

Imagination and Mediation

Is There a Unity Beyond Synthesis?

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ABSTRACT: The article addresses a problem of mediation through the lens of imagination. An idea of “intermedial imagination” — a critical faculty that bears witness to the world’s out-of-jointness” — proposed by Pietro Montani is analysed and brought in the context of Bernard Stiegler’, Gilles Deleuze’s and Jacques Derrida’s thinking. In this way, imagination is associated with various functions of montage, rather than synthesis, as well as revealed as the power of overcoming clichéd forms and fetishes through its shape-shifting and unprecedented transformations. The article also offers an analyses of exhibitions by Raimundas Malašauskas (Photo Finish in Vilnius, and the Lithuania/Cyprus “oO/Oo” Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale) and the avant-garde performances of Romeo Castellucci.

KEYWORDS: Imagination, Mediation, Intermedial Imagination, Montage, Incommensurability.

1. Introduction

The mediating power of imagination was very well-known before the concept of media became a hot topic of philosophy. References might be made not only to Plato but also to Aristotle, or to Stoic φαντασία καταληπτική or to Hume and especially to Kant, for whom imagination was a mediating agent as long as it provided the synthesis of sensory manifold. According to Kant, the schematism of perception was supposed to be the function of imagination. *Einbildungskraft* actualizes the function of transcendental schematism, i.e., accumulates the multitude of varying experiences into sketches of meaning creating the initial models for perception. It is namely because one imagines, one manages to orientate through mediation; or — to be more precise — mediation and imagination coincide.

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One can remember that Bernard Stiegler, in his *Technics and Time*, describes the “human” through the technical, marking a fatal inversion of our evolution. Our origin is neither biological, nor transcendental, but fundamentally prosthetical. It is not a human being that creates tools, but the archi-technical exteriority that constitutes humanity — evolution is inscribed in humanity as a self-revelation of being technical. And just as the technological precedes the organic, imagination also runs prior to perception. To conceive a tool as a tool means to open oneself up towards imaginary possibilities. In the famous scene of Kubrick’s *Space Odyssey 2001*, in which an ape weaponizes a bone to kill a fellow ape, the bone turns into a weapon not just physically, but virtually as well as through an actual gesture — i.e. the way it is being used and quickly becomes a meme used by others. That is why “consciousness has never been self-consciousness *other than in being projected outside itself*”. (Stiegler 2011: 77)

As Stiegler points out, the explosion of technically reproducible images and virtual realities is not a matter of some monstrous evolution. Mass media images, being recurrent, ubiquitous and repetitive, synchronize different consciousnesses into a common flux of images as well as expose what always has been present at the core of the human — its technogenetical nature. However, in this era of information *industries*, and especially of the analogic and numeric technologies, this exteriorized and materialized consciousness has become a function of the manipulations of the flux of consciousness and of mass projections (Stiegler 2011: 76–78).

In this epoch of technology, imaginary eventually merges into “real”, as popular culture of visual and social media becomes the screen organizing our everyday life, displaying the desired patterns for auto-craving consciousness. By virtualizing a standard of the imaginary, much more than a reproduction of reality is created — a measure for our world is delineated in which artificially generated ideals induce the mechanisms of control and reshape the order of desires.

According to Stiegler, human consciousness, therefore, is profoundly cinematic — interiority is produced by virtual exteriority of the technologies that install imaginary patterns into our development: “Lived reality is always a construct of imagination and thus perceived only on condition of being fictional, irreducibly haunted by phantasms” and this why we are “forced to conclude that perception is subordinated to — is in a transductive relationship with — the imagination; that is, there would be no perception outside imagination, and vice versa, perception then being the imagination’s projection screen. The relationship between the two would be constituted of previously nonexistent terms, and this in turn would mean that life is always cinema and that is why “when one loves life one goes to cinema”, as though we go to the cinema in order to find life again — to be somehow resuscitated by it”. (Stiegler 2011: 16)

It is important to note that the concept of imagination should undergo crucial corrections in the context of passive technological receptivity. By “staying tuned” we are induced into a condition of a flitting attention span and lose the capacity to maintain extended memories, unless we keep on connected to the information and socialization machines. Technologies prosthese our capacity to remember and create social media as “temporal objects” that can have both distancing and unifying power. They can steal our time, but they can intensify the synchronization of our minds and bodies. It might be considered as a well-known meaning of *pharmakon* — cure and poison at the same time.

The paradox is that the process of developing this intense identification, succumbing to a bombardment of a multiplicity of images, coincides with the distancing of any unity. Human mind becomes porous to the virtual, losing its connection to the world, that presumably remains unaware of any technological impact. However, the natural, organic, biological, subconscious and alien is not supposed to be rediscovered outside of the technological, but namely through it, by intensifying the disrupting power of machineries, by provoking the virtual fields to reshape their preconceived order, or by intermediating the media itself. The interruption of flux always presents itself as a call for the undetermined, unexpected and unforeseen.

2. What is Intermedial Imagination?

Is synthesis still the right word to describe the impulse of free imagination in the epoch of technologically reproduced mediality? Technologies that offer temporal objects are the illusions of this kind of unity, they are the prostheses of a controlled and uniform world. The technologically produced sensation of unity must both compensate for the fragmented and chaotic reality, and retain the logic of cognitive dissonance.

