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ARCHITECTURES OF TIME

The loss of dimensions in Bourne's world

In order to start a discussion about the connections between urban space and space of the image, it is necessary to refer the reflection to a same semantic system, so that we need, first of all, to define an equivalence between concepts and words. According to this I will adopt the term of architecture by shifting its meaning toward a definition that allows me to use it everywhere the gaze of a moving spectator meets an organized, dimensioned and ordered space. In this way I will be able to talk about urban architecture as well as image architecture, by considering both these expressions as architectures of the visible, where the gaze of a moving spectator drags narrative threads by following traced routes.

My proposal deals with an analysis that respects all the traditional categories of film analysis, but at the same time tries to find out new analytic perspectives, by observing the spatial organization of the image, of its own architecture.

In my opinion this is a really necessary reflection in front of a cinema that for sure is now forced to re-consider all its processes of creating stories, in a representative system where the narrative structure often and often depends on visual dimension in an unbalanced relation.

I will proceed by using the concept of *respatialization* of film image, as a process of visual re-articulation of space, as a consequence of different phenomena of media invasion, according to which the practices of reading and relation between subject and image have to change.

Often *respatialization* is responsible of mutation processes of space-time coordinates, according to which by changing one dimension, the other is submitted to adapt itself like two reciprocally connected variables.

The spreading invasion of vision devices in urban space, each one keeping its own extension, has made the subject in habit with the comparisons of different times. Duration and speed of images flows are the variables through which suspensions, accelerations, delays, mix themselves in the real space, working to control people passages, moments like pieces of projected images.

The transformation of temporal dimension by manipulating space, is a dominant element in the complicated cinematographic transposition of Jason Bourne adventures, created by Robert Ludlum starting from 2002. The cinematographic version is now composed of three chapters - *The Bourne Identity*, *The Bourne Supremacy*, *The Bourne Ultimatum* – telling the efforts of Jason, a secret agent, to recover his memory, passing through escapes and pursuits all around the world. Bourne's trilogy is a meaningful example to introduce the analysis of image space, because it contains several metalinguistic references for the vision, strongly representative of our urban landscape experience. Moreover it is an example of an architectonic representation of the effects of the visual models that devices imposes to real space and its subjects. We are going to start with a scene taken from *The Bourne identity* (USA, 2005) by Doug Liman. Bourne is escaping across Europe trying to find out some details about his real identity. In this moment he is moving by car from Zurich to Paris, but he is identified by the secret service for which he has been working in the past, and becomes a sort of prey of a man-hunt, involving different agents spread all over the continent.

First of all we see the offices of the secret service where we realize that they have found Bourne by using a very sophisticated system of access and control of all the surveillance cameras in the city: Bourne is completely surrounded by lenses following all his movements. In a metalinguistic recall to his role of protagonist, he becomes the main character of the narration running on the central screen in the middle of the wall of the office, too. So he is placed in a perfect position to be seen by all the computer desks, becoming a sort of visual reference for all the shots constructed around his projected images. (figure 1)

So, inside the office we hear the chief asking for the instantaneous reunion of all the best agents in Europe, to be ready to reach and kill Bourne.

We assist to the development of a scene where the image coincides with a portion of a computer screen which is making a research through a map, and then with a satellite vision of South Europe, reducing progressively the shot to a city, Barcelona, a street, a room, a man with a mobile device, and then starting a new research again. The scene shows the same process that we activate using Google Earth or Google Maps to visualize some parts of the world and focus the attention on the precise detail we want to see on our computer screen. When the localization of the agent is complete, the film image is displaced by fusing itself with the image on the computer screen. The space of the image is the satellite map from which the detail of the research comes out, followed by the fly sight of a city that we recognize as Barcelona. (figures 2-4)

The whole scene is built with a very intense and fast editing like the time we need to open a web page, where images of satellite maps overlap to real images of the city, but on that same space several graphic signs of localization devices continue to compare. So, it happens that there is an overlapping between real spaces and representations of spaces that produces a unique space reduced in a unique time,

the present, where the instantaneous events prevail: we see transmission and reception of communications in real time. Everything seems to be accelerated, there is no time to understand all the passages which lead from an image to the other, because watching is enough. Duration of the transmission of information coincides with duration of the vision, so that time appears shorter than real one, shorter than here and now, as well as the editing running after the present.

