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## **Moving Collage or «Image-temps» in Instrumental Exploration of New Modes for Analyzing, Interpreting and Conceiving Urban Spaces**

**Irene Latek**

Full Professor

École d'architecture, Faculté de l'aménagement

Université de Montréal

P.O. Box 6128, succursale Centre-Ville

Montréal, Québec H3C 3J7, Canada

e-mail: [irena.latek@umontreal.ca](mailto:irena.latek@umontreal.ca)

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### Vision in motion, architecture and image-temps

*Banal space*, as lived and perceived, carries the trace of time and bears the mutations that time unavoidably breeds. We are unable to perceive space in a perfectly immobile state. Everything moves: our eyes, our bodies, we in the machines that move us about, among other bodies, other machines and the natural elements that surround us. Every environment is perceived in a temporal flux – *banal space* is a four-dimensional space.

Traditionally, architectural space is apprehended in three dimensions. It is an idealized space expressed through virtual representation. *Banal space* as experienced in time is difficult to master – it unfolds before us in an infinite number of unpredictable shapes and configurations and the architect, as projector and constructor, has but little control..

Ever since the beginning of cinema, moving pictures have burst into the realm of architectural thought. Architects' interest in cinema is expressed by numerous explorations conducted by modern *avant-gardes*, particularly in those works of the Bauhaus. Vision in Motion, written by László Moholy-Nagy, broadly disseminated these ideas in post-war architectural education. It took however nearly a century before animation was adopted into architectural representation as a common instrument to think, analyse, conceive and create space. Everything seemed to evolve significantly with the increasing flexibility of digital tools, however in the process, something had been lost. The space-time generated by 3D software programs commonly used by architects had neither the quality nor richness of initial explorations with conventional film. This long trajectory of architectural representation from static to moving image involves perhaps another component that embodies obstacles of a nature other than technical.

Undoubtedly cinema, a medium rich of fiction, is inconsistent with the pragmatics of the construction process and incompatible with positive objectivist thought. A critical rationalistic architectural approach permits to narrow the gap between these two domains. In these conditions, both the project's real and represented spaces become less stable and approach the instability characteristic of the moving image. As the moving picture is, first and foremost, most closely related to the representation of space in time and to the composition, deconstruction and assembly of the fleeting and multiple states of a place or a situation, it is thus intimately linked to the process and potential of montage. A true architectural appropriation of the moving image

relies more on profound exploration of *time-image* as means of architectural expression, than on technical means.

In *movement-image*, which Deleuze associates with pre-war cinema, time is a mere measure of movement, and this cinema operates by rational cuts of the present. Infiltrated by memory *time-image*, which succeeds *movement-image*, creates a universe which solely maintains complex relationships with the present and ambiguous relationships with the future. Here movement is only a consequence of a live presentation of time. *Time-image* therefore generates false continuities and makes irrational cuts. As Deleuze states, it breaks with empirical succession to be edified within an order of times or series of times, signs of which are inseparable from both thought and speech.

In order to architecturalize movement in an architectural and urban project, would it thus be necessary to transpose the notion of place as an entity existing in synchronic times that are simultaneously here and elsewhere? We work with the hypothesis that understanding movement will lead to architecture that better reflects the difficulties and instabilities of our contemporary world. With this objective, we adopted digital video and spatial montage inspired by architecture and combined it with the representation of space-sensation primarily influenced by cinema. The learning process is continual and, according to Deleuze, universal: «*Parce que l'image cinématographique «fait» elle même le mouvement, par ce qu'elle fait ce que les autres arts se contentent d'exiger (ou de dire), elle recueille l'essentiel des autres arts, elle en hérite, elle est comme le mode d'emploi des autres images, elle convertie en puissance ce qui n'était que possibilité*».

Our second consideration is related to the field of the urban project. How can one translate the multiple ways of living in and perceiving the city? "... (the shape of a city changes more quickly, alas! than the heart of a mortal)..." Every era imbues Baudelaire's phrase with its own movements. Today, the diversity of contexts in a world connected by networks and affected by multidirectional mutations makes the city, once again and in a new way, an unstable place. More than the clamour of construction sites, change is manifesting in flows and the idea of a *Postpolis* is superimposed with that of the notion of city. The need to seek conceptual tools inspired by new urbanities compels us once again. By what means can the architectural project be equipped in order to fully service its conceptual process? How can one translate the multiple ways of living in and perceiving the city? How can the symbolic intentions of a project be transcribed into an intelligible form, and how can these issues, being they philosophical, cultural, social, economic, politic or disciplinary, that reach well beyond the realm of constructed reality be fully expressed? Necessarily multidirectional and imprinted with multiple meanings, such an approach must rely on multilayered representation. It therefore derogates from strictly professional issues and demands broad and uninhibited means. For if pragmatic objectives adopt conventions shared by all producers of the built environment, and this common ground both narrows and renders them relatively stable, expression of symbolic values must naturally draw from a full range of diverse forms of human expression – exposing architectural creation to all artistic techniques and genres.