By way of answering this question I would like to invoke the notion of ‘intermedial imagination’ (*immaginazione intermediale*) offered by Pietro Montani. For him, intermedial imagination experiences not only a creative calling of consciousness; it is also key in understanding the specificity of a process of mediation. It can be understood as a ‘technique of technique’ — i.e., the technique of consciousness, which addresses our technological fate by trying to shift the balance of *pharmakon* towards the side of a cure.

This relationship between *datum* and *fictum* which is best revealed by the theme of the transcendental schematic, turns into a craving for the lost *datum*. Technologically deputised synthesis can anticipate the imagination only because imagination itself is already medial and technological. If imagination offers a scene of this transfiguration, and if it actually is this dimension

upon which, according to Stiegler, technology is grounded, if it is the source of technogenesis, then it is necessary to turn towards its dual potential. It means finding the technological basis of imagination not by suspending the technological, but rather by utilising it to the limit, until the technique of consciousness senses its emancipatory direction. According to Montani,

[a] thorough investigation of mediated images implies cutting through them, opening the passageways, seizing the areas of intersection, building the structures of intermediation; in a word, using imagination not as a force that unifies the multiplicity of senses, but as something that is utilised, something that is used as a certain technique which distributes, divides and confronts. Such an imagination might be called critical if we take into account the etymology of this term—*krinein* means to decompose and separate. (Montani 2010: XI)

Critical imagination does not imply an intellectual relation — a reflective dissociation or perspective from which we reflect on the content that stretches in front of us. Intermedial imagination is critical inasmuch as it is unable to create a unified and finalised picture of that which it wants to portray, but does not abandon its creative intention nonetheless. On the contrary, it becomes critical precisely because of this failure, as it substitutes synthesis with the relation of difference. In other words, instead of a harmonising reproducibility the givenness of which is accepted, processed, and recreated, instead of the primacy of a unified image or representation, intermediation starts from this very discontent and failure which Kant identified in the analytics of the sublime. Furthermore, this inability to represent retains the orientation towards reality expressed through Montani's notion of trace:

Being both creative and receptive ability, imagination is able to ensure a constant relation with the real world thus enabling the established relations between sensuality and intellect, between what is seen and what is not seen, between that which is sensed and that which acquires 'meaning.' However, if this relation is interrupted [...], it can be restored only by a spectral supplement, which implies a more complex and persistent intermediation. Therefore it is not enough for an imagination to act according to its free creativity, it is necessary that it would take into consideration the reality of trace (even when it remains in an archive as something rejected or removed). (Montani 2010: XII)

In this sense, the trace implies not only the famous Derridean notion which, through its marginality, uncovers the undeconstructible realm, but also Roland Barthes' remainder of the real, the undeniable and even technologically traceable givenness of the world. According to Barthes, the great paradox of photography lies not in an adequate representation but in the witnessing of past events:

The photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph suggests that it is already dead. (Barthes 1999: 96)

A photographed object leaves the trace of its realness not because of its 'objective realness' but because of its temporality: in order for a certain gesture of technological reproduction to occur there must be an event of capturing — an object must be witnessed by someone, it must manifest itself in front of a technological lens. Here we could reconsider an old truism, that instead of capturing objects photography records moments — i.e., temporal concentrates. It means that photography's unique property is the fact that someone has encountered a referent (even if we are talking about objects) *sensually* or *personally* (Barthes 1999: 96). A picture leaves a signal that something/someone has participated in a photographic event of commensurable synchronisation.

It is only because we see time technologically — and this is the great power that comes with the function of imagination—that we can register the latter's worldly character. The form of such intermedial imagination calls for both an event and a dimension that, in a temporal sense, befalls no longer as a synthesis but as a temporal bifurcation. The trace is a temporal debt "because even though imagination is capable of many things, it is able to investigate only the real things — traces in the memory archive — that maintain the quality of *debt*". (Montani 2010: XII)

This past is not a simple recollection of a secondary retention (as phenomenology would put it), or a neutral return of past experience, which I call back into the present. The factor of trace or debt is the kind of past that could not have even existed in our experience—indeed, we are talking about a technological inscription. Any involvement of imagination changes the present such that an actual awakening of experiences strikes us as a bifurcation, discrepancy, or temporal interruption. In a temporal sense, debt — even though Montani does not claim that — is a bifurcation of the present.

Deleuze stresses a similar point when he discusses a specific type of cinematographic imagery. In his view, image-crystal (i.e., the specific type of cinematographic imagery which displays several temporal phases simultaneously (for example, mirror reflections)) reveals the realms of contradictory existence, not those of fiction:

What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ

from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. (Deleuze 1989: 81)

Here we have an impossible case whereby the past coincides with the present instead of preceding it. According to Deleuze, a mirror has then quality of a crystal because it allows us to see the past and the present at the same time. There is no difference between that which exists this very moment and that which has already passed — an object dissipates into a spectral mode of existence, therefore Deleuze's crystal unifies the real and the imaginary, present and past, actuality and virtuality. Moreover, this is not merely an intramental imagery, but a public spectacle. Such coexistence is "the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double". (Deleuze 1989: 69)

Thus a crystal-image implies an impossible spatial distribution of time — after all, space is always supposed to be in the present. Crystal-images legitimise the contradiction according to which temporal oppositions remain inseparably related despite the competition between them. We might say that a crystal performs a spectral breakdown, which refers not only to a ghostly 'spectre' but also to a physical phenomenon. White light is always a mixture of several colours, the different intensities of which suppress each other without full cancellation. Spectral breakdown — such as in the case of a rainbow or a crystal prism — presents us with a spatial involute of coexistence. During this process of extraction the intensity of light gets distributed according to frequency — differences secede from the sameness and space becomes an arena of time. Temporal ramification constitutes the collision of past and present in the same dimension, which occurs not as a harmonious relationship but more like a conflictual ramification whereby the same image is found to exist both in the present and in the past.

