

Research Article

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The Plural/Singular in Pierre Huyghe's Interventions in the 1990s

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Abstract: The essay aims to reexamine the underlying contexts and the nature of site-specific projection in *Light Conical Intersect* by Pierre Huyghe by addressing the critical intervention of Gordon Matta-Clark in public space. The essay offers a broad overview of the contexts and the nature of light metaphors. The aim of this research is to delve into how these sorts of light interventions stimulate the debate concerning the public sphere via live events. The essay moves from the approach of using a cone light across the gallery space to one that reflects the cone whole cut in a construction building. It finally illustrates a site-specific projection of the documentary footage from the intervention 20 years later. The crucial point is that layered superposition in projection is a special attribute of the interventions in the nineties of the twentieth century. The essay concludes that the theoretical framework of “plural/singular” arts articulated by Jean-Luc Nancy enables us to retrace the artistic contexts of cone-shaped installations that operate with a circumscribed reservoir of iconographic and thematic components.

Keywords: plural/singular, intervention, projection, public art, cinema effect, embeddedness, homage, remake, cone light

Introduction

The purpose of my article is to reexamine cinematic interventions considered site-specific projections by re-employing recycled forms of expression, beginning with the transition from original works to the “invented tradition.”¹ To elaborate on this intervention, I shall discuss the aesthetic underpinnings of practice by witnessing further interest in the relationship between the nature of an image and the place where it has been displayed. Pierre Huyghe's focus concerns the re-employment of images to evoke reflection on memories of the past. First, I assume that it is possible to apply to the site specific projections from the tools worked out by Jean-Luc Nancy, in order to understand the kind of experience *Light Conical Intersect* (1996) by Pierre Huyghe builds up for their spectators. Second, I suppose that this may help us to trace a history of site-specific interventions taken from the 1970s that explains the specific meaning of the conceptual dialogue between Pierre Huyghe, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Anthony McCall. Finally, I assume that reason for the theoretical adequacy of the shift we propose is that, despite the differences in a formal context, light projection in the gallery, urban site-specific intervention, and urban projection have in common the fact that they can be deconstructive and highly critical. Crucial to the analysis is to take into account only particular works and to critically apply philosophical claims when seeking theoretical tools to demonstrate

¹ See (Hobsbawn and Ranger).

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the transition between the cinematic source and the new utilization of the same scene. According to Michael Rush, the key aspect of Huyghe's particular works is that "Huyghe's digital videos utilize cinematic techniques (dolly shots, tracking), but not toward narrative ends. He disrupts the narrative tension of films in order to create a new relationship between the viewer and the action" (Rush 200). Following Jean-Luc Nancy's claims, I shall call this time-shift "an 'after-image' widespread between visual interventions and the wider context of audiovisual culture" (Connolly 29). In a similar vein, in the article entitled "The Task of Translator," Walter Benjamin emphasizes the importance of the afterlife of works of art, literature, science, or culture:

A translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife ... The philosopher's task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history. ... The history of the great works tells us about their descent from prior models, their realization in the age of the artists [or scientists], and what in principle should be their eternal afterlife in succeeding generations. (Benjamin 255)