**Figure 1**

Fragment of video *Corps à corps*, Martin Coulombe, Fannie Duguay-Lefebvre, Alan Knight, Irena Latek, Marianne Potvin, part 4 of *Espaces mouvants* Soft Public Spaces, medialabAU 2003

In all aspects, whether professional or exploratory, the modes and techniques of architectural representation evolve with disciplinary paradigms. To this effect, we must remember that the revisionist discourse of modern architecture during the 60s and 70s, with its desire to link architectural theory with the development of urban form, considerably widened and modified instruments of architectural and urban analysis, interpretation and projection. The conceptual device and its graphic vocabulary developed at the first CIAMs and enshrined by the Charter of Athens were, during the 60s and 70s, partially absorbed and adapted and in other cases rejected in order to adopt figurative conventions that were considered more apt in their ability to describe urban reality. Many new modes and techniques of architectural representation that emerged at that time were not invented but rather rediscovered and adapted from cartographic techniques of the 18th and 19th centuries as well as from the *École des Beaux-Arts*. The series of methodological and instrumental inventions of the typo-morphological approach is, in this regard, particularly significant. In addition, the alliance between architecture and the city also provoked a certain opening of professional techniques to artistic techniques, most notably painting and drawing. We devoted to this subject our essay «Drawing the City: Thoughts on the (Virtual) Places of Urban Form», (ISUF, Stockholm, 2006). The means of urban architecture (“*architecture urbaine*” (Huet 81) in turn were superseded or complemented by other discourse, deconstruc-

tion and neo-modernism giving rise to new modes of spatial figuration and expression. Architectural representation as a whole was subject to change and development with the introduction of a computer architecture. It is nonetheless significant that these new means remained relatively conservative, dragging the whole of the conventions born of manual technique towards the computer.

Our laboratory seeks to explore the universe of new media in order to better link project process with contemporary reality, as new media leads analogy and reference – essential aspects of architectural expression, down new avenues. More specifically, however not exclusively, we experiment with digital video as a tool for analyzing, reflecting upon and conceiving architecture and the city. This medium has been adopted, not only for its specific and essential qualities but also for its ability to support mixed resources and to incorporate mixed tools. Our experimentation involves various genres of work and is set in different contexts. The fragments of various projects illustrating within are drawn from digital video research/creative endeavours conducted by the medialabAU team in our laboratory and from student work produced during workshops and experimental studios. In both contexts, the works vary in regards to format and character. Video, often becoming the project document but always remaining the project itself, is generally the medium for interpreting a public space and built objects. It allows representation of possible interventions but at the same time is a means of formulating critical commentary. It can become a critical essay within itself. Its analytical, descriptive and conceptual objectives are juxtaposed but are articulated in variable proportions. Furthermore, this medium (film and montage) is an unprecedented space in which to shape an architect's gaze. At the same time, the invention of our documents contributes to new forms of visual culture.

Our approach is characterized by a video in collage. Our technique draws from the most elementary cinematographic montage technique – the observation and composition of what is produced in an image with that which is produced between images. However it deconstructs this principle, juxtaposes and reorganizes both moments while making them spring up, often simultaneously, within the same frame. This process is enriched and made more complex by the diversity of image sources.

### **Moving collage**

Digital video in the form of a moving collage proposes a method of spatial examination, analysis and a conceptual tool. It is a hybrid document inheriting a vast range of modern and post-modern collage methods that also draws, at various moments, upon the proximity between moving image and the city. It is also a spatiality inspired by the palimpsest and by certain concepts stemming from the morphological history of cities, from the idea of layers of urban development. More generally, the moving collage bears the idea that each form of expression is a place of superimposed meanings. Much broader than the montage of still digital images currently used in architecture, these means also differ from documentary video employed for urban analysis. The latter, being a result of linear montage based on narration and observation, is a diachronic



**Figure 2**

Fragment of video T R A N S I T ou l'écotopie locale, réalisation équipe medialabAU sous la direction d'Irena Latek, 2007



