Conveying Light

When loading the data emitted by a cassette player, Sinclair's Spectrum 8-bit computers displayed an easily recognisable animated pattern of horizontal bars in the home television screens. These loading lines or raster bars became a popular visualization of the loading routine -a process that could take several minutes- and were adopted partially by other platforms also, such as Commodore 64 or Amstrad CPC. It was an animation fitted to the CRT's scanned images -top to bottom, left to right- that needed therefore a very small amount of computer resources ('What Are Loading Bars', 2016).

This project proposes to peek into the inner workings of this data-based animation pattern -both in terms of the context of its emergence as its technicities-, and to consider temptatively its visual pattern as a wider "conveying light". Conveying light as a condition characterizes other media creatures such as the standard zebra striping display of tabular data -meant to ease the scanning eye of the human reader (Enders 2017)-, the structured light patterns used by early 3d scanners (Jalkio 1985) or the hidden animation that produces the well-known marching ants effect used as the standard image selection marquee (Hertzfeld 1983).

Despite its spatial definition, conveying light is related to the transformation of time into space in the architecture of the contemporary image. A transformation that lies at the core of Giuliana Bruno's exploration of the "materiality in the virtual age", where surfaces are considered instead of images "to experience how the visual manifests itself materially on the surface of things, where time becomes material space" (Bruno 2014). A transformation that has been extensively analyzed also by Sean Cubitt in his genealogy of the digital image (Cubitt 2014), where a progressive quantification of the visual is addressed as a consequence of the circulation of images between media and of the microtemporalities of the

imaging devices themselves.

Both Bruno and Cubitt share a broad media archaeological perspective that “begins not at the level of meanings but at the prior level of mediations – the materials, energies, and connections comprising the event” (Cubitt 2014). An approach that allows contemporary media to be framed within themes as varied as insects, chemistry or mineral resources, instances of what Jussi Parikka has called medianatures, a continuum between media and nature, entangled by practices that make it impossible to differentiate between them (Parikka 2015).

This project follows this broad approach to media. It is proposed from a pratice-based PhD research that tries to link contemporary visual culture with a media analysis of the expansion of industrial agriculture during the 20th century. Within the scope of the set of practices that gradually transformed land into a visual surface that transforms sunlight into fruits and vegetables, the notion of conveying light appears as an attempt to contribute to the removal of the distance between the screen and the soil. Embracing patterns such as the parallel furrows drawn by the plough, the conveyor belts introduced inside the harvesters, the seed lines designed by contemporary precision farming or the flight paths followed by drones scanning the soil in order to build prescription maps, conveying light appears then as a surface manifestation of an extractive economy where the scanning images mirror the scanned landscapes and viceversa.

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