

The Ecstasy of Hyperrealism

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The hyperreal can be defined as the indiscernibility between the real and the illusory, the order of the image becomes entangled. Cinematic realism has lost out to the spectacle of violence, in violence we glimpse the interval, the convergence of different temporalities. In these images of the hyperreal it is not the violence itself that delights the viewer, rather it is the wonder of an impossible temporal moment. Within digital cinema hyperrealism begins with digital montage.

A jump cut in film editing is a cut that removes a section of a continuous shot. The technique breaks continuity in time. Any moving objects in the shot are displaced. This jumping does not correspond to a rational explanation. A match frame is considered its opposite, it cuts between two different spatial images creating either a sense of continuity or juxtaposition. With the digitisation of cinema and the rise of non-linear editing and compositing software “time becomes spatialised, distributed over the surface of the screen”(Manovich 2001:325). Digital montage is a convergent cut, a spectacle where textual qualities are more important than temporal continuity, reality becomes ambiguous with disconnected arrangements of time. This disjunctive cut is a mastery of spatio-temporal composition. Jan Spechenback (2000) warns of the danger of the anything goes unrestricted temporality of digital cinema, this attitude signals “the collapse in the rational movement-image of classical cinema” (Darren Tofts 2007:114). This spatialisation of time is a visual syncope, an impossible absence.

For Catherine Clement(1994:1) this moment of syncope is “an absence of the self. A ‘cerebral eclipse.’” Syncope is a contracted instance, as Clement(1994:5) says, “Syncope makes things go quickly, it accelerates.” The contraction occurs as a moment of discord, syncope catches you off guard; it is unexpected. A syncopated rhythm is born of an unresolved moment, it is the art of rapture, a jouissance of the mind and body. A mental disjunction, there is an element of ecstatic rapture about the suspension of time where temporal absence

defines form. The syncope of digital cinema involves a divergent temporal reality. The moment of crisis causes the reality to become indiscernible, a convergence arises between the actual and the virtual. This interval distorts temporal reality to an impossible state. The visceral time of syncope leads to rapture in the hyperreal. It is the spectacle of digital cinema: time is now suspended and absent of the self. This non-linearity of form is manifest through the spatialisation of time. The body spasms in a moment of rapture, flickering to and fro, spatial displacement fractures consciousness, the viewer is seduced by the impossible.

Movement and form are abstracted through a suspension of time. The exploration of ruptured moments is essentially the pursuit of the body in time. This attempt to reveal the nature of the disrupted form is inhibited by its instability. This departure from stable forms is apparent within hyperrealism. Forms are displaced in time, they become dislodged from a coherent linear progression. The gap in time, in-between the ruptured movements of the body, is where syncope lies. Digital cinema is the cinema of hyperrealism, the execution of the impossible, “[i]t is a way of sculpting time, of capturing extraordinary moments of transcendence...” (Tofts 2007:112). This is the Deleuze’s ‘interval’ at work in the unstable flow of digital media. Hyperrealism floods our sensory experience in a constant barrage to gain our attention. Here we are captives to the addiction of the ecstasy of hyperrealism, where speed and time orchestrate syncope. Meaning is derived from what is lost, from the textual qualities generated by this ‘temporal hollow’. The ability of hyperrealism to seduce is in the interval, exposed by violence: the moment of impact, the transcendence, the duration. Digital montage is used to temper the speed of violence transitioning between time and space. The violence is interposed seamlessly with stylised linkages of virtuality or by a visual attack exacerbating the violence of speed, creating tension that is viscosly punctuated.

In post-production, to ramp an image is to displace its temporality. Outside of this technical understanding to ramp is to act threateningly or violently. To combine the meanings within the discourse of digital media would be to do violence to the temporal existence of an image. This technique of ramping produces a heavily stylised digital temporality as all modes of time compression are available. Here, digital cinema has the capacity to do violence to time itself. This method of ramping is rife throughout the action and horror sequences of digital cinema, though it is not the violence that arrests our attention, it is the syncope of hyperrealism, the ecstasy of the impossible.

The digital effect of 'bullet time' is essentially a temporal distortion, a slowing of perception in order to reinforce a notion of imperceptible speed, as the name implies it is at the delight in the unknowable temporality of the bullet. Darren Tofts argues that these moments of bullet time, these moments of virtuality have an uncanny parallel to Deleuze's concept of the 'time-image'. For Deleuze's the 'time-image' is the mutual coexistence of the virtual (past) and the actual (present), an interval in temporal continuance. This interval for Deleuze, "is an indeterminate pause, a dislocated transition that is neither here nor there" (Tofts 2007:115). Here bullet time can be considered a temporal manifestation of the disjunctive cut of digital montage. It exists outside of any known temporal existence, it is a simulated expression of false movement. Bullet time is the impossible celerity

of violence, a visual point blank asserting the rhythm of the interval. It is the contemporary romanticisation of the celerity of violence, the duration of the bullet fired from the gun. It accosts attention with a sense of ecstasy, an interval of hyperrealism.

The manipulation of temporal perception is induced by the direct sensory experience of the interval. It is the inevitability of technological violence that injects hyperrealism into the aesthetics of digital media. Digital montage causes a tendency towards disrupting the continuously variable to capture the mind in a moment of syncope, an interval in time. The contraction of perceived time causes consciousness to slip into a moment of syncope, the ambiguity of the interval. This temporal short circuit is an implicit aspect of the hyperrealism. The moment of absence is mediated by violence, it is an act of syncope.

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