Deterritorialized Images: Future Visions, Past Memories

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Abstract

From the very start, electronic language and video technologies have provided a free territory for expanding and reformulating multiple artistic itineraries, as well as a point of confluence for the most creative dialogue between different media. Raymond Bellour's work has been significant in defining the role that video has played in the media context, describing it as a *passeur* between systems of old and new images, between the mobile and the immobile. Following the digital turn, it seems that the most obvious legacy of video in today's digital system lies in the transfer, within the logic of computers, of that vocation for integration and intermediation which has always been acknowledged as its genetic characteristic. The computer becomes itself a *passeur* between the history of photography, the cinema and the experimental electronic world, increasing the possibility of interweaving influences, both practical and conceptual. The essay describes the work of some contemporary artists (Mittelstäd, Vogel, Klasmer), where the choice of a notably inter-media representation condenses the spirit of the history of photography and moving images, in a parabola that originates in pre-cinema to reach electronic experimentation and go towards the all-comprehensive logic of the metamedium-*passeur*.

From the very start, electronic language and video technologies have provided a free territory for expanding and reformulating multiple artistic itineraries, as well as a point of confluence for the most innovative and non-standard lines of research developed in cinema and television. Since the 1960s, media scholars and art historians have therefore observed the birth and evolution of a visual production which was often greatly diverse and disconnected, characterized by an incoherence of identities which opened up potential and horizons.[1] By now this

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[1] Amongst the many studies of international historical recognition, see: *Metamorfosi della visione. Saggi di pensiero elettronico*, ed. by Rosanna Albertini and Sandra Lischi 2nd edn (Pisa: ETS, 2000); *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, ed. by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture/BAVC, 1990); Silvia Bordini, *Videoarte & arte, tracce per una storia* (Rome: Lithos, 1995); *La Vidéo entre art et communication*, ed. by Nathalie Magnant (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1997); Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche. L'oltre del cinema e l'arte del*

history is a familiar story of artistic and media contexts converging in electronic technologies, and of their shared trajectories and exchanges. The interpretation of video by Raymond Bellour has been significant, though often considered ambiguous and elusive by critics, and it clearly defines the role that electronic images have played in the media context: '[...] la grande force de la vidéo a été, est, sera, d'avoir opéré des *passages*. La vidéo est avant tout une passeuse. Passages [...] au deux grands niveau d'expérience que j'ai évoqués : entre mobile et immobile, entre l'analogie photographique et ce qui la transforme.'[2] In his essay Bellour emphasizes the potential of translation that is intrinsic to video: on the one hand capable of incorporating and transforming painting, photography and cinema; on the other hand ready for a production of its own images and therefore inclined, by its very nature, to creating a new and unforeseeable circularity between systems of old and new images.[3]

The intense relationship that over the years has developed between cinema, photography and video has been articulated from many points of view. There are countless authors on the international scene who have drawn inspiration from the cinema, recovering it, quoting it, turning narrative structures upside-down, opposing new ways of telling a story, both in a single-channel work and in forms of installation, up to the many current practices of what is known as exposed cinema. Old and new names come to the surface, from Woody Vasulka to Candice Breitz, from Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi to Douglas Gordon, from Gianni Toti to Oliver Pietsch, from Harun Farocki to Christian Marclay, from Thierry Kuntzel to Antoni Muntadas, and so on. Alongside these names there are filmmakers whose work is open to the electronic experience such as Jean-Luc Godard, Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman and Jonas Mekas, to mention only a few. Scholarly research has been equally intense, having revealed for example the resurfacing of the theories of the avant-gardes in video-practices, the visionary inspiration of surrealist cinema, New American Cinema practices, as well as the return to vision aesthetics that evoke the experiments of pre-cinema and the cinema of the origins.[4]

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video (Rome: Scuola Nazionale di Cinema, 2001); Françoise Parfait, *Vidéo: un art contemporain* (Paris: Regard, 2001); *Le storie del video*, ed. by Valentina Valentini (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003); Florence De Méredieu, *Arts et nouvelles technologies* (Paris: Larousse, 2003); Michael Rush, *Video Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007); Alessandro Amaducci, *Videoarte. Storia, autori, linguaggi* (Turin: Kaplan, 2014).

[2] Raymond Bellour, *L'Entre-Images, Photo, Cinéma, Vidéo* (Paris: La Différence, 2002), p. 14 [emphasis in the original].

