Screen Space

Reconfigured

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Miriam De Rosa and Wanda Strauven

Abstract

This essay discusses the orientations of the screen both as work surface and as display surface by focusing on the shifts from and to the horizontal and vertical axes of the screenic space. To do so, we have collected a variety of examples, mainly media art installations but also films and mixed-media performances, which serve to reconstruct an 'evolution of the desk' and to retrieve a new gesturality. Balancing the producer's and the viewer's perspectives, we argue that it is no longer the function but the usage of a certain device that determines its position on either the vertical or the horizontal axis.

Keywords: Surface, table and wall *dispositifs*, performance, gesture, media art installation, desktop cinema

Introduction: From Desk to Desktop

In the autumn of 2015, an animated GIF entitled *Evolution of the Desk* circulated widely online.[1] As a sort of meta-memento, in a 357-image sequence lasting about 30 seconds, the animation synthesizes a three-and-a-half-decade timespan that turned our once-romantically chaotic desk into a hyper-rationalized and essential work surface, that is, the desktop area of the computer (and then laptop) screen. Structured around three famous (albeit

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[1]   Posted by Laura Sauser, *Evolution of the Desk* (GIF), 23 September 2014, http://blog.up.co/2014/09/23/evolution-desk-gif/. (Last accessed 4 April 2017).

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mocked-up) Apple devices—the classic beige cube or Macintosh 128K, the dark grey PowerBook, and the silky thin MacBook Air—its timeline displays how, from 1980 to 2014, all kinds of office supplies and appliances—ranging from scissors and glue to the phone and fax machine—were gradually absorbed by the screen in the form of offline and online computer applications.[2] This resulted, according to the GIF, in clearing not only the top of our writing table but also the wall behind and the space underneath it. Such a transformation from the (physical) desk to the (metaphorical) desktop implies a number of reconfigurations concerning, among other things, the axial tension between horizontality and verticality—a tension that will be at the centre of this essay.

Let us have a closer look at the animated GIF. As its title indicates, it is all about the desk. The GIF illustrates how the centre/periphery balance of our way of working on a physical desk has drastically changed over the last decades through the convergence of several peripheral devices. Most of them will later become software applications to be activated from a unique machine, weaving and feeding a web of interconnected functionalities. The first device to be absorbed, in the mid-1980s, was the calculator. Then, during the 1990s, PowerPoint, Amazon.com, and Dictionary.com, along with Craigslist, Adobe PDF, and Blogger, made pieces of standard stationery, magazines, a voluminous dictionary, and the fax machine vanish. The second half of the following decade highlights a series of radically profound changes. Since 2006, looking for our next travel destination no longer implies a fast twirl of our old-fashioned globe but instead a click on Google Maps; our correspondence is replaced by Google Mail, which makes our cork bulletin board look rather pointless. Likewise, Facebook, Google Calendar, and Skype make obsolete our address book, paper wall-planner, and landline phone. At this point, a smartphone appears next to the laptop. This is followed by the emergence of YouTube, which allows us to watch clips on the same screen we are working on; Pandora, Yelp, LinkedIn, and Wikipedia continue the same convergence dynamics, until Google News, Ticketmaster, and a rich

2   Unfortunately, the animated GIF confuses the dates: it starts in 1980 with the image of the elementary cube-form desktop computer, which Steve Jobs introduced only in 1984. Instead, in 1984, the GIF already shows us the appearance of a black laptop, substituting the cube and its accessories (i.e. keyboard and mouse). Recalling Apple's PowerBook (launched in 1991) because of its dark colour and its blockish shape, the GIF laptop differs nevertheless in design, lacking the palm rest in front of the keyboard and the track ball in its centre. Then, in 2006, the thinner aluminum laptop appears, which seemingly mimics Apple's MacBook Air brought on the market two years later. However, in 2006, Apple introduced the MacBook Pro, which was the first Mac notebook to use an Intel processor and which might be the reference point for the GIF's last device.

series of social networks including Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest get us to the point at which the desk is finally—ideally—almost empty.

This almost-empty desk emphasizes the shift to the online world, where we end up condensing our activities and tools.[3] As already mentioned, the clearing of the workstation also involves the space underneath it: our documents do not really need those non-practical drawers to be nicely archived because we now have Dropbox. Ironically enough, or for the sake of symbolic continuity, the functions of all the tools and objects that once lay on the top of the desk are now reunited on a metaphorical desktop, the so-called e-desk with its graphical user interface (GUI). One last step needs to be mentioned: once the apps have converged to this metaphorical desktop, the screenic surface of the laptop explodes, thereby expanding the practicable space to the surface of the screen we are actually using to watch the GIF.[4] What eventually remains on the desk next to the open laptop is the touchscreen-based smartphone, alongside a pair of sunglasses.

Horizontality vs. Verticality

Lying on the desk, the smartphone is a perfect example of a 'mobile screenic device', ready to take and to go, as easily as the sunglasses.[5] But what is more, when lying on the desk, the smartphone introduces a new positioning of the screen which is now no longer vertical but instead horizontal, that is, parallel to the work surface of the table. Yet, since it is a mobile screen, it can assume a whole range of different inclinations, from slightly tilted to upright.[6] In the hand of its user, the smartphone tends to remain in a

3   In this sense, the GIF seems to confirm what Félix Guattari foresaw regarding the evolution of screen media in terms of 'postmedia'. See Guattari, 'Towards a Post-Media Era', pp. 26-27.
4   This somehow creates a touchscreen illusion, as if the non-touchable laptop screen opened itself up and merged with the touchscreen surface of one of our more recent screenic devices, like the electronic tablet or the smartphone.
5   The term 'mobile screenic device' (MSD) was introduced by Heidi Rae Cooley. See Cooley, 'It's All About the Fit', pp. 133-155. While emphasizing the portability of sunglasses, it is worth pointing out that they may also allude to a particularly rich set of metaphorical interpretations. For instance, being simultaneously shades and filters, they reduce the natural light that might blind us, but at the same time, they somehow prevent us from watching in a transparent way, that is, they screen, allowing us to see things under a different light. Agnès Varda's short film *Les Fiancés du Pont Macdonald – ou Méfiez-vous des lunettes noires* (1961) nicely draws upon this double feature of the sunglasses.
6   This also applies to the electronic tablet, which can be held more or less horizontally like a book or put into a more upright position by means of various accessories, such as the original foldable iPad cover or all types of stands.

predominantly horizontal position for activities such as texting, browsing the Internet, checking posts on social networks, and even making phone calls when one has ear buds. This horizontally oriented, even if slightly tilted, screenic situation implies a 'looking down attitude', which characterizes today's smartphone addicts or so-called phubbers.[7] Regardless of its asocial implications, what interests us here is that this (new) downward-looking posture is in clear opposition to the traditional frontal viewing mode of the screen—be it a computer monitor, a film screen, a video installation wall, a painting, etc.

As exemplarily demonstrated by the GIF, the desktop computer abolishes the difference between horizontally and vertically placed objects, since they are all coming together on the same surface—resulting in the homogenization of the two axes. However, the difference between horizontality and verticality is re-established by various other media devices (such as the laptop, the smartphone, and the tablet) and, more specifically, by their screenic orientation. Therefore, it is no longer the function of a certain object (or application) to determine its position on either the vertical or the horizontal axis but rather its usage, which is linked to the orientation of the screen. For instance, the cork bulletin board, which used to hang vertically on the wall allowing the user to easily pin messages, postcards, and memoranda, finds its digital equivalent both in smartphone applications such as Reminders and Notes and in social bookmarking and photo-sharing platforms such as Pinterest, which can be accessed by different mobile screenic devices, positioned either vertically or horizontally. While simply checking and looking at a bulletin board website might (still) result in a frontal viewing position with the mobile screenic device held more or less vertically, during (participatory) actions such as writing posts or posting pictures, the screenic orientation tends to be more horizontal.

