NEW PHILOSOPHY FOR NEW MEDIA

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The Digital Any–Space–Whatever

With his concept of the any-space-whatever (ASW), Deleuze furnishes a means to appreciate what is at stake in the spatial problematic presented by Lazzarini's work and the larger body of digital art for which it stands. For if the digital space we encounter in *skulls* can be understood as an extension of the cinematic ASW, it is one that overturns its basic structure: its constitution through the extraction of an underlying potential or singularity from empirical or lived space. In the digital ASW, that is, we encounter a space whose potential or singularity is simply unrelated to any possible human activity whatsoever, such that the problematic it presents us is—not unlike the digital facial image analyzed in chapter 4—that of establishing contact with it in the first place, of forging an *originary* yet *supplementary* analogy.

Initially drawn from his analysis of Robert Bresson,[18] Deleuze's concept of the ASW finds its exemplary expression in the European cinema of the postwar period. As Deleuze sees it, this cinema can be characterized as a direct response to a vastly changed urban topography.[19] Effectively, the ASW discovers a historical motivation in the bombed out environments of postwar Europe: it is these environments that inform the desolate, haunting spaces of Italian neorealism where characters could no longer find their bearings. Faced initially with "disconnected" spaces, and subsequently with "empty or deserted" spaces, the sensorimotor *actors* of the movement-image cinema became instead the *seers* of a new cinema of pure visual and auditory images. In these images, moreover, characters are said to confront the pure potentiality of space, a potentiality strictly correlated with cinematic space and the "mutation" involved in the cinematic ASW.

Réda Bensmaïa has shown how the operative principle of the Deleuzean any-space-whatever can be found in this *mutation* to which Deleuze's thought submits empirical concepts of space like Marc Augé's "non-place" or Michel de Certeau's "place of practice."[20] For what Deleuze's analysis of the ASW accomplishes is the extraction, from such empirical notions of place, of a "pure potentiality."[21] Applied to empirical conceptualizations of place, this same virtualization of affection underwrites a fundamental philosophical mutation of space itself. Whereas the analyses of an Augé or a de Certeau "are negotiated in the geometric terms of 'elementary forms' which homogenize [place] in the

process of de-singularizing it," Deleuze submits the any-space-whatever to an analysis that "pushes it towards what is most singular. . . ."[22] By constructing ASWs through shadow play, oscillation of light and dark, and colorism,[23] cinema might be said to liberate the untapped potential lurking in the empirical spaces of the postwar situation, and to do so precisely by transforming these into a "system of emotions" that opens their virtual affective force to thought. Bensmaïa distills the "formula" for this mutation: "the space called 'whatever' is transformed into a 'philosophical persona' when it becomes the instrument of a 'system of emotions.'"[24]

The radicality of this philosophical mutation of space notwithstanding, we must not forget that the cinematic ASW stems from an analogy with real, experiential spaces. There is, in short, a preexisting *analogical* connection linking the cinematic ASW with the existential ASWs of postwar Europe, as Deleuze's preface to the English translation of *Cinema 2* makes altogether explicit:

> Why is the Second War taken as a break? The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were "any spaces whatever," deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, a kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers. . . . Situations could be extremes, or, on the contrary, those of everyday banality, or both at once: what tends to collapse, or at least to lose its position, is the sensory-motor schema which constituted the action-image of the old cinema. And thanks to this loosening of the sensory-motor linkage, it is time, "a little time in the pure state," which rises up to the surface of the screen.[25]

In the "space" of this remarkable passage, we witness the almost seamless transmutation of "reality" by the cinema: in claiming the historical spaces of the postwar period as the catalyst for a "new race of *characters,*" Deleuze has already crossed from the empirical-historical register to the domain of cinema.[26] It is as if the war brought about a *becoming-cinema* of experience, a fundamental transformation of human beings as existential actors into cinematic seers. That said, the very existence of an "original" correlation between the cinematic ASW

and empirical space means that there is a preexistent analogy between the human experience of space and the cinematic ASW.

It is precisely such a preexistent analogical basis that is missing in the case of the digital ASW. Unlike the cinematic ASW, this latter emerges from the bodily processing of a spatial regime that is, as it were, radically *uninhabitable*—that simply cannot be entered and mapped through human movement. This ontological difference bears directly on how affectivity can be tied to the ASW—on its capacity to become the *medium* for the experience of the ASW. For, whereas in the cinematic ASW, affection is the formal correlate of the cinematic (perceptual) act of framing, in the digital ASW, affection comprises a bodily *supplement,* a response to a digital stimulus that remains fundamentally heterogeneous to human perceptual (visual) capacities. In sum, affection becomes affectivity. To grasp this difference, consider the variant function of "tactile space" in the cinema and in digital media. When he describes Bresson's ASW as "a tactile space," Deleuze invests the tactile as an alternate visual regime: one that organizes vision in terms of what art historian Adolf Hildebrand famously called the *Nahbild* (literally, the "near-image").[27] Here, tactile space does not so much break with the dominant ratios of human perception as readjust them, and the capacity to experience the ASW is guaranteed, as it were, by the underlying perceptual analogy between the cinematic "tactile space" and the operation of a human mode of tactile or haptic vision. By contrast, the tactile or haptic space catalyzed by digital installations like *skulls* presents a more fundamental shift or realignment of human experience *from* the visual register of perception (be it in an "optical" or "haptic" mode)[28] *to* a properly bodily register of affectivity in which vision, losing its long-standing predominance, becomes a mere trigger for a nonvisual haptic apprehension.

