The Video Project: *In Between*

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My video project *In between* [http://vimeo.com/35014133](http://vimeo.com/35014133) is based on my lack of habitual memory in Vancouver as a new comer and failures in my attentive recognition as a consequence, which provoke deeper memories in a Bergsonian sense and wider clouds of virtualities around the actual in Deleuzian terms.

According to Bergson, perception is not adding anything; on the contrary it is only that something be subtracted since it is always interested and therefore partial. Gilles Deleuze also emphasizes that “the virtual is never independent of the singularities which cut it up and divide it out on the plane of immanence” (149-150, 2002). The selection of virtual actions to actualize does not take place at random, but draws on the current intentions/needs and the past experience. Memory operates in terms of a similar virtuality, beginning with a virtual state and leading to the point where it gets materialized in an actual perception (Ansell-Pearson, 1113).

However, the connection between present and past or actual and virtual, is complicated by the integration of what Bergson and Deleuze describe as the image of time (based on Bergson’s notion of duration). Time is always splitting into two parts: the time that moves forward as “the present that passes” referring to the actual image; and the time that is represented as “the past that is preserved” referring to the virtual image. As Laura U. Marks argues (40), “these two types of images create two disjunctive representations of the same moment”.

As Marks puts it, through ‘attentive recognition’ we ‘contact’ to the perceived object, but it also opens up ever-expanding systems (deeper memories/virtualities) with which it may be bound up with in Bergsonian terms (48). In the end, a recollection-image embodies a past event that has no match in the present image repertoire. It can be seen as a sort of virtual image called upon by the process of attentive
recognition (as it is in an actualization process). According to Bergson, this circuit can draw upon more expansive levels of memory, perceiving a more detailed and rich image of the object, embedded in “deeper strata of reality.” (105; 115).

As Alia Al-Saji discusses (217), for Deleuze, this splitting is not complete: “The two jets continue to interpenetrate and to coexist”; the virtual becomes actualized and inserted into new presents, and the actual becomes virtualized as these presents continue to pass. Memory is not closed in on itself, but opens onto other planes of the past and other affective intensities. Memory can be understood as a virtual and an active reality that exceeds consciousness and presence. In the instances where the demands of action and utility (interest) are suspended and where recognition fails to reconnect to the memory, “memory is attentive, receptive and responsive in Bergson’s account”. (230)

In this regard, I see my own multi-sensory experience of Vancouver without a trained sensory repertoire of Vancouver (and therefore without a habitual memory) as an opportunity that generates failures in recognition. From a Bergsonian perspective, it means “perceiving more”; perceiving the objects/images around me in a way different from the known or expected ways beyond what habitual memory offers. As Al-Saji (212-213) discusses referring to Bergson, in experiences where attentive recognition or perception fails, we become aware, albeit in affective rather than cognitive terms, of the doubling of the present into perception and memory. The virtual image, which remains unconscious in a normal perception, -since it is not an actualized image- reveals itself in failures in recognition. Therefore, attentive recognition informs us to a much greater degree when it fails than when it succeeds. When we cannot recognize, the sensory-motor extension remains suspended, and the actual image does not link up with either a motor image or a recollection-image, which would re-establish the contact. It rather enters into relations with virtual elements.
Here, it is important to consider what affect means for Bergson in relation to perception and memory. As Al-Saji points (221); “According to Bergson, affect arises in a body when the sensory-motor schema achieves a complexity that allows indetermination and hesitation between different courses of action. Instead of an excitation causing an action in a predictable sequence, the future action is interrupted or delayed, and replaced by an affective state within the body”.

In this regard, it can be said that “perceiving more” as triggered by the lack of habitual memory or the failures of attentive recognition, does not only refer to the expanding planes of memories (and virtualities) but it also refers to the affective responses within our bodies as triggered by the moments of indetermination, confusion and therefore intensity. As Deleuze describes the “crystal image” (69-70, 2005), affect/intensity comes from the tight circuit between the actual and the virtual as a moment of uncertainty in which one cannot distinguish the actual image from the virtual image for a moment. Based on Deleuzian concepts, Brian Massumi argues that affect is a suspense, gap or excess that is neither contained/captured nor recognized. Therefore, it is not only the temporary suspension of habitual action (automatic recognition), but also a pulling back from the actualization (selection) of memories into representional images (Al-Saji, 225) which can be described as the ‘captured’ images in Massumi’s terms. As Al-Saji emphasizes, this points to the surplus of memory over recollection, recognition and representation.