Incidentally, Derrida also agrees that spectral occurrence has a temporal meaning. Hamlet's famous speech at the end of the first act includes the phrase "The time is out of joint" (Shakespeare 1998: 49) referring to the current times in the play, which are full of horrific events. Here, Hamlet defines the very condition of spectral occurrence: time is no longer a unifying synthesis, it gets disjointed from its usual trajectory as if it had several parallel flows. Derrida emphasises that time is interrupted not by a delay and postponement but by coercion "here-now" which occurs without presence — time becomes disarticulated, removed, displaced from its natural ground. *Dans l'incoercible différance déferle l'ici-maintenant* (Derrida 1994: 60) — here and now it breaks through an uncontrollable *différance*.

This is the true meaning of *différance*. It signifies an absolute singularity, a moment of event where time is coerced — and it is not a lag, or an ever

prevailing present, but a singularity that is exclusive through its difference (*singulière parce que différante*); it is inevitably related to that which befalls — i.e., the future that arrives in that unmistakable moment (Derrida 1994: 60). *The time is out of joint* means not a cyclic repetition but a convergence of all phases, which is otherwise impossible in a normal flow — it is a vertical time which, for a brief moment, expands itself into a horizontal involute of spectrum.

Without a doubt, positions of Deleuze and Derrida draw our attention to various possibilities of temporal bifurcation. However, that which remains important in both cases is the great theme of *différance* as a theme of temporal challenge where virtuality and reality coexist in the very gesture of temporal bifurcation. It is a diagnosis that identifies specific cases when time continues in the present by transforming the present moment through its relation with the phases of past and future. Perhaps, we could also say that Deleuze's reflection on crystal time is one of the variations of temporal spectrality, one of the possible configurations of interruption which brings us back to the time as *out of joint* — that which breaks away from the traditional mode is explained through a phantasmic dimension of opening. Derrida's 'spectre' establishes a possibility for the genesis of a crystal-image.

Moreover, there are material conditions of space where time reveals its contradiction-friendly power. A hologram is the main exhibit in Raimundas Malašauskas' show "Photo Finish" (2012, Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius); it is formed by shooting an object from different points of view. Here lies the paradox: the camera moves in order to reveal a static image, as if paraphrasing the famous story of Honoré de Balzac's fear of photography mentioned by Sontag in her book on photography. The famous writer refused to be photographed as he feared that each operation of an image capturing device would strip him of one of his bodily layers. However, the hologram is based on a different principle — here phases of existence are preserved by overlapping the existing material layers with the new ones. A time-consuming process of hologram production reveals several temporal moments at the same time in the three-dimensional space.

One of the exhibits show depicts Malašauskas himself. He is holding a mirror, which reflects the movement of a holographic camera. Six or seven seconds are seen simultaneously. Another exhibit depicts the holographic space as static, causing an almost a religious paradox: two persons (the Praspaliauskas twins) are combined into one figure. All of this is supplemented with reconstructed scenes from the Vilnius Youth Theatre's "Photo Finish" (1982), a theatre performance based on Peter Ustinov's play of the same title. An eighty-year-old character of the play meets his sixty-year-old, forty-year-old and twenty-year-old selves. Four different actors show up on the stage simultaneously, as if one person was comprised of his four versions.

The figure of Malašauskas holding a mirror is situated in the hologram among the four actors.

This project questions three key principles of Western philosophy — namely, those of non-contradiction, individuation and causality. In the hologram, ‘before’ and ‘after’ overlap and differences coexist by allowing an object to be both as it was in the past and the way it is in the present. The passage of time contracts the range of variations into one state of matter, thus the past becomes a form of presence. At the same time it becomes clear that static space — something that we often take for granted — is merely a physiognomy of time, which manifests as a difference within the sameness. The exhibits of “Photo Finish” can be grasped as a whole only when the *out of joint* bifurcation is being played out in the imaginary. These holograms are media that visualise interruption as an impossibility. However, it is impossible to articulate this sight without reduction, which enables the paradox to be transferred into a virtual state. The margin of error at the very core of existence demands a technological fiction — i.e., the alienation of the imaginary, which exposes something that is unreachable to empirical sight.

Intermedial imagination can be comprehended as an opening in the situation of *out of joint*. Even though Montani does not mention time, the theme of disjointness in relation to the ordinary mode remains important when we talk about an event which is to be expected in the technologised world — i.e., to find a systemic flaw in the whole unity of a system, a trace which raises the theme of radical Alterity even if it remains inaccessible to representation. Here we are talking about Alterity which cannot be detected when we return to the originary unmediated state, but when the emancipatory elements are strengthened in the very logic of mediation:

On the one hand, contrary to an idea about an immediate reception of an image (an idea that loses its value in the face of a fact that today mediation in the world is that of a high or even the highest level); on the other hand, also contrary to the postmodern thesis that the real world risks being substituted with its simulation, this audiovisual paradigm that I have in mind is based on the assumption that only by drawing on an active confrontation between the various technological formats of image (for example, optic or digital) and its various discursive forms (for example, fictional or documental) it is possible to start a right relation between the irreducible alterity of the real world and the attestations of mediatory and non-mediatory facts. (Montani 2010: XIII)

