

Inbetween and immediate

Author(s)

Breuer, Rebecca Louise

Publication date

2017

Document Version

Submitted manuscript

Published in

Kunstlicht

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Breuer, R. L. (2017). Inbetween and immediate. *Kunstlicht*, 38(4), 62-70.

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please contact the library: <https://www.amsterdamuas.com/library/contact/questions>, or send a letter to: University Library (Library of the University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences), Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

[Title]

InBETWEEN AND IMMEDIATE

[Author]

Rebecca Louise Breuer

[Abstract]

This article introduces Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concepts of smooth and striated space and couples these with the realms of art and technology. In doing so, and by analysing a case study, the dynamic natures and complex mixtures of art and technology are discussed. As a result, a perspective through which art and technology work together to enable new experiences opens up. The case study consists of Anja Hertenberger's work entitled *InBetween* — an ongoing performance project in which she examines the reactions of people to her wearing an item of clothing which features a miniature camera on the front and a screen at the back. The article concludes by arguing that although Hertenberger's performance concerns mediation, it mainly brings about *immediate* experiences that can be regarded as 'imaginings' rather than imaginations.

[Text]

Introduction

Media and performance artist Anja Hertenberger works with so-called e-textiles and wearable technologies. In this article, I will focus on *InBetween*, an ongoing performance project for which Hertenberger wears a miniature camera fixed to her front, which sends the images it captures directly to a screen attached to her back, sewn into a coat, backpack, cardigan, or blouse.

With the aid of the conceptual pair of smooth and striated space — as theorized by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari — the simple oppositions between art and technology, the complex merging between the two, and the passages from one to the other will be discussed. As such a deeper understanding of Hertenberger's project, and its impact on reflecting upon a surveillance society, will be enabled.

This article furthermore argues that apart from images that are being mediated through the camera and Hertenberger's body, there is also an experience of immediacy to be noticed. This experience of immediacy is not so much tied to imagination but, as is suggested, may be more suitably characterised by the term 'imaginings', which precede the imagining subject.

Pairs

Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) was not interested in working with concepts of truth or reason. Rather, his work dealt with concepts which enable one to discover those aspects of, and forces within, life that *precede* reason and common sense. That is to say that rather than arguing what something or someone *is*, he was interested in the workings of,

and connections *between*, things and beings even before we recognise them as such. In order to describe this immanent quality, Deleuze saw the need to conceive philosophical concepts that enabled him to think about the forces that are in effect before they are named, labelled, and ordered.

In *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) Deleuze and fellow author and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (1930-1992) present the reader with numerous concepts that envision the processual dynamisms that characterise life. ‘Their question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel?’¹ This article ties the concepts of smooth and striated space to the realms of art and technology. Although they may seem oppositional, and I will follow Deleuze and Guattari’s initial treatment of them as such, their seemingly contrasting relation only works to develop an understanding of their complex differences and actual passages from one into another. In doing so the article questions which *new* thoughts and insights the two encourage and enable. In addition, this article seeks to address how a Deleuzeoguattarian perspective upon art and technology can also help us understand practices of technological surveillance.

The conceptual pair of the smooth and the striated, which Deleuze and Guattari introduce in the aforementioned book, may be particularly appropriate to reflect upon the modus operandi of the dynamic relationship between art and technology in a novel manner. As such perspectives in which the *affiliation* between art and technology is created — as well as the ways in which the crossings from one to another enable new experiences, new processes, and new events — come to the fore. Rather than adopting a dualist perspective in which art and technology appear in a binary opposition, which would entail that art is what technology is not and vice versa, Deleuze and Guattari help to open up a perspective in which *simple* oppositions are turned into complex differences, *de facto* mixes, and where the passages from one to the other come into sight. The latter are particularly interesting for it is here where, according to Deleuze and Guattari, new experiences and insights occur.