The contemporaneous situations in different parts of the world represent the main column of a visual structure based on time. In fact, space seems not to have boundaries, while time is totally condensed in the present, in the action going to be done. Distances do not exist in the visual world of Bourne, because technology deletes it, so that the spaces of the character's life become just exposed surfaces, places without history or depth, possible variations of the same interface. As a matter of fact, the succession of the images is only a multiplication of the present.

In *L'espace critique*, translated as *The lost dimension*, Paul Virilio asserts: «[…] we encounter in the interface a form-image in which time more than space makes the 'surface', since the only depth is that of the primitive dimension of speed […]»[1] by talking about the crisis of physical dimensions due to the always and always unbalanced relation between technology and reality.

In *The Bourne Ultimatum*, directed by Paul Greengrass in 2007, time condensation is subdued to an extreme acceleration, by developing a structure that reminds of *The Fold* described by Gilles Deleuze, but this time under the form of visual folds in time.

Now we are going to watch a scene where Bourne is still surrounded by cameras, followed by the usual secret agents, driven by the ones inside the office. Bourne is trying to meet a journalist whose articles talk about Bourne's story, in order to get more information. The journalist is also controlled by cameras or particular surveillance devices placed in strategic positions or they are mobile points of view, devices in the hands of moving agents. The scene starts in the street but becomes more and more complex inside Waterloo Station. The construction of space follows audiovisual categories: movements are foreseen, communicated and checked through the telephone contact between Bourne and the journalist, on one hand and between agents and offices on the other. Anyway what we are more interested in, is the coincidence of time and the discontinuity of spaces. (figures 5-12)

During the pursuit, very often shots are doubled because we can see them through the eye of the camera or overlapped devices. We see the same moment twice , repeated, doubled, because cinema can represent contemporary actions only in this way: by showing them in succession. So there is a temporal axis that connects visually the spaces of the images that we see on the first layer, the first screen surface (people in the offices) and the mediated ones, a second screen surface. The connection between this two

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[1] Virilio, P., 1991. *The Lost dimension*. Translated from French by D. Moshenberg. New York: Semiotext(e), p. 53.

spaces is a connection between places far from each other, but contemporarily living and visible: «give me eyes on the street» is the request of the man in the office and this literally happens. Even though the shooting *live* works through very fast and uncontrolled movements because of the necessity of looking for an objective (that is Bourne), at the same time the directed shooting respects the same rules: so the direction style is made of dirty shots, out of focus, too fast passages from long shots to close ups, and we sensibly perceive these movements as driven by a technological device.

The mix of voices of people in the office and mute images of the station develops a chiasm structure, by connecting the screen space of mediated images, with the space of the office: the surface and the depth of the present in the same image. This is what we could define a *timed space,* architecture where duration is the essential condition to activate the playing between two spaces.

So the two spaces exchange something reciprocally: on one hand image re-spatializes itself by assuming the *form* of the device and on the other hand it acquires all the specific functions of the device itself. This process allows the gaze to move by crossing different spaces or architectonic layers, running across the present, passing from the condition of the observer to the condition of the observed.

In a system like this, where narration is built on a complex net of screens working as hooks for the gaze, it is clear to realize how the presence of vision devices inside the images could change the meaning (*ri-semantization*) of the film space. It is forced to change its own functions by activating different gaze's behaviours strongly influenced by technological ones.

