

Screen Vision



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List of Abbreviated Titles

AE — Worringer. *Abstraction and Empathy*. Trans. Hilton Kramer. Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 1997.

C1 — Deleuze. *Cinema 1, The movement-image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. Minneapolis: Athlone, 1986.

C2 — Deleuze. *Cinema 2, The time-image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson. Minneapolis: Athlone, 1989.

LR — Riegl. *Late Roman Art Industry*. Trans. Rolf Winkes. Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985.

OT — Derrida. *On Touching - Jean-Luc Nancy*. Trans. Christine Irizarry. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

OTT — Augustine. *On the Trinity*. Trans. Stephen McKenna. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

P — Derrida. "The Parergon." Trans. Craig Owens. *October*, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979): 3-41.

SE — Baudrillard. *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Trans. Iain Hamilton Grant. London: Sage, 1993.

TP — Deleuze & Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

WIP — Deleuze & Guattari. *What is Philosophy?*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia, 1994.

Introduction

Images on screens create our worldview. Emergent within the framework of technology, this new *Weltanschauung* is created by simulating optic vision in the haptic interactivity of the screen. The visual delineation between the haptic and optic blurs, unfixed, simulated, and sublimated—one in the other. The screen's proximity to the viewer's eye engenders the smooth, haptic space of close-vision, yet the image recedes into itself, an inverted endless folding of pixels, a simulation of the optic space of distant-vision. In this 'tunnel-vision', the viewer sees through the screen engaging with a distant-vision of the digital image while simultaneously aware of the physical presence of the screen. Diderot's fourth wall is the machined, plastic-metallic support of the frame. The simulated distant-images fleeting across the screen incorporate haptic reflexivity and optic visuality, engaging the sensory and overwhelming thought.

Access to the Kantian sublime presupposes a distant vision that is no longer imaginable *a priori* a mediated machinic-vision. Contemporary ontology forms in the simulation of distant-vision according to a presentational logic of the digital screen. According to Deleuze and Guattari, haptic vision is associated with short-term memory during the process of creation—the Eskimo space where there is no horizon, line, outline, or striated differentiation (TP 573). The artist works on the object, surface, or composition with haptic-vision. The painter is not concerned with the finished distant-vision of a work while involved in the creation of it, only with what is seen during the moment, an always-already presence enabling action. When engaged in action, one is first and foremost engaged in the immanence of that action. It is a process of short-term memory. Only after the fact can the memory of its creation be simulated, if at all. But when a piece of art, music, literature, architecture, etc., is experienced, it is seen with a more optical, distant-vision. Distant-vision attempts to make-sense, to remember, to striate, to establish the horizon upon which the object functions. It is the passive, recording process of appreciation. The delineation between states of creation and perception inverts the simulated distant-vision in the close-vision of the screen.

The close-vision of the screen and its corresponding tactility imitates the active, haptic, creative process of smooth space while also presenting a distant-vision of striated space. It gives both the haptic vision of creation with the optic vision of appreciation. The striated is therefore always-already present in the smooth. This new, screen vision (which could also be termed hap-optic, close-distant, or virtual smooth-striation) provides the simulation of creation via smooth space and the simulation of appreciation via virtual striated space. Memory and creation are both simulated in the digital, with nothing remembered nor created, yet the desire for both simultaneously satisfied and produced. The gamification of ontology, a

suspended amnesiac space of entropic diversion shaping vision and creating a short-circuiting short-term memory unable or unwilling to grasp optically and create haptically.

This inversion of the haptic/optic may also be thought of as an act of sublimation. An image, for example a landscape, can be seen on a screen, manipulated, touched. In this case, the optical or distant-vision associated with landscapes, vistas, the sublime, etc., is sublimated into the haptic framework of technology. The screen distances the viewer from the landscape while presenting it as an appearance of the thing-in-itself. Vice versa, the haptic is sublimated in the optics of the screen.

Chapter 1

Background or Foreground

1.1. History, Haptic, Optic

“It seems to us that the smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space. The striated, on the contrary, relates to a more distant vision, and a more optical space”

– Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

In the second to last chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, 1440: *The Smooth and the Striated*, Deleuze and Guattari explore aesthetics in its relation with smooth and striated space under the aesthetic mode of nomad art. They assign qualities to nomad art and its inheritors, barbarian, Gothic, and modern. Nomad vision is close-range contrasted to long-distance vision, and nomad space is tactile or haptic as opposed to optical space (TP 572). The crux of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory lies in creating this idealized polarity between the smooth and the striated—exploring the limits of eidetic oppositions in order to generate new concepts.

Deleuze and Guattari choose the word haptic over tactile because, “it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this non optical function” (ibid.). Inviting assumptions may generate problems later on, but the use of hapticity follows the metaphysical tradition. *Haptetai* / *Hapotai* is the Greek for ‘to touch, to come into contact with, to have intercourse with, to behold’. It is touching in the sensual, sexual, and metaphysical—uniting the subject and object in communion. If haptics is fundamentally linked with the sense of touch, how does it intersect with vision? From what history does haptic-vision emerge?

St. Augustine, writing about perception in *On the Trinity*, both prioritizes vision and establishes it as the primary method the soul beholds the world. Augustine’s mind gathers the knowledge of the corporeal through the senses while obtaining knowledge of the incorporeal through itself. He is explicit on the priority of vision, “Let us, therefore, rely principally on the testimony of the eyes, for this sense of the body far excels the rest, and comes closer to mental vision (*visioni mentis*), though it differs from it in kind” (OTT 11.1.1). Ocular vision is the closest link to mental vision and thus a direct method for the mind to behold the corporeal other. The process of seeing is tripartite and mirrors the trinity of the soul—being, knowing, willing.

When we see a body, *species corporis*, we have to consider and distinguish three things: first, the object that we see, the form, being; second, the vision or image impressed upon the sense, knowing; lastly, the power that directs the sense of sight and attention of the mind to the form, the will (ibid., 11.2.2, 11.2.5). The will directs the attention of the mind and through sight, beholds the object seen and knows it. The will, therefore, is that which beholds the other, “the unifier of the visible object and the vision” (ibid., 11.11.18). Wherever there is unification of an object and the will directed towards it, touch is present, the touch of the mind. How else to verify its existence? The idea of hapticity is interwoven with the will and its directed attention. Sensorial haptics.

There is another aspect of haptics, a perceptual haptics. It is not haptic or *haptetai*, but closer to tactility, to actually ‘touching with the eye’. Not a transcendent knowing of the other, but the immanent sensation of seeing texture as it would be touched. Augustine does not mention a change in distances between the subject and the form seen, but when subjected to a close-vision, does the form, or body, not appear different? Beholding a wall from a distance, it is closer to an ideal of the wall, an eidetic wall, the specificities blur. Up close, what appeared to be a solid wall gives way to cracks, fissures, traces, and spray-text. In this way, close-vision could be thought of as touching the surface, traversing the texture of the form, closer to the phenomenological sense of touch.

Haptic-vision, “invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this non-optical function” (TP 572). Deleuze and Guattari’s debt to Augustine is clear, vision is more than just vision. The non-optical function being a function of the will, to know, to behold the other—a serious assumption. But Augustine is not referenced in *Thousand Plateaus*. Instead it is only the early 20th century publications by art historians Wilhelm Worringer and Alois Riegl.

Alois Riegl completed *Late Roman Art Industry* in 1901 while a professor in Vienna. It is a comprehensive study on the evolution of what he designated *Kunstwollen*, or the will to art—starting with the Egyptians, progressing through the classical Greeks, and culminating with the eponymous late Romans. Until the publication of *Late Roman Art Industry*, it was an era overlooked by art historians—with the typical jump going from classic Greek to the Renaissance, with a cursory mention of Giotto di Bondone. Riegl’s thesis maintains that the development of the visual arts in the Egyptian, classic Greek, and late Roman empires follows an evolution in art production and perception shaped by the corresponding empire’s *Kunstwollen*. Which directs the primacy of the viewer’s artistic experience, from the extreme objectivity of the Egyptians to the subjectivity of the Roman fresco. The formal demands of the art object, whether it is primarily beholden to a tactile or optical vision, determine the move from objective to subjective experience. Riegl posits three terms for the three different ways of seeing along the tactile-optic, *Nahsicht*, *Normalsicht*, and *Fernsicht* (LR 24-27).

Nahsicht, near-vision, is the perception of the tactile plane without shadows. It is a close-vision implying both physical closeness of the viewer and an overwhelming tactility of

the object. The figures stand out from the ground, but the ground is not space, there are no spatial relations, every figure is transformed into relation on the plane (ibid., 59). Riegl connects *Nahsicht* to the art of ancient Egypt—its pure planar consistency achieved by silhouettes, symmetry, straight lines, and even curves—no overlapping figures, shadows, or foreshortening. Every mark kept in planar harmony with the inordinate totality of the material becoming-monument. This is the objective experience—there is no appeal to subjective imagination or visual illusion. *Nahsicht*, tactile close-vision, is a precursor of Deleuze and Guattari’s haptic-vision. But Egyptian art will not be the smooth space of the body without organs, it is already striated, an inorganic abstraction.

Although classic Greek art is, “principally directed toward a transformation of spatial relations into plane relations” (ibid., 62) it allows for alterations of depth, overlapping figures, foreshortening, and half-shadows. The totalizing materiality of the plane is visually challenged by the semi-realistic overlapping and arrangement of figures in spatial relation. This is the art of *Normalsicht*, the viewer perceiving a mixture of the tactile-optical. Objective clarity becomes muddled in the obfuscation, overlapping, and foreshortening of figures. The demand is thus shifted towards the viewer’s subjective experience, with a supplement of intellectual experience required for making sense of the artwork (ibid., 63). Riegl identifies modern art, which structures seeing through an intellectual, conceptual, or subjective framework, as an inheritor of what emerged in the classic Greek tradition. (This marks a point of departure between high and low art, with subjective perception relying on a learned intellectual and aesthetic framework.)

In late Roman art, form and space become more illusionistic, with deep shadows and colorful patchwork interrupting the tactility of the surface. There is a decline of the relief and a narrowing intensification of the shadows (ibid., 67). This is where Riegl identifies a new distant-vision, *Fernsicht*, “the move of the beholder away from the individual shape” (ibid., 73). Riegl theorizes that in this increased, fragmented space with heightened three-dimensionality, the figure is increasingly dematerialized (ibid., 74). *Fernsicht*, far-vision or distant-vision, is an optical perception where both the figure and the viewer are further away—pushed towards the illusionistic space of virtual and real distance. Pushed further into subjective experience. *Fernsicht* is an inspiration for the distant vision of an optical space, with the opposing pole, *Nahsicht*, a wellspring for a close vision of a more haptic space.

In Riegl’s observations of vision and artwork from the Egyptian, Greek, and late Roman, there is no dialectical progression of technical ability. The artwork is a product of the *Kunstwollen* of each age. Riegl writes, “An objective art historical observation will in each period of style discover some kind of advantage which other periods lacked, because their *Wollen*, was directed to another part” (ibid., 63n16). Written in the heyday of vitalism, Riegl’s denial of progression and emphasis on *Wollen* is explicitly anti-Hegelian. *Nahsicht*, *Normalsicht*, and *Fernsicht*, remain as they are, vitalist proofs of each empire’s distinctive

Kunstwollen. The question of the will and its relation to artistic creation is also central to Wilhelm Worringer's thesis published five years later, *Abstraction and Empathy*.

Worringer describes the two poles of abstraction and empathy as central to artistic creation. Like Riegl, he expresses this not as a teleological history of art with the apotheosis of the Renaissance, but instead as a history of volition (AE 9). The urge to empathy finds its gratification of beauty in the organic—it accepts and idealizes the observable world—it is naturalism. The will to abstraction finds its beauty in the life-denying inorganic, the crystalline—it is made anxious by the world and sets out to minimize its sovereignty with the use of style (ibid., 4). This binarity can also be thought of, echoing Riegl, as a polarity between space and the plane. The organic is sacrificed for the pure relation of figures in the plan of Egyptian art—this plane is the repudiation of the observable and its objective clarity minimizes the chaos of the world. Conversely, Greek and late Roman art accept the idea of space or the simulacrum of space—it embraces the appearance of reality. There is an outlier to this polarity however, the will the empathy expressed through an inorganic, crystalline form.

