

The Plasmatic Image

Experimental practices between Film and Architecture

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The fact is that the new spiritual automatism and new psychological automata depend on an aesthetic before depending on technology. It is the time-image which calls for an original regime of images and signs before electronics spoils them or in contrast relaunches it.

Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 2 - The Time Image

The task of Kafka the writer was perhaps no different than that of "K." the land surveyor in The Castle and the accused in The Trial. It was, on the one hand, to chart the topography of this peculiar emergent world, to discover the laws of how things combine, and on the other, to trace by trial and error the mysterious principle of its functioning. But at the same time no sketch or figure is anywhere offered up, unless it be one of these deliberately scrambled and inscrutable images like the officers blueprints for the inscription apparatus in the Penal Colony. For in Kafka, the task is no longer to trace the visible form of the world by recourse to an external schema or representational mode, but to somehow espouse its very substance, to become of the world by becoming one with it.

Sanford Kwinter, Architectures of Time

Abstract

With the advent of the digital revolution, architectural drawing has been drawn further away from its origin as a medium for reflection, and towards an even higher degree of nondescript processing of information. This development has been lamented elsewhere, but criticism tends to forget that it is exactly the present state of technology that allow us to relaunch, rethink and invent new practices of architectural drawing, while aligning it with similar practices in cinema and beyond, that are able to grasp the ever increasing flux of what Scott Lash has labelled *intensive culture* (Lash 2010).

In our most recent work, at the programme for Architecture, Space and Time, we have made a collaborative workshop involving both architects and filmmakers. In this respect we have identified a number of 'scapes' which can potentially dimension and distribute different flows and combinations of data. This landscape operate on a continuous *before* and *after*, as a necessary point of departure for a vital and actualized handling of text, memory, drawing and moving image in a contemporary context of 'transvisuality' (Kristensen et al. 2015a) that encompass virtual intensities and the extensity of 'Big Data'.

Introduction

In his famous books on Cinema, philosopher Gilles Deleuze theorized on cinema's initial failure as both technique and medium by pondering the question; 'what was Cinema's position at the outset?' Deleuze came to the conclusion that cinema's failure in the first twenty or so years of its existence, presented a double-figure, since neither its analytic or synthetic qualities were in demand by science and the Arts respectively (Deleuze 2005: 6-7). Today this insight seems astounding *and* perplexing, recognizing that such a distinction between science being analytic and the arts being synthetic, seems absurdly redundant. Today science fundamentally relies on moving images, in its ever increasing 'combinat' of surveillance, computation and

warfare (Lury 2014), while the Arts have moved beyond any idea of unity or re-assemblage of the post industrial thought complex.

To echo Deleuze, we might add, that the idea of the *exposed* and printed negative, which even Deleuze himself took for granted, as an *Original*, informed and restricted a great many traits of classical and modern cinema. That the so-called 'jump cut' and the reuse of material or enlargements of framings ('pistol-cutting') were considered vulgar, was not only derived from the technical problems involved in using the same piece of negative twice, but in a whole ethics of unity, which modern cinema sought to warp but never forsook. With the advent of (MTV) digital editing in the early eighties, the economic cost of the single individual cut in the negative print, went down proportionally with the pace of editing going up. From then on the ubiquity of the Pixel replaced the singularity of the negative.

Today this is all in the annals of history. There is no more negative; exposed, printed or otherwise. The pixel plate of Digital Cinema is wholly analytic and wholly synthetic at the same time. When Deleuze grouped different practices of cinema as either solid, fluent or gaseous (Bogue 2003: 105), we might in turn discuss the prevailing state of affairs as 'plasmatic' (Meldgaard 2013: 172-182), owing to the ever increasing flux of media, images and motion pictures *outside* the realm of cinema. Images are no longer bound by what Patricia Pisters coined 'a camera consciousness' (Pisters 2003: 218-219), nor linked to 'the light chamber' that Roland Barthes (1981) made an essential of the artificial image, moulded or modulated (Deleuze 2005: 25) as photography or moving image.

