

The Analysis of the Artwork

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While the Greek etymology of analysis means “dis-solution,” analysis as a thinking practice (which has been theorized since the ancient times, initially in the realm of geometry¹) involves the related idea of a “breaking up”²: the first experience of it may be considered that of a child breaking a toy to understand its internal structure, and the way it works. Modern thought has reinforced this “decompositional” conception of analysis, which “found its classic statement in the work of Kant at the end of the eighteenth century” and “set the methodological agenda for philosophical approaches and debates in the (late) modern period (nineteenth and twentieth centuries).” (Beaney, 2012)³ Hegel asserted the importance of analysis within the movement of thinking itself:

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Analysis of an idea, as it used to be carried out, did anyhow consist in nothing else than doing away with its character of familiarity. To break up an idea into its ultimate elements means returning upon its moments, which at least do not have the form of the idea as picked up, but are the immediate property of the self. Doubtless this analysis only arrives at thoughts which are themselves known elements, fixed inert determinations. But what is thus broken up into parts, this unreal entity, is itself an essential moment; for just because the concrete fact is self-divided, and turns into unreality, it is something self-moving, self-active (Hegel, 1910: 30).

As Hegel does here, philosophy often links analysis to synthesis (mainly by opposing them, see Hügli and Lübke, 2005): deconstructive and reconstructive processes are two moments within the process of thinking, as René Descartes’ *Discourse on the Method* (1637) clearly stated. But art is not philosophy, and the analysis of the artwork has to reject philosophical drives to abstractness (as

stated by Descartes: “analysis shows the true way by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically and as it where a priori” (in Cottingham, Stoothof, and Murdoch, 1985: 110)). Contemporary artwork’s analysis has a more particular aim: to understand the way the artwork works, which in its broader sense implicates also the specific way of thinking it is able to create. It is important to notice, together with Hegel, the importance for analysis to move from (*aufheben*) what we already know (*Bekanntsein*); but also the need to recognize the dynamic dimension proper to every “idea” or, we will say, of every artwork.⁴

The understanding of the artwork is a multifolded process, starting from the direct experiencing of it, and its relationship to our sociocultural “horizon of expectations” (Hans-Robert Jauss, 1982). The artwork’s configurations and structures will last within memory, both nourishing new experiences in life and informing the reception of other artworks. Being processes, psychological perception and mental cognition develop in time, so that memorial structures (formal memory), their displacements or shifts (migrating memory), as well as dialogue and intellectual debate are at stake during the whole comprehension of the artwork. While all contemporary art may be understood in relation to the “media world,” analyzing media art is a practice intended to understand a specific kind of artwork, the media artwork, that is, the most common form of art of our times. Media artworks will here be understood as works of art involving links, overlaps, and transformations between and beyond different mediums, giving particular attention to the most recent ones.

Analysis tries to reach a better understanding of the artwork through a rational (explicative and falsifiable) argumentation,⁵ which tries to reflect upon its general configuration and its shared or sharable meanings. Experience and memory become now a less important element, while the attempt to embrace the entire work through methodic instruments becomes the main issue. Although the field of art is not considered a “scientific” domain, analysis bets the artwork to be a rational process, which organizes its form and content, solving some problems and bringing about new ones. Analysis finds out the artwork’s material organization and its internal work, be it a conscious or an unconscious process. Analysis restricts the part of the institutional producer and that of the singular receptor, and focalizes onto the work itself as a disposition and interaction between different (homogeneous or heterogeneous) material elements that link them to a larger cultural and social context to be interpreted.

Ideally, analysis gives the same importance to every element of the artwork while trying to find an interpretative path. At the same time, the reading of the artwork cannot be independent from the interpretation we give to it, and the questioning of that relation is the motive behind analysis. The first

step in analyzing an artwork is an adherence to the artwork: being close to it justifies the necessity of a respectful descriptive basis, while the interpretative act is concerned with the matter of the artwork. On the other side, analysis cannot be a pure objectivist explanation. It inevitably contains what Martin Heidegger defined as a “violent” moment: the effort, through interpretation, to grab an unsaid secret from the artwork (Heidegger, 1962).

We may also consider, more generally, that the analyst has to trace its own path within the artwork, inscribing the unavoidable necessity of a subjective drive, and of the analyst’s desire (as Jacques Lacan proposed in his reinvention of psychoanalysis, see his 1964 article “Du ‘Trieb’ de Freud et du désir du psychanalyste” (in Lacan, 1966)) and pleasure/bliss (as Roland Barthes did in his post-semiotic activity⁶). Nevertheless, everything in analysis is geared towards an objective consideration of the artwork: to discover shared questions and to link together internal (to the particular artwork) and external contents. Proceeding from a scientific drive, the analysis of the artwork participates in an ideal of shareable rationality, belonging to the long tradition of the Enlightenment project and to immanent, inductive methods in post-Galilean science; along this path, the place of the observer, his/her desire, and subjectivity have assumed an increasingly important place in the analytical process, sometimes shaking analysis’ basis and legitimacy. That is the contemporary tension between objective and subjective drives within an analytical process.

