journal of visual culture

Books

Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media is an enthralling enquiry into materiality and the image in the virtual age. Giuliana Bruno draws on an expansive array of examples from artist films and installations that engage on various levels with architecture in order to propose a re-theorization of the screen as a surface of transformation. The screen, in all its interdisciplinary forms is examined by Bruno as a space of crossovers, but always one that pertains to a 'luminous surface' (p. 7) of projection that can be both physical and metaphorical. This book then is also about light, and the textural effect light has upon the surface of a substrate, be it architecture, celluloid film, particles in the air and museum walls, to reveal the fabrics of the visual.

The book weaves through its subjects, the reader encountering each as 'assemblage and clusters of thought' which, as Bruno notes, give it pleats and folds, like the surface of cloth (p. 9). She takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on historical and contemporary examples within art, architecture, fashion, and museum archives. The fold is a recurrent theme throughout; drawing on Deleuze, we witness the folds of architecture, thresholds, screens, fabric, clothing, light and shadow, projection and time and through 'folding operations' across a 'multimedial terrain' (p. 16) the author's ideas double back, gain clarity, and develop. In a similar manner to Mieke Bal's 'preposterous history' (see Bal, 1999), Bruno elicits the idea of 'travelling backward in order to make a leap for the future' (p. 247). The writing is fluid, taking many forms; it is narrational, analytical, creative and at times abstract. Engaging its own kind of materiality it is sometimes fairly dense and difficult to penetrate but through its poetic language and evocative imagery it gives weight to such intangible entities of light, transient experiences, and architectures of the mind.

Offering an 'alternative genealogy of the medium of film' (p. 107) and the expansion of its 'luminous existence' (p. 107), Bruno considers the correlation between film and architecture, arguing that both are 'linked on the "screen-surface" of the modern age' (p. 55). Drawing on Siegfried Kracauer's

claim that surface is linked to modernity, the screen here is considered as architectural, as the sites where 'walls turn into screens of light' (p. 56). For Bruno, this intimacy with surface is what defines spectatorship, the attraction for the spectator lying in the tension between 'absorption and dislocation' (p. 58) and subsequently between the transient image and the materiality of the projection surface. As moving images are increasingly being projected in galleries and museums, Bruno draws parallels between the film experience and what she terms the 'architectural design of light' (p. 62). Reflecting on photographic works of Hiroshi Sugimoto and installation artworks of James Turrell and Anthony McCall, she convincingly proposes the luminous screen of projection as a new form of materiality. Projection, she argues, is an immersive and cinematic material phenomenon, inextricably linked to the environmental and spatial. Walls become membranes in the work of Robert Irwin and Krystof Wodiczko, and the materiality of screen surface is further explored as a partition and veil, a 'permeable architectural envelope' which encourages haptic relationships with the 'skin of our inhabitation' (pp. 75, 195). The screen here is flexible, elastic, but remains impenetrable.

Le Corbusier's claim to architecture as sartorial is key to understanding materiality as a surface condition (p. 3) and to demonstrate this, Deleuze's 'texturology' is employed to address the films of Wong Kar-Wai in chapter 2. This is an in-depth and critical analysis that establishes the filmic image as 'visual tapestry' (p. 48) wherein surface tension negates the image as window, reconfiguring it as a different surface, as screen (p. 5). In the 'fashioned worlds' of the films, 'visual pleating and folding create volume and depth, grain and granularity' making for a 'thickness of surface' (p. 49). Using Le Corbusier's concept, Bruno proposes that Hong Kong becomes a second skin; like the protagonist's cheongsam, it tightly envelopes the characters (p. 38). Fashion for Walter Benjamin 'unfolds as a form of historical remembering' (p. 43) and this chapter effectively sets up a later theme: fabric as a surface reflecting the materiality of time. This is profoundly developed in chapter 9 which takes the form of a diary, the author's personal unfolding of Havana's textural depths. Manifest in the crumbling paint, rust and mildew on buildings, and the torn and stained garments in the Museo de la Revolucíon, surface here acts as a material contact between past and present. The notion of a stain as revelatory is another tool through which Bruno evocatively reveals the 'living fabric' (p. 213) of Havana's traumatic past and the hidden intimacies in Sally Potter's film *Yes*, demonstrating certain tensions go deep below the surface.

An alternative angle on the film/architecture relationship is revealed in the museum archive, the cinema and museum share a 'virtual preservation of the material existence of things' (p. 143), places of public viewing where spectators undergo a 'haptic experience of mediated encounters' (p. 144). Isaac Julien's film *Vagabondia* takes the viewer on a mediated journey of the John Soane museum, and is used by Bruno to exemplify a reinvention of the museum through the medium of film, an 'archiving of the archive' (p. 169), 'history in motion' (p. 172), a way of looking forward by looking back, demonstrating a certain folding and unfolding of time.

In a further development on fabric and surface materiality, Bruno examines Deleuze's notion of the fold as the 'architecture of the soul' (p. 20). Mental images are 'fashioned as a matter of surface' (p. 30), 'haptically, out of the texture of our world' they are 'stretchy' and 'malleable' (p. 19). In the latter section of the book, Bruno proposes the concept of an 'architectural imaginary'; the term 'projection' here holds ties to perception and subjectivity. Our image of a city is projective, 'as much a visual, perceptual, and virtual construction as it is an architectural one' (p. 189) thus it is a 'composite mental image' and here this notion of architectural imaginary goes beyond the urban; architecture is used as a metaphor to explore how our 'mental maps' (p. 193) are formed.

The notion of the image as 'film', as a veneer only surface deep plays a key role throughout and Bruno seeks to show how materiality 'manifests itself on the surface tension of media in our times' (p. 2), asking what role materiality can have, and how it might be 'refashioned' in arts and technology. This is expressed with lucidity in relation to Tacita Dean's film *Kodak;* exposing the material quality of film, of 'film as film', it is likened to cloth, upon which the '"weathering"' of time gains materiality (p. 119). Further exemplified in Bill Morrison's *Decasia*, time and history are shown as material influences, '"wearing out"' (p. 108), staining and 'wounding' (p. 123) the surface of film. The stain is used by Bruno as another device alongside the materiality of light and the architecture of projection, to explore the materiality of screen surfaces and surface tension. Bruno's angle on the 'stain' is significant and is used to address larger issues surrounding materiality in the digital age as the recent resurgence toward 'post-digital' practices is an attempt to regain some form of material handle on images and media. It is here that Bruno's concept of 'wearing out' gains particular poignancy, demonstrating that such media can 'weather' changes in time (p. 127).

The final chapter of *Surface* takes the form of a 'virtual' letter; addressed to Sally Potter, it effectively weaves the threads of the book together in a critical reading of her film *Yes.* Bruno requests to contribute to Potter's blog, which acts as a 'fabricated memoir', a 'surface, a medium, a screen – for an intimate public exchange' (p. 231). In light of the book's architectural influences, it is worth considering the internet as virtual architecture, a space to be navigated via the streets of links, each site an intimate room that gives scope to different ideas. The internet here serves as a further refashioning of materiality in contemporary times and perhaps this could have been emphasized more explicitly to provide an alternative take on the transformative surface. It is here, in the virtual age of the internet, that the screen becomes the surface of material relations, a space of public intimacy, a 'dwelling that engages mediation between subjects and with objects' (p. 94).

Reference

Bal M (1999) *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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