EVANESCENT SURFACES: THE WINDOW AS SCREEN

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Abstract

Relationship between cinema and architecture rooted in the very deviations of the passage from a century in full acceleration to a century already in post-acceleration, in which time is a decisive factor. Decisive in the material abstraction in our lives; decisive in virtuality as a pivotal factor in our lives.

Our argument is centred on the possibility of us understanding two parallel courses and finding, on these courses, a single path leading to two-fold action: the opening of the cinematographic screen and the abstraction of the architectural span. As the last century progressed, both the screen and the window were starched to a limit: the first limit is abstraction – abstraction of the window and abstraction of the cinema screen, open and reclined –; the second limit is the consummation of the abstraction.

Keywords: Architecture, Cinema, Gilles Deleuze, Window, Screen

Introduction:

In the 1980s Gilles Deleuze published two books (*Cinéma 1: L'Image-mouvement*, 1983 and *Cinéma 2: L'Image-temps*, 1985) that paved the way for new reflection on cinema. The first of these two works came with a warning: "This study is not a history of the cinema" (2005, xix), revealing Deleuze's intent: his study was to be an "open" one. Relying heavily on Bergsonian[51] ideas, he developed his own theses based on concepts taken from the universe of the cinema, pointing, in our view, to the formation of a path towards modernity enclosed within the essence of cinema itself.

But what kind of modernity? Modernity in camouflage, as proposed by D. W. Griffith and, shortly later, developed by Sergei Eisenstein. A "new"

[51] Deleuze, stated that, however, Henri Bergson saw cinema as an untrue ally.

step that was to define concepts, becoming at the same time, an instrumental means for abstraction: the montage or the editing of the cinematographic image.

It is true that cinema was actively involved in the new society and was a privileged witness of the birth and growth of the 20th century metropolis. But its most valuable role, from our point of view, was as an open field for theoretical and philosophical elaboration, paving the way for the establishment of inter-disciplinary relations that were melded at the roots.

Thus, we are searching for a relationship between cinema and architecture rooted in the very deviations of the passage from a century in full acceleration to a century already in post-acceleration, in which time is a decisive factor. Decisive in the material abstraction in our lives; decisive in virtuality as a pivotal factor in our lives.

According to Deleuze, in modern cinema the time-image – the result of modernity associated with cinematographic montage – is "transcendental" (1985, 355); it is neither metaphysical nor empirical. Deleuze relates this "transcendental" meaning to Kant and Shakespeare – via Hamlet – "[...] time is out of joint and presents itself in the pure state" (1985, 355).

This century of ours, the 21st, has slipped out of joint; it has passed to another side, a reverse side.

Duchamp, time and transparency

The *art-fiction* (During 2010, 121), is a concept developed by the French philosopher Elie During that establishes a parallel between science fiction writers and so-called contemporary artists who develop in their work "scientifically" extraordinary universes that populate our dreams. These *art fictions* adapt to questions of science, developing them further in another environment. An environment of the sensible. (During 2010, 121)

According to During, Marcel Duchamp can be considered a *science fiction* artist in the sense that he sought to take from the realm of fiction forms of experiencing the sensible. In During's opinion, he is one of the most unique creators of *art-fiction* of the last century.

Despite Duchamp's acknowledged taste for "amusing science" (During 2010, 123), his relationship with the world of science was clear and rigid, even revealing his fascination for it. That fascination developed through geometry. Although he was not a geometrician, nor even a mathematician (and it appears he didn't want to be either), he produced *something* geometric in his work, which, in a way, became a very important legacy for the neo-vanguards of the latter half of the 20th century.

It was above all in *La marriée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*The bride stripped bare by her bachelors, even),* also known as *Le grand verre* or *The grand verre* (1915-1923), a work that cannot be understood as a painting

– "[…] it's an accumulation of ideas" (Marcadé 2007, 101) – that his mathematical knowledge was developed through his own invention capacities. For many years this work was a kind of battlefield, a laboratory for his intellectual experiments and quests. And there is in Duchamp this feeling of a "laboratory man" with a pipe in his mouth and not wearing a lab coat reclining on a sofa. This image took Duchamp to a plane of concentration and creative activity that gradually crystallized in the formation of *Le grand verre*. As if the time devoted to it was itself, as a duration, a source of the contents of the work.

