

No hay banda

My interest in cinema architecture is based on the view that the mechanism of cinema with its projection, auditorium and audience is an almost perfect center—the *black hole* of architecture, cinema and the visual arts. The décor of the movie theatre has hardly anything to do with architecture and film and from the point of view of the cinema should almost not exist; however, it is that *space in-between*, where metaphorically speaking, an object is created: between the reality of the street and the imaginary of the projection. The cinema auditorium is an almost *overlooked place of transition*.

Tobias Putrih, 2006

As the blind man Homer walks the streets of Berlin in Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*, he chuckles at the deserted railway station on Alexanderplatz when he sees that in the place where trains usually stop, the railway station itself has stopped. What happens when something which is by definition a place of arrivals and departures *itself stops in time*? This is not a question asked only by Wenders' Homer, but also lucidly formulated by Tobias Putrih by examining the cinematic apparatus. Both deserted railway stations and extinct cinema theatres cut into the supposed time continuum with a spatial volume, which makes us realize that we actually live in relative blocks of *space-time*, or, to put it more precisely: *in the voids between them*, in the overlooked places of transition. When they show us in these materialized transitions, or revealed *gaps*, the way in which our perception of the world works, they remind us kindly that this same perception is bound in principle to the apparatuses of the *train* and the *cinema*.

In one year (1838-1839), the Paris Academy of Sciences published two similar reports: on the train and the daguerreotype (the forerunner of photography). Both the steam locomotive and the photographic camera introduced new images. In 1837, Victor Hugo described his experience of riding on a train for the first time in the following way:

This is magnificent movement, which has to be experienced to realize it. The velocity is incredible. The flowers one sees along the way are no longer flowers, but red and white stains; there are no spots, only lines; the corn fields are large yellow planes, clover fields long green stripes, while towns, bell towers and trees dance, blending strangely on the horizon. Here and there a shadow or an outline emerges and disappears again: a railway warden. In the carriage we say, "One-two-three, here we are!"

The writer quickly noticed how different the world looked once the eye moved. His naturalism will give way to impressionist painters, the clarity of line will "smear" into color impressions, firm bodies will give way to fleeting ghosts, and the picture will begin to form a *one-two-three* series. To animate an image, it has to be *serialized*. A film can only be born when life can be divided into individual frames (with plenty of help from its older sister, photography) and when, thanks to the mechanism of a machine, these frames are combined into a uniform whole which will deceive the eye. The cinema, however ... the cinema truly becomes the cinema when this new totality of moving images finds its way to an audience staring with eyes wide open.

This is precisely what happened on 28 December 1895 in the Salon Indien in the basement of the Grand Café at Boulevard des Capucines, near the old Opera: with *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, a train entered the audience. The audience was not shocked by the view *through the window of the train*; no, what literally lifted them out of their seats was the impression that the train was moving towards them. The viewers in the hall found themselves in a new place, and they were derailed.

Subsequently, it is interesting to examine how the third fundamental dimension of cinema (in addition to going out and seeing through) emerged via the parallel of the train: *being with others*. The Lumière brothers and their cinematograph claimed victory over a similar device invented at about the same time by Thomas Edison (who also invented the light bulb and the phonograph) by creating a *group* cinematic experience. Edison's *Kinetoscope* was at first a peep-hole device for a single pair of eyes: after inserting a coin in a slot, the filmstrip was shown to one viewer only, much like a view through the binoculars mounted on the top of a skyscraper (a view whose duration is limited by the value of an inserted coin) or a juke box that plays the music of your choice. It is true that on 14 April 1894 the first public Kinetoscope parlor was opened on Broadway, but viewers there could only choose whether to listen to voice reproductions on a phonograph or watch moving images through the peep-holes in the Kinetoscope: when they watched images, they were still doing so alone. Edison's statement that he would not kill the goose that lays the golden egg by making the Kinetoscope boxes available to many viewers at the same time is famous; however, it became clear rather quickly that *the multiplication of simultaneous gazes* on the same moving images was the key to film as a form of mass art and that the cinematograph would become its key instrument. Already by the end of the nineteenth century screens were opened up to the first projectors in cafes and under marquees. But film was still considered a pulp, vaudeville affair, and far from high-brow, which is why many mothers refused to allow their daughters to

attend the screenings. But then a new train arrived...

