

Seeing Red

Bridget Crone

Red. Yellow. Green.

We begin with violence.

Red. Yellow. Green.

But they're just circles, digitally projected (or so you think).

Red. Yellow. Green.

The colour throbs. (Do you feel it yet?)

Red. Yellow. Green.

Coloured circles. (Just regular circles digitally projected.) Three colours.

A circle is necessary and productive, he says. (And his voice, all runny viscosity, corrals the space around us.) Back and forwards, to and fro, around and about...We're inside. Everything takes place here. We are inside and we are subject to flows of images and other bodies. (I hear his voice when I write these things; it's been sonically imprinted: etched, indelibly.) We are in their midst.

Power is decentred here, and it is disintegrated. It is cast out into the flow so that movement dominates. Rippling like waves, contained in a vast sea, this is about bodies and feeling, and images, and, of course, movement. This is about power and control, but not as you know it. Here power is viral, a contaminant without a centre. Where are we?

Where do we be *we*?

In the mix.

Disseminated.

Distributed in the flow.

Flowing.

Feeling.

Feeling colour's affects.

I'd call this delirious.

There's no outside. We're trapped in feeling. All body.

We've thrown out all reference to the name, to the matrix, to the body, he says. (Laconic.

Lazily persuasive – probably what you'd call *assured*, and slightly nasal, in that all-

American way.) We're all body, all feeling, yet the body has been suspended in a state of

continual movement so that we cannot stop to feel, to experience or to be body because,

instead, we flow along in accordance with the currents – hot streams, cool

streams...bodies and images moving together. We are disembodied. Our bodies are

suspended in the split that divides us into meat and that which we name 'I'. We can no

longer descend into pure feeling, nor can we be called by name, for we have been

abstracted in this flow and are no longer singular but only polyphonic. The odds are set

against us. The body, the matrix, the name...all discarded for the circle: our circuit.

Control, immersion and force form the bases of the grammar that runs through Amanda

Beech's work, and *Final Machine* (2013) is the latest instalment in a series of works that

address the operations of power within an economic and cultural system that has been

termed neoliberalism for the way in which the pursuit of freedoms (economic, social and

cultural) have produced their opposite effect. However, *Final Machine* goes beyond the

remit of Beech's previous works in the manner in which it accelerates towards its

namesake – a total system in which power has been evacuated into flows, in which the

image has been dissolved into the constant movement of pixels, dots, signals, gigabytes,

and where the body, too, is disseminated throughout the system: abstracted, disembodied,

machinic. As Nick Land has written, this is 'an out to body experience'.¹ It's all body and

not body at all: an affective control that attempts to confine us all through our capacity for

sensation; yet at the same time, our bodies are kept suspended in an unrealised state

somewhere in the grey zone between being named as a subject and giving over to the

¹ N. Land, 'Meat (or How to Kill Oedipus in Cyberspace)', in *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987-2007*, eds. R. Mackay and R. Brassier (Falmouth/New York: Urbanomic/Sequence, 2011), 414.

total fleshy, pure material of our bodies – what Land calls ‘meat’.² Suspension keeps bodies useful by waving the carrot of transcendence (you too can and will ascend to a being a subject that matters) and at the same time by abstracting both material and intellectual labour into the invisible spaces of the call centre or the factory.³ Therefore the gambit of Beech’s work (and indeed Land’s) is that it is the common capacity of our bodies for sensation that keeps us within this horizontal state (suspended, neither transcendent nor descendent), and rather than illustrate or represent the machinations of this hyper form of control, Beech seeks to reproduce the affective operations of power in the twenty-first century: the suspension of our bodies in labouring sensation.