To reflect on this surplus, it is very useful to incorporate the Walter Benjamin’s notion of mimesis where copy and contact merge (333); as the actual and the virtual merge within the Deleuzian ‘crystal image’. Like ‘crystal images’; the mimetic signs are moments of indetermination and intensity. As Anna Gibbs writes (193), referring to Brian Massumi, the mimesis is a similarity which is tied to the senses but lacking in sense content and able to be directly perceived but only in feeling. It is a sensuous moment of experiencing and knowing in its terms without getting contained or localized. It is an image
affecting us in a mimetic way. It offers an embodied perception/memory and a multi-sensory knowledge or communication that can only be understood in its own terms. Very similar to memory, Walter Benjamin’s mimesis goes beyond the proximity in physical/spatial terms and makes ‘contact’ possible beyond presence or consciousness. Such a contact is mediated by body very similar to the Bergsonian theory of memory (Marks, 138). Therefore, the mimetic sign shares some characteristics of the Deleuzian ‘crystal image’ (or the time-image in general terms); as a moment of confusion that is directly addressing our own bodies and a suspension of the usual relations among the senses and their automatic extensions into movement.

Here, the notion of “optical image” also becomes relevant; since it is useful to understand how I can express my own lack of habitual memory and also to disorient the audience’s habitual perceptions. As Laura U. Marks (46-47) argues, referring to Gilles Deleuze, the optical image refers to the images “contrasted with the cliché, a commonsense and hegemonic image that extends unproblematically into action” and “calls for a habitual recognition without reflection”. The crucial thing here is that “the inability to recognize an image encourages us to confront the limits of our knowledge, while the film’s refusal to extend into action constitutes a refusal to “explain” and neutralize the virtual image”. Therefore, it encourages the viewers widen the clouds of virtualities. I think it represents both my experience of Vancouver (as Vancouver sometimes becomes an optical image for me) and also invite the viewer to experience a break with their habitual recognitions and to experience familiar places or objects in different ways as their search for other virtualities/memories are encouraged by the images.

However, I also realized that opening up to wider virtualities as a consequence of my lack of habitual memory has its own limits since sense knowledge is embedded in culture and our personal memories are also shaped by our collective memories. My perception of Vancouver is influenced by the
enormous archive I have brought here with me. At this point, understanding memory or perception within a two-sided relation between actual and virtual (each participating simultaneously with the other) enables us to acknowledge that our memories are able to transform our present perceptions/experiences as they are being transformed by them and enable us to build new relations/contacts (as in the case of the mimetic sign). As Laura U. Marks argues (198-199), “sense knowledge, like any cultural knowledge, is always migrating and transforming”. I believe that trans-city or -cultural experiences offer so many examples to analyze the dynamics of such transformations. In this regard, my video does not only deal with how my sense knowledge or culturally organized perceptions of cityscapes are intervening in my embodied perception of Vancouver, but also how they are being transformed by being in a new city/culture. This whole discussion is highly connected to Benjamin’s notion of mimesis in terms of ‘contact’, a small sense of touch, between things (people, cities, objects). As Anna Gibbs emphasizes (193), the great thing is that mimesis can take anything as its medium.

Therefore, Benjamin’s theory of mimesis plays a significant role in both my analysis and audio-visual production. My strategies are mostly based on my attempts to provoke mimetic responses in the viewers rather than conceptual reflections. It is about creating a moment of confusion (through crystal images or mimetic signs) as a delay for the viewer’s recognition in order to call upon her deeper memories and widen the virtualities around what they experience within my video. Therefore, I mostly avoid discursive elements within my images since they have more prone to call for conceptual responses. I try to create images directly addressing the viewer, as in the case of mimetic sign.

I believe, using very brief shots and the missing elements such as black screens, out of focus images, superimposed or partial images, or the images without sound create the potential for these moments to be completed by the viewer’s own virtualities that are provoked by such missing details. It is also about delaying the viewer’s tendency to build linearity or causality between images so that they
can look for other kind of relating, knowing or communicating as in the case of the mimetic sign. The shots from different angles, slow motion, and close up shots are other strategies with which I try to disorient the viewer’s usual perception of the cityscape. In this regard, I hope that the disjunction between images and sounds, images from Vancouver and sounds from Istanbul as I use in several scenes, works to disorient the viewer’s habitual perceptions and to enable them experience something very similar to my own experience in Vancouver.

On the other hand, I tried to create multi-sensory audio-visuals to enable the viewer to experience them in more tactile way since it has significance both for provoking embodied responses closer to my own experience in Vancouver and also for triggering more mimetic responses in the viewers. In this regard, I attempted to create images provoking memories in multi-sensory ways such as paying attention to texture of the images, creating tactile images or using visuals supporting other senses (in contrast to what has been usually done). When the viewer confronts a visual image under the dominance of other senses, it may also encourage the viewer to relate to the scene in different ways since what their automatic responses rely on does not work for them enough to make sense of it.

In the end, this video project has enabled me to explore certain concepts and thinkers in relation to each other and build ‘contacts’ between them in inspiring ways. My preference to make a video to explore these concepts has enabled me to broaden my project into three significant components: exploring my own embodied perceptions of Vancouver at the intersections of past/present or virtual/actual; expressing my own experiences in their own terms (in less subtracted or contained ways in a sense) as in a mimetic communication; finally, exploring the ways in which one can provoke mimetic responses in the viewer through audio-visual mediums.
Bibliography