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As we will see throughout this chapter, the analysis of an artwork develops through four distinct, although interconnected, moments: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. All of them are consubstantial to the analytical process, even if to different extents. Their order is going from the more objective to the more subjective, so that interpretation and judgment are more debatable steps in the analytical process. We could simplify the main questions advanced within analytical moments as follows: what? (description), how? (analysis), why? (interpretation), what for? (judgment). The first three steps may be somewhat compared to the three levels of signification within an artwork, as proposed by Erwin Panofsky (1972):

1. Primary, or natural subject matter: it corresponds to simple denotation, factual recognition of elements, like figures and motifs in painting (pre-iconological level);
2. Secondary, or conventional subject matter: linked to cultural codes, it allows the viewer to recognize connotative meanings such as, for instance, symbols or allegories (iconography);
3. Tertiary, or intrinsic meaning: giving a whole interpretation, it explains the way an artwork is made according to its social and historical context (iconology).

Within the analytical process, we may consider the simple level of recognizing figures and forms as developing through description; then we try to understand the structure and functions within the artwork, reorganizing its matter according to some great axes, already opening to interpretation (the conventional subject matter already implicates an interpretative act in Panofsky's system); finally, we consider cultural significations according the particular forms and processes of the artwork (corresponding, in a way, to Panofsky's "tertiary" meaning).⁷ Panofsky's iconology is adapted to understand a particular moment in the history of painting and to link it to cultural history, while media aesthetics has to follow its own characteristics and to wonder about its contemporaneity to the artworks it is trying to understand. Nevertheless, both models share the search for precise, rational criteria and for in-depth discursive explorations of the artwork. To Panofsky, the three levels of meaning are meant to be autonomous from the artist's expressive intentions, transcribing non-subjective issues and aiming for "objective" explanations. Analysis, too, tries to reach an objective status through logical (inductive/deductive/abductive) arguments, but it is more and more open to the analyst's subjectivity and to interpretative pluralism. As we will see, my proposition about "judgment" as a necessary foundational moment within analysis will try to synthesize those issues.

Let us now begin our path through artwork's analysis. Each section will be followed by examples of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment, respectively, conducted by "le Silo," a group of French scholars studying the interactions between arts; they chose to study Harun Farocki's video installation *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* (2006) (see Fig. 5.1 in color section).⁸

1. DESCRIPTION

Describing is a process of translation,⁹ mainly into verbal mediums: it involves the passage from media artwork's own semiotic characteristics into words, that is, from "secondary modeling systems" into the primary one, natural language (Lotman, 1977).¹⁰ Description combines meaningful concentration and faithfulness, in order to give a simple and homogeneous recollection (mental image) of an object, person, event, activity, or process (or parts of them). Within our discourse, its function is to prepare the analytic gesture, without considering other possible aims like preserving, cataloguing or archiving the artwork. Ideally, description does not explicate, it is a simple account: that means to represent the artwork's form and content to a public interested in understanding it better and more deeply through analysis. But description

maintains a relative “opacity” to interpretation: while inevitably selective, it aims to be “meaningless” and, like Panofsky said elsewhere, it shall be considered something like a “stupid” operation. But “stupid” comes from the Latin word *stupor*: description is a constant oscillation between trying to fully transcribe the artwork, to reveal its details and internal links, and to respond to the initial astonishment it may (or may not) have given to us. Description itself has a heuristic value, for instance, when trying to discover aspects of the artwork that a first contact could have left unobserved, or that seem to be unconscious (which could be used for “symptomatic readings,” as we will see). Description means both a representation of the artwork and a patient spread of its details, to which the same attention and relevance are owed. The result is a first step towards going beyond what Hegel called *Bekanntsein*.

Description is a process of mediation, because it translates from one medium to another and from one language (or type of language) to another. Moreover, description is both reduction and addition, if compared to the media artwork. It reduces, because it transfers several elements, heterogeneous languages and mediums into one, generally written and homogeneous discourse; moreover, it gives often more relief to the artwork’s topic, proposing a sort of summary of it. On the other side, it adds to the text a detailed attention to its elements, similarities, and configurations, in order to support the paradoxical “discovery of what is there,” which is proper to analytical work. Describing may also be, in that sense, a much more “extended” operation than the original artwork: for instance, the detailed description of every element of a movie could take several weeks, and fill several thousands of pages.

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Description involves closeness to the artwork, ideally, as if we were describing each particular element of it. Usually, according to speech organization and writing’s characteristics, analysis develops itself in a linear way, following the temporal order of the artwork’s reception, be it promoted by the medium (like in movies, dramas, symphonies), by the artwork’s internal structure (e.g., historical paintings, old multimedia apparatuses like religious temples), or by our own “reading” of it (when analyzing multimedia apparatuses, like installations, interactive artworks, and even exhibition spaces like museums). Schemas may help to give some structural precision and fast visualizations, but they are already linked to a further step in analysis, the explicative reorganization of the matter revealing its structure, functions, and (per-)formative principles.

An artwork may be described as organized matter (even in conceptual and imaginary art, some materiality always remains) presented as a piece of art and organizing different elements, ideas, formal characters, and functions. In contemporary art, the contextual elements have become more and more important, reaching a sort of constitutive character “within” the artwork.