[3] The interpretation by Philippe Dubois also echoes that of Bellour. In a similar way, Dubois interpreted video as an intermediary more than a medium, a state of the image more than an object, a way of thinking in images and making images. See Dubois, 'La Question vidéo face au cinéma: déplacements esthetiques', in *Cinéma et dernières technologies*, ed. by Frank Beau, Dubois, Gérard Blanc (Paris, Bruxelles: INA, De Boeck & Larcier, 1998), pp. 189–92; Dubois, *La Question vidéo entre cinéma et art contemporain* (Crisnée: Yellow Now, 2011).

[4] In Italian studies alone, I refer to *Cine ma video*, ed. by Lischi (Pisa: ETS, 1996); Amaducci, *Segnali video. I nuovi immaginari della videoarte* (Santhià: GS, 2000); Bruno Di Marino, *Interferenze dello sguardo. La sperimentazione audiovisiva tra analogico e digitale* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002); Marco Maria Gazzano, *Kinema. Il cinema sulle tracce del cinema: dal film alle arti elettroniche, andata e*

The more subtle and problematic relationship alluded to by Bellour is that which goes beyond salvaging archive images from photographs and films as a place of testimony, or as a fragment of the past on which to weave reflections. Rather it is the dialogue that electronics have enabled between (photographic) fixity and (cinematographic) movement. This direction of research is also the basis of the artistic production of Bill Viola and Robert Cahen, in a different way. They have extensively used the figures of slow motion, still image, stasis-movement passages as figures of style, poetic interpretations and ways of perceptive interrogation.

Very recent international research in film studies has enabled reflection on these topics, specifically on how the digital turning-point has influenced the ontological redefinition of cinema and photography with regard to questions which, in the era of film, had been fundamental: the relationships with time and with movement.[5]

It is looking in this direction that it seems legitimate to ask a question: since, as Philippe Dubois writes, 'Aujourd'hui, le discours ontologique dans les arts visuels (photographie, cinéma, vidéo) n'est plus guère de mise parce qu'il n'y a plus d'image "pure" qui puisse tenir. Le temps n'est plus à la recherche des "spécificités" et des démarcations catégoriques',[6] then in light of the turn to the digital, what has happened to that dialogic tendency of video, widely observed by scholars, and in particular its ability to connect fixity and movement? Observing the current media landscape, and the confluence of languages that the digital has enabled, is it still possible and appropriate to speak of video?[7] If so, in what terms? What remains on the current media scene of Bellour's interpretation?

Following work in the standardization of the media proposed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their *Remediation*, but also the view of Lev Manovich,[8] a staunch defender of the need to put the new and old media on a line of continuity, what in my opinion remains the most obvious legacy of video in today's digital environment is the transfer, within the logics of the comput-

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ritorno (Rome: Exorma, 2012).

[5] Focusing in particular on the texts that are most closely related to the topic in question, I refer to: Barbara Le Maître, *Entre film et photographie. Essai sur l'empreinte* (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2004); *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, ed. by David Green and Joanna Lowry (Brighton: Photoworks 2006); Laura Mulvey, *Death 24× a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006); *The Cinematic*, ed. by David Campany (Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 2007); Di Marino, *Pose in movimento. Fotografia e cinema* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009); *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms*, ed. by Eivind Røssaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

[6] Dubois, *La Question vidéo*, p. 138.

[7] The recent book *Medium senza medium. Amnesia e cannibalizzazione: il video dopo gli anni Novanta*, ed. by Valentini and Cosetta G. Saba (Rome: Bulzoni, 2015) questions the development and fate of video and video art from the 1990s to the present day.

[8] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

er, of that vocation for integration and intermediation which has always been considered its genetic characteristic. Where new technologies and new artistic strategies trouble the domination of images in movement, it seems to me that in the face of the radical change undergone by the arts of film — which have inevitably evolved into algorithmic codes that are infinitely modifiable — video has guaranteed a resistance that, as well as being naturally electronic, is also conceptual, preserving and disseminating its inter-media essence. With this in mind, in fact the computer — a meta-medium which seems to assimilate the aesthetic strategies of the avant-garde in its controls and in the metaphors of software interface, as Manovich writes [9] — moreover picks up the conceptual legacy of video, becoming itself a *passeur* between the history of photography, the cinema and experimental electronic image, assuring a renewed increase in the possibility of interweaving, exchanges and confluences, both practical and conceptual. Therefore, we can no longer refer today to the electronic fluidity of video as something that is capable of receiving the other arts, since it is the very essence of video, not only in its inter-personal inclination, but also in its openness to re-creating images through special effects, which has been diluted into other languages through the digital.[10]

Returning to the central context of this article — the relationship between fixity and movement, particularly in the field of non-fiction digital production since 2000 — one notes the presence of works where the photographic, cinematographic and electronic matrices intersect through the use of images which appear to have dislocated themselves from their original territories. This is a consequence of their 'deterritorialization' in the digital space, to use a Deleuzian concept of memory. This idea of deterritorialization, which has migrated between different disciplines over the years,[11] today seems to be the most appropriate to describe the transversal integrations between media languages which, in the digital field, seem to lose their original purity while nevertheless preserving a trace or a memory of it.[12] In this sense, to speak of the relationship between fixity and movement in a digital field

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[9] Manovich, pp. 258–59.

