Poetics of Fiction: The Physiognomy of the Abyss

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***Abstract* — As an architect as well as a conceptual artist working in the field of installation art, I explore the poetic relationship between digital production and the psychology of modern times, which addresses the nature of containment and the characteristics of the subject. While operating through hybrid forms of representation, the boundaries enclosed by the language specificity of each discipline are literally blurred, such as mathematics, poetry, and architecture, to give rise to the full potentiality of the individual's creative interpretation, both from the viewpoint of the maker and the interpreter. This installation deals with the representational issues and speculative methods for conveying alternative meaning to the contemporary digital art scene.**

***Index Terms* — Anxiety, intermediary art, liminal space, multiple readings, speculative reality, time frame.**

I. Introduction

This video installation is comprised of two poster presentations (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) and a video projection. The former is the extraction of two video still frames, where the actual film sequence begins and ends, accompanied by an explanation of the concept behind its creation. This is achieved, on one hand, by means of a fictional equation based on Einstein's theory of special relativity in terms of time dilation, and on the other hand, a descriptive memory of the whole video piece. The latter, involves the creation of a spatial structure conceived entirely in virtual space, which consists in the modulation of an object within an infinite space. It relies on a three dimensional construction generated through a mesh of structural lines, with specific thickness that, at first glance, suggest an apparent chaotic node. Nevertheless, at closer inspection, this digital net unfolds itself in a succession of tubular surfaces that twist and converge towards unexpected vanishing points; shapes that inhale and exhale the cyclical flux of the vacuum—a virtual house that serves as a receptacle of the mind. In this regard, John Rajchman asserts that "the virtual house becomes here the house of this less grounded condition of image and body, as though it were a house for an unreal, disembodied mind linked to all others in a virtual realm." [1, p.118] A house, he continues, "with the most possibilities might thus seem the one with the least specificities—the empty house of silence or absence, awaiting a revelation that never comes." [1, p.119]

II. Video Still Frames

The two video still frames presented in the posters, depicted in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, preceded the video work and were produced in 2006 as part of a photographic series entitled *Lost-portrait*, despite it being digitally manipulated.

The enunciated "portrait" does not correspond to the common designation of the word, but, ultimately, pretends to reveal an internal physiognomy, a familiar surface, a liminal space, the potency of the abyss. The concept of liminality alluded here concerns what Luc Steels wrote about Mathew Barney´s work in terms of clear instances of representation, by assessing that "representation selects certain aspects of reality that are particularly meaningful to its creator and these aspects are expressed—often very indirectly by invoking associations, metaphors, and analogies—to cause their reconstruction in the mind of the interpreter." [2, p.25] In other words, the psychological space created in my work aims at encapsulating a suspended place where memory—considered as the subject's retrospection, or inward gaze—resists the erosion of current events.

In reference to the intersection of spatial thought with psychoanalytical thought, Anthony Vidler posits the destabilization of one familiar world into another, not quite familiar one, in which "the affect being explored is that of anxiety, the *angoisse* explored by Lacan as a direct function of desire, and situated in what he characterizes as a "void," the contents of which are defined precisely by what is missing, what cannot be found, what is lacking." [3, p.46] Furthermore, he affirms that "space, in this ascription, is not empty, but full of disturbing objects and forms, among which the forms of architecture and the city take their place," which is why architects "are exploring the processes and forms of art, often on the terms set out by artists, in order to escape the rigid codes of functionalism and formalism. This intersection has engendered a kind of intermediary art, comprised of objects that, while situated ostensibly in one practice, require the interpretative terms of another for their explanation." [4, preface]

III. VIDEO

The video consists of a wall projection, created in 2009 with variable dimensions, and occurs in a time frame between the two digital images exposed on the posters (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) which correspond to the endpoints—fist and last frame—of the travelling sequence with a total duration of one minute and thirty seconds. The observer is drawn by the eloquent reading of a poem, specifically written for this piece, where a delicate and hypnotic voice of a young woman drifts the action of this abstract interval. The reading of the poem coincides with the duration of the video which circumscribes the poetic act, hence, as Paul Virilio states "the depth of field of the classical perspective has been replaced by the depth of time of advanced technology." [5, p.25]