Even though intermedial imagination retains the orientation towards reality (whatever is meant by this name), it changes its tactics: instead of grasping the relationship between the world and an image, it seeks to grasp the “relation between various devices of the technological imaginary.” In the case of Deleuze’s temporal crystal, it is precisely technology that

demonstrates the regime where the unreachable temporal dimension is discovered — in Jean Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game* the crystal time is created through the illuminated greenhouses; in Orson Welles’ *Lady from Shanghai* the narrative is shattered into pieces in the mirror hall. This way technology locates the spatial registers through which temporality is expressed in a way that remains inaccessible to an immediate perception. Crystal-images are not representations but rather situations where the technological divide between organicity and artificiality simply vanishes. By analogy, in Montani’s case, by exploiting the technologized confrontation (or by understanding technology as confrontation) we find “a link to an irreducible alterity of the real world”. (Montani 2010: XIV)

Therefore, the intermedial imagination is “a technique of clarifying, refiguring (*rifigurazione*), and witnessing the real world” (Montani 2010: XIV). Refiguring or reforming, which both start with the prefix ‘re-’ are not only the morphological signals of a secondary action. They also refer to the tactics of being, which is inevitably technologized and longing for an escape. Primary figuration is something that has always already occurred — we are already mediated even before the creation of the first medium. However, if imagination is the first technology which turns an individual consciousness into a technological one prior to the discovery of a tool, then only the realisation of this technology of imagination together with the ‘hipertechnologisation of technology’ can help us to establish a dialogue with the mediated states.

While describing “intermedial imagination as a certain technology (instead of seeing it as ‘art’ in an aesthetic sense), it is necessary to understand that imagination not only employs one or another technique, but — or, perhaps, most importantly — imagination itself is already a certain technology and its origin lies not merely in subjects manoeuvring ability, but also in the whole lot of artificial techniques responsible for the effects of subjectivation” (Montani 2010: XV). Intermedial imagination does not simply enter the passive interplay between various audiovisual formats, it adopts them by critically rearranging and suspending them and, by the same token, establishing the space for a creative response. By grasping the trace as a debt and by experiencing a constant failure of representation, such imagination must experience the necessity to reactivate itself anew; it must look for its creative response that has not been already integrated into the mode of industrial schematism. In a certain sense, it is a process of disintegration and reintegration with regards to the established schemes of understanding. Intermedial imagination must see the disagreement, incongruity, visual competition and Heraclitean “war” as a “father of all” — a notion of a critical force in today’s epoch of images.

For Montani, as far as the realm of an intermedial imagination is con-

cerned, the spheres of interiority and exteriority intertwine similarly to the way it happens in the realm of language. Just like words belong both to language and to the consciousness that uses them, images also have their dimension of commensurability where technologically mediated visions both acquire external forms, and are able to return to the subject:

If imagination, similarly to languages, feeds on ready-made images, if it, similarly to certain technology, moves along this specific life form created via the recollected imagery, then it might be possible to claim that such an exteriorised behaviour is “intermedial” in such cases when, in the interplay of various differing technological formats, it is able to grasp a special space of critical practices or “indebted” creativity (*creatività debitoria*). (Montani 2010: XVI)

Individual consciousness is constantly enveloped in this universal world of visual language, which means that the existence of an absolutely unique and independent imagination is impossible. We discover ourselves in a certain visual tradition, we depend on it and we utilise it constantly. Therefore, the freedom of imagination is antinomous — even though it seems that we are free to imagine ‘whatever we please,’ we are nonetheless subjected to a particular medial context. And even if we are able to escape it, we always start by acknowledging it.

Reflection on an intermedial imagination reactualises Kant’s discussion on the negative function of imagination. According to Kant, “For the beautiful in nature we must seek a basis outside ourselves, but for the sublime a basis merely within ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into our presentation of nature”. (Kant 1987: 100) Thus the notion of the sublime reveals not only its subjective side, but also its negative side because the universality of the sublime is based in its incomparability. Therefore, the sublime cannot be extrapolated into the level of a commensurable communication because the sphere of communication implies universal codes, as well as conventional and recognisable registers which would fixate on the idea that ‘something exists as something.’ In other words, the experience of beauty leads us towards the discourse of identity. Beauty can also become a tool of tertiary retentions as it captures our conscious attention and accumulates common desires, fears, and beliefs. Meanwhile, the sublime opens up the dimensions of difference and alterity.

According to Kant, “We call *sublime* what is *absolutely* [*schlechthin*] *large*,” i.e., that which needs no comparison because it is “*large beyond all comparison*”. (Kant 1987: 103) It is also important to note that even if the notion of the sublime breaks out from a comparative relationship, the transgression starts precisely with an unsuccessful attempt of comparison because it opens up a realm of the incommensurable. Only through comparison can we reach the limit that separates the incomparable.

Just as irrational numbers cannot be expressed as a relation between two integers, the sublime arises as a failed linkage. We will return to this relation of the incomparability later. However, the mathematical extremity of the sublime signals that Kant's argument implies a transgressive gesture that discovers the realm of the impossible. Transgression is possible precisely because the systems of consciousness and the world fail to coincide with each other.

Instead of a play of imagination, as in the case of the perception of beauty, transgression causes a series of vicissitudes between satisfaction and dissatisfaction and thus turns into a 'serious work of imagination.' By imagining the sublime, consciousness needs to stay active, and during the aesthetic experience of beauty, consciousness is passive (in our context we might even say 'inter-passive'). Therefore, the sublime implies a shattering shakeup which, according to Kant, is experienced as a vicissitudinous shift between repulsion and attraction towards the same object.