Questioning the active involvement and the role of the artist (or, more generally, the artwork's production), the status of the public (visitors, spectators, listeners, and so on), and introducing into the artwork process what Gérard Genette (1997) defined as "paratexts" (like manifestos, statements, social events around the artwork), contemporary art reinvents the status and borders of the artwork and redefines the rules of analysis. Description involves compromising between all these different actors and to consider also, beyond the "plot" and the formal structure, their intermediations, circulations and interactions. Media artwork proceeds from a specific aesthetical approach that needs specific language to be described. Its very apperception is often processional, and the description we make is linked, but not limited, to our experience of it (one which may also modify the artwork itself, like in interactive art).

The main criteria for the description of media artwork may be summarized as follows:

- a. immanence and adherence to the object (literalness);
- b. language adequacy (pertinence of translation);
- c. dynamic adequacy (pertinence of variation);
- d. meaningful concentration and extension (summarizing, skipping, condensation; attention to details, intensification of perception, precision);
- e. recognition of unsaid, implicit and repressed elements (retracing traces).

An Example of Description by "le Silo"

On the floor, twelve monitors of the same size show moving images. They are lined up and form a barrier of light emerging from the obscurity in which the installation is most often bathed. Across a distance of a few meters, a bench is available for those who want to sit to watch the images. A film sequence has been assigned to each monitor. For the sound sequences (six in all), headsets allow visitors to listen to the soundtrack.

From left to right, monitors display film sequences that cover the history of moving images from their inception to the contemporary period.¹¹ The first two monitors, devoted to the first decade of cinema, show two early films, one by the Lumière brothers (1895), the other by Gabriel Veyre (1899). Each monitor then singles out a different decade, represented by a selected sequence. This temporal journey has specific formal implications: it makes it possible to perceive evolutions, transformations, constants. The passage from black and white to color, the gradual arrival of sound, the diversity in the types of

images, documentary or fictional, or even coming from advertising – Farocki's sampling from this huge ensemble of images offered by cinema includes both minor images (commercial, or banal images) and more canonical ones.

What do these images show? A commonplace setting more or less easily identifiable: the gates of the factory, their immediate surroundings, crossed by the workers differently depending on the period and the type of images. A fixed set, a common stage which crowds come to cross and qualify: fleeing bodies (the Lumière brothers), enslaved bodies (Fritz Lang), imprisoned bodies (Slatan Dudow), fighting bodies (D.W. Griffith); or singular faces piercing through a logic of masses, that of Chaplin in *Modern Times*, that of Monica Vitti as the "witness" of *Red Desert*, that of the female worker at the Wonder factory refusing to go back to work after the strike. "Leaving the factory" is the motif these images endlessly replay in the formal brilliance of the sequence, a kind of crystalline unity for the history of cinema – from both the standpoints of meaning and form, as we will see. Short, long, condensed, figurative, literal, documentary, fictional, heavily edited, or lightly edited, these sequences literally show the critical power of cutting.

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2. ANALYSIS

The second phase is that of "analysis," strictly speaking. The analyst tries to understand the structure of the artwork, to make explicit the functions of its components, to explain its operational processes. Coming from the scientific field, the notion of "analysis" also implicates following a method, ensuring internal coherence. Analysis's methodical principles may be discussed, corrected and reinvented through an analyst's argumentation, but s/he has to be aware of its methodical assumptions, and to avow them as far as possible. You may also try to question the very basis of the analysis, discussing its criteria, but the operational moment – applying principles following a coherent strategy – has to be maintained. To be sure, a media art analyst should be attentive, sensible, and responsive to the interactions between different mediums, to the constitutional differences in terminology, and the way different elements interact (or not) in the whole structure and experience of the media artwork. Such an activity demands many different capabilities, both specific to single mediums and articulating in interplay.

The following schema gives an overview of some methods that may inform the analysis of the artwork:

- a. methodical analysis (following a specific analytical method: iconological,¹² structuralist,¹³ formalist,¹⁴ Marxist (Marx and Engels, 2006), sociological,¹⁵ semiotic,¹⁶ psychoanalytic,¹⁷ etc.);

- b. homothetic analysis (to follow the method that seems the most pertinent to analyze a specific artwork: for instance, Marxist analysis for Marxist artworks, non-psychoanalytic methods for Classical Greek tragedy);
- c. combined, crossing, dialectical analysis (practicing two or more methods);
- d. immanent analysis (to refuse or deny any existing methods in order to stay close to the artwork's material to find internal analytical truths).

Since Descartes, analysis is linked to the drive for simplification, for reduction. The Latin translation¹⁸ for the Greek word analysis was *resolutio*, which stresses the importance of “solution”, actualized by the cognitivist “problem-solving” model.¹⁹ While description tries to “break up” each particular element and to ignore teleological and interpretative a priori, the properly analytical moment introduces a drive for classification, aimed to understand the structure, principles, and rules of the way an artwork “works.” That means according to the specific way the artwork displays itself, linking its preparation to its reception: this way, analysis tries to represent the media artwork according to its apparatus and to the process it involves, not only dealing with it as a physical object.

