



ZOOMISMS

1957-1977-2020

1. "Powers of Ten," 1977, Eames Office, online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfKBhvDjuy0> (accessed November 11, 2020).

The opening scene of the 1977 film *Powers of Ten* shows a picnic on the banks of Lake Michigan in Chicago, from which location the universe is subsequently clearly measured in only nine minutes.¹ A couple is sitting in a field having a picnic. We see the scene from above, at a height of one meter. While the man takes a nap, the camera moves further away and into the earth's atmosphere with exponentially increasing speed, accelerating tenfold every ten seconds. At 104 meters we can still see the field on the shore of the lake but no longer see the picnic blanket, and by a distance of 107 meters we already have a view of the whole world. Eventually the trip ends by leaving the galaxy a hundred million light years away. Then the view returns in fast-forward, back to the picnic blanket and the napping couple. We slow right down, and when the starting point has been reached, we begin to move in the opposite direction: the man's hand is shown in extreme close-up, from where the camera penetrates the surface of the skin, going into the pores and showing us its composite elements. This journey into the skin's molecular structure proceeds inversely; at 10^{-4} we are at the level of the blood capillaries and by 10^{-13} at the inner atomic structure, the protons and neutrons. Here, the male narrator's voice tells us that we have reached the end of our current horizon of knowledge.



The sound sculpture *PENTAGONY* is the result of a multilayered associative work. Conceptual fields are dissected and arranged in relation to one another in the shortest possible way. One could also say crudely dispersed to the point of sheer unrecognizability. What remains is a sphere between the discrete points that whispers, screams, and then leaves.

2. Ariadna Estévez, "Zoomism and Discipline for Productive Immobility," May 13, 2020, Critical Legal Thinking, <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/05/13/zoomism-and-discipline-for-productive-immobility> (accessed November 11, 2020).

3. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Flüchtige Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003). Bauman outlines an individual whose social fabric is in the process of disintegrating against a background of a power structure that has become extraterritorial and mobile.

4. Kees Boeke, *Cosmic View: The Universe in 40 Jumps* (New York: John Day Company, 1957).

Powers of Ten is not just "a film dealing with the relative size of things in the universe and the effect of adding another zero," as stated in the opening credits; it also provides a reference point for the perception of space and its depiction in the mid-twentieth century. It is not only notable in technological terms but also in terms of its geopolitical and social dimensions. The film was made using footage from the US space agency NASA, which provided the various images in outer space. It seems equally significant to me that the client is IBM, a technology company whose core business is the produc-

tion of information technology and whose philosophy appears to be in line with the American economic doctrine of expansion, as the film suggests. However *Powers of Ten* also exemplifies a technique we now call "zooming," using a lens to close in on or pull away from stationary objects—which could not have been depicted more clearly than with a man sleeping on a picnic blanket. This image anticipates "zooming as a discipline for productive immobility," to use Ariadna Estévez's words in relation to the power of the control and ubiquitous nature of digital strategies on subjects compelled to remain where they were during the 2020 lockdowns.²

The well-known designer couple Charles and Ray Eames and their company Eames Office were responsible for the catchy visuals for this scientific and technological spatial concept. Ray was a painter, and Charles had a background in architecture. To me, this is almost paradigmatic of the shift in the production of knowledge from an analogue to a, let's say, "fleeting" digital age³ and the role of art in this age—that is, the extension of the notion of a supposedly static concept of space to a deeply ideological construct at the height of a scientific, progressive zeitgeist, as embodied by the twentieth century. It is also remarkable that *Cosmic View: The Universe in Forty Jumps* was originally published as a book of images in 1957.⁴ It could only be filmed twenty years later, when the technology available to NASA and IBM helped to make it possible. The realization of this peepshow of the universe, however, was the result of an idea that had been conceived far earlier and was therefore bound to the level of knowledge in the nineteenth century.

Yen Noh



Taking as her point of departure Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's performance *Aveugle Voix* (Blind Voice, 1975), Yen Noh explores the poetic relation between "blind", "voice", and "vision" in a technical way as well as with a multilingual interaction in which a condition of not seeing and speaking was tested. Blindfolded, Noh spoke, heard, listened to, and repeated a script she had composed in different languages by playing, pausing, rewinding, and fast-forwarding. Constantly overlapping one another, the recordings eventually deteriorated, turning ultimately into the noise of the tape.

5. A very brief, accepted description is used here. Historical notions of space show that the argumentation is frequently far more nuanced. See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in Neil Leech, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York City: Routledge, 1997), 330–336.

6. Essential reading in this context is Hannah Arendt on the public and private realms, for example, in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958).

7. See Sabine Hark, conference report: "Gendered Spaces—Spatialized Gender: Synthese und Perspektiven der Konstitution von Raum und Geschlecht," October 24–26, 2013, Kassel, in *H-Soz-Kult*, January 16, 2014, <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-5200> (accessed November 11, 2020).

8. Boris Groys, "The Unending Etcetera," in Stephan Berg et al., eds., *Peter Kogler* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), <http://kogler.net/essays/unending-etcetera> (accessed November 11, 2020).

