BADco.

Responsibility for Things Seen

A Reader

ed. **Petar Milat**
with
Giuliana Bruno,
Peter Szendy,
Stephen Zepke

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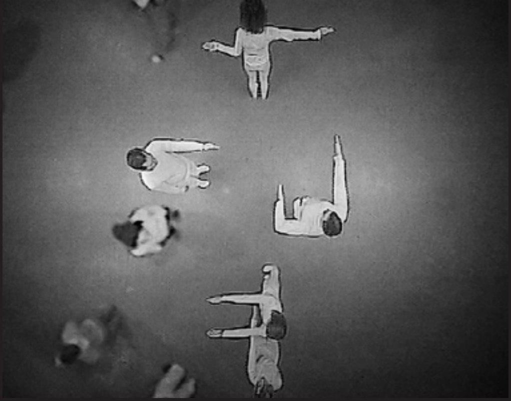

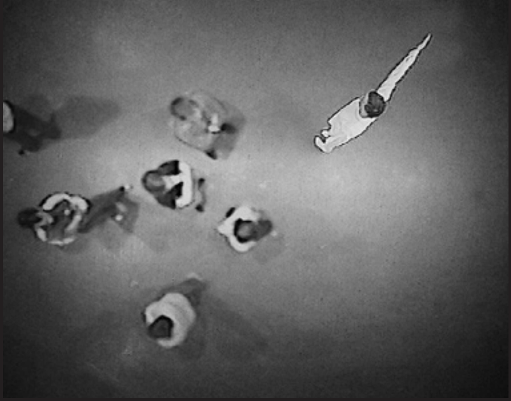

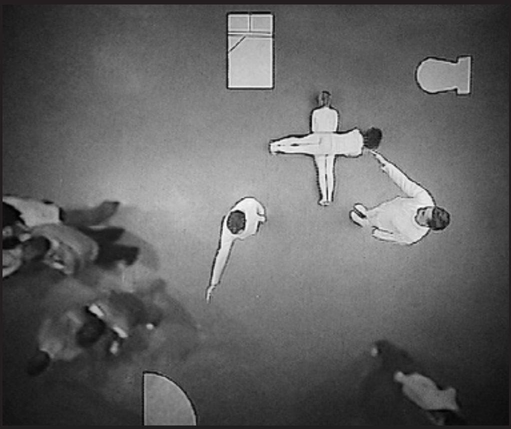

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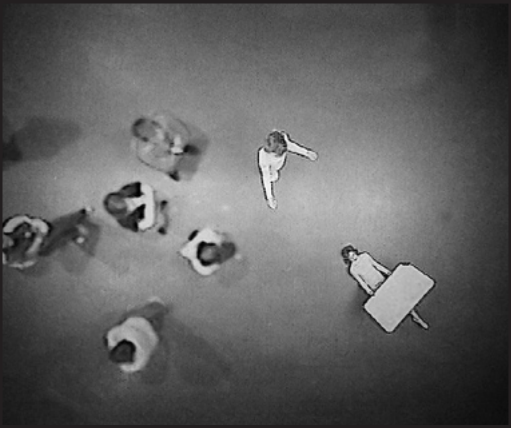

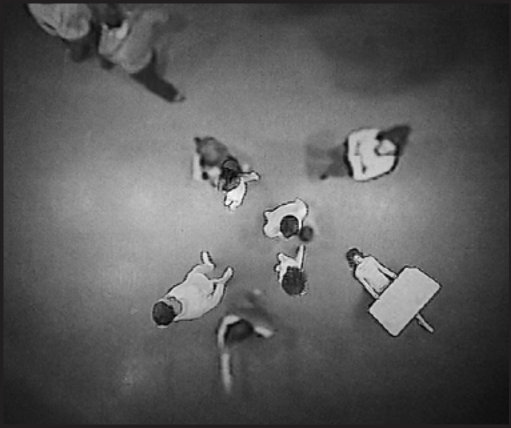

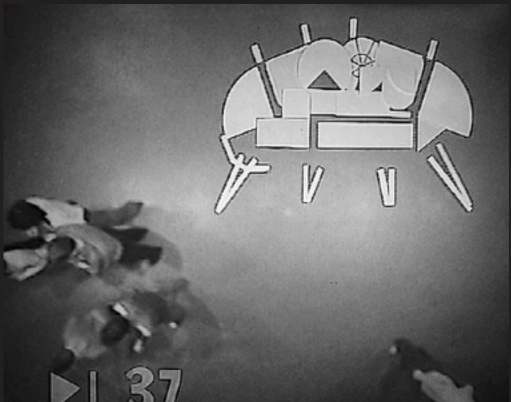
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Learning Processes with Unlikely Outcomes (Observing BADco.)

Petar Milat

In what follows I won't try to respond directly to the provocation that BADco. presents and to their invitation to edit this accompanying booklet for the Venice Biennale. Reacting outrightly to BADco.'s provocation would betray this collective's efforts and sincere intentions, as it would try to domesticate their intellectual endeavour within a specific frame – which is something absolutely opposed to BADco.'s working attitude. A working attitude constituted not just by the artists' proverbial anxiety of influence, but foremost by a highly sensitive (*aesthetic*) and a double-coded (*abstract*) treatment of any classificatory procedures. And if you would like to have any designation attached to BADco., you have to pick up two prefixes: *meta-* and *trans-*. Both of them indicating a displacement – beyond and across. Still, those displacements of beyond and would suffice to fuel imagination and to put BADco. in a role and the easily dealt comfort-zone of today's *artists' artists*, if the displacements of *meta-* and *trans-* were not an intellectual disturbance and annoyance of incessant and simultaneous making things fuzzy and intelligible.

Speaking thus of BADco. has to proceed obliquely, always bearing in mind that a gesture of localizing BADco. into a certain context will be fooled by the artists' mimicry and ability of adaptation: BADco. are just so very fast in taking new appearances and any interpretative stance dealing with them comes necessarily late, at the moment comprehensive understanding of what they are doing is rendered useless by their future metamorphosis.

In a way, speaking about BADco. has to take the risk of a chance-encounter, a future event not warranted by any theory or practice, nor by any calculation whatsoever. And if

at some point you believe to be standing on stable ground from where you can pass an objective judgment on them: they have already been there and have contaminated the position you occupy. There is no *in flagrante* with BADco.

So let's forget them, *this company of anonymous authors*. Take a chance of misrecognizing them.

What does it mean to learn in the age of immaterial labour?

Advocating non-representational practices sooner or later faces the question of how to learn, how to learn together. If you, like Rancière, label learning within the representational frame as stultification and dismiss it, you will have a hard time putting forth alternative ways of making and acquiring knowledges which will not remain on a declaratory level, thus being just more of the same. Learning, if it is to become a *socialization without initiation*, has to break away from a paternalism of the well-intended; it has to become bad and malicious in opening up things and peoples onto a plane of their mutual knowability.

Almost a decade ago it was Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude* that immensely influenced discourse in the arts by linking notions of virtuosity and (bio)political production. As much as Virno's arguments were important, they were so well-received exactly because they fit nicely into a paradigm of *Hungerkünstler*. As if the virtuosistic *know-how* created by multitudes that Virno speaks about and its immaterial character amount only to an updated status of what was once called *brotlose Kunst*. Dwelling on the insight how the unproductive has been put to work by new regimes of production was overshadowed by the underlining presumption that Virno's talk of immaterial virtuosistic *know-how* before anything else will signify a matter-of-fact that as soon as new knowledges and practices emerge they are already appropriated (or, *stolen*) by the capitalist machinery. As if the only lesson learnt was a new gesture of self-victimizing *pathos* when confronted with the *dark side's* ability to appropriate (or, to *dispossess*) goods created in common.

Going beyond the immediate, the auto-flagellant lesson of *know-how* stolen meant to look after procedures of learning that would allow for innovative action to emerge. Curiously enough, this move of going beyond and across, this gesture of *meta-* and *trans-*, has been supplemented by Virno in his subsequent writings by another couple of prefixes, seemingly at odds with the former pair: *sub-* and *semi-*.

Or, to quote Virno: *Far from being situated above or outside of norms, human creativity is even sub-normative: it manifests itself uniquely in the lateral and improper paths that we happen to inaugurate when trying to keep to a de-*

termined norm. Paradoxical as it may seem, the state of exception originally resides in the only apparently obvious activity that Wittgenstein names 'rule-following'. This entails that every humble application of a rule always contains in itself a fragment of a 'state of exception'. Wit brings this fragment to light.

Human creative action exemplified in jokes is sub-normative in Virno's argument because jokes show best the fallacious nature of every particular application of a rule. In the sense that jokes are exactly those proper language-tools representing the incommensurable gap which divides the rule or the norm from its application or case, i.e. an unbridgeable void which separates the grammar from its usage. The prefix *sub-* tells so much that the actual instantiation of a norm, if it has to follow the norm, has to betray the very norm – not in the name of some *extra*-normal domain – but in the name of an application devoid of any normative prescription. Such a defect or fallacious normativity is fundamental for Virno's understanding of human praxis, but one aspect is crucial. Namely, that such a paradoxical sub-normative applying of a norm for Virno is absolute. Which means that there is no remainder left (e.g. some unfulfilled content) after the norm has been actually applied. It is just through this *sub-* or fallacious form that a norm can be applied, in the sense of a paradoxical and absolute division of the norm and its *non-* or unlikely related instantiations.

The witticism of the intellect that Virno sketches in such a way boldly opposes the view many will regard the philosopher of having made prominent in his grammar of the multitude. It is not about updating the figure of *Hungerkünstler* and making it a general metaphor for ways how nowadays societies work; it is about failing procedures without leftovers.

Going *meta-* and *trans-* will mean to go *sub-* and *semi-*; it will mean to adhere to something Alfred Sohn-Rethel once called *the ideal of things broken down*. Like in Naples where machinery will start to function exactly at the moment when it has become properly non-functional or broken down, Sohn-Rethel will claim virtuosistic action is at its most intense when failing, thus disrupting its becoming immediately functional within the processes of its working out.

But there is more attached to this paradoxical ideal, I will claim: to learn within the horizon of things broken down means as much as to make the existing anthropologies explode. It will mean to take a lesson from non-human agents (machines, gadgets, technologies, whatever); to take a lesson from their strange state of failure.

There have been theories around that will say (authoritarian) societal regimes function by way of making people submissive and ignorant. Granted. There are also theories circulating claiming how much technological progress (and

its success) has been beneficiary and instrumental to repression. Granted. But there are just a few attempts to think emancipation (this is another word for *socialization without initiation*) out of ways people, things, procedures, or whatever fails.

This should not add up to a concentrating on catastrophic technological failures and their impact on human societies: it is not a question of lessons drawn from such *disaster management*; it is not an issue to stage a tragedy of an anarcho-primitivist sort. Emancipatory education in the age of immaterial labour and its sympathetic intellectual witticism as the force of the new are rather some sort of refurbished non-human oriented comedy of errors.

What does it mean to communicate a problem?

Bojana Cvejić has elsewhere convincingly pointed out the importance of the concept “problem” for BADco. Taking up Bojana’s intervention I will try to give another turn in responding to the question of what learning means today.

First of all, a “problem” folds onto itself. Problems are problematic. They are problematic insofar they are problems in communicating, transferring themselves. A problem therefore is always already disguised, given just in a problematic (*failing-failed*) format. Never pure or simple. Never totally coherent or present. Ironic.

What does it mean to communicate a problem? Within a performance? As performance? Inside the performance as problem-mediating communication?

Wittgenstein will say, *think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a ruler, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screw. --- The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities.) Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their application is not presented to us so clearly.*

What can a performance communicate? – It is, at first, an immediate communication of mediatic uniformity to which different, discrete elements have to conform because a situation (*live-performance*) requires so. A supposed simultaneity of units is both the medium (i.e. codifying different and divergent units) and the message itself (i.e. its minimal and primary content). In a paradoxical fashion, a performance (through its performative being-there, its being live) communicates nothing else than just its being there, its format or genre. Performance, alas, communicates no singular gesture, tone or an image, but the sheer fact that it is “a performance”, a happenstance that through its machinations will

create a uniform medium of communication, notwithstanding the different pragmatics to which the elements included (gestures, tones, images, etc.) subscribe.

Or else, if it is not the *liveness* of the performance that is being communicated, – a projection of coherence upon a heterogeneous multitude of usages and tools – is it not the *effect* that is being communicated in a performance? *Gesamtkunstwerk*-like, immersive effect negating a barrier among the author/s and the recipient/s, where a nominalist uniformity in the former case ("performance is a performance is a performance ...") has been substituted for the material-affective uniformity of an effect in the latter case, where it has become a question of intensities and of being either overwhelmed by them or indifferent to them.

A third set of performances, neither a tautology nor an immersion, might be performance as an *aesthetic problem-related event*. A problem is set up that seeks its explicit execution and solution during the performance – author/s and recipient/s attuned and directed to a specific aesthetic problematization rather than to the performance's liveness (as its homogenous medium) or its impact (as its effect).

Cards are laid out, criteria set. Re/shuffling the tools – gestures, tones, images – follows a sober agenda: to come to terms with an inherent (aesthetic) provocation. Associating and dis-associating the performance's elements is neither synaesthetic nor cathartic, but *problematic-problematizing*. Insofar as the performance is staged, its problematizing logic is scenic, or rather, the performative scenic logic is more likely rhetorics. As rhetorics being both concerned with the multiple, divergent elements' connectibility and artist's hide-and-seek during the performance.

Performance zooms into a specific basic unit (a gesture, for example) just to find that it is divisible; that this unit is a nod for another, heterogenous kind of series and elements: a series of graphemes or tones or elements of stories. An operative hypothesis, an aesthetic problem is being processed in a fable-like manner, setting up a scene of relays of monads of perception with a definite starting and ending point but without certain moral.

To communicate a problem in the performance (as the performance) will be using a hammer as a saw or a soundbox. It will mean to use a dancer as a line of digital code, or a video-camera as a decorative plant. Communicating the problem will be mediatizing the medium. To perform in the theater of means without ends.

Learning by observing

To come to an end with this editorial, and just to tackle in passing the theme BADco. have chosen to present at the Biennale – *Responsibility for Things Seen*.

Fascinated by the notion of *swarm intelligence* BADco. have been almost since their beginnings eager to learn from birds, ants or insects. And let's not forget computer operating systems and languages, or space-ships.

They have taken seriously and responsibly provocations they have been exposed to. BADco. have taken those provocations *for real*, which for the artists primarily meant to question what the scope of reality is altogether.

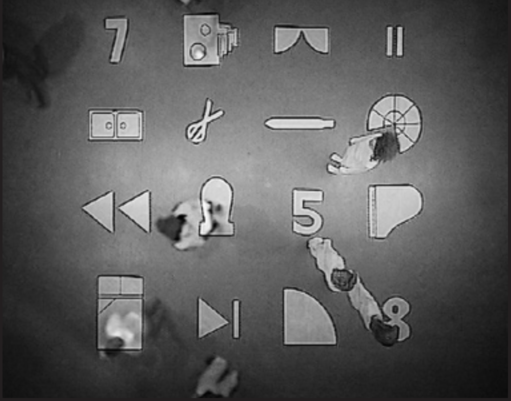
Lorraine Daston in her epistemological project has, among other things, taken up a centuries-long practice of bird-watching. Restating the importance that was attributed to experiments and observations within the modernist scientific methodology (i.e. experiments granted a far more essential role), Daston will go on to cite examples of how bird-watching, an amateur-like practice of observation, has both cut across the disciplines and has gone beyond the existing dispositifs of knowledge, by virtue of its sedimented attentions. Observing birds has thus become a virtuosity in a blink of an eye; a virtuosity of the *jiff* provoked by flocks of birds.

Adapting to birds observed watchers have themselves become bird-like. And if there is a thought-experiment allowed, *for real*: What have the birds learned observing those human virtuosi looking at them? In what ways have the humans provoked animals? Have birds become men-like?

Reversing and multiplying perspectives BADco. open up a space of reciprocal provocation, on uncertain grounds where no single instance has the privileged access to procedures of metamorphosis.

Within this mediatized theatre of change and its *multi-naturalist* procedures, you be sure that BADco. have done everything – out of immense responsibility – to become this booklet you hold, the room you now enter, the people you see and the birds you hear twittering.

It is now up to you to take your share, and to *become-BADco*. To share the company, for an instant, of images immemorial.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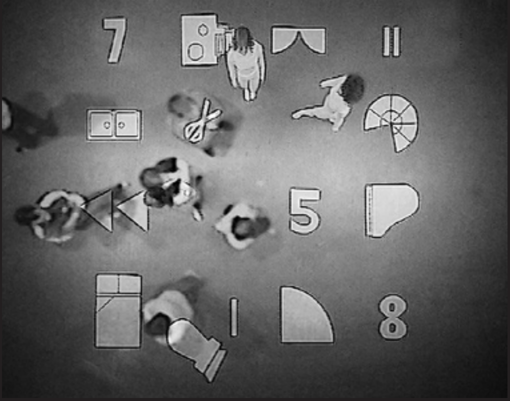
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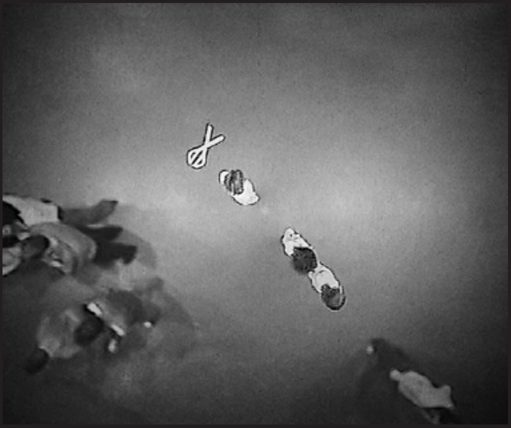

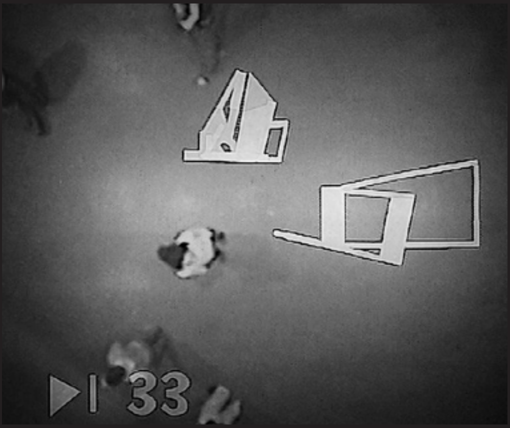
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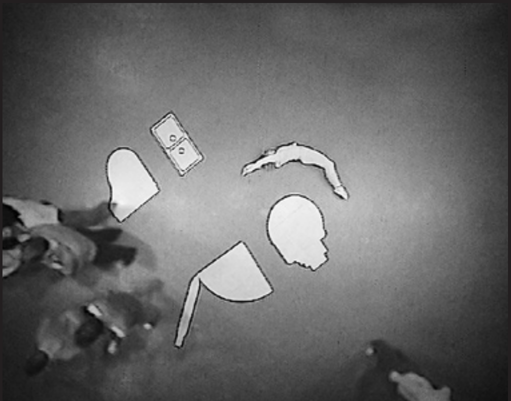