In the Gothic, as an inheritor of the northern European artistic volition, Worringer describes the same urge to empathy as the Greek, yet manifest in the abstract, “a heightened expression on an inorganic fundament” (ibid., 112). The Gothic cathedral is a clear example of such feeling, intense symmetry, crystalline forms, the overwhelming of the subject in the abstract, but with the goal of an empathetic appeal to the transcendent. (Reminiscent of Malevich's black square—a purely abstract form as gateway to the transcendent.) But unlike the Egyptian will to abstraction, the northern artistic volition expresses its anxiety with the world via tangled lines, intensities of symmetry, and heightened movement (ibid., 109). The straight line exists only to draw vision along its path, into a swirling chasm of flourishes and mirrored constellations. Despite the acknowledgment of a conflicted, third tendency, Worringer holds that the urge to empathy and the will to abstraction reflect distinct religious-psychic dispositions, expressing the source culture's *température d'âme*. The urge to empathy is the world of surfaces, acceptance of that which is close at hand, immanence, pantheism, pre-Socratic thought. The will to abstraction is the denial of the visible, the disturbed relation of man with the objective world, transcendence, monotheism (ibid., 101). This conceptual opposition doesn't hold. Egyptian art may be a repudiation of the visible and an appeal to a transcendent ideal of simplified forms and geometrical precision, but their religion was pantheistic, idolatrous, the pharaoh, god made flesh, surface as truth.

Riegl and Worringer share the vitalist belief in an underlying *Kunstwollen* observable in an artist, culture, or empire's art. Points of connection between their ontologies arise and intersect. *Nahsicht*, the close-vision of a primarily haptic space belonging to the plane, is the will to abstraction and desire for objective experience found in Egyptian art. *Fernsicht*, the distant-vision of a primarily optical space, is the urge to empathy in Greek and late Roman art, an increased desire for subjective experience. But what about art of the nomad, the goth, the barbarian whose only expression is of a true organic line? Is an organic line the

provenance of naturalism and representation, or does it not slip between the two poles, existing *a priori* in smooth space? Worringer mentions the Gothic and the pre-Christian northern tribes, the goths, but he describes their expression as inorganic, not as an empathy manifest in organic, smooth space.

1.2. Nomad, imperial, detour of the line

Deleuze and Guattari draw from the polarities found in Riegl and Worringer's analyses but contend that they misrepresent haptic space and the abstract. This misrepresentation is caused by the fact that the examples, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman all belong to a milieu of what Deleuze and Guattari label, imperial art. The political and social systems out of which imperial art is created are based in the regulation of territory, empires, city-states—the social formations are already striated, territorialized, hierarchical, arborescent. Imperial space is centered around the territory, producing a constancy of orientation necessarily limiting free movement, whether people, lines or unstriated haptic space. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is a necessary demand to investigate the concept in its purest state. Therefore, when haptic space is encountered in the previous analyses, it is already, “at a point of mutation” under, “the imperial conditions of Egyptian art” (TP 575). If haptic space and the abstract is to be found, it will not be in an already striated, imperial space.

Although Riegl and Worringer's frameworks are insightful and unique, they prioritize the history of empires to the detriment of that which is harder to place, groups which leave less to posterity, wandering tribes, unassailable groups, the non-striated, barbarians, nomads. The distinction between nomad and imperial is the underlying conceptual opposition of smooth and striated. Although hints of the nomad, abstract, smooth are found and can arise in the imperial, the two are distinctive concepts. Even if historically, nomadic tribes predate imperial societies, the nomad and imperial as concepts exist contemporaneously and occupy a unique, consistent, idealized space.

The distinction between the nomad and the imperial directly correlates to the smooth and the striated. When Deleuze and Guattari invoke a primordial duality between the smooth and the striated, “it is in order to subordinate the differences between “haptic” and “optic”, “close vision” and “distant vision” to this distinction” (ibid., 576). The concepts follow from the smooth and striated. Nomad art is the smooth space of haptic-vision and the abstract line. Imperial art is the striated space of optic-vision and the concrete-organic line. Imperial art manifests its *Kunstwollen* in striating-totalizing gestures—the will to abstraction and urge to empathy are different expressions of the same will to organize, to make sensation sensible. Whereas nomad art, “does not have that role in the guise of a ‘will’; it only has a becoming, it invents a ‘becoming-artist’” (ibid., 577). Lines and the process of forming, drawing, or visualizing them are the first steps in a processual confrontation of space (ibid., 580). Lines

make visible connections, creating, dividing, demarcating or conversely floating, lost, rotating, and mutating in space. Lines connect infinite points, traces, and are tangential in their process of becoming-line. Worringer presented three types: the abstract, the organic, and the gothic. Following the path of the smooth and striated, lines according to Deleuze and Guattari can be thought of as drawn to a pole of abstraction or concretization. Worringer's abstract and organic lines of imperial art are concrete lines—only the gothic line effectuates the true abstract line of smooth space.

The Deleuze and Guattarian abstract line is, “a line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour, that no longer goes from one point to another but instead passes between points...” (ibid., 578). It is not inexpressive and does not constitute a form of expression, but is nevertheless accompanied by material traits of expression. The Egyptian line is rectilinear, a silhouette that delineates individualized space—it striates the unknown in an adversarial relation motivated by anxiety. The will to abstraction is not a will to the abstract, but a will to the concrete. The will is a process of striation, the abstract is becoming. The abstract line is, “positively motivated by the smooth space it draws, not by any striation it might perform to ward off anxiety and subordinate the smooth” (ibid., 577).

The organic line is an empathetic response to striated space, a depiction of appearance. The abstract line is not directly opposed to the organic line, they share functions, but the latter is still a striating process. The organic line follows the generalized organization of forms on a ground. It defines, contours, and preserves the visual in its striation. The abstract and organic are not opposed in the sense that, “imperial lines—the Egyptian rectilinear line, the Assyrian (or Greek) organic line, the supraphenomenal, encompassing Chinese line—convert the abstract line, rend it from its smooth space, and accord it concrete values” (ibid., 577-578). This conversion is like drawing a line of horizon across smooth space, the beginning striation from which all coordinates correspond. Once the space is defined, striated, it exists as space that can be understood as such.

Worringer recognized the unique quality of the Gothic line and its power of expressing the urge to empathy manifest abstractly, but maintained that this was based in an underlying anxiety towards the visible and unknowable cosmos. He is filtering their position through an imperial lens—the Gothic cathedrals of the Christianized northern Europeans. But the irreducible pole of the Gothic line, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the tribal and smooth space of nomad art. In the abstract line of nomad art, Deleuze and Guattari find a pre-structural or side-structural relation with being, “when writing takes charge of abstraction, as it does in empires, the line, already downgraded, necessarily tends to become concrete, even figurative” (ibid., 577).

Imperial writing systems are an imposed exteriority upon the nomad, a corrupting force striating the virtualized free form of the abstract line. At its irreducible point, the abstract line is pre-structural and pre-symbolic. It represents nothing and once it leaves the virtual it is

immediately striated into the symbolic-structural chain. Contrary to Worringer's view, the abstract line is positively motivated by the smooth space it draws, it is an additive, affective process of constant variation, moving step-by-step, emergent with smooth space (ibid.). This step-by-step, vital repetition of machinic force is what Worringer describes as the inorganic, empathetic expression of the Gothic. He detects the difference of the Gothic line, but doesn't attribute it to the specific, nomadic condition of becoming. The abstract and concrete lines are co-emergent with the smooth and the striated, along with entangled, and enmeshed in their own becoming. The concepts of the abstract and concrete are consistent, but never pure, or unmixed in observable reality, only enmeshed. We think of the smooth as always being striated, but the smooth also emerges in the striated, as the Gothic avatar or nomad spirit in the Gothic cathedrals, or as the smooth space of virtuality appearing in the morning marine layer filling the city and obfuscating the horizon.

In the linear, dualist distinction abstract-concrete or nomad-imperial, Deleuze and Guattari see an immanence of conceptual opposition, or polarizing forces of the smooth and the striated. The becoming-line of the abstract belongs to a primarily haptic space while the willing-line of the concrete is closer to an optical space of perception. But what is the connection from space to vision? How does one see smooth space or striated space? How might creation and perception function within the smooth or the striated?

Let's return to the first sentence of our introductory quote, "It seems to us that the smooth is both the object of a close vision par excellence and the element of a haptic space" (ibid., 572). The smooth, as far as it can be seen, is accessible via *Nahsicht*. But, just like the line, once it is attributed to imperial conditions, *Nahsicht*, is already too stratified to effectuate the close-vision of smooth space. Close vision par excellence is vision in the process of becoming, the becoming-line, or the becoming-affect.

1.3. The Smooth and the Striated

In the aesthetic model of *Thousand Plateaus*, nomad art is postulated as the progenitor of barbarian, Gothic, and modern art. Vision, central to aesthetics, haptics, and the soul, is split along the smooth and the striated into close-vision and optic-vision. For Deleuze and Guattari, close-vision is not the haptic observation of planar materiality, but a vision corresponding to a state of creation, an overwhelming space with constant variation, the nomad space of the becoming-artist. Examples are pure, formless, the desert, steppe, sea—local spaces of pure connection with no discernible horizon, landmark, or centralized orientation. Within smooth space, there is never a distance to see or space to see from, there is no exterior position, interiority and exteriority collapse. In a space of this kind, "one is never "in front of," any more than one is "in" (one is "on"...)" (ibid., 573).

In the haptic-space of close-vision, one is on space—constantly touching and touched by the haptetai of the soul. This is also the idealized space of creation, “a painting is done at close range, even if it is seen from a distance” (ibid., 573). The painter, writer, or composer, while creating in a state of becoming-artist are nearly indistinguishable from the work. Both physically and metaphysically in a close-vision haptic space. When painting (like a barbarian) close to the canvas, the frame disappears, there is no horizon or striating force, just broken tones and areas of pure, uniform color, *tons rompus et l’aplat*. Nomad art only has a becoming, a becoming-artist—a harmonics of visual sensations or constant variation, built upon each other, step-by-step.

If close vision-haptic space is linked to a state of becoming, how does this becoming relate to memory? Cézanne answers, “not a minute of the world passes that we will preserve if we do not become that minute.” Becoming that minute is the same as the becoming-artist of the nomad. In this process of becoming one isn’t “in” but “on” time. Artistic creation, as an act of becoming, inhabits a short-term memory, forgetting as process of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari give as examples composers with close-range hearing, writers writing with short-term memory, and Cézanne’s need to no longer see the wheat field (TP 573). The object of vision disappears—merging in a tight embrace of close-vision that fuses with the creator.

Contrasted with the smooth, the striated, “relates to a more distant vision and a more optical space” (ibid., 573). This distant vision, Riegl’s *Fernsicht*, is the condition of optical perception where color dominates materiality and the experience of tactile sense is no longer immediate, producing an increased appeal to intellectualized experience (LR 73). For Deleuze and Guattari, striated space can be defined by the requirements of distant vision; constancy of orientation, points of reference, interlinkage, and constitution of a central perspective (TP 574). Distant vision is a change in perception accomplished by a stepping back, a division of the smooth into gridded coordinates, a horizon of law drawn from and expunging the smooth. It is a withdrawal into subjective experience, detached perception, as opposed to the becoming of creation. The simulated deep space of the Renaissance functions via a gridded perspective, making sense of sensation.

