

De-figuring and Blurring Bodies from Cinema to Data Moshing

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Abstract

In the post-medial era of maximum digital definition of images (Eugeni 2015; 2021), a part of the aesthetic research on images work on the modes of the indistinct and indeterminate, the formless and the blurred (Dusi 2013; 2019). Fictional cinema and TV series, documentary photography that investigates movement and performance, experimental video art that works on the limits of vision, use operations of “imperfect” visibility dominated by a subjectification and non-closure of meaning. They decline the modes of filtered or blurred vision, for example alternating montage of sharp and blurred images or using indistinct images within a single frame. Blurring the images is a way to filter the opposition between visible and invisible and between presence and absence. It complicates the game between real and virtual, opening the audio-visual media products to the drift of interpretations and the vertigo of potential worlds. For some directors (i.e. David Lynch) this type of imperfect vision and the mechanisms of de-figuration by blurring or rarefaction are a way of narrating the loss of identity of the subject (Ricoeur 1990) and become structural mechanisms that affect representation. Nowadays we also face a new manipulation of moving images, producing melted and liquefied images, a collective and playful sharing of a practice that until ten years ago was considered experimental. It is the case of data moshing and glitching, actually an exercise in rewriting and manipulating the algorithms and an intervention on the digital medium that reveals its capacity for decomposition and manipulation of the image.

1. Introduction

For about twenty years we have been dealing, with occasional articles, with images that are out of focus, blurred or shaky, with superimpositions that render individual figures indistinct and emphasize porosity, with trails of light and energy frozen by photographic images or energized by moving images. These problems are partly due to the movement of things and people being filmed or photographed, and partly related to the “resolution” or “low definition” of images, as explained in a recent volume by Casetti and Somaini (2021). Nevertheless, in our view, they are also something else: they are semiotic categories of the construction of rarefied, blurred, partially or totally obstructed visibility, and stratifications of image possibilities, as digital post-production from Photoshop and After Effect onwards has taught us. As Manovich (2001; 2013) claims, digital moving images are built up in layers and levels on which one can always intervene, so a blurring or partial invisibility also represents a kind of process explication of the multiplication of the (virtually infinite) possibilities of manipulating the visible and of moving from the recognizable (traceable to some form or gestalt) to the unrecognizable (i.e. to the blurred, half-deleted, dissipated). These include filters and mechanisms to produce this type of image, from fading and cross-fading overlay, to blurring by excess or defect of visibility, to de-pixelization effects.

What is interesting in our perspective is that we are not (only) faced with cinematic and digital tricks, but with semiotic choices that produce narrative sense, aesthetic research, or ethical-political challenges. We would like to take the opportunity of this article to organize the modes of blurring and de-figuring of the image in a first (albeit imperfect) typology, thinking, as Umberto Eco used to say, that semiotics can still be useful at least in the attempt to put order among multiple practices and different systems of signs (Eco 2005).

2. The Semiotics of Blurring in Cinema and TV series

In the post-medial era of maximum digital definition of images (Eugeni 2015; 2021), part of the aesthetic research on images works on the modes of the indistinct and indeterminate, the formless and the blurred (Dusi 2013; 2019). Fictional cinema and TV series, documen-

tary photography that investigates movement and performance, and experimental video art that works on the limits of vision, use operations of imperfect visibility dominated by a subjectification and non-closure of meaning. They apply the modes of filtered or blurred vision, for example alternating montage of sharp and blurred images or using indistinct images within a single frame. Blurring the images is a way of filtering the opposition between visible and invisible and between presence and absence, working on the dispersion of contours and the dissipation of the fullness of the figure. It complicates the game between real and virtual, opening audio-visual media products to the drift of interpretations and the vertigo of potential worlds.

For some directors, for example David Lynch, this type of imperfect vision and the mechanisms of de-figuration by blurring or rarefaction are a way of narrating the loss of identity of the subject (Ricoeur 1990) and become structural mechanisms that affect both representation and narrative configurations. It is also about getting out of iconic clichés to rediscover the feeling of the subject made of the “flesh of the world”, saturated with both “subjectivity” and “materiality” (Merleau-Ponty 1964).