This structural evolution of the screen and the patterns of use derived from it are triggering, as we see it, a negotiation between horizontality and verticality that we propose to designate here as a 'reorientation'. With this term we refer to the axial repositioning of the screen: from horizontal to vertical or vice versa. But even when no such axial shifting is taking place, there might be a rearrangement of the screen: for instance, from the vertical wall where the bulletin board hangs to the vertically oriented desktop computer screen where we access a site like Pinterest.

In this essay, we are especially looking at examples where the screenic reorientation takes place in the passage from production (screen as work

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7   See Strauven, 'The Screenic Image', pp. 143-156.

surface) to reception (screen as display surface). Proposing a catalogue of case studies from predominantly contemporary filmmaking and visual arts, we intend to (re)consider the screenic space around its horizontal and vertical axes, taking into account both the artist's (or producer's) point of view and the position of the viewer (or user). In other words, the spatiality we are getting at involves not only the spatial orientation of the screen (and the screenic image) but also the situations of production and consumption that might take place along different spatial axes. Our exploration of the screenic space will not be limited to the literal screen but comprises more broadly an ensemble of surfaces serving as a screen in both its veiling and unveiling modes, that is, the screen as concealment or protection device and as display area.[8]

The aim of our essay is twofold. Focusing on the process of reorientation of the screen and its subsequent power of redesigning the space and modes of approaching it, we firstly want to suggest that such an axial reorientation implies a pragmatic shift based upon a reconfiguration of the patterns of use and of the space involved. Secondly, we want to point out that this variation in the usage of the screen implies a more profound change mirrored in our ways of conceptualizing the screenic device, therefore also implying an epistemological shift.[9] Thus, the various screenic reorientations will be studied in both practical and conceptual terms. This gives us the chance to propose possible revisions of the balance regulating the relationship between horizontality and verticality and to retrieve a new gesturality—or a new contextualization for an old gesturality (as, for instance, the browsing of a book). We wish, therefore, to couple our emphasis on the screenic (re)orientation to an engagement with the gesturality that it requires and inspires.

Gesturality has to be understood here as referring to both the performative acts and the situatedness of the human body.[10] This applies not only to the author or creator of the artwork but also to the viewer as active subject.

8   On this double dimension of the screen, see Avezzù, 'Intersections Between Showing and Concealment', pp. 29-41. More generally, on the archaeology of the screen, see, among others, Huhtamo, 'Elements of Screenology', pp. 31-82. Our reading of screens as surfaces is in line with the perspective proposed in Bruno, *Surface.* While Bruno proposes to rethink screens and other kinds of surfaces in material terms, our focus is centred on pragmatics and observes the axial tensions that are at stake in specific screenic dispositifs.

9   The second point has been further developed by Miriam De Rosa in her Arthemis lecture at Concordia University in Montréal in April 2016. See De Rosa, 'Desktop Cinema'.

10   Our concept of gesturality is primarily inspired by that of gesture. On the latter, see at least Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture'; and Flusser, *Gestures.*

In our discussion of interactive art installations, the term 'gesturality' might seem to refer primarily to hand gestures. Yet it implies the full body, as the hand belongs to a whole that is physically embedded in space and that, in the case of the viewer's body, needs to move forward or around in order to experience the artwork. The term, then, does not simply refer to the actual touch of a screenic surface but is rather about the position and movement of the full body in and through space. Thus, for a better understanding of the different viewing perspectives, we need to look at the body of the viewer as it is situated in the same environment where the screenic image unfolds.

It is precisely such an environment that constitutes what we propose to call the 'screenic dispositif'. With the term 'dispositif', we mean the setting or spatial organization as well as the aspects pertaining to the spectator, such as his or her position in relation to the image. We also adopt the concept of disposition, which is instead used to convey the importance of the environmental dimension and which is crucial for our study of the screenic dispositif, because it is indeed in space that an orientation of the screenic image and its variations (or reorientations) take place.[11] In this view, the notion of dispositif includes not only the spectator as physical presence but also his or her surroundings. The viewer, museum-goer, or user is considered within the spatial (and more specifically axial) arrangement as a moving element, as a body in motion, erect and therefore vertical but also moving along the horizontal viewing line. It is important to point out that the starting point of our analysis is not the cinematographic dispositif (i.e. the classical dispositif of the movie theatre) but instead the exhibition dispositif of the modern museum, where paintings—and later on video and film installations—are traditionally exhibited along the vertical axis.[12] The traditionally vertical orientation of the screen as exhibition surface certainly allows for a connection with the cinema screen, as also illustrated by some of our case studies that involve a mixture of the two dispositifs.

Axial Categories

Looking at contemporary video artworks and media installations as dispositifs that are explicitly playing with the tension between horizontality

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11   For a specific account of the notion of disposition, see De Rosa, 'Disposition & Duality', pp. 385-391.
12   On gallery films, see among others Butler, 'A Deictic Turn', pp. 305-323; and Fowler, 'Room for Experiment', pp. 324-344.

and verticality, we have identified five categories that consist of five different screenic reorientations which are taking place, as already mentioned above, in the passage from production to reception. We consider the screen in its double entity of work surface (WS) and display surface (DS), as it is conceived or produced by the artist (or maker), as well as the way it is viewed or consumed by the spectator (or user). Our five categories are: 1) horizontal WS and horizontal DS; 2) horizontal WS and vertical DS; 3) vertical WS and vertical DS; 4) vertical WS and horizontal DS; and 5) horizontal/vertical WS and vertical/horizontal DS. This axial classification is deliberately limited to perpendicular angulations, making abstraction of all the many screenic inclinations that exist between the perfectly horizontal line, which constitutes a 'table dispositif', and the perfectly vertical line, which constitutes a 'wall dispositif'. A 'table dispositif' is a horizontally oriented screen, placed like the top of a physical desk or table, whereas a 'wall dispositif' entails a vertically oriented screen, similar to the canvas on an easel or the screen of the desktop computer.

The axial orientation of the screen needs to be distinguished from its mode of framing, which can also be thought of in terms of verticality (i.e. the so-called portrait mode) and horizontality (i.e. the so-called landscape mode). Both landscape and portrait paintings will be considered here as vertically oriented screens when they are exhibited on the wall. When, instead, they are placed on a table (or a floor, for that matter), they become 'table dispositifs'. In other words, we are not engaging here with the phenomenon of vertical framing (or vertical cinema). Nevertheless, the framing of the image (or the representation within the framing) may sometimes cause, as we will point out, a tension with the axial position of the screen, which complicates (but also enriches) our categorization. On the other hand, we are not so much interested here in the image as representation but rather in the image as screenic appearance, that is, as a depiction that is made available on a screen (even if sometimes there is no physical screen but only a wall or a floor), as implied by our notion of the 'screenic dispositif'.

Our catalogue is not meant to be exhaustive; on the contrary, it is an explorative way of grouping our case studies, of bringing together emblematic works that offer similar axial tensions and that we find particularly symptomatic of the practical and conceptual reconfiguration of the screen. While many contemporary artists are clearly inspired by (or explicitly playing with) the possibilities of screenic reorientation offered by new technologies, we do not believe it is an exclusively present-day phenomenon. Rather, we see the

five categories as five genealogies, each with their historical manifestations and multiple origins.[13]

Lastly, each of the categories is linked to a specific gesture activated by its central object (or practice): the act of tapping on a table, the act of flipping through a book, the act of moving the cursor on the computer's desktop, the act of treading on a carpet, and the complex/mixed gesturality of (live) performance. Our overview discusses these different modes of gesturality in a sort of crescendo, from small gestures to a full body engagement.