Distant vision-optic space is therefore a method of perception by which sense, or law, nomos, is constructed and this edifice is built upon blocks, grids of remembrance. The writer writes with short term memory, but the reader is, “assumed to be endowed with long-term memory” (ibid., 573). The listener, likewise, remembers the progressions, moods, refrains, and choruses, constructing the synthesis of disparate tones into a narrative—internalizing the song into the remembered soundtrack of one’s life. With painting, especially in painting, the story of the creation of the painting, the statement, the myth (even when it is deconstructed) of the artist exists only to striate a ‘bloc of sensations’ into the ‘meaningful’. This is especially true the closer to the artwork is to incommensurable smooth space, nomad, barbarian, abstract art.

“We are not in the world, we become with the world, we become by contemplating it. Everything is vision, becoming” (WIP 169). Deleuze and Guattari equate vision with becoming, similar to Augustine’s will of the soul, beholding the body with directed vision. It is directly from beholding, *haptetai*, that the concept of haptic vision emerged. Both Augustine and Deleuze and Guattari establish vision as a privileged site of access to the other. However, beholding is not becoming. Beholding is to know the transcendental, the noumenon, the ‘thing-in-itself’, where becoming is the becoming-other, becoming-artist, becoming-sunflower of immanence. In this becoming, a direct connection is assumed between the perceiving subject and the world. There is also, even though feigned or denied by Deleuze and Guattari, a privileging of the smooth, the creation, the artist, that which is closer to the ideal.

1.4. Critique of touch

In the first paragraph of the “Aesthetic Model,” before establishing the aesthetic distinctions between the smooth and striated, Deleuze and Guattari write, “we must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture” (TP 552). The smooth and the striated are constantly and simultaneously, traversing, reversing, deterritorializing, reterritorializing. But, “the de facto mixes do not preclude a de jure, or abstract, distinction between the two spaces” (ibid., 552). It is this de jure, abstract distinction that determines the form, the direction and meaning of the mix—whether from striated to smooth or vice-versa. Additionally, although a polar system of conceptual opposition, the movement from smooth to striated is asymmetrical. Each mix a shifting of intensities between near, normal, and distant vision. Is invoking de jure an appeal to the law as a ground, as an opposition without which the smooth is meaningless? How does the primacy of vision consecrate a becoming-other?

We find these questions raised in a surprising source, Derrida’s book on Jean Luc-Nancy, *On Touching*. In several paragraphs of tangential thought, Derrida contests that the appeal to a de jure distinction between the smooth and striated is unreliable because it attempts to extract a pure concept, the smooth, from the law, which is the pole of stratification. Additionally, he contends that the fundamental problem with Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphysics is their idea of becoming, the smooth-space of the body without organs, relies upon a “continuistic postulation” of experience vis-a-vis vision “touching upon the other” (OTT 124-125). We will engage the weaker argument first, the opposition between de facto/de jure.

After admitting that the two spaces (smooth and striated) in fact exist only in mixture, Deleuze and Guattari specify, “but the de facto mixes do not preclude a de jure, or abstract, distinction between the two spaces” (TP 552). An appeal to de jure is an appeal to the law. How can the law not enforce immediate stricture, striation—establishing rules and boundaries antithetical to smooth space? De jure grounds the smooth in striation at the onset, hierarchizing the law as the establishing fundament from which the de facto mixtures

proceed. According to Derrida, on one hand *de jure* pertains to striated power and is thus already implicated in the conceptual opposition smooth-striated, and on the other hand, from his juridical-phenomenological point of view, there is no observable *de jure* or *de facto* sense of pure, smooth space (OT 126). Refuting the last point, we can point to natural spaces and weather conditions where the horizon dissipates, a deluge, blizzard, sandstorm, haze, effectuating an observable smooth space. Additionally, an appeal to sense as immediacy to knowledge is contested by Derrida himself in the same essay and it is disingenuous to appeal to ‘sense’. But what about the first hand, the appeal to law?

Derrida simplifies the appeal. Deleuze and Guattari do not appeal to *de jure*, but to “*de jure*, or abstract”. The abstract knows nothing of form and substance, it is becoming. *De jure* here is not a stratifying formation of the law, but the abstract made observable. The abstract points to concepts, which are thought itself, not thought as image, or thought as observable. The better question of Derrida’s is concerning the consistency of the concepts. If the smooth and striated are always intertwined, co-producing, or co-emergent—this is admitted by Deleuze and Guattari—how can this be considered a reliable conceptual opposition? Derrida is of the opinion that they are not, “but rather an idealizing polarity, an idealized tendency, the tension of contradictory desire” (ibid., 125). Oh, insidious desire, the desire of the body without organs, smooth space, death, mixed with the life-affirming production of the organs, striating space, making sense. We must ask what role ‘reliable’ has in the previous quote, reliable to what, reliable to whom, reliably tested and approved? Smooth spaces are composed within striated space, yet exist on a plane of consistency that knows nothing of substance or form and, “consists, abstractly, but really in relations of speed and slowness between unformed elements, and in compositions of corresponding intensive affects” (TP 589). Derrida’s reliable conceptual opposition—appealing to *de jure* and empirico-phenomenological sense—is questioning the smooth and striated as functions. But they are not functions, and “setting up a concept is not the same thing as marking out a function” (WIP 159). Derrida’s appeal to the law and empiricism, is an attempt at critique via simplification, reducing the metaphysical concept to its observable scientific and legalistic functions only to demonstrate that they do not satisfy those functions. Before we dismiss the critique entirely though, we should entertain the card in Derrida’s other hand, the ‘continuistic postulation’.

Derrida’s deeper and more insightful critique is that Deleuze and Guattari build their smooth space, the plane of consistency, the body without organs, upon an intuitive close-vision that lays claim to an immediacy of knowledge provided by proximate, haptic, experience. This continuism is a continuism of desire—the desire to behold the other. Augustine describes vision that beholds the corporeal while revealing knowledge of the incorporeal simultaneously—there is a continuity between the seen body or object and the knowledge of the object in the mind (OTT 9.3.3.). Even further, Bergson holds that intuitive vision becomes contact with the object of vision (OT 123). Close vision unites vision and the visible object by assuming immediacy via immanence, the becoming-other, and a will (or desire) directing this close vision. Derrida refutes this as nothing but a continuistic postulation, “for the

continuous is never given. There is never any pure, immediate experience of the continuous, nor of closeness, nor of absolute proximity, nor of pure indifferenciation...there is never any “immediate” given” (OT 125). This is his Platonic, deconstructionist, gesture, recontextualizing the insights of the *Phaedo*, “truth is not touched except where it is untouchable (ibid., 120). What then is Derrida’s suggestion for avoiding, circumventing, or short-circuiting this intuitionistic-continuistic logic of immediacy? It is the trace, the detour, the syncope, a constant subtraction of sense from the sovereignty of presence (ibid., 129-130). But Augustine also was concerned with the trace, with subtraction. Augustine connects the trace of a body in water with the sensation of sight. If the body is removed and the traces along with it, the water itself remains, just like the sense itself (OTT 11.2.3.). For Augustine and likewise Deleuze and Guattari, sense remains—it is immanent to being and cannot be subtracted.

Derrida’s solution is thus to replace what he sees as a contradictory (dangerous?) desire with a piety of questioning, of withdrawal. It is a seeking of truth in the delayed, following the long detour, denying the intuitionistic-continuistic logic of immediacy and deconstructing a privileged ontology of presence. The error in this approach however, is that it proceeds from a presumed scientific position of objectivity. Close vision-haptic space is a process of becoming belonging to creation. “One can back away from the thing, but it is a bad painter who backs away from the painting he or she is working on” (TP 573). There is no immediate given, but there is an immediacy, an affective immediacy of creation. Therefore, when Derrida concludes that, “there is no pure concept, nor any pure intuition of course, nor any immediate intuition of the haptical” (OT 126), we must point out that for Deleuze and Guattari, this is not a question of effectuated ‘purity’. Smooth space arises from striation and striation from smooth space. Both are always encountered mixed, but this does not preclude smooth space from existing on a plane of consistency as opposed to the plane of organization of striated space. The smooth is consistent in its becoming, it does not establish permanency as pure eidos. The concept is not the idea Derrida thinks it should be.

In their last collaboration, *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari start with another question, ‘what is a concept?’. We will briefly summarize, in order to distinguish their ontology from Derrida. Additionally, this will provide a certain contextual clarity for the development of new concepts. There are four conclusions Deleuze and Guattari reach regarding the nature, or concept of the concept:

1. Concepts relate to other concepts, both historically and in becoming.
2. Concepts render components inseparably within itself, and these components define the consistency or endoconsistency of the concept.
3. The concept is incorporeal, it does not have spatio-temporal coordinates, only intensive ordinates.
4. The concept is self-referential, it is non-discursive. (WIP 19-22)

The smooth and the striated are coexistent, neither advancing except through the other. They relate historically, like the past interrelations of barbarian and imperial art, and in present becomings with other concepts—smooth space, close vision, nomad art, and the abstract line on the plane of consistency—striated space, distant vision, imperial art, and the concrete line on the plane of organization. There exists a threshold of indiscernibility between the smooth and striated, a *zone de voisinage*. This is the mixture to which Derrida objects for its lack of purity, but the endoconsistency of the concept, composed of distinct, heterogeneous components, is inseparable. It is the exoconsistency that is observable—the passing through their shared zone of indiscernibility. Concepts speak to a pure Event, a singularity composed of intensive ordinates that is syneidetic, “infinite through its survey or its speed but finite through its movement that traces the contour of its components” (ibid., 21). Lastly, the concept should not be confused or thought of as a proposition. Propositions define themselves by reference to a state of affairs—they can be true or false. But this reference refers to extensional conditions, it is a scientific proposition, or function, composed of independent variables. Discursive formations link propositions together in a truth claim, propositions linked to the external. The concept is intensional, consistent, formed by an “inseparability of variations” (ibid., 23).

There is, in a sense, a way we can view this misunderstanding or disagreement, as a question of access to truth. How do we understand phenomenon? Is the path to truth, or the sovereignty of presence, detour after detour, circuitous traces, piously denying sense, touch that always withdraws, splinters, partitions? Or, on the other hand, do we embrace, behold the absolute as one becoming itself with process, the irreducible concept, endoconsistency, incorporeal yet incarnated or effectuated in space? It is a question of taking the detour or embracing the event. Deconstruction, only to recode, recede, step back, striate, or the body without organs, decode, intuit, navigate smooth space, even if it too will not suffice.

Chapter 2

Cinema and the Evolution of the Image

2.1. Introduction

Images do not arrive alone. They always arrive already in a state of linkage, accompanied by both the history of their production and the guidelines, implied or explicit, of how they are to be seen. Concepts of visibility, e.g., the gaze, cliché, referent, are emergent. They arise from the historical process of creating, viewing, critiquing, and recontextualizing images. The creation of every subsequent image is consciously or unconsciously shaped by this visual language in an ongoing process of reification. From the invention of the photograph until the code as digital image, there have been no greater conceptual influencers of visibility than the images of cinema and advertising. The photograph, which started as a medium for documentary record and objective research, was quickly appropriated for storytelling and marketing. None of this is mutually exclusive. It is entangled, links upon links.

The present, which always exists in a state of perpetual crisis over the visual, is experiencing the inversion or sublimation of the experienced and created within the digital field. As a precursor to the virtual, cinema shaped the preliminary aesthetics of the digital image. The cinema's psycho-social functions of relief, escape, and entertainment are mimicked, enhanced, or diminished by the screen. The evolving visual language emerges as a constant production of difference between form, function, cliché, and novelty. Describing this process of visual differentiation begins first by looking at the initial evolution of cinematic presentation—from movement-image to time-image.

