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**Parallel Architectures: Studying Space as a Medium to Express
Dreams, Psychosis and the Unconscious Mind**

Rania Fouad El Bayoumi ¹

¹*Lecturer in Faculty of Fine Arts - Helwan University - Cairo*

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Abstract

This is a paper that is written in relation to a rotoscope painting animation film project that the researcher is currently working on. The film, in a way, is about women. By interpreting both their tangible realities and inner spaces, polar entities co-exist in a way that seems to cancel their disparity.

The project includes moving images of painted spaces and architectures that work within the context of the film as psychological doors to the otherness of the self, a mirror, or a medium to express dreams, psychosis and the unconscious mind.

1. Introduction

This research is inspired by a recent interest in Parallel Architectures, this included a rotoscope painting animation film that spans over several mediums: filmmaking, drawing, printmaking, photography and painting. The main idea was about giving form to the notion of memory and the fleeting reflections of lived moments and places that people have been through and now reside in their minds as blurred entities mixed with thoughts and emotions, contact almost lost with external reality.

From the beginning, there were certain aspects that affected the working strategy while conducting this research:

First, there was a growing interest from the researcher's side to visualize inner spaces that accommodate the tangible reality of various women. The researcher therefore studied pre-existing patterns of visualizing personas in relation to space and looked for that in cinema, focusing on works that undertake a distinct formalistic approach to filmmaking. Secondly, the researcher wanted to explore structures and create narratives of inconsistent prose, reflecting on what is real and what is imaginary. Different scenes were therefore juxtaposed from film archives and real-time documentaries, treating them as if they were the same. Third, the researcher wanted to explore the nature of vision the material world as experienced through senses. Different mediums were used and the researcher experimented with different textures and the forms of apparition each can offer.

2. WORK STRATEGIES IN "PARALLEL ARCHITECTURES"

2.1 Means of visualizing inner spaces that accommodate the tangible reality of various women.

In his own study focused on 'Spaces in European Cinema,' David Forgacs wrote about human presence and drama in films by directors with formal approached like Michelangelo Antonioni, Andre Tarkovsky and Michael Snow. He said, "because of its abstractness and its lack of conventional narrative pace or clear plot resolution – they were easily replaced by that of a landscape or an urban space" (Forgacs, 2000, p.101).

This was exactly the approach I wanted to undertake in my project, putting in mind three examples Forgacs further mentioned:

- a- "The repeated shots from different angles and in slow motion of a house exploding near the end of Zabriskie Point (1970), followed by the protracted dance of consumer goods through the air to the music of Pink Floyd."

- b- "The very slow tracking shot towards and through a hotel window at the end of the Passenger (1975)."
- c- "The very slow zoom, lasting 45 minutes, towards the far wall of a long room in Wavelength (1967)."
("Ibid.")

According to Forgacs, these were "people-less" shots in which the presence of human figures was replaced by tracking space or landscape. In Antonioni's works, these spaces and landscapes were further combined with shots of a voyeuristic type that comprised women's presence and foregrounded what Laura Mulvey called the "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 1975, p.11)

In his film *Solaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky, who is another formalist film director, suggested creating an atmosphere, which would be similar to that seen in the works of the early Italian Renaissance painter Vittore Carpaccio. The picture is of the embankment of Venice's sailboats. There are many people in the foreground, but the most important thing is that all these figures seem to be wrapped up in them. "They don't look at each other or at the landscape; they, in no way, interact with their surroundings. A strange, metaphysical atmosphere of non-communication is created." In the film, in order to produce the equivalent of this, the device of "being aloof" was used (Mark, 2008).

"To-be-looked-at-ness" and "being aloof" were tools the researcher used in my film to go beyond the tangible and create a metaphysical atmosphere that opens the door to express aspects of the inner soul and unconscious mind.