## 1.   Horizontal-Horizontal: Table Installations

As narrated by our opening GIF, the 'evolution of the desk' from 1980 to today resided in the transformation of the physical desk into the metaphorical desktop, which resulted in the convergence of all kinds of objects on the vertically oriented computer/laptop screen. The exact opposite logic is at stake in our first case study: the DigitalDesk—a device developed in the early 1990s by Pierre Wellner at Xerox EuroPARC, the European branch of the Xerox PARC research centre. In Wellner's own words:

> The DigitalDesk is an ordinary desk and can be used as such, but it has a few extra capabilities. A video camera is mounted above the desk pointing down at the work surface. This camera's output is fed through a system that can detect where the user is pointing, and it can read portions of documents that are placed on the desk. A computer-driven projector is also mounted above the desk, allowing the system to superimpose electronic objects onto paper documents and the user's work surface.[14]

Thus, the DigitalDesk is a table dispositif that consists of the projection of a user interface onto the physical desk from above. Both the camera eye and the user's gaze are directed downward toward the horizontal surface, the table functioning as a screen on which everything converges. Not only do physical and electronic objects come together, the human finger is also

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13   Far from searching for the 'pure origin', we propose a Foucauldian/Nietzschean genealogy of a number of screenic configurations conceived in their variable multiplicity, as screen media are understood here as complex, adaptable, and dynamic forms.

14   Wellner, 'The DigitalDesk Calculator', p. 28. See http://uist.acm.org/archive/html/proceedings/1991.html. See also the demo video made in 1991: Wellner, 'Tactile Manipulation on a Digital Desk', *YouTube* (16 December 2009), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laApNiNpnvI. (Accessed 4 April 2017).
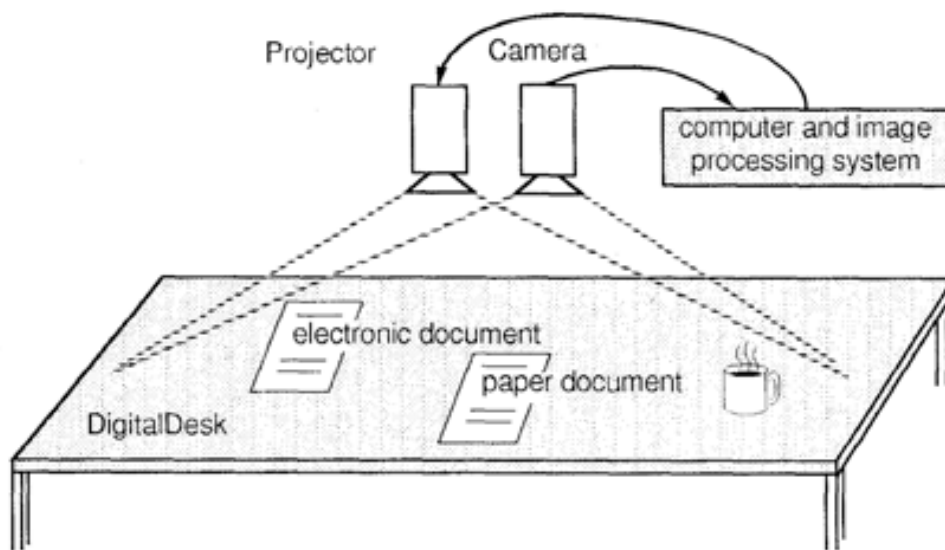
18. A DigitalDesk scheme by Pierre Wellner. From The DigitalDesk Calculator: Tangible Manipulation on a Desk Top Display. November 11-13, 1991. Courtesy of the Association of Computing Machinery.

conflated with the cursor—or rather, the finger becomes the computer mouse, which moves across the 'touchscreen' and acts directly (e.g. pushing the projected buttons of the calculator). By getting rid of the (vertically oriented) computer screen, the idea was to reduce the degree of mediation. Yet the logic of this 'touchscreen' dispositif is mediated per se: you touch a 'real' surface (table) that is meant to take your action onto a different level/surface (GUI). The latter is conceived precisely to introduce a non-physical dimension where the physical performance is then translated. It is important to stress here that the DigitalDesk was supposed to replace the desktop metaphor, which Xerox PARC themselves introduced in 1970. In other words, it was a very explicit attempt to (re)create the working area of the computer screen upon the top of the physical desk, that is, to turn back from the (metaphorical) desktop to the (literal) desk.

Although we consider the DigitalDesk as the matrix of our first category, it clearly is not an artwork. But like the two art installations that follow, its dispositif is characterized by a double horizontality, given the horizontal orientation of both the WS and the DS. An art installation that is arranged as a table dispositif can be called a table installation. Typically, such an installation invites quite naturally museum-goers to come close and put their hands on its (horizontal) surface. An exemplary case, contemporaneous with the DigitalDesk, is Janet Cardiff's *To Touch* (1993). This installation explicitly asked visitors to touch an old carpenter's table, placed in a darkened exhibition room and surrounded by sixteen audio speakers

affixed on the walls.[15] The seemingly simple wooden worktable is, in fact, an interactive 'touchscreen', that is, a 'screen that *must* be touched' in order to bring the artwork to life in its proper dimension as sound installation.[16] It contains hidden photocells that are activated by the touch of the visitor's hand running over the rough surface and that, in turn, trigger specific sound bites—ranging from human voices, whispers, and dialogues to music and environmental sounds. The gesture of the visitor's hands is horizontal, as is the screenic orientation. Although no screenic reorientation is taking place, the tension between horizontality and verticality is nevertheless deepened, as the visitor who is looking down at the work tends to look up and around to understand where the sound feedback is coming from. In other words, there is a reorientation of the viewer's gaze that consists of a shift from the vertical viewing mode (looking down towards one's own hands) to a horizontal viewing mode (looking around the room).

A similar reorientation of the viewer's gaze might happen in *Tavoli* (*Perchè queste mani mi toccano?*) [Tables (Why are these hands touching me?)] (1995), an interactive video environment conceived by the Milan-based art collective Studio Azzurro. Consisting of six 'sensible' tables randomly arranged in a darkened gallery room, *Tavoli* also comes with sound effects, such as the dripping of water. Here the visitor touching the tables, one by one, might look upwards not so much to understand where the sound is coming from but rather to figure out the (simulated) touchscreen principle of the installation. Each of the tables displays a still image that is projected from above and put into motion by means of a simple touch (or tap) by the hand on the table. One might say that, more than in Cardiff's installation, *Tavoli* is about the tabletop, that is, the flat surface of the table. The horizontality of the installation is reinforced by the fact that the images projected onto the tabletops are all images of objects or bodies lying down and being filmed from above (e.g. a bowl placed on a tablecloth that is torn away when put in motion, the rippling of water, a woman on all fours, another one crawling on her back, etc.). What is important to mention, lastly, is that the subtitle of the artwork ('Why are these hands touching me?') evokes a certain sense of gesturality from the table's perspective and not from that of the viewer.

In *To Touch* and *Tavoli*, the viewer is a user, a spectator whose active participation is required to animate the artwork, to make it operative. Also notable is that these table installations, like the DigitalDesk, are touch-based

15   See http://cardiffmiller.com/artworks/inst/totouch.html. (Accessed 4 April 2017).

16   Verhoeff, *Mobile Screens*, p. 24.

without, however, involving any touchscreen technology. Their tabletops are non-technological touchscreens, or non-screens, engaging the viewer/user in a gesturality of physical contact onto their horizontally oriented plane.

2. Horizontal-Vertical: Book Browsing

Our hypothesis—that table installations, because of their horizontal arrangement, most easily favour a tactile interaction or manipulation—is confirmed by opposition by the second axial category, which consists of case studies that are reorienting the producer's (or maker's) horizontal screenic surface (WS) 90 degrees to a vertically mounted non-interactive screen (DS). The result of such a screenic reorientation is a wall dispositif that is not 'accessible' for the viewer. Thomas Hirschhorn's *Touching Reality* (2012) is a case in point. The installation consists of a video projected onto a vertically oriented screen. The video shows us an index finger of a female hand scrolling through a series of images on a touchscreen device, most probably an iPad. In fact, we do not see what is around this touchscreen gesture (or 'Apple gesture'), as there is a perfect conflation between the projection screen and the touchscreen device's screen.[17] We do not see the frame around the iPad's screen, nor the table on which it is placed.

