SEAMLESSNESS IN THE ANALOGUE AND DIGITAL

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Sigune Hamann will discuss work on representation of movement, time and narrative structure through image manipulation with a focus on her process of capturing and reading the dynamics of urban environments in panoramic film-strips.

Introduction

As consumers and producers of contemporary visual culture, we are in an era of high-resolution photographic realism. Continuous hardware and software development simulate close up sharpness in images and hyper-real movement through zoom and panning-actions and enhanced playback technology. In counterpoint to this, I develop analogue film-strip imagery using a still camera in the manner of a movie camera that offers a different representation and a deconstruction of the way we see rather than the objects to be seen.

Reflecting on ideas of data disinformation, this paper will look at the representation of movement, time and narrative structure in film-strips, and examine shifts of information and overlapping, repetition and blurring of images as part of the analogue and digital process of production. It will reflect on ideas of seamlessness and continuity at a time dominated by fragmentation and layering.

Film-strips

PHOTOGRAPHY

In photographic film-strips I capture the energy of urban environments and the movement of people. This process of 'tracing' in film-strips involves using an analogue photographic camera like a movie camera. A whole roll of 35mm film is exposed in a continuous rewinding movement while I am also moving in relation to the subject. The celluloid moves past the lens in a cinematic movement, although unlike film exposed in a cine camera, time is not separated frame by frame but flows in a continuous exposure over minutes to produce one long panoramic image. Although the images are static, they contain the indexical traces of movement – of the film, the camera and myself moving within the optical field.

The hand held camera as an extension of my body and the performative process allow for elements of chance within the work. I intuitively respond to each situation, varying the speed of my own movement and of rewinding the film. Moving elements such as people register more clearly than static backgrounds, which dissolve into ambiguity. The movement of the camera parallel to the movement of the objects let them appear in repetition.

The speed of the rewind is un-even. Moments of slowing reveal the analogue photographic process; vertical lines due to momentary framing become visible. Accelerating the turning results in extensive movement blur. However the level of layering, abstraction and focus cannot be planned, only performed.

INSTALLATION

Digital technology allows the film to be scanned and seamlessly printed in large segments. Viewers can re-enact the time sequences chronologically in video animations or by moving along the images of large-scale photographs, from segments to 360-degree installations relating to the situation in which they were taken. Like fleeting mental images they are at the same time linked and freed from the event, the environment and action that they record.

The film-strip showing at this year's ISEA exhibition Uncontainable: Broken Stillness is a segment of a photograph taken in Whitehall in London last year, during a protest march against the increased student tuition fees. As a demonstrator at the march I captured the dynamics of students and fellow staff moving through Whitehall, chanting and waving banners and flags in a unified expression of protest. For the duration of the exposure the film is rewound past the lens in the hand-held camera, following the movement of the crowd. This process abstracts and compresses the action revealing both chaos and order, yet details are enough to fix the image as an indexical record of the actual event.

The imagery captures the moment described by Götz Großklaus referring to Elias Canetti, when multi directional movement becomes homogenous and when a common goal directs crowds in a common movement, physical and psychological — the moment when we are no longer in a crowd of strangers but in a crowd of 'equals': The movement of the crowd appears in short time stops and starts, in stagnation and continuation. [1] These rhythms and the compression and expansion in transit find their correspondence in the mechanical process of rewinding the film, hesitating and accelerating, and by the fluid density of the resulting imagery.

SEEING AND READING IMAGES

Film-strips are a result of a direct, perhaps pre-cognitive form of seeing and an experience of the duration of time, produced through mechanical and chemical processing. The images are referential and real with a clear pictorial definition within them while showing a general degree of motion blur.

An absence of language is suggested, while objects are present that refer to something apparently quite concrete. As conventional ways of seeing and reading images become less applicable, the representation of visual information in the film-strips becomes closer to the physiological process of seeing than the information itself.

We have learned to see and to understand visual data, to make sense of images in a subconscious process. It is part of an evolutionary development, processing visual input to concentrate on what's vital to us and builds images in our minds. The brain constructs images and seeks order to establish correlations, consistency and continuity. Images change with rapid technical developments, and our perception tries to adjust correspondingly. I think however that the discrepancy between reading an image as a form as it used to be and now experiencing it as an event, fragmented, layered and changing over time needs to be addressed, and that the change of conventions of processing this information is not quite as fluid as it might seem.

The construction of movement and seamless images in the brain depends on our sense of space. According to Wolf Singer the clarity of inner spatial images stems from an evolutionary development, defining the long-term memory mainly as a memory of places and their relationships. [2]

TIME AND CONTINUITY

The length of time represented in the film-strips is determined by its physical length. In terms of mathematical, continuously moving time a couple of minutes of an event are captured. Film-strips don't have beginnings and ends in terms of narrative; they are segments of an ongoing experienced time, the long format suggesting continuity before and after. These segments become like fragmented memories that represent situations or narratives within them.

Film-strips represent a unique sequence of time, but there is a sense of eternity also through repetition of movement, one film-strip written in panning movement over another, images and activities being replaced by others continuing an ongoing narrative. "In life we are accidental witnesses of certain events and images, whose duration in time we cannot control. That's why all art begins with the wish to fix a moment, and to make it last for a long or even infinite time. Only then will the viewers have endless time, that they need to determine duration and rhythm of their observation autonomously." [3] Time is embedded in the film-strips in a curious way relating equally to sequential moving images, sequential still images and single photographs. Although time is stopped, a moment is extended. As Andy Warhol described it in connection with his 8-hour projection Empire one can "see time go by."

The film-strips are loops, particularly in panning animations or 360 degree installations. Loops create new meaning through fragmentation and seamless repetition of original data. As with patterns or a motif in music, the brain registers repeated elements. Loops are generators of form; they offer the possibility of infinite extension, continuity and the evasion of an ending.

"The art of today seems to have discovered a new endlessness. However we are not dealing with a renewal of a romantic aesthetic of the sublime, but the endlessness of the continuation of the always similar in small variations, the endlessness of a project of Continued-Life, that cannot be completed, but only left behind." [4]

References and Notes:

1. *Götz Großklaus, "Massen Event und Massen Medien. Zum Medialen Bild des Massenkörpers", in Medienbilder (Frankfurt: Edition Suhrkamp 2004), 16–54.*
2. *Wolf Singer, "Über Nutzen und Vorteil der Hirnforschung für die Geschichtswissenschaft," in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (28.9.2000), 10-11.*
3. *Boris Groys, "Medienkunst im Museum," in Topologie der Kunstc(München: Edition Akzente Hanser 2003), 59–76.*
4. *Boris Groys, "Fragen ohne Antwort," in Topologie der Kunst (München: Edition Akzente Hanser 2003), 111–117.*