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Pisters, P.

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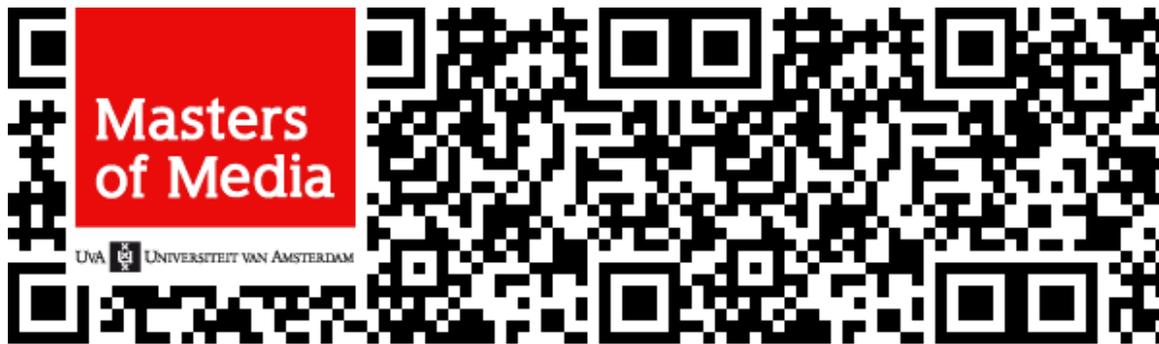http://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2008/05/25/manifesto-for-a-schizo-analysis-of-media-culture/

# Manifesto for a Schizo-analysis of Media Culture

Patricia Pisters | 25 May 2008, 1:48 pm | tags: abstract machine, conmen, Deleuze and Guatari, machines of the invisible, media culture, power of affect, power of the false, power of the virtual, reality of illusion, rhizome, schizophrenia, stammering

1. Contemporary media are characterized by a stammering stream of an ever growing schizophrenic 'logic of addition'.
2. 'Old' mass media like television and cinema are not dead but undead.
3. Schizophrenia points to clinical and critical symptoms of a/v culture.
4. The delirium is socio-political and world historical.
5. The cinematographic regime is already schizo-analytic in conception; this becomes more evident and widespread in contemporary a/v culture.
6. The schizo-analytic regime of the image acknowledges 'the reality of illusions'.
7. Immanent powers of the image present them selves in heterogeneous ways.
8. The virtual is a real power.
9. Images have the power to act.
10. Affect is an autonomous power.
11. Forgers, magicians, charlatans, tricksters, conmen and delusional characters are symptoms and diagnosis makers of the powers of the false.

**Machines of the Invisible**

It is argued with good reasons that digital technology has changed the media landscape completely: old mass media like film, television and radio have been replaced by more fragmented, non-hierarchical, rhizomatic forms of media. This is, however, only partly true. By looking at the level of image-production in contemporary a/v media, I will take the changes in the cinematographic apparatus, or the cinematographic regime, as a starting point for a manifesto for a schizo-analysis of media culture.

The apparatus theory in the 1970s famously proposed to see cinema as a 'machine of the visible'. The underlying idea of this approach is that cinema produces 'impressions of reality' or 'illusions taken for reality'. Cinema is thus seen as a mass medium that invites us into ideologically determined subject positions. However, in contemporary media culture the paradigm has shifted: the audio-visual image in digital culture no longer lures us into taking 'illusion for reality' but gives us the 'reality of illusions'.

At the heart of this change is the cinematographic apparatus itself, which now could be conceived as a schizo-analytic producer of heterogeneous and multiple connections that is tightly connected to other forms of a/v media. The digital cinematographic-apparatus has to be seen as a complex constellation of schizoid 'machines of the invisible'.

**1. Contemporary media are characterized by a stammering stream of an ever growing schizophrenic 'logic of addition'.**
Laptops, mobile phones, webcams, ipods, satellite television, web 2.0: new forms of media grow like wild plants without deep roots (rhizomes) in between older forms of mass media (newspapers, film, radio and television). Undeniably, 'old mass media' have changed by this but it doesn't mean that they have disappeared completely in the rhizomatic network. The television news is no longer the only source of information, CNN competes with Arab satellite channels, bloggers and civil journalism, hypes emerge online, Youtube and Twitter turn everybody into a media producer. But deeply rooted trees are not that easily overgrown. The media have become individualized *and* fragmented *and* specialized *and* opened up

*and* they are also still mass medial. So no either… or-logic but an ever growing process. Contemporary media culture can only be thought in the stammering stream of an and…and…and logic. A schizophrenic logic of intensity and multiplicity that begs for a schizo-analysis.