Imagination can start functioning in a negative mode. As if it 'knew' that grasping the infinite through the senses is impossible, it nevertheless experiences intensification. Kant says that "*Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense*" (Kant 1987: 106); through this difference the sublime leads us to the realm of tautology: it is "a magnitude that is equal only to itself". (Kant 1987: 105) An absolute inadequacy of the structure of consciousness turns out to be a necessary condition for the gesture of overcoming.

Exploiting imagination's inability to give shape to the things that are shapeless or absolutely abstract, the sublime can be understood as a case of resistance to the communication of the beautiful (or, in today's terms, the 'beauty industry'); while the "beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in [the object's] being bounded", "the sublime can also be found in a formless object". (Kant 1987: 98) In the solution of the beautiful, imagination is submissive, it seeks to implement the usual subordination, while in a free play it seeks to find an intellectual notion that would represent beauty. And despite the fact that this cannot be fully achieved, the directionality of expedience and purpose maintains the imagination in a complaisant and submissive disposition. Its freedom is only an illusion: imagination feels free because it encounters beauty — i.e., it is something that an intellect is unable to do. However, imagination is immediately forced to take the intellectual stance — i.e., it seeks to apply a law and find a universal rule for the beautiful, consequently turning beauty into an idea, paradigm, universal measure, etc.

However, a sublime relation also reveals the rebellious nature of imagination. While experiencing the fiasco of representation and adequacy, and, by acknowledging the supremacy of pure reason, imagination plunges into cre-

ativity even more fervently and thus expands its influence beyond its formal bounds. Of course, this creativity is no longer a production of images. It is rather a condensation of experience as well as a supra-sensual sensitisation of a situation when the product of creation is both formless and incomplete. It is a negative or, rather, Apophatic creativity according to which limitation is turned into transgression. Moreover, this experience is inevitably linked with violence — just like the collapse of any system, the sublime cannot be too soft as it “may indeed appear, in its form, contrapurposive for our power of judgment, incommensurate with our power of exhibition, and as it were violent to our imagination, and yet we judge it all the more sublime for that”. (Kant 1987: 99)

At the very heart of Montani’s idea of intermedial imagination we find the same conflict which, by causing a short circuit in this highly-strung system, leads to temporal bifurcations and intertwinements. Intermedial imagination does not try to run away from the system of media, but rather seeks to change it from within through the techniques of distortion and negation, which open up the new realms of non-objective creativity. Resistance — a failure of Kantian style — is the first step. However, this form of resistance implies that anti-mediation is also a remediation which redoubles media formats and forms of representation. Illusion can be overcome only by way of another illusion.

Montani accentuates the mode of “referential indifference” which is based on the strategy of elimination of differences — a widely discussed topic of theoretical discourse (Montani 2010: 23). Through mediating the Alterity as their property, technological media create an anesthetic effect which envelops us in the most horrific illusion of all — the illusion of indifference and passivity. Perhaps, we still believe that the pain transmitted through the screen is real, it nonetheless gets robbed of its key element — the power of *différance* that Derrida is talking about. It is the kind of power, which would make us feel indebted and related to that which is seen on the screen.

Aestheticised anesthesia turns any kind of alterity into a digitally unified equivalent, which operates in a unified technological system — this is precisely how the tension of difference is lost. As soon as the media start reproducing it, alterity ‘runs out of steam’ and turns into mastered and controlled information. When reality turns into messages, pixels, and forms, any dimension of authenticity is suspended. Therefore, according to Montani, the authentication of imagery should first of all address the consequences of “anesthetic derealisation” (Montani 2010: 23), which means that any difference between the world and an image is lost in the process of an endless iconographic adaptation.

Therefore, in the era of new technologies the Kantian analysis of beauty as a function that harmonises intellect and imagination, turns into a form of

anesthesia. Thanks to technologies we become accustomed to the torrents of appealing imagery, which enters individual consciousness and, by remaining attached to it, desensitises the critical power of imagination, which is the power of discontent, iconoclasm and resistance. Thanks to creative industries, aesthetic turned into the main engine of commercial exchange, and its stimulations are no longer stimulating. Contemplative admiration of pretty forms is blocked by a disillusioned and weakened consciousness which no longer believes that beyond all this imagery there is something other than yet another image.

3. Synthesis vs. Montage

In emphasizing the character of unifying synthesis of the manifold, the mediating function of imagination is absorbed into integrity of technological universe which functions by exercising its totalizing power. Saying that our reality is unified and integrated through imagination simply means that the whole interrelation of persons and world is an act of synthesis of identity which is always more than the sum of its parts. It is namely this superstructure of the imaginary installs us into the programme of orientation, as well as provides the symbolic access to the openness of any realm of the so-called real, granting its harmonizing unity. Being a surplus of reality, it constitutes and endorses the very connectivity to the world, as if installing a compatible software to the system of orientation.

But what if 'the real' of the imaginary needs a disintegration rather than unification? This extreme intermediation, proposed by Montani, seems to be a call to establish a disruptive interaction within a mediating network, although not providing a representable uniformity. Subverting technology against itself, it offers a provocation of tension within the system of patterns and formats, templates of understanding and models of perception which all tend to degrade into clichés of stereotyped thinking. However, the short circuit of synthesis doesn't mean the end of interaction. It is rather the beginning of a disharmonious search for alterity, which still maintains an alternative type of relation beyond commensurable properties. It is an act of disjointing the temporal linearity which proposes an impossible unity of what remains incompatible: the coexistence of present and past, the parallel bifurcation of possible sequences of events or even the debt to the Other that has never been the part of my experiences.

