

that it reveals the dynamism of digital images and their inherent transformations. While viewing it, the spectator truly does assist to the consequences of Mondrian's theory and practice, author of the well-known text *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality*. Nonetheless, despite the fact that Mondrian awakened Simon's interest in a specific artistic concept it is obvious that the latter's software pieces cannot be considered a mere extension of the master of abstraction. This is something that is different, which has its own identity, characterised by the undeniable feeling of attraction experienced by the person that observes and studies it. It could even be said that the piece has a life of its own, given its capacity to generate different configurations, colours and structures in the different states that it goes through. The artist himself claims that one of the artists from which he has learnt the most – especially in terms of linear dynamism in drawings- is Paul Klee. (9)

At present, the number of artists that work in the field of digital art is growing. It is sufficient to enter DAM (Digital Art Museum) to recognise many of them and see their work. The virtual museum is a wonderful place to research this vast and magnificent world that is loaded with creativity. Names such as: Dennis H. Miller, Manfred Mohr, Char Davies, John Klima, Charles A. Csuri, Victor Acevedo, Paul Brown, David Em, Helen Golden, Víctor Koen, Juan Antonio Lleó, Karin Schminke, Javier Roca, Michael Wright, Dan Collins, Christian Lavigne, Corinne Whitaker, Jeremy Gardiner, Victoria Vesna, Opy Zouni and a long etcetera are all a part of this vast and yet unexplored world known as digital art.

#### NOTES

[1] See Wands, Bruce, *Art of the Digital Age*, Thames and Hudson, London 2006, pp. 8 and following.

[2] AA.VV., *Vertigo. Il secolo di Arte off-media dal Futurismo al Web*, Exhibition Catalogue,

Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, Skira, 6<sup>th</sup> May – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

[3] Carrillo, Jesús, *Arte en la red*, Ediciones Cátedra, Madrid 2004, p. 160.

[4] *Ib. Id.*, pp.162-163.

[5]vSee Wands, Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

[6]vKawaguchi, Yoichiro, *Arte-pensamiento*, <http://www.artfutura.com/02/kawaguchi.htm> (Consulted on: 03-03-2008.)

[7] Redo, Xavier, *Karl Sims*, [http://www.iaa.upf.es/~berenguer/recursos/ima\\_dig/5/estampes/1\\_15.htmf.es/](http://www.iaa.upf.es/~berenguer/recursos/ima_dig/5/estampes/1_15.htmf.es/) (Consulted on: 03-03-2008.)

[8] *Ib.id.*

[9] Ploug, Kristine, *Interview with John F. Simon Jr.* (19<sup>th</sup> November 2003), <http://www.artificial.dk/articles/simon.htm> (Consulted on: 11-05-2008.)



## FROM CINEMA TO CELL PHONES: CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONS OF IMAGE-MOVEMENT

[ANNA CASANOVAS]

Over the last decade information and communications' technologies have accelerated so much that personally, I have difficulties in recognising the relation between the world I am currently living in and the one in which I grew up.

At present, the numerous screens that surround us are responsible for most of our knowledge and thoughts about the world. Cinema, television, computers and finally, the tiny screen on our cell phones are windows that bring us closer to a kaleidoscopic representation of our environment, although distancing us from the direct life experience of it. In 1968, Guy Debord rightly prophesised

that, "in societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation" [1].

Technology is a language –certainly not neutral- that shapes and informs us of our surrounding world. José Luis Brea explains how the techniques create the era, and how technical discoveries write the traces of time that run through the history of humanity.

When we ponder on the relevance of technological instruments in art and culture, we –quite rightly- tend to talk about photography first. Nonetheless, cinema brought about the greatest technological contribution to social and cultural evolution. Photography allows us to capture static space, to reproduce life in an apparently precise and objective manner. However, life, like thought and language must develop over time, following its process of development, to become a constantly mutating flow.