2.2 Exploring structures

To create a structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which the researcher's images can be presented, experiments with creating one that is like an inconsistent prose, reflecting on the real as well as on the imaginary was carried out. The approach was to blend scenes taken from cinema or video archives with others from real-time documentaries, treating them as if they were the same. The aim was to make them interact seamlessly through the continuity of texture and medium, but also through a loose, broken and non-linear narrative that doesn't provide an identifiable plot; one that is based on images, not on story telling.

In the researcher's film, moving paintings and pure projected images become the language and signs behind which are hidden arbitrary forms of representation.

To create images that invite contemplation, the film was divided into sequences. Each sequence seems unified and autarchic, executed with a sense of muteness and centered on unproductive movements. Like the video works of painter Michaël Borremans "that evoke a state akin to dreaming, a hypnotic atmosphere and a state of mind that is similar to wandering aimlessly through unknown landscape" (Van Duynap, 2008, p.7), "cinetapestries" were made. They celebrate the absence of progress, loops in which time becomes viscous and coagulates into circular moments of repetitive gestures.

2.3 Exploring the nature of vision, the material world as experienced through senses.

2.3.1 Rotoscoping

In this film, the researcher relies on rotoscoping, which is an animation technique where movement references have been taken from real filming views. Live action film movements were traced over frame by frame onto which successive layers of paint were applied. Frames that come from different sources were chosen and film stills of different qualities allowed for experimentations with apparitions and the tactility of the image.

"When our eyes move across a richly textured surface, occasionally pausing but not really focusing, making us wonder what we are actually seeing, they are functioning like organs of touch" (Grant, 2011).

This draws to the mind the term haptic visuality, which Laura Marks used in her film studies (Marks, 2000, 162). Laura Marks defines haptic visuality as containing some of the following formal and textual qualities: "grainy, unclear images; close-to-the-body camera positions and panning across the surface of objects; changes in focus, under and overexposure, decaying film and video imagery; optical printing; scratching on the emulsion; densely textured images, effects and formats such as Pixelvision [...]; and alternating between film/video". The haptic image is in a sense less complete, "requiring the viewer to contemplate the image as a material presence rather than an easily identifiable representational cog in a narrative wheel [...]" (Totaro, 2002).

2.3.2 Working with different mediums.

Creating a second layer of apparition inspired by the quality of my source (film stills), two different mediums were used, oil (figs1, 2,11-21) and colored pencils (figs3-10). The surface onto which I applied oil varied from cells/acrylic sheets (figs2), canvas (fig1) to paper (figs11, 12,15-27). The surface onto which I applied colored pencils varied from canvas (figs 3, 4) to translucent Mylar (figs5-10). Everything was hand painted and hand

drawn. A digital camera with a proper focus and a 16mm lens preserved the tactility of the mediums. In addition the still frames, when set into motion, started to flow and generated its own tactility and skin.

2.3.3 Gum dichromate printmaking:

Other than rotoscoping and painting with oil and colored pencils, a 19th-century photographic printing process using paper coated with a solution of Arabic gum produced some of the frames. It contains potassium dichromate to make it light sensitive, and a pigment to provide image hue and tones resulting in an image which looks more like a drawing or a watercolor painting than a photograph. No frame would come out like the other and the same can be printed and reprinted differently with infinite possibilities (figs13, 14).

3. Author's Work

In the following lines, a brief synopsis for two sequences in the film "Parallel Architecture" will be presented. One exemplary of the part created based on cinema archive, the other on real time documentary. Then 5 pages of photo documentation exemplary of the frames produced in different sequences including the rotoscoped scape paintings (figs16-27) will be presented. The latter played an important role in expressing the inner spaces and the unconscious mind of the characters that appeared briefly, almost in a ghostly way, all over the film. In addition, these landscapes/ mind spaces, even when abstracted, were an effective tool that helped me connect a heterogeneous mixture of "cinetapestrys" into one homogeneous whole.