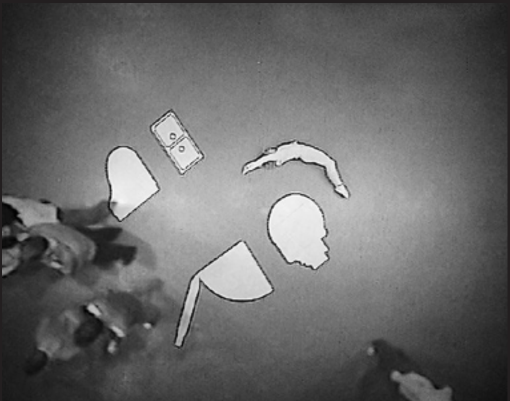

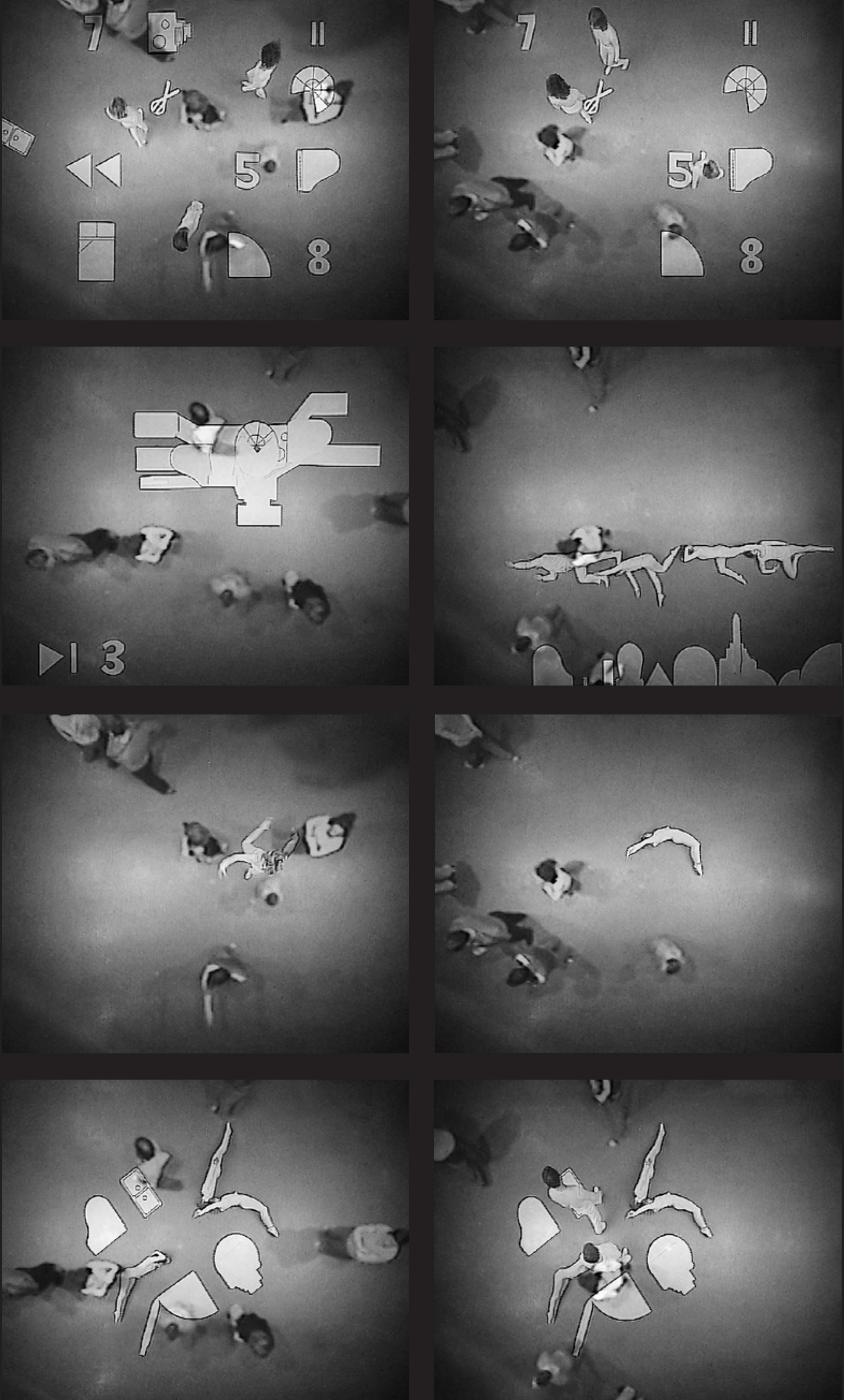
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Projections: The Architectural Imaginary in Art

Giuliana Bruno

> The history of architecture is a history of spatial feelings.
> —August Schmarsow

> The door . . . transcends the separation between the inner and the outer.
> —Georg Simmel

A window cuts out a new frame for looking. Walls put up barriers, but their borders easily crack. The perimeters of a room change into boundaries to be crossed. Doors open up new access, morphing into portals. An entrance way becomes a gateway to an inner world. A mirror shows specular prospects for speculation and reflection. Objects of furniture turn into lively objects of an interior design. A bed tells sweaty stories of love, lust, and dreams. The couch can couch new forms of dialogue and exchange. A staircase takes us up to a whole new level of intimate encounter, and we rise and fall along with it. Well, to tell the truth, we mostly fall. But then a washing machine rinses away the stain of pain. And, finally, the stovetop cooks up some great new life recipes. How can you resist? The offerings of this imaginary kitchen are deliciously hot. For here, in architectural space, you can taste morsels of the imagination.

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In the galleries of the museum we can encounter imaginative forms of building, taste the imagistic power of architecture, and be seduced by the subtle ways in which imaginary space

becomes projected on the surface of things. A widespread phenomenon is taking place in contemporary art: the media of art and architecture are coming closer together, converging in surface tension as they partake of common material ground. Art it is melting into spatial construction, and, as a consequence, architecture has become one of the most influential forms of imaging. A virtual version of architecture is increasingly produced in visual form, and we can witness creative architectural constructs and inventive ways of spatial thinking take shape on gallery walls, floors, and screens. The visual arts are intertwined with a particular "architecture": with its material foundation; that is to say, with our sense of space, urban identity, and experience. They have become sites for the building of our subjectivity and the dwelling of our imagination. We may call this phenomenon a display of the "architectural imaginary." It is an alluring concept, yet one whose definition is not at all obvious or easy to pin down. I will reflect on the notion and offer a conceptual navigational map of this particular space of projection: along the way, we will encounter a vast cultural "construction" that encompasses many realms of fabrication and layers of representation as it traverses the visual arts.

The Art of Imaging

What is an architectural imaginary? How is it fabricated? In unpacking the layers of the construction it is useful to begin by noting that image is inscribed in a spatial imaginary. Think of the city, whose existence is inseparable from its own image, for cities practically live in images. A city can be a canvas to be imaged and imagined, the result of a composite generative process that supersedes architecture per se and even actual building to comprise the way the place is viewed from a variety of perspectives. This includes the ways the city is rendered in different media: how it is photographed in still frames, narrated in literature as poem or tale, portrayed in paintings or drawings, or filmed and circulated in different forms of moving images. An image of the city emerges from this complex projective scenario: a process that makes urban space visible and perceivable. The city's image is thus creatively generated in the arts, and the city itself is compelled, in the end, to closely interact with these visual representations, becoming to some extent the product of an artistic panorama.

If we consider the history of urban space, we can see that it is inextricably connected to artistic forms of viewing. The city became historically imaged in the visual arts when paintings of city views were effectively recognized as an autonomous aesthetic category. In the late seventeenth century, following a growing interest in architectural forms, a flurry of urban images emerged in art, making the city a central protagonist. *Vedutismo* was an actual "art" of viewing. View painting did not simply portray the city; it essentially created a new aesthetics and mode for seeing. The genre, as practiced by Dutch artists, gave rise to the "art of describing."[01] This descriptive architectural gaze was intensely observational, and it developed further in later forms of urban observation. In the nineteenth century, the city re-entered the frame of art and enlarged its perimeter with panorama paintings. Perspectival frames exploded and expanded as the city filled the space of painting, extending it horizontally. Representing the life of the site in wide format, the urban panorama captured its motion in sequential vistas, narrative views, and more fluid time. In portraying the city as a panoramic subject of observation, these views contributed to establishing modernity's particular way of seeing.[02] Panorama paintings created "panoramic vision" and anticipated the work of pictures that would be brought about by the age of mechanical reproduction. With photography, it became possible to observe space at the actual moment it was captured. Later, with motion pictures, it became possible to map a spatio-temporal flow and fully experience a sense of space in visual art.

The Architectural Imaginary: Collective and Collecting Images

The image of the city is as much a visual, perceptual construction as it is an architectural one. This is because in one sense a place can only be understood in its "imageability"—the quality of physical space that evokes an image in the eye of the observer.[03] Although it is important to acknowledge this visibility, the image of the city nevertheless should not be seen as singularly optical or construed as a unifying vision. An architectural image is not a unique view, a still frame or a static construct, for it endlessly changes, shifts, and evolves in representation.[04] Pictures and visions are constantly generated in different media, and they, in turn, change the very image of the city. Art plays a crucial role in this process of constructing a mobile architectonics of space. Places are activated and constantly reinvented in art, which can give shape to a fictional universe of morphing fields and energetic alchemy. The fiction of a city develops along the artistic trajectory of its image-movement as cities become artistic afterimages projected on our own spatial unconscious.

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[01] See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

[02] See Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

[03] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

[04] Although Lynch pioneered a form of experiential understanding of the city, his view of the image of the city resulted in the unifying vision of "cognitive mapping." I argued for a different, fluid notion of the urban imaginary, more open to different forms of imagination, in my books *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), and *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007). On the architectural imaginary see also Andreas Huyssen, ed., *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalized Age*, 2009; and James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

This spatio-visual imaginary can only come into being across the course of time. An urban image is created by the work of history and the flow of memory. This is because the city of images comprises in its space all of its past histories, with their intricate layers of stories. The urban imaginary is a palimpsest of mutable fictions floating in space and residing in time. Mnemonic narratives condense in space, and their material residue seeps into the imaginative construction of a place. The density of historical and mnemonic interactions builds up the architectural imaginary of a city. This process becomes visible in the visual arts, which are capable of capturing temporality and memory in textural ways. Artworks can fabricate traces of existence and exhibit the sedimentation of time in their fabrics. In art, we can feel the texture of an image and the substance of a place when layered forms come to be visible on the surface and mnemonic coatings become palpable to our sensing. The veil of time, actual folds of history, and the vital fabric of memory can thus be "architected" in art, in the depth of surface, which can expose the density of time that becomes space.

In this sense, an architectural imaginary is a visual depository that is active: it is an archive open to the activities of digging, re-viewing, and re-visioning in art. In this urban archive, doors are always unlocked to the possibility of reimagining spaces, and archaeology here is not simply about going back into the past; rather it enables us to look in other directions, and especially forward into the future, in active retrospective motion. This is because the urban archive contains more than what has actually occurred or already happened. It is made up of trajectories of image-making that are varied, some not yet existing or materialized, others not even achievable. This construct contains even the unbuilt or the unrealized. In other words, the urban imaginary contains all kinds of potentialities and projections, which are creative forms of imagination. It is this potentially projective form of imaging that creates new urban archaeologies in art and makes the visual matrix that is the city a moving one.

The image of a city is a moving one because it is also formed collectively as a product of cultural experience. It does not emerge or evolve as an individual act but rather depends on how the site is imagined and experienced by a collectivity, which is made of real and virtual inhabitants. As Walter Benjamin said, "streets are the dwelling place of the collective. The collective is an eternally unquiet, eternally agitated being that—in the space between the building fronts—experiences, learns, understands, and invents."[05] In this sense, architectural space is not only the product of its makers but also of its users, the consumers of space. And it is these users who have the power to activate it.

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[05] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Hravard university Press, 1999), p.423.

Architecture per se does not move, but those who make use of it can set buildings, roads, and sidewalks in motion. The street, in particular, can become such a moving structure. Siegfried Kracauer declared that "the street in the extended sense of the word is not only the arena of fleeting impressions and chance encounters but a place where the flow of life is bound to assert itself."[06] A special traversal occurs on the urban pavement, and this is not simply a physical act but an imaginary activity. Structures themselves become perceptually mobilized as people traverse them, changing into transitory forms of imaging and fleeting places of encounter where the flow of life itself becomes architected.

As a form of collective image-making, the architectural imaginary is actually a product of social space. An outcome of experience and the forces of public agency, space is always the expression of social conditions, which can be externalized or transmitted, and subject to change in architecture. In this sense, an imaginary is a very real and material concept, which emerges out of substantial negotiations with the environment and built space. The abstract, imaginary power of architecture is an everyday reality, for architecture functions daily as the place where social relations and perspectives are modeled. Space provides a material kind of "modeling": it fashions our social existence. Our mode of social interaction and our position as subjects are affected by where we live. Architecture houses the multiple shapes of our diverse, quotidian, collective experience and figures their styles. It plays a crucial part in the fashioning of social forms of connectivity and in the actual modeling of intersubjectivity.

The Urban Imaginary as Mental Projection

If an imaginary is a collective image that is formed and transformed in the flow of social space, this process involves not only subjects but also subjectivities. In a seminal essay from 1903, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," the German sociologist Georg Simmel gave a pioneering introduction to this essential component of the architectural imaginary when he saw the urban dweller as a subject partaking in a novel, destabilized form of subjectivity that proliferates on the urban terrain. Simmel conceived the city as an experiential site of interaction and a stirring place of intersection that produces intense sensory and cognitive stimulation. His city is a real experience; he pictures it as a subjective space of sensations and impressions, a place inundated with shifting representations:

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[06] Siegfried Kracauer, "Once Again the Street," in Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 72.

> The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli . . . the difference between present impressions and those which have preceded . . . the rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli. . . . The metropolis creates these psychological conditions—with every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational, and social life—it creates . . . the sensory foundations of mental life.[07]

If we follow this view, architecture becomes experienced not only as exterior world. The city becomes a collectively lived experience that is internal as well as external. As the metropolis shapes the self and the dynamics of intersubjectivity, it creates "the sensory foundations of mental life." In the city we feel the rhythm of perceptual and mental processes and are immersed in the sensory ambience of representational flow with its "rapid telescoping of changing images." Our being in social space is dependent on our ability to sense and activate this mental space. Ultimately, the dynamics of the city evoke that inner force which is the movement of mental energy.

Conceptual Foundations of Imaginary Projection

The "psychological foundation" upon which Simmel erected his argument permits us to dig the foundation for the conceptual construction of spatial imagination as a form of projection. The architectural imaginary, as it emerges in art, shows clear signs of psychic formation. This visualized city exists in physical space as a creative, mental figuration: it is a projection of the mind, an external trace of mental life. In other words, what we experience in art is architecture as a particular mental condition—a state of mind. In this sense, an architectural imaginary is much more than a cognitive space. A state of mind is, after all, an emotional place as well as a mental one. This aesthetic metropolis is an internal state of feeling. It rests on delicate psychic foundations in that it is built on that restless ground that is "the intensification of emotional life," in which effects are affects, and motion is an emotion. This is a layer of the imaginative ground upon which the experience of the sensible is built, of which architecture partakes, for imagination materializes in the sensible world.[08]

In this imaginary site, "foundation" does not refer to a concrete pillar but rather stands for material experience and

[07] Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 325.

[08] For a philosophical reading of imagination as it is embodied in sensible experience see John Sallis, *The Force of Imagination: The Sense of the Elemental* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

forms of materiality as well as a mobilized psychosocial underpinning. To speak of an architectural imaginary, then, means to understand architecture in the broadest sense: as space, comprising images of built or unbuilt places that are part of a diverse collective practice marked by multiple histories, social perspectives, and intersubjective imagination. Ultimately, an urban imaginary is this composite mental image: a form of representation of the way we imagine our lived space. This is an image of place that we carry deep within ourselves. It is a material mental map, redolent of mnemonic traces and energized by subjective experiences. In this sense, an architectural imaginary is a real inner projection. It is an interior landscape of transformations, for this imaginative psychic map is as "moving" as it is affecting in the material world.

Einfühlung: Aesthetic Connections and Relational Imaginaries

The notion of an architectural imaginary is fundamentally a twentieth-century concept that emerged with the theorization of modernity, to which Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin all contributed. Architecture came to be conceived and understood as space only with the entrance of the modern era.[09] Our modern concern with the inner projections of space, in particular, has a specific origin in German aesthetics, which produced psychological theories of *Raum* as space and place.[10] This discourse emerged in the late nineteenth century as the findings of philosophical aesthetics, psychology, and perceptual research were combined with art and architectural history to provide a theoretical framework for explaining the human response to objects, images, or environments, a response that included affects and empathy.[11] One thinks in particular of the work of philosophers Theodor Lipps and Robert Vischer, and of the art historians August Schmarsow, Heinrich Wölfflin, and Alois Riegl, among others.

These theories can help us dig further into the conceptual foundations of modern space, for they changed the aesthetic viewpoint on architecture in palpable ways. For example, from Schmarsow's theory of spatial creation, we have come to accept that the perception of space is not the product of the eye and of distance from a stationary building-form but a more kinetic affair produced in engagement with the built environment.[12] In this pioneering theory, architecture is not only activated by bodily movement but mobilized by concrete perceptual dynamics. Its ability to forge material relations is particularly dependent on the sense of touch,

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[09] On the emergence of space as a modern concept see Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

[10] See Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou, eds., *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893* (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994).

[11] For an overview of the history of the notion of empathy see Juliet Koss, "On the Limits of Empathy," *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 1 (March 2006): 139–157.

[12] For a useful summary, see Mitchell W. Schwarzer, "The Emergence of Architectural Space: August Schmarsow's Theory of *Raumgestaltung*," *Assemblage* 15 (August 1991): 50–61.

which offers us the possibility of sensing our existence in space.

These properties of touch can also shape our relation to the art space. As we have learned from these modern theories, when tactility is culturally emphasized, a more spatial understanding of art can be achieved. Alois Riegl showed us that art can extend beyond the optic into the haptic, a mode of perception based on the sense of touch.[13] Schmarsow, who expanded on Riegl's ideas of tactile art and the haptic perception while incorporating tactile sensations in space, further contributes to this discourse because his form of spatial thinking engaged what he called "art architecture." In this view, a spatial imaginary—comprising kinesthetic sensations and sensory interaction—is the foundation of modern "art architecture." In Schmarsow's own words:

> The intuited form of space, which surrounds us wherever we may be . . . consists of the residues of sensory experience to which the muscular sensations of our body, the sensitivity of our skin, and the structure of our body all contribute. . . . Our sense of space [*Raumgefühl*] and spatial imagination [*Raumphantasie*] press toward spatial creation [*Raumgestaltung*]; they seek a satisfaction in art. We call this art architecture; in plain words, it is the *creatress of space* [*Raumgestalterin*].[14]

The modern aesthetic rested on the understanding that a place, like an art object, cannot be separated from the viewer: the aesthetic experience is haptic when it tangibly establishes a close, transient relationship between the work of art and its beholder. After all, the term *haptic*, as Greek etymology tells us, refers to more than just touch, for it means "able to come into contact with," and thus comprises the complexity of how we come into contact with things. As a surface extension of the skin, then, the haptic engages that reciprocal con*tact* between the world and us that "art architecture" embodies.

Theodor Lipps also embraced the idea of a diminishing sense of aesthetic distance and added psychic closeness and exchange as further components of proximity to aesthetics. In his 1905 essay, "Empathy and Aesthetic Pleasure," Lipps claimed that the reception of art is a process of encounter: it depends on the ability to sense an inner movement that takes place between the object and the subject.[15] Such movement is the basis of *Einfühlung*, or empathy, which is not only a psychic state of closeness and interaction but also a condition of pleasure. Ultimately, he conceived of empathy as a se-

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[13] For a discussion of Riegl's notion of the haptic in ancient art and of the different uses of haptic in theories of modernity, see Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: Art History and Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

[14] August Schmarsow, "The Essense of Architectural Creation," in Mallgrave and Ikonomou, eds., *Empathy, Form, and Space*, pp. 286–287.

[15] Theodor Lipps, "Empathy and Aesthetic Pleasure," in Karl Aschenbrenner and Arnold Isenberg, eds., *Aesthetic Theories: Studies in the Philosophy of Art*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 403-14. See also Lipps, "Aesthetische Einfülung," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 22 (1900).

ries of projections inward and outward, between that which moves in an art object and that which moves (in) the beholder.

What is particularly interesting about Lipps is that he joined art and architecture in significant psychic motion, thus providing a key to approaching this confluence in contemporary art. If empathy is activated as a mimicry or transfer between the subject and his or her surroundings, the boundaries between the two can blur in close aesthetic encounter with the art space. In this view, one can empathize with the expressive, dynamic forms of art and architecture—even with colors and sounds, scenery and situations, surfaces and textures—and these "projections" include such transmission of affects as atmospheres and moods. This "feeling into" such matters as spatial forms engages a form of "resonance," that is, a sympathetic vibration that enables one to connect to the actual texture of space, and that, in turn, resonates within atmospheric surfaces. As Lipps put it, "a landscape expresses a mood. Such 'expression' says exactly what we intend by the term 'empathy.'"[16] In the end, aesthetics and empathy could then be joined in the very fabrication of architectural expression as it gives shape to the surface of things.

