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Machinery : multi-channel video installation

Graduation project proposal – 2nd Draft

Aims and Objectives

I have divided the objectives in three realms in order to make them more specific and interconnected: What do I want to achieve visually with piece, what is the artistic goal and what is the purpose for the thesis.

The visual objective is to create a visual orchestration that depicts society as a machine. A flow of people, gears, machines and interfaces cross-linked by mechanical principles. Dynamics of motion, different parts working together for bigger organism. The artistic goal is to create a different filmic experience that invites the viewer to reflect on its role and relevance as part of the social machinery. A narrative that makes sense in the space and allows the viewer to dive into the content, an immersive experience that empowers the spectator and gives him something in return. As for the thesis, the objective is to set a theoretic background that works as foundation for the visual metaphors to use. Articulate the content in such way that the form goes a step further.

Rationale

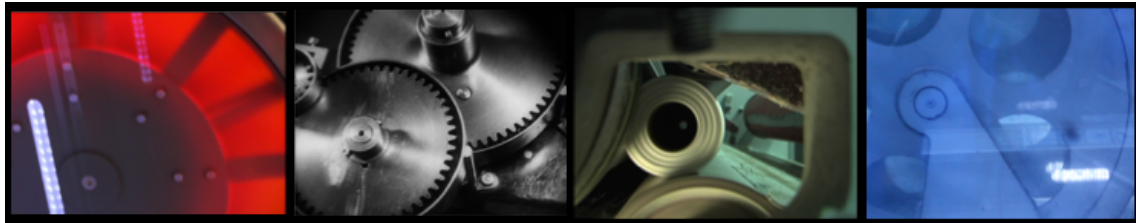
In this time of over stimulus and a path full's of distractions, I consider relevant to evoke questions that ponder on our role in society. Most people feels that is nothing or very little what they can do individually to achieve a meaningful change on society. The intention of the piece is simple: don't forget that we are an important part of this machine. Then if people are just more aware, the "limited" field of action earns a different meaning.

Furthermore, collective actions (reinforced by information technology) are acquiring a new sense. Massive manifestations around the world, the "indignant" and "occupy" movements, the domino effect of the spring Arabic revolution are clear examples of how technology, communication and individuals "connected" can make a stronger impact. In this context in which "connections and links" make a difference, the idea to depict society as interconnected parts (functioning as a machinery) seems appropriate. In times like this, in which the perception is in constant change, I consider that we the artist have the responsibility of creating new ways of communicating and spread our message.

Project Outline, Methods & Approach

The Machinery video installation places the viewer in front of 4 consecutive projections that conforms a canvas of approximately 12 meters long by 1,7 meters high. This big composition renders a system of elements that interact on mechanical principles and relationships of cause and effect. Gears, situations, actions and elements that trigger each other resembling a production line. A Choreography of interconnected elements working together as different pieces of a superior self-organism.

The images used in the installation depict mechanism within society functioning, but more than depicting the social machinery, these images are visual allegories of society as a machine. The visual concept of the installation is to render a system of elements that interact on mechanical principles. A composition of motion and rhythm, a choreography of cause and effect, transformation and change.



Referential image : 4 screens composition

The 4 horizontal and consecutive screens create a wide panoramic scenery, giving the video a sculptural dimension that contributes to create an immersive effect within the piece. The panoramic widescreen format lends itself to represent visually the idea of a production line or a machinery (group of machines working together for a same purpose). The use of many screens allows depicting different situations and ideas, and linked them as gears inside a machine. The multi-channel sound strengthens the immersive feeling and helps to create a more dynamic motion within the space.