2.2. From Movement-Image to Time-Image

“In short, cinema does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image.” - Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I*

The movement-image is the intermediate image as an immediate given. The frames of the frames-per-second are simply the frozen segments of the shots constantly refreshing on the screen—the changes between each frame simulating movement. With direct observation movement is visually perceived the same way, but the snapshots of perception are recomposed in the perceiving subject. With cinema, this recomposition is a given of the projector or screen refresh-rate that simulates the continuity of movement. Therefore, every cinematic image is always perceived as a movement-image—it is never simply an image or

still, no matter how extended the shot. The movement is always given by the projector or the screen, never directly perceived as such. The given nature of the movement-image extends to current screen technology. In an OLED display, microscopic pixels emit light to create the image in accordance with a refresh rate. Even though the frame rate is faster than human perception and therefore imperceptible, the pixels still refresh and the illusion of movement arises from this series of frames. The LED pixels fluctuate across the color spectrum to simulate movement in response to the information displayed and manipulated on the screen.

Not only is movement of the movement-image immediately given in the perception of its occurrence between frames, but simultaneously the perceived movement navigates a binary system between two polarities, the pole of framing and the pole of montage. Movement is created by defining action in the in-field and out-of-field of the frame, along with the movement of the camera frame, and the edited montage of shot after shot that comprises the film. The shot is the movement-image and exists likewise on a plane of intermediacy between two poles—the framing of the set and the montage of the whole (C1 19-22). The shot defines the conditions upon which the duration of the movement-image is extracted from the set and how these conditions of extraction will relate to the whole, the montage, the sequence of shots defining the film. The movement-image simulates movement between the sequence of frames-per-second while the shot defines the field of vision and the subject-object-action relations inside and outside of the frame. The camera frame directing the shot or movement-image is a simulation of subjective, objective, or machinic vision while the montage is the simulation of memory, storytelling, and myth. Cinematic style, in its formalist dimension, is created in the frictional difference between the poles of framing and montage. Inherited from the cinematic tradition, do these poles continue to influence the creation of movement-images on the screen? How do the poles of framing and montage shape the boundaries of image creation?

The shot, the mobile section of duration between the poles of framing and montage, is divisible into three varieties—perception-images, action-images, and affect-images (ibid., 68). Perception-images relate to two poles, the subjective and the objective (ibid., 71). Subjective perception is the set seen by someone that forms a part of the set, like the dizzying, first-person views of the stairs in *Vertigo*. Whereas objective perception is the set seen from the viewpoint of someone or something that remains external to the set, like the tracking shots of Agnes Varda's *Vagabond*. Mona walking from left to right, lugging her backpack through the countryside. The perception-image establishes the subjective and objective perception of space, frequently oscillating between the two. It is used conventionally as a long-shot establishing the film or scene's setting, where the action and story will unfold. The perception-image is closely aligned with optical distant-vision and long-term memory yet it shouldn't be thought of solely as the perception of a subjectivity external or internal to the set but semi-subjective. It inhabits both poles simultaneously. What seems to be external to the set can be internal in the next shot, and vice versa. Only with the second shot do we have a reference for the first. The perception-image is based upon the indeterminacy inherent in the

semi-subjective image and its non-naturalistic vision. Deleuze compares this to the split subject, the perception to the *Cogito*. There is no subject which acts, without another watching the act, either the other, or the self watching the self (ibid., 73). The subjective and objective poles are simply nominal categories that help define its scope, in reality it functions as *free indirect discourse*. The perception-image becomes itself, “the moment that it reflects its content in a camera-consciousness which has become autonomous (‘cinema of poetry’)” (ibid., 74).

The action-image is the relation of the milieu which actualizes and the behavior which embodies (ibid., 141). It is a relation of situation and action, which can be summarized–SAS’–the situation begets the space for action which is actualized and engenders the transformed situation. The situation *a priori* action is outlined by the perception-image. Deleuze describes the process as proceeding, “from the situation, to the transformed situation, via the intermediary of the action” (ibid., 142). The SAS’ transformation may occur once, suspensefully stretched across a film’s duration like in Hitchcock’s *Rope*, or as a recurring loop until the end, e.g., *Le Samourai*, *John Wick*. The action-image is closer to haptic close-vision but the dominant concern is in depicting visceral destruction, not the simulated hapticity of creation. Additionally, the transformed situation is not guaranteed—an act of futility changes the sequence to SAS*—from an initial situation, through failed action, to a failed, objectively unchanged, situation—Hegelian determinate negation—coffee without milk or coffee without cream.

The affect-image is the close-up shot of the face or its equivalent—Joan’s face in Dreyer’s *Passion* to the shuffling and passing of the wallet-as-face in *Pickpocket*. The affect-image is closest in spatial depth to haptic vision yet the face is never seen as a haptic object as such. The face’s penultimate, symbolic relation to subjectivity bars its reduction to objecthood.

Formalistically, the perception-image is the long shot, the action-image the medium shot, and the affect-image the close-up. This simplistic delineation is detectable across photographic mediums, from feature films to snapshot digital content, but it isn’t static, never fixed into a pole of immobility. Images, shots, vision, allow for an infinite number of permutations and nestings. For example, the penultimate, long-take tracking shot of Antonioni’s *The Passenger*—the initial close-up affect shot of Locke, played by Jack Nicholson, smoking on the bed in his hotel room, slowly tracks out, through the room’s barred window, into a plaza where the detectives, cops, kids and an elderly man engage in meaningless action. The shot continues to slowly track until it becomes a perception-image, scanning the dusty, Moorish architecture and horizon, temporarily alienating the affect and action just displayed— $Af > A > P$. It is a visual illustration of the Deleuzian idea that the perception-image is based on subtraction, the subordination of affect and action to a perceiving decentered subject (ibid., 66). Brilliantly, a police car breaks the perception image with diagonal movement into the frame. The camera turns back to the hotel, following the characters as they scramble out of the car and attempt to enter the hotel room. The film ends with a question of recognition, as

everyone is asked to ‘recognize’ the now deceased Locke—marking the return to the subjectivity of the affect-image.

Perception, action, and affect-images passed from the cinema, through television and advertising, to contemporary digital users who proliferate their categorical cliches, specifics, and shaping of vision. One must only spend a few minutes with the content stream of a digital platform to detect the traces of cinematic-vision—the affect-image of a gamer’s emotive face during a livestream—the action-image of the gameplay next to their face—and the composition of all the exterior elements, face, chatbox, gameplay, forming the perception image uniting streamer and viewer. The digital space rewards permutation and variation based upon a groundwork of cliches.

“The highest definition of the medium corresponds to the lowest definition of the message.” – Jean Baudrillard, *A Perfect Crime*

The cliché repeats because it is familiar, and the familiar appears true. The eyes, face, tears, and pathos depicted in affect-images create empathy in the viewer. The technology building the framework of presentation is new, or at the very least simulates newness, but the images themselves follow the perception-action-affect formalist cliches. This is due to technology’s emphatic relation to disruption and efficiency. Disruption is the changing of the framework, structure, medium, while efficiency is achieved by the simplification of complexity into the cliché. Although the cinema solidified and spread the three varieties of movement-images worldwide, it was a direct descendent of photography, itself created and styled as a replacement for painting. The historical categories of painting; landscape, action, still-life, and portrait, developed into the perception, action, and affect-images of cinema.

There is a direct, aesthetic connection between the movement-image and the screen. The screen easily streams movies, realistically displaying all three types of movement-images, establishing a space where a film can operate according to its logic of montage. But, compared to the theatre’s architectural presence, the movement-image on the screen appears contextualized, or framed by a surfeit of information. It is surrounded by a multitude of competing images from different sets, information-images, poor-images, text-images, etc. One could call this type of presentation information-adjacent. But we are skipping ahead. Before information subsumed visual presentation, cinema had its own revolution in the virtuality of the time-image. The time-image attempts to disrupt and circumvent the monopoly of the movement-image by stressing the temporal and arbitrary nature of the shot.

2.3. From Time-Image to Information-Image

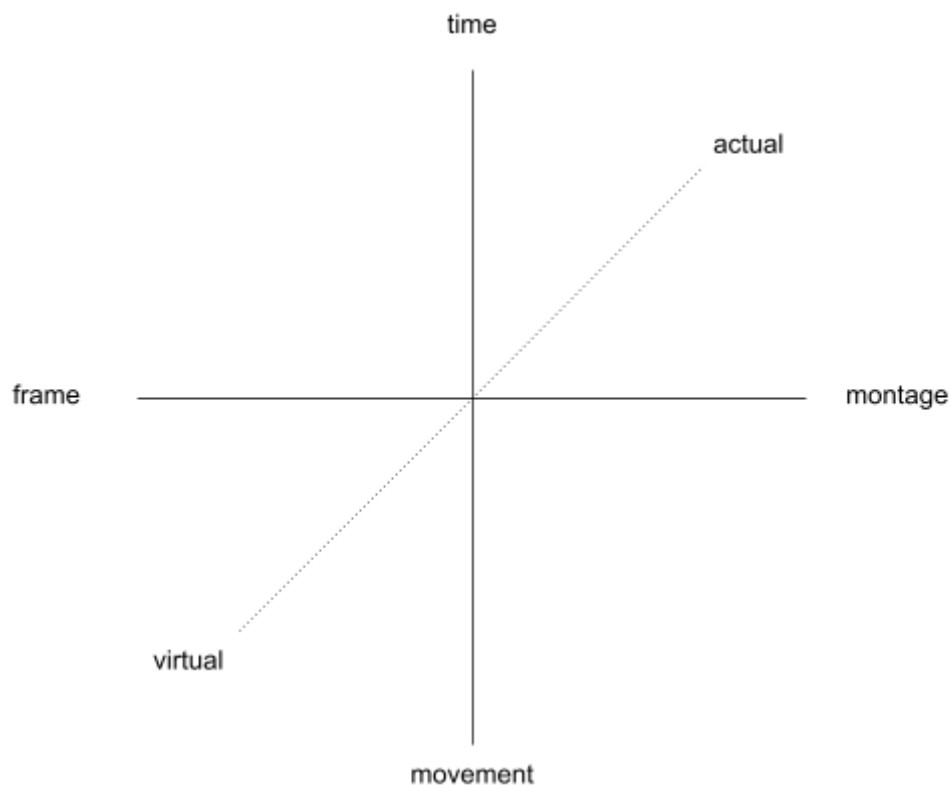
Before the proliferation of the image as a disenchanted surface of information, new film-making techniques and technologies, starting with Italian neorealist cinema, began

challenging the ubiquity of the studio-based movement-image. These new images, time-images, were characterized by dispersiveness, weak or absent linkages between shots, the voyage form of the mobile camera, a consciousness of cliches, and a disregard of traditional plot structure (C1 210). The time-image is an image where time ceases to be subordinated to movement and is able to appear for itself—Visconti's character's encounters with the cliché, Godard's jilted cuts with desynced audio, and Ozu's long poetic shots of stillness. With the latter specifically, the extended duration of the shot, landscape, still-life, or portrait, comes closest to photography while challenging it durationally. It simulates the photograph in order to surpass it, pushing stillness into a durational performance—revealing movement in the passing of time. The time-image flattens the differentiated horizon of the movement-image, establishing time as the central pole along which the multitude of shots revolve. Ozu's subjection of the photographic cliché to extended duration most effectively draws the viewer towards a prominent pole of temporality by re-presenting the familiar in the durational. Action only exists if the temporal space established by the time-image montage allows it to proceed. Action is second to time and this subordination critically allows time and thought to become perceptual, perceptible by the viewer.

Time-images destabilize the direct, causal linkages of the situation-action-situation' montage of the movement-image into loose, untethered linkages between the actual and the virtual. The actual, in the Deleuzian sense, is the 'here and now' as compared to the virtual, which is not the 'here and now'. The distinction is a question of presence versus potentiality. A set of time-images presents an actual image that progresses into a situation of virtuality and returns to a transformed actual—AVA'—actual-virtual-actual'. In this set, the virtual is made visual by techniques like filmic duration, machinic vision, flashback, dream collage, etc. Deleuze's concept of the time-image is based upon his interpretation and application of Henri Bergson. Time, in the Bergsonian tradition, is a constant irreversible splitting of the present into an actualized present and a contemporaneous past. The present is always present with a totality of potential actualities not yet actualized. Deleuze transposes this temporal split to time-images, with the present of the actual image and the contemporaneous past of the virtual image. By flattening the movement-image into a primary vehicle for the visualization of time, the linkage between the actual and the virtual is shown to be as deconstructible as the causal linkages of the movement-image.