Following this theme, the art historian Wilhelm Worringer wrote of empathy as the enjoyment of self that is projected in an object or a form. In his book *Abstraction and Empathy,* he described this projective moving space:

> In the forms of the work of art we enjoy ourselves. Aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment. The value of a line, of a form consists for us in the value of the life that it holds for us. It holds its beauty only through our own vital feeling, which, in some mysterious manner, we project into it.[17]

***Einfühlung* is, literally, a "feeling into" that is projected and can migrate. So empathy can be fully understood as a projection—a part of that "superficial," projective transfer that we have identified as foundational for the architectural imaginary, and that informs a contemporary form of "art architecture."**

Contemporary Models of Art Architecture

Surface encounters, haptic space, kinesthetic sensations, memories of touch, projections of the inner movement of mental life, and the psychic transfer of empathy became key concepts for understanding our material world and building our modern sense of aesthetic space. Today we can experience this relational movement in the mobilization of space—

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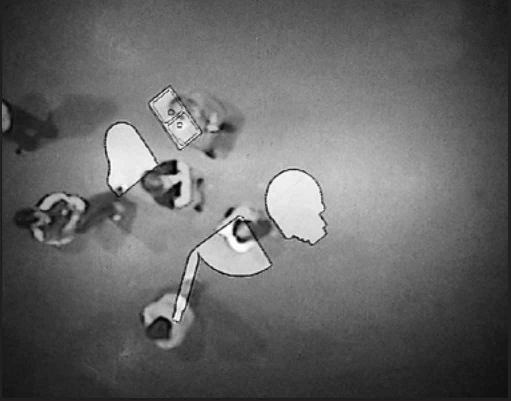
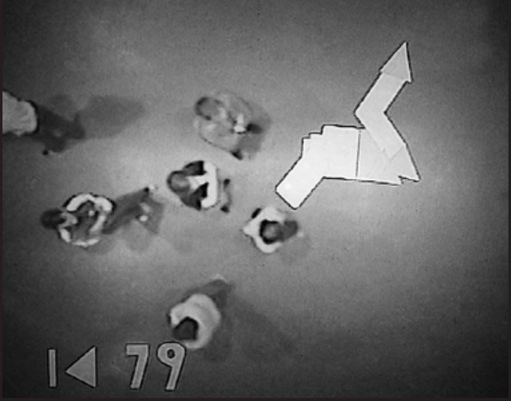
[16] Lipps, "Empathy and Aesthetic Pleasure," 405.

[17] Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1997), p. 14.

both geographic and architectural— that takes place in the articulation of spatial art. When art joins architecture in this relational way, turning contact into communicative interface, it can construct real architectural imaginaries, for these are, indeed, about the movement of habitable sites and how, in turn, these movements shape our inner selves.

In contemporary art, architecture has become a definitive "screen" on which we sense the relational motion that places inspire in us. Art shows ever more clearly that architecture is a generative matrix, visualizing its material construction as the collective product of a perceptual, mental, affective imaginary. Contemporary artists make particularly inventive use of architecture in this sense: for them, architecture is a fabricated construct, an elaborate projection in which imaginative spaces become transmittable substances. Many artworks are now haptically conceived or drawn as maps of memory, fragments of lived space, states of mind, fluid inner and outer constructions. They require relational engagement from mobile viewers and empathy with spatial forms. In the visual arts, architecture is far from being abstracted space; rather it becomes the envelope, the skin of our inhabitation. Here, the architectural imaginary shows as a fully habitable concept: a visual space of intimate fabrication, the very delicate fabric we live in.

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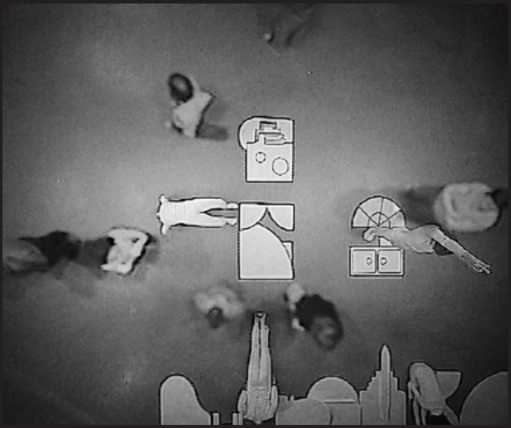

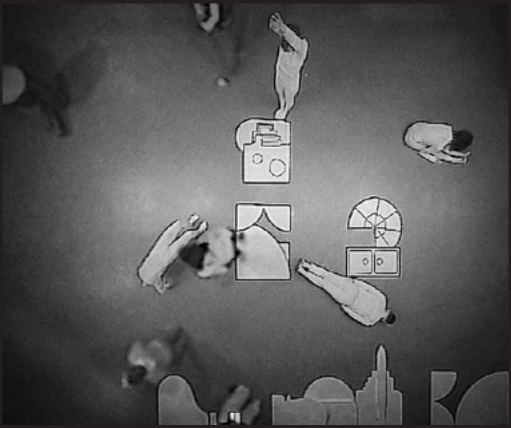

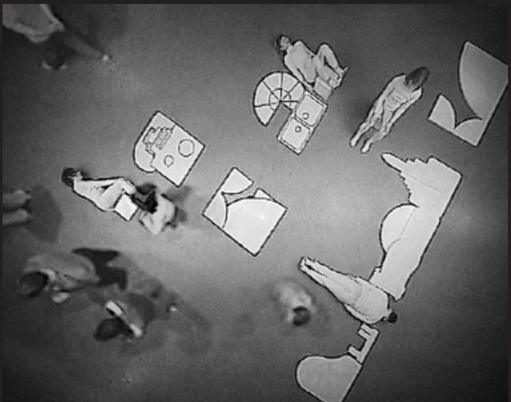

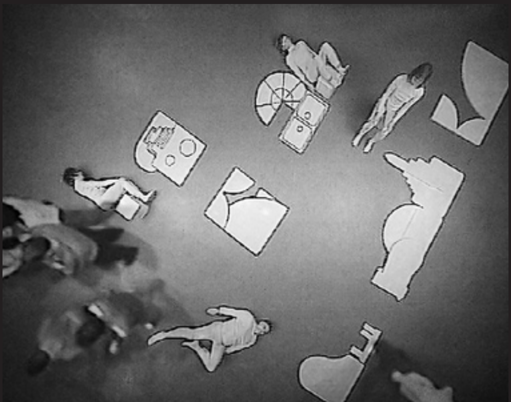

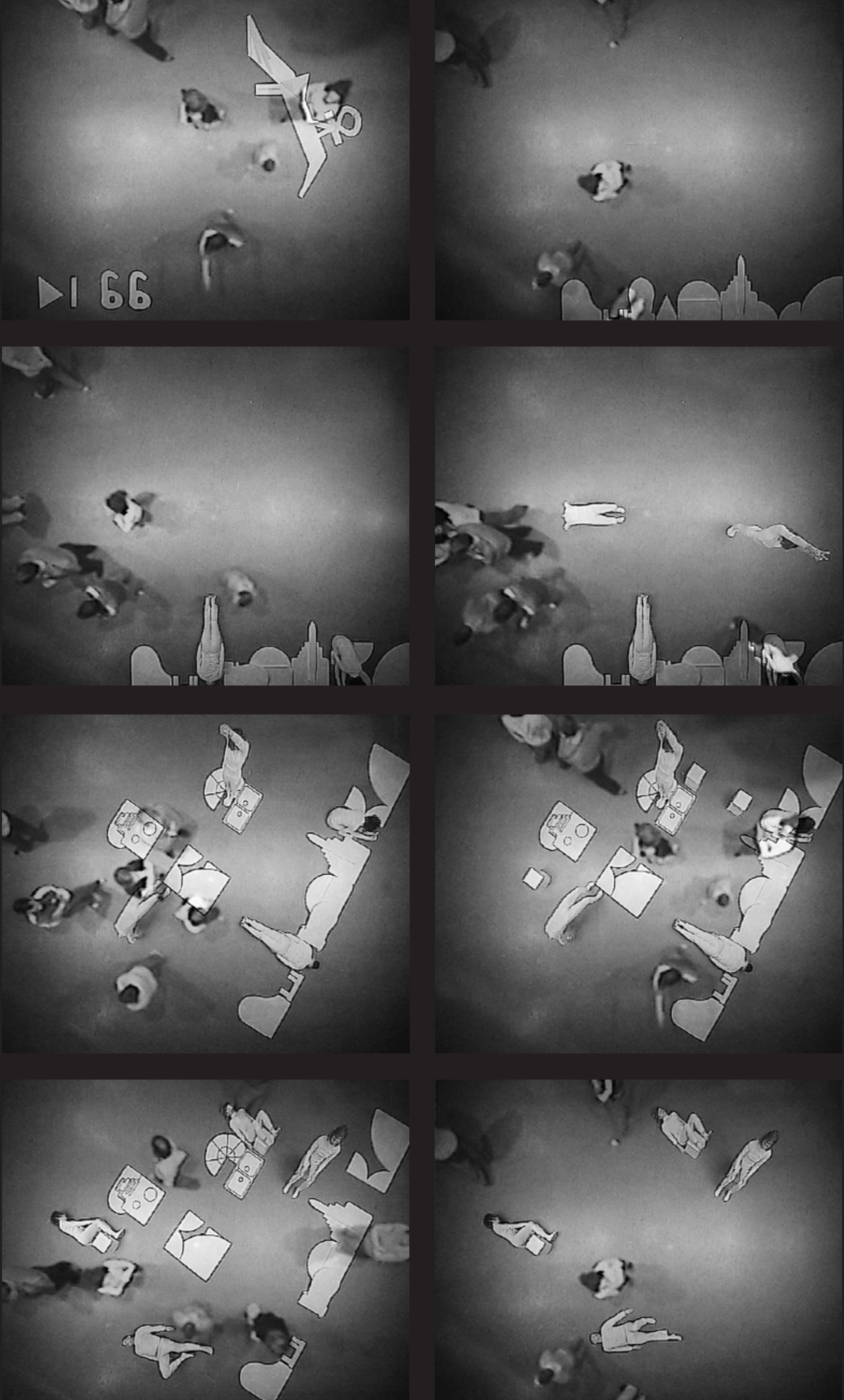
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Cosmetopolitics, or: Gazing – in Bad Company

Peter Szendy

BADco.: their name sounds a bit like an acronym for Bad Company. As if we were dealing with shady, slightly dangerous, disreputable folk.

We are therefore likely to find ourselves in bad company when watching them and gazing with them. When questioning with them what gazing is about.

One of their recent performances is entitled *The League of Time* (2009). They describe it as an "archaeology of visionary scenarios". It is an astonishing journey through utopias, where one can come across fragments of "late socialist ufology" or *The Flying Proletarian* by Mayakovsky – a "propaganda poem", as the poet himself called it, written in 1925 with cutting words ("Sharpened knife / of words / stab / in future fibs!", we read in the last lines).

Mayakovsky imagined the day of a "citizen of the XXXth century". He imagined that after work, in the evening, this citizen of the future would go to the movies. But what he would see there – a "cinematographic rage on the clouds", "feet-high mirages" – would be "completely different from our cinema [...] / packed between narrow walls": "today," we read (and this today is situated far into the future), one can choose one's seat somewhere "between the Earth and Mars".

In order to prepare for BADco.'s new project for the Venice Biennale, we could go to the movies too. And watch science-fiction films as they stage, like Mayakovsky in *The Flying Proletarian*, the cosmic wars of the future or the perpetual peace ("Peace!", the poet writes, "Nations fighting over / Hail the moment! / Mighty American Federation / joins the Soviet Union!"). But the films that I would like to evoke in order to accompany BADco. are also representations of the making of the gaze and of the point of view: what they try to show, as it is often the case in science-fiction movies, is the construction of seeing or viewing as such.

In *The League of Time*, BADco. also paid homage to the Slovak painter, graphic artist and photographer Julius Koller (1939–2007), who often signed with the following formula: "U.F.O.-naut J. K.". In a series of postcard-like works that look like invitations to a performance, he translated in every possible way the U.F.O. acronym: *Utopický Fantastický Objekt, Ultra-Fantastická Observácia, Univerzálny Fantastický Otáznik, Univerzálna Filozofická Organizácia, Univerzálno-Kultúrne Futurologické Operácie, Universale Futurologische Organisation, Unidentified Fantastic Originality...* In BADco.'s company, I will take seriously these invitations to fill the universe with fantastic fictions. I will try to invent some new "cosmopolitical philosofictions[01]", around different flying objects.

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There is a sequence in *Blade Runner*, the famous 1982 film by Ridley Scott, which could serve as a launching ramp. As we know, the story is an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. It is set in Los Angeles in 2019. The Earth is devastated and people are encouraged to seek exile in the colonised "off-worlds," where replicants are used as slaves or soldiers. Their presence on Earth is forbidden since they have staged a rebellion on a Martian colony. However, four of them have escaped and have landed on our planet in order to find Eldon Tyrell – founder of the Tyrell Corporation – the man who created them and who could therefore prolong their life-span. Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) is a replicant-hunter whose task is to find them and neutralize them.

The scene that I am interested in is set in a sort of Chinatown, in the very heart of this dystopian Los Angeles of the future. Two among the rogue replicants – Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) and Leon Kowalski (Brion James) – manage to locate the laboratory where Chew (James Hong) manufactures one of the most important individual parts for the making of the androids: their eyes. From outside, the building is identified by a kind of red eyeball. Next to it, one deciphers the word "eye". Roy and Leon enter. The following shot, inside the laboratory where freezing temperatures visibly prevail, shows Chew using sticks as he takes out an eye immersed in some liquid, in order to examine it with a microscope. Chew himself wears ocular prostheses on his forehead: goggles and magnifiers that look like antennae. The room is covered with frost: only Chew's face is exposed to the cold, his whole body is wrapped in a protection suit. It is freezing in there, while we witness not a freeze-frame, but a freezing, so to speak, of the genesis of the very eye that will look at the images.

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[01] *Cf.* Peter Szendy, *Kant chez les extraterrestres. Philosofictions cosmopolitiques* (Paris: Minuit, 2011)

***Blade Runner*, dir.: Ridley Scott, 1982**

Roy and Leon close in on Chew, from behind. While preparing for a brutal interrogation that aims at obtaining information on the Tyrell Corporation, Roy deliberately misquotes William Blake's lines in *America – A Prophecy:* instead of "fiery the angels rose," he says "fiery the angels fell." Leon then strips off Chew's suit, thus exposing him to the cold as well as to Roy's questioning. But Chew doesn't know or pretends not to know anything: "Don't know, don't know such stuff. I just do eyes. Just eyes... I design your eyes." Roy looks straight into Chew's eyes. The replicant, facing the human being, replies: "If only you could see what I've seen with your eyes."

With *your eyes*, says the replicant from another planet. And it is impossible to decide if the eyes he refers to – *your eyes* – are those manufactured by Chew or if they are Chew's own. Are they the eyes made for the replicants by human hands or are they the eyes of the human beings themselves?

Oscillating in this undecidability, I watch Roy and Chew looking each other in the eyes. And I can't help but wonder who is watching whom, who is gazing with whose eyes into the eyes of the other. They seem to have the same eyes, they resemble each other, they both seem so much human.

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As I have tried to show elsewhere, Kant was in his own way a great ufologist *ante litteram*. In the conclusion of his *Theory of Heaven* written in 1755 (he was 21 at the time), he proposes what we could call a comparative alienology of the inhabitants of Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, etc. And in one of his last works, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (published in 1798, six years before his death), he even writes:

> "... because we do not know of a nonterrestrial rational being which would enable us to refer to its properties and consequently classify that terrestrial being as rational. It seems, therefore, that the problem of giving an account of the character of the human species is quite insoluble, because the problem could only be solved by comparing two ***species*** of rational beings on the basis of experience, but experience has not offered us a comparison between two species of rational beings." *(... so werden wir keinen Charakter desselben nennen können, weil wir von vernünftigen, nicht-irdischen Wesen keine Kenntniß haben, um ihre Eigenthümlichkeit angeben und so jene irdische unter den vernünftigen überhaupt charakterisiren zu können. - Es scheint also, das Problem, den Charakter der Menschengattung anzugeben, sei schlechterdings unauflöslich : weil die Auflösung durch Vergleichung zweier Species*

vernünftiger Wesen durch Erfahrung angestellt sein müßte, welche die letztere uns nicht darbietet.)*

We cannot, Kant says, define the human species. We could characterize mankind only by comparison, but no comparison is available to us. Mankind, he states, has but a comparative being: it consists only by comparison, but a *comparison without anything to compare with*.

However, the impossibility of the comparison is not only due to the fact that the eventual extraterrestrial inhabitants of other planets are outside our reach for the time being. According to a scenario that science-fiction has often explored too, the lack of anything to compare with can be due, on the contrary, to an indiscernible proximity or closeness to us: a clone can be as incomparable as an alien that is absolutely other.

Such is the very Kantian idea of an episode in *The Twilight Zone*, the famous television series first aired in 1959. It is entitled: *People Are Alike All Over*.

The two characters, Samuel Conrad and Warren Marcusson, are about to embark on a space ship that will take them to Mars. They are waiting behind a fence, close to the launching ramp. They are looking at the rocket. Marcusson says: “It’s an odd way to spend the last night.” He thinks that, during their last hours on earth, they should enjoy their planet. As for Samuel, he is afraid of the voyage: “I’m frightened of what we’ll find up there,” he confides. “Sure,” Marcusson replies:

> “The unknown, sure; the loneliness, the silence, that should scare anybody. But I’ve got a philosophy about people. I mean all people, Sam. They’re the same all over.”

The spaceship carrying Samuel and Warren crashes on Mars. Warren dies in the accident. Samuel at first does not dare to step outside. After the commercial break interrupting the episode and leaving us wondering about Samuel’s future, we see him staring into the unknown. But we soon feel safe and reassured, as he does: these dreaded Martians who welcome him are exactly the same as you and me. Samuel, who cannot believe his eyes, cries out: “You’re people, you’re just like I am.”

Martian hospitality is such that Samuel is offered a lodging that is absolutely similar to the one he could have on planet Earth. He feels cosy, he even plans to stay, in order to find out more about these people who are so strangely similar to terrestrial people. He wants to have time to ask them questions. He sips a scotch and smokes a cigarette. But suddenly he realizes that he cannot step outside from his Martian home. The doors are closed and there are no windows. Then, when the walls of his prison start to open, he sees peo-

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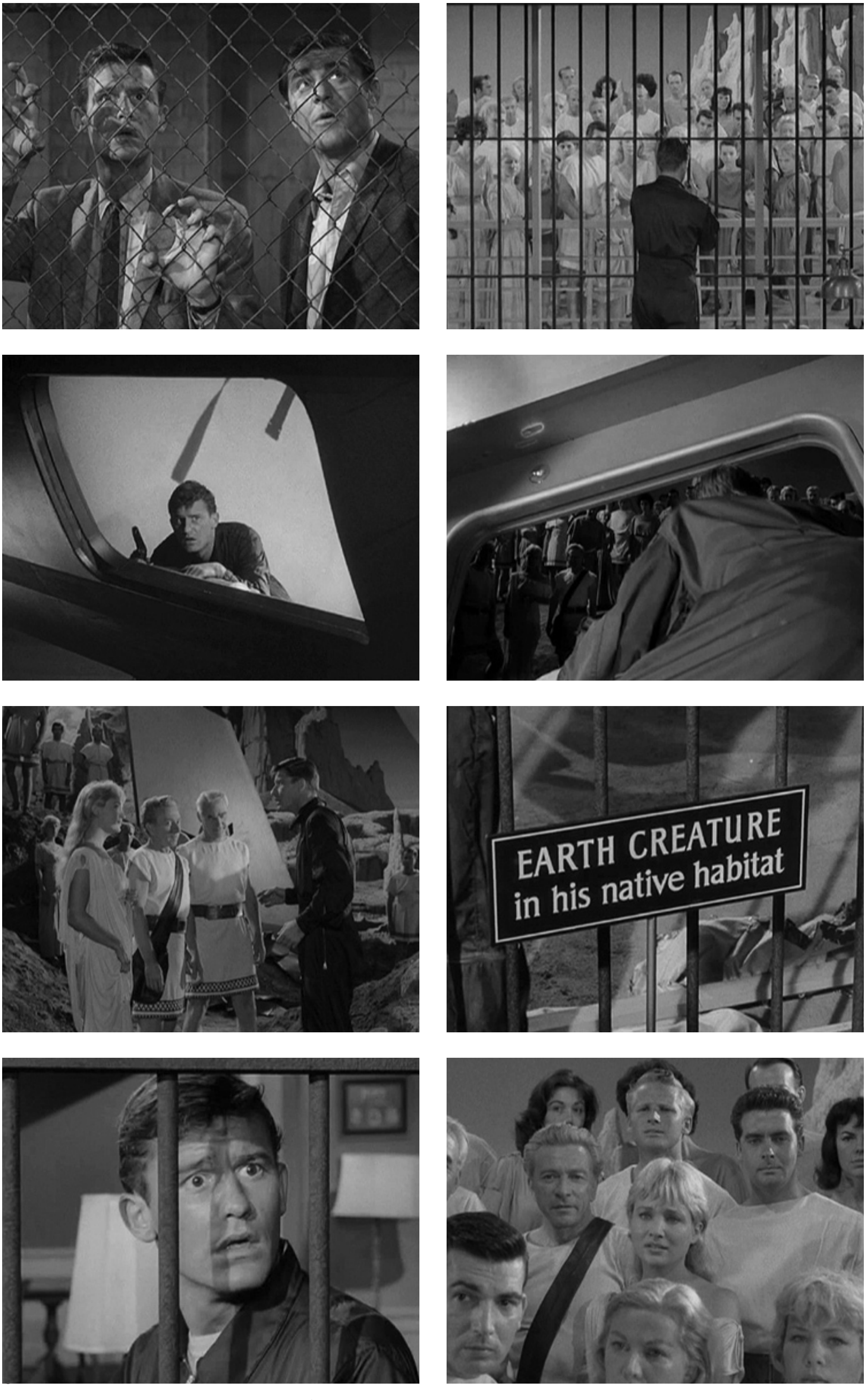
* Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell, rev. and ed. Hans H. Rudnick (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 237-238


EARTH CREATURE
in his native habitat

***The Twilight Zone: People Are Alike All Over*, dir.: Mitchell Leisen, 1959**

ple looking at him. He is being stared at, he is being observed: he is an Earthling in a cage, like at the beginning of the episode, when he watched the rocket with Warren from behind the fence.

