Hybrid

Revue des arts et médiations humaines

3 | 2016

Cultures numériques : alternatives

Creation no. 2

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/1026>

DOI: 10.4000/hybrid.1026

ISSN: 2276-3538

Translation(s):

Creation no. 2 - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/1029> [en]

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Vincennes

Electronic reference

Françoise Chambeft, "Creation no. 2", *Hybrid* [Online], 3 | 2016, Online since 01 December 2016, connection on 13 April 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/1026> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/hybrid.1026>

This text was automatically generated on 13 April 2022.

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Fig. 1

Je suis dans l'autocar, I. Chicoutimi–Québec (screenshot 1)

http://fchambef.fr/je_suis_dans_l_autocar.mp4

- 1 *Je suis dans l'autocar, I. Chicoutimi–Québec* is the first opus of a series of videos questioning our perception of space in a world of ubiquitous digital technologies. This work is based on the concept of heterotopia proposed by Foucault¹.
- 2 After I landed in Quebec for the first time, I took the bus and expected to see fantastic landscapes beyond the window throughout the ride. The windows were yet covered with a thick layer of grime, smears of dirty, dried out snow, through which I could see absolutely nothing.
- 3 The bus was like a giant capsule launched at high speed on a road that was hardly visible ahead, beyond the windscreen wipers. Enclosed in a sort of opaque tube moving in space.

- 4 While the outdoor space could not be seen through the window, it was paradoxically thoroughly accessible through WiFi and Google Street View. I could see what was outside the bus by geolocating myself and displaying the view of the outside world on my iPhone.

Fig. 2

Je suis dans l'autocar, I. Chicoutimi–Québec (screenshot 2)

- 5 *Je suis dans l'autocar* is a composition consisting of animated images and sounds. In the foreground on the left is an iPhone screen displaying the picture of a place in Google Street View.
- 6 On the right, an image that is hard to describe at first sight, a coloured fuzziness covered in droplets, the contours of which are pronounced. This second image bears an obvious relation with the first one, in the forms and colours. It is the same place, photographed through the bus window, with the focus on the dirty surface. Five pairs of images are displayed on screen at an irregular, broken pace, making it difficult for the spectator to perceive anything. The black and white left background is blurred at first. Then, it gradually shows a picture of the subject, arms raised in a selfie stance, this “I” person who is in the bus and whose gaze, both on the iPhone and bus window, make up the foreground. Concurrently with the picture, the music unfolds to its own asynchronous rhythm. It was composed from an audio-recording of footsteps in the snow. The materiality of a travel on foot contrasts with the enclosed, artificial space of the bus. Just like the image, the sound is fragmented: beats, muddy sounds, harmonies interweave in a complex and increasingly brutal manner.

Fig. 3

Je suis dans l'autocar, I. Chicoutimi–Québec (screenshot 3)

- 7 One compromises on a daily basis with this fragmentation of perceptions, which is inherent to the hybridization of our sensitive experiences. *Je suis dans l'autocar* shows the absurd and poetic dimension of our condition as connected human beings. Digital technologies transform our comprehension of reality, in this case of space. But what is most real? that which is displayed on our iPhone screen? which we can see through the window? the image that we order our digital camera lens to capture and render what we can see? that which we can feel? Would the image in the dirty window have the same emotional weight, were it not confronted with such a clean picture as that on Google Street View? In contrast, digital technologies lead us to pay specific attention to the imperfect materiality which our senses can grasp, and to cherish it.

Fig. 4

Je suis dans l'autocar, I. Chicoutimi–Québec (screenshot 4)

- 8 Foucault defines the mirror experience as an articulation between utopia and heterotopia:

In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface ; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror².

- 9 In the same way, on my iPhone, reflecting the world through Google Street View, I can see the space surrounding me virtually opening up behind the surface. There, I can grasp what my senses cannot catch in the physical, present world. The technological object puts an ideal space before my eyes, a sort of essence of a place, frozen out of time, out of the present time that I am experiencing.
- 10 Foucault goes on to show how the real and unreal reverse in the mirror heterotopia:
 But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there³.
- 11 It is from my iPhone screen that I discover the poetic nature of what my senses comprehend in the real space. Based on this image of the ideal space, from the bottom of this virtual space on the other side of the screen, I start again to cast my eyes on the real space and rebuild it. There, I can see matter, contingency, my weakness, which may have to go through this virtual place over there in order to be perceived.

Fig. 5

Je suis dans l'autocar, I. Chicoutimi–Québec (screenshot 5)

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres" (conference held at the *Cercle d'études architecturales*, 14 March 1967), *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, n°5, octobre 1984, p. 46-49.
2. Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres", *Empan*, n° 54, 2004/2, p. 15, trans. by Jay Miskowiec.

3. Michel Foucault, “Des espaces autres”, *Empan*, no. 54, 2004/2, p. 15, trans. by Jay Miskowiec.