Most probably, during the shooting process of *Touching Reality*, the tablet was lying on a horizontal surface with the *performing* hand being recorded from above. As we would like to emphasize, the Apple gestures—besides the forefinger swiping from left to right and back again, the video also displays the pinching between index finger and thumb in order to zoom in and out—are *performed* in a very controlled way. Even if it is not Hirschhorn's, the hand clearly belongs to someone who is consciously taking part in the choreography. The hand is acting in a quite theatrical fashion. But what is more, the installation offers the spectator a non-interactive choreography of interactivity: it is a recording of a staged spectacle of interactivity.

The staged, mechanical movement of the performing hand makes the artwork even more shocking, since the scrolled-through images are all brutal images of mutilated, blood-covered bodies. Yet the finger does not seem to be affected by the horror on display; on the contrary, it browses the tablet as if it were any kind of picture book. It is a non-engaged gesture which, in the artist's own words, 'seems to be a gesture of sensitivity but at the same time

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17   Hirschhorn, 'Insoutenables destructions du corps', http://www.dailymotion.com/ video/xshflo_thomas-hirschhorn- insoutenables-destructions-du-corps_creation. (Accessed 4 April 2017).

is a gesture of enormous distancing'.[18] Such a distancing is reinforced by the choice to exclude the spectator from engaging directly with the artwork, which is projected, enlarged and reoriented, onto the vertical surface of the gallery's wall. Thus, the closeness of the touchscreen interaction of the work's production mode is annulled, alongside its horizontality. Nevertheless, thanks to the landscape display mode of the tablet, the horizontality of the work is still present as mode (or framing) of representation.

As an antecedent to Hirschhorn's representation of tablet browsing (on an invisible, un-represented table), we would like to include the short black-and-white video *Essence* (1975) by the Italian filmmaking couple Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi. In this video, we see a hand leafing through a small book that, because of its size and its rectangular shape, recalls the flipbook. But instead of the quick manipulation required for the latter, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's actor performs the action of turning the pages very slowly, one by one, allowing the viewer to read the text, which is taken from Étienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Traité des sensations* [Treatise on Sensations] (1754). As in the case of *Touching Reality*, there is a high degree of stagedness, of controlled action.[19] Yet, unlike *Touching Reality*, its framing is not restricted to the screen's surface (or the page's type-area), as we clearly see that the little book is lying on a surface, most likely a table. The action is filmed from above, from an extreme high-angle shot. Like in Hirschhorn's installation, however, when displayed as a projection, the film implies a screenic reorientation from the horizontal table on which the performer acts to the traditional, vertically positioned screen, monitor or projection wall (i.e. a wall dispositif). This 90-degree reorientation transforms the table from a physical plane on which objects can be placed to a surface for visual display, which is similar to the shift from the desk to the desktop in our opening GIF.

Of course, film history is rich with cases illustrating the downwards-looking viewing mode (and its screenic reorientation during projection), ranging from aerial footage to vertiginous winding staircases, from the Busby Berkeley top shots in classical musicals to didascalic instances of writing letters or notes. We want to retain one example that we find particularly emblematic and relevant for our argument, namely, the famous picture postcard sequence in *Les Carabiniers* [The Riflemen] (1963) by Jean-Luc Godard. When the protagonists—two bumpkins who joined the King's

Army to get rich—triumphantly return home with their war conquests, a table functions both as physical support and as display surface. First, with a rough gesture, the riflemen place the suitcase on the table. When the suitcase is opened in front of their wives, the spectator too gets a glimpse of the countless postcards, which are bundled in packages, grouped according to the principle of 'order and method'.[20] Then, the riflemen display each category, and its subcategories, by naming the constituting objects and throwing the respective postcards, one by one, on the table—a ritual that cross-cuts between frontal views of the actors and high-angle views of the table. Unlike in *Essence*, it is not an extreme high-angle shot, but the effect is quite similar. The cards are thrown on top of one another, resulting in stacks on the table.[21] An exception is made for the last category, which consists of Women ('Women are a different thing, that's another category!').[22] Here the cards are placed, a bit more gently than in the previous categories, according to three horizontal lines on top of the closed suitcase, lying on the table. The cards partially overlap, like the multiple windows on the desktop of a computer screen. The hand placing the cards is prominently present, somehow echoing—in an anachronistic way—the index finger gliding over the dead bodies in *Touching Reality*. The images, however, are of a totally different nature, more akin to those of glamor if not pornographic magazines—shown to us in a form of intra-frame collage (as opposed to inter-frame montage).

A connection could be made with the Cubist collage technique, which not only brings together various axial perspectives into its picture plane but also induces the artist to work on a horizontal surface in order to facilitate the gluing of newspapers clippings onto the drawing paper.[23] To complete our second axial category, we would like to briefly mention another example from the field of the visual arts which, like the Cubist collage, is a new (or avant-garde) painterly technique: drip painting. Invented in the first half of the twentieth century by Surrealist artists such as Francis Picabia and Max

20 Jean-Luc Godard, *Les Carabiniers* (1963); our translation.

21 Interestingly enough, Facebook took up the same motif (and gesture) of throwing pictures on our virtual walls, selected from our own personal archives and edited into a short video to be posted, as a way of celebrating Happy Friends Day on 4 February 2016.

22 Jean-Luc Godard, *Les Carabiniers* (1963); our translation.

23 See also Henri Matisse's technique of cut-outs (or *gouaches découpées*), invented to cope with his impaired health situation in the 1940s. The technique consisted of cutting sheets of paper, pre-painted with gouache by his assistants, into various shapes that would fall on the table or onto the floor, and then be rearranged and glued into colourful compositions to be exhibited vertically. MoMA devoted an exhibition to this technique of Matisse; for more details, see Friedman et al. (eds.), *Henri Matisse.*

Ernst, this technique became the signature style of Jackson Pollock who, in the 1940s, started laying his canvases out on the studio floor, pouring and dripping liquid paint over them. The reorientation from horizontality (canvas on the floor) to verticality (painting on the wall) is at the core of Pollock's unique style. The physical traces of the action of pouring and dripping gives his work a highly performative quality, which is properly reflected by the term 'action painting'.[24]

3. Vertical-Horizontal: Carpets and Floor Screens

Keeping in mind Jackson Pollock's 'action painting' technique, our third axial category consists of the exact opposite technique, that is, the wall (or easel) as production mode (or WS) and the floor as viewing mode (or DS). A blueprint of this screenic reorientation can be found in the textile tradition, more specifically in the genealogy of carpet weaving. We are thinking here of carpets woven on vertical looms, to be put on the floor as decoration and/or insulation.[25] Surfaces that act as a 'floor screen' because of their horizontal arrangement constitute a special case of table dispositif, which might be better termed 'floor dispositif'. This type of dispositif invites a response that differs from the installations discussed in our first category. For instance, a video loop that is projected onto the floor as a carpet might invite museum-goers, especially the youngest among them, to walk and even jump on it. The Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Science in Brussels hosts such an installation, which consists of a non-interactive animation video combining both horizontal and vertical perspectives: a green field with flowers, walking ducks, and flying birds. Despite its non-interactive nature, children find ways to engage with the installation, trampling the flowers or trying to make the ducks fly. The loop was probably made on the vertically oriented screen of a computer and therefore reoriented when

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24   According to Rosalind Krauss, Pollock put his canvases on the floor not only to gain more space and freedom of action while painting but also to re-contextualize the art form he was up to, and from there to articulate some vectors, which the American art critic defines as the 'horizontal field of an event', thereby emphasizing the performative dimension of the creative act. The surface reorientation here is quite self-explanatory, yet we find it particularly interesting to underscore how the pragmatic shift from a wall dispositif to a table dispositif is, once again, determined by practice, that is, from Pollock's own gesturality. Such a positional change leads to a conceptual revision—the disposition redesigning the dispositif. See Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea.*

25   The same functions also apply to tapestry, which is, however, commonly destined for a vertical orientation (draped on the wall). See for instance Bloch, 'Frontality', pp. S44-S59; and Goren, 'Pilgrimage, Tapestries, and Cartography', pp. 489-513.

projected onto the floor screen. Differently from the live action recording of Hirschhorn's *Touching Reality* or Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's *Essence*, the producer's creative act coincides here with the (post)production process of the computer animation. Nevertheless, the screenic reorientation from computer screen to floor screen also involves a reorientation of the animated images; for instance, the 2D profiled ducks are no longer seen from the side (as conceived on the vertically oriented computer screen) but from above, now resembling paper cut-outs dropped on the floor.