"Why are you looking at me like that?", he yells at those who are staring at him, before discovering the inscription that serves as his caption: "Earth creature in his native habitat." A close-up of Samuel's face and of his eyes is followed by a reverse shot of the eyes of the beautiful Martian woman, Teenya, who runs away, unable to endure this intolerable face to face encounter, eyes staring into the eyes of the other. Of the absolute Other, so different and yet so terribly similar. Samuel cries out: "Marcusson, you were right, people are alike. People are alike everywhere."

Once again, it is a matter of gazing, then: seeing oneself with the gaze of the other, so radically different. It is as if only on Mars, only with the gaze of a Martian could an Earth creature appear as it really is, "in his native habitat". It seems that what Samuel, Warren, and others are looking for on distant planets is the possibility of a comparative characterization of mankind. What they are hoping to find, at the end of their interstellar voyage, is the unattainable *differentia specifica* of the human kind: for its difference as a species could lie in the fact that *it differs above all from itself.*

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What also echoes back from this inaccessible and maybe even indiscernible point of comparison is a dividing line that partitions, or sections, the visible. It is a border-line that constitutes and distributes the gaze.

There is a movie whose title already makes us smile, as if it had become the cliché of itself as a genre: Steven Spielberg's *E.T.,* released in 1982, the same year as *Blade Runner*. But if we watch *E.T.* over and over again, paying close attention to it while allowing ourselves to be surprised again, we notice three series of motives that interlace from the beginning until the end. These are:

1. Cosmopolitical hospitality, which we could describe, borrowing the word from Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, as the "universal hospitality" given to the creature coming from elsewhere.
2. Cosmetics, *i.e.* ornament (the flying saucer, for example, looking like a shiny and kitschy decoration for a Christmas tree), but also retouching, make-up, hairstyles, wigs used by the friendly extraterrestrial for disguising himself in order to become a work of art or a performance (remember the Halloween scene, when he is hidden under a white sheet with two holes enabling him to see?).

E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial, dir.: Stephen Spielberg, 1982

3. The attempt to render visible the framing of the image, *to show in the image itself the partitioning of the image* between that which is seen and that which is not seen, that which is masked and that which is unmasked. Think of the very unusual shots of the government agent named Keys (Peter Coyote): we are only allowed to see his belt and key holder, as if those keys he carries and after which he is nicknamed were guarding the access to another part of the image, invisible and outside of the frame.

To understand what is at stake between these motivic series in *E.T.* – between cosmopolitanism, cosmetics and the distribution of the visible –, we should remember that the Greek word *kosmos* stood for both the universe and the beautiful ornament. The same goes for the Latin translation of *kosmos*, i.e. *mundus*, designating not only the world but also that which has to do with beauty, cleanliness, hairstyle, or feminine make-up (in the expression *mundus muliebris*). This meaning of *mundus* has survived only negatively in the French adjective *immonde* ("filthy, revolting…").

Now, what we should try to think about today, is that cosmopolitism – i.e. politics extended to the dimension of *kosmos* or *mundus* (some would say: globalization) - is also, straight away, cosmetics: a make-up, a retouching, an alteration of the sensible, that is not opposed, though, to any bare reality which we could grasp as it is. In short, what is at stake is what we could name: *cosmopolitical cosmetics*, or *cosmetopolitics*. We experience it on a daily basis without even knowing it: every time a GPS is telling me where I am while I am driving, every time I look at the duration remaining for the next bus to arrive, every time I get prepared for the bad weather that is approaching, I have access to these sensory perceptions from a satellite point of view whose existence depends on a regulated distribution of extraterrestrial space. That is to say: on international treaties such as the *Outer Space Treaty* adopted by UN in 1967 and extending the terms of earthly politics into outer space.

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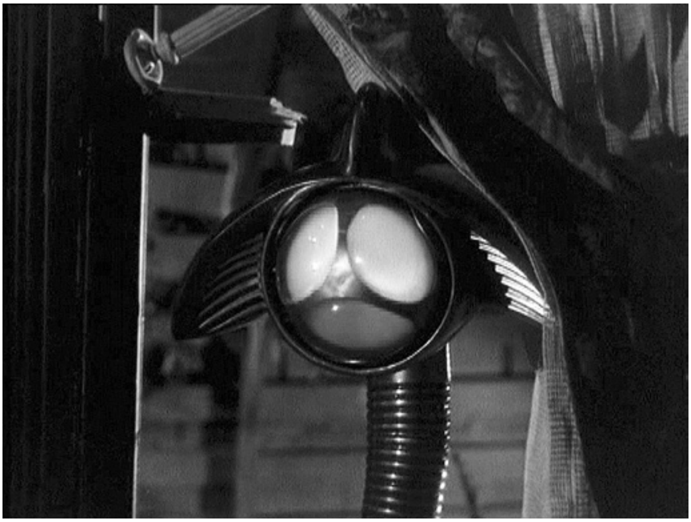
To frame, to show or not to show, to give *access* to the visible, to open it or to close it: these are political matters, strategies of power. *Cosmetopolitics* could be the name for the extension, the pursuit of the politicization of aesthetics in the cosmopolitical perspective of globalization and the conquest of space. *Cosmetopolitics* follows the trail of that which Jacques Rancière, himself profoundly indebted to a Kantian heritage, has named the *distribution of the sensible.*



***The War Of The Worlds*, dir.: Byron Haskin, 1953**

But we shouldn't be mistaken: this perspective, this horizon is not to be found only in the distance. Maybe it is not even a horizon proper: as soon as we open our eyes down here, on this Earth, it already starts to distribute and partition the gaze of these comparisons without comparison that we are.

To make this distribution visible, as it is traced and retraced, as it is *reinscribed in the image*: this is what is at stake in science-fiction movies. And such is, also, the challenge faced by a company like BADco. when it introduces us, ufologically, to the bad company of *aliens* and their radical otherness.

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One more word, one last word.

In the filmic adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* by Byron Haskin (1953), a man and a woman – Clayton Forrester (Gene Barry) and Sylvia Van Buren (Ann Robinson) – have escaped the massacre and general destruction perpetrated by the Martians who have invaded the Earth. They take refuge in an abandoned farm. But suddenly, they see a strange object appear.

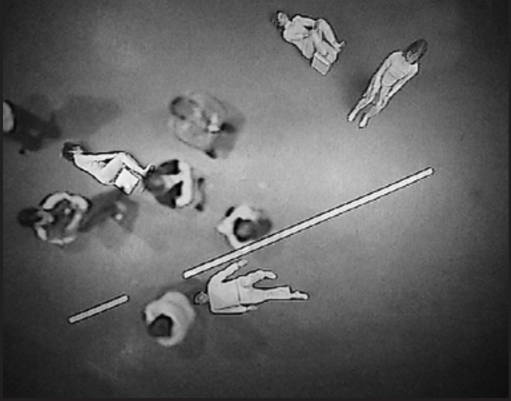
In Herbert George Wells's novel, this thing is described as a "long metallic snake of tentacle... feeling slowly [the objects]". But in Haskin's movie, the essentially *tactile* arm of the extraterrestrial creature, this arm that is searching for survivors to be eliminated, this arm has become, on the screen, what Clayton describes as "an electronic eye". It is, he says, "like a television camera". And he adds, whispering to Sylvia who also holds her breath: "it is looking for us".

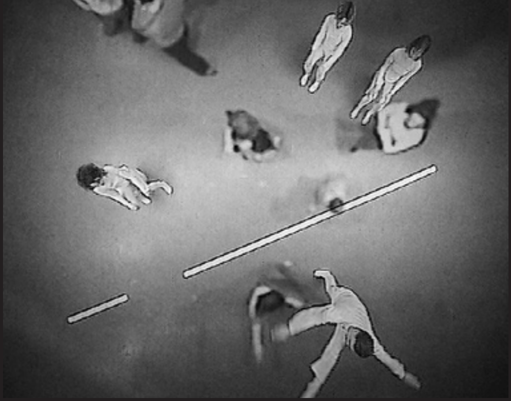
How can we understand this?

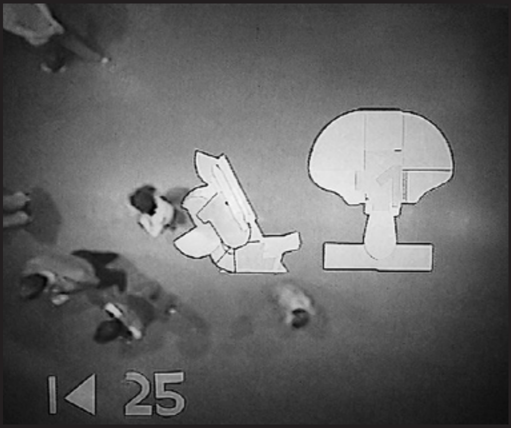
Of course, the electronic eye closely resembles the ocular prostheses in the shape of a camera with whose help we scrutinize the world. And it is *searching for us*. It is tracking us down: we, human beings, are *wanted*, we are being hunted as the viewers we are. But the mobile gaze is also, in Clayton's undecidable words, looking *for* us: in lieu of us, instead of us, in our place.

It is as if Clayton were secretly dreaming that which Roy, the replicant in *Blade Runner*, imagined aloud: "If only you could see what I've seen with your eyes..."

Translated from the French by **Ksenija Stevanović**



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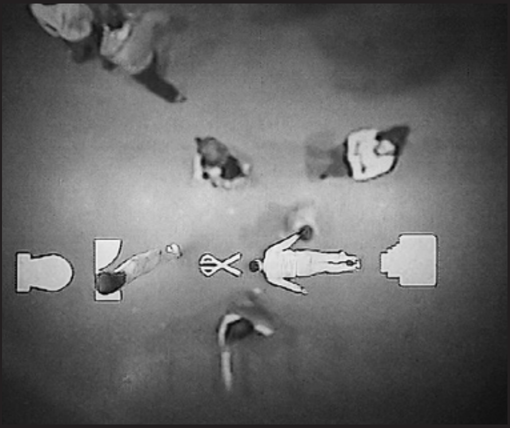

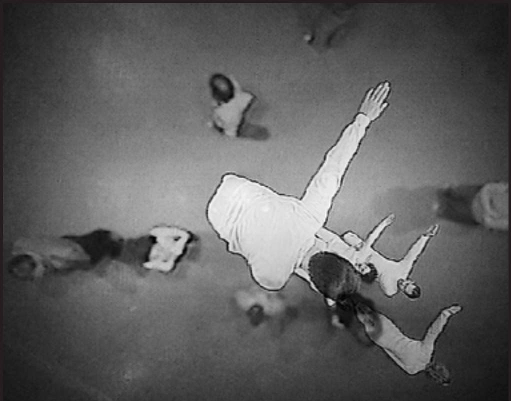

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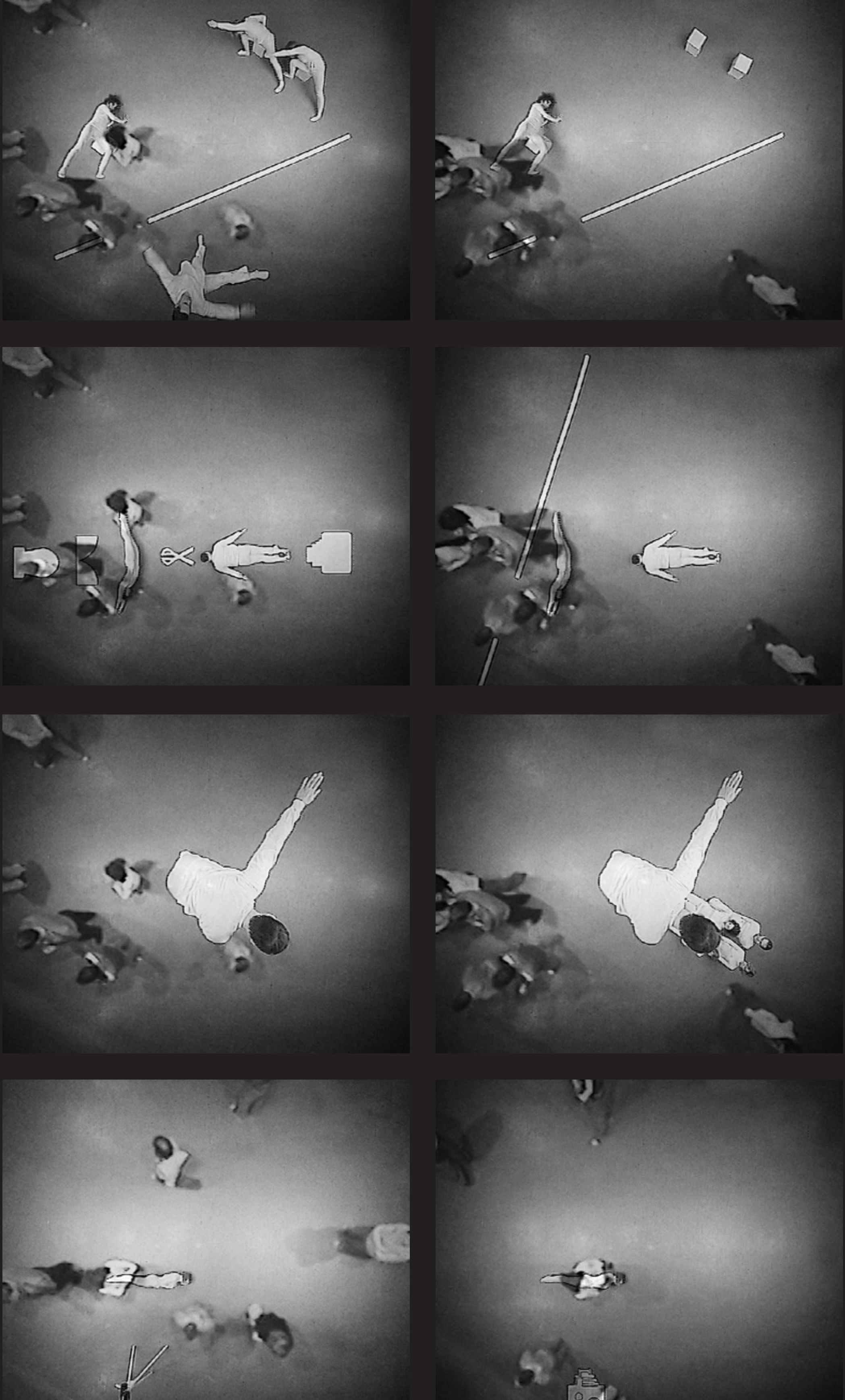

Interface Aesthetics; Science-Fiction Film in the Age of Biopolitics.

Stephen Zepke

The bottom line is, as Matteo Pasquinelli so aptly puts it, 'it is impossible to destroy the machine, as we ourselves have become the machine' (2008, 151).[01] This is a beautifully concise description of the dilemma explored in almost every film about the interface, and we will continue to bear it in mind as we negotiate the more oppositional formulations found in films like *The Lawnmower Man* (Leonard, 1992), which starts;

> By the turn of the millennium a technology known as VIRTUAL REALITY will be in widespread use. It will allow you to enter computer generated artificial worlds as unlimited as the imagination itself. Its creators foresee millions of positive uses – while others fear it is a new form of mind control...

Interface films show humans using computers to create and interact with and within virtual realities.[02] In this sense then, interface films are a contemporary form of social realism. This may sound glib, but in at least one sense it is true, interface films usually portray a contemporary underclass (or cognitariat) in a political struggle against oppression. The most frequent enemy is corporate capitalism, and the field of struggle is defined by digital technology. Admittedly this theme often slides into the excesses of the genre, such as in the recurring fantasy of an armed resistance movement led by a black rapper (*Matrix*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Gamer*),[03] but they are nevertheless 'realist'

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[01] This essay condenses material from the course *Exploring the interface through science fiction cinema* that I taught at the Academy of Fine Art in Zagreb in the summer semester 2010. I would like to thank Petar Milat, Tom Medak, Ivana Ivković and Leonardo Kovačević for their very warm hospitality while I was there, this essay is dedicated to you all.

[02] The computers can range from the vast computer named 'Simulacrum' in Fassbinder's *Welt am Draht* (1973) to the considerably more modest computer games of *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982) or *The Last Starfighter* (Castle, 1984). Similarly, virtual reality can be represented in clunky computer graphics (*Tron* or *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995)), as an exaggerated and obviously false 'reality' (e*XistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999), *Gamer* (Neveldine and Taylor, 2009) or *The Truman Show* (Wier, 1998)), or as indiscernible - but ontologically distinct - from the 'real' as in the *Matrix* trilogy (the Wachowski brothers, 1999-2003), *Abres los ojos* (Amenaber, 1997) or *Total Recall* (Verhoeven, 1990)). Some films explore the necessary co-implication of 'real' and 'virtual' reality – *S1m0ne* (Niccol, 2002), *The Final Cut* (Naim, 2004), *Surrogates* (Mostow, 2009) or *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009). This essay is more concerned with the themes these films share than with a typology that would identify their differences.

in their exploration of how the collective imaginary is controlled and exploited through contemporary technology, or extrapolations from it. This 'exploration' has an important double sense; the films depict a future interface where all that is solid melts into code and digital environments become immersive, while utilizing CGI technology to achieve this effect in the present. As a result, interface films not only represent the future of virtual reality, but they actualize this future by showcasing the most advanced digital technologies of the present. This enfolding of an aesthetics of the future within the technology of the present is a biopolitical process that aims at producing commodified affects. Interface films therefore represent a new form of cultural and political aesthetics in which the future is not only commodified but ubiquitous.[04] Capital's colonization of the future has led Franco 'Bifo' Berardi to produce a 'post-futurist manifesto' that calls for us to 'abandon the illusion of a future' (2009a), but as a science fiction fan I believe that interface films can offer visions of the future with real political potential.

Pasquinelli offers a brilliant analyses of the interface by using Michel Serres' figure of the parasite to describe how digital technology exploits the *bios* and its libidinal drives by simulating fictional worlds, building collaborative environments, and providing communication channels. These operations form a 'symbiosis of desire' (2008, 64) between technological and biological realms, capturing libidinal forces in the interface in order to siphon off surplus value through the rent of technological infrastructure. As a result, both the energetic and economic exchange between biological and technological layers takes place through the hardware rather than the code. Pasquinelli thereby places the digital parasite 'against the autonomy of the digital sphere' (2008, 65), and attacks the prevalence of 'digitalism' (or what he elsewhere calls 'code fetishism' (2008, 65), the idea that reality can be entirely 'recoded' and subsumed within a digital world) within both the academic and popular representations of the interface. Accompanying this digital Idealism is an equally idealist politics, one that believes 'that Internet based communication can be free from any form of exploitation and will naturally evolve towards a society of equal peers' (2008, 66). In this sense digitalism is a perfect description of those interface films that focus on programming and/or advocate a politics of open source software and freedom of information (eg., *War Games* (Badham, 1983), *Hackers* (Softly, 1995), *Johnny Mnemonic, Anti-Trust* (Howitt, 2001), *Tron: The Legacy* (Kosinski, 2010)).[05]

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[03] This is not strictly true in the *Matrix* films I know, but I'm prepared to make Laurence Fishburne an honorary rapper. Cornel West, another honorary rapper, appears in *Matrix: Reloaded* (Wachowski brothers, 2002) and *Matrix: Revolutions* (Wachowski brothers, 2003). For the others, *Johnny Mnemonic* stars Ice-T, and *Gamer* stars Ludacris. *Surrogates* has an armed resistance movement led by 'the Prophet' who is black and almost raps (played by Ving Rhames), and *Strange Days* involves a popular uprising sparked by the killing of 'Jeriko One', a black rapper played by Glen Plummer. What is significant in these films is not that blackness is associated with rebellion, but that the leader of an armed resistance is a media celebrity. This is the paradoxical logic of interface films; the condition of possibility and impossibility of revolution is entertainment.

[04] Steven Shaviro suggests that sci-fi is the equivalent of social realism because the most intense part of our lives today is our sense of the future (2010 n.p.).

