von
Goetz

Field of Vision

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We've all experienced this: the sensation that, when momentarily emotionally removed and socially divested of media and telecommunication, it all becomes *a little bit weird*. It's not that "everything is a fix," but it seems self-evident that everything happens according to a formal logic of a (largely immobile and self-interested) sociopolitical system – more and more I feel acutely aware of my passage on, in, around and under the architecture and organisations of my cultural milieu. Perhaps this is simply a side effect of surplus exposure to contemporary art, a sort of irradiation of my capacity for over-intellectualised self-consciousness, but this feeling is not alleviated or satisfactorily quashed by a reading of it as guff. Evoking this weirdness of the multiplicity (and duplicity) of spaces – a social site so fractured by its technical apparatus that it practically ceases to exist in continuity – I find myself drawn into art that creates new spaces, new terms, new visual systems that force me to engage twice with ground and surface, spaces that activate a third site that fills the interstice between realities.

Giotto's Room seems an apt title from which to depart a proto-renaissance of new perspectives in the digital age, and the work of Aisha Christison and Bea Bonafini renounce the trappings of new media, employing materiality as something collaged, something that is abraded, something binding and resilient but that is not without frayed edges. The exhibition's tactility, its unique ability to be lived and inhabited with relative freedom is its spatial product and gift. Like the ceilings of the 14th Century Giotto where such a fashioned space grounds us as Adam (which in Hebrew means the collective man, as mankind) under the high heavens, as subjects of the earth our perspective is horizontal – we experience reality as a series of conditional changes as we proceed forward, instead of our relativity to ascendance. In such spaces, we are connected by historical and futurological questions, realms of habitation of early man and late man, a closing of the chronological loop that tethers beginning to end. And just as (synchronously with this exhibition) Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (2010) plays on 24-hour loops at the Tate Modern on Bankside, a project so claustrophobically aware of the passing of time, Giotto's Room would appear to renounce this checking of the clock; time forfeits its relativity to space here, and space becomes the absolute object of interrogation.

In what will form a brief segue in this short text, I'd like to sketch an essentialist picture of a query that has grown to form the substructure to my written and curatorial work of late and will expand on this notion of a third site. It would not be false to suggest that the inspirator for these patterns is the digital-virtual spaces of the internet (post-internet, as it concerns contemporary art) and the hyper-mobilised trading, communications and travel that form a vivid shadow of the global territories. But I would not wish to draw so limited a picture of the history of virtual reality, not least because the idea of a disparity between what is *essential* and what is *virtual* has existed since Plato and emerged as a visual-experiential

medium in the theatrical works of the French playwright Antonin Artaud in the early half of the 20th Century. What we now consider "virtual reality" is but another theatre of cruelty (Artaud's concept) that pertains to the simulation and incarnation of an ideological landscape.

The nature of space therefore – as it is traversed, occupied, cultivated, left fallow, observed and lived – is both an elusive philosophical question, as well as a structural sociopolitical one. Space as it can be occupied will always be political, since it is administered and governed by the jurisdiction within which it lies, and this includes the abstract frameworks of the digital sphere. The question that proposes itself is that of spatial divination, a kind of "sphere creation." If we as a society are so heavily encumbered by the regulation and management (not to mention the hidden subversive and criminal nature) of social spaces – to the point that we are tracked, profiled and targeted, how can artists navigate or otherwise circumvent these sites? Has our relationship to space become so fraught and contested that artists must establish individual mythologies in order for works to live inside a habitable atmosphere?

Or is this question itself failing to negotiate the essential problem here: that we have been driven from social spaces that should belong to the public, by commerce, by militarism and by political pretense, and it should be the artists role to proposition its reclamation? The Moscow Conceptualists emerged *because of* the conditions of heavy censorship that existed under Soviet totalitarianism – subversive operations that took place in fields beyond city limits and in apartments between trusted friends – it was imperative that space was not bartered for, but was acutely repossessed one private gesture at a time. Georges Perec so eloquently described this personal fortitude of reconditioning spaces as follows:

'I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin […] Such places don't exist, and it's because they don't exist that space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, ceases to be incorporated, ceases to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it. It's never mine, never given to me, I have to conquer it.'

Perec wrote once of the *species of spaces*. He wrote of spaces of habitation, those that were lived and ordered, sociological spaces – up to and including the world and the cosmos. His Darwinian genealogy of such spheres was concerned less with the dimensionality of his terms, but instead navigated the cultural systems and structures that formed everything from the aloof confines of a bedstead, the ordered (and disordered) nature of bookshelves, to descriptions of the Rue Vilin in north-east Paris and recollections of the East German frontier. Fused and imbricated, the spaces of Perec's genus constantly commingle and move around one another – they form a complex ecosystem of psychosocial and political actors and networks that form points of reference, environmental conditions and cultural

schemata. What is clear is that spaces form an accordant unity, a balanced hierarchy that is underpinned by Perec's fundamental principle that space is assumed through its being lived, conquered and defined.

As a species of space, Giotto's Room synthesises the lived with the observed – it is the figurative "field of vision" as a plane of immanence. The *gusamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) of the exhibition orchestrates a harmonious whole that is in direct conflict with the institutional system that it resides within. We might think of Michael Asher's exhibition at Claire Copley Gallery in 1974 whose work was the deconstruction of the wall separating "gallery space" from "office space," exposing the administrative operations at the core of the gallery's working. Giotto's Room would appear to reverse this expository intervention; Asher's archeology of gallery is inverted as its reconstruction – repurposing

the gallery as a total simulation. This is not a claim for its artifice however. Rather, its simulatory surfaces produce the corporeal space of a Neolithic cave or a teenager's bedroom. That is to say the relationship between image and reality is indirect; it does not address social or cultural realities of its time inasmuch as it fixates upon the simulation of a third site through which both real and fantasy are in equilibrium, unified as a holistic sphere.

Artists, more and more, evoke new spatial terms as a propositional strategy. We might call upon Pierre Huyghe, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, Thomas Hirschhorn, Jason Rhoades, Ernesto Neto or Pipilotti Rist as artists who – whilst often implementing technology, its apparatus and surfaces – are not invested in it as an outcome. Giotto's Room is an exhibition that centralises space as its chief character. It forms as cage as equally as it liberates us from the structures and systems of society. The exhibition does not require us to "conquer it" (as Perec would have it), but its generosity resides in ability to produce a site beyond the social and the self that *gives*, that nourishes a sense of exteriority and confers back upon our conscience in this way; it makes us keenly aware of our position in relation to the limits of our vision and our knowledge.