Stroboscopic Trilogy

video works by Antonin De Bemels
(text by Stamatia Portanova)

Antonin De Bemels' *Trilogie Stroboscopique* (2003 – 2005) is a digital video-choreographic triptych that explores the moving and dancing body through the stroboscopic effect, which consists of a fragmentation and alternation of video sequences frame by frame. In a fascinating series of image-sound combinations, the three videos appear as the products of a simple but careful technical composition that endows them with extreme precision and captivating sensuality in equal measure. Technically re-choreographed through digital editing and effects, the dancing body opens the way to the emergence of sensations, feelings, thoughts.

This is not a review of the videos but a conceptual accompaniment to them. Each of the following interchangeable paragraphs focuses on one particular theme and then transduces it into a concept, to obtain a series of 'nodal thoughts' departing but also deviating, converging and digressing from the actual works. More than descriptive, the aim is to draw a nexus of ideas (or rather, different variations of the same idea), whose unity of sense derives from the general compositional logic of what I would like to define as the 'intuitive mathematics' of the cut. The actualisation of these ideas consists in imagining, rather than illustrating or explaining things; accordingly, the conceptual abstractions presented here never totally explain or coincide but rejoice in their exceeding and in their being simultaneously exceeded by the autonomous unfolding of the moving images.

Insert "Il s'agit" here

The intuitive mathematics of the cut: The cut as infinite

In the first video, *Il s'agit* (2003, 4'20'', dancer Ugo Dehaes), the static torso of a doll-like mannequin coincides with the moving limbs of a dancer who, eyes closed, head swinging, fidgets against a black background. The mechanical fluttering and wriggling movements of the dancer's arms (always in dis-accord with a musical track of syncopated noises, and then of fluid sonic modulations) shatter and multiply the unity of the image, before the recomposition of a final meta-static moment. Granulated sounds accompany the broken motions of the dancing figure. Everything is minutely and

precisely cut, under the sign of an infinitesimal divisibility allowed by the technical digitalisation: video frames, movements, sounds, a whole apparatus of disjointed bits and pieces frenetically converging towards an illusory unity.

De Bemels' work is based on a technique of 'micro-fragmentation' which identifies the digitally cut frames with the microscopic building blocks of a very simple compositional logic of multiple alternations. Following this logic, the digital 'cut' aspires to become the sign of a multitude of microscopic perceptions and movements animating the rhythmical becomings of the dancing body, that imperceptible multiplicity in need of a sensible (even if not clearly discernible) form of expression. For Gottfried Leibniz (and for many other 17th century thinkers), a myriad of 'inconspicuous perceptions' compose the consciousness of one single movement, but without individually standing out enough for us to be aware of them (Deleuze, 2006: 97-113). The concept of inconspicuous micro-movement cannot be merely superimposed onto a digital fragment: the dissectability theorised by Leibniz is not of a binary but of a fractal nature. Differently from the endless fractal level of micro-perception, the video editing software isolates smaller and smaller parts that reach the ultimate scale of the digital bit. And yet, the cut bits reveal a peculiar potential, becoming the testimonies of a machinic propension, a tendency to reach the unreachable, the obscure depth, the 'fuscum subnigrum' of 'infinitely minute elements' that fuzzily connect the whole world to each of our single perceptions and movements. The con-fused and intricate molecular dynamics of the moving body can thus be suggestively perceived, vaguely thought (or conceptually imagined), through the freezing dissections effected by the digital composition.

De Bemels' digital compositional technique can be defined as a sort of microscopic cinematography, in the sense of its use of the software to analyse movement into its infinite critical instants, and then to re-edit it frame by frame. Cinematographically speaking, to re-construct movement from small sections (or frames) is always more than a mere mechanical collage of frozen bits retroactively mimicking the continuity of what was once alive. It is more like a de- and re-composition of singularities, a material filtering and interpretation of movement by the cinematographic machine. As a technical variation of the cinematographic phylum, digital cinema perceives its object through an extremely subtle mesh: a linear succession of cuts, however small and detailed, can never reach the complexity of a manifold (an infinite multiplicity of folds rather than particles), but its audiovisual effects can get very close to it. [1] The digital technique shows a capacity to affect perception and thought, in a way which is very similar to that of the microscopic lens. Already in the 17th century, the use of the microscope introduced a new way to see things, thanks to its capacity to dis-assemble the atomic consistency of matter. An imaginative, almost 'hallucinatory' vision could unfold itself, constituting a visionary field where art and philosophy could meet and share a particular taste (a 'way of treating things') with science. This particular way of treating, or seeing, the world microscopically, was like a sensitivity and imagination of the infinite hidden behind the surface of a finite perception:

"When [thinkers] see what microscopes show them, they see a confirmation of it: the microscope is the instrument that gives us a sensible and confused presentiment of this activity of the infinite under any finite relation." [2] For the visionary scientist, it did not really matter that the dissection of compounds, molecules, atoms, could not go ad infinitum, insofar as it showed a way, or a tendency, towards the infinite. It is exactly in this sense that, if not ontologically or phenomenally, the microscopic manufacturing of light by digital video reveals a capacity to approach the molecularity of perception at least imaginatively, inducing our attention to wonder on the interstice, the interval, the infinity of the in-between-cut.

Insert "Au quart de tour" here

The cut as idea

Au quart de tour (2004, 7', dancer Bruno Marin) consists of three different shots of the same action filmed by two cameras on the same tripod, with the same travelling, panoramic and zooming motions but different lights. Each of the six shots is alternated at the rate of 1 frame per second, only taking one frame from the first sequence, one from the second, one from the third, and so on... In the actual shooting, a man swings his arms against a black background, but the final effect of the stroboscopic technique is the appearance of someone running in the dark. As if a movement and its speed were already virtually contained in the still body and were actualised by the operations of the technical machine.

The subtle quantification and measurement of movement operated by the software allows the creation of sequences endowed with incredibly fast or slow velocities, as if every increase in the number of micro-fragments could produce a maximum of speed. It can always be argued that velocity is not speed, and that the digital re-construction of a movement does not have to do with the virtuality implicit in the live experience of that same movement. The multiple possible combinations offered by the digital appear hopelessly distant from the potentiality of the virtual as a transcendental and open condition of experience. In fact, as a condition (rather than an occasion) of experience, the virtual is never directly experienced, presented or re-presented as such by any specific inorganic, living or human body. It can only push, as a "focus or horizon within perception", a tendency pressing for its own actualisation or an energetic field of non-actualised tendencies towards taking-form (Deleuze, 2001: 169). By defining the virtual as the field where effects (the tendencies of a process of taking-form) become independent from causes, Steven Shaviro relates it to "sonorous, optical, or linguistic 'effects', or what in the movies are called 'special effects'". [3] From this point of view, it becomes possible to ontologically define an effect not as the passive, perceptible last phase of a process, but as whatever actively brings forth a problematic and sets things in motion, in the perceptual as well as in the intellectual field: an idea in someone's (or something's) mind, attracting

creative processes with its potential indeterminacy, a potential connection or differential relation which is yet to come. In other words, it can be argued that ideas are the 'special effects' constituting the virtuality of the real. [4] These incorporeal effects act autonomously from their direct physical causes, establishing a kind of precedence that transforms them into sufficient reasons, as "the generative conditions – the 'meanings' and the 'reasons' – for the very processes that physically produce them. Deleuze calls such generative after-effects "quasi-causes"" (Deleuze quoted in Shaviro's blog). [5] Quasi-causality is "an unreal and ghostly causality", more an insinuation than a determination, both objective and undetermined (Deleuze in Shaviro). While inducing the productivity of the actual, the paradoxical quasi-causality of the virtual represents a transcendental dimension that "neither copies the real, nor prefigures it," partaking only of an "extra-being" which in itself is totally "sterile, inefficacious, and on the surface of things" (Deleuze in Shaviro).