A similar principle is at work in the video installation *Spill Life* (2014-2015), conceived in two installments by LOOP.[26] The interactive mechanism is water-based: visitors are explicitly invited to collect water with a glass and then spill it into a beaker placed in the centre of the room. The more water the participants pour, the more the plants of the 3D animation grow. The title of the installation is an obvious pun on 'still life', which in Italian is called *natura morta* (dead nature). *Spill Life* is about the tension between nature and technology, between the (digitally) animated *natura morta* and the low-tech gesture of the human hand. However, no 'real' interaction between the two is taking place since the operating hand cannot touch the source of the animated action nor change its course.[27] It all happens through the experimental interface, which communicates with a computer when the right amount (or rather weight) of water has been poured into the beaker.

In axial terms, the first installment of *Spill Life* reoriented the gaze: various clips of computer imagery were projected high up onto the (vertical) walls of an old building, forcing the amazed spectators to look up. Yet in the second installment, *SPILL LIFE #2 – Versus Natura* (2015), the artists projected their vertically created computer animation onto the floor of the inner court of Palazzo Bevilacqua. This old palazzo has a well at its centre, around which the water-spilling action was organized. Like the floor screen of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Science, this stone carpet became a screenic playground for children who tried to catch the butterflies flying above the colourful flowers that had grown thanks to the spilling of water. Again, the animation video itself was not interactive.

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26   The first installment took place at the Water Design event in Bologna in October 2014; the second one featured at the White Night of Bologna ArtCity in January 2015. Promotional clips of both installments can be found, respectively, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBXKUHqslQo and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KydJK_CEhuM. (Accessed 4 April 2017). See also http://www.bolognatoday.it/eventi/mostre/as-above-so-below-loop.html. (Accessed 4 April 2017).

27   On the relationship between the intangible digital materiality of the operations of the touchscreen and the shortcomings of the capacity of touch in the face of it, see Sæther, 'Gestures of Touch in Recent Video Art', pp. 89-110.

Floor screens are also popular outside the museum world, for instance, in discos or nightclubs. As shown by the above examples, the gesturality in this category of screenic reorientations is no longer in the hands of the hands but instead of the feet—jumping, stomping, dancing, trampling. This is a major difference with artworks that are reoriented 90 degrees in the other direction towards the ceiling. Generally, such a screenic reorientation from vertical WS (i.e. the computer screen) to horizontal DS (i.e. the ceiling) does not allow any form of physical contact, simply because the screen is quite literally out of reach.[28]

Between floor and ceiling, a special case is offered by Bill Viola's video sculpture, *Heaven and Earth* (1992). This installation consists of an encounter between two CTR monitors that are stripped and unboxed. Both screens are placed in a horizontal position, the one with the close-up of a newborn facing up and the other with the image of an old woman facing down. In fact, the screens are facing one another, mounted at the ends of two wooden columns that are each extending from the floor and the ceiling, respectively—a screenic dispositif that creates the effect of a single wooden column with a gap in its centre. In order to see the black-and-white images emitted by and reflected upon both screens as they almost touch one another, visitors need to get very close and literally put their nose in between. It is an installation of proximity that is not supposed to be touched but that cannot be contemplated in a traditional way, either.

The crucial intimacy of *Heaven and Earth*'s exhibition space is in contrast with most of Viola's video works which often require huge rooms and projection walls, as is the case in his 'chapel' installation, *Going Forth By Day* (2002), conceived as an HD video tribute to Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel frescoes. Of the five panels that constitute this major video installation, *The Path* directly connects to our next axial category, even if it creates a strong feeling of horizontality. Projected on the wall, we see people walking through a forest in a long, panoramic moving image. And as visitors, we walk along their path, following their flow in a never-ending journey.

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28   Being out of reach does not necessarily exclude interaction or manipulation/operation from the side of the viewer. This is the logic behind the newly designed Moonlite device that uses the flashlight of your smartphone to project images on the ceiling of your (or your child's) bedroom. The device uses disk-formed reels, similar to those of the View-Master, and is connected to a bedtime story app. See https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1483155071/moonlite-a-bedtime-story-projector-for-your-mobile. (Accessed 4 April 2017).

4. Vertical-Vertical: Desktop Cinema

Entering the exhibition space of the Italian Pavilion at the Expo 2010 in Shanghai, the visitor is confronted with a room that is limited diagonally by a massive translucent screen. The images projected on the screen represent the clear focus of the whole space. However, it takes some time to understand how to relate to the images: they show a number of life-sized people walking along the wall of sorts that the device ends up building, and the spectators cannot help but following them, either with their eyes or with their full bodies. In this wall dispositif, the visitors are quite free to move—a fact that makes them empathize with these figures. The sense of proximity is even more emphasized as they literally get in touch with the projected life-sized people, since the full interactive dimension of the installation is disclosed by touching the screen. The visitors realize that what is vertically located right in front of them is not simply a screen but a multilayered ensemble of superimposed screens, the closest of which is touch-based. In fact, the key gesture to let the artwork unfold further meanings and visual layers is not the frontal viewing mode of distanced contemplation but instead the direct contact between the visitor's hand and the walking figures. Resembling the act of stopping passers-by to ask for directions, the visitor's touch arrests the walkers' movement. The walkers turn towards the visitor and start telling their story. In the background, their words find completion in the maps, the photographs, and the video sequences that describe the journey they are talking about. The result is a 'sensitive' portrait of minor Italian cities, as the title of the installation, *Sensitive City*, also reveals.[29] Created by Studio Azzurro, this video environment is a vertically displayed artwork, conceived to be consumed by spectators in a standing position, but it strongly alludes to the horizontal axis, as they are called to walk along with the projected people, precisely like in Viola's above-mentioned video panel *The Path*.

In more analytical terms, from a producer's point of view, the characters were filmed with a camera shooting frontally, and the same frontal position is occupied by the projector once the artwork is installed. The spectators are asked to activate a frontal kind of looking and to touch the vertical screens. Standing vertically, upright in front of the screens, they reduce their mobility throughout the exhibition space and thus find themselves in a revisited organization of what, ultimately, is a model of consumption of the moving image that is quite close to the traditional exhibition dispositif.

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29   For a thorough analysis of the installation, see De Rosa, *Cinema e postmedia,* in particular Chapter 5.

Despite the strong element of interaction, then, the contemplative stance characterizing the spectator's attitude seems here to be the main feature determining a pragmatic re-disposition of the situation: in comparison to the table installations where we do not need the dispositif to be vertical in order to operate it, *Sensitive City* offers a screenic articulation rooted first and foremost in the request to be looked at and through. It is then this very function—better yet the usage—that decides the whole orientation. Conceptually echoing the staged dimension we already mentioned in the category of book browsing, looking wins over touching even if without the latter, the artwork is not fully activated.[30]

We see this installation as a matrix of our fourth axial category, which includes works that explore the combination of double verticality. As in *Sensitive City,* the films and installations belonging to this group propose a rather classical arrangement of the screenic axis and of the author/spectator's postures. Instead of creating a real tension between the two coordinates, they nevertheless evoke some friction and explicitly call for a closer reading of the innovative character of their fabrication.