The last vestiges of humanism, Land and Beech might suggest, have left us in a double-bind, so that we are able neither to ascend to being a perfect, beautifully formed subject, nor to descend to being meat. Instead, we are caught up, tricked and deceived by our bodies that are ready-primed for the sensory – that is to say that we are controlled by the flows of affects within which we are immersed. We believe we might matter, but we are dematerialised. We believe we might be a subject around which everything flows, but we too have been strewn across the matrix. As Land suggests in his essay ‘Circuitries’, we have been incorporated into a cybernetic circuit and disseminated throughout it so that we are immersed – as bodies – within the matrix. In *Final Machine*, Beech takes us further into this post-dystopian futility of flows when, in *Lecture Two: ‘Correctness’* (the second of the work’s three chapters), we are told of a complete incorporation into the machine so that *all reference to the name, to the matrix, to the body* has been eradicated (or so he says): *We’ve gone through it and we’re inside the machine... We’re waking up to a shadow that engulfs and negates our selfhood. We are truly in the dark.* This total system or total immersion that Beech activates renders the political obsolete through the manner in which power is not just decentred, but is disintegrated into flows and forces. And the political becomes simply an effect of these flows rather than an agent for change.

² Ibid.

³ For Land, a descent into being meat (total fleshy, pure material) is liberation from this suspended half-life....

Beech's earlier single-screen video *Statecraft* (2008) lays the ground for what takes place in *Final Machine*, and you could almost say that it conditions us for the final assault, the complete dunking, the all-in. *We've lost that feeling for the outside*, Beech's narrator in *Final Machine* tells us – but how did we get to this point? *Statecraft* demonstrates the way in which the body has been conditioned, primed for total control, particularly in the manner in which, through its three parts, the work articulates the passage from the attractions of affect to its control. *Statecraft* begins with light. The light is centre screen, bright and interrogative. It is both a metaphor for the projector itself – as the apparatus of its own appearance, its own being – and a signal of mind control: whether sinister (interrogative) or hedonistic (dance-floor). It's a single source of light, a pulsing strobe or perhaps a searchlight, and it fills almost the entire screen with its insistent illumination: it's a centralised action emanating outwards. White and blue and blinding, we want to wince and hide our eyes from its penetrating effect, which seems interrogatory, assertive. Text appears flashing quickly onto the screen: HIGH REGULATION...CENTRAL PLANNING. The white and blue light is replaced with colour now, and the strobe swings more vigorously: blue, red, green, yellow, pink and blue...red floods the screen. LOW INTENSITY SUPPRESSANT. Flashes. White light. ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT. Flashes. Green light pervades. A white beam of light shines out from the screen, menacingly. CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE. All block letters. Blood-red colour seeps down the white letterforms only for the words to be quickly snatched away again. Do we read these words, anyway, or do we perceive them only as impressions? They are feelings and sensations, and language has been abstracted into an array of surface effects. This is no literature, the crafting of language to display an artful narrative; instead, it is a narrative of sensations disseminated...no less artful but presenting language as feeling rather than information, packaged and addressed. Hard letterforms hit the screen with force. They're stamped upon the image. Slapped on. Violently. Or perhaps they're pushed out of the background, and harshly separated from the ground of the image: image giving birth to image (or to image-text, we might say). AND DISTINCTIVENESS appears now, and is quickly flooded with a soft lavender-pink colour that gently fills its letterforms: a benign and calming effect ensues.