The above passage indicates the contemporary post-cinematic tendency to rework and translate previously established works of art, thereby bringing them into new contexts whereby they gain new life via semi-otically enriched, new circumstances reflecting both new technologies and also aesthetically expanded forms of exposition. In particular, Pierre Huyghe has been defined as a recycler by some scholars "since their installations appropriate and examine the cinema as an art form and as a social and artistic idea" (Hoonkim 242). Based on this consideration, his works are distinguished by strategies of "re-enactment, re-making" (Connolly 35). This supposed re-employment of previously existing cinematic material is, however, "not quoted, it is redone, imitates by re-using the thing as it is" (Brenez 322). Accordingly, one might venture to say that the recycling strategy consists of utilizing "pre-existing forms in an intelligent manner" (Jullier 7). What is peculiar in his case is that these works exemplify an in-depth, conceptual strategy that draws upon the spectator's knowledge both of the history of art and also of the social history of the place itself. In Rush's view, "Huyghe reworks the original with a new 'collective' of actors whose interactions in real-time are more important to him than the narrative content of the film" (Rush 201). The current study would draw attention to the problem of "embeddedness," conceived as "an array of curatorial initiatives and discursive strategies that have been undertaken since the late 1990s and early 2000s, collectively described under the banner of New Institutionalism" (Rogoff URL). In order to reexamine the problem of transmission of light metaphors, let me provide historical insight to investigate how *mise-en-scène* has been replaced in the case of "Light Conical Intersect" (1996) by Pierre Huyghe by documentary film projections, thereby bringing together not only the tools of narrative but also the forms of establishing continuity with the past. As Nelson Goodman argued, "from the nature of metaphors derives some characteristic capacity of expression for suggestive allusion, elusive suggestion and intrepid transcendence of basic boundaries" (Goodman 93). This study takes up Jean-Luc Nancy's idea of the coexistence of "plural/singular" in the area of site-specific practices which renegotiate further meanings through construction sites of light projections. These represent transpositions in-between artistic media and deploy a circumscribed reservoir of iconographic and thematic components seen in the light of mirror reflections. "The cinema – or rather the 'cinema-effect'" – says Dubois, also "pervades the very concept of preparation of 'setting up' the art exhibition and the route through it, inspiring its lexis and absorbing its professions and b competences" (Laschi 24). The last section of the article reflects on the semiotic significance of the "plural singular" for analyzing the artistic potential of *Light Conical Intersect* (1996), projected 20 years later after *Conical Intersect* (1975) by Gordon Matta-Clark in the exact same site in Paris in the Clock District on 23 March 1996. This was determined by the complex tools in the narrative as a form of developing continuity with the past. Finally, this study raises the possibility of pluralization the voices of the community, according to Nancy, which might induce image theories that negotiate further meanings in reinvigorating old masterpieces by using digital tools that restore the past. To elaborate on the first concept conceived in terms of "plural-singular," I address two texts by Jean-Luc Nancy, one of which is devoted to the analysis of poetic inspiration (through the study of Plato's *Ion*) to introduce in this article the ways in which Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of sharing voices that build upon plural/singular aesthetics helps us to reveal conceptual affinities between the mentioned works. The second comparative level is the philosophical interpretation of Jean-Luc Nancy's account of the issue of creating new, complex

aspects of understanding in art. In brief, let us assume as a starting point that “the multiple idioms have taken hold in the world of video art as well” (Friedberg 219).

The Projection as an Intervention

In reflecting upon cinematic site-specific projection, one purpose is to reinvestigate how the nature of experimental, creative activity changes its surroundings. Importantly, it should be noted that “scale, size, and location of site-specific works are determined by the topography of the site, whether they be urban or landscape or architectonic enclosure” (Kwon 12). Furthermore, Miwon Kwon stressed that “the works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site” (12). By way of explanation, one may argue that the site-specific arrangements illustrate the transition from a “traditional space of aesthetic contemplation to a place for play, performance, public discussion, lectures, and so on” (Manovitch 222). The projections, opened freely to the public, may evoke plural meaning, as the ontic nature of spectacle exceeds the words to formulate abstract meaning. I shall provide a range of definitions (for terms such as site-specific and projection), making it possible to grasp the range of relationships between the performance and what is visible in the eyes of the viewer. Here the issue is addressed as follows:

from the literal sense of projecting onto support flows all the others: the translation on a plane of a three-dimensional geometric figure, the optical path of light rays projected by an image towards a screen, the imaginary elaboration from averaged facts or the transfer to others of affects or traumas from which one may protect the ego. Whether physical or mental transport, projection supposes a displacement and a transformation in space as in the time of which the cinematographic device will offer here the paradigm. (Campan 9)

In our contemporary world, there are a number of ways to examine the multiple projections, given the peculiar transformations of visual practice which result from light projection. In Raymond Bellour’s view, “the projection dispositive is the only evidence allowing, since always, but all the more in these times of mixtures and the hidden crisis, to specify the cinema as such inside the sphere of day by day larger images in movement and countless devices ready to welcome them” (Bellour 33). Taking this quote as a relevant point of reference in our article I shall underpin the particular case studies with the methodology of pluralization of arts (as proposed by Jean-Luc Nancy) to introduce the conceptual framework, considering that Huyghe extends our filmic vocabulary by using two scenes within film diegesis, including the extra-diegetic time differing the original production from the contemporary days. Based on these considerations, one may argue that the notion of projection can possess concealed meanings strictly associated with the past which are sometimes quite accessible, given the significant contextual problems with opening the reservoirs of hermeneutic knowledge, and the coexistence of time-based media.

