

vibrant *repoussoirs* on Kurt Hentschläger's *SECTOR2c*

Kurt Hentschläger – *SECTOR 2c*
2012/13
HD video, 1920×1080
Stereo sound
10:55 min
Loop
Edition of 5
A.P. 1

«(...) there is not an atom missing since the world has been a world; liquid is not liquid, it is the most solid, most resistant, most permanent of beings in the world.» (Michel Serres – *Rome. The Book of Foundations*)

In Kurt Hentschläger's body of works, video compositions such as *SCAPE* or *SECTOR2c* have a place of their own. Their contemplative character, underlying video landscapes that gently shift and alter the perception of space and time through fluctuations occurring in our 'representational' process of perceiving, draws on a phenomenological approach. What is emphasized in *SECTOR2c* is a border, the limit or the margin that separates the representation of nature and pure abstraction, raising questions on our mediated understanding and view on nature. Concepts such as sequence, framing, camera perspective or focus are used less for their photographic or cinematic qualities, but rather to instrument the mediation itself of our viewing and its impact on sight. Manieristic appearances underlying the editing and composition process, where original video and audio field recordings superpose to create a multistage perceptual experience, expose the hybridization of nature only to show how natural forms, man-made structures and abstract grids generate a tension between architected spaces and a subtending, all-embracing void. There is no attempt to outline clearly defined forms or spaces, nor is there any attempt to instrument an imitation of nature. The artist recreates rather than actually

represents effects of material formation, with topographical views and sonic landscapes carefully selected as scenes that portray and decompose the set conventions for sublime panorama. *From a western, urban perspective*, says Kurt Hentschläger, *by being both removed from original nature while inhabiting increasingly man made environments, real or artificial, the idea of unspoiled, uninterrupted nature has become a romantic notion of the past*. It is this ‘romantic notion of the past’ however, and less a phenomenological perspective, that one must grasp in order to render sight free of the objective and informing perspectives as set before us.

In SECTOR2c, the organic mutates into something artificial. As nature becomes ungraspable, a techno-logical subject itself exceeding even the powers of abstraction through a dramatic intensification in the production of nature itself, the surroundings morph and reformulate our sense of presence. The artist reformulates the codes of (landscape) representation and expresses an abstract re-construction on the ‘ruins’ of a Romantic experience, as the viewer becomes de-familiarized with even the closest surroundings. In SECTOR2c, it is the vitality of matter alone and the gathering powers of material formation that shape reality and inform our viewing of it. It is a vital, potentially dangerous materiality acting as an effective agent of its own, which thus expresses a view of nature as an ‘actant’ rather than a resource, commodity or instrumentality.

As Jane Bennett says, ‘Actant means has efficacy, can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.’ (in *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2010, p. VII) And it is worth reminding here that ‘Though the movements and effectivity of electricity, food, trash are crucial to political life (and human life per se), almost as soon as they appear in public, these activities and powers are represented as human mood, action, meaning, agenda or ideology.’ (Jane Bennett – *ibid.*, p. X) This agency involves a subverted perspective: it is an attempt to present human and nonhuman actants on a less vertical plane. The hierarchies and instrumentality of viewing are abandoned in order to emphasize the image of dead or instrumentalized matter as it feeds our ever-growing fantasy of mastery and consumption. The binaries of life and matter, human and animal, organic and inorganic, as seen through a predominantly western perspective, can no longer account for the contribution and influence of material vitality over our aesthetic-affective apparatus.

When looking at the superposed frames in SECTOR2c, the colliding dialectics of formal and material imagination emphasize the abstract imagining powers of matter over one's perception of mediated reality. Water does not relate to flowing, but to a turbulently stable and dense element, as the viewer's imagination is led inside a field of depth and volume arising from inside the substance itself. It is in the depths of matter where an obscure perception and self-awareness grow only to meet with the underestimated and rousen powers of matter. A mass of turbulent motion is set through the formworks that organize the real and artificial space and removes them from their local circumstance. Decay, oversight, transience, possibility and the circumstantial are all set in movement, as the superposed frames de-ontologize the question of subjectivity and drive us nearer to an edge.

A constructed de-construction of our viewing grids emphasizes the already virtual and already mediated perception of space. But space is here something else than an inhabited environment where different autopoietic observers would define different modes of embodiment according to different organizing schemata. The artist does not appeal to an 'unreal' perspective; it is a 'multi-dimensional' perspective making reality all the more real as it supersaturates the environment with an excess or a submergence of possibilities re-arranged outside the 'common' – that is to say, already mediated, already represented, or, phenomenologically speaking, already re-presented – modes of perception and experience. It is Derrida who observed that space is not 'essentially mastered by the look', but is itself a matter of spacing. In SECTOR2c too, the viewer observes the fragmented and diverted spacing of multiple elements that cannot occupy the same place or the same reality at a time, as an abstract relation emerges only to emphasize the way in which mediated constructions conceal not only social, but geographical information and relations as well. The artist composes different spatial ranges and horizons, an experimental geography separating frames and reality on the one hand, perception and experience on the other. It is here, in this very separation and decomposition, that we perceive the layering of elements, space and time as revealed by the material processes which inform our perception.