But are forms in fluid, indistinct movement still ‘forms’, gestaltually understood? If they deny their closure, the plastic contrast that defines and cuts them out, can we still speak of forms and figures? It would be more correct to speak of developing forms, open to the deformation-dissipation of formants and figures. In 2010 Paolo Fabbri, during a congress on photography in Rome, suggested that “blurred signs” always indicate the problem of the relationship between *movement, vision and energy*: the blur would then be what we perceive at the moment of maximum energy of an action. Of course, we already knew this from Marey’s photographs and the experiments of futurist photographers on the duration of movement in front of the camera.

3. Chronophotographs: Movement as Progression

In the study of movement and chronophotographs, for our topic it appears more interesting Étienne Jules Marey’s serial work than Eadweard Muybridge’s, also remembering that Marey’s book *La machine animale* was printed in 1873 and certainly influenced Muybridge (Fig. 1). The images taken with Marey’s chrono-

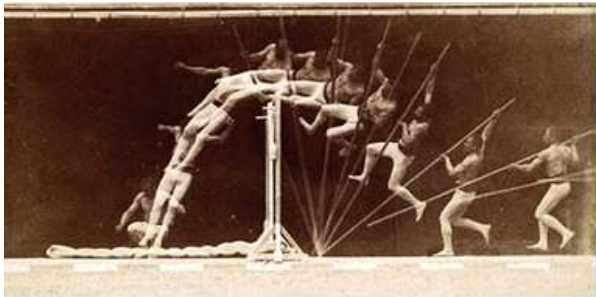


Fig. 1a | Marey, *Salto con l'asta* (1889 circa).

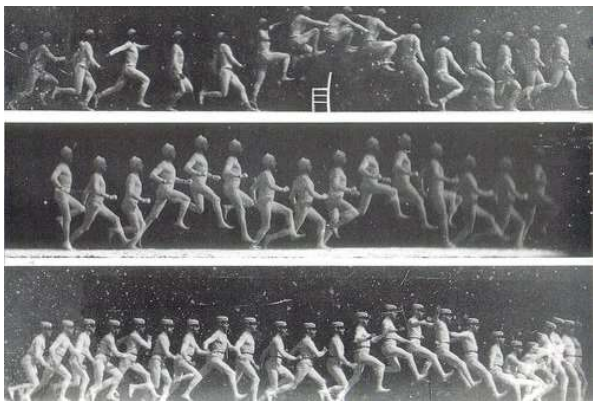


Fig. 1b | Marey, *Corse di ginnasti e coreografie*.

photographic gun, capable of rapidly taking sequential poses by impressing a sensitive disk, show sequences of images in varying quantities that would soon be defined as an “analytical photography of movements”, with its own high aesthetic level (Mannoni 1994, our transl.). Muybridge and Marey photograph an action in progress, break it down into a successive series of instants, capture the partial progression of a gesture in its completion (Grespi 2017). It is a first serialisation of the photographic image, between repetition and difference. A minimal displacement and transformation take place, with the inevitable perception of a cause and effect relationship in the gestural progression: it is a logic of consequence that provokes in us a narrative reading of the actions, with an association by transitivity that is already a form of montage, a logic of actions whose succession is temporalized in a linear progression (Dusi 2011).

Muybridge works on a series of clearly separated photographs, with a sequential and serial segmenta-



Fig. 2 | *Fotodinamica* di Anton Giulio e Arturo Bragaglia, *Dattilografo* (1913).

tion of movement, whereas Marey produces a form of montage of homogeneous elements in a single image and sometimes succeeds in capturing not one single instant, but an immediate succession of many. In Marey, one thus captures a simultaneous layering of poses that partially overlap each other, as would occur later in the research of Futurist photodynamism (Lista 2001), e.g. in Anton Giulio Bragaglia’s experiments (Di Marino 2009) (Fig. 2).

The forms blur into each other and the series seems to undergo compression, but shows movement in its relative duration. This produces a proximity effect and a greater fluidity of movement than in Muybridge’s series.

4. Morphodynamic Blurs Between Energy and Speed, Streak of Light

The indiscernibility of shapes and their appearance as a stream, or streak of light, is first and foremost a direct experience, which we have when we watch as pedestrians a speeding train, or the speeding of cars from an elevated point. In order to perceive the trail, we need a certain distance and a stable point of view, as well as adequate brightness and a certain environment surrounding the moving object (Pierantoni 1986).