All produced between 2013 and 2015, the works we wish to mention here have been presented in very diverse occasions and venues ranging from galleries to film festivals and Internet platforms. They are all (except one) fully digital works that share a specific sensitivity towards the issue of the screenic image. Thematizing or presenting a structural reference to the balance between horizontal and vertical axes, these works create an interesting conceptual superimposition between representation and setting, which is to be found especially in the deictic aspect, that is, at the intersection of production and spectatorship.

Introducing these works along a line that sees the presence of the screenic image from the highest (and exclusively) aesthetic to a dispositif-related dimension, our first encounter is with Victoria Fu's *Lorem ipsum 1* (2013), a 16mm film transferred to digital. Following a woman's movements

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30   By way of touching, spectators activate a new visual expansion of the image, for their gestures also elicit a sort of lateral development of the visuals on the surface of the screen in the foreground as well as the articulation of a new depth created by the unfolding of other audiovisual materials in the other screens placed behind the former. The sound dimension is probably the element that mostly underscores the difference between the situation before and after the touch gesture takes place, tracing a continuity based on the cause/effect connection between the touch and the sound feedback that bridges this installation and Cardiff's table installation (see category 1). Given the similarity of the logics behind the two artworks, it is interesting to notice that the orientation and therefore the usage of the screenic device is what differentiate them.

throughout a domestic environment, the installation introduces a series of visual tropes—such as the multiplicity of frames—that anticipate a PC-interface-based aesthetics, which constitutes the core of our fourth category. Remaining on the representational level, the reiterated image of opening and closing doors, windows, etc. works here as *fictionalized mobilization* of the screen. A threshold on the whole, this artwork simulates in a quite visionary fashion the possibilities for the manipulation and integration of the interface window into the cinematic language: when watching this work on a big projection screen in the gallery space, it seems indeed as if we are looking at a huge desktop computer screen. This is why we see *Lorem Ipsum 1* as an important antecedent of desktop cinema.

First used by Miriam De Rosa to describe Kevin B. Lee's video-essay *Transformers: The Premake* (2014), the label 'desktop cinema' refers to those films that incorporate the desktop environment in the narrative by way of a combination of pre-recorded desktop footage and other sources, including original or found footage, as well as PC-delivered data. In particular, Lee emphasizes the idea of documentation, as to indicate the process connecting all these kinds of audio-visual materials; it is not by chance that he refers to his own pioneering production style as 'desktop documentary'.[31] Clearly, adding this category to our journey into the (re)orientation of the screen signals an important step that, if somewhat anticipated by our opening GIF, becomes here quite emblematic: the centrality of the (desktop/laptop) computer screen—a WS that becomes a DS, too. By Lee's own admission, the inclusion of such an element and the way it is conceived in the frame of desktop cinema, was not something he pre-established:

> I realized that a lot [...] of this investigation had taken place on my computer through finding all those videos, editing the footage on my computer, doing all the research on my computer, so why not have the computer be the stage or the set for the story to take place? Not just as the machine by which you put the movie together, but the set where the movie takes place. So you can start thinking the desktop in multiple definitions *of what it's doing*: it can be the apparatus through which you make the film, but it can be the setting, and then when it becomes the setting you think—is it a location? Is it a place? Or is it actually a camera that is capturing images one after another? How does this desktop environment

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31   Lee, 'De-Coding or Re-Encoding', p. 220. For 'desktop cinema', see De Rosa's Arthemis lecture with the same name.

work cinematically? Is it a screen? Is it a camera? Is it an editing device? [...] There are all these existing techniques, and methods and *concepts by which we understand cinema*.[32]

Confirming the tight connection between new usages ('what [the desktop] is doing') and new ways of thinking about the screen ('concepts by which we understand cinema'), what desktop cinema reveals, then, is not a new relationship between horizontality and verticality but rather an exacerbation of the features of the 'dynamic screen', as defined by Lev Manovich. The desktop metaphor reigning today on our computer screens shows a basic continuity with the classic conception that sees the screen as a 'flat, rectangular surface [intended] for frontal viewing', actually existing in the same phenomenological dimension where the body of the viewer also exists.[33] Working as a portal towards an interactive elsewhere, at the same time it introduces a new depth able to trigger what Alexander Galloway has called an 'interface effect [bringing] about transformations in material states'.[34]

Developed in terms that echo Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto, the same 'interface effect' constitutes the heart of Louis Henderson's desktop film *All That Is Solid* (2014). Focused on the parallel between an e-waste dump site and a neo-colonial illegal gold mine in Ghana, the video proposes a multiplication of windows on the desktop, disposing them in a *mise-en-abyme* set that conveys a clear critique of the capitalist system and its production processes, underscoring the contrast between the predicated intangibility of computer technology and the sense of weight characterizing the mineral extraction. The same technique is also used by Camille Henrot in her award-winning video *Grosse Fatigue* (2013). Centred on the narrative about the creation of the universe, the artist uses the desktop environment as a displayed working surface where manifold windows simultaneously show us fragments of the myth of the origin.

In comparison to Lee's work, *All That Is Solid* and *Grosse Fatigue*, while definitely sharing the same desktop aesthetics, propose a higher degree of stagedness. Even though we clearly see the interface (frames of the windows,

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32   'Kevin B. Lee discusses Desktop Documentary and Transformers: The Premake', lecture podcast available online at *Film Studies For Free*, 6 April 2015: http://filmstudiesforfree.podbean. com/e/kevin-b-lee-discusses-desktop-documentary-and-transformers-the-premake/. (Accessed 4 April 2017); our emphasis. The film is also available at https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=dD3K1eWXI54. (Accessed 4 April 2017).

33   Manovich, 'Towards an Archaeology of the Computer Screen', p. 28.

34   Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, p. vii.

option bar at the top of the screen, desktop in the background, icons on top of it), no cursor shows us the presence of an agency operating on the desktop. Whereas *The Premake* unveils the intention of the author in the very moment in which it takes shape, Henderson and Henrot do not disclose their gestures. In their videos, the actions mobilizing the windows—which can be seen as represented screens on-screen—are most evidently following a script.

We are not claiming by any means that such difference symptomatizes either the non-performativity of Lee's exercise (which is also clearly prepared and rehearsed in view of the screen recording), nor Henderson and Henrot's non-adherence to a real time-inspired language; the point we rather wish to make is to highlight a continuity with the staged aspect we already observed in our second category of book browsing. Possibly in a more striking way than in Hirschhorn, the presence of the interface alludes here to the chance of an interaction with the spectator who would join the author in the displayed universe of performativity but who cannot effectively operate on the desktop. In other words, these works offer choreographies of interactivity without being really interactive for the spectator. As in Hirshhorn's case, we are presented a recorded spectacle of interactivity and, therefore, a simulated spectacle of interactivity, where the recorded yet supposedly interactive gestures are in fact 'fake'. What we see unfolding is the calculated result of a gesturality, which is purposely designed by the authors in order to imitate the interface (which, interestingly enough, is in turn designed to imitate or allude to an exquisitely human gesturality). What is at stake is an aesthetics of fakeness, which most of the time sits on a strong presence of the author and a consistent hypermediacy of the screenic interface.[35]

The same sense of fabrication is made more explicit in a series of contemporary works all featuring a direct and ironic reference to gesturality and, in particular, to the Apple gesture. In the single-channel video installation *Belle Captive 1* (2013) by Victoria Fu, for example, we have two vertically oriented screens in front of a wall; they are placed like overlapping windows on a computer screen and a projection goes over both screens flowing over their edges, creating a halo that expands onto the floor and that produces the illusory impression of some horizontality.[36] However, the main illusory aspect pertains the touchscreen effect, as we see a touchscreen gesture

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35   On the notion of hypermediacy, see Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation.*
36   A similar effect is obtained even more efficiently by video artist Helen Dowling in her installation *The Burning Time Slideshow* (2015), for which she covers the section of the floor in front of the screen with a shining foil that creates a reflection on the ground. This work was part of the exhibition 'Close-Up – A New Generation of Film and Video Artists in the Netherlands', EYE Film Institute Netherlands, January-May 2016.