'We're tired of the tree because we have grass in our heads', Deleuze and Guattari argue when they introduce non-hierarchical rhizomatic thinking in *A Thousand Plateaus*. At the

same time they indicate that out of every rhizome a tree can grow, and that trees can behave rhizomaticly. So it is not a matter of saying: old media are tools of capitalist ideology, whereas new media free us from ideological interpellation. 'Old' and 'new' media are two different ways of thinking and behaving that can have both positive and negative effects, produce the most beautiful creations and the most horrible suffocations. The media are complex and interwoven networks of grass roots and tree-structures.

## 2. 'Old' mass media like television and cinema are not dead but undead.

Like zombies or vampires 'old mass media' have strong regenerative powers as indicated by the fact that for instance,

a. Programs such as 'Idols', 'Dancing on Ice' and other popular shows are still able to keep a mass audience on a Saturday night in front of the television set. Not to mention the Dutch BNN-program 'The Big Donor Show' that attracted a million audience, 30.000 potentially new donors and was Breaking News all over the world. Cinema retains or regains its multiplex attractions.

b. Mass media are indeed no longer the most important makers or distributors of the news, but still have a huge filtering function. Only when an internet hype is reported by the 8 o'clock news it becomes really popular and widely followed (such as the 'jumping'-dance hype in the Netherlands). In this way traditional media have become the 'curators' of the internet.

c. Mass media use new forms of media as well: podcasting is also still radio, the 8 o'clock news on demand is still the 8 o'clock news. Did you miss an emission? 'Were you too afraid to watch (the 'Big Donor Show')? Try again', broadcast company BNN says on their website. In this way new media do not weaken the power of the traditional media but reinforce it. And beside all fragmentation and multiplication, the internet becomes a huge store, database and audiovisual archive of the mass media.

## 3. Schizophrenia points to clinical and critical symptoms of a/v culture.

By arguing for a schizo-analysis of media culture I am not proposing to pathologize culture, nor calling for insanity. However, the clinical symptoms of schizophrenia do point to important characteristics of contemporary a/v culture and criticize them at the same time.

*Positive symptoms*: an overflow of energy, intensity, everything is connected to

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everything, liberated and recreated, explosion. As Deleuze and Guattari say: 'Connecticut – Connect-I-Cut': machines and bodies, bodies that liberate themselves from their normative organization (BwO).

*Negative symptoms*: intensity turns into catatonia, inertia, apathy, implosion. Every production provokes its own anti-production. That is the core (axiom) of the immanent system of 'capitalism and schizophrenia', indicated by Deleuze and Guattari. Our image culture is more like a schizoid delirium that like the psychoanalytic dream.

**4. The delirium is socio-political and world historical.**

The schizoid delirium is situated at the other end of the individual Oedipal dream. The delirium is in the first place collective, socio-political and world-historical. In *Alienations* documentary maker Malek Bensmail has filmed patients and doctors on a psychiatric ward in Algeria.

The patients are moving between hyperactivity and a stream of delusional words and catatonic states. But at the same time their remarks are incredibly sharp, addressing socio-political issues all the time.

This documentary also shows that the difference between doctor and patient is not that big anymore. Everybody feels the insanity of the contemporary situation. Doctors and patients, but also filmmakers and spectators are implicated – we all share the collective deliria of our audio-visual media society.

**5. The cinematographic regime is already schizo-analytic in conception; this becomes more evident and widespread in contemporary a/v culture.**
As Ian Buchanan has argued the tripartite schizo-analytic conceptual schema of 'body without organs', 'assemblage' and 'abstract machine' informs the basic matrix of Deleuze's account of the cinematic image. It follows the logic of the 'frame', the 'shot' and 'montage'. The frame selects and deterritorializes the image, presenting it in new ways (BwO), the shot unites elements in a closed set (assemblage), montage joins together the powers of the frame and the shot (abstract machine).

But the cinematic image also operates in a larger 'abstract machine' of media culture, where it can join all kind of hegemonic and resisting forces.

**6. The schizo-analytic regime of the image acknowledges 'the reality of illusions'.**
The classical film theoretical notion of the filmed (or mediated) image as an 'impression', 'effect' or 'illusion of reality' has modulated into the image as a 'reality of illusions'. This insight translates schizophrenic (and neurobiological and Deleuzian) findings that the image has its own immanent power to do something (in our mind, in the world).

A schizo-analysis of media culture takes into account at least four immanent (and autonomous) powers of the image: the power of the virtual, the power of the performative speech act, the power of affect and the power of the false.

**7. Immanent powers of the image present them selves in heterogeneous ways.**
These powers do not provide an unequivocal model of analysis. They present themselves in all kind forms and on different types of levels, they metamorphose in good and bad, nobel and base and everything in between.

## 8. The virtual is a real power.

'There is no actual image that is not surrounded by a mist of virtual images'. One of Deleuze's last aphorisms seems to grow in relevance every minute. Every image we see resonates in all kinds of ways with other images: images from our personal and collective memory, fantasy images, film- and other media images.