For some contemporary dance photographers, such as the Israeli Gadi Dagon (Fig. 3), the surrounding environment, perceived as static, provides a backdrop for one or more dancer figures that are partially indistinct because they are in motion – human figures in which contrasts are blurred, assimilated, reduced to a non-uniform and continuous whole. In the vision me-



Fig. 3 | Gadi Dagon, *Dancing With a Camera*.

diated by a technological device lay the foundations of an aesthetics of movement: positioning of the viewer, brightness, background, speed of the object or body in front of the viewer, together with the speed of the shooting (or of the capture of the image by a digital sensor).

We have a sharp vision when there is discontinuity of the cropped forms in their contours, in the difference between figure and background and in the contrast between light and dark, while a blurred vision opens up the continuity of forms and the indiscernibility of background and figure, of lines and contours. The extreme effect, mediated by the cinematic device, is that of a continuous mass flowing in a light trail, which provokes us in terms of the experience of vision and the perception of movement.

In contemporary photos of blurs and light trails, the layering effect of movement creates the effect of multiple simultaneous temporalities. There is a partial overlapping of repeated figures, a montage of different temporalities, which come together and coexist in the same photograph achieving the blurred effect. The transition from the series, discontinuous and progressive, to the continuous stratification in simultaneous accumulation, becomes almost a folding of the time continuum. A photo of the trail of light produced by moving bodies and objects shows movement in its relative duration, unfreezes the moment and transforms it into a fluid and rarefied succession of moving forms in the continuity of space-time. We have an agglomeration of figures in continuity tracing a path in space and time, a trajectory or a kind of filling of the void made by the fullness of gestures and the moving

body or object. In these cases the blurred in photography represents trajectories of movement, but also “diagrams” showing modulations of energy, as to say a sort of immanent organisation of forces and tensions (Deleuze 1981; Fabbri 2015).

5.1. Pictorial, Cognitive, Identity Blurs

I will make a quick reference to some modes of blurring that are interesting in movies and in today’s “complex TV” fiction series (Mittell 2015), in particular cognitive and affective blurring, expressive blurring constructed through an impediment to vision or a filter (a curtain, excess of brightness, blurred glasses), with which we could compare the all-digital practice of “de-pixelization” of moving images (Casetti, Somaini 2021). Recently in a major *auteur* TV series such as Paolo Sorrentino’s *The New Pope* (Sky 2020, ep. six), we find sequences of image blurring to show, for example, the pope’s heroin withdrawal symptoms (in a scene where he is in front of a journalist for a worldwide broadcast interview), or to show the loss of security and identity through the streaking of a doubled-up reflected image (when the woman manager in charge of Vatican communications discovers her husband’s vices and infidelities).

When we first developed an interest in blurred images, we had studied Bernardo Bertolucci’s way, in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), of narrating existential angst and the precariousness of erotic relationships through homages to Francis Bacon’s painting, beginning with the film’s opening credits and moving on to scenes in which blurring is played out as partial invisibility, through translucent curtains, glass doors or frosted windows (Dusi 2003) (Fig. 4a). For such visions, the “semiotics of light” (Fontanille 1995) would speak of a tension between intensity and extension of light, between “propagation” and “localization” of light in space, between transparency and opacity, where material light (“lumière-matière”) shapes the obstacle or structures its transparency, or diffuses into “haziness” (Fontanille 1995: 40).

The cognitive tension for the viewer is between the possibility and the impossibility to watch clearly, between concealment and focus, opening to the expectation of seeing and being able to recognize (Fig. 4b). What seems interesting is the tension between opacity and haziness, in the blurring that should be



Fig. 4a-b | B. Bertolucci, *Ultimo tango a Parigi* (1972).

understood as meaning effects produced by the configuration of light on visual and audio-visual texts (in the graduality between light and dark). A “de-figuration” that can be reached through deformation by saturation of brightness, or confusion between forms by blurring and rarefaction (Dusi 2003: 276-278). These meaning effects (e.g., opacity or haziness) are produced by image blurring agents, which act as filters, dispersing and dissipating the legibility of the figures of the world: they can be defined as “modulators of forces and tensions that build a system of variations capable of rendering the figure unstable and transforming it” (ibidem).