In 1904, Kansas City's fire chief George C. Hale bought a patent from William J. Keefe in order to promote himself at the St. Louis World's Fair in Missouri. Keefe's original idea was to gather people in a railcar and take them for a circular ride through a tunnel, while landscape images previously shot from a moving train would be projected onto the windows. Hale simplified the project: why move the train if the images are moving? He fixed the train (every so often the carriage was rocked slightly and some steam was released, so it would seem as if the train was departing, moving or slowing down) and projected the images on the front wall rather than on the side windows. Thus the film viewers symbolically progressed from being ordinary passengers to train drivers; the active role of film viewing hasn't been shaken off since then. *Our gaze is actually the fundamental "machine" which guides and moves the film machinery: what happens on the screen happens for our gaze.*

In order to *identify* with the events and heroes on the screen, we must first fundamentally identify with the film apparatus. We concede to *primary identification* by sitting in the darkness of the theatre, but only *secondary identification* can take us from one hero to another and with them from one event to the next.

Hale's idea was quickly taken up by image traders, and more than five hundred "Hale's Tours" apparatuses emerged in the amusement parks and commercial districts of U.S. cities. This was the first big chain of cinemas, and was not only a precursor to the nickelodeons but also to classic cinema *theatres*, which embellished themselves by hiring liveried doormen and ushers—a tradition that went hand in hand with the golden age of classic Hollywood cinema in the 1930s.

The *train* has thus played a triple role in its encounter with the film: it has released the human gaze, so that it dared to enter the world of moving images (*going out*); by arriving at La Ciotat station it shocked human beings the first time they were in front of the screen (*seeing through*); and, finally, it united humans on a group journey with others by standardizing the conditions of watching moving pictures in the "cinema carriage" (*being with others*). Since then we have been going to the cinema to go *out*, to be *with others* and to see *through*. However, at the moment we are with others, when we are in a multitude, questions of (optical) *pleasure* and (panoptical) *control* arise.

And who can tell us more about this than Franz Kafka? In his journal he describes an episode that tells us a lot about the intertwining of apparatuses of optical pleasure and domination as it emerged in the darkness of the cinema theatre. This story is lucidly described by Hanns Zischler (the same Zischler who appears in many

films by Wenders; perhaps his most memorable role was that of a psycholinguist for children in *Kings of the Road*) in his book *Kafka Goes to the Movies*.¹ During a visit to Northern Bohemia in the winter of 1911, the insurance agent Kafka came across the *Kaiser Panorama* in Friedland. The basic apparatus of the panorama was as follows: seats were arranged around a large cylinder, with two peep-holes in front of each. The eyes were kept in place by stereoscopic goggles, while the machine displayed a pair of "stereo" images, which, when viewed together, created an illusion of depth. Images of foreign countries emerged one after the other. And how did our insurance agent feel there?

1. Hans Zischler, *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, Susan H. Gillespie, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Don't feel properly comfortable in it, because I had not expected such a handsome installation as I found there, had entered in snow-laden boots, and now, sitting in front of the eyepiece, barely touched the carpet with the tips of my toes. I had forgotten how the panoramas are arranged, and for a moment I was afraid I would have to go from chair to chair. An old man at a lamp-lit table, who is reading a copy of the *Illustrated World*, directs everything. (...) The scenes more alive than in the cinematograph, because they allow the eye the stillness of reality. The cinematograph lends the observed objects the agitation of their movement, the stillness of the gaze seems more important. (...) At the end wanted to tell the old man how much it had pleased me, didn't dare.²

Every time the trigger of the photographic camera is pressed, every time a take is called, every time a projectionist starts the projector, living bodies begin to languish into an image—a unique process of irreversible metempsychosis which makes us beholden to the master's stare. No matter how we revel in images and search for a resting place for our gaze, we are caught in the projection, which is inevitably operated by someone other than ourselves: again and again we are before the Law—and thus the great game of dominating the gaze is played. Kafka knows that we are closest to ourselves when we have nowhere to rest our gaze—when it bounces back, reflected, and painfully reveals the reality we perceive to be no more than the blinding light that each of us confronts as a screen. Tell this to the old man with the *Illustrated World* if you dare!

2. Ibid.

We also come across a situation in which "the scenes are more alive than in the cinematograph" in the most sublime moment of David Lynch's film *Mulholland Drive* (2001)—the scene in the mysterious *Silencio* club. If the whole film can be read as an homage to the Hollywood "dream factory" (the film was advertised with the slogan "Nightmare in the City of Dreams"), the sequence in the