To grasp this difference concretely, let us briefly consider the work of another contemporary digital artist, Craig Kalpakjian. Like Lazzarini, Kalpakjian migrated to digital art from sculpture, discovering in the former the possibility to move from the object to space itself. Explaining this transition in his own practice, Kalpakjian underscores the direct correlation between digital design and space: "It seemed like the sculptural objects became the things that everyone wanted to focus on, and I was really more interested in the space around them. I thought that as a medium these programmes could explore space more directly."[29] To bring this intuition to material fruition, Kalpakjian deploys the computer as a vehicle to create digital images of spaces that have no real-world

referents. Video presented the artist with an initial means to eliminate the ob-
ject from his practice; his first nonsculptural work, *Hall* (1999) is a continuous
video loop of movement through a hall without any exits, which generates in
the spectator a vertiginous feeling of being trapped in a deadly, because thor-
oughly generic, space (figure 6.2). Kalpakjian's subsequent shift from video to
still images produced entirely on the computer allowed him to eliminate move-
ment as well. His digitally composed images of corporate air ducts (in works
like *Duct* [1999] *HVAC III* [2000] and *HVAC* IV [2000]) confront us with
neutral, generic spaces that have been thoroughly depotentialized, that is,
stripped of all signs of force (figure 6.3). Viewing these oddly pristine images,
we are made acutely aware of the capacity of movement—even the allegedly
"inhuman" movement of the video camera—to introduce an analogical con-
nection between our perception and space.

Kalpakjian's aesthetic strategy can be understood as a drive to short-
circuit precisely this analogical connection without embracing the technicist
logic of computer graphics that forms the motor of Kittler's radical posthu-
manism. To do so, he creates images that are literally supersaturated with in-

formation, but that nonetheless address the constraints of human perception.[30] In a work like *Duct,* for example, Kalpakjian builds in information from incompossible perspectives in order to highlight the extraction of human presence from the artificial corporate spaces he renders (figure 6.4). The technical fact that these images are entirely computer-rendered is thus made experientially salient via the embodied, aesthetic process of assimilating these incompossible perspectives. What results is something like "a claustrophobic hall of mirrors," as the brochure to the Whitney "Bitstreams" exhibit puts it, except that this space does not resolve in optical-geometric terms, but rather, via the various lighting effects supersaturated into the image, superposes what would in Euclidean space constitute incompossible visual "grabs." The resulting space is certainly tactile, but in a sense altogether different from that which Deleuze associates with Bresson (and with the larger art historical tradition it instances): here space becomes tactile precisely to the extent that it ceases being visual or mappable through vision (whether as distance or near viewing, i.e., in optical or haptical modes). It is tactile because it catalyzes a nonvisual mode of experience that *takes place* in the body of the spectator, and indeed, as the production of place within the body.

Because of its implicit reference to Augé's notion of the "non-place,"
Kalpakjian's work helps us appreciate another crucial difference demarcating
the digital ASW from its cinematic cousin: far from being the virtual correlate
of an empirical space, the digital ASW emerges as a response to the rapid and
in some sense "inhuman" acceleration of life in the age of global, digital
telecommunications. In this respect, Augé's theorization of the non-place
forms the very antithesis of the Deleuzean ASW: for Augé, the problem is "not
the horrors of the twentieth century (whose only new feature—their unprece-
dented scale—is a by-product of technology), nor its political and intellectual
mutations, of which history offers many other examples," but rather the tem-
poral and spatial situation we confront in the face of contemporary technol-
ogy: "the overabundance of events."[31] The problem, in short, is the radical
disjunction between the technical capacity for producing events (instantiated

or expedited by the digital computer's ahuman acceleration of formal opera-
tions) and the human capacity to experience those events.[32] As the site for the
production of the event, the non-place thus demarcates a space that has *always
already been de-actualized*—a space without any "original" analogical correla-
tion with human activity.

As exemplified in the process catalyzed by Kalpakjian's digitally created
spatial images, the digital ASW can be understood as a radical transmutation
of the non-place: works like *Duct* offer images of non-places that are de-
signed to trigger a bodily response and thus to reinvest the body as a privileged
site for experience. Such *images* of non-places are fundamentally antithetical to
the empirical non-places analyzed by Augé and by contemporary architects like
Rem Koolhaas.[33] For, as both Augé's analysis and Koolhaas's application of it
to contemporary "global" architecture attest, non-places are, despite their im-
personal neutrality, nonetheless intended as sites for "generic" *human* activity;
although they may bring about a shift to "disembodied" modes of social inter-
action (i.e., disembodied in the sense of "stipped of particularity"), they still
function as spaces for empirical activity and are to this extent marked by an
"original" analogy with the human. It is as if space and activity were governed
by a strict principle of reciprocity: just as identity "happens" only when the user
of a non-place proves his innocence,[34] non-places materialize only at these
same moments when they function as vehicles for social control over human
bodies. Kalpakjian's images, on the other hand, function by foreclosing all
possibility of human entry, and precisely for this reason, they catalyze the pro-
duction of a space within the body that is without direct (perceptual) correla-
tion with the non-places they present. Kalpakjian's digital images thus part
company with Augé's non-places to the extent that they foreground the au-
tonomy of the digital image—its status as what the artist calls "completely ab-
stract points."[35]