De-linking, or destabilizing the situation-action relation in order to present the time-image reveals its own clichés and unstable assumptions. When overused, it becomes banal—the durational image, the flashback—just new techniques of illusion prepared for mass entertainment. When the linkage between an actual image and its virtual double is pushed to its inherent limit it reaches a situation of indiscernibility or perpetual exchange between the two—a mirror that absorbs and creates its own distinct, indiscernible objects—the same and the same'. In this state of indiscernibility, the links aren't simply fragile, they are frictionless. This ease of interchangeability pushes both the actual and the virtual to a state of illusion.

The virtual image, or pure recollection, according to Deleuze, “is not a psychological state or a consciousness: it exists outside of consciousness, in time” (C2 79). The virtual image is the contemporaneous past—it follows the actual image as a constant state of possibility—similar to the Derridean trace—a realized and illusory crystalline reflection. Initially jarring, the passage from the actual image to its virtual became smoother and undetectable thanks to technology and the new clichés of filmic vision produced by the new wave. The perpetual exchange between the actual and virtual image presaging screen technology and its frictionless interplay of information. The situation of perpetual exchange created between the actual and virtual image anticipated the flow of data across frictionless networks. When the virtual and actual is easily exchangeable, the content or sign function of the image loses symbolic power and becomes equalized as data. The screen becomes not a site for the presentation of movement or time-images orchestrated between the poles of framing and montage, but a site for the flattening of the image into data—the information-image.



Example 1

After the emergence and advancement of the time-image, cinematic images can be imagined as operating in a three-dimensional space pulled between six directions. The x-axis is created by the poles of framing and montage, the y-axis by the poles of time and movement, and the z-axis between the tension of the actual and virtual. The ground upon which this model exists is now the information image.

Instead of adding another axis, pushing the model into four dimensions, information is the plane which subsumes and flattens the dimensional complexity of the model into raw material–data. The creation of the image is still imaginable as operating in and according to the classic cinematic poles, but the image is increasingly treated as a surface of information, an easily replaced, or refreshed data set competing with every other data set. The circulation, dispersion, and contextual networks of information pre-figure the reception, or viewing of the image as an image in itself. The information image can never be seen solely as an image ‘as such’, but can any image be seen solely as an image? A chain of social relations has always determined the production, distribution, and display of images, that hasn’t changed. The change is in the distribution systems overwhelming contextual scope, overwhelming the viewer’s use of the image to access the symbolic.

2.4. Parallel Movements of Information

The information-image operates dialectically. On the one hand, it exists as a type, or category of images distinct from movement or time-images. Yet, on the other, it negates the power of these images as such and sublimates them into its form. The information-image is the medium and the message. There is a pure information image and a transforming of all extant images into information images. The information image and network which allows its distribution is a fourth-dimensional plane encompassing the poles of the classical image while flattening all difference. It is the elimination of difference by the radical nullity of information.

Frictionless information-networks allow and encourage an endless production of content. This overabundance of information, previously looked upon as fostering an age of radical enlightenment, is now viewed with suspicion and it is thought that humanity is drowning in this sea of content. Proposed solutions are concerned, or feign concern, with guaranteeing information has a relational basis to objective truth. The use of trusted peer-networks, AI-fact checkers to filter out false or damaging news, platform curation, and human monitors, try to assuage the public that the network is working in good faith. In his essay *Dispersion* from 2002, on the still-optimistic cusp of internet 2.0, Seth Price advocated a new art practice based on mining the unruly archive of information and recontextualizing it to produce new social contexts. (Price, 13) This is a retelling of the Duchampian tale, a shifting of the browser frame towards the gallery wall and back again. Not that these efforts shouldn’t be appreciated. It is productive to recontextualize and re-evaluate information. Art is a recontextualizing of studio labor into the presentation of an object with limited use and potentially unlimited exchange value—the inverse of traditional labor value. Information operates according to the law of unlimited exchangeability. But instead of this unlimited exchangeability arriving from the singular, irreproducible genius of a painting, a singular aesthetic experience, it arises from the information models’ ability to predict and shape outcomes. In addition to its fundamental basis as a system of control, information is powerful

because it is everywhere and simultaneously radically null—its binary structure allows infinite simulation, permutation, and metastasis. Information demolishes and transcends the temporary context provided by a platform, screen, browser, or institution. Recontextualizing isn't a challenge to the dynamic mutability of information—it simply provides new avenues of coded operability. The Duchampian gesture of elevating the quotidian to the singular transcendent is futile within a context unable to maintain its superstructure. The gesture, the image, circulates as information according to the machinic logic of the coded network—a logic based on prediction, simulation, and control.

Since its inception, Photography has been thought of as an extension of the subject, a method of acquiring and preserving the subject's soul, along with granting the possessor a certain power over the subjectivity trapped in the image (Sontag, 155). Sontag distinguishes the methods of photographic acquisition into a tripartite form: the surrogate possession of a person or thing as a unique object, the consumer's relation to events and experience, and the image as information granting the possibility of control (*ibid.*, 155-157). The photo-based image continues to function according to these three methods of acquisition, but increasingly the material basis of the image is data. Information is data, and data is composed of information, it is a direct relation. But information is also created from the subjective interpretation of data into a means or image of presentation.

The information image successfully flattens and encompasses the symbolic, narrative, and experiential acquisition functions of the image with its primary, direct relationship with data. As an example, consider the first method of the image as acquisition, the unique object, a photograph of a loved one on a digital device. Is the digital image a unique object? It still presents the possessor a direct trace of the subject and functions as a gateway to memory, yet this image exists in a sea of data stored on a specific device or in the 'cloud'—a server-farm in the desert. The material basis of the image is a data set, simultaneously infinite and ephemeral, easily reproduced, altered, deleted, or data mined for information. The image as an acquisition or memory of an experience is likewise governed and distributed by coded algorithms, blurring the hyperstition of experience. Consumers or users share places seen, not seen, imagined, and consume these experiences in ever accumulating photographs from landscapes to terror attacks. The types of experiential images the user takes, posts, shares, and views influence the aesthetics of others in the same community, while also creating an archival set for analysis and exploitation. The Hollywood sign vista is a digital fingerprint, sharpening the appearance of the subjectivity which posted or liked it. Once photographed, the image enters a system of classification, storage, reference, analysis, and circulation. The shared image enters the network as a data set waiting to be decoded, deformed, and decontextualized.

The digital image is directly recorded into the code upon its genesis. It is inscribed into a system of information that serves as the baseline data (circulating code) upon which its forms of acquisition emerge. Pre-digital images maintained the independence of functionality due to

their differing methods of inscription, surfaces, and codings. However, as exchangeability became frictionless, the movement-image, time-image, image as unique object, experience, et. al. were subsumed into the code, and (re)presented to the user as the information-image. No more spectacle, only endless content, a spinning crystal image.

Chapter 3

Art and Technology

3.1. On the Enframing of the Screen

The essence of modern technology, Enframing (*Gestellen*), Heidegger defines as, “the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve” (Heidegger, 20). ‘Revealing the real as standing reserve’ is Heidegger’s description of the fundamental economic activity of technology as the process of extracting a stockpile of resources (standing-reserve) from nature and humankind. Technology instrumentalizes the entire world into its service. This process, the bringing-forth of the real as standing-reserve, is not intrinsically positive or negative but invasive, viral. Unchecked, this process of extraction deterritorializes nature and destabilizes social relations. This is the demand of industrial production corresponding to the second-order of simulacra.

Gestand is the word Heidegger uses for standing-reserve. A peculiar word—reminiscent of a military term like the army reserves, and like the reserves always ready for action or being called to action, *Herausfordern*. It is the always ready, always available, precarious resource production utilizes. But in the original German, *Gestand* is the past tense form of the verb *gestehen*, meaning to confess, to admit, to own up to. Is there an implication of guilt in this word? Has nature already admitted to its guilt of self-deterritorialization? Or is it a positive theological confession, atoning for past mistakes to continually repeat them into the future? However one plays with these differences between languages and etymologies, the idea that modern technology in its service of industrial production turns the real into the standing-reserve is an undeniable fact of contemporaneity.

To reveal the real as standing-reserve is not claiming that the real is inherently *a priori* standing-reserve, but that it is the process of modern technology to describe or reveal it as such. Baudrillard, referring to the scientific process of inquiry, states that science defines the real as, “that of which it is possible to provide an equivalent reproduction ” (SE 73). Equivalent reproduction is necessary to prove or disprove the hypothesis, thereby creating scientific knowledge. A series of tests which must be reproducible and produce the same results. The real is revealed as standing-reserve for technological production and the real is only considered real if it is reproducible. This is the beginning of the transition to the code—after production, reproduction, after reproduction, simulation.

Heidegger, on the teleological tendencies of modern technology, writes, “Nature reports itself in some way or other that is identifiable through calculation and that it remains orderable as a

system of information” (Heidegger, 23). Information systems are post-production. The calculation that identifies and orders a system of information, the self-reporting of nature as standing-reserve, is the code. The code, as the base of the information system, is infinitely reversible and mutable, which inherently changes its relation and interpretation of causality. Heidegger again, “Causality now displays neither the occasioning that brings forth nor the nature of the *causa efficiens*, let alone that of the *causa formalis*” (ibid.). The calculation, the code which orders the real, conceals the real as the system of abstraction elaborates upon itself. If the real is the source material of technology, exponential levels of abstraction attempt to erase the existence of its source material, like a sample, distorted, deep-fried, passed along a memetic chain. This is the response to the challenge of Enframing.

The dominant form of our interaction with modern technology occurs upon the surface of the screen. Modern technology and the screen developed simultaneously, the screen being the site where we directly and indirectly interface with the code. Mutational complexities and data analysis undertaken with the screen directly affect and control nature as standing-reserve. When nature is malleable via technology, why wouldn’t the simulation emerge as a preferable alternative? Is it not more efficient to simulate all possibilities before enacting unalterable change?

The code is an image, framed on the screen. Enframing is not framing *sensu stricto*, yet it is subjected or mediated by it. Enframing operates simultaneously inside and outside the frame of the screen and yet it can’t be subjectively experienced outside of the frame. Even a direct, neural ‘image’ of the real is framed by a technological apparatus of delivery. Heidegger’s concern was that causality, under the technological order, tends to drift towards a situation of reporting which is always present, demanded and guaranteed, simultaneously or sequentially (ibid.). As experienced, simultaneity has long eclipsed the sequence. The binary sequence is still the basis of the code delivering the enframed reporting of the standing-reserve. But at the subjective, operational system-screen level, information appears to flow simultaneously. Coded materialities endlessly forecasting, mutating, and jousting with one another.

Is it the frame that enables us to steal a glance at Enframing? Is it through the screen that we report, confirm, or deny our existence? Is it the framing of Enframing or the Enframing of framing? It is both, it is the collapse, the permeated permutational enfolding of both. First, let’s consider the former, the framing of Enframing. The framing of Enframing prioritizes the screen, as the site of framing, over the nature of modern technology, Enframing. The screen is the product or *techne* and as such is unable to compromise or constitute Enframing (ibid., 46). Instead, it should be at the service of Enframing, revealing and extracting standing-reserve. The screen not only displays images and captures data, revealing behavior and trends but it is also a network of labor relations, extracting standing-reserve on multiple layers. Yet, doesn’t the appearance, or the ability to produce illusion both undermine and overmine Enframing? Is it possible for *techne* to reverse the relation and redefine the process of Enframing via reflection?