3.1 Production

As a film, this is a work that is still in progress. However, along the phase of production in the years 2016 and 2017, sequences were shown as autonomous artworks in the form of video and painting installations within the following venues:

- Gypsum Gallery in Cairo, Egypt (2016).
- The Centre For Creative Activities in Ustka, Poland (2016).
- Museum of Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo, Egypt (2016).
- Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt (2016).
- Contemporary Image Collective (CIC) in Cairo, Egypt (2017).

The Arab Fund supports parallel Architecture production for Arts and Culture in Beirut, Lebanon and Contemporary Image Collective that offered its dark room for the gum dichromate photo printing process.

3.2 Synopsis

3.2.1 Sequence no.1 (sample exemplary of sequences based on cinema archive)

In this sequence, there is a subject looking upon a scene. A woman who is presenting herself as part of an image of the larger world, she is not separate from it, nor is she fixated on her own singular image. She can see, but, more importantly, she recognizes herself as being seen by others. Based on cinema archive, the frames for this sequence were taken from the 1994 Tunisian film "The Silence of palace" (Samt El Qusur) directed by Moufida Tlatli.

My selection had nothing to do with the drama of the film. I was more interested in "skin" and the "apparition"; the quality of the surface and the moment when I turned off the sound and the girl on the screen moving her lips seemed to be looking at nothingness in the eye. In Tlati's film, I knew she was saying something like "I hope". "I hope", but in the animation, I broke the blocks of her words and reconstructed them into abstract syllables that no one can hear any way.

(Figs 1, 2). Mediums used in this sequence were mainly oil painting and snaps of photography.

3.2.2 Sequence no.6 (sample exemplary of sequences based on real time documentary)

This sequence is a staged reenactment of gestures. Being concerned with developing the expressiveness of bodies and movements within the frame, the opacity of the performance leaves uncertain what lies behind a certain action or gesture. The author aboard a ship originally filmed this where some girls were getting ready to go on stage and perform. With shots that are not obviously subordinated to or functional within a narrative, frame compositions invoke the forms of representation familiar in fashion photography.

I used oil colors to hand paint the cabin scenes which then were combined to create the animated sequence (Figs11, 12). In addition, experimenting with formal and textual qualities of the image as a means of defining different realities including inner space, separate frames of the girls consciously performing for the camera as

they walk along the ship's floating architecture were printed with gum dichromate (Figs 13,14). Flares of pure medium were created by blowing up the painted photographs of each character and combining it with animated close ups of ethereal landscapes (Figs 15-27) . Mediums used in this sequence spanned over photography, oil painting and gum dichromate printmaking.

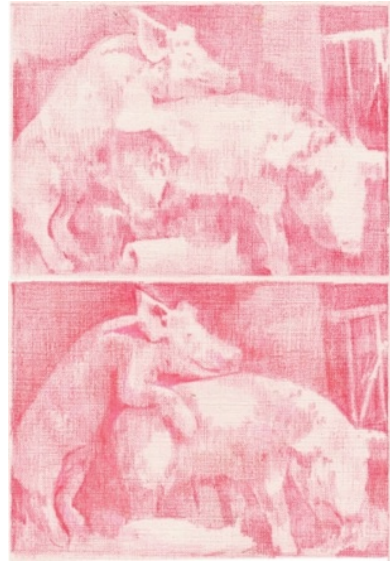
4. Conclusions

Parallel Architectures is a long-term project that aims to expand the parameters of painting by putting it in dialogue with time-based visual media. Injecting time into painting by cinematic means expands the aesthetic and affective possibilities of both mediums and defies the notion of medium specificity. As a painter, it helped me leave the comfort zone of canvas painting, cross-disciplinary boundaries and borrow approaches that are adapted in other mediums.