Thus synthesis should be substituted with a concept that introduces an interaction of non-homogeneous realms: montage as a fundamental operation of alternative mode of imagination. Stiegler described the procedure of montage as a fundamental operation of imagination, which was

best revealed in a classical experiment by Lev Kuleshov. In the 1920s, Soviet filmmaker intercut a shot of an expressionless actor with various objects: a bowl of soup, a dead child and a woman on a couch. He argued that because the spectator saw emotions in the actor's face (which varied depending on the image of the intercut) this had to be a result of editing rather than of the actor's performance alone.

Basically, by introducing a cinematic concept into the functioning of consciousness, Stiegler traces the outset of cinema before the actual discovery of cinematic practices. (Stiegler 2011: 13–16) We are *homo cinematicus*, since the imagination constantly offers a screen for the surplus of reality, obeying the classical dialectical formula of montage: $1+1>2$. Eisenstein's theory of dialectical montage exactly clings to that model, suggesting that a third idea can emerge from the presentation of two conflicting shots. Defining film in terms of the actions of the human mind, Eisenstein conceived this tension as a "shock to thought" which emerges out of the conflict between two shots and which forces us to think its synthesis. (Eisenstein 1988: 45) However, despite the demand to think on the screen that a filmmaker poses on the viewer, this concept of montage is still based on Hegelian (and Marxist) understanding of dialectics. It sets a clear goal, a *telos*, that regulates the conflict and elevates it into foreseeable synthesis. The director knows what he wants to transmit, he controls the effect of surplus of imagination and, consequently, the role of this synthesis. By indicating this element of cinematic dialectics, Deleuze juxtaposed classical paradigm by Eisenstein with modern paradigm by Godard. In this sense, Godard's take on montage no longer seeks to subsume the parts to whole according to teleological hierarchy, but rather performs the tension of open heterogeneity (Deleuze 1989: 156–88).

In this context, by coining a term of "intermedial montage", Montani brings it beyond the field of cinema *sensu stricto*. This cinematographically oriented notion does not seek to relate sensuality and intellect — the realms that, traditionally, imagination is supposed to be responsible for; it rather practices forms that intensify disintegration and interruption. At the same time this is where the illusions begin to be demystified. The intermedial montage that imagination seeks not only to restructure the audio–visual relations, but to trigger the gestures of visual authentication aimed primarily at the suppressed debt of the real.

Among the many examples offered by Montani we might mention Lars von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* (2003) where, according to Montani, a gradual process of de-aesthetisation is inspired by an ardour to testify the real (*azzardo testimoniale*). In this film we see a unique experiment: Jørgen Leth, the director of *The Perfect Human* — a film with a paradigmatic title and subtle imagery — follows Lars von Trier's orders and remakes his own film

five times, each time with a different obstruction, in different circumstances, in controversial locations, only in order to reveal what Montani calls an “ethics of intermedial spaces” (*etica degli spazi intermedi*) (Montani 2010: 47).

Here the controversial tension between aesthetics and ethics raises the question of how valid the responsibility towards the represented other is. Or, on the contrary — towards that which is forgotten, beyond the screen and unrepresentable. In other words, the process of de-aesthetisation cannot fully implement its task to represent something beyond aesthetics. However, by stripping off the aesthetic forms and by dissipating the harmonising unity, this process nonetheless brings forward the mode of an intended recollection — an embarrassing recollection about old and unpaid debts. This is how, by way of imposing an iconoclastic gesture on itself, an aesthetic imagination opens up the dimension of an ethical imagination.

In order to better comprehend imagination’s specific mode of disjointing functioning, which gradually emerges in the context of technology, we might also recall Jacques Rancière’s concept of dialectic and symbolic montage proposed in *The Future of the Image*. Here the french philosopher distinguishes a specific state of images which he calls “sentence–image” (*la phrase–image*). This combination marks a transitive and correlative state of both images and texts. It is obvious that images are related to texts through a constant interaction, which also affects the imaginary. Each act is a consequence of an interaction between that which is said (*dicible*) and that which is seen (*visible*). When the verbal side prevails, we encounter representational imagery. When visual expression directs the text by providing it with a form, then the aesthetic dimension becomes more prominent. However, in a sentence–image its sentence can be equated neither to that which is represented, nor to what is visualised aesthetically. Sentence–image is both an articulation and a visualisation, but at the same time it is neither of those; a sentence–image is rather a relation between these two elements — a specific situation that creates all the additional levels the variety of which is impossible to locate via the usual sum of images.

Here, text is not an offscreen ‘narrator’s voice’ just like an image is not an aesthetic form of an articulated idea; rather they both act interchangeably. In other words, in a sentence–image, that which is visible liberates itself from a defined individual form and various functions are dissipated through other visual functions. By fusing into a sentence, the image turns into an open structure which can be located in literary sentences, theatrical stagings, cinematographic episodes or photographic pictures.

Thus in a sentence–image we witness a tension of nonexistence, which cannot come into being without existence. Therefore, in reality the sentence–image turns out to be a performative gesture of enactment: an interaction between the elements produces an excess that does not correspond with

the comprising segments (visual or textual) but corrects and expands these segments even if it remains dependent on them. It means there is both support for the current system and its distortion — something that Rancière calls *la grande parataxe*.