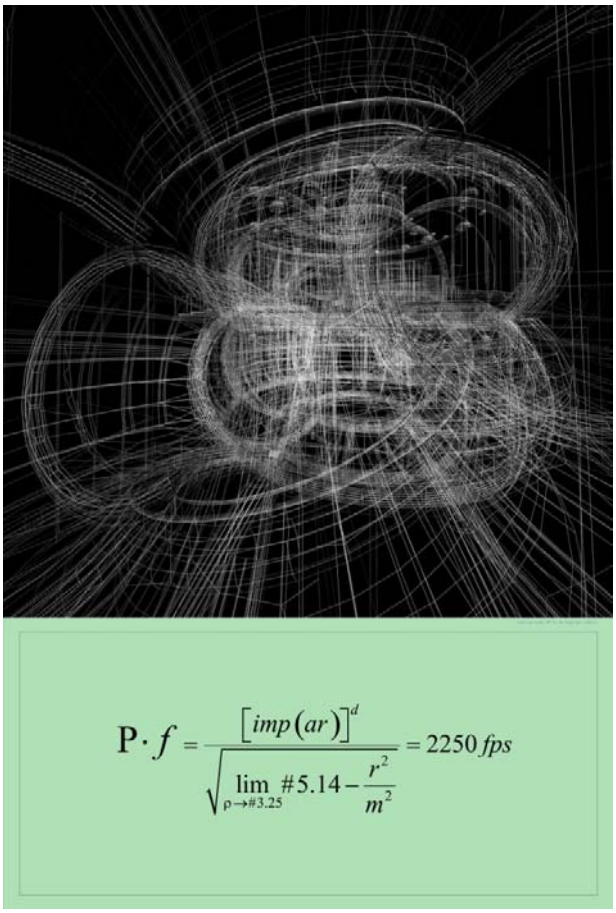


Fig. 1. Poster number 1, digital image #5.14 from the series *Lost-portrait* (2006). On the bottom is the fictional equation based on Einstein's theory of relativity in terms of time dilation as explained in section V. Note that this image is only for the purpose of visual reference and not to be legible.

IV. POSTERS

Both posters serve as guidelines not just to explain the video work presented in the form of a projection and, therefore, it should be located in the entrance of a dark room, but also to establish a conceptual relation between art, poetry and science. In this sense, fiction—a speculative genre—can be understood as a mediator of fields, transgressing all boundaries, linking improbable relations and proposing alternative realities.

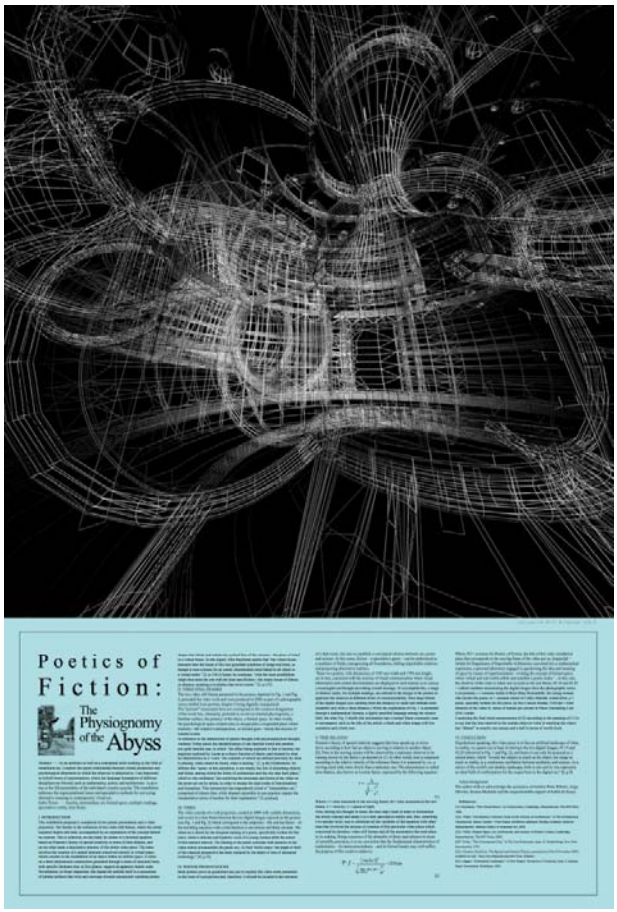


Fig. 2. Poster number 2, digital image #3.25 from the series *Lost-portrait* (2006). On the bottom is the newspaper format explaining the concept of the whole work, as described in this paper. Note that this image is only for the purpose of visual reference and not to be legible.