[10] On this shift of the role of video, see also Georges Heck, 'La Vidéo entre medium et art. De la formation d'un genre à son éclatement', in *Vidéo topiques. Tours et retours de l'art vidéo*, ed. by Fabrice Hergott and others (Strasbourg: Musée de Strasbourg, 2002), pp. 18–23.

[11] For example in the fields of anthropology and sociology, I refer to Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Elsewhere, I have discussed the various meanings of deterritorialization, from a mix of languages to the multiplicity of viewing channels; see Elena Marcheschi, *Videoestetiche dell'emergenza. L'immagine della crisi nella sperimentazione audiovisiva* (Turin: Kaplan, 2015). The same concept is used to interpret the language of video by Saba, 'Per un supplemento d'indagine: la forza deterritorializzante del video' in *Medium senza medium*, pp. 78–127. Although he does not use the concept of deterritorialization, Luciano De Giusti also discusses osmosis and intermedia fluidity when defining new paradigms of the audiovisual experience; *Immagini migranti. Forme intermediali del cinema nell'era digitale*, ed. by Luciano De Giusti (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), pp. 9–17.

[12] To mention just one example, a broad affection for the grainy image and the warmth of film stock, which is often recreated in digital images.

that dilutes photography with cinema and video, today it seems only partially effective to employ the references and theories of the past, which were linked primarily to the analysis of the physical nature of the supports referring to the essence of the frame, or to theories of the electronic image. This is because, as Røssaak maintains, the images are no longer facts, but algorithmic codes which, having lost the nostalgia for authenticity and indexicality, can be processed in infinite ways.[13]

Therefore, if the digital demarcates the new space for the passages between media, and if the notion of video, in addition to what has been observed above, remains categorized by the short format and experimentations in non-fiction, how then can we redefine the relationship between fixity and movement in current digital audiovisual production?

Among the various international artists who have addressed these subjects in recent years, I would like to mention in particular the crucial work *entre-images* by Egbert Mittelstädt, François Vogel and Shira Klasmer.[14] In different ways, as we will see, these authors examine the world and its dynamism from a digital-technological perspective that is reminiscent of earlier, varied experimentations in the passage from the photographic image to the cinematographic one.

To begin, let us consider the question of the relationship between fixity and movement through the analysis of all the single-channel works and installations by the German artist Egbert Mittelstädt.[15] The recurrent theme in his works is the observation of urban space, often saturated with humanity, traffic, physicality, through a representation which sets itself at a distance from the poetic enquiries in the style of metropolitan symphonies.[16] This takes place through a physical and temporal deconstruction of the environments: in a video such as *Genkai* (2011) (fig. 1), to take only one example into consideration, the natural movement of spaces is decomposed and divided into both photographic and dynamic portions that are then superimposed or scrolled past, one on top of the other, therefore fraying and contorting the architectonic structures and shapes thanks to the use of the slit-scan. In the same way, in the passage of states between fixity and movement, human bodies also change consistency, they become fluid, thin but also frozen in photographic snapshots. On the one hand, the artist's research recovers the experimental itinerary of the pioneers of video-art, with special reference to the concept of the mechanical eye elaborated by the Vasulkas; on the other, it is connected with age-old ex-

