

## **The Aesthetic Potential of the Virtual: Device, Form, Idea.**

Call for papers

International Conference, Université Paris-3 Sorbonne Nouvelle, IRCAV  
28-30 March 2018 (INHA, Paris)

**Submission Deadline : November 10th, 2017**

What is the virtual and what is the aesthetics of the virtual, beyond how we see them through technological innovation and their incarnation through new media? What is their origin and what is this idea of reality and art that we see embodied in technological advances, what are their aesthetic, political, media and more deeply philosophical implications?

The massive integration of virtual apparatuses in any societal domain, which Pierre Lévy called the “general movement of virtualization”, affects not only the way society functions, but also its very arrangement and organization. It reconfigures the relationship between media and politics (“post-truth politics”), as well as the one between the acts of creation and the acts of communication. It also reinvents the very concept of teaching and of the transmission of knowledge (“inventive intelligence is to be measured against the distance from knowledge”, Michel Serres, *Thumbelina*), and directly affects fields such as industry, cinematic aesthetics and the arts more generally. If “every disruption of the way art is made needs a disruption of the way it is thought of” (Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*), would it be possible to tentatively conceptualize the impact of the virtual, carrying its due share of virtuality, by defining the twofold interdependence between technology and the concept itself as a strong philosophical idea: thinking as the origin of technology, and at the same time technology at the service of the setting up and of the transformation of thinking?

Therefore, it seems necessary to define and historicize this complex aesthetic notion stretching beyond its direct involvement in new technologies. This conference sets out to better pinpoint the concept of the virtual (a very rich notion and, precisely as such, still a very uncertain one) in order to draw a conceptual map of its theoretical and philosophical issues, to get a better sense of aesthetics, of technology and of contemporary art.

The first axis of our reflection thus concerns the issue of the philosophical origins of the virtual. In philosophy, the notion of the virtual, deriving from the Latin *virtus* (which stands for virtue as well as strength), has been associated from the very outset with the term “potential”. Classical tradition rests upon the concept of *dynamis* as devised by Aristotle, designating any kind of power, strength or potential. Be it passive (*pathètikè*) or active (*poiètikè*), this concept has always been linked to that of actuality (*energeia*), i.e. the shift from a potential state to an actual state. The potential is on the side of matter, whereas actuality is realized in form; here (that is, according to the doctrine of the “unmoved mover”, or of the origin as pure act), the essence precedes the potential, as the idea of the final form is originally embedded in the potential. Deleuze, as well as Bergson before him, reverses the classical stance and replaces the “potential” with the “virtual”, by putting forward the famous double opposition: “If the real is opposed to the possible, the virtual, on its part, is opposed to the actual” (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*). Deleuze thus endows the virtual with “full-fledged reality, qua virtual”, and suggests that every object should be regarded as having “one of its parts in the virtual”, namely a part which, far from being undetermined, would rather make for an objective dimension originating the actualization process. Lately, Pierre Lévy has shifted the focus of this

reflection on how the movement of virtualization qua concomitant movement is to be defined; his answer is that it should be defined as a problematization, which is to say that “the essential consistency of an entity is now to be found in a problematic field, as opposed to being defined by its actuality (that is, by a “solution”)” (Pierre Lévy, *Becoming Virtual*). Therefore, the virtual is in turn *potential*, *full-fledged reality* and *problematization*. We thus set out to retrace the genealogy of the concept of the virtual by way of outlining the philosophical issues it is informed by and relates to.

The second axis concerns the definition of the aesthetics of the virtual in general and more particularly in relation to the cinema. There are three major questions concerning aesthetics which interest us: the theme of fiction, the pre-existence of the virtual in celluloid film (as well as in more traditional visual arts) and the necessity for a better definition of contemporary film forms as well as the formulation of a new cinematic vocabulary related to the development of new technologies.