It is not only the visual but the audio scapes of SECTOR2c as well which point to a burst, an uproaring mass, as matter loses its density to reveal the different grids, forms and constructions that make it amenable, operational and consumable, only so that it can then abandon them. The

viewer is thus given the superposed viewing of matter in a raw state and a configurable form, with the power to transgress its margins and return to a savage state, bursting over its own limits, and separating itself from the cultivated view and masterable realm of form and set perceptions. The viewer is suspended between split mental intrigues, as both the video and audio scapes make it impossible for the mind to approach, associate or synthesize what it sees. As if abandoned by the very conventional perspectives set forth by an oriented and directed way of seeing, the viewer is assailed and surrenders to the untamable powers – of nature and imagination equally.

The images slowly displace, mixing different elements and representations, various tones and colours, altering coloured and black and white scenes, and an excess of presence starts to define the frames as they form visual and sonic landscapes opposed to our mediated places of perception, which are ordered by knowledge. The images created by the artist erase the support of mediated view and dissolve the possibility of a narrative inscription. And as the image and sound of roaring water continues to spill over the margins of the planes, the frames point to an absence. This undefined and unidentified subtraction stands as a sign of the unmasterable presence, where the mind misses to see beyond the realm of consumable forms.

Structured – or, rather said, *oriented* – perceptive fields as those appearing in SECTOR2c reflect the current transition to a culture that continues to stress the manipulation of material capital, devoid of its forming or vibrant principles. On the other hand, the artificial grids allow the viewer to further investigate a deepening field where the interaction of life forms reforms the perceptual terrain. The limited yet apparently conflicting range of elements the artist appeals to become part of an artificial program that directs behavior and re-defines one's set position inside a virtual field. As the viewer tries to trace positions inside this terrain, the information is continuously rendered to create mutable fields of view, as complex perspectives emerge from basic sets of rules. But what the grids actually translate is the reduction of perception and behavior to these sets of rules and patterns. The subtlety of SECTOR2c is the conflicting embodiment and merging of both the metaphoric and the mimetic. As the viewer looks deeper 'inside' the constructed field, the scenes seem recognizable and create an aura of familiarity and recognition; but then the mimesis is repeatedly and precipitously interrupted by flat facets, grids and patterns that disrupt familiarity and give way to improbable perceptions, as we are reminded

of and see the contradictions of the constructed sources of the images that define our mediated view. This alteration de-composes notions of personal view or understanding and in doing so, it de-composes cultural patterns. The disquieting roar of the elemental thus questions the ideological construction of the way individuals privilege certain processes, instruments and interpretations over others in their account of seeing, experiencing and understanding the mediations of reality. The vital concentrations of matter thus occupy and inform the common places in the visual envelope of the space; in doing so, they maintain a generally concentric character, though none of the planes actually covers the whole dimension in an uninterrupted and dominating layer.

What is it that we actually see then?

Different figures and patterns of space and time, based on dynamic and evolutionary volumes, create abstract topographies where the elemental flow, fall or divide roll continuously over the set viewing area. Water spills out and exceeds the frames only to resile its own inner turbulence, as the artist generates implicate planes and orders with complex volumes folding over different and layered realities. Water both concentrates and divides the viewing. As space and time constantly gather up, they not only transform but also release the spacing of their own matter. The foundational view on framing, perspective or focus is thus confronted with the equilibrium of roaring and resisting forces that absorb and flood the terrene in order to reveal and unleash a tonic and vibrating material mass, in order to induce kinetic potential to an otherwise dead or constructed matter. We're given to see the incipient of shape as charged matter. These fields do not create the image of a moving, dissipating and therefore linear time perspective, but a field for the re-gathering and accumulating matter. The artist does not construct frames that are arranged in a perceptual continuum, and instead follows the contracting and fluctuating forms of natural structures, the dynamics and folding of matter on itself. These images of the *nature* of the perceptual thus become the image of the activity of thought and knowledge, with both space and time constantly falling out of their frames.

While the artist denounces the crudely mechanical and automated conceptions of the nature and workings of social life, time and constructed perception, the images transform into a landscape of turbulent, nightly imaginary terrains where all materialities collide and disintegrate only to

endlessly morph and evolve. As they reveal nature's fundamental powers, the raw landscapes unveil the architectonics of natural morphology, with landscape being at once organic and constructed, at once limitless and finite. The subtending tension between elemental plasticity, abstract constructions, and accumulating forms expresses and invites the viewer to contemplate on the 'dialectical construction' of both abstraction and the human nature.

It is here that Kurt Hentschläger unveils his romantic approach, in the way these otherworldly terrains collide to recreate abstract structures that transcend constructed orders. One characteristic of this romantic approach is the way the grids offer unnatural order to the natural, the way these symmetries are used to reveal the transcending clarity of the elemental. But the artist does not transform the landscapes by imposing a geometry; it is rather the uncultivated nature that breaks formal conventions. The grids themselves function as hardly controlled, vibrant *repoussoirs* that bring the viewer closer to the edge of roaring tides, only to be overwhelmed by the irresistible, vibrant force of matter. There is an inexact topographical account of the scene, as composite impressions create a seemingly infinite space of retreating and regathering tides where the artist continuously divides and unites disparate objects visually to restore a dramatic elemental tension. But the conventional components of the image diminish in importance as everything turns into a spectral presence, with matter floundering in primal chaos charged with the vitality of a creative force.