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The Foregrounding l'n the Issue of Space

If indeed, the medium is the message, the issue that accompanies many of our discourses about the digital, is that of emergence. Utopian promises are always emergent, and deferring to tomorrow, lack the rigor necessary to radically examine our concerns. Salvation is promised it will emerge, as soon as this or that problem is solved, and we are asked to display more than a degree of evangelical faith. Even worse, we experience the invention of terms, which at their limit should be taken hyperbolically, but are offered to us as theory. But in considering an attack on such utopian thinkers, one often finds redeeming facets to their thought, perhaps due to the magpie nature of their rhetoric. But what if we were to take a step back from this situation and consider the issue of emergence not as an issue of tomorrow, but as an intrinsic phenomenon of the digital.a phenomenon which lends this quality to our discourses? What I therefore propose, is that we deal not with an emergent phenomenology, but a phenomenology of emergence. McLuhan stated that "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with irnpunity just because he is an expert aware of the *changes* in sense perception."¹ Thus McLuhan offers us a more tangible starting point than the unfulfilled promises of tomorrow.

How then are we to approach the phenomenology of emergence? McLuhan dearly makes a daim for this, not through sense perception, but its *alteration*. It is through the alteration and rupture of space that I intend to draw out the themes which lead us to a sense of emergence, and if we are to think emergence, that from which things emerge. My interest m the spatial began as a consequence of an engagement with the "expressive space" generated through sculpture and installation. Having worked with the human figure, the concept of an expressive space mediated by the 'l can' of consciousness originally seemed the most plausible explanation of this experience. As a way of thinking certain experiences this no doubt has some validity, but the richness of the experience in question goes beyond explication in such straightforward terms. It is in the later work of Merleau-Ponty we discover the beginnings of a radicalised understanding of the spatial.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty moves towards the limits of phenomenology. As the study of appearances, the phenomenological investigation of the invisible seems compromised at the outset. However, Merteau-Ponty understands the invisible as the "latency of the world"; and as such it is *implicated* in appearance. The text gives particular consideration to the issue of the seer and the seen, leading to the concept of the "Resh" of the world, in which the seer is caught up m what is seen. But in questioning our notions of the seer and the seen we must first question our assumptions about the visible. Merleau-Ponty daims that the visible is

" ... not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sorts of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colour or visible world resound at the distances, a *cenain differentiation,* an ephemeral modulation of this world - *fen a colour or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colours, a momentary crystallisation of coloured being or of visibility. Between the alleged colours and visibfes* we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, and *which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things.* •1

The visible therefore, no longer remains in itself, identified within a lexicon of things, but comes into question as "a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation". This differentiation. opening upon the visible, is not the difference between the *already* visible things of the world, but an *original* and productive difference which explicates the visible. Due to Merleau-Ponty's death, this aspect of his thought is only hinted at, and we are left to make our own sense of it Leaving their divergence's aside, Gilles Deleuze affords us one means of developing this thought. In Deleuze's philosophy of difference *in itself,* he employs notions of differential calculus. In discussing its formulae he notes that

'Toe relation *dy!dx* is not like a fraction which is established between particular quanta in intuition, but neither is it a general relation between variable algebraic magnitudes or quantities. Each term exists *absolutely only in rt5 relation to the other.* it is no longer necessary or *even possible to indicate on independent variab/e."3*

Thinking differentiation with Deleuze, we need to acknowledge the intertwining of the sentient and the sensible, the seeing and the seen. So that when Merleau-Ponty claims that"l must no longer think of *myself in the **world**cf'4* there is a recognition of our indivisibility with. and *implication* in, the world and therefore a rupture of the traditional model of thinking subject and object. This also allows us to make an important distinction. Interaction, the influence of things upon each other, is realized as a condition of our being in the world. But it has been mistakenly applied to virtual worlds. as many who speak of interaction are in reality dealing with the issue of power; the power to transform a world.

But what is the nature of this invisible which lines the visible? It seems that our only option is to seek

this latency, this flesh of things via the visible. In his search for the invuible Merleau-Ponty identifies "the disdosure of a universe of ideas' that unlike those" of science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity "5 These ideas which cannot be simply thought are

" ... in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart. Each time we want to get at lt immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or *see* it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach. The explication does not give us the idea itself. it is but a second version of it, a more manageable derivat1ve.',6

The ideas therefore are not opposed to the real, but to the actual, for the ideas are real in themselves. It is not even possible to think back to the ideas from the actual, to multiply the actual to the possible, as this is antithetical to the reality of the ideas. The ungraspab1lity of ideas occurs through their *explication, the differentiation* which gives us the "more manageable derivative" This world of the invisible, this universe of ideas, is one which not only arrests or evades ihouqht. but must it seems, *remain* in its latency. This also occurs in Deleuzes philosophy. where he uses the term **"**Idea" as the"differential of thought,"7 presenting Ideas as multiplicities within a virtual state, which

" ... must have neither sensible form nor conceptual signification, nor, therefore, any assiqnable function. They are not even actually existent, but inseparable from a potential or a virtuality. In this sense they imply no prior identity, no positing of a something that could be called the *one and the same .. •8*

The very possibility of considering difference in nself must be divorced from identity. Identity relates difference to a point, to the one and the same, a *difference from,* an assimilation denying difference in itself. Deleuze also relates the ideas not to the Cogito but what he terms the "fractured l of a dissolved Cogito,,9. Therefore the ideas have the quality of multiplicity, not only in relation to, but also of the self. But we must ask ourselves how can we know of a quality which retreats in our attempt to know it? Merleau-Ponty notes that "We do not see, do not hear the ideas, and not even wrth the mind's eye or with a third ear·l0 If we cannot know the Ideas through explicated identity, if the attempt to think this quality is flawed, then it may be within its *interruption* of consciousness that we know them. As Levinas's analysis of the Other reminds us, what is at stake is" ... the calling of consciousness into question and not a consciousness of calling into question."ll Merleau-Ponty goes so far as to state that"There rs no longer consciousness, projections, In itself or object, There are fields in intersecton" An intersection in which the invisible affects us without becoming the one and the same. Both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze use the term Depth to describe this intersection, this dunenuon of appearances.