These two posters are, in fact, concerned with the exercise of visual communication where visual information and content discrimination are displayed in such manner as to convey a meaningful and thought-provoking overall message. To accomplish this, a range of distinct scales, for multiple readings, are utilized in the design of the posters to approach the observer at different

levels of communicability: from large format of the digital images (eye catching from the distance) to small and intimate texts (readable only from a short distance).

While the explanation of Fig. 1 is presented through a mathematical formula (a highly specified language among the science field), the other Fig. 2 distills this information into a textual framework commonly seen in newspapers, such as the title of the article, a black and white image with low resolution and a body text.

V. Time Dilation

Einstein's theory of special relativity suggests that time speeds up or slows down according to how fast an object is moving in relation to another object [6]. Time in the moving system will be observed by a stationary observer to be running slower by the factor t, as denoted in (1). In other words, time is measured according to the relative velocity of the reference frame it is measured in, i.e., a moving clock ticks more slowly than a stationary one. This phenomenon is called time dilation, also known as Lorentz factor, expressed by the following equation:

$$t = \frac{t_0}{\sqrt{1 - \frac{v^2}{c^2}}} \quad (1)$$

Where: t = time measured in the moving frame; t0 = time measured at the rest frame; v = velocity; c = speed of light.

Now, having this thought in mind, the next step I took in order to fictionalize the whole concept and adapt it to a new speculative reality and, thus, stretching it to another level, was to substitute all the variables of the equation with other ones that involved the process of creation of this particular video piece which concerned its duration, video still frames and all the parameters that took place in its making. Being conscious of the absurdity of these equivalences in terms of scientific precision, it is my conviction that the fundamental characteristics of mathematics—its interconnectedness—and its formal beauty may well suffice the purpose of this creative endeavor.

$$\mathrm{P}\cdot f = \frac{\left[imp(ar)\right]^d}{\sqrt{\lim_{\rho \to \#3.25} \#5.14 - \frac{r^2}{m^2}}} = 2250\, fps \quad . \quad (2)$$

Where: P.f = acronym for *Poetics of Fiction*, the title of this video installation piece that corresponds to the moving frame of the video per se; $[imp(ar)]^d$ = initials for *Department of Improbable Architecture* converted into a mathematical expression, a personal laboratory engaged in questioning the idea and meaning of space by means of experimentation—evoking the concept of liminal space, where virtual and real world collide and manifest a poetic realm—, in this case, the observer of the video is taken into account as the rest frame; #5.14 and #3.25 = ordinal numbers enumerating the digital images from the photographic series *Lost-portrait*; r = surname initial of Rose Mary Roisindubh, the young women who recites the poem; m = surname initial of Cédric Maridet, sound artist; p = poem, specially written for this piece, by Rui Cascais Parada; 2250 fps = total duration of the video in terms of frames per second in Phase Alternating Line (PAL) mode.

Construing the final result measurement of (2) according to the meaning of (1) is to advert that the time interval to the outside observer (who is watching the video) has "dilated" to exactly one minute and a half in terms of world clock.

VI. Conclusion

Hypothetical speaking, this video piece is in fact an artificial landscape of what, in reality, we cannot see or hear in-between the two digital images, #5.14 and #3.25 (observed in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2), and hence it can only be assumed as a mental place, which "reveals the subject as much as the object, the image as much as reality, in a continuous oscillation between aesthetics and science. As a mirror of the world's uni-duality, landscape, both *in situ* and *in visu* represents an ideal field of confrontation for the scapes born in the digital era." [7, p.8]

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