Accordingly, the film is a condensation of everything that makes the question of space productive in art and theory today: the combination of technology and corporate culture, of economics, territory, and aesthetic skills. The concept of space has been released from the static role allotted to it for centuries⁵ and is moving toward an integration of psychological, social, economic, and ultimately also emancipatory approaches.⁶ The inclusion of political and gender-oriented approaches, in particular, makes it clear that space should be understood as relational and not only as an absolute category.⁷

Against this background, the art of the last sixty years can be described, above all, by the dissipation of rigid categories of space-time, even if the majority of it remained stuck in the binary dispositions of state and opposition, offering little in between. Fluxus and Nouveau Réalisme—two striking currents of the 1960s—expanded the pictorial space through materials and everyday objects not previously used for art, through actions such as eating or the destruction of socially accepted civilized achievements, such as music or books. And even a presumably strongly image-oriented art such as two-dimensional Pop Art can easily be placed in a context of "spatial expansion" by defining its advertising-related practices—Andy Warhol had a background as a commercial graphic artist—as economic space. Deconstruction and Institutional Critique involved architecture and cinematic practices—think of Gordon Matta-Clark's sawing up entire houses or VALIE EXPORT's expanded cinema interventions in public space.

Leaving out what lies in between, namely the media art of the 1990s and 2000s, which established the paradigm of an endless reproduction of space in art in the "Unending Etcetera,"⁸ we take a look at some current approaches to contemporary art production that are also pursued by students of the TransArts class at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. These illustrate the broad spectrum of possibilities that are important in the current artistic and theoretical discussion of space and which can be described with spatial configurations of the relational, the non-binary, and



Provocative for his day and age, Francisco Goya's female nude *La Maja vestida* (1797) and its counterpart, *La Maja desnuda*, realized shortly afterward, are the departure point for the work by Katharina Schaar. The two pictures were restaged in a setting as a tableau vivant and expanded upon with a change in gender role. A reflection on identity, sexuality, and pictorial traditions.

intersectionality. In other words, with positions that have not been defined by an attitude of negation and marginalization but aim instead at confluence and recomposition.

The British artist Charlotte Prodger integrates technology, data, and equipment from very different sources in her works to create a kind of psycho-physical narrative. For her contribution *SaF05*, which was shown in the Scottish Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale, she used both standard cameras and drone footage or her own smartphone to create the fictional narrative of a long-tailed lioness as a metaphor for queer identity and desire. Through extensive switching between the macro and micro levels, a kind of zooming produced by the various technical devices and external geophysical data, Prodger creates a utopian perspective for her own body, which is inscribed in the landscape as a data subject. The Italian-German artist Rosa Barba works predominantly with analogue film, which she also understands sculpturally as a physical part of her installations. So the media apparatus forms an aesthetic statement, which can also be understood as a commitment to a work of art that is not predominantly digitally produced in order to refer, for instance, to ecological and exploitative aspects of landscape and territories. Her 2019 film installation *Aggregate States of Matters* is a travelogue about a trip to the Huascarán massif in the Peruvian Andes, where she investigated the effects of climate change in so-called remote areas. Barba also relies on a combination of different technological arrangements and sometimes zooms in on devastated and bled-out landscapes from a distance, as if the monstrosity of exploitation could be magnified by the massive use of technology. The slow moving images of *Aggregate States of Matters* seem to anticipate the “suspended time” during the 2020 corona pandemic. The last example shows how space and political territories are negotiated by means of advanced new media technology: Forensic Architecture is a collective around the architect Eyal Weizman at Goldsmiths in London, who was denied entry to the USA in spring 2020, at the time of the outbreak of the pandemic, after an algorithm classified him as a “security threat” to the country. In its projects, the collective uses geographical and security data to locate territories and places where human rights abuses occur, such as experienced by boat migrants in the Mediterranean. The reconstruction of specific architectures also allows the visualization and publication of secret state actions in war zones, like drone attacks on



The phenakistoscope, also known as the phantasmoscope, is one of the predecessors of cinematography and is based on the after-image effect. Janine Schranz uses this process, which was developed around 1830 to construct and deconstruct images. Visual fragments are set in motion by the machine. They converge or decompose, depending on the speed of the machine. Within this process the viewer comes close to generating a static image.

9. See Oliver Wainwright, "The Worst Place on Earth: Inside Assad's Brutal Saydnaya Prison," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/aug/18/saydnaya-prison-syria-assad-amnesty-reconstruction> (accessed November 11, 2020).

the civilian population. Forensic Architecture is working continuously on an "architecture of public truth."⁹

An experience of suspended time was not unique to the corona measures and the state-decreed sense of being in limbo but they did heighten it considerably. It is this experience of time that implies a sense of relative remoteness that accompanies the adherence to one location. This situation once again emphasizes the different concepts of space: the physical space as a "site," which in times of video conferences overlaps ever further with digital space. Space as a "site" is closely connected with the scapes of psychological, social, and political spaces.

Back to Charles and Ray Eames in the present, on a visit to the Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, near Basel, where the "real" Eames office is presented as an authentic reference to the legendary designer duo, in the midst of twentieth-century design and furniture classics. This view inside the creative hub is full of surprises: like a Renaissance studiolo, it is equipped with scientific instruments, such as a globe, maps, everyday objects, designer pieces, and, above all, art. A symbol of the vastness of the horizon that is obviously prerequisite for success as a creative. A symbol too, however, for total and concentrated introspection in times of the forced availability of political subjects: it is not by chance that Zoom is also the name of a video conference provider that expanded enormously in the third decade of the twenty-first century.