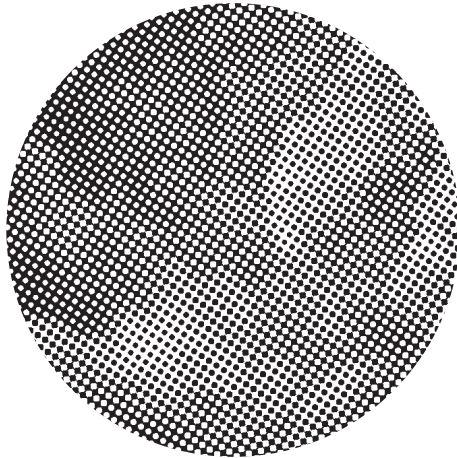


# PEACE IN SPACE.

Janine Randerson



## Projection

What if there is no ‘inner life’? What if the myth of psychology appeared only at that sad moment when René Descartes, exhausted by the endless religious wars of the seventeenth century ‘which have not yet been brought to a termination’, slumped in his tent, the cold wind thrumming in the guy ropes, a flickering lantern the only light in his darkness, turned his back on all certainties of the world? What if, in that dark night, apart from his god, when Descartes stripped away the world to produce from crisis the critical phrase, he invented not only method but the very idea of personhood? What if cogito ergo sum, I think therefore I am, is neither the final statement of a soul in torment nor the resounding monument of modernity but a technical act of invention?

The Latin doesn't even use the word ego, 'I'. Yet it is on this rock that the church of Ego stands. With it rests the vainglorious and paranoid delusion that the self-identical self might produce from out of its wrinkled cerebrum a world, a universe, all Creation's complexities. The refusal of God, essential to found modernity, though it was never the devout Descartes' refusal, was in its initiating moment a refusal less of the deity than of His works, a turn away from the givenness of the world on which its reconstruction as scientific datum might be built. The introjection of all powers of conception, and the consequent extrojection of all worldly stuff as object for that sovereign inwardness; this separation of self from world on which the bastions of consciousness reside – what if all this was just a historical accident, from which we struggle to awaken?

The age of the world picture arrives in that same cold dawn when Descartes stumbled blinking into the light of a world now utterly alien. Though he would forever keep his faith, nonetheless he of all men had most profoundly transgressed the Second Commandment. The world was no longer a continuum with his mind, nor his mind a long-legged fly moving on its surface. For in his moment of doubt he had committed the most awful sin that doubt can commit: he had doubted away the givenness of the world, and replaced it with its phantom. From now on the world would not be the world to the West, but at best a distant, unknowable planet from which only remote transmissions might be received in a sensorium no longer integral to it, but merely a receiving station on which it traced its epiphenomenal impressions, sensations which would need to be rebuilt, as Kant's apperceptions and as Hegel's concepts. Heidegger and most European philosophy of the 20th century would mourn the passing of the world. What it should have mourned was the arrival of the self.

We culturalists perpetually claim that there are no more master narratives. It isn't true. Though we might be happier believing that the human race is doomed to environmental or atomic apocalypse than that capitalism might decay and die, we have acquired, over the long twentieth century, a new mode of thought that drags these divided elements back into some sort of system: ecology. So much of it is sentimental nonsense or pious dogma we forget how profound is its rethinking of the world. For the ecologist, not only are we not alone, we scarcely exist as free-standing entities. Instead our every breath is permeated with the coexisting species

that dwell in and on us, that feed and clothe, the waters that wash and the airs that inspire us. Our every action is consequential, and contingent on innumerable modulations of the soil, the sea, the parasite and the tides.

What if "I" am not apart from the ground under my feet or the stars overhead? What claim do I have to be the centre of my world, when that world is without centre? It is not that my senses and thinking do not matter but that they are not "mine" in any sense that makes sense. It was not Descartes' vice but it is ours: pride holds the breathing thing apart from the world. Pride alone, the vanity that makes believe the universe and all its wonders exist only for me, and that alone in all the universes my thoughts matter to the lonely, doomed homunculus inside the bone box of my skull.

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The projected image is like and unlike any other image. Plato establishes his tragic metaphor of the cave on the basis of projected light. Melanie Klein understands projection as one of two primal processes by which the infant child copes with the instincts that threaten to engulf it. For Plato, the reflection is a delusion, and only the light source is real – a thesis most projectionists can easily counter. For Klein, projection's first and formative task is to deflect outwards the infantile death instinct: to project onto bad objects the destructive impulses that otherwise the mewling brat would visit on itself. The beginnings of mental and psychic life alike lie in the detournement of light, and the distortions that reflection and projection bring to an originary upwelling of biology or structure of the world.