Framing is the creation of illusion. It is a demarcated space with simultaneous speech. Framing in the sense of the screen is the visual presentation of techno-social-logical data. It is the illusion of the code. It both displays and enables the rearrangement, alteration, deletion, and creation of its material basis. This reversibility, or challenge, to the hegemony of Enframing is what Baudrillard designates the hyperreal. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, the hyperreal is said to operate in four ways; deconstruction of the real, infinite refraction, the serial form, and that which encompasses and enables all the others, binarity and digitality (SE 72-73). We will address these individually later in the chapter. Our primary interest is in how the power of the hyperreal screen leads to a situation of challenge or usurpation with that which created it. This is due to the fact that the illusion has the power to change the real. More precisely, framing uses the power of illusion to create the illusion of having the power to change the real. The illusion, the image, is *a priori* the real. Whether or not the illusion escapes Enframing, we will not judge. The only certainty is that the framing of Enframing is how subjectivities interact with the code; from gene alteration to identity creation.

3.2. Art on the Screen, Existence in the Frame

“The user cannot ignore the frame, because he or she created it. The framing—and operation of framing—become explicit throughout the experience of contemplating and writing” – Boris Groys, *In the Flow*

Our historical interactions with images, from caves to monasteries, to the museum or theatre, occurred in situ. The success of the image or artwork is to erase the body. Once the mind ceases to be aware of the body, the impression of experience is felt exponentially. The loss or dissociation of the self, witness to the architect and/or artist’s ability. The frame is the liminal space most effective as a self-effacing buffer allowing a ‘pure’ experience of the artwork. Kant proposes the parergon as the buffer that is both outside and inside the work. His three examples are; the frame of a painting, the columns of a building, and the drapery on classic sculpture. The parergon is both practical and theoretical—part of the work yet detachable from it. Easier to imagine with the frame and drapery, a bit complicated when a forklift is required. But why is this third term, between the *ergon* and the space or milieu, necessary? According to Derrida, in *The Parergon*, “this permanent demand—to distinguish between the internal or proper meaning and the circumstances of the object in question—organizes every philosophical discourse on art, the meaning of art and meaning itself” (P 12). The parergon effaces itself in order to establish a space for meaning to be revealed.

The parergon is an organizational system for meaning creation and in the case of art a physical medium, e.g., gilded frame, book, library, metaphysical system... It is expandable and contractible in exponential layers. The virtual frame of the browser, text, or screen image follows the same principle of organization. Around this virtual frame, there is the operating

system, the resizable, zoomable frame of content, the adjacent screen space of simultaneous applications, the material, hardware casing of the screen, and its specific spatial location, on a desk, in a hand, in the eye.

Framing consistently permutates along the rivers of mediation. Mediated immediacy is always already framed, television, big stack aggregator, influencer—the medium of the message. Derrida echoes, “a frame is in essence constructed and therefore fragile, this is the essence or the truth of the frame” (ibid., 33). There are several difficulties warping around. Is the Kantian parergon translatable to the software or hardware frame both 'of' and 'in' the screen? Likewise, is Derrida's critique of the frame and the violence of framing also translatable?

“Even what we call “ornaments” parerga, ie. those things which do not belong to the complete representation of the object internally as elements, but only externally as complements, and which augment the satisfaction of taste, do so only by their form, and if it is used as a golden frame is used, merely to recommend the painting by its charm, it is then called finery and injures genuine beauty.” – Kant, *Critique of Judgement*

The form of the screen begins with a separation. Even if we prefer not to establish binaries, there is a hardware and software aspect to the framing of the screen. The hardware establishes the physical material limitations of the user experience. The gold, red, black, or edgeless frame surrounding the display is the materially dependent gilded frame. The video work presented in a gallery or museum setting as a mimesis of painting. The screen is always framed, even if edgeless or curved back to the sides, simulating no frame, no end, like a waterfall display, or a projection. Even if the screen has no visible exterior or parergon, it is still resting upon an internal frame of varied dimensions and materiality.

Kant mentions parerga only briefly in his explication of the third moment of the analytic of the beautiful. The first two moments concern mathematical categories, quality and quantity, while the third and fourth are dynamic categories, relation and modality. The pure judgement of taste is independent of charm and emotion, purely formal as opposed to materially aesthetic. Concerning formative art; painting, sculpture, horticulture, and architecture, so long as they are beautiful, Kant writes, “the delineation is the essential thing; and here it is not what gratifies in sensation but what pleases by means of its form that is fundamental for taste” (Kant, 61). There is delineation in the artwork to establish the fundamental formal ground upon which the composition and color are added and there is the delineation of the artwork by the parergon.

Derrida's critique appropriates this concept of delineation and accuses Kant of using his critique of theoretical judgement and applying it, like an ill-fitted frame, onto an aesthetical judgement relying upon an assumption that imagination, in relation to beauty, may perhaps be

linked with understanding. Yet, and similar to a *mise en abyme* of delineation, deconstruction depends on the theory of the frame in order to create a space of meaning to be deconstructed. It is a simulated frame, closer to the browser window, it becomes a software critique.

One may object that the parergon is fundamentally, in Kantian terms, only the physical manifestation of the framing which establishes space for art to emerge and be judged formally. It is the hardware—the framing of the screen. The software or the framing in the screen is the experienced, deconstructed *Mittelglied* made visible. This is the frame that does not disappear. The software frame is materially the same, essentially it is the same ground, and it is user created. Yet, it still allows for a certain considered suspension via an outline or negative space. Certainly we could frame a painting with a painting? Or should we dismiss the overproduction of tabs, windows, screens as a simulated surplus-value of what is materially a binaric nullity. Aesthetic judgement, Derrida writes, “must concern intrinsic beauty, and not the around and about. It is, therefore, necessary to know—this is the fundamental presupposition, the foundation—how to define the intrinsic, the framed, and what to exclude as the frame and beyond the frame” (P 26). If aesthetic judgement concerns intrinsic beauty is it possible to exclude or include, to define, when the entirety of the presentation is on the same virtual ground? The parergon is a delineation in physical space that reflects or represents, according to Derrida, the violence of confinement used to produce meaning, an onto-metaphysics. The parergon in the screen is an *inergon*, a virtual delineation inside an already framed.

How does one define the intrinsic, the framed, and what to include or exclude? It is either left undefined because one is indifferent or it is experienced through suspension. Even if the app, stack, O/S, or user creates and consistently modulates the frame, the possibility of suspension or disappearance remains the same. After all, the parergon is determined by disappearing, exerting its greatest energy in the process of dissolving (P 26). The frame can disappear or the user can ignore the frame, but the simulated space of screen vision is inescapable.

3.3. Poles of Cyberspace, Simulation, and Performativity

The digital is inevitably linked with the transition from modernism to post-modernism. It is the site of communication exchange, enabling and powering informational abstraction, or the abstraction of information. There are three poles to consider. Two bound dialectically and a third which encompasses the contemporality and singularity of all digital images. The bound poles, according to Fredric Jameson, are axiomatic abstraction (cyberspace) and simulation. The floating, third pole is the performativity of the digital image. First the dialectical poles of postmodern abstraction, cyberspace and simulation.

Jameson posits these two poles in an essay on the cyberpunk classic, *Neuromancer*. There are two methods of interacting or interfacing across a network. The first, the cold pole, involves

directly linking (neural jacking) and viewing the world of data, financial abstraction, as a self-projected ontology, the Gibsonian cyberspace. Jameson relates this to a second-level abstraction of axiomatic projection imaginable as a paper architecture of sheer relationships or Spinoza's *rerum concatenatio* (Jameson, 230). The second, hot pole, is simulation—the simulation of stimulus—shortened to the Gibsonian *simstim*. This simulation is the ability to inhabit another person's body and experience their visual and sensory experience. Gibson stretches a libidinal band across these two poles, and the hero switches between them, cold to hot, global to local, confined to the body, framed by the network.

Cyberspace, the word is now antiquated, anachronistic, bound to the early romance of the internet, 2600, and Usenet forums. But second-level abstraction, or information network doesn't quite flow either. Cyberspace can be imagined as Enframing and simulation as Dasein, but nevertheless, the pole around which it orients, wraps, folds, and unfolds is clear. Cyberspace is visualized and subsumed in the concept of data. Cyberspace is data and this data a product of the Enframing of technology. It is analyzed and used in order to extract more of it from itself—this is why cyberspace corresponds to the third stage of capitalism, financial abstraction. Contemporary or postmodern art also revolves around this pole, drawing both aesthetic and conceptual inspiration from data and functioning as a data set itself—for development modeling, city planning, trend forecasting, and capital investment. This pole is widely discussed and acknowledged yet it continues to hide, to mutate, and to cover itself, as it is the site of Enframing.

The pole of cyberspace is the pole of consummate data. The transitory belief in the utopian promise of cyberspace reduced to data mining, trend forecasting, and behavioral analytics. An attempt to predict and control the 'trajectories' through space. Perhaps this is also transitory, but the intense competition to collect and shape this information begs to differ. Who will control the data space? Why does the control of data matter when it can always be challenged with reversibility? Modernist abstraction, in both reactionary and progressive forms, was a movement towards the non-figural as an expression of metaphysical truth inaccessible to technology. However, postmodern abstraction is, "the abstraction of information as such: the way in which the seemingly concrete visual image is already abstract by virtue of its transmission in advertising" (ibid., 232). The pole of cyberspace is also the pole of the distribution of this data. Stored data is already a second-level abstraction and in order to comprehend it, we abstract again, to the view or third-level, dynamic models, analytics, artworks.

The warmer, local pole of this dialectic, simulation, is also an abstraction from the real, but it is an abstraction that is experienced as image. It is an abstraction that recreates or re-presents the empirical for a viewer to experience. In *Neuromancer*, this involves experiencing the sensory perceptions of the other in first-person-perspective—as simulated spectacle. We are familiar with rudimentary forms of this pole of abstraction, from body cameras to live streaming. If the pole of cyberspace is the presentation of data as comprehensible reality, the

pole of simulation is the representation of reality as illusion. Mediated culture dominates the syntactical field to such an extent that even exemplary artwork that attempts to deterritorialize simulation, or push it to its structural limitations, is immediately assimilated. The dialectical tension between the poles is mutually reinforcing—the further data is used to analyze, shape, and influence behavior, the more simulation advances in recreating an experience of the real as illusion.

Jameson's materialist scepticism leads him to remind us that, "cyberspace is a literary invention and does not really exist, however much time we spend on the computer every day" (ibid., 222). But, in *Neuromancer*, we are already in an idealistic, privileged world of the mind—the body is meat, dominated by the world of illusion and appearance presented by simulation and sheer data. Literature is the word made image in the mind. Simulation is data or information made image on the screen. Whereas Jameson leaves the dialectic between the global of cyberspace and the local of simulation as paradox, Baudrillard synthesizes the two poles in the hyperreal and recognizes their shared materiality as the code.

According to Baudrillard's definition, "the real is not only that which can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced: the hyperreal" (SE, 73). As previously mentioned, the hyperreal operates in four ways: the deconstruction of the real, infinite refraction (as in Deleuze's crystal image), the serial form, and the binarity and digitality of the code that generates and encompasses them all (ibid., 72-73). The deconstruction of the real is the flattening out and elimination of metaphor and metonymy in service of a 'textual' close reading of the object. It is an n-model of interpretation, proliferating modulations of infinite variation of surface readings—reducing complexity to a frictionless exchangeability of signifiers. Infinite refraction is the serial bifurcation and duplication of the object, as if placed between two mirrors. Each subsequent reflection or split, folds upon itself like the planes of a crystal, giving an illusion of profundity and variation. But each plane only reflects the surface—a depthless, postmodern cubism. The serial form is reproduction, most accurately illustrated in the work of Andy Warhol (ibid.). The flattened, silkscreened, duplicated image presents itself knowingly and approvingly as serial, without the supplement of feigned depth as in the crystal image. The code, which enables reproduction, redoubling, enfolding, modulation and frictionless exchangeability is the foundation of the operability of the hyperreal. Jameson's dialectical poles of cyberspace and simulation reflect differences in the visualization or presentation of this operability. The selected experience of the coded image constitutes a third pole. That is the *a priori* experiential field of subjectivity and performativity of the image.