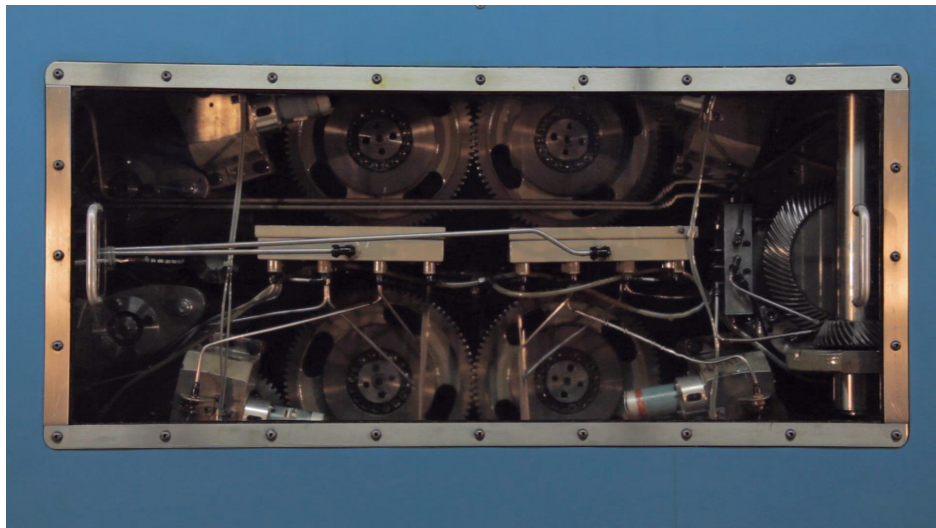
The audio mix is of great relevance; the 4 screens can easily make the spectator to lose the production line inside the machine. The sound will determine the point (or screen) of interest. The audio mix will be the "visual" guide of the installation. The perception in this piece will be drastically marked by the sound, in this sense, the concept of "audio-vision" of Michel Chion will be very present, giving the final audio mix a heavy expressive weigh. This combination of a long format and multi channel sound makes the video to loses its bi-dimensional character, it allows to use the space as a expressive resource, expanding the image beyond the filmic frame. The fact that the projection has a large format and that is bigger than the viewer, reinforces the idea that the social machinery is much bigger than the individual, and that the person is immersed in these processes. The idea is to visualize these topics through the intricate beauty of an assembly line, a graceful orchestration of machines and people. Elements working in harmony for a kind of super-organism or system.

I've always been attracted to machines and understanding how they work. As a small kid I disarmed my toys to play with their parts and then re-built them. I even found most interesting what was inside than the toy itself. This mechanical curiosity, my observer personality and my affinity for social issues, made me always be aware of the social machinery and the omnipresence of the system. I developed a tendency to identify protocols and mechanisms of power that helped me to see what was behind certain situations. Machines fascinate me, in matter of industrial design their beauty is undeniable. It is also interesting to realize the design of the interface between the mechanical and electronic components of a machine and its users. The design of a machine is quite particular because functionality and safety are more relevant than the appearance of the product. There is certain beauty in a machine working, its orderly desirability is almost magical, its repetitive and mechanical movements have a special hypnotic grace. I feel driven by the challenge of making a visible manifestation of this much greater system. Creatively it will be very fun to mix and play with machines, motion, actions and ideas. Artistically I feel attracted by the ideas of composition, collage and juxtaposition. This multichannel installation gives me the opportunity to construct my own visual puzzle not only of visual elements but also of ideas and messages. The first step

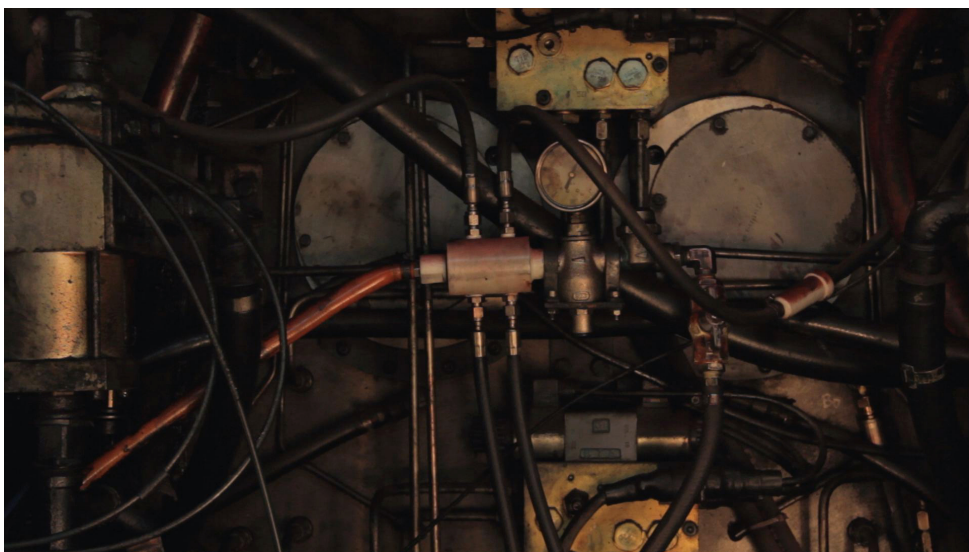
will be to obtain as most footage as possible of machines and people in ways that they resembled to the topics mentioned before. The more visually impact and the more meaningful that my images are, the more meaningful and stronger their combination will be.