William Kentridge's recent exhibition in Paris²⁰ was a major example of media dialectical integration, which aims to establish a form of consistency between different mediums while preserving a deep knowledge of each of them. Kentridge's work, beginning with painting and theater went on connecting together drawing, animation, film, and video in a particular environment experienced in time. Within that exhibition, each room set a particular environment and way of reception in time and space: in the first room, three artworks were reshaped in three contiguous spaces, articulating video projection, music and mechanical puppet theater in a theater-like setting with a seated audience: a fragmented, dialectical “total artwork” to achieve a *Trauerarbeit* for the bloody 20th century; the second room linked eight projections on the four walls (3+1+3+1 “screens”) of the piece's perambulatory space, generating various possible positions, for example, consecutive lecture, side-by-side analysis of two or three projections, and mirrorlike study of opposite-sided projections; the third room offered a simpler apparatus using a rotating zoetrope-like anamorphic display of turning projection. To Kentridge, art expresses the “impermanence and improvisationality of the world”: in a similar way, such aesthetics create impermanent apparatuses, varying the relational connections for the visitor, and offering him/her different mediums linked to different epochs (from drawing to opera, from eighteenth-century visual toys

to digital projections, and so on), that interact in a “contemporary” cultural reshaping. Analysis has to find out regularities and irregularities within the perceptive whole, and to give an order to its going back and forth between different scales of understanding it. Media artwork creates a circulation between homogeneous or heterogeneous elements.

An Example of Analysis by “le Silo”

For *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades*, Harun Farocki did some research for one year. He thoroughly tracked down the cinematographic theme of workers leaving the factory. His project involved three decisive moments: inquiry, cutting/sampling, and montage. His montage work includes, on the one hand, the analogical association of individual figures through excerpts and, on the other hand, the material assembly [*montage* in French, translator's note] of the installation in the exhibition room. Through which process does the analysis of twelve preexisting moving images compose a synthesis with its own logic and syntax, conveying a meta-sense both new and implicit in each of the constituent parts? The question determines one of the possible angles in the analysis of the work.

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Each moment in the production of the work refers to a distinct gesture. The first step in its production was the moment of documentation and historical inquiry. Through the history of cinema and moving images, Farocki set out to look for formal, stylistic, or ideological traces of one of the founding motifs of cinema. The second moment was that of the selection of excerpts and their sampling. This purely analytical gesture allowed him to distinguish between the similarities and the differences in the various excerpts. Finally, editing the excerpts within a new entity constituted the third moment in the work. Farocki put in place a demonstrative system at once paradigmatic and syntagmatic: paradigmatic because of the expressive variety of a single figure; syntagmatic due to the logic of chronological progression and technical improvement accomplished by cinema and perceptible in the succession of excerpts. On the one hand, the installation thus compresses time thanks to the narrative of a few episodes in the history of a specific cinematographic figure; on the other hand it infinitely stretches and prolongs the time of the repetition of the same figure. In short, Farocki proposes a new temporality, that of anachronistic viewing, both microscopic and macroscopic, between (the contents of) each individual image and (those of) the totality of images featured in the installation. The different durations of the excerpts make each screen vibrate with its own rhythm, adding to this double temporality and reinforcing the irregularity of the rhythm of the whole.

The core of Farocki's work is located at the very place of this articulation, at the intersection of a reflection on history and story, the local and the general, analysis and synthesis, the production of new meanings and the reproduction of old ones. The focal point in his process is the camera. From the Lumière camera to contemporary surveillance cameras, Farocki emphasizes a type of look deprived of subjectivity and consciousness. Behind the figure of the workers leaving the factory, the artist makes an inventory of the cameras filming them. Full-face, from behind, or in their midst, cameras confront workers in movement, let them move away or follow them. They fix them from afar or cling to their movements. Cameras then pass before or behind the boundary separating the factory from the street, placed at this intermediate space of the gates. They occupy the borderline, a virtual dividing line which points to a qualitative shift, the passage from one scale of values to another, rather than it separating two entities of a similar nature. The camera thus plays the part of a transformer. Situated in the space "between," it negotiates the change from the time of production to the time of leisure, and from the body of the anonymous crowd to characters.

3. INTERPRETATION

Having understood the structure and functioning of the artwork, the question of its interpretation comes to the foreground. For sure, interpretation is at work since the very beginning of the analytic path, and informs the single words and concepts we use, and the order of discourse itself. The very idea of understanding the artwork as an organized whole involves a complex play of evidence, assumptions and codifications: no "pure" description or analysis can be done, because that process simply cannot exist without our presuppositions, our desires, even our alienation, hidden behind technical, "objective" language. But description and analysis, as we have defined them, are also efforts to stay beyond interpretation, to resist to the temptation of imposing a meaning, to suspend the explanatory drive. The analytical process is a back-and-forth process linking distinct moments of the comprehension of the artwork in a coherent whole.