Blurs in cinema are thus an agent of image transformation even at the temporal level, and can construct a “logic of sensation” (Deleuze 1981) that resonates one level of the visual text with respect to another, recalled and denied at the same time. They are filters, instruments of variation, frequency modulators between levels of the film text, that is, between expression and content, or between rhythms and intensity, but also between density of the figure, its iconic legibility and its deformation, rarefaction and illegibility.

At the cognitive level they provoke the viewer, in the tension between presence and absence, between memory, virtuality and realization; at the “pathemic” (or affective) level they build an expectation of iconic reading, a kind of nostalgia for the sharply cropped and perceptible vision. This mechanism of modulating image forces, rhythmic tensions and their frequency is what we will also find in digital processes of de-pixelization.

5.2. Blurred Cinema

We find the use of filters or distortions of sharp vision in much cinema reacting to the digital shift with a blurred aesthetic, particularly in films from the turn of the century and early 2000s, which promote new “aesthetics of low fidelity”, starting with the new Danish cinema of the Dogma movement with films such as *Festen* and *I dioterne*, *Mifune*, *Dancer in the Dark* or in *The Blair Witch Project* from the US.¹ For some directors (thinking of some of Scorsese’s or Van Sant’s films) this kind of “imperfect” vision can become a precise stylistic choice, built up with the figures of water and the use of reflections, or by placing other filters and obstacles to sharp visibility. A film that sums up the trend of the Nineties is Wong Kar Wai’s *In the Mood for Love* (2000), which uses steam and sheets of rain that de-figure the image in a refined way, and opens up an aestheticizing fashion (Fig. 5).

These are blurred visions, to be understood as operations aimed at blurring visibility. We have reflections, curtains of water (from rain or other sources) thanks to which the image twitches and is partially *de-figured*, creating a rhythmic tension that produces new significations and which could build, as we said before, a “logic of sensation” (Deleuze 1981) that is more pervasive and expressive than the narrative one.



Fig. 5a | Wong Kar Wai, *In the mood for love* (2000).



Fig. 5b | Wong Kar Wai, *In the mood for love* (2000).

5.3. Figurality in Lynch

Many of David Lynch's films, such as *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Lost Highways* (1997), *Mulholland Drive* (2001) or *Inland Empire* (2006) but also the recent sequel to *Twin Peaks* (2017), use fog and blurry vapours to create an unsettling, cerebral world caught between surreal delirium and bizarre play.

In *Lost Highways* de-figuration becomes a way of narrating the loss of identity of the protagonist (Curtis 2008), when, for example, head movements become too fast to be distinguishable and images become blurred, even though the montage inserts visual traces that allow the viewer to continue to recognize the human figure. The resulting effect is to represent "intense spasms" that shake the body and disfigure it from within, as happens to many human figures painted by Francis Bacon, studied by Deleuze (1981) in the forces and rhythms at work to de-figure the image.

Some of Lynch's films contrast sharp and distinct modes of the visible and the narrative, with reassuring cityscapes of (apparently) quiet American country towns, and dark, opaque atmospheres in which a rarefied luminosity prevails, innervated with often percussive and disturbing extradiegetic music. Sometimes, in the space in-between the sharp visions and the opaque visions, between apparently linear narratives that turn into the indistinct and the discontinuous, there are inserts in which the audio-vision becomes blurred, out of focus, the visibility is reduced, and the listening becomes complicated with high volumes and sounds in which the organic and the inorganic are mixed (in *Blue Velvet*, for example). It is these visual-auditory lacerations, where corporeity and in-

congruous, formless worlds appear, that are particularly interesting for our research (Dusi 2019). These are disturbing audio-visual sequences which, in the complicated economy of the (often) co-present possible worlds of Lynch's films, become a sign of a narrative and sensorial turning point – albeit marked by undecidability – starting with the bodies and faces of the characters, who seem to undergo a profound mutation, a somatic and affective transformation – sequences in which the film goes beyond the figurative and representative level, to enter precisely into a "haptic" (namely tactile) regime (Deleuze 1981).