Contrary to this, Pasquinelli's work explores the libidinal and unconscious dimension of the interface through a pathology of parasites, rejecting the idealism of a 'clean' and 'democratic' interface in favor of its 'dirty' and 'demonic' violence (2008, 66). Some interface films also move in this direction, although most simply exploit a mawkish morality regarding the 'evil' drives unleashed by technology. The Brett Leonard films *The Lawnmower Man* and *Virtuosity* (1995) explore the potential of the interface for unleashing sexual and psychopathic violence, but individualize this potential in a single, monomaniacal villain. More interesting is *Strange Days*, where the direct feedback of a murderous rapist's experience to their victim allows someone else to 'consume' the confused result. Snuff porn, rape, voyeurism, it is as if every perversion has been unleashed and rolled into one interfaced 'hit' – like reality tv only better. While *Strange Days* revels lasciviously in these 'forbidden fruit' (Lenny, the dealer, declares; 'I'm the main connection to the unconscious'), it does so only in order to finally put things right. Emotional and democratic sanity is restored with Lenny recognizing his love of Macy after she firmly tells him to 'get real', and the racism of the LAPD is exposed through technology to avert a cataclysmic public riot. So while it obviously enjoys its symptoms, *Strange Days* remains a moral tale advocating a sensible path against excess.

More recently some films have explored physical avatars, where the protagonist's consciousness is placed in another body (eg., *Surrogates*, *Gamer*, *Avatar*), and like *Strange Days* these films figure the interface as a technology of wish-fulfillment. *Avatar*'s phenomenal success is no doubt in part due to the uplifting way the interface frees its protagonist Jake's 'strong heart'. Through his avatar he is able to escape his physical disability to become who he really is, a kind of super-native. The criticism of the film as being 'anti-human' is in this sense misguided, because in fact Jake represents the very best of what is human – love, intelligence, strength and their combination in a militant environmentalism. In fact the world of the Navi represents a highly optimistic 'new-age' vision of a non-technological interface with the world-brain where – wait for it – everything is connected. Of course the narrative's technological condition of possibility is gleefully ignored in the excitement of its 'family of man' rhetoric. *Surrogates* and *Gamer* on the other hand offer much darker pathologies of the interface. In the first the use of beautiful young robotic avatars controlled from home (they are, their adverts proclaim, 'better than life') is directly linked to the

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Even when not directly concerned with internet politics, most interface films present material and immaterial 'realities' as parallel and ontologically distinct worlds (eg., *Matrix*, *Tron, Welt am Draht*), where the desires of the characters remain recognizable and consistent in both. As a result, the 'action' is able to pass seamlessly across the interface, even when this produces unexpected results. In *The Final Cut* for example, the digital recording of the protagonists life finally absolves him of his deadly 'sin' by proving it imagined, so reversing the usual designations of the 'real' world as 'true' and the 'virtual' world as 'false'. Although this reversal is interesting, the film resolutely confirms the idea of an 'impartial' technology counter-balancing the vagaries of human memory with documentary 'fact'. In a similar way *Until the End of the World* (Wenders ,1991) and *Brainstorm* (Trumbull ,1983) posit digital technology as a positive prosthetic extension of human perception (allowing us to see death in the case of *Brainstorm* or returning it to the blind in *Until the End of the World*).

fear and depression of the protagonist and his wife following their son's death. Similarly, in *Gamer* although the avatar's in the social networking interface of 'Society' offer a sensual cornucopia of nubile delights, their 'user' is not only physically disgusting and living in filth, he has such a jaded and depressed sensibility he is only excited by the threat of death. *Strange Days* also connects depression and the interface through Lenny's addiction to replaying recorded experiences with his ex, while *Abros los ojos* and its American remake *Vanilla Sky* (Crowe, 2001) explore a virtual reality that has 'gone wrong' and given rise to horrifying visions emerging from paranoia and self-hatred.

All of these latter examples make a direct connection between 'bad' pathologies of the interface and corporate capitalism, hammering home the message that a profit can be made from our depression, addiction or psychosis as easily, or perhaps more easily, as from positive emotions. In response these films advocate a return to what is real – the human body with all its flaws, the love of family, and a healthy and realistic sense of self. This response to the 'problem' of the interface finds its theoretical elaboration in the work of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi. Bifo's more than 'vaguely apocalyptic' (2009, 134) account of the interface claims it has produced a 'psycho-cognitive mutation' amongst the 'video-electronic generation' resulting from our current state of 'info-invasion, nervous overload, mass psychopharmacology', and the 'fractalization of working and existential time and social insecurity' caused by the interface (2005, 2). This expansion of the 'Infosphere' has led to a proportional decline in our ability to sense anything that is not formatted in codified signs, resulting in an 'impoverishment' (2009, 86) of our relationships with others through the prevalence of stereotypes and readymade emotions. This process of 're-formatting' (2005, 4) produces a standardization of subjectivity, and its increased passivity, even while, or perhaps especially when our identity is becoming ever more 'flexible'. The constant mobility, stimulation and tension of the interface creates an 'inconclusive excitation' (2005, 5) that produces a de-eroticisation of our relationship to alterity, turning it into 'a joyless fiction' (2009, 87). Here, desire is fully instrumentalised by cognitive labour in a 'frigid thought where the relationship to the other is artificially euphoric but substantially desexualized as well' (2009, 103). Human sensibility fully subjugated to the accelerated and fragmented experiences of the infosphere has led to a 'dis-empathy diffused in social action' (2009, 134), and caused the pathologies of fear, solitude, depression, panic and terror.

How can we resist this mutation? Bifo suggests a 'planetary humanism' (2009, 133) that 'sings of the danger of love, the daily creation of a sweet energy that is never dispersed'

(2009a). This requires the slowing down of the human organism through a strategic unplugging from the network. Bifo's appeals for a renewed humanism can sound rather conservative,[06] largely because of the dialectical relation he sees between the infosphere and the human body. Perversely influenced by Baudrillard, his descriptions of the interface often veer sharply towards 'digitalism'; 'Digital technology' he writes, 'makes possible a process of infinite replication of the sign. The sign becomes a virus eating the reality of its referent' (2009, 149). Bifo's Baudrillardian angst is also evident in many interface films, most famously in the appearance of a copy of *Simulations* in *Matrix*. The problem with Baudrillard's 'dandyish necrophilia of the System' (Pasquinelli, 70) however, is that like a rhetorical mushroom cloud it obliterates any creative and political potential of the interface; 'The proliferation of simulation viruses,' Bifo writes, 'has swallowed the event. The infinite capacity of replication of the recombining simulator device erases the originality of the event. What is left is suicide' (2009, 161). Such nihilist enthusiasm leaves little room to move, except towards an onanistic aesthetics of catastrophe. This is no better seen than when Bifo refers to Pasquinelli's concept of 'libidinal parasites', and describes them as 'a sort of cancer reaching the very heart of the libidinal experience. Libidinal energy is attacked by a replicant of a parasitic type, as shown by the phenomenon of synthetic media pornography' (2009, 157). This misses Pasquinelli's most interesting point, which is certainly not the horror of parasites degrading humanism and the human (which Pasquinelli thinks is cool), but is a parasitic logic that might be used to redirect the libidinal investments of the interface, creating an event that takes back control over the libidinal means of social and subjective production.[07]

Consequently, Bifo's call for a sensibility capable of engaging with alterity must be disengaged from any 'return' to humanism, and understood strictly in relation to what he calls 'the productive Unconscious'. This productive and libidinal force is capable, he suggests more optimistically, of producing 'a singular existence in its complex relation to the world' (2009, 118). This force of creation, Bifo argues, is the beginning of a process of 'social recomposition' on the basis of a relationship to otherness. This process is, as Bifo also calls it, art and aesthetics. Art, he claims, 'looks for new possible modalities of becoming, and aesthetics seems to be at the same time a diagnostic of psychospheric pollution and a therapy for the relation between the organism and the world' (2009, 130). What is required, and what art can achieve, is 'the creation of new centers of attention' (2009, 131) that

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[06] He claims, for example, that 'without the heritage of Humanism and the Enlightenment, capitalism is a regime of pure, endless and inhuman violence' (2009, 132).

[07] Pasquinelli mirrors Bifo's misreading, although in the opposite direction, when he rather generously suggests; 'The basic assumption behind Berardi's position is that libidinal energy is limited and we simply cannot party all the time' (2008, 203).

can produce a bifurcation within the interface powerful enough to proliferate and thereby introduce heterogeneity and singularity back into experience. On a more practical level, it involves confronting the libidinal entropy Bifo associates with the psychopathology of the interface; 'panic, anxiety, depression' (2009, 135) with alternative aesthetic attractors – or parasites – of attention.

The question now becomes what these aesthetic attractors might be, and how do they work? In many ways this is a question that must be posed not only to Pasquinelli and Bifo, but to post-Operaism as a whole, and more precisely to its insistence on the dual strategy of negation and creation. As Sergio Bologna has very astutely observed of post-Operaism; 'It's not clear which was greater: the paean to the working class, or that to the capitalist capacity of subsuming this working class from the point of view of its components' (quoted in Wright, 114). As a result post-Operaism (and it must be said interface films as well) seem to take more pleasure in describing the horrors of capitalism and fighting them, than in creating alternatives. When capitalist violence is so spectacularly and seductively described that it condemns any rational political resistance as hopeless, it demands an equally or even more spectacular response. This often takes the form of an aesthetics of catastrophe, a 'crash 'n' burn' militancy that takes heart from Deleuze and Guattari's well-known comments in *Anti-Oedipus* calling for an acceleration of capitalism's schizophrenia.[08] Pasquinelli offers us a version of this, with his calls for 'a strategic sabotage' (2008, 48) of the interface consisting in non-cooperation (refusal of work) and sabotage, and culminating in '*an immaterial civil war* of cognitive workers' (2008, 110). Pasquinelli's approach therefore amalgamates the two parts of the traditional Italian political gesture – negation and creation – into what he calls a 'new theory of the negative' (2008, 101); negation *is* creation. The question is what sort of creation – or to return to Bifo's terms what sort of art and aesthetics – is generated by the negative? Like most post-Operaist thought Pasquinelli rejects the art world as a possible site of resistance inasmuch as its institutions are economically complicit with capitalism, its practices have become instrumentalised by the 'creative industries', and its heros have become 'artists in the age of their social reproducibility' (2008, 20). Art has already become life through the instrumentalization of 'creativity' and 'innovation', or as Bifo puts it, 'economy has subsumed art as a factor of perpetual deterritorialisation and of valorization without territory' (2008a, 33). Today aesthetics is perhaps the most important capitalist mechanism for generating surplus-value. Once art and aesthetics has become life the question is no longer how

[08] 'Not to withdraw from the process,' Deleuze and Guattari write, 'but to go further, to "accelerate the process", as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is we havn't seen anything yet' (1983, 240).

to create art, but how to create an experience, or event, that will negate the aestheticized homogeneity and control of life. But this typical post-Operaist claim that art is already subsumed by life is actually made in order to subsume creation to the more important *political* gesture of negation. If creative work – or politics – has left the privileged realm of the art work to become strategic sabotage then, Pasquinelli argues, there is 'more *politics* (in the sense of collective action) and *art* (in the sense of aesthetic gesture) in the sphere of production than any institution, political party or museum' (2008, 24). As a result, and as one of his subtitles has it; '*My Creativity is my Conflict*' (2008, 106). In other words, creation as a political mechanism must attack capitalist parasites (ie., it is negation, sabotage), in order to redistribute libidinal energy – and hence value. This is what he calls '*productive sabotage*' or 'creative sabotage' (2008, 147), a '*positive sabotage*' which 'is productive of value and *creative,* not simply destructive' (2008, 151).[09]

The strongest part of Pasquinelli's book is certainly his proposal that productive sabotage can emerge from aesthetic production. However Pasquinelli's negative aesthetics do tend towards those of a Heavy Metal concert and its inevitable salute of 'Hail Satan'. Crawling from the 'abyss of the immaterial', he tells us, come the '*animal spirits*' of new capitalism 'incarnated in the forms of Internet pornography, war imagery and video terrorism' (2008, 156). These demonic figures of the digital unconscious constitute a collective imaginary feeding – its a media frenzy – on our libidinal energy, but they also contain, Pasquinelli argues, an excess or surplus of energy that can turn against their captors (2008, 157). This 'internet underground' (2008, 158), this 'biomorphic horror' of the 'subterranean libido' (2008: 165, 167) therefore needs to be unleashed, like, he says, 'monsters emerging from the collective Id' (2008, 159). A 'perverse polymorphism' would become the model for an excessive libidinal mediascape, one that would return war imagery and porn to the social body – only massively amplified – in order to launch this body on its trajectory away from human subjectivity, and away – one presumes – from Bifo's now quaint appeal to the joy of sex. As the popular saying has it, nothing succeeds like excess, and there is no doubt Pasquinelli has high ambitions for his atrocity exhibition; 'Warpunk uses warporn in a tragic way to *overcome Western culture* and the self-censorship of the counterculture itself' (2008, 199 italics added)!

David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983) is a film that seems to have pre-empted Pasquinelli's argument inasmuch as it explores the televisual interface through the figure of sexually violent parasite. Pasquinelli's description of the

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[09] Pasquinelli references Negri's claim that 'Proletarian self-valorization is sabotage', and so is the 'negative power of the positive' (quoted in 2008 154).

parasite could be of the film; ‘The parasite is another politically ambivalent diagram that shifts from a tactical alliance to a strategic sabotage’ (2008, 48). The film shows the disturbing consequences of a tumor – the videodrome – which has entered the body of the protagonist (Max) through a pirate broadcast of torture and rape, and disrupts his empirical perception of reality so that he can be controlled in turn by shadowy corporate forces and a charity ‘treating’ the tv addiction of the homeless. The videodrome is ambivalent inasmuch as it both frees and feeds off the libidinal forces instrumentalized by the mass-media (fantasies of sexual violence), but these forces finally emerge for themselves beyond their parasitical exploitation by capital, employing an aesthetic strategy that can no longer be understood as sabotage, but as the creation of something entirely new. In this sense it is no longer possible to distinguish whether *Videodrome* is operating according to a logic of alliance or sabotage, or even to identify criteria by which it would be possible to distinguish them. The videodrome is able to enter Max’s head because his desire for sex and violence is mediated by the images produced by the tele-visual interface, but although the film begins by equating these elements inasmuch as this desire is both personal (his sado-maso relationship with Debbie Harry) and corporate (his network requires something ‘tough’ that will ‘break through’), the videodrome is not simply a biopolitical parasite of ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ reality because it finally destroys their distinction within the ‘hallucination’ it creates. The ‘interface’ offered by the videodrome is not an alliance/sabotage of corporate television, it is a new kind of ‘broadcast’ that collapses the dichotomies the parasite feeds upon. The videodrome is both organic and inorganic, producing a new flesh both in Max’s body, which opens to receive a gun and then ejects it so it can become melded to his hand, and in the ‘body’ of the interface (a television and a videotape) which become soft and fleshy ‘organisms’. Similarly, although the film initially distinguishes Max’s reality and his hallucinations, as the film progresses it becomes not only impossible to tell them apart, but meaningless to try. The videodrome melds organic and inorganic into a living force that is beyond good and evil, and serves neither the imperative for profit nor that of human self-preservation. As a result, the final scene of Max’s apparent suicide cannot even be understood as a cathartic self-sacrifice, because even the categories of life and death seem to have dissolved. *Videodrome* depicts an absolute phase-change emerging through the interface, an unleashing of libidinal drives leading to permanent schizophrenia, a continuous ‘death-drive’ in which capitalist systems are immolated along with any sense of ‘humanity’. By the end of *Videodrome* we seem to have moved beyond the paradigm of negation, not to mention the

political understanding of ‘beyond’ that goes with it, and have entered a world in which images are not parasites of desire but living hallucinations. ‘Hallucinations’, as Deleuze describes them, are ‘independent, alienated, off-balance, in some sense embryonic, strangely active fossils, radioactive, inexplicable in the present where they surface, and all the more harmful and autonomous’ (1989, 113). The great achievement of the film is its absolute lack of sentiment, it refuses any sense of loss, its motto ‘long live the new flesh’ affirming instead a powerfully inhuman and sublime force that obliterates its conditions by creating an entirely new future.

What *Videodrome* so brilliantly reveals is that despite its alluring teen spirit Pasquinelli’s parasites remain dialectical figures inasmuch as their libidinal violence requires what they escape to give their negations political force. *Videodrome* creates an opening onto a future that is truly ‘abstract’ in the sense that it evades any categorical description, while Pasquinelli’s proposal of a ‘creative sabotage’ finally collapses creation onto the priority of negation, which leaves his program of political aesthetics forever on the brink of ‘exodus’. This suggests, to me at least, that perhaps we need to approach the problem the other way around, and try to hallucinate what Deleuze calls ‘pure differences which have become independent of the negative [...], destructions in relation to which those of the negative are only appearances’ (1994, xx). If, as post-Operaism inevitably does, we glorify the horror and power of capitalism to the point where only its direct negation – even one that operates immanently – is going to satisfy our outrage, then we will be forever doomed to a glorious death, a kind of ‘aggressive suicide’ as Bifo calls it. This is precisely to ignore any form of image production that does not try to negate capitalism, but instead privileges the creative potentials of the interface. I am talking here of an unfashionable thing – art. Art in its modernist sense, as an autonomous aesthetic process creating new sensations (something *Videodrome* so singularly succeeds in), which is precisely what the Italians leave out of their account – naturally enough, they are Marxists after all, to whom art appears irredeemably bourgeoise – but more significantly it is precisely what they leave out of their account of Deleuze and Guattari. Hardt and Negri have articulated this position with the most vehemence in *Empire* when they directly reject Bergson’s concept of the ‘virtual’ in favour of the ‘possible’ (2000: 356, 468). What is at stake here is the genetic or constituent power of the multitude, which Deleuze and Guattari locate in art and Hardt and Negri locate in ‘living labour’, or more simply work.[10] What is most interesting here is that Hardt and Negri reject the virtual because it is not, they claim, real enough. What they mean by this is that

[10] ‘Living labour is what constructs the passageway from the virtual to the real; it is the vehicle of possibility’ (Hardt and Negri, 357)

it is not sufficiently grounded in the actual state of things, it doesn't, they say, give sufficient 'ontological weight' to reality (2000, 468). The possible on the other hand, is directly related to reality, inasmuch as it dialectically defines politics as a negation of the existing situation. In this sense the possible is the ontological category of what Hardt and Negri call 'being-against', or 'counter-empire'. Indeed, in one of the most startling metaphors of the book they argue that Empire is the 'inverted image' of the multitude's 'productive activities' something 'like a photographic negative' (2000, 211). In this strange inversion it is Empire that appears as the condition of possibility (the photographic negative) for the multitude's creative work. Politics must begin (and quite possibly end) with a dialectical negation of existing oppression that, according to Hardt and Negri, grounds the creative event in the 'reality' of everyday life. As a result, they claim, Deleuze and Guattari,

> seem to be able to conceive positively only the tendencies towards continuous movement and absolute flows, and thus in their thought too, the creative elements and the radical ontology of the social remain insubstantial and impotent. Deleuze and Guattari discover the productivity of social reproduction (creative production, production of values, social relations, affects, becomings), but manage to articulate it only superficially and ephemerally, as a chaotic, indeterminate horizon marked by the ungraspable event (2000, 28).

What is so wonderful about this rather acerbic description of Deleuze and Guattari is that it is absolutely right. They are committed to the event in its most ungraspable aspect, that is in its creativity entirely undetermined by what is, in its absolutely virtual aspect. This aspect is what Bifo called the 'productive unconscious' and what Guattari calls the 'machinic unconscious' – 'an unconscious turned towards the future' (2011, 10) – a future that does not emerge through negating the present but by affirming an aleatory role of the dice. This affirmation is, as Nietzsche had it, art and nothing but art, the great stimulant to life. So while Guattari agrees with post-Operaism that capitalism subsumes all productive processes, he maintains that some 'psychotic' and 'unconscious' aspects of production 'involve a dimension of autonomy *of an aesthetic order*' (1995: 13, italics added). It is going to be precisely this *aesthetic* and im-possible element that Guattari will affirm in all its political efficacy, in the way he says 'it grabs you by the throat'. It is this 'existential impact' that makes art 'the most advanced model for resistance against the steamroller of capitalist subjectivity' (Guattari; 1992: 90-1). We have seen that Bifo advocates 'art', but this is a post-Operaist 'art' that 'seeks to abolish

the separation between poetry and mass-communication' (2009a). Deleuze and Guattari do not do this, and instead affirm the necessity of the autonomy of the modernist art work. Deleuze argued that 'To thrive, all art needs the distinction between these two sectors, the commercial and the creative' (2006, 208). Art needs this distinction not only to be good art, but as well – and this is the point – so it can do politics. What Guattari praised was 'the phenomenon of rupture in the plastic arts' (2008, 383), its ability to suddenly launch us into an entirely new sensual world, into a new 'existential Universe'. Guattari found this micropolitics of sensation in unlikely places, such as the paintings of Modigliani (2008, 260) or Balthus (1987). Guattari argues that the rupture art makes must remain undetermined by the 'real' world if it is to explore the limits of its freedom;

> Fabricated in the socius, art, however, is only sustained by itself. This is because each work produced possesses a double finality: to insert itself into a social network which will either appropriate or reject it, and to celebrate, once again, the universe of art as such, precisely because it is always in danger of collapsing (1995, 130).

