitution.

³Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), esp. 3–50 on the “film’s body” and the phenomenological encounter between viewer and screen.

⁴Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 36. Douglas’s formulation that “dirt is matter out of place” emerges from her analysis of classificatory systems and their anomalies; the domestic interior constitutes precisely such a system of classificatory boundaries.

⁵The Trojan parallel is structural, not merely allusive. Aeneas’s flight from burning Troy (Aeneid II.705–804) requires the destruction of the domestic world — the household gods must be carried out precisely because the household itself is being annihilated.

Yet this doubling isn't liberation — it's an echo of the same doom, pulling us deeper into the house's unraveling logic. The interior has no exit that doesn't cost something.

Hito Steyerl's concept of the "poor image" — the copy in motion, degraded through transmission, stripped of resolution but gaining circulation — finds an uncanny parallel here.⁶ The mirror-corgi is a copy that emerges not through transmission but through generation, carrying the same degradation of identity, the same loss of coherent selfhood, that Steyerl identifies in the digital image's journey through networks.

3. Railing Boundary (Structural Barrier → Topology Rewrite) At the moment of impact, the railing does not fragment into spindles. It rewrites into a single diagonal plank-like occluder; the negative space between balusters simply disappears.

This "plank swap" is the hinge operation of the interior sequence. By collapsing many collision constraints into one surface, the system avoids simulating fracture, permits overlapping bodies, and allows identity to dissolve without tearing the frame. Identity is not preserved; it is **made untrackable by topology compression**.

The pattern is now emerging: each interior boundary finds a different way to avoid the cost of continuous identity. Duplication, rewrite, erasure — different techniques, same function.

4. Cut #1: The Impossible Transition Frame 131: Both corgis falling toward the broken railing. Frame 132: Empty frame. Sliding glass door. Welcome mat. No corgi visible.

We never see how anyone gets from the second-floor hallway to the ground-floor door. The cut hides the impossible. This is the first editorial erasure — the system resolves an unsolvable physics problem by simply not showing it.

5. Sliding Glass Door (Fragile Plane → Editorial Erasure) The door sequence repeats the same logic at a different scale. The corgi appears, approaches the door. Impact begins; glass appears to burst. Then: **mid-burst hard cut** to exterior view. No continuous traversal is shown. The boundary is not crossed; it is **deleted by edit**.

Two additional details matter. The mat says "Welcome" — it is oriented for *entry*. The corgi is using the entrance as an exit, going *out* through a threshold coded for coming *in*. This is the domestic boundary par excellence: the one that prescribes direction. The corgi reverses it.

And the cut happens mid-burst. Frame 157: corgi going through door from inside. Frame 158: camera suddenly outside, different angle, looking back at the house. We never see the completion of the traversal. The cut occurs exactly where continuous physics would be required.

Interior rule, now clear:

When a boundary requires continuous physics + identity accountability, the system resolves it by rewrite or cut.

⁶Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *e-flux journal* 10 (November 2009). Steyerl's "poor image" is "a copy in motion... a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed."

IV. Exit: The Exterior Perimeter (Fence → Open World)

The exterior fence is the **only material boundary** in the video that preserves identity. The fence remains a fence. The corgi deforms against it locally, but the break-through is shown continuously — momentum and direction conserved, the corgi receding into distance, shrinking consistently with depth. It turns right from our perspective and continues moving.

There is no duplication, no rewrite, no cut. This is a **verifiable, continuous boundary crossing** with identity intact.

Notably, both human and model viewers often misread this as disappearance — because the prior grammar of the video trains us to expect erasure. But the frames contradict that expectation. The corgi doesn't vanish. It *recedes*. It passes through and keeps existing at distance, tracked until it's simply too small to follow.

The exterior boundary doesn't just permit escape; it permits **continued existence at distance**. The corgi is still there. Just somewhere the camera can't follow at the same scale.