Interpretation is a very ancient practice we find in ancient Greece, one which finds in Hermeneutics its own discipline: the Greek god Hermes was the "messenger," the go-between different worlds, mostly divine and human ones. But he also was the god of commerce and trickery: interpretation has to do with truth and falsity, with communicative ambiguities and making sense out of them. Hermeneutical theory is historically linked to the public organization of meaning, that is, to power and ideology, mostly related to sacred

texts, like in Jewish and Christian biblical exegesis. A great separation informs two main interpretative strategies, searching for – if we use medieval categories – literal or spiritual (e.g., metaphorical, allegorical, unspoken) meanings: such an opposition was represented since the beginnings of Christianity by the Antiochene and Alexandrine schools, the latter centered on the recognition of allegories, the former not willing to transcend literal meanings. Medieval theology has formalized the interpretation of the Scriptures according to these two main senses,²¹ unfolding the spiritual one in a “threefold division.” This gives four levels of meaning in the text: literal (or historical) sense on one hand, and allegorical, tropological (moral), and anagogical senses on the other hand.²²

Let us consider, for instance, Aldo Tambellini’s black-and-white piece *Black* using 1,000 slides, 16mm film, TV managers, and 30 children. This is his contribution to the early “video art” TV broadcasting produced by David Oppenheim, *The Medium Is the Medium* (1969). In order to reflect upon the “social concept” of Blackness and to show (Black) power, he made a series of works both using different mediums and mixed media, as in this case. Our interpretation of the broadcasted piece may be literal, close to the formal matter, to the interplay between and beyond mediums, to the articulation of figuration and abstraction, and of stillness and movement; but we may also be making meaning out of its philosophical and ideological implications, the research of Black’s beauty as a means to express Black people’s issues; the use of negative images of the children to make a sort of Hegelian “negation of negation,” to move beyond representation but also against the idea of Black people as the opposite of “civilization”; the insistence on circular motifs as a mean to express the reference to the vision (the eye), and to link cosmic images to almost documentary ones; the use of visual pulsation as an energetic drive mixing video and film potentialities; the use of mixed voices of Black children to express the pluralistic openness and dynamism of an emerging subject in history, fighting for freedom and self-determination.

Modern hermeneutics as a study of interpretation deployed itself as the attempt to explain an artwork’s hidden significations.²³ Laicization of hermeneutical practices extended religious exegesis into philology, trying to find out the original text from different versions of it (i.e. its “tradition”). In occidental traditions, the written text remains the main object of interpretation, but it progressively enlarged into a larger “semiotic” frame, involving every possible search for meaning within communicative contexts. A new polarization arose in modern hermeneutics between “objectivist” and “subjectivist” interpretations, the former considering the autonomous existence of a text according to the author’s intentions, the latter involving the reader as the main actor of interpretation. This opposition between drive for “meaning” and drive for “sig-

nificance” was formalized, for instance by Eric Donald Hirsch, Jr., defending the second option against the dominant formalism of New Criticism’s “close reading” of the text. Such an opposition seems to reproduce that between two different fields, involving specialized jobs: critics, and academic research. The contemporary cultural field partially blurs such a separation: artworks themselves often propose their own explanations, and interpretative practices articulate increasingly subjective and objective drives. Interpretation is no longer seen as an intellectual, abstract operation, while senses, especially in the case of media environments, play a more important role; they just shall root themselves in objective configurations and develop through argumentative discourse to remain within analysis’s expanded frame. In a period of modernist “freezing” of modernity as an historical ideology, Susan Sontag (1966) stressed such a need for sensual lectures of art (an “erotics of art”). While acting like a reaction against dogmatic and univocal theories, this criticism goes beyond the need for restoring the subjective dimension of critical writing, but it is also important for analytical purposes. In our “postmodern” times we have the opposite problem: a sort of dictatorship of the emotional, a new Superego dogma created by contemporary capitalism that Slavoj Žižek repeatedly formalized as the “injunction to enjoy.”

Philosophers like Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer mostly represent contemporary hermeneutics as an enlarged practice of interpretation. They established the notion of the “Hermeneutic circle” as a back-and-forth process between explicit and implicit meaning, linked by Heidegger to the personal experience of the interpreter. So, hermeneutics shapes a new place for the visitor, spectator, and analyst him-/herself: Gadamer’s idea of art as a “representation for” someone opens the way to contemporary forms of “relationality” (Bourriaud, 2002). The social and political impact of a media artwork tends to go beyond the limits of the art field and to involve “real” life, often while using “virtual” technologies such as digital platforms to achieve it. Such a theory of media involvement in everyday life as an “extension” of the human field finds its origins in Marshall McLuhan’s “communicative” – more than simply “communicational” – utopia, intended to abolish the distinction between artistic mediums and socio-political media: technologies become the main operators to create “communities.” Having involved into the media artwork, the process of interpretation displaces itself from simply decoding and making sense from a formal configuration, and wonders about the social implications, relational questions, and temporal (Birnbbaum, 2007) evolutions of the artwork.

As I mentioned, the artwork itself may contain interpretative drives, inscribed in its form: self-referent criticism and statements about art, all that which is generally called “reflexivity,” a main modernist exigency. A radicalized form of this analysis within the media artwork is the reconsideration of

artworks within the same medium or through appropriation and recoding (Foster, 1985), such as in “visual studies” – a way of thinking about cinema using cinema’s own means and material as is done in the film *Visual Essays: Origins of Film* (Al Razutis, 1973-1984), or through video, as in the video project *Histoire(s) du cinema* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1988-1998) (see Brenez, 1998: 313-335). Or we may consider Piero Bargellini’s 16mm film *Trasferimento di modulazione* (1969) as another example of reinventing the transfer within the medium. Bargellini shoots the 16mm projection of a pornographic film, reworking the image during development, to let the image show the “latent image” hidden within representation, in the matter of the support. An author may also come back to his own work, as Michael Snow did in the digital “condensation” of his own seminal 16mm film *Wavelength* (1967), which for him has to be seen only as a film screening (see Fig. 5.2 in color section). He took his own film and fragmented it in three parts of the same length, superimposing the three pictures and soundtracks and obtaining a digital work lasting one-third of the original one: the result, the DVD *WVLNT: Wavelength For Those Who Haven’t The Time* (2003), is also a theoretical statement about digital video, by a multimedia artist whose work articulates the specificities of particular mediums (painting, drawing, collage, sculpture, installation, music, photography, film, video...).