The Smooth and the Striated

Before further elaborating upon smooth and striated space, it is important to explain the way in which Deleuze’s philosophical concepts, which seem oppositional, overcome their perceived dichotomies by always coming together: concepts are never one *or* another; smooth *or* striated, art *or* technology, but always one *and* the other. And even though he may initially present his concepts as being of different natures, he does so in order to be able to then think about the complex, expanding relations between distinct qualities which enable new ways of thinking. He hence adds a happening, a layer, an event, an occurrence in which multiple, further connections that may be thought and experienced come to the fore. Smooth and striated space are such complex abstract concepts, which Deleuze and Guattari use to envision the ways in which human beings have organised and ordered the world which is *also* a disorganised, chaotic and absurd place.² Following their elaboration of these concepts may help envision the complex differences between art and technology, their mutual influence and – most importantly – the new experiences and passages between the two. I suggest following Deleuze and Guattari by firstly

looking into the opposition between smooth and striated space, which, as I will show, is relevant and fruitful for considering the interconnection between art and technology.

Smooth space is more than length, width and height; it is non-metric, acentered, ‘continuous variation, continuous development of form’.³ It is a sphere that knows no limits, a realm that extends endlessly, a plane of intuition and intensities. It is a mobile space, with no centre, like the sea, wind, or desert. Its limitlessness, unbound, open, and undefined character resembles the realm of the arts. Art, in that sense, does not let itself be strictly defined, cannot be limited to certain boundaries, and even though it may involve numbers it is not metric. Smooth space is, furthermore, experienced with close-range vision, and it is haptic, rather than optical space. ‘Haptic’, for Deleuze and Guattari, entails more than the optic, for it includes all stimuli (intensities) one may perceive. More than vision, it is the eye that feels, or as they write: “‘Haptic’ is a better word than “tactile” since it does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil this nonoptical function’.⁴

Deleuze and Guattari name the sea as an open space par excellence, but emphasise that it was also the first space that demanded striation.⁵ It was delimited, mapped, and plotted onto a grid by calculations based upon the stars and the sun. Striated space is metric, numerical, and dimensional, rather than directional. It is an optical space, which is experienced with long-distance vision, such as with binoculars, for instance. The properties of striated space are organised and fit in a framework; it involves definitions, formulas and computation, and it serves a concrete purpose. Striated space, in short, resembles the realm of technology. Take, for instance, digital technology in which ones and zeros in numerous variations enable the exchange of information. The codes used pertain to the realm of striation, and its properties enable long-distance communication. In this sense, art and technology, like the smooth and the striated, are characterised by different trajectories and occupy different, yet supplementary, spaces.

Alongside discussing the simple oppositions of, and complex differences between, smooth and striated spaces, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise that ‘smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to smooth space’.⁶ By using the words ‘translation’ and ‘reversed’ Deleuze and Guattari indicate that smooth space comes *before* striation, an experience is thus characterised by a haptic sphere before it becomes optical; close-range vision precludes long-distance, and perhaps one could say that through such a prism, technology presupposes art.⁷ What is more, and specifically interesting in relation to art and technology, is that Deleuze and Guattari emphasise that ‘the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture’.⁸ They are hence particularly interested in the passages that exist between the two; the occasions where and when the smooth is being striated and those in which the striated is becoming smooth. For it is here where new affects, new emotions, and ideas arise.

InBetween

A miniature camera where a button should be. A screen attached to the back of the coat showing the images captured at the front (figure 1). This is the basis of Anja Hertenberger’s ongoing performance *InBetween*, which she commenced in 2003. On the

weblog accompanying the project, Hertenberger explains that she was inspired by a visit to the control room of the police headquarters in Groningen, Netherlands.⁹ She spent a night with policemen behind the monitors of the surveillance cameras placed in the centre of the city. There, she noticed how the digital cameras that were used seemed to diminish the distance between the people being filmed and the observing officers. The psychological distance the officers exhibited, however, could not have been greater. They spoke about people as if they were objects rather than subjects. And when the officers observing the images told her that they needed to go out onto the streets from time to time to experience the actual situation, the seeds for *InBetween* were sown.¹⁰