The ghostly in-efficacy of ideas induces us to think that virtuality is nowhere, in the sense of its not existing anywhere in its actualisations (no more in the body than in technology), or rather that it is everywhere but without direct relation to the actual, a potential lurking behind (or on the surface of) every actual entity, organic or technological, no matter its way to code reality. In fact, the paradox is that of a relational non-relation: in-between the idea as virtual quasi-cause and its actualisation as an experienced effect, an immanent relation is woven by the registering of an intensive difference, a difference of intensity carried by the idea and emerging like the precursor of an imminent actualisation. In the technological domain, what is digitised has always already been actualised, and has therefore already distanced itself from the virtuality of the idea, by taking a determinate form, even if only the microscopic shape of a bit. But the frozen possibilism of the digital only appears when considering the technology from the point of view of its linear causality, when taking into account the pre-conditions (the on and off energetic states, 0s and 1s) and the algorithmic rules directing its working and physically producing its effects. Differently from the linear causality of the digital as 'pure code', the quasi-causality of the virtual is constituted by the autonomous concatenation of effects, the objective ideas carrying with them the potential to actualise and at the same time to 'constrain' the process of actualisation. Residing neither in the separate dimension of a metaphysical realm nor in the embodied subjectivity of perception, the idea wavers, as a predictive memory of what is to come, in an intensive, and therefore indivisible, interval, the instant in which qualities prepare themselves to appear, on the limit of their imminent actualisation. How are we to understand this indivisibility and imminence of ideas, in the light of digital technology and its extreme logic of the cut? How can we take into account the different lengths and measures, the abrupt velocities, implied by digitisation and its infinitesimally determined scale?

Intensity already has its own degrees, quasi-quantities or incipient quantifications. It is in this sense that Deleuze can define the 'continuousness' of ideas not as the intuitive continuity of a sensible field, but as already a

'quantitability', a potential for being quantified: a continuous graduation representing the quasi-cause for the generation of actual quantities (Deleuze, 2001: 175). Without corresponding to a definite quantity, the differential of the idea constitutes a pre-condition for the production of quantification and for the generation of discontinuous series. Neither a fixed nor a variable quantity, quantitability refers to a susceptibility for limits or cuts, an opening towards the cut, or the calling forth of the cut, a 'cuttability' towards its actualisation. As a border between what is changeable and what is unchangeable, what is determinable and what is not to be determined in the virtuality of ideas, quantitability or 'cuttability' operates a selection on the level of intensive differences, between what undergoes actualisation (quantification and qualification) and what will 'statically' remain virtual. In other words, in order to actualise themselves, ideas ('cuttabilities' as the ideal causes of continuity, 'virtual cuts' as the special effects of reality), need a concrete cut. [6]

Following Nietzsche, Deleuze defines 'differenciation' as a form of reciprocal determination between magnitudes (to be intended here as the different forces of attraction of ideas), of which one is always superior to another (Deleuze, 2002a: 61). As Nietzsche himself reminds us in his late writings, the tendencies (or virtualities) of matter have their own qualities, a 'qualitability', as Deleuze defines it, which is the evidence of an emerging difference, the apparitional consequence of an irreducible material inequality that the philosopher can paradoxically understand (or critically evaluate) through 'metric scales and numbers' (Nietzsche quoted in Deleuze, 2002a: 65). In other words, the quality of a force is nothing more than the corresponding perceptible evaluation of a quantitative difference between magnitudes. As a consequence, qualities become measurable, or interpretable, along numerical scales (which for the philosopher represent the only instrument of critical discernment free of any 'too human' intellectual, emotional or phenomenological bias). Nietzsche's extreme affirmation clearly highlights how the problem never resides in metric quantification per se, but in its scientific use according to homogenising parameters that only reduce difference to identity. In this way, the Nietzschean paradoxical reconciliation of quantity and quality in the virtual field (quantitability and qualitability), is the pre-condition for the inevitable split between the qualities-quantities in the actualised world.

In fact, the actualisation of a virtuality always happens in parallel with the intervention of particular codes, or systems of capture, enclosing the unlimited openness of potential into the space of possibilistic limits: even the most visceral bodily feeling is nevertheless subject to a coded biological apparatus of molecules, tissues, organs, without which it could never appear. As a result, or rather as a side-effect of this parallel actualisation/realisation, quantities, qualities and codes spread everywhere in matter, opening up the irremediable forking between material divisibility (for example movement as a succession of units and the metric measurement of its velocity), flow (the continuity of movement and speed as its qualitative change) and code (as an

already realised form). In any case, the intensity of what is only incipient and in potential is always connected to a set of possible articulations and limited degrees of freedom: it is the creative encounter with the limit that becomes productive of new qualities of experience.

