

The Digital In-between: Using Gilles Deleuze's concept of "affect" to theorise slowness in interactive online video

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Introduction

[1] *Close Up* (Basier, 2012) is an interactive online video I made to explore the concepts of 'slow' and 'affect' in the online environment. This paper will conceptualise slow in the context of Deleuze's (1986) affection-image as described in *Cinema One: The Movement-Image*, to then discuss how I used this conceptualisation of slow and affect in the making of a speculative interactive online video entitled *Close Up* (Basier, 2012). The intention behind *Close Up* was to consider Deleuze's affection-image as a means to extend time between noticing and doing within an online context. The project considers this through using what Deleuze (1986) describes as the "affective film *par excellence*, Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*" as a case study (p. 109). Through emphasising the connections between the affections of *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer, 1928) and subordinating the narrative movement from cause to effect *Close Up* (Basier, 2012) is meant to be an example of an affective and slow video work within the online environment.

Deleuze's Affection-Image and Slowness

[2] In *Cinema One: The Movement Image* (1986) Deleuze proposes three types of cinematic images. These are the perception, action, and affection-images, which he takes from Henri Bergson's (1908) sensory-motor-schema. In Bergson's schema there is a relationship between perception, action, and affection. These can be reduced to noticing (perception), doing (action), and the enlargement of the experiences which lie between noticing and doing, which Deleuze (1986) describes as affect. In cinema the affection-image takes the form of a shot existing independent of a narrative of cause and effect. This is usually a close-up within an emptied frame—a moment of expression, which enlarges a moment between perception and action. It may involve an indecisive character, not knowing how to act upon an event they have perceived. An example could be a film sequence showing a character witnessing a stranger getting murdered, interrupted by close-ups of the perceiving character's expression of fear and shock, followed by the action of them running to save the

victim. This scenario presents a montage of movement from perception (witnessing attempted murder) into action (running to save victim), prolonged by the indeterminacy of the character's indecision as indicated by the close-ups. These close-ups could show the character expressing shock, followed by fear, and then perhaps an expression of confidence, describing the process of indeterminacy the character has experienced. This scenario is indicative of the affection-image as an "intensive series which marks an ascent towards ... a critical instance" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 89). Through interrupting narrative causation Deleuze's affection-image slows the movement of noticing into doing.

The Passion of Joan of Arc as a Case Study

[3] It is the close-up of the face which Deleuze describes specifically as a type of affection-image. A close-up of a character's face allows the intensity of expressions such as sadness, happiness, and fear to be communicated to an audience. Furthermore, due to the linearity of the cinematic form close-ups almost still narrative movement because they show one intensity at a particular moment, encompassed within a particular shot, as if story time has paused. Deleuze (1986) argues Dreyer's film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) is "an almost exclusively affective film" as it shows how the form of the affection-image as close-up distends the movement of perception into action (p. 72). From this, Deleuze (1986) suggests there are two parallel levels of narration throughout Dreyer's film; the first being the "whole historical state of things", which is essentially Joan's accusation, trial and death, yet on another level the "internal" (p. 109). The "internal" is emphasised, such as Joan's martyrdom and the Bishop's anger, and it is these affections which Deleuze (1986) describes as the "quality" (martyrdom) and "power" (anger) of the affection-image in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (p. 110). The "internal" is emphasised as the film is made almost entirely of fragmented close-ups of isolated character's faces. An example is Joan's face sitting very low in the frame, where isolating her removes direct narrative causation between characters. Through placing these close-ups within a montage of affections Dreyer expands the moment from accusation to trial to death. An expansion able to exploit the narrative events of the story of Joan of Arc as we know the film will end when Joan gets burned at the stake. This allows Dreyer to focus on the affections to extend the movement from accusation (perception) to death (action), through the film's emphasis on the emotional weight the trial is having on each of the individuals and collectives which make up the

narrative whole. These affections as a “*power-quality expressed by a face*” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 113)[original emphasis] creates slowness as the narrative events of the film have been subordinated by the emotive weight of the character’s expressions.

