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Andreas Kaufmann as a Technician of the Phenomenon

The relationship between love and exact science is a problematic one. While one would like to know as exactly as possible whether, and in what manner, one is loved, any physical measurement of emotional states would be felt to be a threat. The same problems apply to the relationship between media and love. Although one can claim that nothing in the world happens without media, one is forced to realize that much of the world appears to be loveless. Whether the world is in fact loveless cannot be ascertained with certainty, since media always mediate between the world and people. Nobody can judge how the world or, in consequence, love, really is. Even if neither artists nor scientists can say what really exists, they do at least dispose over technologies enabling them to compare media effects. And that is a chance.

Films tend to camouflage their mediated semblance. In return for the price of a ticket, they guarantee the experience of a different reality. The purposes of cinema are fulfilled when viewers accept as real the events on the screen. For instance, viewers of *Casablanca* are expected to believe that Humphrey Bogart really loves Ingrid Bergmann, that the world of *Casablanca* really is black-and-white, and that the living really is hot beneath the fans in Rick's Café. Long after leaving the cinema, viewers continue to see the trench-coated Ricky on the runway. By that time, they have been forced to accept that the world is not divided up into black-and-white views, but they also feel sure they know what grand emotions are, what great love is. Imperceptibly, people gear their own lives towards this new knowledge, and compare perceived personal emotions with those enacted by Humphrey and Ingrid. And, in accordance with their personal disposition, they signal to the others that they are changing their lives in response to the impression made by the film. They start turning up the collar of their coat even if there is no chilly nighttime breeze or air strip in the vicinity, or raising their eyes to the heavens, lost and elegant in equal measures, even if there are no hostile immigrant authorities to be feared, or decorating their own apartments in the style of Rick's Café. Andreas Kaufmann's video work (which he also terms furniture or painting), is initially an item of furniture ideal for indicating to others the standards on which one's own feelings are based.

Kaufmann's piece shows exactly the moment at which Ingrid and Humphrey kiss each other. Apparently, the role of the artist has taken a back seat to that of media designer. He takes footage from film history and arranges it in such a way that it fits agreeably into the everyday of the living world. Yet the video work is a Trojan horse. The longer you look at it, the more frayed becomes the effect of the kiss scene. You see a film still, and at the same time you don't: imperceptibly, the actors' mouths move towards each other and slowly move apart. You need to look away if you want to catch what happens on the screen. It is only possible to consciously follow the progress of the scene if you briefly close your eyes in order to compare the change in the distance between the mouths. At the same time, it is the identical visual material that leads to differing degrees of attentiveness. In a movie theater, you miss the most exciting moments by closing your eyes. In Kaufmann's video piece, you have to keep closing your eyes in order to notice that anything happens at all. The quality of the work is attributable to the phenomenotechnical approach.

Bachelard describes as phenomenotechnology the procedure of modern scientists who in experiments shape a reality in line with theoretical laws, and produce – as opposed to simply reproduce – it in accordance with its image. Similarly, the artist Andreas Kaufmann does not content himself with faithfully reproducing emotional worlds but models periods of time– and a film scene is a period of time – in compliance with technological possibilities of which one is no more real than the other. The kiss in the film is no more real than the kiss in Kaufmann’s video work. Both views are based on constructions and manipulations of the spatio-temporal sensation of the viewer. Kaufmann’s computer allows a finer division of space and time than the engineers of the Dream Factory would permit. The phenomenotechnician uses a basic computer to vary and regulate what the cinema offers as emotion. Cinema, then, is just one of many possible techniques of arousing the impression of love. The success of film has consisted in its repeated ability to set standards for what society may consider to be love, or otherwise. To this extent, film is a dictatorial power station of emotions in that it forces individuals to conform to its self-determined standard of supply.

Video technology enables viewers to become self-suppliers in the sense that they can independently produce the film sequences on which they want to base their own lives. Yet standards can only be set if one is able to encode. Kaufmann’s video piece is a lesson for self-suppliers. It tells you something about the formability of the code by which cinema generates and controls emotions. It makes it possible to experience love as a function of media coding. Now, without reference to Hollywood, one can start to write or to hack codes of love.

Translated by Tom Morrison

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