In De Bemels' microscopic video-choreographic cinema, a particular quality seems to emerge from digitisation and its precise mathematical functioning. Through the use of a deterministic binary metrics, digital technology divides and 'interprets' electromagnetic energy according to a precise scale, measuring movement along a linear spatialisation of time, for example through the sequential alignment of frames: a code accompanying a quantitative increase coinciding with a qualitative modification. From analog cinema to its digital transduction, the quantity of space and time containable in the in-between cuts increases: the frames multiply themselves, giving a different velocity and an amplified possibility of re-combination to the montage techniques. This qualitative modification does not only relate to the different velocities obtained in movement, but to a different way to perceive and 'treat' it: while the software produces particular realisations through its numerical code, it is the virtuality of the cut as a 'special effect' that moves technology and its quantitative and qualitative actualisations.

A whole series of questions starts to unravel itself here: how does the virtual-actual encounter happen? How can intensity be coded? Is it possible to conceive a difference between 'productive' and 'nonproductive', bodily and technological limits (or codes)? Or maybe it is only possible to talk about a more or less creative way to use the limit? How can a body be limited, coded, cut, and at the same time 'retain' virtuality? We understand that what is critical in the technique or the code is its use to either flatten or accentuate differences: for example in the hyper-realistic aim of digital cinema, special effects become a way to homogenise the qualitative difference between 'organic' and 'cinematic' perception, while in the more 'sensationalist' aims of the cinematographic industry, these effects paradoxically manage to bring forth a whole range of new kinetic qualities. In this sense, the cut, or the actual 'limit' of digital video becomes a synthetic operator, an in-between marker to accentuate the difference, or the non-coincidence, between an 'ordinary' and a 'singular' perception of movement.

Insert "Light Body Corpuscles" here

The cut as sensation

In *Light Body Corpuscles* (2005, 6'20'', dancers Ugo Dehaes and Melanie Munt), ethereal light particles dance against a black background and along a soundtrack of electro-acoustic noise, like a performance of microscopic molecules with no direct referent but movement, light and sound in themselves. Gradually, the particles appear to be the parts of a body frenetically moving under crossed light rays. The outlines of two bodies then

start to reveal themselves in the dark, a man and a woman continuously changing their configuration, position, motion, fragmented and discontinuous, their figures quickly alternating until they convulsively fuse into a single body.

The stroboscopic technique is based on a very simple mathematical juxtaposition of different layers in the editing program. For example, in a series of four juxtaposed layers or shots, for the first layer, 1 frame is made visible, the remaining 3 frames invisible. For the second: 2 frames visible, 2 invisible. For the third: 3 visible, 1 invisible. Fourth layer: no effect. The use of this montage technique allows De Bemels to productively engage the idea of the 'limit', pragmatically proposing a 'sensational effect' where the too small (the isolated digital bit always enveloping other invisible micro-fragments) directly comes to coincide with perceptual excess. In *Difference and Repetition,* Deleuze conceptualises two different ways to deal with the idea of the limit (Deleuze, 2001: 148-153). The first way is quantitative and qualitative: in this sense, digitisation becomes a possibility towards the production of the 'too many' and the 'too fast' which, in relation to the limited scale of human perception, are already proper of matter in its molecular composition. The human limit appears thus as much more 'limited' and less comprehensive than technological capacity in itself. Thanks to its analytical and selective function, human perception can capture the infinitely repeated vibrations of light and heat, contracting an unbearable multiplicity into a unified image: trillions of external oscillations need to be condensed, or filtered, into a millisecond colour vision. [7] Every sensorial interface acts as a reality 'converter', translating, or 'trans-ducing', one velocity into another, one scale of movement into another, and producing the different degrees of clarity at which the material world appears to us.

Borrowing from Brian Massumi's terminology, we can define the functioning of transduction as

> a continuously variable impulse or momentum that can cross from one qualitatively different medium into another. Like electricity into sound waves … Or light waves into vision … Or noise in the ear into music in the heart …[Or, we might add, music in the heart into the body's dance] Variable continuity across the qualitatively different: … transduction (Massumi, 2002a: 135).