Deleuze states that "Depth is simultaneously the imperceptible and that which can only be perceived ... ; echoing h,s earlier formulation of the Idea. He identifies Depth as the *limit* of sensibility, as the undifferentiated, difference in itself, which tends to be cancelled because the explication covers it with a quality which alienates or contradicts it. However this difference is always implicated in actualisation.

"It is a transcendental illusion because it is entirely true that difference is cancelled qualitatively and in extension. It rs nevertheless an illusion, since the nature of difference lies neither in the quality by which it is covered nor in the extensity by which it is explicated. Difference is intensive. *md1mngllJsh-able from depth in the form ofo non-qualified spatlum,* the matrix of the unequal and the dfferent. Intensity rs not the sensible but the being of the sensible, where different relates to different "ll

Opening upon un-differenciated being, the interruption of consciousness signals a move from the understanding of expressive space as the "l can" of consciousness towards the sensible intensity of Depth, towards a non-qualified space at the limits of sensibility. Both thinkers posit Depth, not as a third dimension derived from the other two, a measured absence between things, but as a dimension in its own right from which *the* others are derived. But if one were to try and think Depth, to try and give essence to that which cannot have essence how might this be done? Merleau-Ponty attempts this in *Eye and Mind* through the consideration of the aesthetic.

"Also in the water colours of Cezanne's last years, for example, space ... radiates around planes which cannot be assigned to any place at all:"a superimposing of transparent surfaces," a flowing movement of planes of colour which overlap, which advance and retreat."13

Through the rupturing of space as a measured absence, we realise relationships beyond a particular point of view, beyond dualism. Implicit within this is the overturning of consciousness and the rupturing of the Cogito. Merleau-Ponty daims this for Cezanne when he daims that he sought the "deflagration of Being" 14.

Though Depth's spatiality is not attributable solely to space, we nevertheless might ask why it should be, if space is an explicated value derived from Depth. Deleuze talks of Depth which" ... bears witness to the furthest past and to the coexistence of the past with the present." l5 lt rs at this point that Levinas's analysis of the trace comes to mind where he identifies the trace as" ... the insertion of

space in time, the point at which the world inclines toward a past and a time."16 and hence the interruption – spacing – of the temporal flow or unity of consciousness. This moment which is a non-rnoment and its relationship to the spatial underpins a cliche of film making. The moment when amidst the action there is a pause as we zoom in on a character. Not only do we experience the flexing of space, but the suspension of time, often emphasized by a dramatic return the narrative.

The issue of time gives us another way to consider the interruption of consciousness that depth signifies. Our everyday lives are possessed of a thickness of time, allowing one to listen to music for instance, without which it would just be a series of successive tones. But the experience of music is such that we are able to experience these tones rather than recollect them. This is also found in reading or listening, we do not need to recollect a sentence to follow it, indeed the moment we do, we fail to listen. A number of analyses, neurological and philosophical have viewed this as a matter of feedback, the feedback providing the lived thickness of an event beyond its duration. However thinking time in such a way it is still a linear progression, the feedback merely the folding back that experience as the thickness of the flow. But what if we were to think of linear time, not as original, but as part and parcel of differentiation and the formation of identity? Then we need to seek not the difference between the experienced moments of the flow, but an *original* and productive difference which explicates the flow. Deleuze seems to point this notion out when he states that'Actuahzat,on takes place in three series: space, time, and also consdousness'Hewever the feedback model allows further insights, since the explicated only covers over the implicated, this feedback would explain how we sometimes describe things as having resonance, as the invisible also resonates sensibly through the explicated order. Thus this resonance is the quality, which *cannot* be identified, but pervades a work. In making installation although having worked very much with the sensuality of materials, I have had to accept the fact that one is working with not so much with the materials but with the resonant qualities that they possess.

In conclusion it can be said that there has been a rush to force the analogy between the human and the digital, much in the way the mechanistic view was adopted after Newton. If the medium is the message, we have to avoid these analogies. A r.idicalized phenomenology of space of Depth,adequate to both material and digital worlds, departs from traditional models of consciousness and sensation, and relies upon the intertwining of the sensible and sentient, and as such the body ~ inseparable from such a «msideratkm The sensuality of the digital beccrnes a r.idical element in the consideration of this phenomenology. It is upon the very intangibility, the immateriality ofthe cybernetic space upon which its sensuality rests, and the remarkable nature of the digital starts to be realized. This immateriality can, and has, been made manifest in many ways, the increasing power of precessors allows translucency in real time, but simpler means are available as anyone who has chased Fujihata's stone will realize. The fractured I that Deleuze identifies is another manifestation of this sensuality. But what is important is that we do not ask the digital to imitate a reality which subverts its own, but look torts own reality, which is between the material and the immaterial, which is of emergence.

1, *Issemia! McLuhan* p 159
2. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* p 132
3. Gilles *Deleuze,Difference and Repention* p 172
4. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* p 227
S. Ibid p 149
6. Ibid p 150
7. Gilles *Deleuze,Difference and Repetirion* p 194
8. Ibid p 183
9. Ibid p 194
10. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* p 151
11. *Levinas,Basic Philosophical Wrirings* p 54
12. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* p 266
13. *Merteau-Ponty,EyPandMindp* 180
14. Ibid
15. Ibid p 230
16. Levinas,Basic *Philosophical Wrin·ngs* p 62