Silencio club (actually filmed in Los Angeles, in the Tower Theatre at 802 South Broadway) is its *Mousetrap*, an essential film within a film about film. If many levels of the film process have been revealed by this point (the relationships between producers, casting problems, the whims of the director, and the mysterious nature of film acting are all explored), the director now addresses the original sin of the film apparatus—the moment the film usurps the viewer in the theatre. The happening on the stage is a unique pre-recorded audio-visual phenomenon (when we hear the host explaining: “No hay banda. There’s no orchestra. It’s all recorded. It’s all on tape,” it seems as if Orson Welles were disclosing the secrets of his *F for Fake*), but what happens to the heroines in the hall is a vivid example of how the essence of film, when it affects us, can lift us from our seats, shake us and make us cry. It is all here: from the magical disappearance of the host in a cloud of smoke created with special effects (the thunder and lightning which terrify our heroines)—an homage to film’s roots in the marketplace of spectacle—to the most radical disclosure of the essence of film: *the fundamental disaccord of bodies and voices, images and sounds*. Without this fundamental cut into human identity, no film cut would be that strong, no identification that fatal. When, on the stage of the *Silencio* night club, the voice of the singer is heard after her body collapses in the middle of the stage, we have the impression that we have traced the essence of the sublime.

Slavoj Žižek describes this moment in his book *Organs without Bodies. On Deleuze and Consequences*, but he is not satisfied with the simple explanation that we hear only the playback of a recording of the singer’s voice (and are therefore deceived, fall for a joke, are immersed in fiction). This explanation, he says, does not cover all the effects which the shattering of the scene has on the viewer. It is not about disclosing fiction, but rather that the emergence of fiction *has the ability to smash reality into pieces*—and so the floating voice in the darkened *Silencio* (singing the Roy Orbison song “Crying” in Spanish) becomes autonomized as “a pure spectral apparition of a bodiless “undead” voice.”³

Žižek also maintains that no matter how persuasive the subsequent explanation is, it does not eliminate the dilemma we felt when, for a brief moment, *a piece of reality was (mis)perceived as a nightmarish apparition*. In reality, this apparition was “more real than reality”—as the Real shone (or perhaps darkened itself) precisely through it: “*Much more difficult than to denounce/unmask (what appears as) reality as fiction is to recognize in “real” reality the part of fiction.*”⁴

Let us not forget: at the end of this scene the heroines find the key which opens “the dark box”—opening it (or their entry into

3. Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies. On Deleuze and Consequences*. Routledge, 2004, p. 169.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

it, if you will) has fatal consequences for both of them: one remains in dreams and the other wakes up. The beauty of Lynch's film is that, contrary to the majority of such scenes of "awakening," it does not take us with the one who has woken up, but leaves us for a moment *in her dreams, lost in passage*.

It seems that the dark box is similar to another image in David Lynch's work, the black hole at the end of the hall in *Lost Highway*: from amidst the prosaic reality of domestic architecture a black hole stares out at the viewer. It not only draws the viewer's gaze, but also pulls toward it the bodies of the heroes and film images—as if through this black passage we might directly enter a mysterious videotape, whose apparition at the doors shakes reality itself. Lynch shows us that in the darkness of the cinema, passages from one dimension to the other can materialize and that in them "that which is more real than reality" can be touched. In his section on "The Cut of the Gaze," Žižek stresses that Gilles Deleuze offers a useful concept for such an element of passage: "*the dark precursor*" (which is also the *harbinger of dusk*), an element which *brings into communication disparate series of intensities*.

When Tobias Putrih searches for "the black hole of architecture, film and visual arts," he is looking to communicate these disparate series of intensities. But the more you delve into intensities, the more identities are shaken. The unique element which, inasmuch as it belongs to only one level, serves as a bridge, mediator or point of passage between several levels, could also be called the *dark passage* in homage to one of the most beautiful examples of film noir, *Dark Passage*, directed by Delmer Daves. To stress again: the *dark passage* does not act as a stand-in for reality within fiction, on the contrary: it acts as a *stand-in for the illusory, fictional universe in reality itself*—as cinema!

If we are to understand *the cinema* as the kind of *dark passage* that places fiction in reality, cuts into it and imprints a block of space-time (thereby making all reality relative!), we must say something about the *virtual* as thematized by Gilles Deleuze. All interpreters of Deleuze's *virtual* agree that it is not to be understood as something in opposition to the real (in the sense of "real" reality and "virtual" reality). Rather, it should be read in conjunction with the *actual* as "*la pièce maîtresse de l'ontologie deleuzienne*,"⁵ since it frees his philosophy of becoming from the opposition between essence and existence, the possible and the real. According to Deleuze, the best formula for virtual states was invented by Proust: "*réels sans être actuels, idéaux sans être abstraits*"—real without being actual, ideal without being abstract. This interchange of the virtual and the actual translates the dynamics of becoming as differentiation and creation. The virtual introduces a non-actual ideality,

5. Robert Sasso, ed. "Actuel/virtuel v: Le vocabulaire de Gilles Deleuze," in Arnaud Villani, *Les cahiers de Noesis* no. 3. Spring 2006. p. 25.