Therefore, cinema, which has the capacity to restore movement to the moment frozen by photography, became, according to Brea (from whom I borrowed the title of my presentation), the greatest event in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Cinema opens up the gates to an unknown perception of moving images [2]. It incorporates representations capable of capturing the passing of time onto images that had previously always been definitive and identical. Thus, cinema became the only medium capable of representing the reality of time –which never stops- while also approaching the natural manner of thinking as a flow. Paul Virilio named this new device the *art of absence*. Not only because one image has to disappear to allow the next one to appear (at a rhythm of 24 frames per second), but also because what we are viewing in the present belongs irremissibly to the past.

As of then, image-time –continuing with Deleuze's terminology-, rapidly expands thanks to the appearance of various technologies and supports that facilitate its

reproduction, manipulation, display and storage. The initial photochemical image gave way to electromagnetic images, and digital images soon after. Consequently, new cultural and artistic horizons appeared rapidly throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Having reached this point, I would venture to say that the new panorama introduced by the hypervisual phenomenon that surrounds us, is one of the factors that hinders our recognition of the old world from our current position.

On the other hand, the daily observance of a nearly vanished time and a compressed geographical space continues to surprise and alarm us [3]. The current new demands such as the speed that marks our actions, our diminished direct communications, our acceptance of violence, of our controlled society, etc. have given rise to feelings of instability, anxiety, dissatisfaction, doubts and fear that hover over the so-called *era of urgency* [4].

The *radical change* occurred with the generalised use of digital technologies. The old distinction between photochemical and electromagnetic supports became obsolete. Digitality rapidly contaminated everything. Whereas cinematographic modernity challenged oculo-centrism and anthropomorphism, postmodernity (to give it a name) related to digital technologies threatens the representation of the world; the new images have become **simulations** of reality and are no longer mere **representations**. These simulations can be entirely unrelated to the known practicable world.

Wim Wenders highlights the fact that images contain increasingly less truth within them [5]. However, what truth are we talking about? Must we associate truth to reality? Is only the feasible world real? Could virtual worlds not be as real to us as our dreams? Is it not possible that **reality** and **simulation** are parts of one same thing? These questions compel us to know what has happened and force us to reconsider this new reality, which has appeared over one single generation and

which affects all spheres of life.

Technology-intensive blockbuster movies have sunk spectators in a sea of perplexity and confusion. On the one hand, this kind of cinema is criticised and undermined; considered by a part of the public and critics as alienating, exhibitionist, empty and insubstantial. However, on the other hand, everybody is aware of the enormous expressive potential that it contributes to cinematographic language.

Without wanting to play the devil's advocate for technology, I defend researching new things, the possibility of creating new grammars, which in parallel with pre-existing ones enable us to generate other perspectives. Points of view, which as we shall see partly explain, the relevance of the new visibility regime on our culture. This is why I aim to defend significantly legitimate cultural audiovisual creations from sweeping and superficial accusations.

Laurent Jullier stresses that a significant amount of movies currently produced with digital mediums present the audience with sensory enjoyment. He considers that these are really *movie-concerts*, as one of their main features is the importance acquired by the soundtrack. For example, the use of reverberation creates the feeling of a surrounding source of sound that facilitates the immersive experience into a sensory Jacuzzi that dilutes the distance between the image and its spectator. This absence of distance is characteristic in the evolution from communication to fusion. In so doing, words or the effect of identification-projection no longer transmit the movie's meaning; replaced by a chain of rising sensory stimuli that enable the spectator to enjoy without having to think [6].

Notwithstanding, following from Jullier's work in the field of productions for mass consumption, Serge Daney defines the existence of two types of movie. The first he names **illusive**, as they approach the experience of light and sound spectacles, whereas the second are **allusive**, as they play

the hand of "recognise and enjoy". The latter, allusive cinema, uses previously created images, and plays with references that are recognisable to the knowing spectator who is capable of acknowledging and gleefully enjoying the pre-existing quotes, situations and characters from the audiovisual world. In this case, knowledge mutates into recognition.

A precedent of this kind of movies that play with different degrees of "recycling" is George Lucas' "Star Wars" (1977). We can all identify the reformulation of certain universal myths (Hercules, Ulysses) in new environments, as well as the influence of narrative forms from other cinematographic genres (westerns, medieval adventure films), comics (Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers) and even videogames. Only the real film buffs will recognise the influence of Kurosawa's "The Hidden Fortress" (1955) in Lucas' work, and among these, only the most attentive will be thrilled to realise that the look of Princess Leia's hologram is directly inspired in Lady Godwin from Henry Hathaway's medieval adventure film "Prince Valiant" (1954).