Transvisuality

But what might define such a 'plasmatic' image? First of all we have to ask, what constitutes an environment where they might appear and how we go about researching them? Perhaps it is due time that we stopped asking images about their meaning and focus instead on how they are being generated and how they operate. The discourse of the 'transvisual' offers this ambition, realizing that images are no longer a representative of power, but a fully governing and operational strata in it self. (Kristensen et al. 12-52) Even Henri Bergson seems to have noted this growing tendency of the *Index*, a moulded or modulated image, when he famously used it as a metaphor: 'Photography, if there is such a thing, is already snapped, already shot, in the very interiority of things and for all the points in space' (Bergson 2005: 38). Today visuality moves away from and beyond traditional borders of representation, power and meaning. Visuality is fully able, to create these stratifications as internal operations, within its own combines, while coaxing, connecting and creating independent transversals through media, culture, economics, politics, geographies and zones of privacy. The 'Transvisual' is an all-encompassing plethora of image-matter akin to the *Chiasm* of Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Not the word, but the Image becomes (the) *Flesh* of the world. Ultimately this reversal of the 'facialism' of the 'White wall-Black hole' system, means that bodies, no longer let themselves be imprinted on Images, but that Images now imprint themselves as self-governing and sufficient bodies. (Deleuze, Guattari 2005: 211-200) This is where the 'when' of genesis and the 'how' of operation become crucial to understanding post-industrial mediascape and the ever-increasing flux of unrestrained image production.

Hence the visual material accompanying this text is not only derived from cinema, but from a combined effort of filmmakers and architects alike, to negotiate different 'scapes' of memory, affect, necessity and desire as we draw transversals and construct chronotopes, which in turn generate an artificial landscape built from textual assemblages, cinematic sequences and diagrammatic constructs of drawing. Easily we might conclude that cinema has moved away from the 'movie house', and that architecture today is cinematic, topological and sequential, but more importantly seems the shared difference of the frame and the essential discussion of how

the visual domain is constituted today, what is its basic framework, what is the *Architecture* of this ‘ocean of formlessness’?

The Plasmatic Image

In many ways our current understanding and grasp of the state of the Image in contemporary culture seem as limited and conventional as early 20th century concepts of what cinema actually was and was capable of (Kracauer 2004; Deleuze 2005: 253). Have we actually remembered to ask of the pixel what more it can do? As Godard said of montage, as he disobeyed the rule of reuse; it is much more and of a greater significance:

Montage is what made Cinema unique...The silent movie felt it very strongly and talked about it a lot. No-one found it. Griffith was looking for something like montage, he discovered the close-up. Eisenstein naturally thought that he had found montage... But by montage I mean something much more vast. (Lundemo 2004: 380)

The Plasmatic Image is the much more of Godard’s claim; the virtuality of what has not yet been cut, will be cut, cannot be cut. But it is “Trans-Vertovian”, in the sense that it is no longer the camera (and its inherent capability of montage) that extends the human eye and consciousness. No, the pixel exists on its own level, a difference in kind, since it does not *a priori* include traditional camera values or acts, like exposure, shot, take, lightning, speed, in any way. The plasmatic Image is no longer ‘a cloud of camera eyes’; it is in turn what constitutes *the Cloud*, as a computational necessity of that said digital entity.

Any inclusion or exclusion of current phenomena would be remote from this definition. Everything that could be exposed on a pixel plate, including what has, is and will be exposed, through acts of camera exposure, animation, manipulation, computation, falls within this definition; a montage in depth of the plate (layers) and a morphing in length of its duration (vectors). This can be observed in any current media production from advertising, apps, reality, gaming, documentary and to the remains of fiction itself: It is a ‘Volume Image’ (Meldgaard 2013:172-183), since it goes back to Space-Time volume of the brain as the screen of screens and it is informational in its ever increasing production of new visual strata as a plasmatic substitute for a new terrain. The plasmatic image is a landscaping or gardening of two distinct traits: layers in depths, morphing in lengths, while relying on the absolute “Out of Field”, that which is not cinema, that which could not occur as ‘image only’.