Hertenberger paired the existing digital technology of a miniature camera and a LCD screen with an artistic experiment and decided that she wanted to find out how people would react if they realised they were being filmed. The images the camera captures are not recorded, but *directly* transposed to the screen she wears on her back, sewn into a coat, backpack, cardigan, or blouse. Digital technology hence forms an essential part of her artistic performance. Wearing these technologies on her body enabled Hertenberger to breach the distance she had noticed in the officers' behaviour; the people she filmed were the people she encountered (figure 2). On the other hand, she minimised the distance created by the digital technology by wearing both the camera as well as the screen on her body; screen and camera were about as close to each other as they could be. Hertenberger's intention was to make the public aware of the fact that they were being recorded by less visible cameras, positioned on buildings and lampposts and that they were being observed by officers in police headquarters. In addition, she wondered how people would react to her wearing the technologies and what she herself would experience.

On her weblog 27 different incidents have been documented in words and the occasional photograph taken by friends that accompanied her from a distance.¹¹ At times little happens and people seem to hardly notice that they are being captured. Often brief talks take place and Hertenberger describes how she asks passers-by whether they are aware of the surveillance cameras in the city. One woman with whom she speaks, remarks that their conversation is less private since it is funnelled to Hertenberger's back and hence open to others. In a few occasions Hertenberger is flirted with and asked to join a man home, but flirting also happens *through* the camera. Specifically, in one situation a woman 'kisses' a man through the miniature camera. The man is standing behind Hertenberger, and she realises how little she is aware of what happens behind her back. During one of the first actions, in Groningen by night, a group of young men discover the set up and realise that the registration of the images takes place in front of Hertenberger's body. They then start playing with her, twisting her around, and taking turns at being captured and viewing the images. Hertenberger comments that they stop talking to her altogether. She feels objectified. At the same time her body has become a medium, a passage *in between* the camera and the screen.

Hertenberger's performances may be regarded as artistic interventions in public space in which the effects of surveillance technologies are examined by using a similar kind of technology, albeit in a completely different manner. The experiences Hertenberger describes, furthermore, open up a perspective upon the workings of technology in relation to the perceptive body of the artist. Eva Sturm, professor of art, mediation and *Bildung* has reflected upon Hertenberger's project and its mediative

character as follows: ‘The body of the artist [...] is the support system, the carrier, the substructure of the devices, which enables a passage. Anja Hertenberger has a medium, that she wears and carries, and she finds herself in between the medium.’¹² She hence enables a mediation by lending her body to carry the digital media of the camera and screen, and becomes a medium herself at the same time, for it is her body that mediates between camera and screen. She herself furthermore comments that she felt as if she had a hole in her body.¹³ A hole she never intended but that in the first instance felt threatening, a black hole. Hertenberger, however, also expresses that there is a certain attractiveness in the experience, in the sense that she feels her body opening up, creating a passage, a threshold.¹⁴

Immediate imaginings

When we connect Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of smooth and striated space to Hertenberger’s performance, several insights come to the fore. Firstly, the hole Hertenberger says to have experienced in her body while wearing the camera and screen, indicates that there is a passage between the smooth, artistic space of her moving body, and that of the technology she is wearing both on the front as well as on the back of her body. This experience is not so much an imagination, it only reaches the realm of imagination when Hertenberger refers to the hole. Before that she was actually experiencing the void, which very much resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of crossing from smooth to striated spaces: there is an event, a sensation, that is new and that has suddenly come into being because a passage was created.

Secondly, one may notice that the people Hertenberger encounters during her performance are observed by Hertenberger’s ‘warm eyes’ as well as by the ‘cold eye’ of the miniature camera she is wearing.¹⁵ Again one can tie this to the smooth notion of artistic, haptic, short-range vision – Hertenberger’s eyes – and the striated, technological, optical vision of the camera. Both ‘eyes’, the artistic and the technological, the warm and the cold, look in the same direction at the same time and a crossover between the two occurs since what the camera lens sees is transposed to the back of Hertenberger’s body. Although the distance between camera and screen is extremely small, the long-range vision occurs because onlookers can become part of what is normally one’s private, haptic vision.