- The question of fiction arises as one of the main vehicles of virtualization. How do virtual devices, as means of autonomous productivity, redefine the concept of fiction at the aesthetic level? How does the audiovisual fiction of today indicate the opening of new spaces of freedom still unexplored by the traditional narrative?
- The genealogy of the aesthetics of the virtual also arises in celluloid cinema, and more broadly, in visual arts. Following from the work of Lev Manovich, for example, who considers Vertov as "an important database filmmaker", but also from more abstract reflections on the very definition of the cinematographic image, we would like to consider the beginnings of technical, plastic and conceptual cinematographic manifestations of the virtual before the appearance of new technologies.
- Finally, there is today a lack of vocabulary in film analysis, the extreme malleability of the image modifying the very notion of the shot, rejecting its authority as a fundamental unit of film. Can we still use the terms "tracking", "point of view" and "sequence" in relation to images generated by a computer? How do we define these new virtual film forms or forms related to them?

The third axis concerns more directly the virtual devices for production, distribution and conservation of films, with the latter being one of the current concerns of most importance, both institutionally and artistically, while the recent controversy seen at the Cannes Film Festival by the film *Okja* by Bong Joon-ho, financed by the American video-on-demand platform Netflix, has raised the question of the reorganization of the film industry as a whole and has confirmed the necessity to review the definition of the cinematic device (Gaudreault, Marion, Soulez), of the film industry and its economy. Therefore, what are the aesthetic, ethical and political implications of a new virtual economy?

The outcomes of our thinking on this subject will be published in the conference proceedings.

Abstract proposals, in French or in English, of between 500 and 800 words should be sent to Olga Kobryn and Massimo Olivero ([colloquevirtuel@gmail.com](mailto:colloquevirtuel@gmail.com)) by **November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017**. The proposal must fit within one of the theoretical categories proposed, without it being necessary to correspond to the sub-categories, which are provided as an indication only. Please indicate the theoretical category chosen and include a short biography of 10 lines.

### **I. History, archaeology, and politics of the concept of the virtual:**

- Proposition of the historization and definition of the concept of the virtual in philosophy from its origins. Search for related concepts that contribute to its constitution and its diffusion.
- The notion of the virtual in contemporary philosophy (Kierkegaard, Bergson, Bloch, Deleuze, Serres, Lévy, Souriau, Simondon, Châtelet, etc.)

### **II. Towards the aesthetics of the virtual:**

- Theories and analysis of the aesthetic dimension of the virtual.
- Problems of the aesthetic vocabulary of the virtual (what is a virtual form?, etc.)
- Definition of virtual art, the question of the permeability of borders (virtual and augmented reality, digital creation, GIF, Chris Marker's website *Gorgomancy*, 4D cinema, etc.)
- Virtuality of fiction in media and arts. The concept of post-truth.

### **III. The virtualization of cinematic forms. The aesthetics of the virtual in cinema:**

- The aesthetic and technical history of the evolution of the virtual in cinema (virtual film, motion capture) versus the aesthetic of the virtual (presence of the virtual in celluloid film).
- Redefinition of contemporary cinematic forms considering the notion of the virtual and considering the technical and conceptual innovations of the virtual.
- Technical progress and its influence on the aesthetics of film.
- Rethinking the vocabulary of film analysis based on the virtual: problems of vocabulary (notions of shot, sequence, editing, image mixing, etc.)

### **IV. The virtualization of the film as an object, of its device and the cinematographic institution:**

1. Theories of diversification of cinematic devices.
  - Virtualisation of device (cinema “éclaté”, Soulez).
  - Search for the definition of the distance between the device as a distribution platform and the device as an aesthetic part of the work.
  - Research around the ethical problems posed by the virtualization of the film as an object and of the cinema industry.
2. Problems of conservation:
  - To determine the issues and problems linked to the conservation of cinematic archives and digital audiovisual material (INA, La Cinematheque Francaise, Centre Pompidou, BnF, etc.) and digital works.

#### **Scientific Committee :**

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