19. Victoria Fu, *Belle Captive I*, 2013. Video installation with sound, 06:00 loop. Exhibition view, Whitney Biennial. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

projected onto a non-touchscreen: sometimes, the represented figures react to the (also represented) touch, but the installation does not allow for any interaction from the side of the spectator.

The same motif also appears in *Velvet Peel 1* (2015) by the same artist, where the Apple gesture is performed with the entire body instead of with the fingers: not only the head but also the butt are swiping. Such gestures reveal a humorous approach to the new touchscreen gesturality. Set in the same ironic tone, *Démontable* (2014) by Douwe Dijkstra also mocks the interaction solicited by touchscreens. Here, at the very end of the film, once more we have an Apple gesture represented when—after various 'adventures' taking place on the horizontal surface of a table—the hand operating the tools displayed during the film seeks to switch off an old-fashioned TV set in order to put an end to the story. It swipes the fingertips on the vertical screen from left to right as on an Apple device, enhancing a funny tone that implies a positional coincidence of the represented TV screen and film frame, thereby strengthening their shared vertical axis. Also, this gesture ironizes the illusory nature and the staged regime of the gesture, evoking a WS that is, in fact, only a DS.

In order to summarize this fourth category of our catalogue, we would like to maintain that—reproducing a model structured around a double verticality—the aesthetics of desktop cinema seems to imply a viewer who is

kept at a distance. Despite the familiarity of the computer environment and the apparent 'communal gesture'[37] performed by the artists, the viewer is only rhetorically implied, for the films and artworks propose what is, in fact, a figuration of the interface rather than an actual one. Consequently, by way of ironic and sometimes critical narratives, the 'sense of action' emphasized by the highly displayed procedurality betrays a screenic dispositif that—as is often the case in the field of interactive arts—'at times enclose[s] one into a schema of manipulation' (and, we would add, of underrated constructedness), for the windows and the multiple vertically oriented screens appearing in the film installations do not open up a real space of interaction.[38] Without reorienting the screen, these works reinforce the traditional axial balance between horizontality and verticality as well as the separation between on/off-screen, author and spectator, WS and DS. Yet our examples underline the meaningfulness of performativity—a notion that we will further explore in our next and last category.

5. Horizontal/Vertical-Vertical/Horizontal: Tabletop Performances

Taking the performative dimension quite literally and to its pure extreme, the fifth group includes live or recorded performances that entail both the moving image and the presence of one or more screens of sorts. We shall look at Julien Maire's *Model for the Apocalypse* (2008), Gautam Kansara's *Save As* (2014), Joan Jonas' *They Come to Us Without a Word II* (2015), and Laetitia Gendre's *The Erased* (2014). These works are all complex versions of the table dispositif triggering an action that happens—by way of a performance—on the top of a table. Despite the profound differences between the themes tackled by the narratives of these four art installations, their distribution and public resonance, as well as the artists' background, they all present important similarities that favour our reflection on the conception, mobilization, and (re)orientation of the screen. Let us begin by saying that they accomplish a complete revision of the axial coordinates by positioning

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37 Lee, 'Film Studies For Free', lecture podcast.

38 Poissant, 'The Passage from Material to Interface', p. 245. For the opposite perspective on this issue, see Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*, p. 227. While Friedberg touches upon the metaphoric value of both the desktop and the multiple windows, the notion of the screenic dispositif as we propose it sits on a more concrete idea of the objects at stake, for the window can be connected to a physical, vertically oriented wall and the desk is in fact based on the model of a real horizontal table surface. Pushing beyond Friedberg's envisaged simultaneity of a virtual object being *metaphorically* both a window and a desk, we are exploring the dynamics of reorientation to offer a more *pragmatic* and hopefully complementary take on the issue.

20. Julien Maire, *Model for the Apocalypse*, 2008. View of the artist performance during the Art.Ware Festival, Hong Kong, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Art.Ware Festival. All rights are reserved.

the screen both horizontally and vertically. Furthermore, the distinction between WS and DS is no longer applicable, precisely because of their complex axial dispositifs and their performative dimension.

In 1997, Julien Maire created the special 'slow-motion material' needed for his *Model for the Apocalypse*, which premiered as a performance in 2008 at the Shanghai Zendai Museum of Modern Art. Sitting at a table, the performing artist builds formless forms with this unique material made of micro steel balls, to which special glue is added and which disintegrates in slow motion under the glance of a camera. Behind the artist, the action is projected, as a live broadcast, onto a screen. Special software displays different points of view of the material, using a single video camera. The audience stands around the table, looking at the artist performing on the horizontal axis and simultaneously watching the footage displayed on the vertically oriented screen.

As Edwin Carels observes, it is a setting or dispositif that 'conflat[es] real-time perception with mediated vision'.[39] The temporal sense of extension conveyed by both the slow motion of the material and the long duration of the performance might echo the spatial extension of the performance from the horizontal space of liveness to the vertical one of detached representation. As

39   Carels, 'The Productivity of the Prototype', p. 181.

for the viewer, this slow motion spectacle is consumed from a safe distance, without direct interaction.

The same is true for Gautam Kansara's *Save As* performance, recorded and projected as a single-channel HD video, first exhibited at Shrine Empire Gallery in New Delhi in November 2014. It reflects upon the issue of memory by coupling a highly bodily and material treatment of various substances with the intangibility of digital technology, translating the contrast onto the visual level and paying specific attention to the mechanisms of focusing, re-focusing, storing, updating, and overwriting through the 'save as' option. Projected onto a glass table, we see some moving images recycled from previous videos by the artist.[40] A concrete universe is added to the virtual one by the artist's hand, which also appears in the frame: this physically added layer is made of simple, rough materials (flour, liquid, bleach, etc.) and white paper clippings used in the actual performance. Evoking in a quite uncanny fashion the postcard sequence in *Les Carabiniers*, Kansara, who is standing in front of the table, throws these paper clippings on the horizontal surface, while a camera records his gestures from above. The resulting image is projected onto the gallery walls. Bearing in mind the experimentation of desktop cinema, and catching the allusion to digital technology brought by the title, the pieces of paper remind us of computer windows, overlapping one another and with images overflowing outside the multitude of frames. The screenic orientation is similar to that of Maire's *Model for the Apocalypse*: at the core is the *coexistence* of a horizontal screen (i.e. the table) where the performance takes place, and of a vertical one (i.e. the wall) where its spectacle is offered to the eye of the non-interactive, contemplative spectator.

Joan Jonas' *They Come to Us Without a Word II* (2015), which complemented her video installation representing the United States at the 56th Venice Biennale of Art, is a live performance that ran for three nights at Teatro Piccolo Arsenale in July 2015. Proposing a dispositif that the artist has been experimenting with for decades, the piece is based on a simultaneous projection on the multilayered vertical screens located at centre stage of what Jonas performs on the laterally placed table.[41] In addition, jazz composer Jason Moran creates a live score to the performance, playing his piano on the opposite side of the stage. It is as if the artwork would result not only

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40   See https://gautamkansara.wordpress.com/save-as-2014/. (Accessed 4 April 2017).
41   See, for example, *Reanimation* (Hangar Bicocca, Milan, 2014), where the artist revisits her earlier work *Disturbances* (1974), in which an investigation of surfaces and mirrored, extended spaces was already inspiring her. See also Reynolds, 'How the Box Contains Us', pp. 20-29.

from the intermingling of mixed media but also from an encounter between hands—Moran's action of touching the keyboard resembling Jonas' hands on the table surface, before they become part of the vertically projected image.