Rather than just being reducible to a simple process of quantitative filtering (a measurement, distinction and selection of particles), transduction implies qualitative change. We can paraphrase this argument in Deleuzian terms, considering the two aspects, the numerical quantification of particles and the qualitative transformations implied by their passages, as two actualisations of the same effect. Qualitative difference thus becomes the corresponding value of a variation in the 'unit of measure' (from light and its own unit of measure to the digital metrics, from light to our senses and brain) (Deleuze, 2002b: 56-66). In the passage, it is always possible to count and discern particles ad

infinitum (even if only abstractly), as long as the unit stays homogeneous, whereas the qualitative variation in the unit of measure poses an actual challenge and limitation to the human faculties.

The challenge represented by the quantitative/qualitative variation from one movement (or one scale or movement) to another, is also always accompanied by the impossibility to comprehend all the movements and variations simultaneously and continuously occurring in nature, like a failure not only of perception, but of the imagination as well. The question of whether the digital is ontologically and materially distant or close to the virtual, needs therefore to be replaced by a different problematic: how can a body conceive simultaneity as an idea (and therefore a virtuality) in itself? For Deleuze, it is only a prerogative of thought to think the simultaneity of all movements, while perception and imagination can only give us the isolated reality of a relative movement-section. It is what Kant defines as the 'mathematical sublime': imagination trying to apprehend all the possible relative movements, with their implied qualitative and quantitative variations, by continuously converting its unit of measure, while thought simultaneously reaches what overcomes imagination and the senses, not the too much or the too many but movement as a whole, absolute movement or the 'unmeasurable'. [8] This second aspect of movement, not the present of the sequential intervals but the openness of a changing whole, does not correspond to a succession of units and its velocity but to a simultaneity and its differential speeds. Bergson distinguishes these two aspects as the material and spiritual poles of movement, respectively related to a physical and a transcendental exercise of the faculties (perception, imagination, thought): in other words, it is never possible to go from one to the other and to reach infinity, or the wholeness and incommensurability of movement, by simply converging the unit of measure, but only by reaching towards the incommensurable in relation to every faculty. Simultaneity appears thus as the impossible, imperceptible virtuality forcing sensibility and all the faculties to face their own limit and reach their 'nth' power, or to 'transcendentalise' themselves (Deleuze, 2001: 141). The question is therefore how to reach, in every sensible entity, this 'nth' power of sensitivity in itself.

Conceptually borrowing from Deleuze, we can define the stroboscope and its simple numerical basis as the example of a 'mathematico-spiritual' conception of montage, a montage based on accurate calculations (the quantification of the cut-frames), on their corresponding qualitative differentiations (the variation from human to beyond-the-human speed), but also on a more abstractly sensible (or insensible) effect (Deleuze, 2002b: 64). By juxtaposing a large number of layers and by adding and subtracting frames, De Bemels knows that the viewer will never be able to actually see everything that is super-imposed in the technical processing of his videos: perception and imagination are overcome, overflown, pushed towards their own quantitative/qualitative limit. We can paraphrase Deleuze and argue that the superimposed frames constitute a mathematical 'rhythm of added (or subtracted) values' suggesting to our perception and imagination the idea of

their own limit (2002b: 64-65). Rather than allowing us to distinguish and recognise a form, the abstract (or mathematical, or algorithmic) line of connection between the frames/forms constructs, with its interruptions or cuts, a sort of Cubist synthetic re-composition of movement in its continuity and speed, according to a purely mathematical intuition. 'Difference', as determination or distinction, the emergence of singularity as such, is "no longer a form but an abstract line acting directly upon the soul", a rigorous abstract line "fed by chiaroscuro" (Deleuze, 2001: 28-29). This determination of singularity can possess more or less distinction: in this sense that Cubist painting could also be expressive of the different forces of variation of a single line of movement, as if the chiaroscuro had retained its profound in-determination, despite the high precision of the segmented sections. A paradoxically distinct chiaroscuro playing with the singularity and in-visibility of motion. And the distinction of the line can become even sharper and precise, obeying the mathematical order and the digital logic of the cut, as in De Bemels' digital video. In this sense, each single digital frame contains, or envelops and freezes, a line of movement at a remarkable point. The digital cut is associated to a perceptual caesura, or an affective interval which allows the emergence of the different levels of a unique sensation in one single frame, and of the different intensities of a movement along a single line. [9] But if the artistic question posed to technology is to make its mathematical functioning available as a creative means for the generation of a different, 'singular' sensitivity to movement, philosophical reflection finds itself in a different position. The creative challenge becomes a metaphysical question, an exhortation to the technical machine to take its own sensitivity, its 'computational faculty' to its 'nth' level, transcendentalising and forcing itself to the point of computing what can only be computed (and tnot coded, perceived or understood), in other words, the 'incomputable'.