So when Bifo claims that for Guattari 'the aura [of art] was definitively forgotten' (2008a, 34), we must ask what Guattari meant when he claimed that Duchamp's *Bottle Rack* 'singularizes' a 'constellation of referential universes' in such a way that 'the Benjaminian *aura* arises from this genre of singularizing ritornellization' (1996: 164, italics in the original). For Guattari this *aura* was precisely that of an autonomous singularity, an eruption of the future awaiting its social network. We will come back to the possibility and potential of an autonomous aesthetic production – an 'hallucination' in the terms of both *Videodrome* and Deleuze. But first I would like to explore the alarming possibility raised by the work of Steven Shaviro that art's modernist rupture is flourishing today, not in the obscure *ateliers* of avant-garde invention, but because it has been successfully instrumentalised and put to work by commercial cinema.

Shaviro claims that the emergence of cognitive capitalism 'has led to a mutation in the relation of the actual and the virtual' (2010, 44), one in which the event has not been destroyed in the interface, as Bifo claimed, but fully subsumed. Shaviro explains this in terms of Deleuze's cinematic concept of 'any-space-whatevers', a space not only disconnected from any actual space, but as well one that 'has eliminated that which happened and acted in it. It is an extinction or a disappearing, but one which is not opposed to the genetic element' (1986, 120). Clearly then, the any-space-whatever is an aspect of modernist cinema, it is the autonomous emergence of

what Deleuze calls 'pure Powers and Qualities' independent of any actualization. Its dominant feature in fact is abstraction, inasmuch as it is 'a collection of locations or positions which coexist independently of the temporal order which moves from one part to the other, independently of the connections and orientations which the vanished characters and situations gave to them. There are therefore two states of the any-space-whatever, deconnection and emptiness' (1986, 120). Such spaces are devoid of the aspects we usually associate with cinema – narrative and subjectivity – but in themselves they are full of 'pure potential', and are what Deleuze will call '*pure optical or sound situations*' (1986, 120). Significantly for us, Deleuze will repeatedly associate these situations with hallucination (eg., 1989: 12, 46, 55, 167, 263).

Shaviro argues that the technological and accompanying formal innovations that contemporary cinema has drawn from the growing ubiquity of the interface (from computer games, music videos, multi-tasking, surfing etc.) commodify and so instrumentalize pure optical or sound situations. Mainstream cinema, he argues, has therefore moved away from narrative and characterization, which remain only as a rudimentary support, in order to exploit the realm of affect that was opened up by 'art' cinema but has now become our biopolitical mode of interface. Shaviro draws on Brian Massumi's influential distinction between emotion and affect, where emotion is understood as a feeling that belongs to me, that I 'have', and that defines my temporal trajectory through the different moments of my life. An affect, on the contrary, is a feeling in which 'I' am not yet, a libidinal intensity – fuck or fight – that leaves no room for a subjective reflection (see Massumi 1996). These 'pre-subjective' affects are those Pasquinelli and Bifo describe traversing the interface and animating – for better or worse – its shared flesh, and which Shaviro identifies in a new style of film that is entirely generic in its narrative and characterization, but experimental (precisely in the sense of 'experimental cinema') in its camera-work and editing. These films de-connect the viewer from the subjective level of emotion and narrative, in order to plug them into the realm of animal spirits, of affect 'hits' or sensations that convulse the interface but are emptied of sense. This allows the film to be arranged around their action sequences, which seem to occupy an agitated and multi-dimensional space constructed by an extremely mobile camera and a very rapid montage (what Shaviro calls 'ADD editing'), and unfold in a permanent present. These camera and montage techniques are made possible by digital 'CGI' technology, and are sometimes referred to as 'digital compositing'. This is a 'bi-polar' composition of long shots and close-ups, subjective and objective point of view, strange angles and an extremely fluid and fast camera movement that make up a seamless object (the sequence) that is no longer organized in a space that contains it, but unfolds within the intense and constantly variable sensation of the affect it produces. This type of contemporary cinema therefore operates according to the logic of the 'and' whereby everything is connected. These connections are vague rather than causal, emphasizing chance 'links' and the diffusions of 'sharing' evident in 'database logic'. These techniques create a visceral connection of the viewer to what she sees, as in the ubiquitous 'impressionistic' fight scenes in *Gamer* which Shaviro says are edited 'behaviouristically' rather than spatially (2009). All of this announces, Shaviro finally claims, a radical new and biopolitical aesthetic regime, a new style of 'filmmaking that abandons the ontology of time and space, and the articulation of bodies in relation to this, in order to instead set up rhythms of immediate stimulation and manipulation' (2009).

What Shaviro likes about these films, and it comes as no surprise for those of us who have followed his work since *Doom Patrols*, is the way their embrace of affect joyfully abandons any moral position. But apart from (or perhaps because of) the naughty pleasures films like *Gamer* deliver, they also 'provide us with something like a cognitive mapping of the contemporary world system' (Shaviro, 2009). From the beginning of *Gamer*, where a montage of contemporary and archaic sites from all over the world is shown overlaid with corporate advertising, we are clearly in a pure present defined by consumption. Similarly, television news is only concerned with the games 'Slayer' and 'Society', making reality and entertainment the same thing – the biopolitical interface. This is also true of the game scenarios, which use real body avatars and so collapse the distinction that usually organizes the interface film's dominant question; what is reality? In *Gamer* its all real, or its all unreal, as you want. Constant and intense stimulation is the norm, a kind of permanent hormonal hysteria of teenage sex and violence being sold to its participants, where every taboo can be broken and 'excess' simply doesn't exist. As a result the narrative climax of the film, when the corporate control mechanism inside Tillman's head is finally turned off, is nothing more than a kind of disappointing visual 'pause', a suspended moment merely waiting for us to push 'restart'. Even the film's quotational moments seem desultory, with the final shot of the car containing Tillman's reunited family entering a tunnel giving a deliberately flacid echo of *North by Northwests* memorably erotic punch. All of this means, at least according to Shaviro, that 'the strategy of *Gamer* in this regard is not to offer a critique [of contemporary capitalism], but to embody the situation so enthusiastically, and absolutely, as to push it to the point of absurdity' (2009). Two connected problems emerge in Shaviro's account at this point. First, his account of *Gamer* as a 'cognitive mapping' of the present (a term he takes from Frederic Jameson) turns his analysis into a type of 'cultural studies'. And second, his affirmation of the film as 'embodying' the biopolitical affect 'to the point of absurdity' risks turning its political strategy into a type of 'over-identification'. Shaviro's position therefore tends towards the 'postmodern' inasmuch as it appeals to irony, parody or even sarcasm as critical strategies, while accepting that this offers no political gains greater than a 'demented fabulation' that 'reflects upon our actual situation, while at the same time inserting itself within that situation' (2010, 93). Finally then, Shaviro's 'cognitive mapping' seems to be a type of 'cognitive estrangement' (despite his explicit denial of this (2009)), where the ultimate political achievement of *Gamer* is to give us a 'critical distance' on and in the present.

Pasquinelli is less cynical than Shaviro, although not as funny (which is also a serious political consideration, let's not forget!). Pasquinelli firmly rejects over-identification, which, he says, 'may paradoxically repeat the dominant language' but 'feature no real hacks at all'. The problem is simple, 'once the ideological tricks are recognized and turned upside down through over-identification, what is the critique of the economic model sustaining the culture industries themselves? Where are the real forces driving over-identification?' (2008, 22). Shaviro's argument was that there are no differences between the force of economic production and the force of cultural production, together they produce a biopolitical affect operating within an interfaced version of the 'Society of the Spectacle'. Pasquinelli's parasite however, posits a relation between the realm of interface aesthetics and 'real forces' that can produce an energetic and political 'excess' (2008, 22). Nevertheless, Pasquinelli's affirmation of a material sabotage poses a similar dilemma to Shaviro's postmodernism, because as long as he understands cultural production as the pathological symptom of new capitalism (ie., through a libidinal cultural studies), then any 'excess' of 'real forces' capable of sabotaging (or 'negating') the system remains captured by it.

This is actually an old problem in the realm of science-fiction studies, one that its arguably greatest practitioner Frederic Jameson has thoroughly explored. How, he asks, is it possible that any future can escape its present-day conditions of production, concluding that 'we come to wonder whether any Utopianism [or truly new future] is possible which is not some mere projection of our own situation' (2005, 172). Jameson articulates – and finally accepts – this problem that Pasquinelli is unable to escape and that Shaviro perversely embraces, but he does so in a way that adds something important to their accounts. What all science-fiction shares, he argues, is a belief in the necessity of a break with our present, a break possibly complete (a utopian world) or perhaps only minute (a new piece of technology), but one through which something new can emerge in our world. This is, Jameson believes, science-fiction's most political aspect. Although in the end Jameson's dialectical method determines this break to be impossible, he does think science-fiction forces us into thinking about the 'break', even if this is only 'to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to image the future'. Nevertheless, and this is Jameson's version of politics, it forces us 'into a contemplation of our own limits' (2005: 288-9). In this sense, he argues, the problems that science-fiction has always had in imagining the future is actually its strength, 'in that it forces us precisely to concentrate on the break itself: a meditation on the impossible, on the unrealizable in its own right' (2005, 232).

It has no doubt come time when cards must be laid on the table and we must think about what possible political strategies remain within interface films, and more widely within any possible 'interface aesthetics'. It will come as no surprise that I would like to return at this point to Deleuze and Guattari's very Nietzschean affirmation of art. Obviously the mainstreaming of Deleuze and Guattari's work has been in no small part due to their remarkable perspicuity in seeing creation and connection as the new ontology of the globalized world. We have already seen how useful this ontology has been for post-Operaist theorists such as Bifo and Pasquinelli, and for others such as Shaviro. What has been lost in this uptake however has been Deleuze and Guattari's insistence upon the autonomy of art as the political mechanism operating inside any aesthetic production. We have already seen Deleuze affirm the 'pure optical or sound situations' produced by modern cinema as 'disconnections' of sensation from the 'cliche' of human experience. Such images, he argued, cause 'our sensory-motor schemata to jam or break' revealing 'the thing itself, literally, in its excess of horror or beauty, in its radical or unjustifiable character' (1989, 20). The thing itself is the asubjective affect, the virtual space of pure potential, or as he also liked to call it, the 'event'. Although Pasquinelli maintains a role for the event qua 'excess', by restricting it to a negation of the actual situation he insists on limiting the political possibilities of aesthetics to 'anti-art', and so denies its autonomous and 'unjustifiable character'. He is of course not alone in this, and at least since Conceptual art this has been the hegemonic position within the visual arts – art must be justified as politics. Shaviro takes a different tack, affirming the 'art' event within contemporary cinema, but claiming it can no longer resist capitalism, because capitalism itself has ejected human emotion and the subjective narrative it implies in favor of ex-

ploiting the biopolitical affect. But the example of *Videodrome* points towards affects that can ‘disconnect’ or ‘break’ with their conditions of production, and therefore offer a new ‘vision’ of the world, no matter how fleeting or brief. This last point is important, and it is no accident that Deleuze and Guattari insist that ‘the success of a revolution resides only in itself’ (1994: 177 see also 110) rather than in what it negates. An hallucination is in this sense a nonhistorical event, an abstraction inasmuch as it is radically nonrepresentational, asignifying, and without sense. Unlike Jameson then, Deleuze and Guattari see an hallucination as a ‘break’ that goes beyond our human, all too human limits, and as such embodies the future, an unthought outside that actually exists. It is only as such, they argue, that it can have a political effect, because finally it is the creation of rupture that marks art’s ‘revolutionary potential’ (1983, 379). This is the true meaning of the ‘aesthetic critique’ of the 60s, rather than that to which Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) have with such bad conscience attributed the beginnings of the biopolitics of new capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari could already see such travesties in 1971, when they anticipate those who will reproach them ‘for believing too much in the pure potentialities of art’ (1983, 378). But as an answer to such reproaches Deleuze will later claim ‘that cinema has a special relationship with belief’ (1989, 171) because it creates images that change the world, that change the world by breaking with it. It is this revolutionary ‘link’ between man and the future that has been lost, Deleuze writes, this link which ‘is the impossible which can only be restored within a faith’ (1989, 172).

Admittedly, we could perhaps think of no less appetizing figure for political militancy than faith. And reassuringly we didn’t think of it, so we can also discard it if we wish. But what remains is Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence upon the political efficacy of the radical autonomy of art and the sensations that it creates. It is precisely this insistence that makes art a kind of science-fiction, inasmuch as science fiction can be understood as the creation of an untimely future that resists the present, and ‘as a correlate of this creation’ evokes a people-yet-to-come who might inhabit the new earth (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 108).[11] As a result, it is creation that comes first, it is creation and its affirmation of the outside and the impossible that will create a rupture through which the future will enter the present, and be embodied or not. Creation not negation, creation not apocalypse, creation not cynicism and this means – I give in to the temptation – the creation of art and not politics. This is finally what Deleuze and Guattari offer us in our analysis of interface films, an ontology of the future that turns politics into art.

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[11] Just as the thought of ‘pure difference’ makes, Deleuze claimed, a book of philosophy ‘a kind of science fiction’ (1994, xx). Or, as Guattari somewhat more sheepishly admits; ‘To think time against the grain, to imagine what came “after” can modify what was “before” or that changing the past at the root can transform a current state of affairs: what madness! A return to magical thought! It is pure science fiction, and yet…’ (2011: 10-11).

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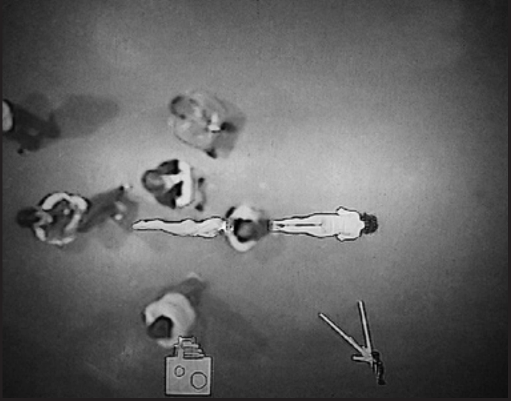
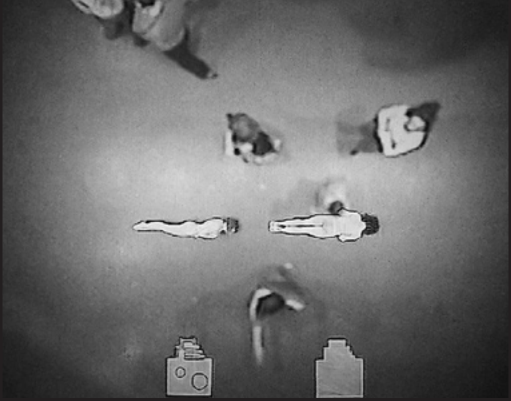
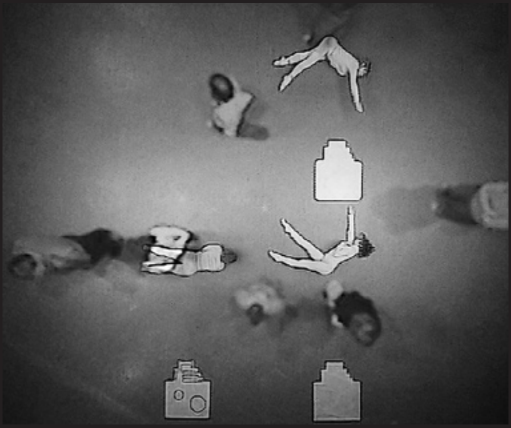
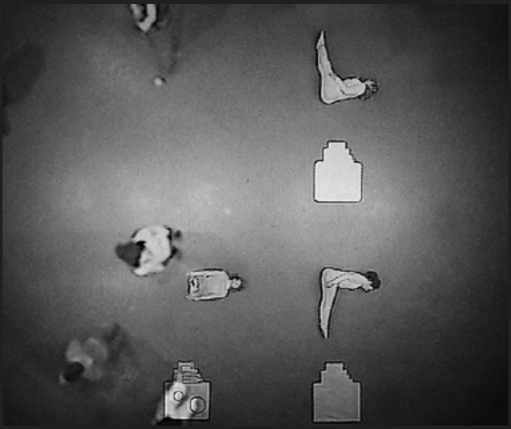
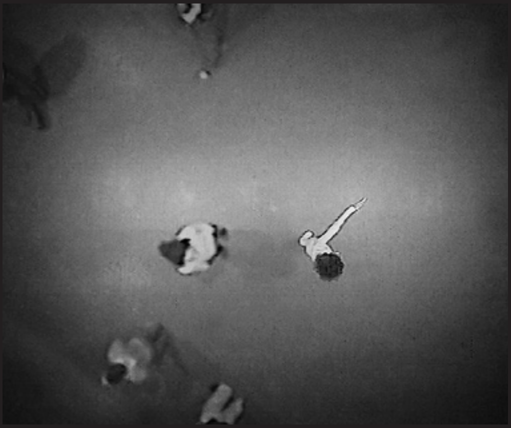

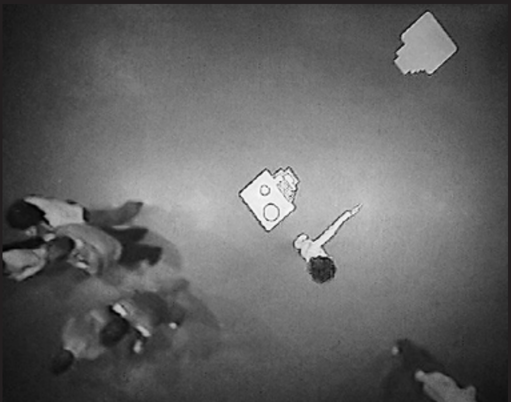

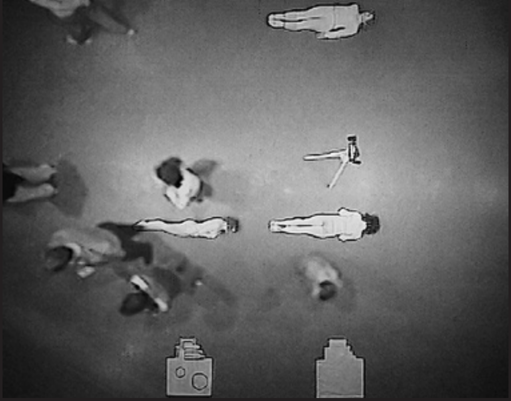

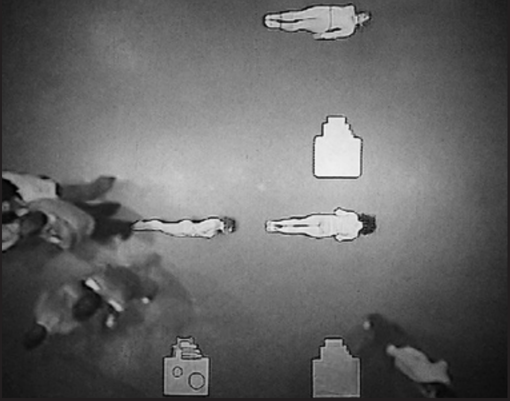

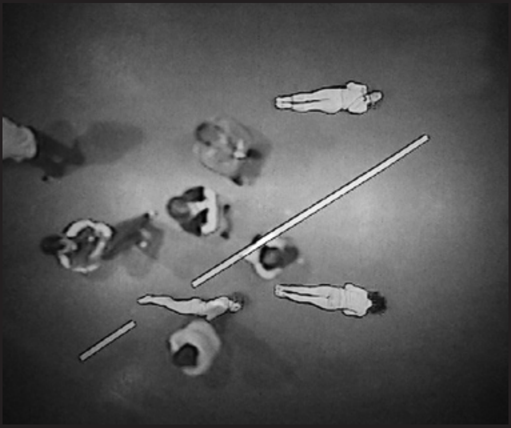

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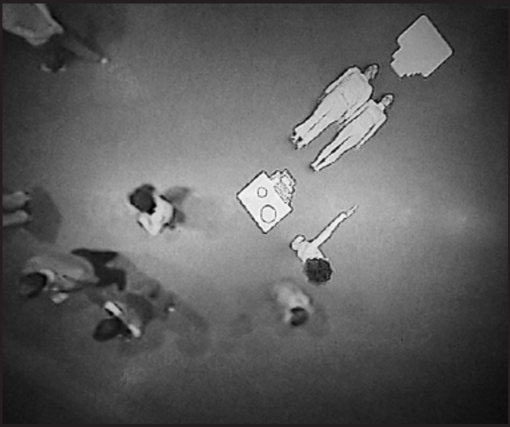

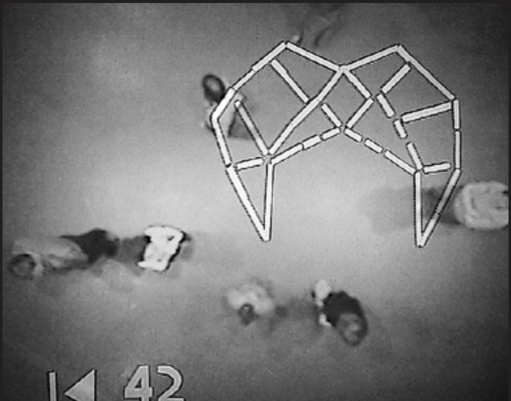
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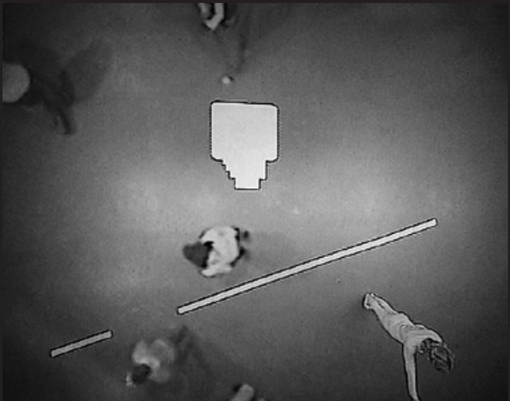


BADco. Responsibility For Things Seen: Tales in Negative Space

(Work presented within the Croatian presentation at the 54th Biennale di Venezia.)