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To conclude, we can summarize the methods for the interpretation of the artwork into the following typology:

- a. holistic methods: interpreting the entire artwork in the most exhaustive way;
- b. fetishistic methods: to concentrate on details that dazzle the analyst or her/his desire, and considering them as revelators for the whole and/or the only relevant ones to give an interpretation;
- c. dialectic methods: to articulate the particular and the general reflecting upon the meaning of different levels of interpretation, in order to find and go beyond interpretative contradictions.

On the other side, as for the relation between the artwork and its contextual elements:

- a. circular paradigm: interpretation as a practice centered on the reciprocal, sometimes tautological, relationships between the artwork and its context, (for instance, the Hermeneutic circle, or the “mirror theories” in Marxist hermeneutics);
- b. symptomatic paradigm: to concentrate on details as traces of the artwork’s “truth,” of the artist’s subconscious or unconscious, of a collective *Kunstwollen*. This is a mainly negative and fragmentary paradigm that tries to find out a general meaning from the inverted reading of particular aspects of it;

- c. deconstructive paradigm: considering the artwork as having no exteriority (“there is no outside to the text” (Derrida, 1976)): the opposition text/context itself becomes no more pertinent to the analyst.

An Example of Interpretation by “le Silo”

Less than a minute elapses between the opening and the closing of the doors, which is enough time to see about a hundred workers pass by, in the first film screened in front of a paying audience at a demonstration of the Lumière cinematograph in December 1895. The motif of exiting from the factory and this inaugural shot by the Lumière brothers first appeared in Farocki’s work in a documentary essay (*Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*, 1995), which was released in the context of the commemoration of the centenary of cinema. The undertaking was interpreted as announcing the movement triggered by the third Industrial Revolution, with factories gradually emptied of their workers,²⁴ as well as a genealogy of video surveillance in the workplace. The installation materialized eleven years later in the exhibition *Kino wie noch nie* presented in Vienna and curated by Farocki and Antje Ehmann. The film and the installation share a number of images, but understanding the latter as a mere transposition of the film into an exhibition space would be a mistake. First of all because in 1995 Farocki subjected the excerpts to slow motion, freeze frames, and repetitions, whereas in 2006 he simply exhibited them side by side, at a regular speed (due to the different durations of the excerpts, random montages are presented to the visitors). Besides, the director’s commentary disappeared in the installation and the experience of images changed as a consequence.

The alignment of the twelve monitors makes similarities and differences between excerpts visible, inviting one to observe a permanence of forms worthy of Warburg’s plates. The recurrence of images of metal gates, walls, and doors reinforces the parallel between the factory and the prison.²⁵ From a formal standpoint, the barrier of monitors reproduces the line of workers and stands in the way of the visitor’s movement. One has to walk around it, just as the Lumières’ workers exited the factory and the frame through the sides. The exhibition starts with their anonymous bodies in 1895, in a factory where photographic equipment was produced. By contrast, the work ends with the image of two stars playing the parts of workers, one an icon of modern cinema (Deneuve), the other an icon of the contemporary pop scene (Björk). In *Dancer in the Dark*, the character played by Björk gradually loses her sight, possibly the allegory of a working class gone blind and of a crisis of cinema.

The installation becomes a reflection on cinema and its history. The progression over decades allows one to observe the evolution of technique, from

black and white to color, from film to digital, from silent to sound, one turning point being Griffith's editing in shot/reverse shot (in fact Griffith did appear in another installation by Farocki, presented in the same 2006 exhibition in Vienna). While the gesture of laying out the monitors on the floor evokes Jackson Pollock, their assembly is reminiscent of Douglas Gordon's and Nam June Paik's piles of television sets. Lower than the spectator and freed of any commentary, the film sequences may not suggest the end of cinema, but rather its exit from a conventional habitat, the theater and its darkness, in order to move into art spaces.

4. JUDGMENT

At first sight, the act of judgment may seem to be an external one, when we think of analysis as an objective and shareable practice.²⁶ Analysis as a "scientific" practice is founded on the repression of personal judgment of value or taste, as well as any form of normative a priori. But such a denial should not be taken for granted, for four reasons at least. First, an artwork always takes position within a context: its interpretation leads one to wonder about its signification, situation, and qualities. Second, as a boundary moment of analysis, judgment defines an internal path linking the artwork's statements and the analyst's point of view, involving her/his drives and desires. The artwork faces the world (or turns against, or away from it) in its own time and space, while the analyst judges from another context and following criteria that may be similar (and even homological), or not. Third, evaluative criteria – as beauty, necessity, newness, truth, relevance, etc. – orient the very choice of the object of analysis, and inform its own deployment. For instance, "masterpieces" are often considered the most creative, thoughtful, intense configurations, and also the most productive for analytical activity. Finally, the interpretative moment in analysis cannot help to open analytical process to judgment. As Adorno wrote: "understanding and criticism are one" (1997: 262).