> […] *Le grand verre*, if one follows the author, should be approached as a three-dimensional projection, itself reporting to two dimensions on a double glass panel, of a scene invisible to four dimensions. But the essential is not there. (During 2010, 124)

It is as if Duchamp has taken time off its hinges, leaving a path to our sensibility, to our visual and tactile imagination.

With his *Nu descendant un escalier* (*Nude descending a staircase*) (1912), Duchamp stated that what he was searching for was the organization of space and time through the abstract expression of movement. Thus, in *Le grand verre*, what he sought was to understand how to organize and articulate the different dimensions with one another, elevating the third and fourth dimensions. (During 2010, 125)

> If one follows Duchamp's intuition to the end, the limit can be formulated as follows: instead of entering the fourth dimension via the edges, that is to say, via the thin profiles it presents in three dimensions, we rather try to install ourselves in it in one fell swoop, with a kind of leap of mind. This leap, the entire device of Le grand verre, with its multiple programmes and diagrams, is charged with establishing the possibility and even the necessity. (During 2010, 126)

Materiality plays an extremely important role here, for in *Le grand verre* Duchamp replaces the opaque canvas with transparent glass. Like a photographic negative or cinema film stock or even like an x-ray (remember Man Ray's "rayographs"). The inter-relationship between Duchamp's work and the observer references the capture of the image and the "beyond…": the observer is invited to establish "capture points" through successive positions which, as François Albera points out (2009b, 62), update possible points of view. In a way, Duchamp was proposing a chronographic device. But not just that.

On *Le grand verre* José Gil writes:

> The photographic plate not only gives the reverse of the form, the colour and the mass, but also the reverse of the movement (in three dimensions); and that reverse is the photographic instant that produces it – it is the static mould, absolutely at rest, of a movement that generates a space that is non-

measurable, non-objective (three dimensions), not referenceable by the dimensions of high, low, left, right, front, back – in other words it generates a four-dimensional space. (2011, 33)

These analogies between the glass and the photographic or cinematographic film gain in depth when During argues that the surface of *Le grand verre* can be seen as an *evanescent film*. Close to virtuality, according to During, it is in the arts and literature that we find the "clothing" or the "consistency" of virtuality. It is in these areas that we should operate to offer objectivity to virtuality (During 2010, 121), so that the virtual is not reduced to a decorative mode and can be understood as a regime of reality. (During 2010, 122)

The reality is thus the depot, the residue (rather than the projection) of four-dimensional forms that a superior mind could unfold in an additional dimension. And virtuality is precisely the evanescent film, the '*inframince*' [our italic], that separates us from that other dimension. (During 2010, 127)

Is *Le grand verre* the announcement of proto-cinema in which we, the users, are the aggregating element? At any rate, transparency emerges in this context as a pivotal element.

Irrespective of this work, which Duchamp began in 1915, transparency was already the *air du temps* at the turn of the 20th century: photographic film, cinematographic celluloid, the x-ray, the use of glass in architecture. The early decades of the century were driving force for the passage from the functional aspect of transparency to the conceptual values. And with the latter, the attention to the fourth dimension began to impose itself.

Cinema is a vehicle for the valuation of transparency as a concept: it asserts itself in the "collage" (montage), by reflecting its moment in history – a universe in superimposition and depth updated in diverse contrasting, discordant and concurrent points of view that are made in fluidity, referencing duration. The Deleuzian movement-images and time-images.

Which brings us back to Duchamp, when he, as During points out (2010, 126), sought to capture a truly "plastic" duration. This duration leads to a time in space or a time-space that is not limited to the chronographic illusion associated with multiple perspectives. *Nu descendant un escalier* is on the cusp of that new feeling – a "plastic" duration.