Towards Pluralization

Making explicit reference to this conceptual homage, in the next passages I shall focus on how the idea of recycling time-based media oscillates in-between diegetic and extra-diegetic time in greater detail. Beginning with a project from the first part of the nineties, Françoise Chaloin reminds us that in *Barbès-Rochechouart Site* (Paris 1994), “you got the actors to play the part of workmen on the site and actors to pose for all the billboards you subsequently produced. It’s worth remembering that these billboards, which appeared in places especially earmarked for their presence, represented the situation as it occurred on those very sites” (Chaloin 86). From a slightly different angle, one might similarly note that in *Versions Multiples, or Little Story* (1995), as Jean-Christophe Royaux has argued, Pierre Huyghe

uses three 4 × 3 meter posters dispersed in the city, showing the same person at three distinct moments of a moment from the city center toward the periphery, the modes of reading deployed in the work are of a syntactic nature: a spatial reading based on simultaneity and without a vertical, directed, and 'deep' hierarchy of time. (Royoux 118)

The underlying idea of repetition re-entangled in a new context is reflected in the video footage of a shot-by-shot remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, comprising Pierre Huyghe's work entitled *Remake* (1995). Highly inspired by Hitchcock's own shots and framings, the main variation unveils the story where the characters are now played by unknown French actors and the setting has been transposed to a poorer French suburb. The main difference concerns the fact that the actor playing Grace Kelly's role does not invest himself psychologically in the part.

In a similar vein, Pierre Huyghe's projection was screened on the wall of the Horloge district where Matta-Clark's building intervention occurred, aiming to provide a "cinema-effect," as Philippe Dubois argued, "by "setting up" the art exhibition in public space. The installation of moving images in public spaces ... seems to disappear in favor of that "point"" (Laschi 28). It may be said that the visible surface covered by the narrative represents "the plural/singular image" treating "the spectator as a medium of environmental experience making the shift from the private (from the circumscribed, the institutional) to the public understood in terms of architectonic and urban space, recognizing these as central issues" (Laschi 23). As Marie Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier puts it, in the writings of French philosopher, the singular art:

created within context each of the arts is seen in its fiction, integrating the other, the plural of art does not cover the plurality of the arts, and by the confrontation of the arts, the internal break-up of art, or language, always double of its other that cannot be incorporated, since it is self-evident. (145)

In this intricate relationship in which the arts interact with each other, Nancy argued that the

representation as hypotypopsis, as placed right before the eyes, and as *mise-en-scène*, as production of the truth in praesentia: in all these respects, representation plays a decisive role within the framework of a vision of the regeneration of "race", of Europe, of humanity. Furthermore, although I cannot dwell on it here, we must nonetheless not forget how an entire epoch called for and inaugurated such as a role for (re)presentation. (Nancy 2009, 36)

To paraphrase, in Nancy's view, the *Bild* has a long and complex history in German Idealism "designates the image in its form or fabrication – comes from a root (*bil-*) that designates a prodigious force or a miraculous sign: It is in this sense that there is a monstrosity of the image. The image is outside the common sphere of presence because it is the display of presence" (Nancy 22). One might note that if the thought of art necessarily implies the plurality of the arts – and therefore questions the relationships, of scale and differences, of exchange and transgression – we recall with Jean-Luc Nancy, as Ropars-Wuilleumier reiterates, that this

aesthetic pluralization is practiced within each of the arts; and it will be noted that, for literature in any case, as it is exhibited and its fictions, the strangeness denies precisely because it is impossible to integrate the other. (Ropars-Wuilleumier 146)

In other words, Ropars-Wuilleumier argued that the arts are combined with each other in different manners, although they are not fully unified, fused, coalesced. The problem with this plurality lies in the fact of concealing, confronting, and doubling, as "the plural of art does not reopen not the plurality of the arts, and the simulacrum transactional would thus have the sole function of concealing, through the confrontation of the arts, the internal invasion of the arts, or of language, always double of its other, which it could not incorporate since it depends on itself alone" (146).