**Figure 3**

Fragment of work Flux, Alain Carle, Irena Latek, part 1 of *Ubiquités publiques* Desynchronized Public Spaces, medialabAU 2005



**Figure 4**  
Fragment of work *J'arrive à la ville*, Martin Bourgault, Irena Latek, part 2 of *Ubiquités publiques*  
Desyncronized Public Spaces, medialabAU 2005

**Figure 5**  
Fragment of vidéo *TRAnsCript*, by Stanislava Avouska, Agathe Destelle, Anabelle  
Feuvrier, student work from Irena Latek video workshop ENSA Grenoble, 2007



representation. The moving collage adopts a spatial montage, functions in a synchronic manner and aims at the simultaneous notation of form and meaning evoking the latter's unstable nature. This mode of representation at once permits translation of the typo-morphological comprehension of an urban fragment, the reproduction of a territory's topography, the qualification of this territory as landscape and the anticipation of situations that may occur. In a visual and aural register with the assistance of analogous representations, the moving collage instantly evokes a site's essential characteristics, cultural dimension, use, social meaning, and identifies the project's symbolic and critical intensions.

First and foremost, the camera plays the role of a moving eye. It records unstable spatial characteristics and captures flow (movement reflected in windows, the trajectory of a moving object, one's perception through a car windshield, etc.) It also provides a sensitive perspective, and thus a sensorial body - a visual, aural and tactile receiver. Finally, it is an instrument of measure, the means to establish distance or proximity to a spatial fragment.

### ***Moving urban space***

Video tends to reflect the ways of using and living in a city radically altered by the invention of the automobile and perceived differently since the introduction of cinema. In this sense, our work refers to certain topics discussed within Paul Virilio's *The Aesthetics of Disappearance (l'Esthétique de la disparition)*. Subsequently, the city of the sedentary - the city-theatre, city- agora and city-forum, is often invaded by the city of voyagers-voyeurs where the spectacle offered through the car windshield is analogous to the locomotive illusion produced by cinema. In parallel, the camera records the presence of pedestrians, notes their furtive passing and accompanies their wandering.

### ***Represented space and space of representation***

The montage of digital video relies on the movement of the viewpoint and proposes discontinuous registers of projected spaces. Projects attempt to inscribe movement in the form of projected space and explore the possibility of including movement as a constant element in the repertoire of means of expressing space. From movement emanates a certain stylistic project signature. Movement induces transparency of forms in space, erasing their specificities and concrete character but also implying choice. This framework incorporates events in a synchronic manner. The montage introduces a level of tension and imposes that the spectator devote his attention to simultaneous actions. The montage includes the observer within the object of his observation. It also suggests the possibility of countless sections through the same reality. Finally, it attempts to translate its diverse territorial and temporal scales.

### ***Landscapes and gazes – unstable entities of urban space***

By its method and themes, our work on the one hand reconciles architecture with multimedia arts and on the other hand, roots itself to the city while confronting the architectural project with the idea of an instability of the entities of urban spaces. Our work strives to explore the concept



of urban landscape posed within a temporal and experiential perspective of urban places. It presents the hypothesis that the relationships between these two perspectives continually re-define the form and meaning of urban space. This view of the city constructed of the landscapes and gazes of its citizens as they move about, as such, cannot be rendered intelligible without an instrument that incorporates movement. Our work explores the city in its unstable form and develops means of transcribing (and/or constructing) it in represented space imprinted by mixed media.

They are attempts to reflect on urban public space in its most contemporary aspects: to consider cultural, social and political public space in a city affected by multi-configured communities, originating from diverse territories and having variable scales; and to grasp a new and radical temporality of urban space. Considering the city where the “others”, suburbanites, students, immigrants, transient workers, and tourists, have become majority citizens and the foreign investor a major decision-maker. Our work therefore aims to conceive this disembodied urban space that seeks to reconstitute itself in a reality where “a building’s public space disappears into the background of an unstable public image.” They are aimed at reading and interpreting its hybrid reality with hybrid means.