which attains the same ontological level as the actual—because of which it can assert a claim on the reality of *time*. When we make the ontological axis intersect with the temporal axis, we are first seduced into pushing the virtual into the past or the future, but Deleuze's understanding of duration as intense multiplicity insists that we can only experience the virtual in the process of a perpetual *splitting of time*, the differentiation of duration as powerful multiplicity, which makes way for this formula: "*the subjective, or duration, is the virtual.*"⁶

The virtual is used so that *it is not necessary to resort to the possible*, as the category of the possible puts us into a triple ontological-modal-temporal negativity, and Deleuze wants to think becoming without reducing it to the linear realization of the possible. The virtual is thus different from the possible: a) because it is real without being actual, and b) because it is released from the boundaries of similarities (without these boundaries everything possible would be realized). To put it differently: the virtual exists and breaks into pieces, creates real effects inasmuch as it deforms. When Putrih precisely measures the dimensions of the cinema screen to then break it into pieces and replace it in *space*, he does the same thing. He creates real effects inasmuch as he deforms the virtual by moving the perception of the cinematographic apparatus from individual experience to the level of collective experience, or, more precisely, to that elusive intermediate level of singularity which Deleuze names *dividual*: the actual remains at the level of the individual, while the real terrain of the virtual is the *plane of immanence*, with seething *singularities*.

The virtual is no longer the chaotic virtual but rather virtuality that has become consistent, that has become an entity formed on a plane of immanence that sections the chaos. This is what we call the Event, or the part that eludes its own actualization in everything that happens. The event is not the state of affairs. It is actualized in a state of affairs, in a body, but it has a shadowy and secret part that is continually subtracted from or added to its actualization: in contrast with the state of affairs, it neither begins nor ends but has gained or kept the infinite movement to which it gives consistency. It is the virtual that is distinct from the actual, but a virtual that is no longer chaotic, that has become consistent or real on the plane of immanence that wrests it from the chaos—it is a virtual that is real without being actual, ideal without being abstract. The event might seem to be transcendent because it surveys the state of affairs, but it is pure immanence that gives it the capacity to survey itself by itself and on the plane.⁷

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson, trans. New York: Zone Books, 1988, pp. 42-43. See also "Le vocabulaire..." pp. 22-25.

7. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell trans. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 156.

Even in Žižek's succinct presentation of the process of recognition of the fictional core of reality, we find the regimes of actuality and the virtual. These latter come meaningfully close to the Lacanian categories of reality and the Real.

- a) First the excess is still contained in reality, although already disturbing it by sticking out of it (for example the videotape in front of the door in *Lost Highway*);
- b) then it arrives at its full *autonomization*, which causes a complete disintegration of reality (a prime example being the "escape" of the voice from the body on the stage of the *Silencio* club as described above).

When we are faced with these moments of autonomization, *thought* is born. This is no longer an emotion or sensation, but pure, unintentional forced cerebral operation: *a thought, which thinks itself*. In other words: *dark passages* are *arrivals* of the (mo)mental into the monumental, moments powerfully cerebral inside the material: they are *images of thought*.

The cinema draws its fundamental fascination from the fact that somewhere in between the light of the projection beam and the screen, we trace the thought, we have the feeling that it is possible to *think the thought*, and that we hold, suddenly, the key to the darkest secret, to the darkest chamber, to a *camera obscura*. When Putrih literally *takes apart the cinema apparatus*, he deconstructs in front of us the fascinating dimension of a process which begins by throwing money into the *light* (which is how John Boorman described shooting a film) and ends with *enlightenment*.

When does this happen to the heroines of Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, and when does it happen to us, the viewers? When we *go out* of our chamber, when we find ourselves in the movie theatre *with others* and when the events on the set take us *through* the dimension of the screen, the auditorium and the present moment.

In its essence, cinema is connected with a triple transposition, a displacement from everyday life; it is a *triple journey*. When you go to the movies, you go *out* to be *together* and to be taken away.

Finally, I would like to make a comparison: I see Tobias Putrih as an ideal anachronistic counterpart to David Lynch. In an interview, Lynch explained what took him from painting to the creation of his first film images, saying that he lacked two things: space and sound. He could not enter his own canvas, and he did not hear the sound of wind from it. He projected his first moving images, a one-minute film entitled *Six Figures*, onto an unusual sculpture, which was more like a body with many heads and hands than a screen. Putrih *returns the cinema to the visual arts*: by thematizing movie theatres from an era

when films were silent, he returns the soundtrack to the minds of the audience; and by cutting the screen, the privileged space of the film's illusion, in a modernistic gesture reminiscent of Lucio Fontana, he hollows out a void in the space of reality, as if to assert that the best cinema is always in the head.