“The new common term of measurement, thus contrasted with the old one, is rhythm, the vital element of each material unbound atom which causes the image to pass into the world, the world into the brush–stroke, the brush–stroke into the vibration of light or motion”. (Rancière 2009: 45) This transitory moment that highlights the paratactic order does not create a commensurable system, it rather brings forward a special moment of presence, a deepened mode of “profound today” (*profond aujourd’hui*) — i.e., a certain temporal coexistence that changes presence as a subordinating syntax into a ‘great parataxis’ without a governing element at the centre of a sentence such as the pairing of subject and predicate that would ground the common criteria or coordination system. However, a paratactic phrase is able to change the presence through a certain conjunction of the comprising elements into a single row, chain, or field. “It is the common factor of dis–measure or chaos that now gives art its power”. (Rancière 2009: 45)

Thus, it is not a commonality of an articulated and clear meaning, nor is it an inclusive torrent of continuum; it is rather a disturbing rupture that can occur via a rhythmic change — i.e., as a transformation in an intensifying consonance, in a “schizophrenic explosion, where the sentence sinks into the scream and meaning into the rhythm of bodily states”. (Rancière 2009: 45) In a sentence–image we encounter a specific mode of consensus where the force of disruption and chaotisation explodes. The origin of this paratactic force is, after all, cinematic — only here it acts according to the principle of a montage beyond the screen. Here montage is seen as a measure of what is measureless or as a disciplining of chaos (Rancière 2009: 48).

Rancière recalls various artistic practices — from Rimbaud and Baudelaire to Godard — where such a form of disciplined chaos is possible. We can also mention the work of the contemporary theatre director Romeo Castellucci, whose theatre can be seen as a production of sentence–images — i.e., as a certain convergence of content into a paratactic whole when the chaotising powers of disruption reach the level of a sensory impact. The action on stage can be regarded not as an object to be observed or a staging of narrative, but as a gesture that is liberated from the syntax of a narrative.

For example, in the series of performances “Tragedia endogonidia,” the situations and occurrences are invented without any kind of comment or explanation, thus the viewer’s involvement in the paratactic sequences is an implicit part of theatrical practice, which carries out an actualisation of heterogeneous experience—the final montage of difference. During Castellucci’s performance the very act of looking at the stage is anything

but sterile, it creates the perfect conditions for the attacks of dichotomous kinetics. Such theatre of shock and penetration acts as a schizophrenic explosion where the beginning of perception starts with a mismatch.

The imagery that is extracted arranges itself into phrases that, as Rancière would say, create sequences but escape homogenisation (Rancière 2009: 55); rather the opposite — the exposure of heterogeneity is a real expression of the force behind these sequences; and the effect of commonality is created by the shock of otherness, Alterity, the unknown, the unarticulated. Obviously, Castellucci is interested in the kind of Alterity that would essentially reveal itself in its uncontrolled and unreduced form. Perhaps, this is the reason why disabled persons and animals are turned into main characters along with naked and tormented bodies and all the technical mechanisms. They create the shock of heterogeneity, which provides us with the common measure. It is precisely the shock — i.e., the situation of dissociation — that gives connectedness a true dimension of commonality. “It is the clash of heterogeneous elements that provides a common measure”. (Rancière 2009: 55)

Therefore the process of fragmentation is as important as convergence. However, a montage — the beginning of a “schizophrenia or consensus” — is based on the very gesture of disruption that incites the situations of decomposition and dismemberment. Rancière distinguishes two forms of montage that are able to unravel this potential — namely, dialectical and symbolic. As we already mentioned, both cases imply the cinematographic techniques that surpass cinematography — the principle of montage is operative in cinema, theatre, literature, and contemporary art. Montage is the organisation of a situation, which is, strictly speaking, not an internal or external event, but rather a process where different realms overlap and transgress each other. Here, this relation could be understood as an exposure of the imaginary in the broadest sense — it is a situation where, by way of appearing in certain constellations, the realms of subjectivity and objectivity create resonating intensities. Instead of being a transmission of a message or information, it is rather a kind of liberation that Rancière describes in rhythmic terms. Parataxis acts only when the interconnectivity of the imaginary is played out; when the relations of heterogeneity are established and turned into an event of the unknown.

According to Rancière, dialectical montage inspires a chaoticising power through the creation of “little machineries of the heterogeneous.” By way of fragmenting the continuums, by bringing different segments together, by relating that which is unrelated, dialectical montage not only creates a shock but also creates new dimensions for that which is beyond measure (Rancière 2009: 56). This encounter between the incompatible elements creates alternative dimensions, parallel harmonies, cohabitations and clashes

of alterities, thus exiting an absolute reality of desires and dreams (Rancière 2009: 56). This is precisely the character of Castellucci's theatre — its inconsistent harmony is the condition of the viewer's oneiric vision where the dream does not belong to either the director or an individual consciousness. Here, the dream refers to the orders of parallel dimensions that can only be uncovered by the violence of conflict (Rancière 2009: 57). This means that violence is necessary in order to start dreaming for real, in order for the illusion to be unveiled for the sake of a 'real' vision — a vision, which is an act of an ingression of Alterity. It is a dream that is no longer imposed; it is rather an act of radical transgression; a nauseating dream, which distorts, burns, overheats. Here, seeing, imagining and dreaming means that one's safe world of fantasies is abandoned, one's compensatory illusions are shattered, one's cosy dreams are turned into nightmares. This is the imagination of a dialectical montage — it is a conflicting and violent act during which the orders of comprehension set by an individual consciousness are reconfigured by the orders of heterogeneous imagery. It is as if the initiative of understanding would no longer belong to an ego-logical consciousness and all the visions on stage would constantly initiate the uncontrolled visions inside the individual consciousness.