#### ***Mixed conventions and recycling***

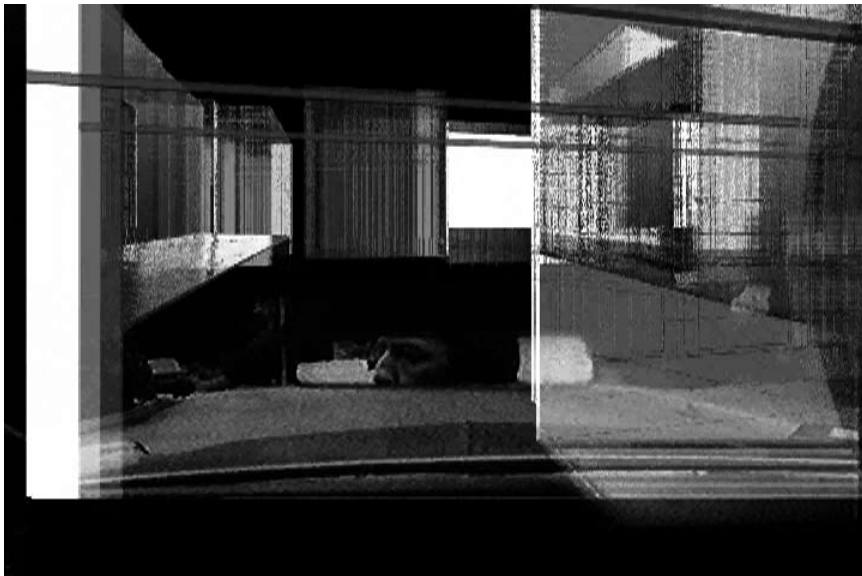
In the majority of our projects, architectural representation relies on three elements: conventional representation (professional) – digital models, photographs and video footage of sites as well as recycled images. Our projects are constructed through a process of de-familiarization and recycling of cinematographic or television excerpts interplayed with video footage, photographs and three-dimensional models of subject sites. De-familiarized images have varied status with a project. They are utilized as insertions/installations that provoke a metamorphosis of projected spaces but at the same time, are also assigned to enact an evoked situation and finally, they have the purely conceptual role of analogous figures. Collage assembly follows several steps: reading, observation, sampling, accessibility, transposition and composition.

#### ***Projected place and space as meaning***

The image of a site that a project aims to construct as well as the formal organization of this image is almost always affected, informed or invaded by elements of meaning drawn from representations of what is known of a space. Thus the representation of a given space is never purely visual (i.e. the place as it is seen) or purely constructive (i.e. the place as it must be constructed) but rather a conceptual representation that integrates the complexity that emanates from the sense of place. Conversely, these representations carry the forms and textures of the media employed: video, televised images and three-dimensional models.

#### ***Construction and narration***

Conceived as observatories of the form invested by events, projects produced with video integrate narration and film, however are not necessarily stories. They are rather spatial constructions/in-



**Figure 6**

Fragment of video *Îlot Parisien*, Maryse Bissonnette, Martin Coulombe, Irena Latek, coll. Marianne Potvin, part 3 of *Espaces mouvants* Soft Public Spaces, medialabAU 2003



**Figure 7**

Fragment of video *Marché*, Alain Carle, Irena Latek, Marianne Potvin, part 2 of *Espaces mouvants* Soft Public Spaces, medialabAU 2003

terpretations affirming the character of urban constructs. Storylines are sometimes inserted in order to establish a space's meaning yet do not bear any value on their own. Similarly, video is chosen as a support without any reference to the artistic genre it represents. Hence, medialabAU's work attempts, through various explorations, to broaden the limits of expertise of architects and urban planners. It therefore questions the permanence of *savoir-faire*. By proposing a work that extends beyond the definition of constructed and stable elements of public space, our projects stipulate the importance of a place's form as affected by bodies in motion and events taking place. It thus attempts to broaden the territory of the architectural project and enhance its means of representation.

### **Medium / message**

The moving collage is, par excellence, a hybrid document: a hybrid genre (project of space, reflexivity and critique) and a work of mixed media. In the same way as all represented and critical space, our work discloses and interrogates the media which it employs. Video is often decomposed revealing its elementary particles. These moments of revelation provide the raw material for new technological landscapes. The marvel of technology operates between its power to construct fiction and its reflexive capability.

### **Intermediacy**

The various collage mediums: sound, image, model, text and speech, more than the sum of their means, form multiple interfaces where elements reciprocally confront, merge, organize, and transpose their respective qualities. Thus, we can refer to a certain intermediacy of the moving collage. Each of our video documents demonstrates interstitial traits in the same sense that Deleuze attributes to this term in his thoughts on cinematographic image. For Deleuze, the interstice is a place that summons the outside and in which circuits between virtual and actual are ruptured, redoubled, confronted and confounded, but most of all, in which they are organized.