For matters of content (as visual material as well), there are two different approaches towards machines: One older and more mechanical, in which cogs, gears and pistons were visible and their functioning was more exposed as evident. And a more recent one in which the functioning and components are hidden inside a “black box”. These two approaches are directly related to the narrative structure of the video that consist of 2 parts respectively.

- First Part : This first part is more related to the industrial revolution, to a time in which machines and their strength became the wheels of industry. A machine related to steel, to a line of production and manufacturing, to physical manoeuvring. In this part, the rhythm and the visual bonds between screens are given by mechanical principles. This part at the same time is good way to introduce to the audience how the installations “works” visually and as a machine itself.



Still machinery .- original footage



Still machinery - original footage

- Second part : This part is related to the era of the “information technology”, to processors, computers and codes. Machines in which the “operation” is less visible and everything is independent and interconnected at the same time. Processes in which we basically see the inputs and outputs, but the transformation in between gets lost in a special dimension. In this part, the bonds between screens are triggered (perhaps more digitally than mechanically).



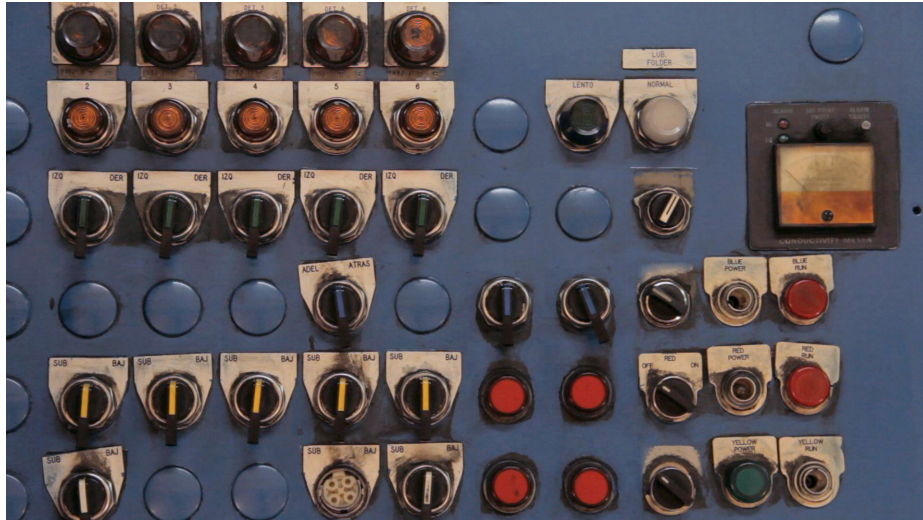
Still machinery - original footage



Still machinery - original footage

These two approaches towards the machines (the mechanical device vs the black box) are each related to a different era, to a different way of economy, and especially into a mode of imaging. But that this project more than talking how people work with machines before and now, or the imaginary of the world in each era and what was used to documented it. This project is about creating a machine according my thoughts, and to construct (digitally) a window to see that imaginary machine working.

The mediums I am using (DSLR and postproduction) are tools to assemble that machine. The projections and the space are windows to see its internal functioning. The screens conform a window into the veins of this bigger system. The subject matter of the mechanical era and the characteristic of production in the information age, will be differentiated through how the connections between screens are given and how the action - reaction is triggered (mechanically in the first part and more digital in the second one). Also by images of interfaces of each epoque. The interfaces acquire special sense because they connote the way we interact with machines and how we exert certain power and control on machines (or the other way around).



