

Faces of Seeing.  
Towards a Gaze in the Temporal  
In-Between of Images

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(C)

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*Heraclitus (after Diels-Kranz)*

It “is possible to embody the gaze”, Jacques Lacan wrote in his *Fundamental Principles of Psychoanalysis* while reading in great depth the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty for his theoretical construction of the “object a” - the gaze itself. The gaze, then, the being-seen and seeing itself, may be given a mask, a face or an image. Also in the temporal dimension of eye movements and gazes, in “momentariness” ?

In the process of decoding writing, be it text or image, the gaze scans what it reads and what it sees in sequences of time. Usually, iconic images or printed books transfixe the eye of the beholder under the gaze-guiding control of the artist or author. Meaning is prescribed and enacted, single or multiple, and sense is repeatable as identity in reproduction. The free floating of signifiers is often covered over, making it passive (“per-reception”) instead of active (“per-ception”, Lat. *capere* to seize). But reading and seeing, as the history of art and culture shows, are in fact also active, somewhere in the in-between of active and passive -interactive.

## DIAGRAMMATICAL READ / WRITE-HEAD

Film-maker Peter Greenaway wrote: “The most interactive task I know is reading, and that’s been around since 5000 years.” In this sense, The “Diagrammatical Read / Write-Head” installation (2001) enacts reading as interaction, as writing. From an original white noise of destroyed signifiers there evolve individual words and fragments of text that the viewer reads. An equally probable and creative variation of typographical information-carriers thus appears slowly and successively as meaning. In connection with an eye/gaze-tracking system, this reading is also writing, for the gaze touches and selects the words. The eye/gaze-tracking system can measure the viewer’s reading gazes and thereby generate new, subjectivized statements. The reader himself creates experimental texts with his eye movements. The exhibit suggests, on the one hand, an imaginary continuity of reading but is, on the other hand, an apparatus for writing. Reading and writing, decoding and coding, can be experienced here as a space in between at the interface to the computer.

Not the endless tape, not the conditions of the electronic machinery are in question here but rather the sensorial materialities of the read/write-head itself. With the computer as medium, interfaces and surfaces appear as new paradigms of cultural aesthetics. Prior to the advent of printing, reading was aloud and writing was bound to the hand, the text had a different relationship to the body. In the “Gutenberg Galaxy” texts are disembodied by

standardisation. But meaning is only created in the reader's body, by way of the viewer. The really most interactive process of cultures - reading - is reversed into writing. The reading eyes are writing hands. Experimental literature in new media reflects reading as a sensomotoric process, reading seeing as a diagram.

## VISIONARY.APPARATUS

The "visionary.apparatus" (2001) installation does not deal with reading but rather with seeing as seeing. The beginning of the gaze-based interactive installation is void, a black rectangle, a blank projection surface, pure emptiness in the in-between. The movements of the visitors' eyes leave graphical traces on the projection screen, gaze trajectories. The subject/object interface is an eye/gaze-tracking system that treats the viewer's gazes as generative and selective, as subjective moments of seeing.

The installation records, learns and writes the various eye movements and shows the spectation of emptiness and the observation of observation as a dynamic, flowing memory of form. The visionary apparatus returns spectation as a pictorial process, as an experimental and subjective sketch. Not a "de-viewer" (Zerseher), but rather a "projector". The image as actable surface for the gaze consists of projected data that are, in turn, selected, written or deleted in a second, evolutionary process. The projection of forms is followed by the projection (de-signification), the assessment of what is projected by gaze-based selection as time-based manipulation of picture memory. The algorithms of technical visionariness dynamically adapt the history of the viewer in and through the process of seeing.

## ../VOYURE EN SURVOL

In the "../voyure en survol - Pour Petit a." (2002) installation, the gaze not only casts data but also the codes of image build-up themselves. Not only passive structures but also active machines (algorithms, scientific formulae, etc.) are the dynamic material of the gaze - a game between surface, noise and form. In fluid codes, the viewer invents different faces and sights in the mirror.

The viewer sees the projection surface of his gaze represented in a mirror fastened to the floor. The image is not reflected as identity, like a beam of light in the law of reflection since Euclid, but rather projects itself out of the gaze, like a beam of vision striking a rough surface. The gaze meta-dynamically regulates the image not as a piece of data but rather the conditions of the constantly regenerating image system itself. The image - as

in the “visionary.apparatus” installation -is constantly rebuilding, visible as flickering and fluttering. Depending on the intensity of the eye movements, build-up of the image breaks off or is re-triggered. The gaze cuts into the image. The codes and forms, the representations, are never complete but are fragmentary in the temporal synthesis of the image itself. The gaze breaks into the representation, into the temporal dimension of image build-up itself and searches for a visual form in the temporal in-between of the images. In this sense, the “visionary.apparatus” und “.../voyure en survol” installations experiment with a black rectangle as artistic culture that shows the image as an interruption of fluid codes by the viewer.

## TO DRAW-THE BOW

If the modern eye is overcome, the gaze touches the things it sees. In his book “Le regard, l'être et l'apparance dans l'optique de l'antiquité” Gérard Simon broadens Michel Foucault's analysis of knowledge into a historical analysis of the gaze. Simon promised total subjectivity in the techniques of seeing: “even assuming the gaze could make contact with the object, it being my gaze alone, that can differ from the gaze of other people or indeed of animals - nothing could justify the assumption that it furnishes a universal knowledge of the visible. A complete relativism in which every seeing person individually constitutes the measure of all things is certainly theoretically justifiable.” The theory of reflection as a theory of phantasm reads: an eye must see in order for an image to come into being.

The viewer, then, is not only in the picture but also drafts the process of seeing in each case himself. Seeing itself becomes an image. “Seeing oneself seeing”. The interruption of image build-up by the gaze causes electronic system time to interfere with the time experienced by the viewer. Inside and outside must be linked, a chiasmus between the system and the observer, the image and the viewer, the installation and the visitor, an oscillation of subject and object must be enacted, just as a Chinese butterfly may irritate and deceive a dreamer.

The gaze-based installations attempt to give coding time back to the viewer by superimposing the eye movements and the movements of image build-up. This time between images is the frame line, in analogy to the film strip. Here we see the viewer, the tension between the sequences of shots. The black bar is a place of the conditions of possibility of shooting. Kairos is also hidden in new media: as time experienced, in the drawing of a bow, i.e. ultimately in processual programming and coding, and perhaps also in momentariness, in the temporal in-between, frame-to-frame, fluid and interrupted.

Other texts:

E. Schüttpelz und A. Kümmel (Hg.), “Die Kunst der Störung durch Täuschung: Bugs Bunny”, in: Signale der Störung, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich, 2002.

Peter Weibel (Ed.), “Diagrammatical Read / Write-Head”, in: Im Buchstabenfeld -Die Zukunft der Literatur, exhibition catalogue, Neue Galerie Graz, 2001, p. 303 - 317.

Andreas Hiepko und Katja Stopka (Eds.), “Stochastic Interaction and the Mind-Reading Machine II”, in: Rauschen. Seine Phänomenologie und Semantik zwischen Sinn und Störung, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg, 2001, p. 181 - 187.

Manfred Faßler (Hg.), “Die Wasseroberfläche. Medialität und Ästhetik der elektronischen Reflexion”, in: Ohne Spiegel leben. Sichtbarkeiten und post-humane Menschenbilder, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich, 2000, p. 123 - 140.

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