But then, Leroi-Gourhan records the hands of hunters outlined in sprays of ochre on the walls of caves. The puff of life that so many gods give to so many clay effigies is one of the first techniques for mark-making – a projection of breath as colour onto the wall. Nor would the modern world's picture of itself be possible if it were not already a projection of one kind or another. The age of the world picture pictured the world with two tools, perspective and cartography, systems for deploying knowledge of three dimensions onto sheets of two. That every map projection is a distortion any schoolboy can tell you. That perspective is illusory has been bread and butter to the arts since Greenberg and before.

And yet video projection is today the cliché of biennial art,

despised because it is both overused and underexplored. To project means. And projection as technique is rich with possibilities. Yet neither meaning nor technique is explored in the endless rows of four-square projections onto flat white walls. The gifts of keystoneing, anamorphosis and the endless variety of reflective and translucent materials lie about like last year's broken toys. The majority of artworks scarcely even question the landscape format of the aspect ratios they inherit.

Which makes Janine Randerson's work even more important. The early years of a new technology usually prove the most productive of new and crazy ideas. Projection was blessed with more: Eisenstein's argument for square screens to allow frames composed in horizontal, vertical, oval formats, for example, Xenakis' explosion of architectural and auditory space in mathematical laser projection; Jeff Wall's geodesic projections, Stansfield and Hooykaas' anamorphoses, the People Show's corrugated screen with its banded interpolation of two images... From the Lumières gigantic screen of 1900, via Domitor to Speer's searchlight columns and OMNIMAX, projection has been architecture, sculpture and, in the combination of internet and data projectors, geography. It is an art of space.

Randerson's work since *Report to Darmstadt*, 2005 pulls in this history of projection, and in it reconfigures the early modern inventions of the arts of space in perspective and cartography. If our European ancestors set out to conquer the world with their maps and drawings, with the results we know, Randerson's activity is more like that of Klein's child, but without the savage motivation Klein ascribes to projection. Instead, you might say, she reverses the introjection of objects that occurred when Descartes first isolated himself from the world to ask how he could be sure the world existed. The possible answer – that “I” created the world – is one that devours the world and all its lives and loves, reduces them to their map, to their assigned places in the grid of geometrical perspective.

These suspended domes each replace the flat page of the atlas with the curved surface that the atlas sought to flatten. Not that these are globes or even hemispheres, so not in themselves stitched into the project of finding an adequate miniaturisation of the universe, making it portable, as the oil painting, the map and the drawing-master's manual had done. Their form is disconnected

from the purposes of representation. Their shape seems more reminiscent of speaker cones or the mirrored parabola behind the bulb that shapes a torch's beam: shapes made from technologies, not nature, and destined not just to receive but to refocus and transmit the light that falls so softly on them.

It is always a matter of where the screen is. Mona Hatoum was neither first nor last to project onto the floor: Simon Biggs to project onto the ceiling or Tony Oursler to project onto objects. Randerson is not the first to disestablish cinema's monocular orientation towards the single wall, breaking her imagery across an array of screens, establishing the continuities and discontinuities that form the movement of her work through the spaces it occupies, just as it encourages a viewer to move and inhabit. This is at least one meaning of the 'space' of the title: that this is a work in which spaces are at once discrete, and so potentially at war, but are also neighbours, and can at least dream of peace.

And what would peace consist of? The conqueror is never at peace. The conquered are never defeated. The opposite of peace is not war but victory. Peace alone comes to the ones who refuse to conquer, refuse the struggle to the death, deny the inevitability of hierarchy. That is not, of course, to deny difference. Transmission and retransmission, focus and refocus are the attributes of projection, that it brings to bear on the world.

Projection is an art without properties if by property we mean the textbook definition of the right to deny another the use of something you have. Projection is quite the opposite. As a psychological ploy, it is obdurate giving with no room left for refusal. As the process of focused light, it is nothing if it cannot pour out, only exists as a throwing forth. Projection replaces projectiles as peace replaces war: both are gifts that cannot be refused, but only one comes capable of richer messages than “Surrender or die”.

There is always a point – in fact several points – from which the flat screen disappears from vision: anywhere on the same plane. What is so lovely about these curved screens is that even when you are away from their focal centre, you are always alert to them, aware of their slower or faster illuminations, and the sway and buckle of light on them, top and bottom, inside and out. There is no one immaculate place from which it all makes sense, no throne, no pineal gland at which the world might come to focus and all

thoughts find their core and quality. Dispersed and radiant, the dome-screens echo fleets of flying saucers, arriving from or departing to a universe without boundaries and a time without end. You could say: an art that's pointless, where the point is the old enemy, the authoritative and regal spot from which a painting in perspective or an empire's maps made sense. The loss of the focal point is like the wrench of leaving the pentameter in modern verse: the single essential step which makes it possible to think the ending of that paradox of paradoxes, the sovereign subject.

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In his Promethean moment Rimbaud, in the same letter to Paul Demeny in which he pronounced "JE est un autre" (I am an other) gave his famed recipe for the delirium of the artist: "The poet makes himself a seer through a long, immense and reasoned deregulation of all the senses". 15th May 1871. The height of the Paris Commune. Rimbaud is seventeen.