Thirdly, and in contrast to what the police officers in their headquarters experience, the onlookers behind Hertenberger, the people she speaks to, and herself are not recorded. Anyone wanting to see them must be there and then, behind Hertenberger. And they immediately see what the cold camera eye sees. In addition, the newness of this performance and the emotions it evokes do not so much entail an imagination that belongs solely to the artist. The public, the technology, and the actual time and place are crucial for the performance to have any effect at all. Furthermore, the digital technologies of the camera and the screen do more than just mediate; they are essential to help arouse the affects one may experience when encountering Hertenberger. Thus, instead of thinking of the performance as one which deals with mediating imagination, Deleuze and Guattari enable us to see it as one of ‘immediate imaginings’.¹⁶ These move in between

art and technology; from the body of the artist, to her front where the camera is, and to the back where the images can be seen.

If one now thinks about the policemen in their headquarters it may be noticed that they lack the vastness of smooth space Hertenberger has created by wearing the technology on her body. Their view depends on what the surveillance cameras capture; this is a perspective that is mainly technological, optical and long-distance. It is dominantly striated and the officers thus feel the need to go back to the streets and experience the city with their haptic, warm eyes, to reclaim smooth space.

The void that Hertenberger feels, and the people she encounters in front of her, and behind her back, are unique and immediate experiences that occur due to a cross-over between artistic and technological spaces. A Deleuzeogauattarian perspective upon Hertenberger's *InBetween* performances hence enables one to reflect upon new events, emotions, and experiences as immediate imaginings, perceptible both for the artist and for the people she encounters; and perhaps, even for the reader of this article. It also allows for future reflections upon what is missing in perspectives and situations that start with, and rely upon technological camera monitoring. As such, this passage between art and technology allows for a critical perspective upon surveillance society itself.

[Writer's Profile]

Rebecca Louise Breuer received her PhD from the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Amsterdam. She is a senior lecturer and associate researcher at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Her current research interests lie in the development of philosophical theory in order to enable a radically different thinking of the perception of technology in relation to the intimate human body and its experiences.

[Image Captions]

Fig. 1. Anja Hertenberger, *InBetween*, 2014, © Anja Hertenberger.

Fig. 2. Anja Hertenberger, *InBetween*, 2005, © Anja Hertenberger.

¹ Brian Massumi, 'Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy', in: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), London and New York: Continuum, 2007, pp. ix-xvi.

² Or as Claire Colebrook writes: 'We create concepts not in order to label life and tidy up our ideas, but to transform life and complicate our ideas.' Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, Crows Nest: Allen & Umwin, 2002, p. xix.

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), London and New York: Continuum, 2007, p. 528.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), London and New York: Continuum, 2007, p. 543.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), London and New York: Continuum, 2007, p. 529.

⁶ Ibid. p. 524.

⁷ The *Oxford Dictionary of English* originates the term ‘technology’ in the early 17th century and situates its etymological referents in the Greek *tekhnologia*, systematic treatment, which can be divided into *tekhnē*, art or craft, and *-logia*. This could indicate that there needs to be art before one can systematically deploy certain traits of the arts and crafts into technologies. I, however, choose not to elaborate upon this idea here, since, with Deleuze and Guattari, I want to concentrate on the passages between the two, where new experiences arise.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), London and New York: Continuum, 2007, p. 524.

⁹ <http://anjahertenberger.net/weblog/weblog.html#Beginn>, last accessed 1 September 2017.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Eva Sturm, *Von Kunst aus. Kunstvermittlung met Gilles Deleuze*, Vienna and Berlin: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2011, p. 114.

¹³ E-mail interview, d.d. 29 July 2017.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ I am indebted to my friend, philosopher and librarian Fred Goudswaard for the conceptual pair of warm and cold eyes.

¹⁶ Since Deleuze and Guattari are interested in the processes that occur when entities (be they human or non-human) encounter each other, they do not think of a subject that *then* imagines something, but rather grant ‘what happens’ a new, conceptual term.