Insert "Lilith" here

Lilith and time

Lilith (2006, 7'30'', performer Barbara Mavro Thalassitis), is a video installation which was initially created for the Brigittines Chapel, an old religious building transformed in a cultural center, situated in downtown Brussels. The video loop is screened by night above the front door of a chapel. Another special requirement for the installation of the piece is its screening in a hollow niche or alcove, in semi-darkness.

> The ghostlike body of a woman stares at you from inside the surface of a wall. Only her head and arms are moving, alternating frantic contortions with slow and concentrated gestures [and 'silent shouts']. She seems to struggle to keep her own flesh from mingling with the inorganic substance of the wall… [10]

The digital technique used for *Lilith* is not that of the stroboscope: the whole work is based on a series of meltings, traces and blurs obtained through various digital effects reproducing the techniques of 'long exposure' or 'slow shutter'. Another technique used in this piece is what De Bemels defines as 'déformation temporelle': a calculation of additional frames interpolated to create smooth slow motions from normal speed sequences (some kind of 'morphing' technique, but applied between frames and to a whole sequence). The overall effect is therefore more textural, painterly and 'shaded' than the sharp cut style of the *Trilogie Stroboscopique*. The author himself mentions some of Francis Bacon's paintings as the main 'ideas' at the basis of his work, and apart from the obvious representational similarities and technical differences between the two works, a series of interesting parallels seem to emerge on the compositional level. Immediately, we recognise the three basic elements characterising the composition of this video: the material structure of the church, the frame or contour of the niche, and the video positioned in it, three fundamental features appearing as the creative variations of a 'Baconian' compositional schema... (Deleuze, 2002c).

In some of Bacon's works, such as *Head VI* (1949) or *Figure Standing at a Washbasin* (1976), the body's effort to escape through the basin pipe, or even through its own mouth, is caught as a movement which is not provoked by any external impulse but originates and happens *in the body itself* (Deleuze, 2002c: 41). In the body, or in its painted materiality: the effort is therefore not so much represented, as it is materially conveyed through the paint brushes and their coposition, as a tendency or a virtuality of the figure *and* of paint itself, an intensity going beyond the body's capacities not so much because of its 'un-realizability', but in the sense of proclaiming its 'inactuality' or 'in-actualisation' (the virtual as always being too much, in temporal excess with respect to its possible actualisations on a canvas). The paint-figure is caught in the spasm of a tendency, an intense immobile effort which is too much for its limited actuality and for the limited space of a framed rectangular surface. This effort is made visible as the hysterical moment of the figure pushing hard to leak and reach the material structure, to finally dissolve in it... All the gradual passages undergone in preparation of the escape are conveyed by the simultaneously careful and chaotic composition of the artistic material, by the diagrammatic distribution of paint, as 'sensations'. The passages between levels, orders or fields of sensation, constitute the painted rhythm of the work.

At this point, we should remember how an important compositional element enters Bacon's works, as a fundamental complementary counterpart to his moving (or 'moved') painting, without which no rhythmical becoming could take place or become visible: that of the witness (Deleuze, 2002c: 135-138). Indicating more a compositional constant than the representation of a real observer, this parallel figure which is so present in most of the paintings fulfills, with its immutable repeatability, the precise structural role of keeping a constant temporality, beating an almost flat time or cadence with respect to which the variation of the other figures can be critically valued and perceived. This particular technical feature refers to a decisive aesthetical peculiarity

which is also proper of De Bemels' work: the important presence of a constant framing structure for the perspectival emerging of difference, or rhythm. If the precise digital composition of the stroboscopic technique already provides a stable structure to the videos of the *Trilogie*, the painterly quality of this work and its more shaded effects demand for a different framing technique. It is the reason why the video needs to be so solidly and tightly secured in a niche, which becomes the necessary structural or compositional 'witness' of the multiple variations, meltings and re-formations undergone by the moving image (almost realised as a 'moving painting') through the digital effects.