Bearing in mind this aesthetic lesson of pluralism of arts within one work may lead one to stress both the intermingling of temporalities and the coexistence of plural works within one shape.

As Nancy powerfully elaborates through the reading of contemporary fragmentation of arts the main hallmark in Huyghe's work is the combination of diegetic and extradiegetic time to co-create the impression of looking behind the scenes of the movie itself within the new interpretative context to gain self-awareness.

The New Perspective of the Urban Experience in *Conical Intersect*

Let us briefly introduce the origins of visual action, a sort of matrix for Huyghe's remake, a classical urban temporary work prepared by Gordon Matta-Clark to express oppositional views against urban modern transformations in the centre of Paris. In Nancy's words, Gordon Matta-Clark's interventions have been a "manifestation of presence, not as appearance, but as exhibiting, as bringing to light and setting forth" (Mulders 22). This site-specific construction was erected at the ninth Paris Biennale in 1975 within the last remnants of seventeenth-century tenement houses slated to soon be demolished to allow for the construction of the modernist Centre Pompidou, a modernized district on Rue de Beaubourg 27–29. Before that occurred, Gordon Matta Clark was invited in February 1975 to the ninth Paris Biennale. Alongside the photographic display of his previous projects, Matta-Clark asked for permission to intervene in the building on rue Beaubourg. An American artist was allowed to occupy this house to make tampered drilling until October 10. More specifically, the intervention expressed its opposition against significant urban transformations, the development of the negative "Beaubourg effect," as Jean Baudrillard called it: associated with the destruction of Les Halles, where the semi-detached stone house was located, and the narrow, open market had existed since the Middle Ages. In their place was constructed an underground supermarket and Centre National d'Art et de Culture, now known as Centre Georges Pompidou, erected on the building's south side, as well as the construction of a transport hub connecting passengers of suburban lines to the centre of Paris.

This counterpoint to the newly erected "cultural center" of Paris encompassed the tradition of urban planning defined as "haussmanization." In the film documentation of the whole process under the same title, an intervention illustrates the act of cutting up the whole building to recreate in the same place where it is constructed the vacant lot *Conical Intersect* in the process of shaping a circle 4 m in diameter. It gradually narrowed, moving upwards at a 45° angle to make a hole in the roof through the houses in an ascending direction at the level of the third and fifth floors, while the intersection remained visible from the street. While the houses were staying in an ascending direction the intersection remained clearly visible from the street "while the intersection remained clearly visible from the street" (Mulders 21). In brief, the process of cutting may be summarized as follows:

First, a semicircular opening was made on the sixth floor, and the fifth-floor walls and beams removed, with a hole on the north side forming a circle. Walls and floors encroaching on the length of the cone were taken out. This opening cut through the wall of the adjacent house reaching the roof, thus allowing light in the interior, and forming a peephole of sorts down onto the street. (Chieko 252)

Interpreting this passage of light in more detail, what may be stressed is that the underlying assumptions behind this context suggest that "the whole is not simply a central motif of the film, but precisely what structures and organizes its narrative" (Lee 176). The drilling of a gigantic hole in the building at 27–29 Beaubourg Street opened a view of the Centre Pompidou under construction to provided an insight into what comes after the demolition of this construction. In addition to Matta-Clark's cut in architectural construction, a conceptual link to a cut through time can be found in homage paid to Anthony McCall's movie. This periscope-like cone draws inspiration from the canvas of Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), in which the element of imitation presents the form of a beam of light emanating from this projector. Matta-Clarks' strategy adopts the employment of a conical light in a gallery, which is concerned with the circulation of light across the exhibition space, so as to draw attention to the cone hole cut from a constructed building. As Pamela Lee suggested, "This cone of light, a non-material form, apparently generated the idea for the spiraling cut in *Conical Intersect*" (Lee 2000, 176).