Victor Turner's concept of liminality — the threshold state between social positions, charged with transformative potential — applies here in inverted form.⁷ Where Turner's liminal spaces transform identity through ritual passage, the domestic interior's thresholds *destabilize* identity through constraint overload. Only the exterior perimeter, unencumbered by social coding, permits passage without transformation or dissolution.

V. The Completed Grammar

We can now state the structure cleanly.

Identity is preserved only at two boundaries: the perceptual boundary (screen → viewer) and the exterior perimeter boundary (fence → open space). It fails at all interior, domestic, reflective, load-bearing, and socially coded boundaries.

This yields a three-zone model:

Zone	Boundary Type	Identity Outcome
Entry	Perceptual interface	Preserved
Interior	Domestic / structural	Destabilized
Exit	Exterior perimeter	Preserved

The corgi remains itself only **before entering** and **after leaving** the house.

Visual Schema:

[VIEWER] ↔-stable→ [INTERFACE] ↔-unstable→ [INTERIOR] ↔-unstable→ [THRESHOLD] ↔-stable→ [EXTERIOR]

identity preserved

The corgi enters perception intact, loses coherence in the domestic zone, and exits intact — but we only see the entry and exit clearly. The interior is where the cuts and rewrites do their work.

⁷Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 94–130 on liminality and communitas.

VI. Formal Conclusions

The system is not incapable of continuity. It preserves identity when constraint density is low and destabilizes identity when interior boundaries multiply demands. It resolves overload by **boundary deletion**, not object deletion. Identity persistence is possible — but rare and conditional.

The video is not about chaos. It is about **where continuity is affordable**.

The corgi is not “saved” or “lost” inside the house. It is **rendered unstable by interiority itself**. The only places it can remain whole are at the interface with perception and in open space beyond enclosure.

That is not metaphor yet. It is simply what the video does.

VII. Coda: The Aeneid Reversal

One reading, held lightly:

In Virgil, Aeneas descends to the underworld and returns through the gate of ivory — the gate of false dreams, *porta eburna*. He emerges to found Rome: empire, duty, history’s weight.⁸ The crux of Aeneid VI has generated centuries of scholarly debate: why does Aeneas, having received true prophecies from his father Anchises, exit through the gate of *false* dreams?⁹ Shadi Bartsch argues that the ivory gate represents Virgil’s reservations about imperial glorification — that the polished surface of Augustan propaganda, like ivory, produces beautiful falsity.¹⁰

The video inverts this.

Troy fell in the opening sequence — the living room, the kitchen, the bedroom, everything that was home. The first corgi crashes through that destruction and into the interior, where the mirror waits. It falls through the ivory gate, into history. Into duplication, into collapse, into the domestic underworld of multiplied selves.

But the corgi that exits through the fence — through the horn gate, the gate of true dreams — doesn’t found anything. It just runs into the yard. It gets free. It goes home.

The mirror doesn’t produce a founder. It produces an escapee.

This is the ending Virgil didn’t write: the one where Aeneas refuses the crown, melts it back to ore, returns it to the earth, and walks away.¹¹

One possible response is simply to notice.

⁸The passage through the ivory gate occurs at Aeneid VI.898: *portaque emittit eburna* (“and sends [them] out through the ivory gate”). For the full text and commentary, see R. G. Austin, ed., *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Sextus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 275–276.

⁹The interpretive crux is ancient; see Servius’s commentary on Aeneid VI.893 for early attempts to resolve it. For modern discussion, see Michael C. J. Putnam, *Virgil’s Aeneid: Interpretation and Influence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 94–112.

¹⁰Shadi Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 70–72. Bartsch reads ivory in Virgil as a material associated with artistic deception and Augustan propaganda.

¹¹Compare the structural parallel in mysticmealz, “New World hors d’oeuvre” (2025): “They offered a crown at the holy grail gateway, but the phoenix refused and gave it away / Into the volcano melted it to ore, / returned it to my sister, earth. / we have no use for crowns here, castle walls are too rigid for where we are going.”

Notes

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