Spielberg, to put another example, is one of the greatest "plunderers" of the modern film industry. Similarly, television adverts often base their persuasive strategies in the re-elaboration of images from the recent past to facilitate the audience's recognition, and thereby awaken their interest.

Daney's **illusive** cinema (of *sons et lumière*) comes closer to Jullier's concept of concert-films. Daney adds, "there are movies that cannot be retold, because their enjoyment has to do with viewing them, and viewing them over again. If they are evoked it is merely through specific points (climax), moments, fragments of script. Between two viewings we forget them (...) so completely, that each successive viewing seems like the first (...) The joy and freedom that these movies provide are, like language, infinite." [7] In these movies, the importance of the technological dimension is crucial. Many serve as launch pads for, previously unseen

digital effects. These movies seek neither meaning nor communication. They generate a *continuum* of powerful stimuli in spectators that remain rooted in their seats, dazed and fascinated, as they would in a pyromusical show or riding the Dragon Khan roller coaster. The kind of cinema that focuses on digital effects is not embedded in realism, but rather in illusion. It is a cinema that plays on basic senses and which relies, more than ever, on the well-known "suspension of disbelief" advocated by Román Gubern.

It is interesting to note that this type of cinema based on digital magic and visual attractions that is seemingly so modern is similar in many ways to the unfortunately termed "primitive" cinema. This kind of cinema existed before classic cinema and the MRI imposed their dramaturgy and linear narrative, both of which are distinctively literary legacies. These groundbreaking movies combined thrilling persecutions, impossible falls, juggling tricks and magical visual effects, with minimal narrative continuity. The significant difference lies in the fact that modern entertainment cinema is characterised, as previously mentioned, by its significant –and technological– sound dimension that goes beyond the musical field and multiplies visual illusionist effects. Nevertheless, the parallel evolution of cinema and popular forms of entertainment from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (music hall, parodies, gags, magic, exoticism, etc.), conceived to create enthralling spectacles and to provoke powerful stimulus of fascination and awe among audiences, can be considered precedents of the modern commercial cinematographic experience.

Abandoning linear and causal narrative, fatalist endings, narrators and the majority of classic movies' discursive forms, mass entertainment movies establish a new form of storytelling, greatly influenced by the presence of other audiovisual manifestations, which had previously been on the margins of our culture. I am referring to the classic videogames, music videos, publicity spots and comics, as well as the new contributions

from domestic cameras, surveillance videos, images on the Web and in the tiny screens of cell phones. Thereby, the appearance of these other screens proceeding from other technological devices displaces the centrality of the large movie screen. Other usages have emerged which bring new experiences – literally- within arm's reach. A society immersed in an audiovisual world that offers infinite forms of unreality, simulations and chimeras have clearly overcome the society of spectacle, as criticised by Debord.

Angel Quintana [8] stresses that videogames have generated a new form of narrative based on the creation of a **narrative framework** that hosts various episodes of audiovisual stimulus. Fascinated by the power of virtual images, spectators suspend disbelief and submerge themselves into a diegetic world that is now bereft of any reference to the outside world. This lack of reference has assisted in the disappearance of the classical idea of images as imprints of a real event. According to this point of view, virtual reality films can be referred to as *perfect crimes*, as they kill reality and erase all traces.

On the other hand, digital effects cinema has brought about an enormous transformation that affects the spectators. In most classical narrative cinema, the characters lead the spectator's eyes. This kind of cinema **focuses on the characters**; the points of view are essentially similar to those of humans, given that a human operator handles the camera. The camera itself acts as invisible witness of a fictional world in which spectators penetrate and can project themselves. However, digital effects cinema **focuses on the spectators**. In this case, the camera acquires suprahuman movements and points of view; it also seems governed at a distance. It offers us a perspective that is beyond human capacities as it uses a language (breathtaking forwards and backwards travelling shots, nose-dives from the heavens, etc.) that no longer responds to the logic of human vision. In this case, the spectator ceases to be a direct and involved witness of the action and becomes

an explorer of an unknown and labyrinthic virtual space. Undoubtedly, the introduction of digital images signifies the submission of the criteria of truth to the imperatives of credibility.