The Topology of Before and After

In the 2012 fall issue of *Theory, Society & Culture*, Lury, Parisi and Terranova, argue that culture itself has taken a topological turn. Not only is its various functions, economies, schemes and operations now governed by topologically driven informatics and data-mining, but the very *Gestalt*, i.e. the way society creates itself, has become topological (2012: 3-35). It could be argued that we are living in a new form of continuity, endlessly connecting through our gadgets and their combined *Informata* (i.e. informational strata), creating a novel and unprecedented *Lifeworld*, prone to new and only as yet to be seen laws of combination, alignment and transversality. In *Architectures of Time* Sanford Kwinter notoriously abandons design for a lengthy discussion of the work of writer Franz Kafka, and the ‘becoming topological of prose’:

It is in Kafka then that one may begin to speak not only of a new narrative order of space-time, but of a new topographical mode of writing. Problems of transmissibility and non-transmissibility, affiliation and separation, and of the complex relations of physical parts to (metaphysical) wholes now replace the traditional literary meditation of interiority: meaning, psychology, truth. (Kwinter 2001: 120-121)

In this respect topology plays an important part, both as reflective agent and as a way of operating within this 'New Nature' (Abraham 2009). Topology operates with a set of dimensions wherein certain properties remain or are kept relationally intact through different temporal and morphological changes. In this sense a property of a certain artistic material can be said to create a transversal, when it is allowed to operate and inform diverse layers, configurations and regions of a work of art.

In the pragmatic and concrete work with artistic produce, both in architecture and cinema, two topological parameters seem paramount, the 'Out of Field', i.e. that which is defined by being outside the space of the frame, and the 'Before and After', i.e. that which is defined by being outside the timeframe. Ultimately this might lead to an aesthetics, which could be said to be sequential in the sense that it operates as a mathematical function within a given set. A banal example of this would be how $\sqrt{2}$ operates as a sequence in the group of natural numbers, while creating the relational aesthetics of the standard DIN A format. Stemming from this idea we have tried to conceive of the sequence shot and its relation to its context (Troiani, Campbell 2015: 7-16) as a *dark precursor* for a much more radical aesthetics of irrational sequences working in diverse media and creating intensive environments.

Issues of Methodology

In his famous film *Stalker* director Andrei Tarkovsky (1979) lets his protagonist find his way in 'the Zone' by throwing a bolt tied with a white piece of cloth. This well known 'throw' of the skilled practitioner and the connotations of 'the Zone' has been seen as a model for creativity, but we might also look at it as a method where all other methods or systematics fail in their rationality. For anyone involved in the processes and production of art, it is evident that such a thing as a method cannot be conceived, since Art relies on singular expressions that cannot be arrived at by repeatable means or re-enactments of formulae. Art is not a product, which derives from a method, but is the product of an event of which it is in itself an inseparable element. Methods tend to reproduce what is already known by a limitation of possibilities while the production of art aims at producing that, which is only virtually a possibility, the emergence of the truly *New* (Deleuze 2002: 96-97).

Hence the teaching of Art, and the research into artistic image production faces some radical methodological issues. How do you actually produce the 'New', and, perhaps much more poignant to teachers and researchers alike, how do you recognize it when it does happen? In the well known text *Der Essay als Form*, Theodor W. Adorno describes the literary form of an essay as specific '*Erkenntnis*', i.e. knowledge where the issue of morphology of the textual matter itself arises, as intertwined between content and form. Adorno describes how a text can be written, which is not only reproducing thoughts, but which is actually in the process of thinking them. He describes this as a 'carpet of thought operations which creates its own critical density' (Adorno 1998: 107), a process of differentiation which the text tries to open up rather than hide. This is the process or practice, that most artists will recognize, not as a method, but as a form of practice: the production through a series of discrete operations of density in a given material, which in turn opens up for a variety of transversals and concrete fault lines, which give the final work its vibration and depth (Meldgaard 2013). Jean Luc Godard said this plainly when referring to his work on *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* / *Two or three things I know about her* (1967): 'If Cinema = Life, then $1+2+3=4$ ' (Godard 1972: 240). In addition to the known (and repeatable) methods of rationality " $1+2=3$ ", we must find new modes of counting, 1, 2, 3, 4..., new ways and practices of forcing us by ourselves to think and produce the 'New'.

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