The specific rotoscoping endeavor involves accumulations or choosing of certain moments that possess not only the inner worldliness of the presence of women generally or specifically, but also the sort of choreographies employed/ deployed (within specific blocking and/or character movement and positioning within space). These movement sentences are in a sort of non linear time continuum that allows for expansive tangential ties to appear mechanical and rhythmic at times; (since the coding of the movements and apparent similarity in the shots chosen involve semi similar energies within movement); this process of choosing existing moments in a choreography is instinctive almost at this point after my immersion in the accumulative process. Analyzing such 'traits' or patterns is unimportant; however, these moments are almost units within a greater time organism being gradually constructed. Therefore, the film becomes layered between existing layered meanings of the symbolic (i.e. The woman or women) and these newer layers involve the questioning again of point of view, voyeuristic stances, objectification or documentation. This subsequently happens through a process similar to tapestry weaving where certain blocks within time or space become interconnected with other time continuums such as alluding memories or flashback type realizations within a given 'inner mind' and at any given moment. This deconstruction and gradual reforming of linear times becomes a platform which the spectator his or herself can exchange positions of gaze with what is thought to be the subject or the protagonist of a movement sentence; therefore, placing first person and third person in a magnetic field of attraction and repulsion or very organically fluctuating and not dissimilar to human consciousness/ subconscious shifting.



'Figures 1 & 2. Still frames from the film "Parallel Architectures" - Sequence based on cinema archive. Oil painting on canvas and cells . Author 2015'

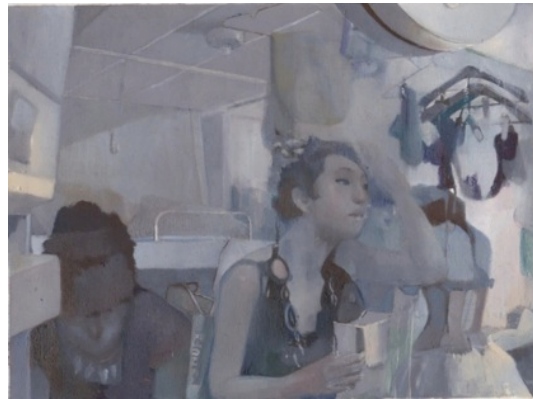


'Figures 3&4, Still frames from the film "Parallel Architectures" – Sequence based on cinema/video archive .colored pencil on canvas . Author 2016'





'Figures 5,6,7,8,9&10. Still frames from the film "Parallel Architectures".Sequence based on cinema archive .Colored pencil on mylar.Author 2016'



'Figures11&12. Still frames from the film "Parallel Architectures" – Sequence based on real-time documentary.Oil painting on paper. Author 2016-17'

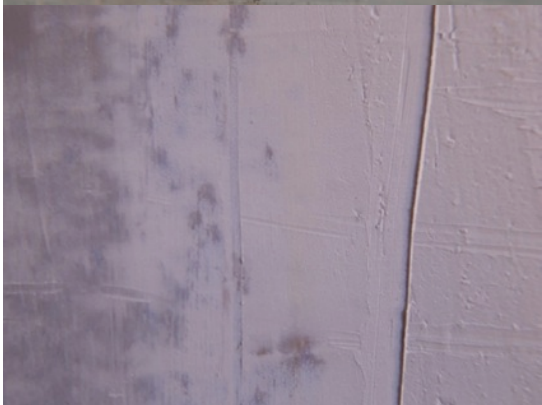


'Figures13&14. Still frames from the film "Parallel Architectures" -Sequence based on real-time documentary – Gum Dichromate prints multicolored and monochrome on Arches watercolor paper. Author (2017) '



‘Figures15&16. Still frames from the film “Parallel Architectures” -Sequence based on real-time documentary. Oil painting on photograph. Author (2017)’





‘Figures17,18,19,20&21. Still frames from the film “Parallel Architectures” -Sequence based on real-time documentary. Oil painting on paper . Author (2017)’



'Figures22,23,24&25. Still frames from the film "Parallel Architectures" -Sequence based on real-time documentary. Oil painting on paper . Author (2017)'



'Figures26&27. Still frames from the film "Parallel Architectures" -Sequence based on real-time documentary. Oil painting on photograph . Author (2017)'

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