On the other hand, technologies related to videogames, have brought about a new form of audiovisual narrative. I am referring to the *Machinima*, animation shorts carried out in real time and distributed on-line.

*Machinima* was born and raised thanks to the creativity of its users. Its goal is to capture –with the help of special software- the images and sounds of a videogame to edit them differently, thereby resemanticising their content. These pieces have no financial, political or cultural limitations. Some of them are characterised by their effrontery and degree of experimentation. Their interaction with *Second Life* is relevant given that *Machinima* characters are directly related to avatars, and because this virtual territory represents the ideal space to exhibit these films. Richard Gars, a Catalan who lives in England is one of the pioneers in the creation of these animated shorts, who started to manipulate videogames in 2001. Since 2005, many festivals have sprung up dedicated to this genre, among which we can highlight the **New York Machinima Film Festival**.

The adaptation of comic books to cinema began while cinema was still in its infancy. Emile Cohl and Winsor McCay, for example, did their animation work in the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, using step-by-step photography. Later on, superheroes, such as: Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Flash Gordon, Dick Tracy, etc. were **interpreted** on the big screen by actors in more or less extravagant sets.

At present, digital technologies have enabled these adaptations to recreate the graphic aspects of the original comic books. We can mention "Sin City," Frank Miller's comic, as a hyperbolic example. The author adapted it for the big screen together with Robert Rodríguez and Quentin Tarantino in 2005.

Although there are actors in the movie, it is entirely digital, and uses reality exclusively as a palette. The movie is an exercise in black and white with violent brushstrokes of colour, which ferociously attack the spectators' bedazzled eyes. Having said this, its unusual *mise-en-scène* softens its extremely gruesome images by submerging us in an obviously fictional world that stops us from reaching full identification/ projection. We are aware, at all times, that we are viewing a comic.

The current proliferation of **domestic cameras** is revolutionising the world of communications and offers new perspectives on reality. These points of view can be personal, subjective and often clandestine perspectives that contradict official, allegedly objective, versions as presented by the media. Nowadays, there is always somebody recording. The easy and speedy on-line diffusion of these images turn them into powerful political weapons. The circulation of images, never seen on television, of victims of the latest wars on the Internet, is a sufficient example.

Quintana [9] stresses that it is no longer sufficient for contemporary fiction to resort to the traditional forms of narrative, it must create a pact with proliferating images that were until recently relegated to the margins of cinematographic creations.

One of the most interesting examples of movies shot in a home movie style is "The Blair Witch Project" (1999). This movie, directed by two youngsters, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, who shot it in black and white, with a bit of colour with a handheld camera. It also adopts a documentary style, which greatly increases its dramatic power. The Cannes Film Festival recognised its original and powerful look, by awarding it the Youth prize. Nevertheless, the most significant aspect of this movie –one of the most profitable in movie history- was the innovative and intelligent marketing campaign launched on the Internet weeks before its premiere. The feeling of spontaneity and improvisation that movies filmed with

handheld cameras obtain, further heighten their credibility and favour the spectators' involvement. Such is the case in Jaume Beleguer and Paco Plaza's recent movie *REC* (2007).

**Video surveillance cameras** share some uses with domestic videos, but have given cinema a new perspective. It is the equivalent of the Orwellian eye-that-sees-it-all; an eye that is omniscient, deforming, impassible and unnerving. Given the usual location of video surveillance cameras, their perspective is usually from a height, angled and deforming, the opposite of classical perspectives. Video surveillance cameras are unnerving because of their omnipresence and inhumanity. They stare at us; we do not know who but this constant surveillance has blurred the necessary boundary between private and public. However, this Orwellian eye has awoken the interest of moviemakers and artists [10] who adopt styles and subject matters drawn from video surveillance recordings in their productions.