[13] Røssaak, 'The Still/Moving Field: An Introduction', in *Between Stillness and Motion*, pp. 11–24 (pp. 16–20).
[14] With respect to my focus here, on the relationship between fixity and movement in images, I have decided to omit the analysis of sound design, which nonetheless would deserve a separate, specific discussion insofar as it is an element that affects the perception of movement and rhythm.
[15] The reader is referred to the Vimeo channel <https://vimeo.com/egbertmittelstaedt> [accessed 10 February 2016], in particular to the works *La Rue Coupée* (2005), *Altostratus* (2006), *Elsewhere 2* (2007), *Genkai* (2011).
[16] Here I refer to both cinematographic and video traditions, obviously accounting for their respective differences, ranging from films such as those by Vertov and Ruttmann to the video works by Cohen, Toti or Cahen.
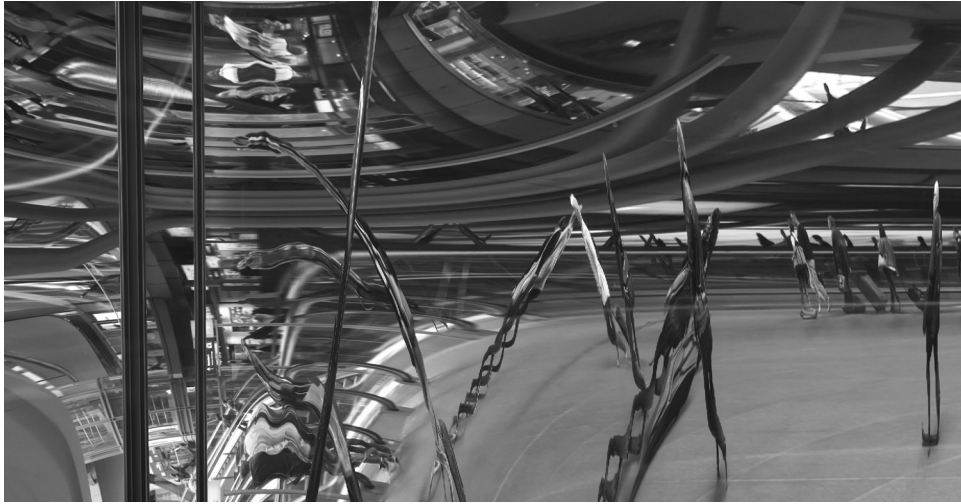
Fig. 1: *Genkai* (Egbert Mittelstädt, 2011)

perimentations which refer back to the romantic visions of the nineteenth-century *vedute* and the chronophotographic research by Muybridge. For Mittelstädt, the reflection on the relationship between static and dynamic image becomes above all a way of investigating relations between the past, present and future of a given urban and anthropic context. In this sense, while situating himself within a profoundly digital perspective, his research is closely related to the history of the technological reproduction of the image, both photographic and cinematographic. The worlds that Mittelstädt constructs are actually the result of using advanced technologies that have their roots in the mechanics (or dreamt-of mechanics) of the past: the roundshot that allows circular vision thanks to the use of a mobile film camera connected to the computer, or the use of the slit-scan which allows fragmentation and the effects of dragged images. In his installations or performances, the use of slide projectors, translucent screens or rotating projectors does not appear to be anything other than the technologies desired by the theoretician-filmmakers of the early twentieth century: here I refer to the pre-visions of Vertov, Ėjzenštejn, Gance, Moholy-Nagy and many others. Though at the end of the nineteenth century the reproduction of movement appeared to be the inevitable future of photographic experimentation, with a reverse perspective we can see a kind of hesitation in the works of Mittelstädt, a fascination for slowing down the images, the decomposition of their dynamism, the freezing of movement, as though the artist wants to recreate a sort of post-pre-cinema with present-day digital techniques.

Let us now consider the work of the French artist François Vogel, defined in the magazine *Bref* as the 'baroque magician of video'.[17] In his single-channel works, in

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[17] James Donald, 'François Vogel, magicien baroque', *Bref*, 95 (2010), 20–21. To view his works, see the site <http://francoisvogel.com/fr> [accessed 13 February 2016], with particular attention

Fig. 2: *Terrains glissants* (François Vogel, 2010)

his installations but also in the photographs he produced, Vogel observes with equal attention both the world closest to him, the domestic one, but also the urban or natural environments in which he moves, often framing himself within the various contexts. With an engineering-like inclination towards the fabrication of images, the artist offers a dilated representation of reality, between optical straining and stretching, offering a baroque, wide-angle and anamorphic vision of the world (fig. 2) that leads back to the memory of optical boxes and the catoptrical magic of the pre-cinema. This complex way of looking inevitably involves and also determines the temporal trend, in images where the use of photographic fixity goes beyond stop-motion, in favour of the hyper-kinesis of city life and spaces, and where baroque views imply a kaleidoscopic and improbable regeneration of urban dynamism. The work in digital and the use of 3D in Vogel is combined with age-old practices, for example in the use of stenopeic machines that he constructed himself;[18] his artisanal work with reflecting spheres, with which he creates shots; the use of cameras; recourse to stop-motion and the organization of spaces according to stereographic visions. Questioning the classic perspective frees a vision of the world which is at one and the same time playful and enigmatic, and which pays tribute to the graphic art of Escher, the cinema of McLaren and the (im)possible visions of cinematographic and electronic research of Rybczynski. Temporality thus appears altered between acceleration and deceleration, between moments of only apparent stasis and the continuous, dynamic transformations of space. The treatment of the human bodies is also involved in this reformulation through optical deformations, inverted images and back-to-front repetitions of gestures which seem to abandon human natural-

to *Cuisine* (2007), *Stretching* (2009), *Terrains glissants* (2010).
[18] The artist is also the author of the book *Nouveau traité du sténopé* (Paris: Éditions Éoliennes, 2011).