In Deleuze's words, "for the variation-Figure, a witness-Figure is needed" (2002c:135). The compositional role of this structural Figure is to negotiate a passage, but in the video the passage does not happen as a linear movement from the more dynamic temporality of video to its dissolution into the stillness of the stone (the church wall can never be defined as being more static than Bacon's coloured fields swarming with chromatic potentials), or vice versa. Rather, the aim (and effect) is to make time appear as a relation between two varieties of temporal extension, the stone wall and the video image, with their respective different capacities of material contraction. De Bemels' work shows all its originality and difference in its way to 'reveal' time. A first important temporal differentiation obviously comes from the use of the digital tool and its oscillation between cuts and their qualitative potential, between calculation and its effects. Technically speaking, the special effects,). Apart and together with these specific temporal techniques, another important structural peculiarity of *Lilith* is represented by the installation format, and by the specific setting and materials chosen for it. A wall is obviously apparently (or 'apparitionally') different from a digital video. But the rule of discontinuity in repetition is not a prerogative of the digital: every physical entity is characterised by a repetition of composing elements, accompanied by a contractile power which, in the repetition, is able to retain the previous element while the successive appears. All living organisms are for example made of contracted water, earth, light and air, and retain within themselves, or contract, every past moment in the form of an expectation of a future yet to come, molecule after molecule, atom after atom (Deleuze, 2001: 70-79). In Bergsonian terms, this is what Deleuze defines as 'habit', a 'passive synthesis' of time, a contraction of past and future into the lived present of duration. An organic or inorganic body can thus be defined as a sum of contractions, retentions and expectations, or of what Deleuze defines as 'contemplations' of elements, and the 'auto-satisfactions' of those contemplations. In this sense, every body, even that of a stone, is 'habitual' and contemplative, in the sense of its being composed by a series of repeated habitual contemplations and contractions. In other words, stone possesses its own way to contract the present, as the repetition of a number of contracted instants (instants of oxygen, hydrogen, light and air); since the duration of the present varies according to the contractile range, we can 'imagine' the stone's present as one with a very distended duration, giving the impression of an almost frozen time, with respect to the quick succession of the video's light particles. The impression left by the contraction is in both cases a qualitative

impression. The connective structure of the niche therefore acts as a relational element between two different qualitative sensations of time: the figure's becoming in the video, and its meta-stable support by the stone wall.

The habitual synthesis of the present and its corresponding qualitative sensation (a video-present, a wall-present) constitute the 'foundation' of time, the common soil occupied by stones and human beings, by the walls of a church and the digital figure inhabiting its surface. However, while this foundation is constantly (even if imperceptibly, as in the case of a wall) moving and constitutes a passing present, what causes the present to pass is what Deleuze defines as 'the ground of time', memory, or the pure being of the past which allows memory to take place as a representation of the former present which the past was, as an extra dimension of the present itself (Deleuze, 2001: 79-85). Memory, in other words, conjugates two representations as two coexisting dimensions of the present: the past as a past present, and the present in relation to which it is past. It is in this sense that the old walls of the church can appear as 'textured' and 'inhabited' by time and memories, evoking the character of Lilith, a woman that "has been banned from the church but (maybe) still haunts its walls,..." not only as a past recollection but as a present reflection, a remembrance and a recognition, the representational object of memory and understanding at the same time.