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Judgment informs the very presuppositions of the analysis: the simple alternative between analyzing and judging is a false one, or better an ideological one, because methodical choices are far from neutral. For instance, limiting its means to words, and to a specific, reduced language, analysis tries to make us discover something more regarding the artwork's work, but reveals also its own partiality, as a practice separate from the proper movement of art. An artwork always posits itself and intervenes in a social, cultural, historical, political frame. The analyst's judgment arises from the encounter between the positions expressed within the artwork and the fundamental desire of the analyst, and the site of his/her pleasure. The most immanent analysis, the

most objectivist one, cannot escape the question of judgment: while trying to evacuate it, the “scientific” posture can only repress, not eliminate it. On the other side, analysis differentiates itself from a simple “everything’s subjective” post-modernist posture, assuming the necessity for searching objective validation in the artwork’s matter.

There are also historical reasons for the repression of judgment in analytical activity. In modern times, judgment has been hypostatized as a partial activity, a “job”: criticism. Nowadays, we observe criticism’s crisis (also on economic grounds), which is a sort of etymological paradox, because the “criticism” involves the act of putting in crisis something in order to judge it. Such a remark makes us understand the analysis of the artwork from a sociological basis: it develops itself as a specialized activity within academic institutions, and is mainly reserved for paid professionals of analysis, and to university students. More generally, when academic disciplines try to wonder about the objects they study, they often pretend to evade the question of judgment. Analysis, like scientific research, has to create a fracture from moral, religious, or aesthetic rules, which could give a predetermined dimension to its proper activity. Analysis’s autonomy inscribes the price of its separateness, but its solitude is full of memories: among them, critical judgment may become the most important one, that which gives the direction to go through the “post-modern” desert.

The paradigms of judgment may be resumed in the following way:

- a. internal coherence between means and ends (Aristotelian);
- b. normative adequacy (for instance, “necessity”);
- c. aesthetic comprehension;
- d. judgment of taste;
- e. denial of judgment;
- f. dialectical judgment.

All of these approaches to judgment may unfold in a key moment of analysis, for instance at the beginning or at the end, to explain the choice of an artwork or a particular way of analyzing it. That is the moment where analysis shows it is aware of its limits, but also of its necessary grounding in something external to the analytical process. Judgment represents the border and the place for conciliation between aesthetics and analysis, between the necessity of theorizing art and the everyday practice of understanding artworks.

An Example of Judgment by “le Silo”

“Leaving the factory” looks in many ways like cinema’s own attempted departure for the rooms of museums, as it turns its back on the historical arrangement of the theater after a century of existence. The trajectory outlined by Farocki’s installation does not ignore this departure, nor does it omit a detour through video (and television). Still, and notwithstanding the many qualities we acknowledge in the work, the concern for questioning this recent “museal condition” of cinematographic images distinguishes Farocki’s output from countless others, interested in this change of scene only for the new formal possibilities it promises. Farocki’s work, under few illusions as to the “ruses of museal reason,” does not fail to engage in a genuine dialogue with the forms of discourse privileged by the institution. *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* therefore presents the advantage of proposing a reflection which is more than necessary on the pillars of the regime of meaning conveyed by the museum: the collection, the exhibition, the transfer of knowledge, notably, and, more particularly, the heuristic value of analogy (the system of resemblances) predominantly orienting museal practices (incidentally, the sphere of influence of analogical thought largely exceeds this field). Indeed, the proximity of Farocki’s rhetoric with this form of thought is real – compiling (*Der Ausdruck der Hände / The Expression of the Hands* [1997]), comparing (*Verleihen über ein Drittes / Comparison via a Third* [2007]), assembling (*Deep Play* [2007]), taking apart and putting back together – but it clearly appears as a subtle shield against the rapture of “correspondences” even as it refers to Baudelaire, Malraux, Warburg... Farocki does not mix up means and ends: the horizon of his work is not the revelation of resemblances (an operation he leaves for the images he calls “operative images,” subject to the intelligence of machines, that is, essentially, solely to their capacity for recognition). On the contrary, this horizon is the production of differences. What is striking in *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* (as in a Vertov interval) are discontinuities: formal discontinuities (chromatic ones, for instance), generic discontinuities (fiction vs. documentary), and above all historical discontinuities (those which mark the history of work, of public space, of women, etc.). While we have never been as much in need of experiencing the distance between images, Farocki’s gaze may be one which, going against the grain of museal reason, contributes to sharpening differences with the monomaniac mind and the discourses of the “same” that tend to set themselves up as a method.