During argues that in order to give form to new propositions related to desire – the intuition and the sensible associated with virtuality – and to speed, the fourth dimension becomes a fundamental factor, indicating the dimension of an intermediation that is yet to be invented, to be composed. (2010, 126) That is the task left to this century, to us.

Glass houses and screens

Let us imagine, for a few moments, the small plates of dark, x-rayed glass that transparently revealed the internal circuits of life – like a mirror image in profundity – that occupied (and preoccupied) doctors and patients in the large medical centres of the early 20th century. Circulation of flows in space and in time suspended in the obscured and glassy transparency.

Beatriz Colomina uses these images, or these transparencies, to explain a specific theory on what we call the glass houses. From the crude, rudimentary x-ray of the early 20th century we went to the mass screening of the North American population by the middle of the century. As Colomina argues, the intimate space of the body came to belong to the public domain. (2006: 146) Exposed. And, in this sense, the "invasion of the domestic space", exposed concurrently in time, was carried out through the proliferation of the glass house.

The glass house acted as a symbol not only of the new form of surveillance and health but also of terror.

The development of the x-ray and that of the modern house coincide. Just as the x-ray exposes the inside of the body to the public eye, the modern house exposes its interior. (Colomina 2006, 146)

The ample, immodest modern window spans, like amoral cinema screens, recall cinema theatres and cinema itself.

We know that the cinematographic and architectural experiments of the early 20th century were mutually important for the development of both fields (Vidler 2000, 119) – as they were important for the establishment of modernity as argued by Deleuze. But is it possible that cinematographic developments – such as the emergence of Cinemascope in 1953, which opened the screen, in its rectangular proportions, to the spectator in a previously inconceivable way – were reflected in the way the span or window in architecture was gradually abstracted in relation to our body? Or is precisely the opposite the case? At any rate, that would take us beyond Colomina's theory.

The timeline would appear to be an interesting point: while it is true that the first glass houses, which were still rather crude in the way they offered their insides to the exterior, are conceptually linked to the early years of the 20th century[52], and not to the its mid, one can see a relationship between the capacity for conceptual abstraction achieved in Philip Johnson's Glass House of 1949 and Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House of 1951 and, for example, Pierre Chareau's Maison de Verre of 1931.

[52] From Bruno Taut's experiments, to Le Corbusier designs for the Glass Skyscraper, 1925 and Walter Gropius's Bauhaus, 1925-26, and to George Keck's Crystal House for the Chicago World's Fair, 1933-34, and many other examples.

This conceptual abstraction takes the idea of something that shows the naked body further; or, going further still, through the transparent skin and the flesh in dissolution (space and time), it shows the bones and organs. However, it is true that the crude images obtained through the magnificent original skin[53] of Chareau's house seem to be close to the obscure x-ray images obtained in the early decades of the 20th century[54]. Which means that the Johnson and Mies examples come closer to the open screen of the cinema. It is the screen that opens up, it is the screen that exposes and leaves naked.

Large glass surfaces can also be seen as a means of abstraction, of acceleration, leading to the dissolution and the consequent rarefaction of the material – a path towards the virtualities of the material at the same time as the actuality is offered to the eye. We are, basically, elaborating on the abstraction of the material and the strange paradox of time – inherent in the passage from the 20th century to the 21st century – which leaks while it condenses. We are even in a condition to elaborate on the possibility of this abstraction being a manifestation, intentional or otherwise, of the new screen or the new abstract spans being Duchampian surfaces, like a *Grand verre* in action.

From this assumption on, we are beyond the x-ray image of Colomina – even if Edith Farnsworth compared her unloved Miesian house of glass to the invasion of intimacy through the x-ray – body in transparency. (Barry 2006, 153)

Naked. Bone and organ. Despite her chosen profession, medicine, Edith Farnsworth was not prepared, not so much for the naked body of the house – that revealed her own body – but for the transparency of the skin and the visibility of the "bone" and the organ, even if such visibility is not a dissection.