Symbolic montage does not utilise the violence of experience — it is devoid of conflict but it still exploits the harmony of alien and unrelated elements. An indirect kinship is established between the elements that are seemingly unrelated. This is a gesture of an accidental analogy, which reveals the previously unnoticed dependence on a common ground. Dialectical montage seeks to shock, while symbolic montage reveals the realm of a mystery (*mystère*) — instead of relating it to a mystical or enigmatic realm, Rancière attributes it to an aesthetic category (Rancière 2009: 57), which is common to both Mallarmé's poetry and Godard's films. "The machine of mystery is a machine of making something common, not to contrast worlds, but to present, in the most unexpected ways, a co-belonging" (Rancière 2009: 58).

The functioning of the mystery machine could also be seen in the Lithuanian pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (curated by Raimundas Malašauskas). The sports palace *Palasport Arsenale* in Castello, Venice became a presupposition for the sentence-image. Two countries that seemingly have nothing in common — Lithuania and Cyprus — contributed to the exhibition entitled "oO" or "Oo." The comprising elements—mobile walls from various European museums brought by Gabriel Lester; short stories by Vytautė Žilinskaitė; series of images with gymnastic exercises by Algirdas Šeškus; Myriam Lefkowitz's blind tours around Venice where the artist blindfolds and leads each participant by hand to guide them around the city; the painting *Last Shot* by Kazys Varnelis; live sculptures by Maria

Hassabi; Lia Haraki's performances of repetitive actions; as well as many other artistic gestures — incorporated the trajectories of artistic actions that generated rhythms of interdependences and demonstrated that a common measure can be established not only for homogeneous content. On the contrary — the incommensurability is a resonating condition of the mystery when that which cannot survive in a single system supporting one register of meanings, incorporates itself across multiple spatiotemporal relations.

The practice of Malašauskas, which could not have been articulated in an artistic statement, presupposed a weird paratactic order that was based on the gradually intensifying vibrations that came from the counter-intensification of the artistic actions. Parallels are necessary in order to catalyse and transpose each other onto a different level of commensurability, which does not coincide with the meeting between the identical but can instead be compared to a resonating eurhythmics of duration. Rancière would say that this commonality provides a measure for the incommensurable (Rancière 2009: 58). The introduction in the "Oo" booklet reads: "the leaps between the two national pavilions and their lines of flight define the rhythm of oO. A double-sided line crossing time, a body, a life, a country or two. It is a mental expedition to one's own atomic space full of history and future". In other words, leaps 'between' reveals the crossing line — a measure of commensurability that acts according to the alternative imagination: the performance of a nonexisting existence creates an equal spread of existence. "The power of the sentence-image is thus extended between these two poles, dialectical and symbolic; between the clash that effects a division of systems of measurement and the analogy which gives shape to the great community; between the image that separates and the sentence which strives for continuous phrasing". (Rancière 2009: 58)

Incidentally, the forces of commonality on which rationality is grounded reached us from the ancient Greeks and their insights into the mathematical problem of irrational numbers. One of the most prominent researchers in this field, Gaetano Chiurazzi, claims that the geometrical thought of Pythagoreans feature the oxymoronic notion of 'diagonal rationality' (*rationalité diagonale*), which signifies a transformation of the concept of *logos*. Diagonal rationality takes into account the principle of irrationality that lies at the very heart of rationality and therefore grounds it (Chiurazzi 2012: 97–98). In the texts of Plato and Aristotle this theme is played out by taking into account the possibility to determine the relationship between the elements that are different but comparable and measurable. According to Chiurazzi, the complex elaborations around the question "is there a common measure of all things?" signals that *incommensurability* becomes a central topic for later Plato (Chiurazzi 2013). For example, in *Theaetetus* we find a critique of a certain kind of rationality. The incomparable quantities

(irrational numbers) cannot be measured directly, but only according to the Chiurazzi's idea — i.e., diagonally. Akin to the $\sqrt{2}$ or π , they reveal the mysterious or analogous aspect of reality itself, the existence of which can be verified only via detachment and refusal — i.e., by acknowledging that the positivist view is not sufficient. The intermediary number that comes between 1 and 2 is of different origin to either 1 or 2, and it is rather a mediating diagonal dimension which is of different rational origin.

By the same token, a visual situation that falls within the range of the spectrum of an intermedial imagination — both cases provoke a collision of the same kind of diagonality. This is the strategy of visual conjunction that seeks to exterminate representationalism and extract the diagonal relation between the incommensurable. By refusing itself simple representation, the shocked imagination of dialectic and symbolic montage is forced to expose itself into *incommensurability*. Here, it remains impossible to preserve any lasting principle that would guarantee a relational and encompassing unity. In this alternative dialectics, imagination functions as a systemic engine which modifies the inner structure of the whole system. Imagination enables the most radical exteriorization — not only a convergence into the general flow of teleaction, but also a true egression beyond oneself towards the undefined X. Only this way one is able to understand that the system as such never constitutes a final reality. Even if imagination is unable to be completely free, it is the only thing that allows one to realise the impulse of freedom — by enabling the volatility of all the variations, it tests the established structures and reveals that which can be called a disruptive force, which not only enables but also forces to refuse any apparent certainty.

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