What *Close Up* Is

[4] The intention behind *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) was to create an interactive online video using Deleuze’s (1986) concept of the cinematic affection-image to perform slowness in the online environment. *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) breaks *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer, 1928) into individual clips which are then organised using Korsakow; an authoring software for online interactive videos. Characteristic of Korsakow is it is “rule-based”, where the maker of the work “decides on the rules by which the scenes relate to each other” (Thalhofer, n.d.). However, these rules do not create “fixed paths” through the work (Thalhofer, n.d.). What this means is the individual clips are linked via an architecture of keywords, and the path the user navigates and orders the clips is determined between the user and these keywords. These keywords which operate as rules linking the videos are hidden and associations happen “in the background” providing the user the “freedom and choice to have an explorative, [and] open experience” of the work (Cooke, 2012). From this, a Korsakow interactive online video is an interface, which shows one main playing video and a set of accompanying thumbnails. The viewer navigates and guides their own journey through the work, depending on which thumbnail they click and the associations this makes between each clip. In light of these characteristics of Korsakow, *Close Up* has ninety-six clips, and uses five keywords to organise these clips. The keywords divide the clips between those strictly an affection-image, such as the Bishop’s anger, Joan’s sadness and fear, or the people’s sympathy, and those referring to the three predominant events which take place within the film—the accusation, the trial, and the burning at the stake. From this the keywords organising the clips are “fear”, “sad”, “happy”, and “anger” (the affective series), and “trial” (which shows representations of the events which take place within the film). The interface shows one main video and a set of eight accompanying thumbnails.

What *Close Up* Does

[5] What the structure of *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) intends to do is extend the “internal” affects, and subordinate the “whole historical state of things” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 109). For example, if the main playing clip is Joan getting her hair cut in misery, this has fifty seven

possible associations with clips all containing the “sad” keyword, and thirty nine clips connected via the “trial” keyword. The Korsakow system selects eight out of these ninety-six clips to present to the user through its interface, and then the user can choose a thumbnail from this eight. The only rule which I have scripted is that seven of those have to be “sad” and one has to be “trial”. In this scenario the relationships possible between clips don’t render narrative cause and effect, but assemble a story of “sadness”. In contrast if the main video plays a clip of Joan stating her name is Joan in France the user has entered this clip via the “trial” keyword, and the eight thumbnails will show two of each of the “sad”, “anger”, “fear”, and “happy” clips. In light of these scenarios there is a greater likelihood the user will create associations between the affection clips, rather than the “trial” perceptions and actions. This is because every time a user enters an affect video only one “trial” clip is available for selection and when they enter a “trial” video I have scripted that only affect clips are available within the thumbnails. This makes the affect videos more prominent within the system. Furthermore, the affect clips are programmed to always be available to the system, whilst the “trial” clips are constrained to a maximum of two appearances. What this means for the user is if they explore the work over a prolonged period of time the “trial” clips would all “die”, leaving the user with a montage of affections. The intention is that the user has a prolonged engagement with the affective moments of the film.

[6] This movement from perception (accusation) to action (death) is further prolonged in *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) by the exclusion of Joan’s death from the architecture of the project. The decision to exclude Joan’s death was to emphasise the affections as the “internal” intensities do not get subsumed into the action of Joan dying. They remain as an excess because they extend beyond the end of the film. This is what Tofts (2002) describes as the “charged multiplicity of the beginning” (p. 10), where excluding the film’s conclusion allows the clips to “retain a powerful sense of restrained encyclopaedic complexity” (p. 12). Furthermore, Tofts (2002) argues the individual particle, or in *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) the individual clip, is dense in its ability to act as a “potential multiplicity” which Tofts (2002) argues is “diffused once it is extended into a relation, a link, an elongation” (p. 10). In other words, each affection-image clip making up the architecture of *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) is a “potential multiplicity” because the clips do not elongate or extend into the closure of Joan’s death. What this allows is the clips to remain open as they are not confined to the linearity and fixed duration of movement through linear montage. The difference being the user of *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) must literally act, in terms of clicking a thumbnail, to proceed,

allowing a multitude of possible associations between clips. The user creates associations between the individual clips depending on what they see (perceive) and how they react towards what they see (action), where their indecision of which thumbnail to click next becomes a “centre of indetermination” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 68). *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) emphasises the connections between affection-images in the underlying architecture of the work. The user is, therefore, positioned to have an elongated experience with the internal affections, without losing the potentiality of these intensities into the action of Joan’s death.

Conclusion

[7] *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) uses *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer, 1928) as a case study to explore how affection-images and slowness can manifest within an online environment. Slowness is conceptualised within a specific cinematic context, as Deleuze’s (1986) affection-image, because it expands, and can almost still the time between perception and action. From this perspective of the affection-image performing slowness the intention with *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) was to create a slow interactive online video. What I realised through making this project was a means to theorise and make an affective interactive online video, discovering a practice which afforded me the possibility to create work which inserts a manifestation of the slow within the speed driven online environment. Through the making of *Close Up* (Brasier, 2012) I have begun to formulate a means of creating small descriptive interactive online video works through a potential method I can apply to further research projects within an online and cinematic discipline.

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