

## On Empathy and Presentness

The world is experienced inattentively. It is part of human existence to be able to attain such a high level of empathy that the limit of oneself becomes blurred into others. Our own reality ceases to be a defined wall that separates our experience from other narratives. There is an impossibility in complete presentness due to the complexity of human desire and the simplicity of human thought, which effectively manages to unconsciously curate the perception we have of our surroundings and ourselves. Our society is faced with the criticism of permanent ADD; but in fact, it is this precise mechanism that gives humanity its dominant trait; sensibility. As a unity of diverse individuals we rely on empathy as a teaching mechanism through which we attain other people's knowledge to further our personal aspirations. Allowing the unconscious to command the perception of our surroundings provides society with multiple narratives that enable the creation of culture and sensibility.

The film industry has mastered the ability to control a person's focus by providing a varying narrative that completely redirects a person's sensibility. It is producing an augmented version of real sensibilities by triggering immediate relatable systems. There are different scales at which your awareness can be triggered by empathy; on the

largest frame, it refers to daily activities that require no conscious action by which the brain defines which stimuli is being imputed and which one is being blocked out. The smallest scale of the frame is when a person makes a conscious decision to engage an activity that retains most of our focus. When a person walks through a park, both scales -and many in between- are being activated; the person is unconsciously ignoring its environment to walk directly to a puppy he wants to pet and put his attention to. This idea is clearly represented in Jaques Tati's *Playtime*, where the structure of the six sequences demonstrate a very clearly fabricated environment that defines the reaction and receptivity of the characters to provide a narrative or experience. We see the main character M. Holot as a reflection of an ambivalent society who uncomfortably traverses through a foreign environment attempting to create a conscious understanding of it but blantly failing due to human nature's inability to absorb all of our surroundings stimuli. This is not an implication of human stupidity, rather an acknowledgment of a person's functionality; humanity has not prevailed by becoming the all-encompassing smart specie, but by allowing abstraction to define our reality.

A movie and the curation of it can create such a variation and array of sensitivities and narratives that it can place a person into a state of complete unawareness and or one of hyper attentiveness in an incredibly curated experience. In contrast to *Playtime*, which focuses on a range of stories that fluctuate in order to disperse our attentiveness and diffuse the plot; Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* characterizes the camera as our own eyes to provide a perspective which allows the viewer to feel as a part of the narrative. The audience becomes lost in the plot because of its empathic relationship to the movie 'structure. Their minds ignore the movie theatre, the popcorn they're eating; and even at time, the mind ignores its own reality to become completely invested into another narrative.

Film produces a narrative by creating highly engineered environments that are calibrated in order to produce a specific effect. *Playtime* depended greatly on its visual comedy and sound effects; it required an enormous set with real scale buildings to portray the futurist modern city.



"Playtime" still

It created a sense of estrangement and confusion through an abstracted and repetitive theme that displayed monotony and relentlessness. This is coupled by the over exaggerated sound effects that draw the viewers' attention to particular areas of the frame. In a contrasting manner, *Rear Window* attempts to recreate a common environment as a means to produce relatability; his set design is curated around camera angels and focal points to guide the viewer through the story and produce an incepted detective quality in each viewer.



"Rear Window" still

Architecture -as a part of film and real space- has depended on the audience's engagement with a sensorial experience that is given by the architect's ability to curate space -form, light, wind, material-. Medieval cathedrals had a primordial goal in hand; they wanted to impose fear in the people to enact a moral code. Parisian urban development widened its streets not to create better views, but to be able to control any rebellion that may surge. Contemporary architecture is still rooted in the evocations it produces; and although they might be for less dark motives, it is just as effective. The Burder Klaus Field Chapel by Peter Zumthor embraces its sensorial motifs through the construction. He places native trees as structure and then applies compacted earth on the exterior; but the crucial moment comes

when the structure is lit and allowed to burn off leaving only the echo of the tree trunks in its rugged surfaces and burnt smells. This is enhanced by the progression through the church, starting at a dark entrance that lead into a large space with an opening at the top to allow light into the space, creating a sensation of rebirth.



"Burder Klaus Field Chapel" Peter Zumthor

The beauty that lies in inattentiveness is that it gives way for creativity and culture. Sensibility cannot be attained by attempting to be present, but by allowing consciousness to drift into unexpected environments. Humanity's empathy is the reason why societies continue, we are capable of relating to someone else and producing value. Empathy allows people to not be determined by the end of their physical body but by the effects of their interactions; we must stop looking at ourselves as anthropocentric entities, and rather as the reaction of our surroundings. Film, architecture, art and any medium that is effected in space attempts to reach out to people; but it is a human's ability to reach back and produce a dialogue.

#### Work Cited

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