These moments turn the discourse into a *figural regime*, which we would define as a tension between the semiotic mode and the aesthetic mode. A figural in which the still recognizable visual and sound configurations are altered with transformations given by torsions, fibrillations and plastic and rhythmic deformations, blurs and de-figurations (Bertetto 2007; 2008). A world, then, at once recognizable and disfigured, superficial and visceral, which at times turns abruptly and transforms bodies and subjects into a "flesh of the world", as Merleau-Ponty (1964) would call it.

In semiotic terms (Floch 1993), *intensification* and *presentification* appear as two fundamental meaning effects of the transformations of the visible and audible in Lynch's films. They are modes that also become a vehicle for refiguring bodies, environments and landscapes, all of which are innervated by tensions that are often at odds with one another or traversed by devastating forces, as is the case in *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet* and *Lost Highways*. Accordingly, we find these modes, like an authorial signature, in the first thirty minutes of the pilot of the third *Twin Peaks*, with disturbing and disfigured body figures, once again very Baconian.

6. Synesthesia and Figurative Syntaxes

By providing us with sensitive, passionate and cognitive experiences, cinema teaches us (also) the functioning of the cultural logics by which we construct a meaningful world, for example our ways of thinking and the different "figurative syntaxes" of sensualities (Fontanille 2004). They are synesthesia or better figurative syntaxes, as body semiotics calls them (ibidem) that often intermingle with each other, and we know that the way we feel movies is not only through our gaze and hearing, but (thanks to sensory, plastic and

rhythmic balances and contrasts) also through the figurative syntaxes of touch and taste, sensorimotor perception (between movement and stasis), or our internal sense of balance and vertigo.

Following Vivian Sobchack (2004), in the synaesthetic (or rather, for film, “kinaesthetic”) experience there is an embodied dimension as an effect of the relationship between the expressive activity of the film and the perceptive activity of the spectator, mediated by a sensual organisation that turns the film into a kind of body that not only engages the spectator but also enables him to implement a sensible (sensory and perceptive) knowledge, in a relationship that for Sobchack has a “somatic basis” (Sobchack 2004: 59–60). It is as if the film would “touch” the spectator not only in a cognitive sense but precisely through a sensory engagement in the cinematic experience, which makes her or him experience a vision that is always “embodied”, because “the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies*” (ibidem). Sobchack claims it is an experience of “prereflective bodily responsiveness to film” (ivi: 63). Cinema then uses sensitive figures, to let us know through our bodies prior to our minds how to take in and interpret the narrative that is presented to us. And sensitive figures can become visual metaphors, enabling us to understand how our memory and cultural systems work.

7.1. Manipulating Compression: Blurring Images as a Political Act

If blurred aesthetics exploded around the late twentieth century-early 2000s, it is perhaps related to showing images that enhance the viewer’s experiential moment and the perception of a danger, reviving a



Fig. 6 | Glitch image.

specificity, with respect to digital images and technologies that were transforming the practice of shooting, editing and post-production in those years. But contemporary blurred images are not just an aesthetic of nostalgia that looks back to media archaeology. The transition from analogue to digital, and in particular our present post-medial world (Eugeni 2015), allows a new awareness of the stratification and intrinsic manipulation of digital images to the processes of deformation, blurring, and filtering of images (Fig. 6).

There is perhaps also a leap forward today. Blurring doesn’t have the effect of making us enter the fictional world even more through a renewed awareness of its artifices. If we think of de-pixelization, it is rather a matter of disfiguring, or corrupting the very process of encoding moving images. Examples of this are techniques (and related blogs and tutorials) of disfiguring, de-figuring, discolouring moving images achieved through open source software and dedicated writing programmes whose fans extol the subversive manipulation of images. For example, two digital image transformation processes, operations that produce demonstration videos for fans of the genre: image and sound *glitching* and *data moshing*.

7.2. Glitching and Data moshing: ReWriting the Algorithms

Glitching is a colour manipulation operation, while data moshing is, in the explanation of a Toronto-based programmer, a work on video image compression that intervenes in the software that handles such compression. Following the programmer and hardware hacker Phil Tucker (curator of the data moshing blog),² we learn that there is a difference between frames of the same video, which allow for “correct” viewing. The “I-frames” contain the complete picture and return in a regular manner in the playback flow, and they are different from the incomplete frames related to image compression called “Predictive-frames” (or P-frames) and “Bi-Predictive frames” (or B-frames) which are instead carriers of partial data, with which they indicate differences from the complete picture. The system regulating the interaction between I-Frames and P-Frames is then a differential relationship on the ongoing process of image encoding, a way of producing images that is inherently semiotic, if we think that a sign is constructed in the difference with another sign,

even if here we are dealing with more complete shapes and more partial figures (Fig. 7).