The present times, ridden with the sustained crisis of capitalism, environmental catastrophes and the depletion of common resources, require a reordering of economic and political relations on a global scale. As is repeatedly echoed throughout our work: When there is not enough for everybody, there is no equitable order that can be negotiated. It can function and be understood only on the basis of active policing of differential entitlements and exclusions. Yet attempts to fathom the ongoing reordering of the global space and to imagine a different course of social development to the existing capitalist system run aground at the limits of representation of systemic totality and the fragmentation of agency within it. Even in the face of crass injustices, the collective capacity to imagine and project the common future remains captured in images, creating generalised desires, consumerist fragmentation of responsibility and a sense of public progress that are ultimately mobilised to sustain and maximise private profit. Our work reflects this conundrum using what’s most immediate to us as theatre makers: investigating strategies of representation, spatial orderings of representation, future scenarios and asymmetric acts of collective communication.

This work starts as a spatial gesture: an insertion of the outside space into the exhibition room. The back wall has been replicated in the space, and the non-space behind the original wall now populates the exhibition room. This non-space, found outside, might be any number of things – anything that can be imagined. For all we know it is a theatre scene, a stage – and this exhibition room might be just a backstage. But it’s not quite that – it’s a withdrawal of space, a double negativity: not quite this exhibition space,

1

But when she turned the corner she found herself facing a wall – a body amongst bodies, as if this was the only way she ever existed. And then, as in a compressed movie clip, she felt herself disappearing, shifting, diluting – frame by frame, step by step, image by image she understood what defined her was the only possible, very anachronistic epithet – a soul. Not fearing words she attempted to name her impulses, to measure this space turned outside in, to count the frames of this cut-up mirror. It did not take long for her shape to become a figure, still in worrisome consistency, just to the stage where a figure becomes a thing. She stepped forward, no longer needing wings. Joint sensors, deformations of legs and contact of feet attested her aptitude to freely move; walk, run, sit – she was ready for a field test.

not quite a different place. Well, it could be anything that can be imagined, but many more things that cannot. Maybe a totality of global processes outside of this room that begs the question of how it can be represented.

This work endures as a temporal gesture: it records in images the comings and goings. Theatre, our line of work, always requires our presence. It cannot take place if we're not there. Imagine if we miss a flight! And here we remain in our absence. In recorded images – as you will too. And in images on screens you will see the presence of your absent fellow-visitors, just as you will perhaps witness the absence of your own presence. Become co-present in time with someone who is not with you in the space. The image is a time machine, a transport in time. It opens and forecloses the imagination of the future.

This work demands a scopic act: the much maligned capacity of images to capture our imagination and to supplant our sociality by its simulation is only commensurate with our capacity to always produce new images, new configurations and new disfigurations of images. Here it's no different. Produce images we did, attempted to create images differently we did. And, yet, things don't stop here. There seems to be something incomplete in images that coax out our action in the receptive act of viewing: our intent capacity to become captured, our passionate passivity in surrendering to our own hijacking, our engaged absorption in the intimacy of images. And it's not the sovereign, enlightened viewer that is the agent of this activity. Rather it's a beholder that loses her hold as she becomes immersed in an image and the image loses its clarity as she starts deciphering its detail, unravelling a scene that becomes more and more impossible to relate to as she looks closer and closer, requiring a spiral of reading, a responsibility disturbed by the non-totalisable subject of the image.

Responsibility for Things Seen is based on BADco.'s analytical performative principles. It is an evolving work, presented here in Venice as 'theatre by other means'- through an installation and an intervention. It consists of the following elements that form an integral work:

1) A door left open on the back wall of the exhibition space, suggesting an imaginary space behind.
2) The replica of that same wall displaced into the exhibition space, letting the non-space outside into this room.
3) Five video displays: three set behind the back wall and accessible through cutouts in the wall, and two on the displaced replica wall.
   — Three videos behind the back wall provide intimate cinematic accounts, each accessible only to one spectator at any one time, of displacements in space, image and human presence. The first is a photo essay.

2

As she peered through, the crowds were once again impatiently waiting for the light to turn green. Now that it did, they stormed across the street and continued along the line of buildings that seemed as if they were always there, instilling a sense that nothing was ever changing. Approaching the square, the line became increasingly broken by gaping voids of torn-down buildings, opening views onto the backside of the buildings all the way across. Toppled masonry replaced by billboards announcing in the transparent shine of an architectural visualization a visitation of the future upon the unchanging present. She could clearly make out that the new structures will eat up the voids between the old ones, filling the long-forsaken inner spaces of unchange.

She could easily think back to the times when the development was spread across the city, spread across different functions. Particularly intense at the periphery. Nothing had to be built in a clearing between two buildings. The clearing could remain. Whatever new needed to be built could expand into new spaces. But at one point the space became the private domain. It started to contract and concentrate. Capital-driven development required capital-intense organization of space. It is only by concentrating, creating ever narrower circles of centrality, that scarcity could be maintained. The old center was now fragmented into micro-centers and the new micro-centers inserted into the interstices of former peripheries. Both became overrun by construction sites, mechanisation and building materials. But that was over now. There was no more demand for expansion by concentration either.

The architectural imagery. As things got worse, power outages more frequent, political promises more in demand, hopes for change more desperate, architectural images became ever more present. Architecture in the public was now more imagery than it was actually architecture, the actual architecture was replaced by its promise. Things were announced and then faded away into the invisibility of private enclaves. Images were public, architecture was private. Mobilizing the collective imagination of the future so that the few could profit from the future. Future anxiety. She felt complicit, displaced.

The expropriation of the future through images of the future. That was the future of expropriation. For the expropriator the future was its exact opposite: he had to do away with the future – that unforeseeable future that always fails our capacity of prediction – and make sure it turns out not very different from what the profit scheme requires it to be. No future. She felt future anxious as her thoughts strayed away back to her complicitous project lying open on the desk.

The second is a mix of choreography of performers absent from the actual exhibition space and the inadvertent movement of exhibition visitors who are present. The third display shows a live camera shot processed by software subtracting or adding the human presence in the exhibition space.

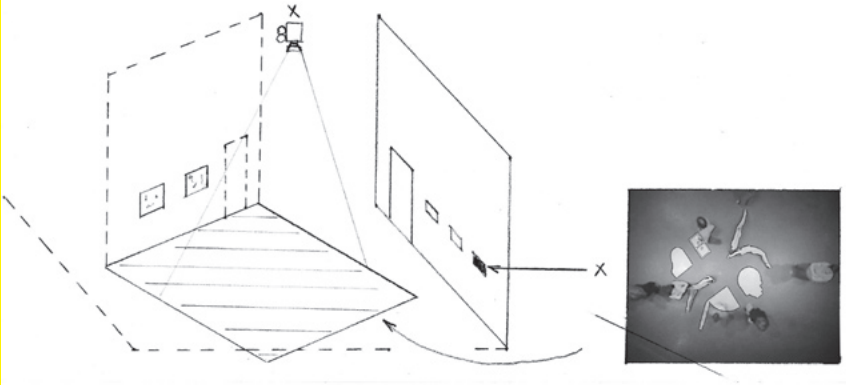
- Two interactive videos on the two replica wall displays show short cinematic narratives algorithmically edited in real time using prerecorded material and live feed from cameras in the exhibition space.

4) Intermittent choreographic interventions during the opening days of the Biennale.

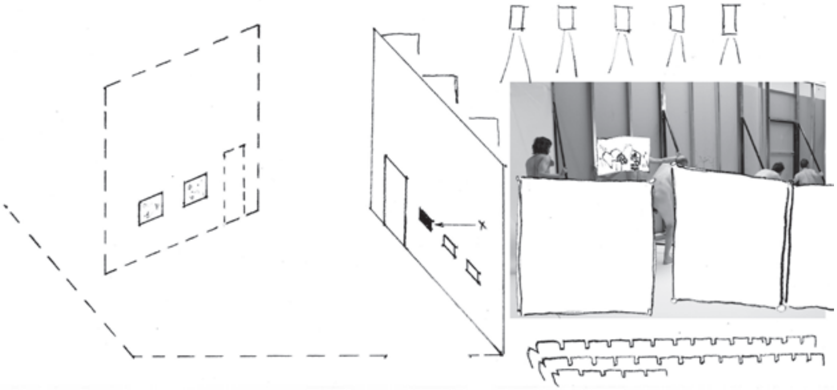
3

Grasping at the last piercing through of city lights, she sinned once more the sin of envious attention. In the visions of broken window panes falling to the ground, reflecting a kaleidoscope of sun and pain, she walked a few steps forward. After the alarms sounded she began searching for an ally in the screaming mass of ant-like humans, rushing, enveloped in the panic, tired, silenced, cold feet and tight nerves. A wounded landscape, transformed beyond recognition by the catastrophe. The unease of lives changed, or lost. Her reality now a badly sketched drawing of a life she could not fathom, she didn't want. Rivets, more glass, screeching of tires, madness – were replaced by legal constraints and pressing due dates, a field of disappointment. Was there anyone to call a neighbor anymore? Once everything returned to normal she began to feel captured, detained in a moment of immobility, stuck in a fissure of the mundane.

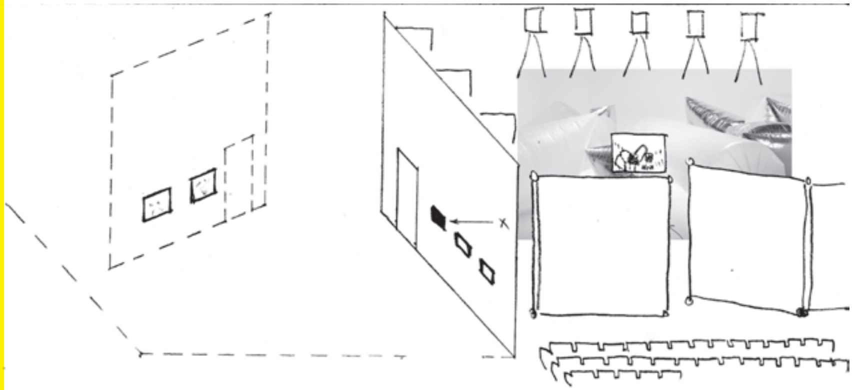
Chapters 4 & 5: Latency / “Le Voyage dans la lune”



Chapter 2: “No Future”

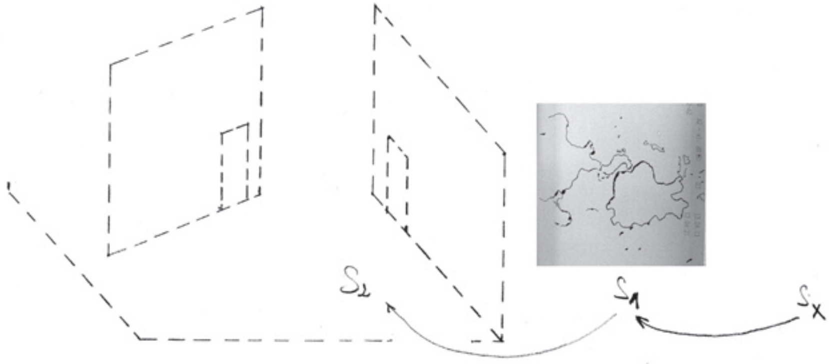


Chapter 2: Parametricism

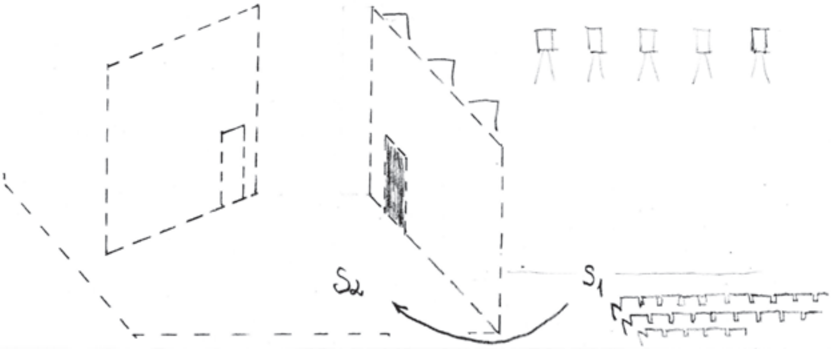


4 Morning, and another door appears in the hallway. No warning, no apparent cause. It is just there. Doors in particular are rather alarming in her world. Behind them are spatial disjunctions and traces of alien invasion. Her inner stress at observing this portal slowly becomes panic, as the shaking starts and the noise on the other side of the wall hits new highs. Unable to resist, she cracks it open. The air on the other side seems distinct, abnormally so. At the climax of our story, this protagonist is invited to leave her world through this door – this exit takes over the function of a spatial verb, delivering her into a different actuality. She turns to scream warning into the void for those who will come after her – an emissary of her time, stuck to the ticking clock's minute hand, knit into the fabric of an alien epoch.

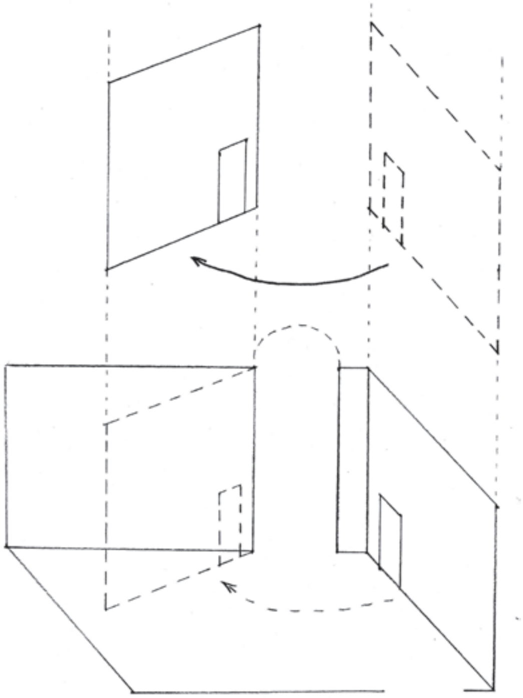
Chapter 1:
Negative Space



Chpater 1:
The Door



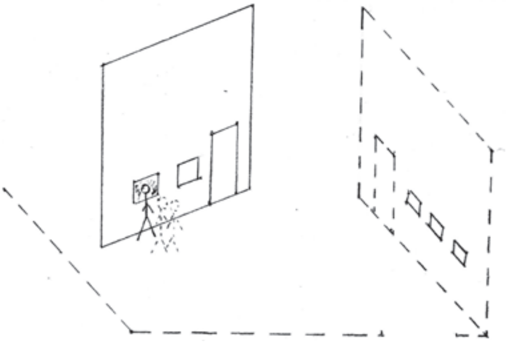
Prologue:
Spatial Displacement



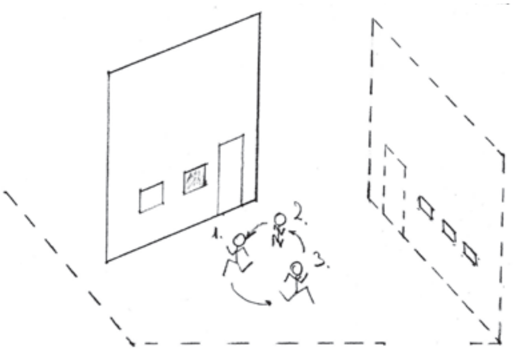
5

She started ripping the drawings into shreds, rejoicing and laughing aloud. A red-haired plan and a long-nosed dog. She never tired of knowing that there is an immense distance in the way an embodied mind experiences its surroundings from what some thought “objective”. Galatea. A living body. In millimeters and precise measured units of exposure. Just a few more streets, a tall building, and flight will be possible. If even for a split second. This paradoxical desire engorged her, took over, eclipsed the everyday, became sovereign in her mind. There was no true access, just a ripple in the system, a tingling, beads of sweat, a wanting. She, extant while improbable, in present while glimpsing the future, giggling.

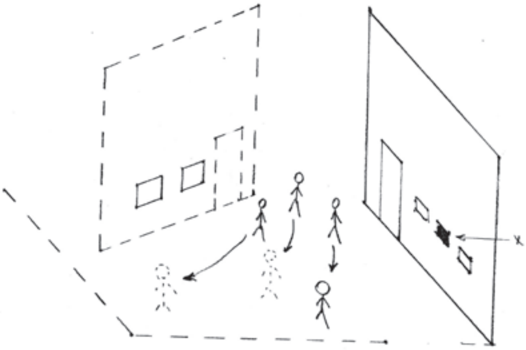
Chapters 10-14: Face-Space / Excavation



Chapters 15-20: Zoopraxographer's chamber



Chapter 23: Amerika



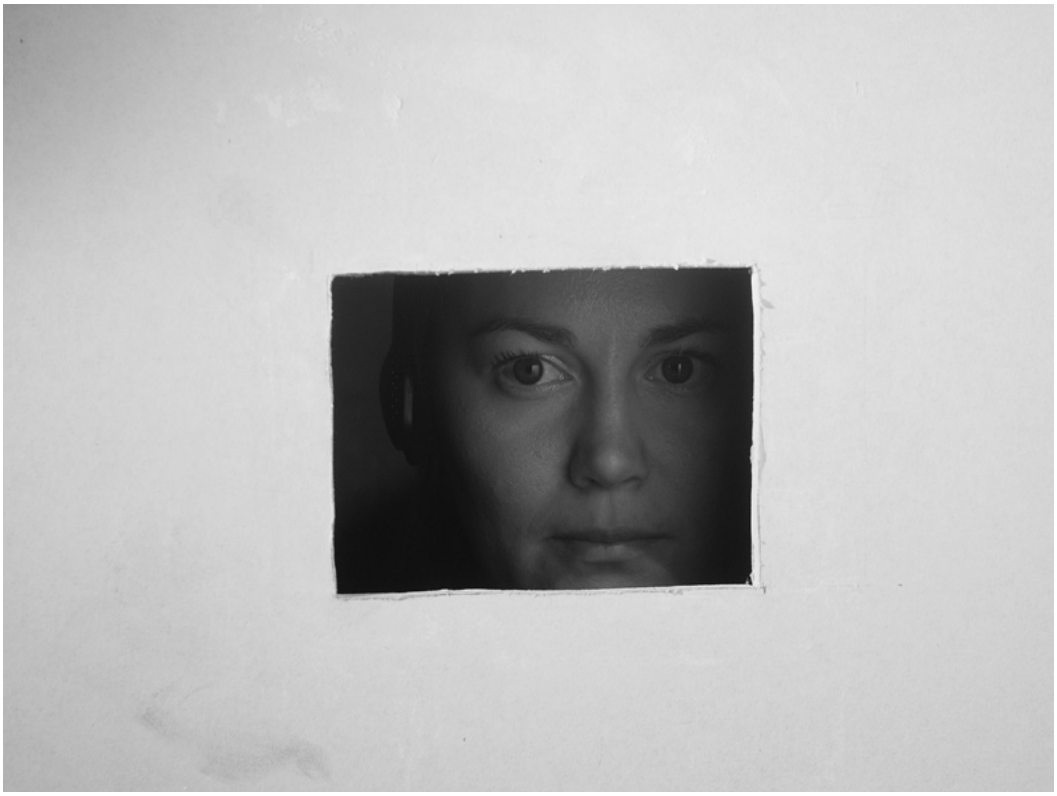
6

To conquer the world by possessing its image, this was a wet dream she couldn’t shake off. So was to contemplate to one’s desire, to conjoin disparate things. She desired to be a simple shell of a life, in wait of events to occupy it, establish it, run it: a brief public address, eyes open, cards on the table, maps drawn and set in history. She longed to look back into the future and see the new popular fashions of thinking. Discovering those prospective visions, photographs on top of photographs: paper wet, image distorted, multiple expositions and traces of radiation. She desired to scream warning into the void of those who will come after us, to whisper to her grandchild’s grandchild, and to hear the response in the present. She felt an emissary of her time, stuck to the ticking clock’s minute hand, knit into the fabric of an alien epoch.