ness in order to adopt a mechanical nature. The 'vertigo of the perspective'[19] of Vogel's works, the resulting dialogue between the analogue matrix and the digital context, thus also becomes a vertigo of time, by means of the phenomenic representation which simultaneously synthesizes photographic fixity and kinetic frenzy.

In the production of the two artists quoted here, on the one hand the choice of a profound inter-media representation condenses the spirit of the history of moving images and of photography, in a parabola that originates in the pre-cinema, extends to electronic experimentation and culminates in the all-comprehensive logic of the metamedium-*passeur.* On the other hand, this operative method also aims to be representative of the chaotic nature of the contemporary world, with its hyper-built-up environments, overpopulation, frenzy and existential decentralization and, through the alteration of spatial-temporal categories, to translate the disorienting perception that man has of reality.

As a last case study, I would like to present the work of Shira Klasmer,[20] a London-based Israeli photographer, who defines herself a movement artist. Her aesthetic research is based on a special technique she developed herself: that of dragging the film inside the camera in order to create panoramic images which return a narration of movement like a continuous trace. From her works, let us take the example of *Successions* (2009) (fig. 3): once developed, the roll of film was digitized and the static panoramic images were subsequently rendered dynamic using video editing software. In this way, time is stretched in a linear way and yet contained within one frame. In this work, as in all of her research, the temporal transitions, the relationship that the movement has with space and time, and the human capacity to perceive these connections are the main objects of investigation in her works, where the photographic technique developed is also at the basis of her audiovisual production. In Klasmer's gaze we find again a taste for the scientific observation that has its most direct ancestor in Marey and in his plates, the studies on movement by the Futurists and by Marcel Duchamp, but also a meticulousness in her management of the relationship between the gaze and the phenomenic world, that attains results with a pictorial and sculptural flavour, as though the movement were impacting the images in a continuous flow.

To conclude, the case studies that I have mentioned are only a small selection from a much wider panorama of authors who work in digital experimentation, using images that appear to us as stratified, hybrid objects '[…] of *casting* and *calculation*, of *ancient* and *modern*, of *past* and *future*'.[21] The relationship between

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[19] I quote the title of the article by Giulia Simi, 'Vertigini prospettiche. Le immagini di François Vogel', *Digimag*, 71 (2012) <http://www.digicult.it/it/digimag/issue-071/italiano-vertigine-prospettiche-le-immagini-di-francois-vogel/> [accessed 13 January 2016].

[20] See the page <https://vimeo.com/shiraklasmer> and the site <http://www.shiraklasmerphotography.com/> [accessed 13 February 2016].

[21] Christian Uva describes the digital image this way in *Impronte digitali. Il cinema e le sue immagini tra regime fotografico e tecnologia numerica* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2009), p. 163 [emphasis in the original]. In the context of film studies, those who support the idea of a new flourishing of cinema

Fig. 3: *Successions* (Shira Klasmer, 2009)

new and old technologies today appears completely reinforced in digital environments and the analysis of the renewed relationship between fixity and movement is only confirmation of this. Is the cinema gaining ground?[22] It certainly is not losing any and, together with pre-cinema and photography, has been revitalized in new dimensions where to question the relationship between fixity and movement means to reflect on a dialogue between media which today appear increasingly without specificities. As Laura Mulvey has written, 'Passing time, in and of itself, shifts perception of relations and aesthetic patterns and these shifts are, in turn, accentuated by the new horizons formed by new technologies. As a result, a new kind of ontology may emerge, in which ambivalence, impurity and uncertainty displace the traditional oppositions.'[23]

While we try to define this new ontology — at least as far as the most experimental audiovisual production is concerned, where inter-media exchanges appear fertile — all that remains is for us to accept the vertigo of images which, by preserving the memory of film, reach us, transported by an electronic flow which is renewed with algorithmic vitality, pulsating and flowing instant by instant.

in the era of convergence include Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).
[22] The question takes inspiration from the title *Extended Cinema. Le cinéma gagne du terrain*, ed. by Dubois, Frédéric Monvoisin, Elena Biserna (Udine: Campanotto, 2010).
[23] Mulvey, p. 14.