Still machinery - original footage



Still machinery - original footage

A potential problem could be that a multi-channel projection in which each screen shows a different image demands a lot of material. The fact of working on a large multi-projection piece brings a technical challenge in all senses.

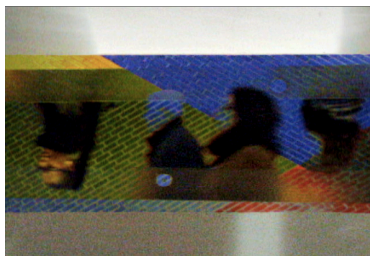
Relationship to Previous Work

In my work I am interested in researching the landscape as a social portrait of our surroundings. In this sense, to create a work of larger scale and to work with very long panoramic screen (with which I have not worked before) lends itself for continuing this social landscape idea, and of course gives me a more creative and expressive canvas. It will allow me to use scale relationship between screen and spectator in favor of the content, and not merely as a spectacularization of the image.

This idea of a panoramic landscape was also explored in the Paisal video installation (2007, <http://vimeo.com/18921588>) for this piece also a multi-channel projection and multi-channel sound (3:1) was used. In pieces like the video Day No8 (2010, <http://vimeo.com/8848019>) I have also played with the idea of people in line as products conducted through a transportation belt. And within the master programme I already developed some video test exploring the visual and content approach of this project: Machinery video test No1 (2011, <http://vimeo.com/23863746>) and Machinery video test No2 (2011, <http://vimeo.com/25758974>).



PAISAL video installation (2007)



Day No 8 – single channel video (2010)



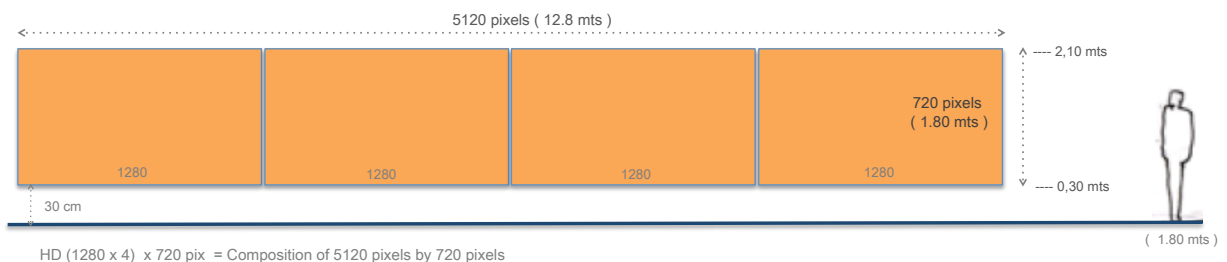
Machinery video test2 (2011)

Expected Outcomes

The media to be employed for the montage of this piece will be:

- 4 video projectors
- 1 video synchronizer (maybe a special hardware and software)
- 4 speakers
- 1 audio Dolby mixer

Below you will find a graphic showing the proportions of the projection in relationship to the spectator. A video registry with some excerpts of the piece will be needed for documentation and promotion.



Research – Framing the Work

If all machines have as a result (outcome) one product. What does the social machinery produces? Is there a raw material and what is the outcome? Into what it transforms? Who operates the machine? ? Who pushes the button ? What is the source of energy of this machinery? What keeps the machine going? In what direction is it going? Do we have an influence as individuals over this machine? Do we have an important role? Can we escape from it?

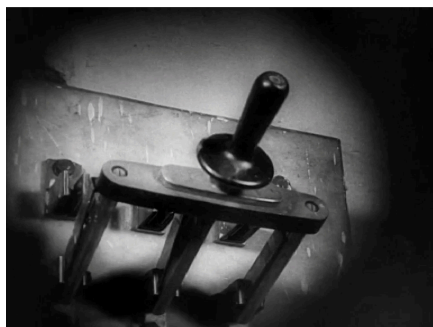
To answer these questions properly, a deep theoretical research together with hands-on approach is required. Then, I may find personal answers, but for the piece I do not pretend the spectator to “read” my answers. My intention is that the spectator - after seeing the piece - inquire himself the same questions, and maybe then, find his own answers.