Furthermore, our Toronto hacker explains, calling it the “Bloom effect”, that there is also another data moshing technique that is implemented by “selecting one or more P-frames and duplicating them multiple times consecutively”. This results in “the same P-frame data being applied to one picture over and over again, accentuating the movement” (ibidem). This process of relating frames, instead of using difference employs the repetition or duplication of the same P-frames. Thus, we will have two ways of corrupting the moving image: the first by differential relationships that are suppressed or rarefied by eliminating integral frames, or rather by spacing them further apart, widening the intervals; the second by obsessive repetition of only partial frames, which thus do not allow the moving image to fully create itself, in the manner of a complete and recognisable figure.

All these manipulations of moving images, this melting and liquefying of images, is nothing new for experimental video art. Manovich (2013) wrote about it analysing 2007 Takeshi Murata’s video *Pink Dot* from 2007 (Fig. 8). The novelty today, in our opinion, lies in

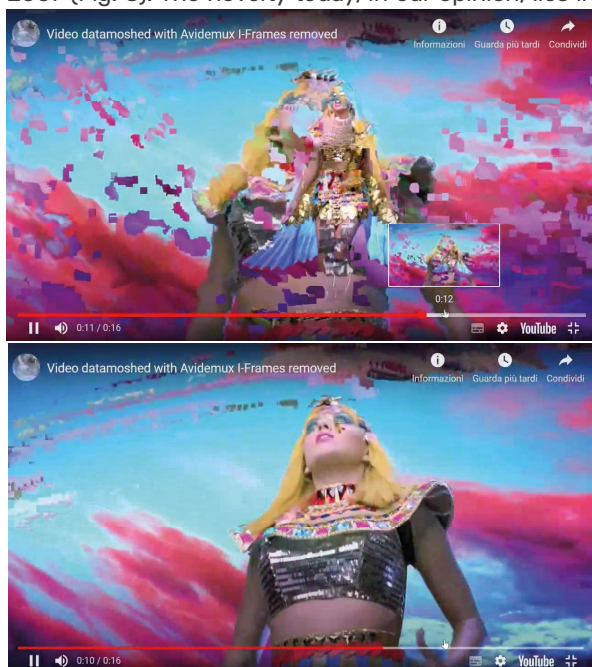


Fig. 7 | Data moshing tutorial video (2022).

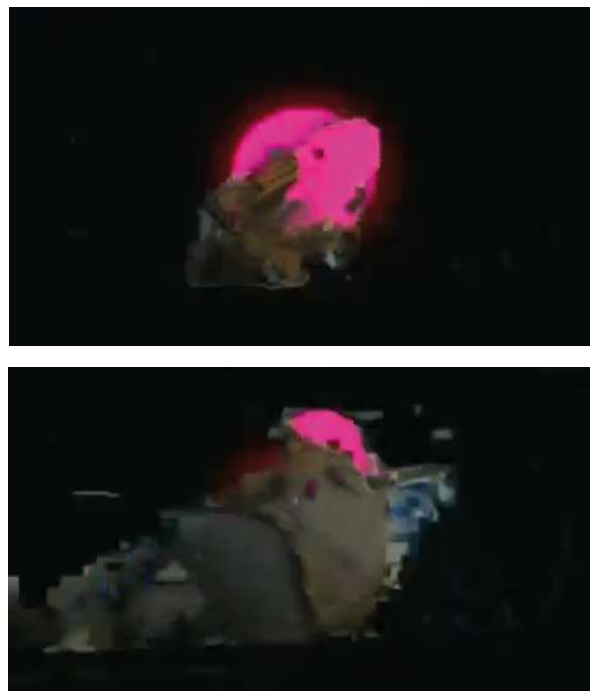


Fig. 8 | Takeshi Murata, *Untitled (Pink Dot)* (2007).

the collective and playful sharing of a practice that until ten years ago was considered experimental.

