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Between Screens, Between Identities. Multi-Screen Installations and Interculturality.

Keywords

Multi-Screen Installation, Cinematic Installation, (Embodied) Spectatorship, Interculturality, Identity Politics, Fiona Tan, Isaac Julien, Eija-Liisa Ahtila

Abstract

In this thesis, the expression and communication of the topic of interculturality and identity politics by three multi-screen installations (*Where is Where?* (2008) by Eija-Liisa Ahtila, *Disorient* (2009) by Fiona Tan and *Western Union-small boats* (2007) by Isaac Julien) will be researched. By a cinema phenomenological methodology (Sobchack, Marks) the installation and the spectator are considered as equals that both express and perceive. Hereby, spectatorship is defined as an interactive process. A visual analysis is performed in three chapters, which focuses on the cinematic expression of the installations in the first two chapters, while the third chapter focuses specifically on the interaction between installation and spectator. The three installations, which are part of a broader cinematic turn in contemporary art, are hybrid art forms that can both be seen in the cinematic tradition of art cinema and expanded cinema, while simultaneously showing resemblances to installation art. While these installations are currently studied either from the cinematic or the installational perspective, the visual analyses in this thesis propose a combination of these approaches, analysing the multi-screen installations as cinematic expressions (focusing on mise-en-scene, cinematography and editing) with spatial elements (multiplication of the projection, spatial installation and spatial editing).

The three multi-screen installations analysed in this thesis all express a status of interculturality in which the protagonists experience a transformation from a static self (or a static colonial other) to an identity that is partially self and partially other (Bhabha). This transformation of the protagonists' identity is expressed by the loss of stable spatial and temporal (cinematic) borders. The three multi-screen installations are studied in the tradition of accented and intercultural cinema, where concepts as Naficy's cinematic chronotope and Deleuze's time-image will be taken as

a starting point to define how the multi-screen installations produce a tactile aesthetics that rather communicate abstract expressions than a cinematic illusion. By the multiplication of the image, multiple locations and non-chronological layers of time are presented simultaneously through spatial editing. This way the feeling of dislocation and liminality is expressed directly to the embodied spectator. Moreover, by the multiplicity of disorienting camera angles and movements, both cinematic space and time lose all stability.

All three installations hereby produce a critical attitude towards colonial history and thereby deeply involve the spectator in this process of reflection towards colonial history. By involving the embodied spectator in the production of the imagery, by the process of comparing and navigating, the multi-screen installations communicate the complexities of history and writing about the other. The multi-screen installations and their tactile cinematic expression and communication of interculturality can be seen in the accented and intercultural cinema tradition (Naficy, Marks). However, by the multiplication of the cinematic image and its spatial installations, the installations produce a new cinematic experience, and an embodied and more intense spectating experience.