NOTES

- 1 Its main adaptation to philosophical thought is to be found in Aristotle's logic, and in particular in the Analytics' theory of the syllogism.
- 2 "The process of breaking up a concept, proposition, linguistic complex, or fact into its simple or ultimate constituents." (from "Analysis" in Audi, 1999).
- 3 Coming from an analytical philosopher, such a statement should be deflated, but it interests us to underline the particular dominance of "decomposition" within modern analysis.
- 4 A more subtle link between Hegel's quote and our concerns about art may be traced: Hegel writes on the analysis of a "*Vorstellung*" (from *vor-stellen*, "to put forward, in front of"), which also means "(re)presentation," "mental picture," "imagination."
- 5 "Rational" has to be understood as a coherent argumentation, which follows the drive for clarification affirmed by modern culture of the Enlightenment (the "Age of Reason"). In Kantian terms, it should be assumed that what is at stake in an analysis of artwork is "theoretical," not "practical," analysis (thus, always in Kantian terms, the analyst seems to represent within his/her gesture the main character of art, its "disinterestedness").
- 6 Starting from his very passionate interpretation of Japanese culture in *Empire of Signs* (1983), and the pluralistic explosion of interpretative possibilities represented by *S/Z. An Essay* (1975a). See also Barthes (1975b).
- 7 It should be evident that the comparison with Panofsky is meant to facilitate the understanding of possibilities more than to define an exact parallelism. Some noticeably great differences involve the second step, and the whole project is a synchronic coexistence of significations, in Panofsky's system, while our path develops in time through different moments, even if every moment may question its relationship to the other ones.
- 8 Harun Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* (2006). Video installation for twelve monitors, black and white/color, sound, 36', loop.
- 9 "The transposition or the translation of values and structures from one expressive sphere to another" (Pächt, 1999).
- 10 To be completed by this particular remark by Jacques Aumont: "The words are much less numerous than visual experiences, that are almost infinitely variable" (Aumont, 1996: 202).
- 11 In order of appearance, the following films may be seen: Auguste and Louis Lumière, *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* (*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*), France, 1895, 42 s; Gabriel Veyre, *Sortie de la briqueterie Meffre et Bourgoin à Hanoi*, France, 1899, 42 s; director unknown, excerpt probably shot in Moscow, 1912, 58 s; D.W. Griffith, *Intolerance*, USA, 1916, 2 min 30 s; Fritz Lang, *Metropolis*, Germany, 1926, 1 min 40 s; Charles S. Chaplin, *Modern Times*, USA, 1936, 42 s; Slatan

- Dudow, *Frauenschicksale*, Germany, 1952, 33 s; Michelangelo Antonioni, *Deserto Rosso* (Red Desert), Italy, 1964, 4 min 45 s; Jacques Willemont, *La reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, France, 1968, 9 min 33 s; Jean-Marie Straub, Danielle Huillet, *Trop tôt, trop tard*, France/Germany, 1981, 10 min 15 s; Durchfahrtssperren DSP®, commissioned elkostar®, Germany, 1987, 1 min 11 s; Lars von Trier, *Dancer in the Dark*, USA, 2000, 1 min 47 s.
- 12 The seminal work by Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (1603), established the distinction between the simple description through written texts (iconography) and the interpretation of art images (iconology). At the beginning of the 20th century, Aby Warburg extended this approach to all sorts of cultural images, followed by Panofsky (1972).
 - 13 Founded by linguistic methods like Saussure's, and the Prague or Moscow schools, structuralism was reinvented through Claude Lévi-Strauss' approach to anthropology. The structural method supposes the existence of a coherent structure to be discovered (for me: within the artwork).
 - 14 Going back to Russian Formalism of the 1910s (see Steiner, 1984).
 - 15 Linked to Marxist "de-sublimating" tradition, sociology of art has an influential landmark in György Lukacs's pre-Marxist *Theory of the Novel* (1974), originally published in 1916. See Tanner (2003); for the analysis of the sociological art "field" see Bourdieu (1996 and 1993).
 - 16 After the seminal work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles S. Peirce, see Barthes (1967). See also (Nöth, 1997).
 - 17 Sigmund Freud in 1910 himself started this approach to artworks with his book on Leonardo da Vinci (1990), in which he claims to find a latent homosexuality through biographical statements and formal analysis.
 - 18 Noticeably, by Thomas Aquinas, see Sweeney (1994).
 - 19 See D'zurilla and Goldfried (1971); Newell and Simon (1972). No need to repeat it again: the scientific drive for analysis is linked to the history of its concept, but it has to be questioned, as the aesthetic is not a scientific field.
 - 20 William Kentridge, *Five Themes*. Curated by Mark Rosenthal in collaboration with W. Kentridge. Museum Jeu de Paume, Paris, 29 June – 5 September 2010.
 - 21 Its most famous systematization is Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (1265–1274).
 - 22 According to Hugh of St. Victor's (c.1096–1141) *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*, allegorical and anagogical levels express – respectively – visible and invisible facts.
 - 23 Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) considerably helped the art of interpretation to become fully applicable to non-sacred texts.
 - 24 This idea appeared in Klaus Gronenborn's review of the 1995 film, published in the Hildesheimer Allgemeine Zeitung on 21 November 1995, and reproduced on Farocki's website (farocki-film.de, last access: 30 April 2012). It echoes a recurring

gesture in Farocki's cinema, that of analyzing images of the past in the light of later advances in knowledge.

- 25 The comparison becomes unavoidable with the seventh monitor: in the excerpt from *Frauenschicksale* (Slatan Dudow, 1952), leaving the prison leads to the factory (work being a path to redemption). Already, on the previous screen, the tramp was shown leaving the factory, only to board a police car (*Modern Times*, 1936).
- 26 Analysis would be "not evaluative nor normative" (Odin, 1977). This statement has to be corrected as a "relative autonomy" of analysis from judgment.

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