In the case of data moshing and glitching, it is actually an exercise in rewriting and manipulating the algorithms that allow video image reproduction software to function – and with practices explained in an elementary manner, so as to make them easily operational even for non-expert programmers. These programming manipulations that are deployed to hack a video product make it possible to automate an operation that would otherwise have to be done frame by frame. It is therefore an aesthetic of damaged software, a composition process that is corrupted to create distortion effects. It is a creativity that shifts away from the pleasure of the destruction of a previous form, but we can also read into it the search for the demystification of the glossy and perfect, hyperreal images by which we are invaded. But it is also, as we said before, a demonstration of awareness of the layering and manipulability of the contemporary image, which takes it a little bit beyond the remix and crossover investigated by Manovich (2013).

We think back to the mechanisms of de-figuration

or disfiguration of vision such as moving blurs or light trails in film and photography, a way of showing temporal duration, continuity of movement, lines of force and energy behind moving poses. Thinking of light trails, as in the case of partial or total de-pixelization, we can speak of the production of waves of low-resolution zones. These waves are also visual links between moving images, and thus indicate a continuity and durability (or duration) of the syntagmatic chain of (in turn distorted) images and sounds. And they are an obstruction to clear vision, a manipulation of the viewer's gaze where one would like to know more. Of course, they also tell of the power to manipulate images, sometimes used to censor them and to construct a mainstream vision by the official media, as denounced by the visual artist Thomas Hirschhorn studied by Casetti and Somaini, who explain: "Since resolution is an indicator of the quantity of detail contained in an image, controlling resolution is a way of *controlling visibility*" (Casetti, Somaini 2018: 82).

Yet this is not just a light circulation problem, to do with an "economy of light", as in the case of the fictional cinema and video art we have been considering. Instead, we are really dealing with an "economy of data" (Eugeni 2021: 290). In fact, it is a matter of manipulating programming data, and thus demonstrating that the images we watch and experience in the media are the result of an algorithmic construction, organised to produce a certain piece of information. In short, the result of an enunciative choice valorised in the name of a perspective that is always "ideological", in the Barthesian sense, as to say a rhetorical construction with a value perspective (Barthes 1982).

8. Conclusions: A Semiotic Typology

We have quickly reviewed many examples of image transformations given by confrontation with the movement of the world (in film or photographic shooting) or by the absorption of movement within a textual configuration. De-pixelated videos show us another kind of movement, related to software manipulation that produces effects of trail, waves, and amalgamation between figures and backgrounds. We interpret in this way the call for paper suggestion with respect to "movement as a metaphor of textual regeneration", in which movement becomes engine or motif of textual transformations, between recodifications, hybridiza-

tions and resemantizations.

We could summarise looking for a typology, as we promised in our opening, thinking of the semiotics of media experience proposed by Eugeni (2010). There are various levels of analysis for looking at the similarity and differentiation between the use of blurs in cinema and videos with de-pixelization, understood as the effect of data moshing. We will try to list them with some concise formulas.

A level of the *logics of perception and affect*: it is an expressive and plastic level (circulation of light, figures, movement and rhythms) between saturation and rarefaction of the image, concentration and dissipation of rhythms and editing. Here we also find aspectual and rhythmic temporality: emphasised by the trails of light (or energy) produced in the continuity of the movement, thus highlighting the duration of the whole (as opposed to the discontinuity of the "any instant" that produce a frame, as Deleuze 1983 claimed).

A *narrative level* of the blur used in cinema serving the narration, in which there is also a value orientation, actantial logics of relation and transformation between subject and object and narrative paths, in which the blur can mark moments of transition.

A *discursive level* in which visibility is partially erased or obstructed on spatial and temporal elements (understood as markers of an era), or on characters. A story, for example, is problematised at the spatial or temporal level if the evolution of an element cannot be seen because it is blurred. Here we find "cognitive blurs", relating to the characters' knowledge and belief, and "pathemic blurs", relating to the characters' affective relationships with themselves and with others.