These questions will set the foundation for the visual orchestration that I am aiming for. So it is probable that this contents appear in a very metaphoric or sub-textual manner (even in a subliminal way); but I consider them relevant points for the future aesthetic decisions to take that at the same time will influence on the way to set the narrative.

Review of Field of Research and Practice

In terms of form this project is closely related to what is know as expanded cinema. Some relevant contemporary artists who work with space and multi-channel projections are: Doug Aitken, Isaac Julien, Pawel Wojtasik, Eiiija-Liisa Ahtila and Ergin Cavusoglu (among many others). I mentioned them not only because the way they used video, but also because how they develop a narrative through the space. Going back in time, a first reference in the

approach of movie making would be the late 20's avant garde. Especially movies like *Walter Ruttmann's Berlin Symphony* of a great city and *Vertov's Man with a movie camera*. Both movies share a non-narrative documentary signature and are made with shots and scenes connected on relationships of image and motion, aiming to depict the life and energy generated within the city. Besides their experimental touch, in terms of content these movies also shared a similar approach with this project. In both movies we can easily perceive a symbiotic relation between man and machine, and how the directors acclaims the human relevance for the functioning of the machines. Through the use of close-ups of machinery and their juxtaposition with scenes of daily life an idea of an assemblage is given, the interaction of men and machinery conform an excellent first attempt to depict the city (a representation of society) as a mechanical flow.



Still – Man with a movie camera



Still machinery – Berlin symphony

A more related piece in terms of a moving object that excites the next is the piece “Der Lauf der dinge” (the way things go) by the swiss duo artists Peter Fischli and David Weis, a film that documents a long causal chain reaction assembled of everyday objects, resembling a Rube Goldberg Machine (This last term comes from Goldberg's series of cartoons in which a character made complex machines to perform simple tasks). Although this piece is more related to the relation cause- effect, it feels like a holistic machine (something also I am looking for). Another more recent artist that reflects about this industrialized processes in society is Mika Rottenberg. In her pieces she makes a sort of weird factories in which surreal characters are featured as bearers of production. What I found interesting is that Rottemberg does an sub-textual speech about labour exploitation and the relationship, effort, cost and products. “*If you simplify it, people use their vitality in order to make products; therefore every product contains part of the lives of the various that were involved in making it. I like the idea of measuring the value of something not by its “use value” but by the processes that were invested in its making – the amount of “life” that was put into it*”¹.

Another relevant artist who is interested in factories, machines, and the distribution of labour hand is the photographer Edward Burtynsky. His pieces more than a landscape are a social portray of what and how is the World nowadays. An interesting film-maker worth to mention is Harun Farocki, his films show how things, events and even training courses are made or organized, but more than a “how things are done” documentary, his films focuses in the production modes, and how this processes create spaces, social relations and structures.

¹ Mika Rottenberg “dough cheese squeeze” - text accompanied by the artist.

In a similar way Aleksander Komarov in his piece “estate” connects the production of asbestos, the stock market and art collectors as pieces for the production of value, desire and state; highlighting how these realms are related to the distribution of power and labour.



Isaac Julien – The true north



Pavel Wojtasik – Below the sea level



Doug Aitken – Electrio Earth

Critical Self-Evaluation

To talk about a subject as complex as the social machinery, a thorough investigation from different perspectives is a must, diverse point of views as the anthropological, sociological and even philosophical can broaden the topics and bring new ideas. Definitely a very interesting topic, maybe during the investigation I could feel some affinity towards theories that matches my hypothesis or agree with my point of view about society. Maybe I could feel more attracted to speeches that lend their selves to be easily visually represented. But something more relevant than these discourses is how to link them, how to find the bonds. Well, actually the idea of a line production feels almost “ad-hoc” for this purpose. A relevant criteria for what works or not (besides visual composition, narrative and rhythm) is if the sense remarks the relevance of the people, the idea to highlight the human factor.

Initial Bibliography

For this project proposal not to many texts have being already analyzed or quoted, but some texts have been already selected, between them:

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