So far, we have taken the image for granted. Whether it is a real-time axiomatic rendering of offshore drilling production, a famed CGI gymnast's livestream, or a Korean eating celebrity accompanying dinner, the image doesn't just appear *ex nihilo* but is selected by the user. That is, the user grants the streamed data set or file a temporal presence, visualized on the screen. Data is invisible—incomprehensible until it is visualized. According to Groys, this is why, "a

digital image cannot be merely exhibited or copied (as an analogue, ‘mechanically reproducible’ image can), but always only staged or performed” (Groys, 143). Temporal performativity provides the framework for the image to be visualized and therefore understood or experienced as image. Due to the image data only being experienced as a staging or performance, “one can argue that digitalization turns visual arts into performing arts” (ibid.).

The pole of performativity is closer to a plane of immanence upon which the concepts of data and simulation ebb and flow upon the screen—visualized and effaced by the haptic/optic feedback of the user and the reversibility of the code. We could contest that this performativity of the image and the duration granted to it isn’t subjectively different from visiting a gallery and viewing a painting, sculpture, or video for a duration of time. But objectively, the difference is that the digital file or image is always the same data, like a musical score, yet only visualizable or performed on the screen. The visualization of the image affords it an aura of originality—erasing the distinction between the original and copy. Every performance is singular even if the digital score is identical.

The visualization of the image, stretching across the band between the poles of cyberspace and simulation is experienced as a user-controlled summoning of the invisible—a singular performance. Visualization of the digital is always accompanied or arriving as an act of performance orchestrated by the user. The user desires the image and grants it a temporal presence, a period of duration upon the screen. But the user cannot be assumed *a priori* the code. That is, the control or desire associated with the user is not autonomous. The user interacting with the code experiences, prior to the performative visualization of the image, a simulation of control over the contents, the sea of data. (One could argue that, in a very real way, there is control, files can be deleted, websites deleted, images altered, the entire global network system destroyed. But, that objection is like refusing to play a game that will go on irrespectively. It is in fact the obligation to play that enables social control by coded modalities.) Even the term user or viewer implies an exteriority that must be used or viewed—an exteriority of coded indeterminacy beyond any singular user’s control. Yet, this is the paradox upon which the code regenerates. All virtualized interaction with the code takes place through the framework of screen vision-simulated space—combining interactive user control within an appearance of total freedom. An MMORPG swallowing the social. The continued evolution and development of the code relies upon users as providers of data and editors of the code—horizontal, decentralized serfs of the digital landscape.

The simulation of control precedes and directs the user’s interaction with the code as visualized on the screen. It is always already implied—from the browser window to the command prompt. Every digital interaction is presented as a first-level simulation of control that, if well designed, motivates the user to continue using. When the simulation of control is impeded, as in a transition to an increasingly centralized (censorial) control of digital space, user interaction suffers, declines, or shifts to another platform with more autonomy or

simulated control. Contrary to the popular utopian sentiment of early internet adopters, the internet began and remains a governed platform of controlled communication. After all, the Arpanet was a military project. The emancipatory potential of the early internet was merely the transition into a more advanced form of social control—cloaked in the indeterminate flux of digital freedom. The social control of simulation is the *parergon*—Heidegger's Enframing.

The virtual image of the underlying digital code never arrives alone. The viewer is given simulated control over the visualization of the image and its duration on the screen. The duration of the image and its ontological uniqueness give it a performative 'here and now'. Contained in this temporal performativity, the virtual image translates the code around the dialectical poles of axiomatic abstraction, the rendering of sheer data sets, and the simulation of the real, what can be experienced with the senses. The pole of simulation, taken to its abstracted ideal, effaces the contradiction of the real and imaginary. Reality, as it loses its claim on origin, collapses into the hyperreal. Does not the concept of the hyperreal appear as a neo-Kantian metaphysical fiction in the framing of the screen? The illusory transcendental field of possible experience?

3.4. Coded

"Practically and historically, this means that social control by means of the end is replaced by social control by means of prediction, simulation, programmed anticipation and indeterminate mutation, all governed, however, by the code."

— Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* from 1976, Baudrillard defines three successive orders of simulacra, running parallel to changes in the dominant law of value. The first-order simulacrum, is the counterfeit which operates on the natural law of value (SED 50). The counterfeit is the duplicate of the original, it poses no threat to the existence of the 'aura' of the original. It is the fake, allowing for mass participation without destabilizing the symbolic power of the original. If anything, the counterfeit reiterates the hierarchy of the latter. The second-order simulacrum is production, dominant during the industrial era, which operates according to the market law of value (ibid.). Production is driven by the logic of the pure series of n -identical objects. N by definition being any real number, bars the possibility of a defined original. The relation of n -identical objects is no longer between an original and its counterfeit, but according to relations of equivalence and indifference (ibid., 55). Take Coca-Cola as an example. The original is the recipe or model. There is no original bottle or can of which all the counterfeit Coca-Colas are only imitations. Of course, there are counterfeit versions (New Coke, Pepsi, Shasta, etc.), but these are only variations of the recipe with less symbolic power. All Coca-Cola's are equivalent. It is the extinction, or lack of an original reference which enables the general law of equivalences and the very possibility of production (ibid.). As production advanced, the importance of the n -model

superseded that of the production process. Modulation, design, and marketing of the *n*-series became the primary focus of capital investment—Marx’s *faux frais* of capital. Reproduction superseded production. Production, labor power as a world-historical revolutionary force was overcome by technics (ibid., 56). The emergence of technics or technology as a medium began the transition from the industrial to the post-industrial—from second to third-order simulacrum—simulation.

Simulation, in the current code-governed phase, operates on the structural law of value (ibid., 50). The code operates precessionally—simulating, testing, altering, and diffracting from a core model. In operational simulation there are no longer counterfeits and originals, nor pure *n*-series of production but, “models from which all forms proceed according to modulated differences” (ibid., 56). The code is the basis of the third-order simulacrum which subsumes the previous orders. The language of the operational code is the realization of Leibniz’s binarity and the decoding and recoding of DNA. It operates upon the level of the real. Compared to the limited scope of production and its emphasis on seriality and capital accumulation, simulation operates at the structural level of value, Enframing the real as standing-reserve.

The precessional immanence of the code dominates social and psychic reality. As a perpetually changing emergence, responding, mimicking, producing and reproducing data flows, the code generates the message, medium, and the real simultaneously. It operates according to equivalence, synthesizing social values, identities, and production into exchangeable and accumulating data—equivalent exchange. According to Baudrillard, only that which can’t be exchanged challenges the code. This is the theoretical foundation of symbolic exchange—the gift. The exemplary gift, the *ne plus ultra*, the coffee without cream, destabilizes the code by creating a situation of indecipherable ambivalence.

Chapter 4

On Screen Vision

4.1. What You Touch is What You See

“What interests us in operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. Even the most striated city gives rise to smooth spaces: to live in the city as a nomad, or as a cave dweller”

– Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

The close-vision of the screen and its corresponding tactility, simulate the active, haptic, creative process of smooth space presented in a simulated distant vision of striated space. The screen simultaneously gives both the haptic vision of creation with the optic vision of appreciation—the percept is always-already present in smooth space—as an actualized combination, this is new. It is neither close vision-haptic space nor distant vision-optic space because it has ceased to be either smooth or striated, but the simulated striated in the simulated smooth—*screen vision-simulated space*. This screen-vision (which could also be termed hap-optic, close-distant, or virtual smooth striation) simulates creation via smooth space and appreciation via virtual striated space. The result being that, as an experience of viewing as well as a fact of production, nothing is remembered and nothing is created. Or, more precisely, it allows creation, it is a tool after all, ready-at-hand, yet it simulates the act of creation on a screen that presents every movement, letter, or scroll as an experience of distant-vision. It hints at a beyond—the virtual dimension of cybernetic futures—an imagined infinity of permutation. Could we object, is this just another mixture of the smooth and striated? Or is there a singularity of disparate, intensive ordinates that allow us to posit a new concept? Always keeping in mind that *defining distinctions does not preclude infinite variation*.

Screen-vision relates historically to Riegl's concepts of distant, normal, and close vision. Deleuze and Guattari associate distant vision with striated space and close vision with smooth space. Following this line of flight, screen-vision coexists and is co-emergent with simulated space. We can trace the concept of *Wollen*, from Augustine to Worringer and clearly identify it in the directed vision of a culture currently effectuated in screen-vision. If nomad art is a result of the close vision of smooth space, and imperial art emergent with distant vision, where might we place contemporary art from the screen-vision of simulated space? Observable in its present becoming, the art of simulated space relates to the code of network connections and modalities that bring it about, *techné*, and the parergon defining and

enclosing the limits of its presentation. A truncated list of related components, which in turn may become concepts, include; the code, simulation, performativity, information, optic vision, haptic vision, and an actual touched, or felt haptics of the screen.

A slight digression permits us to recall an early connection formed between the screen and an actualized haptics, from the mouse or trackpad—relating the finger to the cursor—to the DualShock controller for the Playstation. Released in 1997 and composed of elliptical motors, it whirls based on real-time feedback, vibrating in the player's hand at differing intensities determined by the activities on the screen, e.g., slashing a knife versus firing a pistol or shotgun, being punched, falling off a cliff. It proved immensely successful and was taken as a nonpareil model for intensifying user experience. The phenomenon of phantom phone vibration shows how intuitively the brain co-associates feeling and alertness, a constant technological communion. Haptic feedback directs the Augustinian will of vision towards the screen. If you see, hear and feel it, how does it not form a reality that you immediately know? The optic and haptic depth of the screen is more than just an extension of close vision-smooth space, but the new, simulated space of screen-vision.

Like the smooth emerging from the striated, simulated space is actualized by the highest form of striation, the code. But unlike striated space, which is deterritorialized by the smooth, the code is infinitely reversible within itself. Simulated space only generates the appearance of smooth and striated spaces from reversible, coded binarities. Simulated space and the code are of similar components, yet both consistent in that they render their components inseparably as the distinct concepts of the code and simulated space. Their *de facto* mix does not preclude their abstract separation. At the locus of simulated space and the code, screen vision emerges as a distinct concept, both in its history with previous concepts of vision and space, and in its becoming with the code.

How inseparable are the components of screen vision-simulated space within itself? The internal consistency of the concept is determined by the indiscernibility of the *zone de voisinage*, or overlapping areas of the components. For example, with screen-vision the haptic touch upon the screen cannot be distinguished from the activity, or action it acts upon the components depicted on the screen. They can be separated, into components, the finger, surface, optic screen, visual response, the code, app, or program running—but the concept screen vision-simulated space is the observed zone of indiscernibility between these components. This is why a simplified idea of the virtual or simulation subsumes all its components. The terms prefix, or pre-configure how the components manifest. This is why we speak of a simulated space, simulated vision, simulated hapticity, etc. The components are made consistent in their shared commonality of simulation, preconfiguring and reconfigured in simulate space, coexisting with screen vision. Simulation is both the object of screen vision and the element of a simulated space—comparable to the concept of the Other and its inseparable separable components; the gaze, the touch, the ear, the knowledge of the Other.

The encompassing of the components or intensive ordinates of screen vision are effectuated as observable. Screen vision-simulated space is the point of coincidence, or condensation, of its intensive ordinates which nonetheless maintain their singularity in themselves. Screen vision, simulation, touch, reversibility, performativity, optic and haptic space, compose the actualized event of screen vision-simulated space. But simulated space as such is never seen in itself. The concept remains incorporeal, an ideation. Its intensive ordinates are like pointillist marks of varying color, shade, and intensity that vibrate, resonant, and remain always in motion. The concept is the absolute surface of volume, a canvas, but a canvas one never sees. The concept is both absolute and relative, “it is infinite through its survey or its speed but finite through its movement that traces the contour of its components” (WIP 21).