The intimacy of the modern American house of the post-war period absorbed the question of the window as screen, i.e. the dilution of the window to the abstract span – "showcase of domesticity" as Colomina puts (2006, 168). Just like the new cinema screen format, the wide screen, which "embraced" the public in its two-dimensional vertigo, placed the viewer in another world "perspective".

However, the supposed "horror" of the glass houses can be offset by the way in which the skeleton holds its skin, in other words, the strategic choice

[53] Originally, the glass bricks used in the façades of the Maison de Verre were denser and thicker. This denseness was 'affected' by the artisanal content of the bricks, leading them to refract the light "less clearly", meaning that the translucency was more diffuse. In the renovation work carried out in the 1960s most of these original bricks were replaced.

[54] Jean Dalsace, who, with Annie Dalsace, was one half of the couple who owned the Maison de Verre, was a gynaecologist. Edith Farnsworth was also a doctor, nephrologist.

in the relationship between an open house and the place. And there, that which (en)closes is the place. The place as boundary. But boundary in thickness: the place becomes the flesh of the Glass House and the Farnsworth House.

The boundary planes, are no longer windows but double-faced screens. These screens break down into multiple perspectives – from inside out, with Johnson (as resident) or Farnsworth (or later, Peter Palumbo), from the interior to the exterior or vice-versa, or also from the exterior to the exterior as interiority, or vice-versa… Photograms mounted in successive, alternating, fluid planes – movement in time. We are in the post-war cinema. The square dismantled to form the wide screen in the cinema and in architecture. But are we not, conceptually, further than that? Are we not entering the surface of the *Grand verre* – a three-dimensional projection, marked in two dimensions by the double-faced glass, of an action invisible in four dimensions?

Evanescent – four dimensional – surfaces which the higher spirit, as During argues, can unfold; and between the "interior" and the "exterior" the *inframince* surfaces where virtuality resides – the evanescent film.

Sou Fujimoto states:

I have a feeling that if we depart from our conventional view of windows and see them as devices for producing spatial relationships, we will find it possible to create a sense of thickness between the interior and exterior, or sense of distance, or unexpected sense of adjacency. Looking back at recent projects of mine, it strikes me that I am working from the perspective that contemporary architecture is itself a kind of spatialized window.
(Tsukamoto, Fujimoto 2009, 8)

Eisenstein and the *glass house*

Glass House is also an unrealized project by Sergei Eisenstein.

In March 1926, Eisenstein developed a project for a film that was to be called *Glass house* (Albera 2009a, 7)[55]. The project was inspired by a visit to Berlin; glass and its use in the architectural context, as well as the association of glass architecture with a set of social utopias, emerged as a discovery for the cineaste.

In Eisenstein's project the glass house was defined as a skyscraper totally made of glass, the quest for total transparency. This "house of glass" was to be the site of a series of paradoxical, satirical situations, to be used to dismantle the logic of the capitalist world, from the viewpoint of the Soviet film-maker.

[55] Curiously enough, the project name appears occasionally as *Glashaus*, but never in Russian. (Albera 2009, 7)

Transparency emerges as a "path" for the film-maker to explore narratives and dramaturgical ideas, at the same time as elaborating on questions pertaining to the formal potential of the cinematographic scenario: "[…] all the information on the organization of space in cinema, largely homothetic to that of the habitat (as Griffith's short films of brilliantly systematized it: frame/door, inside/outside, up/down) […]" (Albera 2009a, 7-8), always in transparency, where "real man" can get lost.

However, the Glass House project was too ambitious for early 20th century Soviet cinema (where experimentation had reached its highest point with Dziga Vertov and *Man with a movie camera* in 1929).

Glass house became a film of impossibilities, a project destined to be virtual. A film that succumbed to the virtualities of the material, the same material that was meant to sustain it.[56]

In François Albera's view, the *Glass house* project was a fantastic laboratory of experimentation and reflection. Experimentation and reflection on representation in the cinema – but also in other art forms such as painting, sculpture and architecture – proceeding from the notion of transparency. (2009b, 82)

While *Glass house* remains a strange and obscure project today, it contains within itself the potential for pure theoretical speculation. We are dealing with a "practical" concrete project for a film that becomes a cinema project – in the sense of its possibilities – to end up being a utopia.