Up to a point, we can compare Kalpakjian's transformation of the non-
place with Deleuze's transformation of the "disembodied" and "empty" spaces
of postwar Europe: just as the cinematic ASW extracts the potential from em-
pirical space, the digital ASWs triggered by Kalpakjian's images tap into the po-
tential latent within contemporary non-places. In light of such a consequence,
what Kalpakjian's work offers to experience is not the images of empirical non-
places, but the *infraempirical* forces underlying their production. Insofar as these
forces emerge from the digital mediation of the event—and specifically, from

the "overabundance" of events that results from this mediation—Kalpakjian's images catalyze a corporeal apprehension of the mutation in the correlation of space and time (i.e., in the very basis of empirical experience) effectuated by the digital. In this respect, they comprise a concrete instance of what Edmond Couchot calls "time-objects," objects of which time—here understood as a cipher for the triple overabundance constitutive of supermodernity—comprises an essential formal component. Just as digital design processing presents us with virtual objects that cannot be fabricated, the incorporation of time (the triple overabundance) into the image presents us with intervals between forms or spaces that cannot be actualized, or more precisely, that can be actualized only as the process of transformation itself. Insofar as they can only be felt (or experienced through the affects they catalyze), such "virtual images" are not images of empirical spaces but rather triggers for the process of bodily spacing from which concepts of empirical space (including the non-place) emerge. It is precisely to stress its status as a transformation that takes place "*between* forms" (or empirical places) that Couchot dubs this autonomous domain of process "diamorphosis."[36]

This engagement with the non-place as a "time-object" strains the homology with the Deleuzean mutation. Given the specific problematic presented by the digital image—the difficulty of forging any analogical connection to it whatsoever—the mutation of the non-place into the digital ASW will have to follow a wholly different trajectory from the one pursued by Deleuze. What is called for is not a potentialization of digital space itself so much as a potentialization of our capacity to generate spatial analogy within our own bodies. Instead of a *deactualization* that transforms the ASW into a "new figure of Firstness" or "system of emotions," what is needed is a supplementary *actualization* that articulates the always already *deactualized* spaces of the digital with the constitutive virtuality of our bodily activity. In short: we must combine the potential of the Deleuzean ASW with the productivity or creativity of the body such that the body itself becomes the "place" where space is generated.

How Can We Restore Belief in the World?

Of all the questions one could pose to the modern cinema, this one (how can we restore belief in the world?) certainly looms large for contemporary readers of Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2.* Faced as we are with the standardization

of digital processing and the specter of "digital convergence," we have every reason to doubt the philosophical burden Deleuze accords the modern cinema of purely visual and sound situations. How can such purified images—images that are at heart (at least within today's media ecology) only contingent configurations of information (digital data flow)—possibly restore our link with the world? From where does belief acquire its efficiency, if not from the sensorimotor body left behind following the "crisis of the action-image"? And can thought—even when it is provoked by the intolerable, the impossible, the unthought—still succeed today in conferring reality on the purely imaginary?

If raising the question of belief today requires us to rethink what Deleuze (following Pasolini) calls the *theorematic* basis of cinema's construction of space (space as the correlate of a formal logic internal to the image), it does so first and foremost because digital modeling of space would seem to overturn the subordination of technics to aesthetics that lies at the heart of Deleuze's theory. In the digital space-image, it is the technical basis of the image itself that alters or catalyzes the alteration in our relation with space: thus, in *skulls,* what causes the installation space to become visually impenetrable is precisely the digital transformational process to which Lazzarini submits the original, nondeformed skull. The projected installation space does not simply happen to be uninhabited at a certain moment; it is *uninhabitable in principle.* Moreover, affect cannot be extracted from this projected space for the precise reason that it was never there in the first place; this space is a radically nonhuman one, one without any analogical correlation to human movement and perception, and one into which affection can be introduced only from the outside, as a supplement that originates in the embodied response of the viewer-spectator. Accordingly, rather than a virtuality emanating from the image itself (the "problematic" or "theorematic" catalysis of thought),[37] what the digital modeling of space both introduces and solicits—as an activity necessary for its own constitution—is the *virtuality of the body itself.*

This conclusion has profound implications for how we configure the problem of restoring belief in a world where the sensorimotor logic internal to the image has been radically suspended. Among other things, it returns us to the correlation of body and affection that was so central to Bergson's understanding of the body as a "center of indetermination." Specifically, it allows us to appreciate that affectivity, beyond its function as a bodily element contaminating