Laetitia Gendre's *The Erased* (2014) is another installation that combines both the horizontal and the vertical axes. In Gendre's piece, the artist's performance is not live but recorded as part of a video slideshow. The installation consists of a black table with a huge black-boxed folder on its top, lying open and containing white sheets with line drawings. The drawings are contour tracings of the various panel compositions constituting Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*; however, all the panels' visual contents are 'erased', resulting in empty frames. On the wall next to the table, a video slideshow is projected, showing the drawings inside a box that the spectator is not allowed to touch. The randomly generated split-screen framing of the video slideshow editor turns the whole into a digital *mise-en-abyme* of Warburg's *Atlas,* completed by the appearance of a white gloved hand—the hand of the archivist/artist—whose index finger points to some invisible details. This mixture of analog and digital gestures is not directly accessible to the spectator, whose viewing mode is nevertheless shifting between horizontality and verticality, between looking down at the 'real' drawings in the black box and frontally facing their electronically projected images. As the artist explains it, the slideshow video is 'directly related to the idea of the screen, in the sense that it is symptomatic of the use made of this kind of software for digital photos, and there is also an allusion to the search engines on the Internet'.[42]

If desktop cinema testified to the possibility to use and thus conceive of the computer screen and its interface as a stage for film, the tabletop performances of our last category adopt the same logic reinterpreting it. Hence, by translating the same 'cinematic' stance into a more theatrical realm, the screen looks like an extension of the stage. This is not only motivated by an expressive research that is directed towards the territories of performance but also by an undivided attention to the process in its *happening*. We are presented with a documentation of things as they are taking shape and of events as they unfold: what in desktop cinema was a real-time rhetoric here becomes liveness (even if recorded, as in Gendre's *The Erased*). Similarly, from a desktop that was intended as stage, we move here to an actual stage. Moreover, the performing artists accomplish this shift that multiplies the stage surfaces by including a number of areas and spaces in the setting that allow the disruption and enhancement of its physical dimensions. As

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42   Email conversation with the artist, 27 January 2016.

a consequence, the angles from which the image is made available to the spectator are also multiplied. Since a multitude of operating surfaces is included in the artworks, the viewer is then enabled to pragmatically search for new positions and ways to look at the image, to shift from one position to another, and direct his or her gaze from one surface to another. In other words, many surfaces are offered: they superimpose on top of one another, sometimes clashing, taking shape in real time before our eyes; consequently, at times we cannot see them at all from our position—this is where the screenic dispositif (be it a WS or a DS, or both) is called into play in order to transfer the image onto a diverse, differently oriented and more visible area, most of the time perpendicular to the one where the action is actually taking place.

Conclusion: Authorship vs. Spectatorship?

The effective axial reorientation of the screen in the last category does not afford more interaction or interactivity than in most of the other case studies, insofar as the tabletop performances similarly preclude the spectator from participation: he or she is engaged by the live dimension of the artwork and yet is excluded from the displayed gesturality given his or her fixed, separated postures. Table installations, as discussed in our first category, allow instead for the concrete participation of the viewer.

Both the first and the last category feature a strong gesturality. In the table installations of the first category, it is a gesture that belongs directly to the spectator and constitutes the basis of the interaction that is essential for unfolding the installations' potential. And in the tabletop performances of the last category, the action is the necessary element for the performance to take place but belongs solely to the author. In axial terms, it is evident that horizontality is connected to a sphere of practicability and authorship, whereas verticality is the orientation directing the spectator and informing the more passive stance of watching. But reality offers many nuances in between these two opposite poles. Table installations do indeed propose a horizontal surface onto which the spectator is invited to direct both gaze and gesture. Yet by touching the horizontal surface, the spectator becomes, in fact, a producer. Spectatorship shifts, therefore, towards authorship, substantiating the connection between horizontality, action, and production.

As for the tabletop performances, we tried to demonstrate that these types of experiences do not alter the traditional exhibition (and cinematic) dispositif, which tends to see authorship and spectatorship as two non-interacting, distinct spheres. If such separation seems to be softened in

temporal terms—for liveness implies a real-time temporality without delay between the event happening on the horizontal table surface and its image projected onto the vertical frame of the screen—this passage obviously requires a spatial fracture. Put differently, temporal proximity finds its own counterpart in the spatial element because the traditional dispositif works as a sort of detaching device that allows us to see it at the cost of taking the image away from its source. Underscoring a rupture from the action that created it, gesturality and looking, authorship and spectatorship are thereby distinguished. However, we still believe that these performances challenge the axial coordinates, since a way to connect horizontality and verticality is definitely at the centre of the artists' expressive searches; in this sense, the image of the performer's hand and its metaphors (be it a pointer or a cursor) stand most likely as an attempt to bridge these two dimensions.

This is not a novel effort, as our discussion of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's *Essence* as well as Godard's postcard sequence has made clear; yet in the performance installations of the fifth category, such an attempt is newly proposed and reinterpreted by shifting from a cinematic to a more markedly performative language. Despite the spatial separation of the screenic dispositifs, their co-existence on stage and the temporal coincidence of the action/image featuring both the table and the screen establishes a *trait-d'union*, an in-between space. It is a threshold where the opportunity for reorientation might be developed, an area where authorial and spectatorial stances are put in communication. Here, a mixture between the two is negotiated by means of the simultaneous usage of the horizontal and the vertical screenic spaces, as well as of the performer's gesturality and the (possible revisions of) the spectator's posture. We would like to qualify this threshold as a conceptual playground, as an extension of the children's playground we described in our account of floor screens. Adopting Victor Turner's notion of play, we can then maintain that those who play—author and spectator—are agents of change: what actually changes is the orientation and, thus, the way of thinking about the screen via its usage.[43]

43   Turner's concept of play is to be connected to his broader anthropological thought, according to which cultural performances entail a ritual potential that may lead to a change, envisage a shift, or formalize a state of transformation and passage. Inextricably bound to the creativity that is produced in such circumstances, play is a *summa* of deep and symbolic values, a condensation of traditions, habits, and beliefs but, at the same time, is a liminal action performed in a threshold space (among which are the playground and the kind of liminal spaces we tried to sketch out in our catalogue of screenic dispositifs). As such, it may well give room for novelties, original inclinations, and reorientations that determine a passage and may therefore be taken as a model for change. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre.*

Pragmatically tested through play, the various uses of the screenic surface revise the traditional ones: they enhance, challenge and—most of all—displace and re-place the screen itself along a new axial direction. In the frame of a reflection about performance, the PC-based environment, and its interfaces, Marshall Soules claimed that

> [e]ach machine or new technology contributes an idiomatic orientation to the message it conveys, and much of the critical writing on hypermedia is concerned to varying degrees with attempts to characterize the idiomatic proclivities of the digital medium.[44]

Hazarding a quite literal interpretation of Soules' point, by way of conclusion, we might well try to relate it to the case studies composing our catalogue. What our journey across the axial orientation of the screen and along its pretended or actual innovative dispositions finally leads us to claim is that observing a wide set of screenic variations and modulations hopefully enables us to highlight a threshold where horizontality and verticality, doing and seeing, authorship and spectatorship can meet. Moving through this playground, we have encountered table installations, book browsing, carpet and floor screens, desktop cinema works, and tabletop performances— categories that are all nuances describing the varying axial inclinations defining the orientation of the screen. Such variations open up room for multiple forms of gesturality, thereby creating new 'idiomatic proclivities' of the screenic image.

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44   Soules, 'Animating the Language Machine', p. 329.

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