Memories are stored on film, a film-image becomes a memory-image. Fact and fiction chase each other, virtual and actual form a circuit as in the hall of mirrors of *The Lady from Shanghai*. Hitchcock's fiction has become a collective memory. Collective memory has been colored by fiction (Stone's *JFK*). And where is Laura Dern in *Inland Empire*: in the present, the past, in Poland, in America? In which layer of reality or fictions is she moving... or trapped? And in this film, isn't it precisely that scene of her death, explicitly indicated as fictitious because we see an enormous camera appearing in a suddenly widening frame, that is the most raw and social-realistic?

## 9. Images have the power to act.

Another power that is acknowledged by a schizo-analytic approach of media culture, is the power of the speech act, 'act de parole' as Deleuze says. Or better still we should perhaps speak of an '*act de l' image*'. Philosophers of language have since long demonstrated convincingly that words have performative power: the power to do something or to have something done. In this way words operate in reality. Images have the same kind of (or maybe more) performative power of the speech act.

Even if everybody knows that an image is staged, it has an effect: it penetrates our mind and puts itself somewhere in the flux of images. Of course this effect is not new. Propaganda images have been used like this for a long time. But this power goes beyond conscious propagandistic means. All images have this creative power of the speech act.

So, in a similar vein the image can be used to tell stories that call a minority group into existence, 'creating a people'. The active power of the image is not to be underestimated. *The Battle of Algiers* has become the Algerian War of Independence.

On the level of the contents of the images the Algerian women in *The Battle of Algiers*

are very conscious of the power of the performative: with bleached hair, speaking perfect French and in an elegant dress the French barricades in the city are no longer closed. And in a recent French movie the message is cynical: a simple French man all of a sudden sees the absurdity of random (and not so random) identity checks and the whole social system: he ends up in a police cell, then in a psychiatric hospital and finally looses his job. But with a fake cv and following the social 'rules of the game' without too many critical questions, everything turns out all right: *ça va? tres bien merci!*

### 10. Affect is an autonomous power.

The schizophrenic feeling of a too much of everything, too much injustice, too unbearable, too many images – it all reduces our sensory-motor capacities. But it creates more room for the affect. Deleuze has demonstrated how the affect is connected to the close-up.

The close-up is one of the most typical and most striking stylistic features of the cinematographic/audio-visual image. In that way cinema has contributed to the power of affect. Faces and other bodily parts or objects in close-up obtain affective impressive or expressive qualities. The eyes loose their perspectival overview, disoriented the image touches us directly. 'The affect has autonomous power', Brian Massumi has elaborated on this. It works independent of story or context.

On a political level the power of affect takes on a different guise. Helen Mirren as Queen Elisabeth gradually discovers that the representative powers of the 'Queen as the Country' has modulated into the affective power of the 'Queen of Hearts'.

### 11. Forgers, magicians, charlatans, tricksters, conmen and delusional characters are symptoms and diagnosis makers of the powers of the false.

Finally the schizoanalytic lesson of Orson Welles, again first noted by Deleuze. In *F For Fake* Welles performs as a magician to introduce the stories of other charlatans. Master forger Elmyr de Hory draws a Picasso in ten minutes: no museum in the world that distinguishes it from an original one. The magician knows like no body else how to play with the reality of illusions. The art forger undermines the difference between copy and

original. The conman plays a game with our expectations and conventions (Sawyer in *Lost*). The artist plays this game most creatively and most generously.

What is demonstrated in the power of the false is that the truth is very difficult to retrieve and most of the time is based on a choice. An affective choice, even if it is often wrapped in rational arguments, moral principles or dogmatic convictions. But the true ethical evaluation should be the affirmative creative potentiality, the ultimate motivation of the 'charlatan'. In *The Illusionist* we don't really know how Eisenheim has conjured his plan. But inspector Uhl decides that he knows what happened. And real magic or just a trick, it actually doesn't matter, Eisenheim's motivation (love, life) is what counts.

The media are an immanent system that feeds itself. An abstract machine that always grows, expands, produces: from the most cruel and horrific to the most beautiful and sublime. Production *and* anti-production. Schizo-analysis not as a disease but as a process and method to understand the immanent powers of the image, to play with them, and break through them (without breaking down).

The brain and the screen maintain an intimate and complex relationship. The camera has penetrated our mind, for the best and for the worst. But the brain also determines for a large part what we see on the screen, for the best and for the worst. The cinematographic apparatus is no longer a machine that renders the visible, a machine of the visible.

The new cinematic regime of digital a/v culture points to the fact that the screen is that thin membrane between world and brain and that the mediated image, in producing all kind of 'invisible' powers, should be conceived as 'machines of the invisible.'

*With thanks to Jasper Moes for help with this post.*

*mom-schizo-manifesto1*

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