A *textual level*, that of logics of enunciation and communication, in which blurring is part of the logics of "enunciative chaining" and the construction of the relationship between textual levels. We think of the relations between expression and content, of the story and the way of telling it, in which expressive distortions or blurring and visual and auditory disfiguration can be favoured as a stylistic and authorial form. Or to the level of focalisation on relations between the narrator and the characters, as to say focalisations on knowledge and belief, which can create identity or existential blurs (both cognitive and pathemic or affective as we said before). And here we find also all subjectivising and objectivising modes of visual construction, and all the operations of relation between film and specta-

tor, at the level of the choice of communication and enunciation, which can conceal or make explicit information through opacity or transparency of image and sound. A good example of the *existential blur* is Woody Allen's film *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), in which the main character can no longer (literally) "focus" on himself and loses identity first and foremost visually, also for the other characters and the viewer. It is a game of digital post-production, which is, however, consistently at the service of the narration.

But blurs work above all at the level of *meta-discursive and metatextual logics*, which open up the folding and thus the reflection of the text on itself and its strategies (as Metz 1991 would claim). They are semiotic logics of "enunciated enunciation" (Greimas 1983), which can become metaphorical or symbolic. In this way, blurs and de-pixelizations open up to the most diverse connotations and allow us to explore new valorisations and re-semantizations of media products.

However, de-pixelization reminds us of something else: it is a *meta-media logic*, that is a reflection on the medium on itself, which allows the media product with some de-pixelated areas to show us that there is not only the optical blurring of cinema, today also reworked with the digital post-production serving the story or an aesthetic project. There is also an intervention on the digital medium that shows the composition software at work, or rather reveals its capacity for decomposition and manipulation of the image. Therefore, we can speak of a reflection on the digital image understood as an expressive apparatus, a basic level of reflection on the medium, which immediately leads to a second, new reading. Previously, we have defined blurs as frequency modulators of light energy. With de-pixelization we will instead have algorithmic frequency modulators, linked to the density of some data and the rarefaction of others.

Finally, in broader terms, the medium also becomes a construction of collectives of enunciation, of social contexts and practices, in which we can say that de-pixelization enables socio-cultural interpretations. In its proposition as a meta-media operation, de-pixelization opens up ethical and epistemic problems.

The *ethics* of the products of de-pixelization is that of the hackers, of the counterculture that attacks the refined and aesthetically correct products of the dominant or mainstream audio-visual culture. They rework

and remix them to show, on the one hand, as always, their skill in doing so, and on the other, the fragility of the dominant aesthetic and ideological construction – thus putting it to the test, sometimes to overthrow it parodically, as happens in Murata's *Untitled (Pink Dot)* (2007) and in the well-known practices of remixing studied after Manovich (2001; 2013) by Navas (2010) or in cinema by Tryon (2009). In the case of the de-pixelization there is an *underlying playful aspect*, a play of destroying conventional forms, which drives a generic protest against the dominant software of standardised expressive construction of moving images. It is a playful ethic that is basically gratuitous, without consequences, because this desire to ruin, to remix by decoding or recoding, seems to have nothing to do with an aesthetic breakthrough or a more radical revolutionary project. It brings no economic or legal consequences, but only social recognition consequences e.g. in one's programming community. This is clearly not the case with the aesthetic research by artists such as Thomas Hirschhorn, who instead explicates the forms of censorship of mass information images and considers the forms of power linked to the visibility allowed or denied for such images (Casetti, Somaini 2021).

Lastly, there is also an interesting epistemic bearing: in meta medial terms, de-pixelization shows us that one can rework and rewrite image composition software from inside, and thus one can affect the materiality and realisation of the final product. This rewriting is epistemic, with immediate practical consequences. It has to do with a skill that is learnt and knowledge that circulates, in the cultural and political perspective of open access and sharing, of collective thinking and the participatory logic of the web (Jenkins 2006).

Aesthetic rendering can in some cases be interesting. Certainly, if an artist intervenes, it becomes an operation aimed at the creation of new forms. But when the act of programming and hacking is emphasised, the aesthetic result will only be a possible consequence, not the one aimed at. Because the result sought is instead the demonstration that, if everything is coding, one can remix and "corrupt" the forms of the dominant culture, either for one's own pleasure as a *bricoleur*, or to demonstrate that code can always be disassembled and sabotaged.

Notes

¹ *Festen* by Thomas Vinterberg (1998); *Idioterne* by Lars Von Trier (1998); *Dancer in the Dark* by Lars Von Trier (2000); *The Blair Witch Project* by Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sánchez (1996).

² See Phil Tucker's blog, <http://datamoshing.com/about/> (last visited on April 2023).

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