Both the examples we saw show two situations where the screen surface works like an interface in between, a threshold where the distinction between outside and inside, far and close, disappears. Virilio suggests the interpretation of the screen-interface like

«a new surface that annuls the classical separation of position, of instant or object as well as the traditional partitioning of space into physical dimensions, in favour of an almost instantaneous configuration in which the observer and the observed are roughly linked, confused and chained by an encoded language from which emerges the ambiguity of interpretation of represented form images [...]».[2]

The process followed by Virilio, moving between two disciplines, by adopting the architect's gaze in front of the organization of an urban design that includes a medial communication system, allows to substitute the traditional spatial, geographical, geometrical parameters with the screen interface ones. He uses the dimensions of the screen to describe the real space ones, passing from virtuality to reality. The screen becomes only a passage threshold that connects two worlds, an edge where the distinction between

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[2] *Ivi*, p.52.

inside and outside, far and near falls. At the same time volume and weight are no longer essential dimensions because they cannot survive on a two-dimensional surface.

> «Each surface is an interface between two environments that is ruled by constant activity in the form of an exchange between the two substances in contact with one another. […] The limitation of space has become commutation: the radical separation, the necessary crossing, the transit of a constant activity, the activity of incessant exchanges, the transfer between two environments and two substances. What used to be the boundary of a material, its "terminus", has become an entryway hidden in the most imperceptible entity. From here on, the appearance of surfaces and superficies conceals a secret transparency, a thickness without thickness, a volume without volume, an imperceptible quantity».[3]

As Virilio points out in a prophetic analysis, the notions of geometric *scale* and physical dimension disappear by losing consistence in an undefined fragmentation of visible, spread on different points of view. As in the scenes we have just watched, the represented space is so wide and spread on very huge distances, that it is reduced to a whole present: it is the perspective of real time, "the real time-space where the action starts to happen" as Virilio says in *L'espace critique*. Virilio describes an urban landscape where the time coordinates prevail on the space ones and where physical distances fall because of the instantaneous times. What he tries to describe is what I see in this images: in the urban space the subject assists to the presentation and narration of *now*. The system of surveillance devices in our cities, in the shopping centres, in the banks, produces places where the subject can see himself living, but displaced on a screen visible to everybody. So that he loses his difference between here and there, between private and public dimension. In a space without any kind of physical parameter, time is the unique immutable dimension. The spatial distance between reality and virtuality is substituted by a temporal proximity.

> «[…] the inhabitant of the teletopical metacity can no longer clearly distinguish here from elsewhere, private from public. The insecurity of their territorial hold extends from the space of their own world to the space of their own body».[4]

In *L'estetique de la sparition,* translated *The aesthehic of disappereance* (1984), Paul Virilio asserts that «The question today therefore is no longer to know if cinema can do without a place but if places can do without cinema».[5]

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[3] *Ivi*, p. 17.
[4] Virilio, P., 1997. *Open Sky*, London: Verso, p.56.
[5] Virilio, P., 1991. *The aesthehic of disappereance.* Translated from French by P. Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), p. 64.

In this assertion is contained, in my opinion, the depth of our reflection about the intersection between disciplines and kinds of spaces: the real, urban, architectural one and the virtual one of the communication system, the image. Well, in what he defines the "global world" where we live, without any territorial limits, cinema is displacing itself in several portions of space of representation just trying to continue to represent the world as it is: an indefinite mosaic of static and mobile (sur)faces of the present.

Figura 1

Figura 2

Figura 3

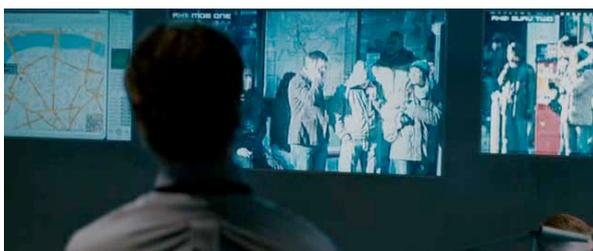**Figura 4**

Figura 5

Figura 6

Figura 7

Figura 8

Figura 9

Figura 10

Figura 11

Figura 12