4.2. Screen as Seen

The screen appears, it responds to the face, illuminating itself as presence. It presents another world, a world of boundless connectivities under the thumb, finger or gaze of the subjectivity interacting with its smooth surface. Behind the screen the most sophisticated binaries are continuously processed. The screen presents Nietzsche's true world as an actualized, or virtualized presence. The true world of the screen is a totalizing, encompassing element of infinite possibilities—the infinite of appearance. But the simulated depth of optic visibility and limitless concatenations of knowledge is only infinite in appearance. Only with a foundation based on the nullity of the code is the appearance of the infinite possible.

We slide our gaze, thumb, finger, upon the screen and it responds—fluctuating images, signs, frames, alerts, vibrations, notices. A line may be drawn, mutated and disbanded. The undo, the back, the ‘it never was’ of a simulated reversibility. We take a photograph of a landscape and zoom in so close that the abscissa of the horizon disappears. Is this a smooth space? No. The image is zoomed out, striation returns. We survey simulated space haptically, running our eye-become-finger over the information display.

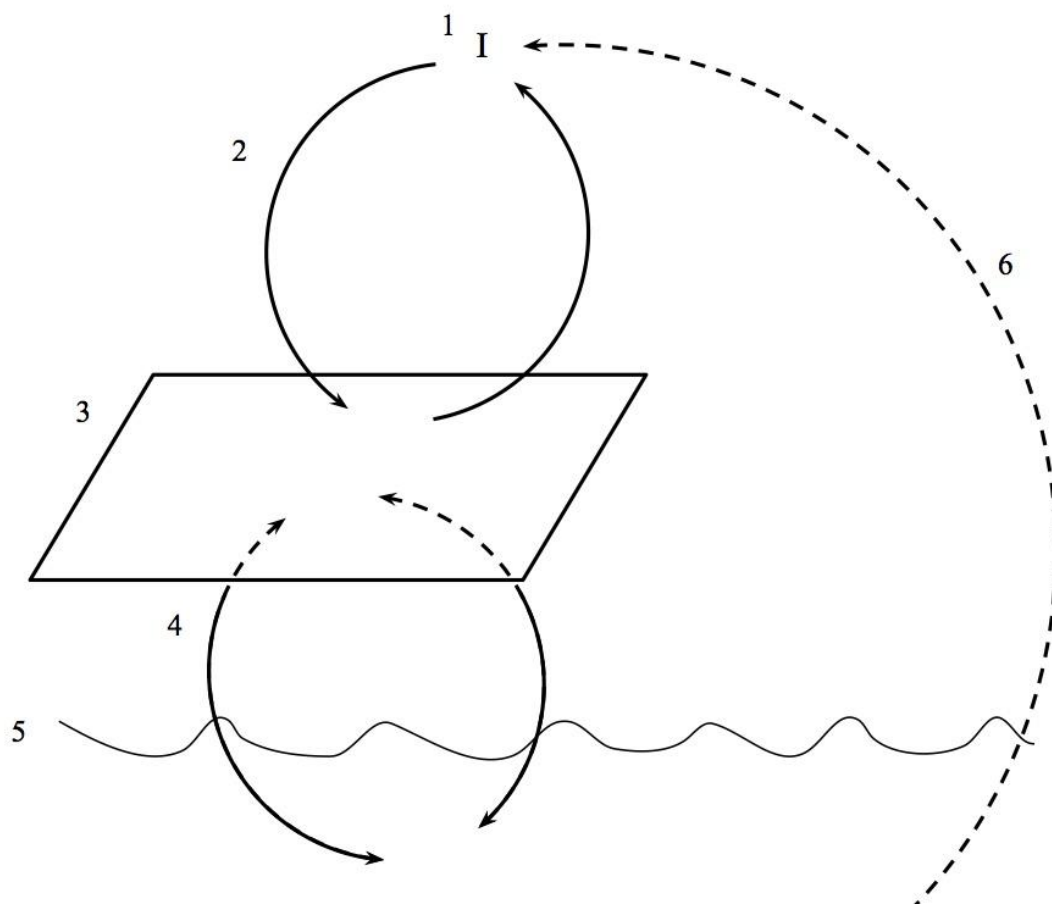
Screen vision is Augustine's *visioni mentis* become supplement. It creates an active, haptic-optic feedback loop connecting vision and touch. It is like drawing, but with the promise of full erasure. Once the ‘bandwidth issue’ between the screen and the mind is solved, via neuralink, augmented reality contact lenses, or some other techno gimmick, what will distinguish screen vision from *visioni mentis*? Especially if the user is presented with a feed of projected images or ideas they don't even know they are not imagining? Subjectivity dissolves into the code. The lure of appearance and the phantasy of disappearance bonded as the utopic-nihilistic fusion of technics. This is nothing but commodity fetishism. Subjectivity at the irreducible point of negativity, retains its autonomy.

An alert, a connection to the other, but always through the interface of the screen. Inter-facing. A presentation of infinity in the dullest technocratic binarity. The screen doesn't

withdraw, it overwhelms in its nullity, presenting presence without avowal—generating a simulation of transcendence and immanence. You can know the *ding an sich* right now...

An empirical description of screen vision-simulated space is an attempt at tracing the contours of its components as actualized in an ever changing state of affairs. The extensional function of simulated space as proposition, or function, is separate from the intension of the concept. Nevertheless, the traces trace similarities from the relative of the actual to the idealized of the concept. Describing the state of affairs of screen vision links propositions between the screen, finger, device, code, network, etc. It refers, establishes, references, linkages discursively. The concept however, is non-discursive, it is not a state of affairs even if actualized as such. The concept, screen vision-simulated space, should not be conflated with the binary, true-false propositions of its state of affairs. The latter are effectuated instances that reveal a threshold of indeterminacy of the intensive ordinates of the concept. This *zone de voisinage* is where haptic touch, optic vision, a letter, a face, an instantiation of code, concatenation become indistinct, blurry—the variations made inseparable by the consistency of the concept.

4.3. Schema of Screen Vision



Example 2

The concept screen vision-simulated space can be explained by a schema of its components: 1) the point of condensation of the concept (the user or subjectivity interacting with the screen); 2) the haptic-optic feedback loop between the user or point of condensation and the screen; 3) the screen as plane of infinite display–mirror of translation between the haptic/optic feedback loop and the reversibility of the code; 4) the code or reversible processing of decoding and recoding–the operating system linking the screen and data; 5) the sea of data created by the interlinkage and accumulation of information technology–the *Gestand* of the screen–a materially constrained false-infinity; 6) the transcendental field of possible experience–bringing knowledge of the thing-in-itself, to the point of condensation, be this pure concept, digital user, machinic singularity, AI, etc. Importantly, the schema is only an attempt to render an effectuated arrangement of possible components, it does not imply a concretization. The schema is only a possible path of thought to discover the consistency and difference of the concept of screen vision-simulated space, especially in regards to close vision-haptic space and distant vision-striated space.

Screen vision shares components with close vision and distant vision, but instead of serving smooth space in the former or striated space in the latter, it is coexistent with simulated space, hence the couplet, screen vision-simulated space. The haptic-optic feedback loop connects screen vision with an optic field in the appearance of depth and striation of the screen, simultaneously begetting a haptic interaction with the actual surface of the screen. The haptic-optic loop sublimates a simulation of smooth space, that is, it sublimates the space of creation. A state of creation, the pole of the smooth, is presented as already striated–not striated as admixture, but striated as simulated smooth. Simulated space is not striated space because the entire visual field is malleable–variations of finite, discrete coordinates–due to the reversibility of the code. Close vision simulates, simultaneously, the close vision of creation in the distant vision of perception–connecting neither with the smooth space of nomad art or the striated space of imperial art, but with a simulated space of simulated art. This is the space where the continuistic postulation of Augustine becomes actualized. The eye and the finger synthesized into a hybrid experience of creation and perception. Shouldn't this touch, this simulated presence, be interrogated, constantly, ruthlessly, with the utmost suspicion? It is a lure of control–the *Gerede* of touch–gliding across the simulated smooth space of functionality. This is where Derrida, following Heidegger, is most insightful–in withdrawing, stepping back from enthusiasm, the ecstasy of *techne*, with the reminder, “truth is not touched except where it is untouchable” (OT 120).

The screen is always touched, always touchable, but a touch that only touches upon machinic indifference. The screen is a mirror of translation between interactivity and the code. The screen presents upon its immediate, haptic surface, a recessed, deepening, always receding

body: textual, imaged, social. The bodies appear and disappear from an endless profundity of simulated space. This is what is commonly referred to as virtual space or virtual reality because it actualizes, or presents as new, *visioni mentis*. The magic of this ‘mental’ appearance and the technological mysticism of its underlying operations create the illusion of infinity, a virtual false consciousness. The code plunges into the sea of data, which is not virtual, nor infinite, but only increasing within a framework of networked storage. Information is the sea of data that is analogous to the real keeping the hyperreal and its components afloat: deconstruction, refraction, reproduction, digitality. The entire schema of screen vision-simulated space floats upon this sea of data. The code is the reversible operability while the data forms the sea or mutating mass of information with which it operates. Appearing as an infinite well of potentiality and becoming—like smooth space—it is nevertheless a highly rigidified diagrammatic totality. The sea of data, recording input/output from the process of interactivity, is subject to alterations, mutations, or deletions of decoding and recoding. The system is flexible, but only to the limits of its materially bound framing edifice—it only provides a semblance of smooth space. Simulated space is the smooth stripped of the infinite and bound to finite, discrete quantification.

Immanent to the I, the user, the point of condensation, is the illusion of a transcendental field of possible experience exscribed from the sea of data. The seemingly endless depth of information formed by the excess of communication projects a becoming-universe at one's fingertips. The illusion of transcendence at the point of condensation creates a false consciousness of technology, ‘empowering’ the user with a flattened, accessible world of simulation and performativity. Screen vision generates the space in which transcendental access to the thing-in-itself is simulated. Looking into the screen is like staring at the sea.

Conclusion

Screen vision-simulated space is both the result of a close vision and the element of haptic interactivity that simultaneously relates to a more distant vision and a more optical space. Its presentation is the appearance of presence—untouchable in its very tactility. As an extension of modern technology, it reveals the real as standing-reserve. Do we touch upon the untouchable on the surface of appearance with the eye, the finger, the mind? Or is this not a dreamed activity—the technical mediation of signs and signals materializing an abstract ideal? No, this is an idealization, materializing an abstract ideal from technical mediation, or what Debord calls the “false consciousness of encounter” (SS 217). *Techne* as concept becoming component of screen vision reveals the real as standing reserve. The interactive, performative functionality of this organization of the real subjugates Being via fascination. This works on two levels—appearance and knowledge. If the real, that is the world (and word) organized and presented through the code is always already-at-hand as appearance—then vis-a-vis this presence, or immanence of the appearance of the world—knowledge of the world as standing-reserve, information—is also already at hand. The dreamed activity, the illusion of the transcendental ideal, is an epiphenomenon of this knowledge-at-hand. Therefore it is the appearance of appearance and the appearance of knowledge (of the *ding an sich*), simulation. The event of screen vision-simulated space is inscribed on a plane of appearance.

“What is the art of painting designed to be—an imitation of things as they are,
or as they appear—of appearance or of reality? Of appearance”
— Plato, *The Republic*

Art is the use, extraction, creation, and presentation of affects. It is an attempt at translating the infinite into the finite. Screen vision challenges art and painting specifically, in the realm of appearances. But screen vision is experienced as the information translated into the visible. Affect is reduced to the presentation of information. Any new technology that uses appearance issues a specific challenge to art. Phenomenologically and empirically it is of the same concern, imitation, appearance, simulation. Art is singular in its presentation of affect, irreducible to information. Screen vision-simulated space is an event of appearance, the translation of the real into information, the presentation of data. It is only affect, the becoming-universe of affect that challenges screen vision with a counter-gift of form irreducible to the code. Art must use the concept of screen vision-simulated space against itself. A reverse challenge to the challenge of *techne*. Rip the same from the same.

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