But Eisenstein's search interests us. We are interested in the search for transparency without limits, where the bodies are suspended in a floating universe, where the cinema or the cinematographic form is, as Albera argues, beyond representation, searching for the non-figurative – "suprematism". "[…] Eisenstein wrote precisely: 'suprematist composition'". (2009b, 89)

In Eisenstein's project, the screen was to be a suprematist surface; but suprematist in the sense of abstraction of transparency itself.

For glass, thanks to its intrinsic transparency, can be understood in its physical aspect as a solid surface and a surface of passage, screen and lens – the screen as a place of projection and the lens as an aid to the eye. "So there is ambiguity between the glass as an intermediary, which serves to produce the motif on the canvas, and the ultimate glass surface as the canvas itself." (Albera 2009b, 91) We are, once again in Duchampian territory: ambiguity between "real" – or "actual", to use the Deleuze terms – transparency, and "virtual" transparency.

[56] Paradoxically, there were efforts to realize the project in Hollywood. At Paramount a team of scriptwriters was even set up to work with Eisenstein. But although it had the support of figures such as Charlie Chaplin, Eisenstein's project also did not go ahead in the US.

By exposing the "fragilities" of glass architecture and the virtualities of transparency, like a time crystal (Gaston Bachelard/ Gilles Delleuze) – just like Duchamp's "transparent painting" –, Eisenstein detonated the cinematographic representation system. Not in the sense of producing a multiplicity of screens, but more in the sense of seepage beyond the screen.

The timelessness of this project asserts itself in the diaphaneity, the volume dreamt by Eisenstein. Let us speculate: screen; and then on the canvas, transparent screen, behind a transparent screen – bodies in suspension, acting in the space, bodies on bodies, in the space; could time come out of its joints by means of such a spectacle? Definition of boundaries, voyeurism: problems that are inherent in our contemporaneity announced in a past and carried into the future.

> […] in his notes on *Das Kapital*, Eisenstein wrote on April 8, 1928 that in order to reformulate on another basis the concept of *kadr'* (*Bildausschnitt*, frame) it was necessary to conduct an experiment that includes the Glass House as a prerequisite. The abolition of the boundaries of the frame of the image, which are more or less analogous to those of a building (windows, doors, walls, habitation cells: this analogy leads, in the films of the early 20th century, that leaving the frame is the equivalent of leaving a room), the simultaneity of actions being at different levels thanks to the transparent floors, the elimination of distinctions between interior and exterior, up and down, near and far, the adoption of absolutely new views, induce a disruption of the plan, of the image, causing it to explode, the 'dissolution of form', as he wrote in his essay on Piranesi. (Albera 2009b, 88-9)

The Duchampian Glass House. The nature of the material can give rise to a "lapse into a dream" and into its virtualities.

Framing and abstraction

Our argument is centred on the possibility of us understanding two parallel courses and finding, on these courses, a single path leading to two-fold action: the opening of the cinematographic screen and the abstraction of the architectural span.

However, the parallelism of the two courses cannot be considered "perfect". In other words, there are deviations along the courses and points of contacts are established through these deviations – divergences and convergences in parallelism.

These "parallel" paths relating to cinema and architecture are made up of layers of possibilities. But conceptually, we can find in the depth of their structures a common nucleus – at the bottom of the walls of the chasm a common nucleus emanates possibilities that cross, and warp, possible paths of communication between the vertical abyssal surfaces.

The small rectangular screen of the early cinema opens up space, within its own boundaries, to a new conceptual universe. A universe that also reflects on the position of the spectator in relation to the screen, who is also framed by it, forming a new world of "exchanges".

The screen as a window to new worlds and the spectator who observes these new worlds through the screen.

However, as the last century progressed, both the screen and the window were stretched to a limit: the first limit is abstraction – abstraction of the window and abstraction of the cinema screen, open and reclined; the second limit is the consummation of the abstraction. And where are we now?