### **Interactive landscape**

This mode of representation transposes the instantaneous and simultaneous spaces of the moving collage within a more reflexive space. Equally adopting the principle of palimpsest, the document calls for an active discovery of place and its meaning. It can be considered an archeological approach that explores layers and voids. The document at once encloses and liberates a place as it permits to anticipate its multiple configurations. This mode of representation therefore welcomes recomposition. Perception is supported within the work as much by the sense of vision as it is by those of hearing and touch. The spectator in action is drawn nearer to the event and becomes a part of it; his vagabondage may even divert the project's intentions.

### **Conclusion**

As an instrument of architectural conception, the moving collage or interactive landscape is a four-dimensional construction that constitutes – it goes without saying – a work of architecture itself. The spatiality of representation corresponds to themes which it evokes and the meaning



**Figures 8 and 9**

Fragment of video Passages, Irena Latek, medialabAU, Laboratoire MHA, 2006

**Figure 10**

Fragment of video La vie est mémoire, Elise Lacoursière Bourget, Etienne Ostiguy, student work from Irena Latek studio École d'architecture de l'Université de Montréal 2007





**Figure 11**  
Fragment of work Panorama, interactive document, part 5 of *Ubiquités publiques*  
Desyncronized Public Spaces, medialabAU 2005

**Figure 12**  
Fragment of video *Détournements*, Fannie Duguay-Lefebvre, Irena Latek, Véronique Roy,  
coll. Martin Bourgault, part 3 of *Ubiquités publiques* Desyncronized Public Spaces, medialabAU 2005



which it ascribes. Our hybrid techniques seek to qualify a place within its symbolic complexity – the project itself becomes a formal and material installation bearing intentions, ambiances and behaviours. Places are apprehended, first and foremost, as spaces of memory and life. This instrumental exploration traces the route towards a critical approach of urban and, more generally, social practices. It strives to open the architectural project to forms of space that remain unfamiliar and provide it with a medium and platform for creating metaphors of contemporary reality. In a broader sense, tackling the question of the meaning of the architect's work, our work follows Heidegger's ideas about origins of work of art. Video in collage claims to be the architectural work where reality is being un-covered, where truth is at work. It is a work that does not use language but is rather submerged in a language; while discovering that this language itself is one that is composed of many tongues and, rather than the architect, the language itself speaks of multiple horizons.

## Notes

- 1 Gilles Deleuze, *L'image-temps*, Édition de Minit, Paris, 1985, p.203. "As the cinematographic image itself "produces" movement by what it does and what other arts are satisfied in demanding (or stating), it gathers together the fundamentals of the arts and inherits them, it resembles the operating instructions for other images, it transforms what was only possibility into power." (our translation)
- 2 Charles Baudelaire, *Le cygne*, A Victor Hugo, dans *Les fleurs du mal*.
- 3 Founded in 2001, medialabAU is a creation laboratory at the *École d'architecture de l'Université de Montréal*. The approach of medialabAU is marked by a dual objective: the investigation of new relationships between architecture and the city generated by new forms of metropolitan culture and the exploration of architectural representation with new digital media. This group formed of architects and artists seeks to establish meaning of space with tools considered as non-conventional to the discipline of architecture in order to enlarge project territory and enrich its palette of resources. With the aid of these tools, medialabAU aims to explore the cultural and political dimensions of public space. [www.arc.umontreal.ca](http://www.arc.umontreal.ca)
- 4 The moving collage's sphere of influence extends from cubism to Dadaism, from techniques popularized by Archigram and Superstudio, to the procedures of a young Rem Koolhaas and Bernard Tschumi, from films by Moholy-Nagy to those of the situationists.
- 5 The research and cinematographic work of Zbigniew Rybczynski provides very significant witness of camera movement and, more largely, of the relationship between cinematographic image and movement of the eye. Rybczynski studies the range of normal human observation and demonstrates its extraordinary mobility. He conducts countless experiments, confrontations and juxtapositions of different camera types, of filmed elements (figure versus ground) and finally, animations due to montage. Refer particularly to Z. Rybczynski, *Kafka*, Unites States, Fr, 1992, 52min. To this effect, reference to the work of Norman MacLaren is also inevitable.
- 6 See Virilio, P. (1991) *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (The MIT Press, Cambridge).
- 7 An expression of Paul Virilio as proclaimed during a seminar at the *Collège International de Philosophie* in 1992 and cited many times thereafter.
- 8 Marion Forger develops this idea in the article, 'Agencement et cinéma: la pertinence du modèle discursive en question' in *Cinémas*, vol. 10, nos. 2-3, "Cinéma et intermédialité", Spring 2000.