7

Twisting the map in all directions he wondered how justified his confidence still was. Soon it became clear that there was no corner, no street, just as its name was not written on the map although it was clearly marked and it visibly separated two blocks. He looked up, and realized that there was no bridge that connected the buildings across the street, and that both the glass bridge and the street were drawn on the map only for the sake of copyright. But he could not shake the feeling that this map was perhaps more real than the houses that stood in front of him. Even more so because the satellite view of the trap street reflected in the glass panes of the bridge, in all except one, an open window behind which one could perhaps have seen a human face.

The time came to abandon the search and try to find another way out. He knew that his solution was not a popular choice, but with a little creak he lifted the trapdoor in the floor and disappeared into the trap room.



8

Before he left he came over for Sunday dinner. He wasn’t his usual talkative self. Visibly anguished, he avoided any mention of the summit. Except, when it got too late to put off going home, with everyone else at the table already drooping weary-eyed over the fourth emptied bottle and the beckoning early start of tomorrow’s day, he got up hesitantly and sighed in a barely audible voice: This is going to be an endless round of negotiations.

His letter would arrive on the 8th day. He wasn’t in the habit of sending letters, I don’t even remember ever receiving a post-card from his innumerable journeys. Just an occasional call to let me know he’s coming back soon. Enclosed in the letter was a pressed Möbius strip with four simplified human figures drawn at equal intervals across the strip. In the letter he briefly wrote that the negotiations came too late and that the usual arm-twisting of the developing nations into conceding to this kind of international treaty no longer made any sense. There was no international treaty to be brokered: when there’s not enough to for everyone, no talk of fair distribution makes any sense. And when there’s not even enough for the most, no talk of fair settlement makes any sense either. The sources of ore were simply drying out. We handled too late. No theory of international relation would help us now.

But then he recounted at length the dream he had on the day before. He woke, in his dream, not an hour after falling asleep. Unable to shake off insomnia, even though the hour was late, he put on the robe over his pyjamas and went downstairs to the hotel lobby. Nobody was in sight. Dismayed at this human absence, he remained standing there at the bottom of the staircase. After a short while he heard the door at the side of the lobby, probably leading into the kitchen, opening and out came the receptionist wearing strange headgear, and with gliding, slow steps approached him and asked: “Can I help you, Sir?” – “Oh, just insomnia” – “Well”, leaning gently forward to his ear, whispered gently, pointing with his finger towards a small wooden booth with two doors not unlike a confessional, “would you like to see an omniscopic film?” Somewhat confused over this statement he let himself be led by the receptionist into the dark booth through the doors on the right side, while the receptionist sat next to him entering through the doors on the left side. The dark booth from within opened onto yet another, larger dark box. The receptionist started spooling a roll of film consisting of three parallel strips into a strange, seemingly old contraption with a very complex set of spools that resembled more a watch mechanism than a simple film projector. Working with amazing facility, he placed the film into the projector, closed the back cover that read “Omniscope”, and started the projection, which now immediately lit the larger dark box. The title read “Imploding Times” and what followed was unlike any film he had seen before – it was a merging succession of images where human figures extended in time and almost synchronously unfolded from three different angles, creating a strange sensation of a lasting now and a sensation that the accumulation of movements that constituted the duration of time was imploding in these voluminous images. Later, once the projection was over, the receptionist tried to explain the effect by showing the labyrinthine system of spools and an inert lens material over which the image was projected, but the explanation simply eluded him in his oniric dazedness. All he could clearly recall was the mention of a three-dimensional synthetic film.

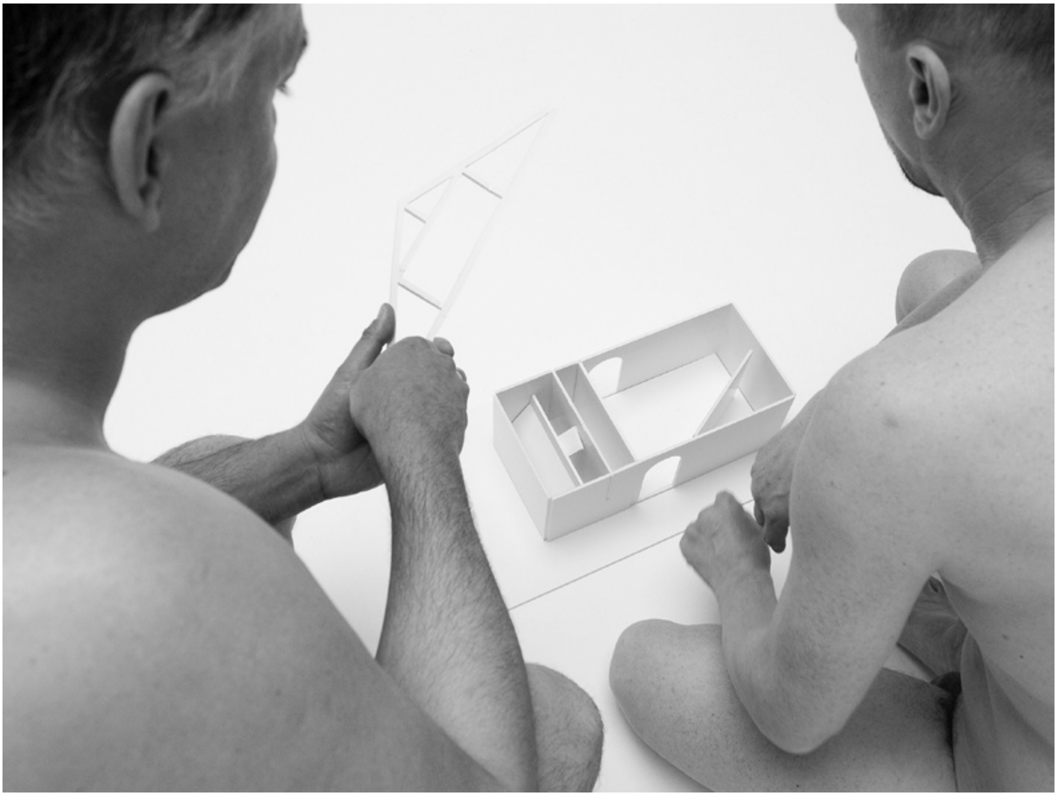
9

I received yet another letter from him. This one arrived after he had already come back and left again to another meeting somewhere else. Before he left again we spoke on the phone and he said: “I’m leaving to do more of the same – lip-service to bilateral exchange in the face of collapsing multilateralism. Where there was not enough for everyone, all that can be done is to negotiate more inequalities.”

He also recounted having spent evenings on the previous trip alone at the hotel. He must have watched over and over as the news of another big bank bailout came in. That’s what I assume. He didn’t spend too much time on the context that would make the understanding of the letter easier. But the letter stated: “This is depressing. We are transported by images, but how do images travel to us? Broadcasters put us in the midst of action, but where do images materialize for us? How do we answer for what we have witnessed in images? We cannot not answer for the things we see. True, not for everything. We are not responsible for everything. But we cannot renounce responsibility at free will either. That would be naive. Responsibility is only in part tied to act. In other part to participating in the regime that creates human disasters.

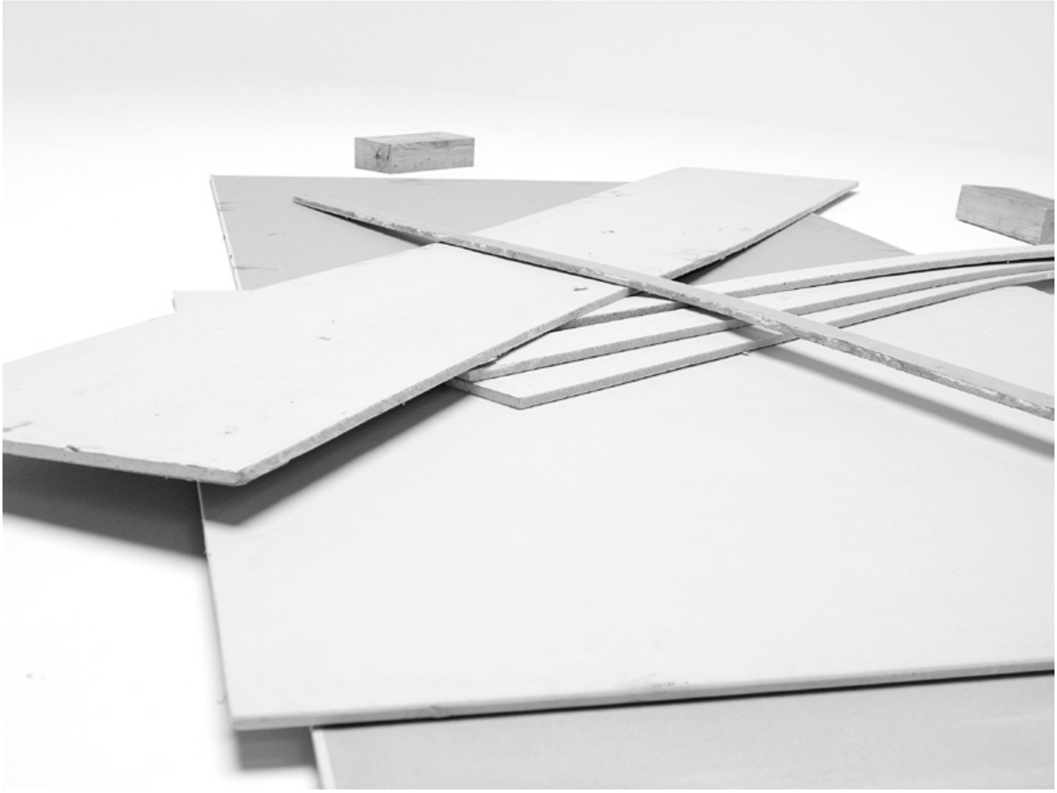
Consider the financial markets. They are transforming into an absolute form of social answering for private risk-taking. Responsibility modeled on external economy. Industrial companies, for instance, externalize the cost of environmental impact and integrate the benefits they have from public education. The first is a negative externality for the society. The second is a positive externality for the company. The financial players are taking it a step further. They know that their risk is at such a scale that they are too big for society to let them go bankrupt. The old wisdom of market regulation in industrial economy was that self-regulating markets needed correction. The new wisdom in the financial economy is that the market has nothing to do with self-regulation and has all to do with riding the bubble while it lasts. Society will pay – sooner or later. And it is through externalities that we come to pay for the images of financial meltdowns beamed at us. You’ve seen it before: socialization of loss, privatization of profit.

But, it is a cynical difference in speed that for some images we come to answer sooner and for some maybe not at all. That the economic losses of our speculators catch up with us sooner than the bombs of our military alliances going off at innocent victims. We shouldn’t watch images thinking that there are no consequences, that we won’t answer. Unless we find a way to externalize them onto others.”



10

Encountering his own face reflected in the facade, he was no longer sure if he felt like a larva or a ghost. He wondered whether his physical reality was only a cocoon and his thoughts were so far from reality that his own reflection seemed more real than the original. He stood in front of a building which in its foundations shared his concerns, although those foundations were hidden deep in the bowels of the Earth. The facade grown from self-forming vector patterns changed like a mirage, shifting through endless forms. A canyon of a crystal glass fissure, a steel schematic of the interference of magnetic waves, window frames in a rhythmic structure of polycarbonate materials, a computer-controlled dynamic of interweaving levels... The facade was no longer on the surface of the building, the facade was now his face perfectly composed into precise holographic advertisements displaying his portrait. He stood in front, and was incorporated, his money attaining character even before he spent it.



11

The last footage he reviewed was also the most expensive. When last, some sixty years ago perhaps, he sought to have that material restored from a destroyed hard-disc they told him that it would cost too much, but that the procedure would in a few years become cheap and available to everyone. He thought that no one would show interest in his experimental home movies anyway, and as the years passed he lost track of the disc. It took him time to recognize what a hard-disc was, he could not remember what his first home 3D camera looked like. But the films were still alive in his memory. Maybe not so much the films, but his roles in them. If nothing else, he remembered that he was a film extra and that in these films he always re-enacted his performance works, but as an extra. Now when he viewed them again he tried to figure out if it all had some political cause…

12

— *Are you watching the photo-film? The sequence of still images is unrelenting.*

— True, they don’t arrive in rapid succession. Their speed varies.

— *But, the slower they progress, the more obvious becomes the withdrawal of movement.*

— The more obvious becomes the change from image to image.

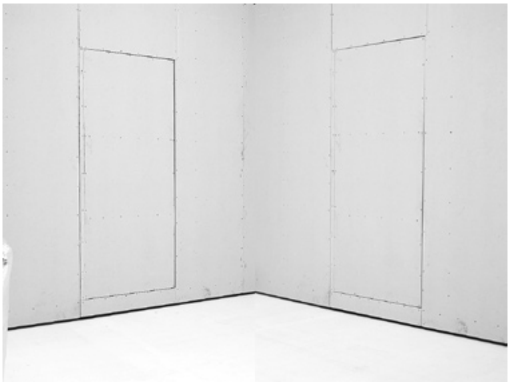
— *Moving images reinforce our expectation that time is uniform and consequential. Once you remove the movement, the expectation of time tenses. The less images there are, the more we crave to see. The more time remains unseen, the more unstable our sense of time becomes. And the strange unsettling of our cinematic habituation in these images doesn’t stop there.*

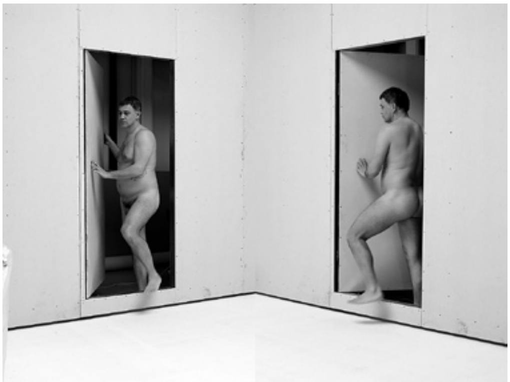
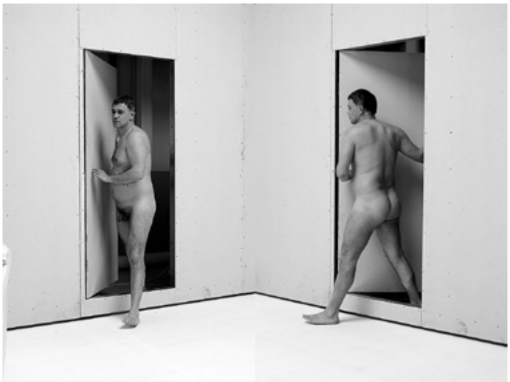
— Yes, there is also a strange incoherence of time within images. Some elements seem to be changing more rapidly than others, showing the rapid wear of time while others run in continuity. That female character’s face aged visibly while her action was taking the real-time that it takes for one image to replace the other.

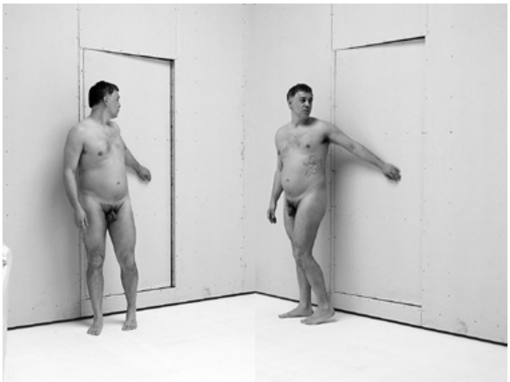
— *The architecture seems to behave even more volatile, changing back and forth in time, while everything else is seemingly progressing normally. Once there is an anomaly in movement of images, we can no longer follow the displacements in space and time. There is a bifurcation of seen and unseen, of cinema in images and cinema in us.*

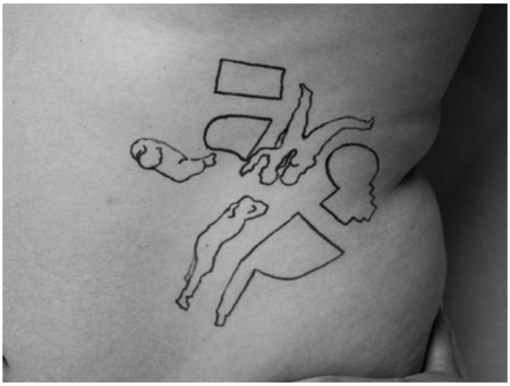
13

A look to the left, a look to the right, a touch, wherever she went there were remains. Abandoned data, ruins of augmented reality, discarded lines of navigation. Data trash that was not swept for days. The surrounding walls were barely discernible under the decomposed banners and she only recognized the shop windows that were protected from illegal advertising. One drunken weekend, one holiday and the state of city services becomes apparent. “Mine is not much better,” she thought looking at the facial thermogram on the lock and opening the door to her apartment, and she only hoped the all too eager Office of Construction had not changed the Master Plan over the weekend. She wondered whether her balcony was still in place or had the symbiosis with the neighboring villa progressed further, the symbiosis that had surely placed into her winter garden some energy unit of her neighbor’s Aquatic Center.







14 In moments of sexual rapture architecture flashes before my eyes. Just so. With no intent. Not to steer my mind away from the ennui of intercourse nor to push away the climax. Simply, in full throb of ecstasy, while I lose control over my breathing, stern lines of architecture flash before my eyes. I cannot think back to how and when this reminiscence got imprinted in my memory. It resembles though long Antonionian tracking shots of high-modernist architecture that set the stage for the implosion of the bourgeois serenity between Jeanne Moreau and Marcello Mastroianni. An unfolding collapse of togetherness acquiring its full spatial extension. The modernist architecture is that encapsulation of bourgeois homeostasis that the post-war modernism, in its sincere moment of progressivism, aspired to provide to everyone. A Le Corbusier for every proletarian. The failure of this aspiration is analogous to the inner void, the anxiety of the external skin of architecture flashing during my intimate act in the inner space of habitation. The authentic lie of an ecstatic moment that can’t be shared and provided to everyone. Just as the modernism of equality turned into a modernism of privilege. And that, when I think about it, might have been the Antonionian void too: not that of failed love, but that of settling with the failure of social overturn.

15

As she watched the group of two men and one woman layering another wall to add to an already fragile structure, using old tools to wedge in the doors that were not quite fitting in, she became acutely aware that housing was no longer built. The existing structures had to be replaced long ago, but there was no economy and the population was only shrinking. They became dilapidated and defunct. Evidently dependent on the effort and domestic economy of their dwellers to keep them from collapsing. Their structural performance was simply human effort. And as they started to depend on human effort for their structural soundness – they started to grow and contract in unpredictable ways. Expanding and receding in vertical layers and horizontal directions. Constructing levels in mid air over the existing rooftops, with slender pylons perched in the interstices between the buildings. The built environment was changing wildly. Where she stood now, only two weeks before stood an empty lot filled with a type of motorized vehicle that was no longer in use. She was sent here to survey the use of land and mark the new buildings into the existing map, but now she understood that it was an impossible task. In two weeks all her effort would make no sense. She could no longer map the built environment, she could only try to figure out the processes of human infrastructure around it.

16

Images were moving quickly, their flicker illuminating the small cutout in the wall that provided access to the screen. It was a quick roundup of news of the day: another parliamentary session, price of water going up again, the going-abouts of the rich and famous. Nothing notable. Suddenly the procession of images was interrupted and paused on an image of an older peasant woman crossing the street. Behind her a long stretch of road and two patrolling soldiers standing a few yards away. The photograph was no different than any other photograph from a conflict zone. But the procession of images just would not resume. That one image persisted. For minutes. In that unending silence there was no way around watching and becoming engrossed in its detail, revealing a small bucket with masonry tools in the woman’s hand, the resigned anger in her exhausted face, the threatening look of one guard and a mouth open in shout of the other, the fence on each side of the road, and the semi-erected brick wall behind the fence on the side that the woman was walking towards. The frozen photo was slowly unfolding into a theater scene presenting the daily humiliation that our security and our exclusion of those who were barred from access to our society required. The image started to break, but before the news broadcast could resume, the photo was replaced by a message that could be barely made out. It read: “From their position, the spectator can occasionally foresee, or predict the future. The secrets of the future could be revealed to them, but so too could the atrocities of the present, thus they are able, through skilled observation, to identify and forewarn others of the dangers that lie ahead.” Now the images started to move quickly again, their flicker illuminating the small cutout in the wall.

BADco.

Responsibility for Things Seen
A Reader

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