In Deleuze's work, the 'last word' in the philosophical conceptualisation of time is neither given by the first, repetitive synthesis of the present (the material contraction of wall-time and video-time), nor by the pure past as the ground for a representation of memory as 'past' present (Lilith as significant representation). It is rather the future which, by allowing the constitution of a third kind of temporal synthesis, represents time's last word (Deleuze, 2001: 85-91). Deleuze and Guattari insist that memory plays only a small part in art, whose finality resides in an 'enlarged perception', where this perception is enlarged 'to the limits of the universe' and 'breaks with the identity to which memory rivets it' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002: 166). The ambiguity consists in the fact that whenever art appeals to memory it is, in fact, appealing to something else. Apparently connecting a contemporary present with a distant past, the reminiscence resolves itself into a 'mere' impression, something 'common both to the past and the present' but more essential than either of them: a sensation. The experience of sensation is not one of continual flux, but one in which the 'harsh law' of passing reality is neutralised and the transcendental form of time (which is not ordinarily visible to us) is given all together in an image that makes it sensible, or 'thinkable'. Beyond its quantitative relation to quality as an experience of the present, and beyond its representational relation to memory as a figure of the past, sensation has a direct relation with thought, where it becomes the equivalent of an Idea. The last synthesis of time involved by the sensation-idea is therefore static, because time is not subordinated to movement anymore but appears as the virtual form of change that does not change: Time as idea, the caesura indispensable to thought to ordain a before and an after, to create the possibility of time, to generate the repetition of the future as the condition of

the eternal return (Deleuze, 2001: 89-90). In other words, sensation is the form of time which reveals the formlessness of the eternal return, extreme formality being there only for the unveiling of an excessive formlessness, the ground being now superseded by a more fundamental groundlessness.

Lilith overflows with time, or with different times. The repetitive mathematical working of technology and its visual effects, the material cadence of the video loop and its lingering in the dilated time of memory, the qualities of the video and the structure of the church wall: the video is the coexistence of all these aspects in one framed image. But one fundamental aspect seems to envelop the significance of the work in a comprehensive way: its nature of open installation, its insertion into the wider city landscape, which at the same time constitutes its carved setting and its 'dissolution', its real significance and its 'groundlessness'. Acting as a large multidimensional frame, the external environment enters the compositional process, penetrating the time of the moving image with its own timings, and even more importantly, giving it its own sounds. It is this temporal interpenetration in the qualitative fabric of the urban setting, this juxtaposition and mixing of time-frames, which makes of *Lilith* a moving crystal, an immobile image of rhythm in itself. In the changing whole of the landscape, its own time coincides with the duration of an instant glimpse, a sensation. In this framing, the video image becomes a sign of what we can define as a 'mathematical intuition' of rhythm, a sensation and a thought implicitly contained in the numerical understanding of light, movement and time by digital technology, and explicitly actualised through its direct contemplation of the infinite world extending itself beyond its frame. As usually in art, everything happens in proximity to us, but beyond us.

Notes:

[1] Deleuze and Guattari define the 'machinic phylum' as "matter in movement, in flux, in variation, matter as a conveyor of singularities and traits of expression" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002b: 409). In other words, the definition of the phylum is more related to the ontogenetic value of the matter in itself, than to the different ontologies of the different codifications and moldings it undergoes throughout its movements. For this reason, it seems important to understand, or rather to follow, the matter-flow of light as the particular material constituting the cinematographic phylum, throughout its different analog or digital variations.

[2] Deleuze's lecture on Spinoza, Vincennes, 17/02/1981, available at: http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=38&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2

[3] See "Kant, Deleuze and the virtual", a post on Steven Shaviro's blog *The Pinocchio Theory*, at: http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=577

[4] Here, Shaviro's discussion on the parallel between Deleuze's notion of virtuality and Whitehead's 'eternal objects' is also very much reminiscent of the attractive power of William James's concept of 'terminus'. See James (1952).

[5] "The Pinocchio Theory", Steven Shaviro's blog, can be accessed at http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/

[6] In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze defines the limit/relation between the immutability of the virtual and that which is cancelled and, in cancelling, changes, as "a genuine cut [*coupure*]" (Deleuze, 2001: 172). The Deleuzian concept of the 'cut' has been replaced here by that of 'cuttability', in order to emphasise its ontological nature, and its difference from the actualisation of the digital cut, with which it will be put in combination.

[7] In the 1950s, Henri Bergson defined the brain as a central telephonic operator: more than a centre of conscious representation, the cerebral membrane appeared to him like a switchboard letting only a small amount of information pass through, while relaying the rest. See Bergson (2002).

[8] On the Kantian notion of 'mathematical sublime', see Deleuze (2002b).

[9] On the 'line' of difference in itself, see Deleuze (2001: 29). On the idea of the sensation as cut or 'caesura', see Deleuze (2002: 78-79).

[10] From the author's synopsis.

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