The curious element of his poetic is not his youth, his ignorance of politics, his self-absorption: these are the stuff of all teenage boys' dreams. It is that despite his desire, miserably soon fulfilled, to cast himself into vice and drunkenness, he proposes a paradox: *dérèglement raisonné*, reasoned deregulating, rational irrationalism. The twist is perhaps less absurd than it seems. Unreason has been reason's twin since the French revolution first paired justice and terror. It is one of those great moments in which the Romanticism of his near contemporary Baudelaire finds early expression in a trajectory that will take it through chocolate box surrealism to the jesuitical debauch of Bataille. Baudelaire's celebration of synaesthesia, of perfumes, lights and echoes recombining in the depths of time and space into a single sensory rapture, become not a goal but a method for Rimbaud. These opium dreams will fuel the great Romantic agony of Wagner's music theatre. They will become the total and totalitarian artwork that overwhelms and transfixes its audiences: Speer's architecture, the aestheticisation of politics which Benjamin would decry as the central vice of fascism. Modernism's Apollonian purity rose from its profound distrust of blood, fury and the mire as the sources of anything but nazism.

Yet all the while another sect pursued in the margins of Europe another synaesthetic. Scriabin's staggering Prometheus fed not the nazi myth of blood and land but a spiritual mysticism

that tried to reconcile the givenness of the scientific world with the yearnings of the soul for higher things. Scriabin took up, you could say, the mystical science of Goethe's morphology and theory of colour, ready to hand on to Rudolf Steiner, and through him to Kandinsky's *Blaue Ritter*, Itten's Bauhaus, Doesberg and Mondriaan's *de Stijl*. Anthroposophy, the missing link in the formation of European modernism in the period after World War One, is the embarrassing sibling of psychoanalysis and communism: a nearly secular mysticism, and an intellectual system that embraced art, architecture and music, and produced its own delicate synthetic performing art, eurythmy.

These, rather than the sturm and drang of Rimbaud and Artaud, are the roots of the synaesthetic lights of Randerson's installation. There and here, colour operates in forms shaped by beliefs in its ability to translate between the human and the non-human worlds. Maverick biology would argue that the world existed in order for us to perceive it. That flowers have colour and birds song because we have eyes for a certain spectrum, ears for a circumscribed tonal range. We may think we know better now, that plants radiate in wavelengths we cannot perceive, and starlight radiates in modes for which we have no senses. Yet the premise is a rich and generous one if we take it to mean: we humans have a duty to perceive the world.

The imagery that slips and fades across the suspended screens of *Peace in Space* are treated, shifted, shaped and graded but in many instances show their sources, not as specific places and phenomena but as technologically mediated images from the green world, the prehuman world of outer planets and distant nebulae, the previsual world of biota, cells... The pun of micro and macro is, like the punning of the soul and the universe in late Kandinsky, an attribute of mapping which the abstract artist can extrapolate for new purposes. And that is, in many respects, what makes Randerson what she is when she makes these works: an abstract painter in light.

That her images are sourced from some other, only partially identifiable place – NASA or NIH, it scarcely matters – distinguishes her work only in the sense that tubes of prefabricated colour distinguish the painting of the Impressionists. It is the assembly of them that counts, and the multiple layers of treatment they go through, their assemblage into experiences of time.

They say that the digital age is disembodied. But these cellular and celestial bodies are ours. The waft of light, the vibration of fluorescing pixels and molecules of air as they warm and caress, are the voices of stars, the songs of plasma that make us and lure us, the deep history from which we spring and the flights into which we leap. To be more than screens, to project ourselves, not our accounts, into an unknown future.

The Body, like its pair the Mind, is a construct. We have been trained in the belief that Mind ends where the skull meets the spine, and that Body ends where the epidermis meets the air. But these are strange fallacies. Mind permeates the body with its nerves and reaches out to touch a world that touches it back. Body is sutured into the ebb of the moon, radiance of the sun, saturated with food and the swirling of drink in the mouth and the sounds of bush and bird in the portals of the ear. There is no inner life, only these passages, through the nexus of consciousness, of all the humming life of the cosmos, its endless signals, its constant fade to black.

To move among these lanterns, to feel projected on us the coloured thoughts, timbres and pitches of communication Randerson places in our paths, is to recognise the contingency of sensation, how it all depends on vast cosmic emergence. There is no self, but the projection of inwardness out into the world, the projection of outwardness in onto the receivers of the skin and its specialised orbs and cavities. So much escapes us, and so much is brought back in these technologically mediated visions and hearings. The molecular beauty of it all. All. Every godforsaken atom.

The tents she builds for us have no walls. They do not shut out, but draw light, sound, the world, in. Video ergo est.

**Sean Cubitt**

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The fundamental physical constant in quantum mechanics, which describes the behaviour of particles and waves on the atomic scale, including the particle aspect of light.

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