Conceptually speaking, cinema, regardless of its support format (film or digital), by means of the movement-images and the time-images, should be open to what is beyond itself. The spectator should be led, not without effort, to virtually integrate the Whole that is going on "around him". In other words, a film made in coalescence or a time crystal; is David Lynch's *Mulholland drive* not heading towards that universe?

Mulholland drive is an enormous crystal. It is the indiscernibility of the actual and the virtual. But it is also the indiscernibility of the path itself. It dismantles boundaries and reconstructs them at the same time.

Mulholland drive is within the crystal and is itself the crystal – like a *Grand verre*. It is an example of what contemporary cinema can be: in the way that it absorbs – film as thing – the screen, placing us, conceptually, inside it. Interactivity.

Interactivity as a virtual world, without succumbing to the false question of a technology that still brings so little: poor 3D in the cinema theatres – the direct heir of the experiments in the mid 20th century – which today is disseminated on a level of "total entertainment" or even the "theme park", to use the expressions of Patrice Maniglier. (2010, 58)

The screen of a new cinema can be that which Patricia Pisters refers to as the *neuro-image* (2012: 3), but this type of image should be associated with the difficulty of the artistic context: "This struggle, according to Deleuze, is fundamental to cinema's very survival as a 'will to art'". (Pisters 2012, 3)

"Will to art". Cineastes and architects as the new creators of *art-fiction*. A field - *art-fiction* – where screens and windows are a contraction of the Deleuzian time crystal and the Duchampian evanescent surface. Screens and windows can be inside our body; they can also contain our body.

In architecture the body has lost, though not yet completely, the parapet of the window span as an ally. But there is space for the window – more abstract, more diluted – to gain, conceptually, depth in its relationship with the interior and the exterior. An illusory or real *inframince* relationship.

Sou Fujimoto states:

I personally have offered the perspective that such development will be forthcoming from 'place.' This is an aspect related to what you call 'performance,' I think, but it means not just the window itself but rather the totality of the architectural place around it. The reason I use the word 'place' instead of 'space' is in order to imply people's actions of living. When we consider this kind of place-like window, shall we say, or window-like place, what we call a window expands into something much richer, I think. (Tsukamoto & Fujimoto 2009, 9)

In opening the matter, architecture opens the space and, in turn, can reveal time: movement-images? Time-images?

We do not know whether or not in the future the "flesh" of architecture will be denser or more diluted. Just as we do not know where the cinema screen will end up. But the time crystal is cracked and time is out of joint.

Conclusion:

Duchamp never finished his Grand verre. Is that relevant?

For his Glass house project, Eisenstein imagined a specific scene: in his glass box, part of the monumental crystalline edifice, a man tries to commit suicide by hanging. Around him is a crowd. Despite the transparency and the exposure of his action, he is alone.

Edith Farnsworth sold her glass house to Lord Peter Palumbo in 1972. She spent the rest of the life in Bagno a Ripoli outside Florence, surrounded by memories, history and matter.

Lord Peter Palumbo refurnished the Farnsworth House with original Mies van der Rohe furniture, "exposing" it clearly to transparency.

Philip Johnson died in bed in his Glass House, with no crowd, in transparency; but he was not alone.

The film director Abel Ferrara said in an interview that David Lynch probably won't be making any more cinema films. His last film, Inland empire, was shot in digital video. Lynch has now entered virtuality. He is in cinema forever; he has gone into the screen. "Deleuze has famously argued with regard to the ongoing development of cinema that 'the brain is the screen'" (Pisters 2012, 3).[57]

[57] "The brain is unity. The brain is the screen. I don't believe that linguistics and psychoanalysis offer a great deal to the cinema. On the contrary, the biology of the brain – molecular biology – does. Thought is molecular. Molecular speeds make up the slow beings that we are. As Michaux said, 'Man is a slow being, who is only made possible thanks to fantastic speeds.' The circuits and linkages of the brain don't pre-exist the stimuli, corpuscles, and particles [grains] that trace them. Cinema isn´t theatre; rather, it makes bodies out of grains." (Deleuze 2000, 366)

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