A new road for experimentation has opened up in the panorama of contemporary audiovisual creation with the appearance of **cell phones** equipped with integrated cameras and screens. This is a new example of a transfer of utilities; a tool for communication has become a new means of artistic expression, joining the sequence of screens that have determined audiovisual history from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The *fourth screen* is now capable of presenting "pocket-sized" narratives and experiences to all those who own a cell phone and have a few minutes to spare.

**Moviefilmfest** in 2007 raised the challenge, in the Spanish context: to tell a story in one minute with only a cell phone. In this on-line festival with the backing of the Spanish Film Academy, award-winning shorts transfer on to the big screen. However, the pioneering festival for cell phone shorts was the French **Pocket Film Festival** which back in 2005 received and gave awards to imaginative cell

phone productions.

Another important showcase is the **Punto de Vista** section of the International Documentary Film Festival of Navarra, which this year established the "*La mano que mira la mano*" ("The Seeing Hand") project. Seven filmmakers share the aim of experimenting, pondering and exchanging their experiences around the (somewhat hazy) possibilities of a pocket camera.

Trying to answer the questions raised at the beginning of this article, this world that we can barely recognise corresponds to a society dominated by digital-technological factors that have unsuspectingly empowered a new regime of visibility, expanded by the multiplicity of available screens. The facility that digital technologies present to exchange images between users, recycling old images, the desire to store all that is visible, together with the already mentioned flowering of an individual subjectivity that is superimposed on the alleged objectivity of the media have awakened our awareness that we are living in an era in which images may determine historic events.

Now that digital creations develop collectively and in an organised manner, as opposed to individually, undoubtedly illustrates how the Internet has revolutionised the world of **art and culture**. David Casacuberta [11] points out that artists become producers (or mediums) the moment they offer their tools and the necessary information to develop and broadcast their interventions according to their interests. The emergence of collective forums, collective comic books, the philosophy of collective creation, peer-to-peer servers, collective virtual cities, collective databases, etc. allow us to talk about the predominance of a **collective culture** that is fundamentally different to that of the previous century.

Because of all of the above, I believe that we must face the digital world from a perspective that goes beyond the artistic field. Our goal must be to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with an approach and a critical theory that respond

to the new communicative and creative phenomena, in a world of diffused power and proliferating images.

#### NOTES

- [1] DEBORD, Guy. *La sociedad del espectáculo*. Buenos Aires: La Marca, 1995 (1967) (epígrafe I)
- [2] Ver BREA, José Luis. *La era postmedia: Acción comunicativa, prácticas (post) artísticas y dispositivos neomediales*. Salamanca: Centro de Arte de Salamanca, 2002
- [3] In this same publication, Marisa Gómez muses over the new space-time concepts in Cyberculture.
- [4] See LIPOVETSKI, Pilles. *Els temps hipermoderns*. Breus. Barcelona: CCCB, 2007
- [5] WENDERS, Wim. La memoria de las imágenes. Textos de la emoción, la lógica y la verdad. Valencia: La mirada, 2000
- [6] Ver JULIER, Laurent. *L'écran post-moderne. Un cinema de l'allusion et du feu d'artifice*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997
- [7] SERGE, Daney. *Cine, arte del presente*. [en línea]. Disponible en: <<http://www.trenensombras.com>> [Consulta: febrero 2008]
- [8] QUINTANA, Angel. "Formatos innobles". *La Vanguardia* [Barcelona], 13 de septiembre de 2007
- [9] Ib. Id.
- [10] Ver el artículo de Paloma González Díaz en esta misma publicación.
- [11] CASACUBERTA, David. *Creación Colectiva: En internet el creador es el público*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2003

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## ART AND POLITICS IN THE WEB: TOWARDS A CRITICAL CULTURE

[GABRIELA BERTI]

*"The aesthetic processual paradigm has ethical-political implications, because talking about creation is talking about responsibility towards what is created."*  
(F. Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p.132)

#### CIRCUMSTANCES

The term net.art first appeared around 1994 and its paternity is generally attributed to the artist Vuk Cosic who, while mocking "labels," said that he had bumped by chance into a name on the Web that best defined what he had been doing for some time. Cosic had received an email in which all that he could understand, amidst several ASCII characters, were the words: net.art. Since then, the term net.art has been circumscribed to those artistic practices carried out in the Web.