Significantly, *Conical Intersect* has been renamed "the Cyclops" addressing the mythological figure with one eye. Let us also note that the site-specific construction erected at the Paris Biennale on the last remnants of seventeenth-century houses has been destroyed to make way for the modernist Centre Pompidou. In the process of deconstructing the wall facing a busy street, this hole was guaranteed high visibility from pedestrians entering or leaving the Rambuteau metro station. As a result of the departure from functionalism in architecture, Matta-Clark set out new perspectives for the experience of the urban building as a result of interference not only in the structure of the building but also in the public space in

which he built the urban community. In doing so, he expanded the possibilities of recognizing a spatial object, as it both opened the possibility of its conceptual de- (or re-) construction from the inside, and making it possible to be re-entered in the field of view through the public sphere from the outside, as emphasized by Pamela M. Lee, to revitalize the “invisible” places of urban texture.

Dan Graham emphasized that in the “periscope,” viewers could look not only at the interior of the sculpture to reflect the past of Paris (Graham 202). The mission of this intervention was to “survive in the web of an ‘immense modern structure’,” as Matta-Clark defined the steel frame of Centre Pompidou standing behind the building by cutting out the floors and walls. The second aspect of transformation was the reverberated memories of the disintegration of the traditional market, reborn in Les Halles in the second half of the nineteenth century and relocated in 1969 to the suburbs. To re-trigger the temporary effect of restoring the market into Les Halles, Matta-Clark, similarly to in his previous performance *The Food* (1972), spent 750 pounds on beef put into sandwiches and gave them to the passer-by to evoke the nature of historical surroundings. A spectacle made the spectator more conscious of the art event, letting him linger during the rush hour and consume. This work reinvigorated the audience because they had an active role to play in the event.

Cut in Time and the Difference in an Image

As previously stated, in line with putting the viewer in front of a monocular projection both Matta-Clark and 20 years later Huyghe recreated the traditional position of the cinema's viewer, tracking the path of a projected light within the structure of the same neighbourhood but at different times. Despite the historical distance between Matta-Clark's and Huyghe's works, both of them are distinguished by the process of recording visual phenomena. Thus, it may provide an insightful procedure visible only for a differential exploration of visual phenomena and the very constitution of the research object formed by two amplitudes in the cut-outs in his drawing. Let us reiterate that

a relationship particularly observable in Matta-Clark's complex cultural and artistic palimpsests – exposes an inherent tension between the artwork's sign and its referent as Huyghe's attempts to combine memory and remembrance, its presence, like that of the ‘original presence within the architectural and social spaces of the Les Halles district, seeking to establish an intermediary between the society's memory-work and the events they evoke and recall. (Muir 144–145)

To re-establish new urban meaning, Huyghe extended his previous interests and works related to making billboards, but in this case, he used an immaterial light instead of material posters by projecting this screening onto the wall of the building of the Horloges district, the place where Matta Clark's building stood. The effect was transmitted not only through the lights of memory and photographs of Matta Clark's work but also superposed by Anthony McCall's movie, thus paying attention to his inspiration and the co-existence of two different time periods of given places.

Huyghe's copy conceals what is suspected to reside within the original itself. Shifting emphasis to the difference between the original and the copy, Nancy argued that the image is not the interruption itself. Building on this deconstructive interplay within differential images can be understood more fully and convincingly when we underline the significance of a “cut in time” marked by “a lapse of some period: it introduces a distinction between real-time and represented time” (McDonough 124). The parallels drawn between Matta-Clark's and Huyghe's works are possible, thanks to the process of recording visual phenomena to provide an insightful procedure involving not only drawing technique but also allowing for a differential exploration of visual phenomena based on the very constitution of the research object. This disappearance of the new context reflects generally new urban meanings. *The Light Conical Intersect* is transferred today not only in the prism of the lights of memory but also as a result of the photographs commenting on Matta Clark's work and emphasizing the co-existence of two different times, past and present.