The beginning of *Statecraft* confronts us with an image that no longer shows us anything other than bodily effects. Or more correctly, its dominant modus operandi is not representation but feeling – sensory experience. This is a feeling-image that we encounter in *Statecraft*, a fact that is demonstrated by the manner in which the image acts to prime us for the textual material when it is introduced. Information isn't simply conveyed through text here, but is primarily communicated to us as feeling: the text has been abstracted from its discursive role toward that of hard forms that produce immediate sensation. In this way, *Statecraft* produces in us the feeling of the image. It takes us forcefully into its midst, this image, beguiling us and blinding us with the strobing light that occurs at the start and at punctuated points throughout the work (just in case its effects wane). At first, we might think the text a possible disruption to the image's cooptive powers, until we realise that the text, too, operates as an affective-image – that is to say, text is as much effect as information. The words in *Statecraft* are carefully coloured to produce the sensation of their meaning so that we might not even bother to read them as words as such, but instead let their actions wash over us. The blood-red colour that seeps down CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE tells us of the violence of place-making. The lavender gently flowing down AND DISTINCTIVENESS produces an immediate calmness (and we're reassured in our own desires for individual freedoms – “ahhhh”). Towards the end of the first section of the video the music rises and, picking up the pace, it reminds us that image and text-image operate within a similar modality of rhythm, flow, pause, pace, for this is the imageless image: a liquified, material image – an image of constant movement, flow, affects.... In this way, *Statecraft* enacts the information that it conveys, so that rather than a critique of regeneration being made through the communication of information as facts, it instead *signals* this information as a series of transmissions that act to modulate bodies to create sensation. CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY. CONTRIBUTING TO THE SOCIAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING...this text cues a slow fade into the banal, concrete-grey-scape of a postwar housing estate. It is a people-less landscape: cold and empty.

Brian Massumi has described the US Terror Alert System as operating through 'signals without signification', a phrase that confronts all that we have come to know and expect

from the image in regard to the established conventions of image theory.⁴ Massumi suggests an image that signals and produces sensation and no longer simply signifies or represents the truth or fiction of a subject, object or thing. Therefore, we can no longer expect an image to be simply read by a viewer. Instead, it transmits a signal – but to whom does it communicate? While Massumi’s affective-image transmits the sensation of fear through a signal-response mechanism for the purposes of social control or governmentality, this is a vaguely directed image that spreads itself far and wide. It inculcates all within its address, and affects all within its viral flows, yet it does not directly address a particular viewer. We could say that, in this way, the affective image doesn’t speak directly to a single viewer by basing its address on commonalities of signification or identification; instead, virus-like, it spreads itself far and wide in a manner that involves all without bounds. This is an image that involves all in the velocity of its movement and effects; it is mainlined by a social body hungry for its manifest sensations. This is social planning and governance on a grand scale, as Beech’s video suggests to us. COMMUNITY WITHOUT COERCION, we are told, and we feel it. WALK LOOK THINK... is the direction that we are given for action. HEADLIGHTS. DIRTROADS. The images of the concrete estate begin to flash also now, as if there has been an abrupt transition to an analogue style of transmission interrupted (the reception has gone a bit astray at this point). Moving to a more analogue mode for the third and final part of *Statecraft*, we enter a classical architecture. FARMER LOVER ARCADES THE RIDDLE VAMPIRE WHITE LIGHTS TEARS CHANGE UP. Classical columns replace the previous modernist sculptures silhouetted against the sky, and the images convey the rich, aristocratic comfort of the architect’s home. TRANSFORMING INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTIONS THE INVISIBLE HAND STYLE OF REASONING SURVIVAL THE REVELATION SNAP THEORY ALL BECOMES LIGHT DO IT NOW. DELPHIC FUTURE.

With its desert setting and subject matter, *Final Machine* bears similarities to Peter Watkins’s seminal film *Punishment Park* (1971) in which groups of detainees (actually

⁴ B. Massumi, ‘Fear (The Spectrum Said)’, in *positions* 13:1, Spring, 2005: 32. The conventions of art history consider (a) that the purpose of the image is to represent or signify, and (b) that representation or signification assume and reinforce the role of the subject as the reader of the image.