The conjoint articulation of previous events in “Light Conical Intersect” represents another shift in modern artistic practice making us aware of the function of a jump cut. The difference between these two

interventions lies in “the actual distance and the time it really takes to move from one place in the story to the text, as Daniel Birnbaum has written. It is a means of interposing a temporal discontinuity within the filmic narrative” (McDonough 124). Shifting emphasis beyond the same projection and appropriation of pre-existent visual documentation permits Huyghe to include “two scenes within film diegesis, but also ... separating the original production of the movie from our own present. ... the inserted footage rather like sedimentation of time settling into the gap between the original’s film shot” (124). In discussing Matta-Clark’s critical approach to urban transformations, Pierre Huyghe engages site-specific projection to recirculate moving images in construction sites and document the event restored to the temporary luminous, reverberating memories seen at the building. This double or triple nature is seen in the enlightened building revolving sightless in kaleidoscopic change. In reference to his concept “plural/singular” Nancy has written: “being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence” (Nancy 2000, 3). Making explicit reference to the Situationist’s “construction of situations” Huyghe’s homage to Matta-Clark can be comprehended as site-specific intervention converging with reanimated Quartier d’Horloge and the new Les Halles surrounding. Coextensive with the patterns of thematic counterpoint, the architectural device is resolved into the light and thus returns to its origin. This effect is particularly highlighted by media theorist Nanna Verhoeff’s notion of “performative cartography” (Gor 11). This underlying context of self-referentiality of the place in performative art is that: “the film sequences that his “remakes” rescenarize – are contradictions of complex processes of temporalization, the (re)potentization of which comprises the aims of Huyghe’s artistic interventions” (Hansen 36). In line with this recycled type of activity, the signified and signifier embedded in the restored project from the past does not become forgotten despite the passing of years, but attempts to reanimate the contemporary architectural surroundings without permanently penetrating inside as the previous one did, leaving only a trace on their surface.

Concluding Remarks or How to Intervene by “Embedding” the Image

I have been discussing what constitutes site-specific projection as a form of embeddedness in cinematic storytelling within the context of European art. As I have suggested, the relationship with thematic elements is densely re-entangled. My argument has been to suggest that if we consider all plural/singular elements as an investigation into the tradition and background of these artists we may emphasize two points; the enormous influence of Gordon Matta Clark, and the second, the importance of light transformations in Western Art by the artists following the experimental live events resembling Platonic metaphor of the cave. In other words, it may be reiterated that the “performance value” of the projection reinvigorated in an environmental experience of urban transformations shifts from the private to the public to recreate the architectonic and urban space reawaking the socio-cultural tensions from the past. The critical dimension of *The Light Conical Intersect* emerges from his ability to select similar places despite the passage of time, to re-employ them systematically, and combine them with repeated viewing in a constructed situation. It is essential at this point to reflect on the situation when these two times rejoin but in the modern scenery of the same place. According to Patricia Pisters, “we now live in a meta cinematic universe that calls for an immanent conception of audiovisual and in which new camera consciousness has entered our perception” (Pisters 16). What is particularly vital to conceive the difference in-between the images spread in time is the fact that the horizon of an image can be extended to *Abbild* or copy (the translator says “likeness” in the sense of a portrait or reflection; a photo is commonly referred to as an *Abbild*) - the copy of a present thing, then, or else to *Nachbild*, an imitation, reproduction, or “after-image” of a being no longer present, and to *Vorbild*, the model or “fore-image” of being yet to be created (Nancy 85). With the concept of “the plural/singular” in mind, one might venture that the outcome of being displayed is to view things not as real but as they probably are singular copies gaining value due to their inherited history and site-specific location. The

parallels drawn in this article address not direct similarity but more precisely they re-employ the previous concepts and their artistic and social specificity to redefine the contemporary surrounding thanks to the use of light. The *Light Conical Intersect* nostalgically addresses its spectators as witnesses of the destruction of the past urban era showing how the setting has changed in 20 years' time. Let us begin to consider cinematic installations as not art events *per se* but as strategic interventions which bring back the meaning of the place and its previous meaning.

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