antiwar protesters) are given the chance of freedom if they can escape across the California desert whilst being pursued by National Guardsmen. *Punishment Park* was shot with a small crew and on 16mm film, and takes on the form of a quasi-documentary, as we watch a crew of German documentary filmmakers film the scenario before us. As the film unfolds it becomes increasingly uncertain what is a scripted or planned scenario and what is the unmediated reaction of the actors and crew – and in this way the film takes on the form of a delirium in which escape seems impossible, the outside is eradicated, and the pursuit of freedom turns out to have been, after all, a con. *Final Machine* updates *Punishment Park* for the twenty-first century postcapitalist landscape, in the sense that freedom has never even been suggested within the total system that *Final Machine* presents: the outside, the possibility of exit into something better, has simply been eradicated in Beech's work, and, unlike in *Punishment Park*, it cannot be something towards which we might strive. *Punishment Park* pursues a linear narrative trajectory toward an endpoint that is either escape or death. While this is a type of delirium typified by a sense of immersion, loss of ground and continual movement, we know that we are on a passage towards an endpoint where we (as viewers) might exit the film. (And this is accentuated by the counting down of the deaths of the detainees as they are hunted down and killed during their escape across the desert.)

In contrast to the more linear narrative direction pursued by *Punishment Park*, Beech presents us with a circuit that flows back and forwards, around and around, so that our immersion is complete. This circuitry is pursued through the form of the work – in the three chapters that segue seamlessly from one to the other – and its affective register, in which we are rendered inside the image as sensing, feeling bodies subjected to the flow of images. Most curious, however, is the use of the circle to introduce multiple points of view within the one scene, so that often, we see only part of an image – as if we were looking through a telescope, for example – or we see a whole image with parts obliterated by various means. The various ways in which our point of view is curtailed, and the presentation of multiple views within the one image, have the effect of rendering obsolete any sense of a freedom of seeing, feeling, or sensing: We are subjected to a controlled

view that is always only partial. Overview is an anachronism, as we are hereby immersed and contained in microworlds, and any vestiges of universalism have vanished. What Beech suggests to us, therefore, is not so much a contingency of encounter with images as a total control of the boundaries of seeing and sensing.

A negotiation of reality that went beyond the visible, beyond the machine. This was a negotiation of reality as thought and the processes of thought material, he says (in his honeyed, hypnotic voice). And so we are immersed, and we are controlled in our immersion, as body and image, or feeling and thought combined. There is no longer any hidden depth of the image, body or language to be discovered, but instead there is the modulation of the body as an image and as a phantasm of surface movements. Jean Baudrillard has referred to this action as ‘a liquidation of all referentials’ and, in speaking about Nick Land’s work, Ray Brassier has articulated Land’s own ‘materialist liquidation of representation’.⁵ In this way, both Baudrillard and Land liquify the space between the image and the embodiment of the image, so that the space between the image and the body is elided and, as a result, the distinction between experience (‘physical reality in the external world’) and image or imagination (‘psychic reality in consciousness’) no longer holds.⁶ We see this evinced in Beech’s work, in the way that the image is materialised as sensation and, furthermore, as a sensation that enacts the feeling of the information that it conveys. *Statecraft* weaves a commentary of these flows and movements of image through the narrative of its own text (AVENUES OF COMMUNICATION) – as modulation (MODULATED BY THE BREEZE) and reiteration (HOT VISIONS RECHARGED) – but most importantly through the operations of its image: through its various actions and movements. There is no room for simulation here because any fiction has been rendered obsolete in the absolutism of the projected image. It is a projected light that beguiles us, controls our sensations-thoughts-being as we watch its movement, centre screen.

⁵ J. Baudrillard, ‘The Precession of Simulacra’, in *Simulacra and Simulation*, tr. S. F. Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2; R. Brassier, paper given at *Accelerationism* conference, Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths University of London, 14 September 2010.

⁶ G. Deleuze, “Preface to the French Edition”, in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Babara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2005). Here Deleuze refers to Henri Bergson’s discovery of the movement image in his book, *Matter and Memory*, 1896.

...dot

pixel

signal

transmission

mathematical punctuality

dissolve

cut

patterns

shapes

digital codings

glistening electronics

information streams in from Cyberia

breeding the dot patterns

the screen⁷

⁷ N. Land, 'Circuitries', in *Fanged Noumena*, 290-2. **Words chosen at random.**