

THE GAZE ALONG DIAGONALS – HORIZONTALS, AND
HARMONY IN DIALOG... THE GAZE FROM ABOVE

FOR THE VIDEO-CINEMATIC PROJECT OF NATAŠA PROSENC STEARNS IN
MONFORT

“They seemed to spring up from nowhere, blossoming out in the slightly moist tepidity of the air, they flowed gently along as though they were seeping from the walls, from the boxed trees, the benches, the dirty sidewalks, the public squares. [...] They stretched out in long, dark clusters between the dead house fronts. Now and then, before the shop windows, they formed more compact, motionless little knots, giving rise to occasional eddies, slight cloggings. [...] A strange quietude, a sort of desperate satisfaction emanated from them. They looked closely at the piles of linen in the White Sale display, clever imitations of snow-covered mountains, or at a doll with teeth and eyes that, at regular intervals, lighted up, went out, lighted up, went out, lighted up, went out, each time at the same interval, lighted up again and again went out. [...] They looked for a long time, without moving, they remained there, in offering, before the shop windows, they kept postponing till the next interval the moment of leaving.” /N. Sarraute, *Tropisms*, 1957/

Nataša Prosenč Stearns’s *Crawlers* present a perspective along diagonals and horizontals, and, at the same time, the gaze from below and above, the harmony of two and simultaneously multiple projections. The *Crawlers* are Body, Figure, Figurativeness, bound in a knot, a noose. They are kneaded into a mass that is reflected into the space, from below—rudiments into the sky, in the roof beams, in the heights. And yet, they are swarming, flattened and wounded bodies into the foundation, into the ground, slithering across the slippery earth like a mass of dirty, naked, stripped, fecal, stretched-out forms that cling together, drawing nearer and then farther apart again, like a taut muscular “chain” of dehumanized and newly awakened creatures looking for a way out, for a solution, for “liberation” from the clamp that holds them to the ground.

This is how Gilles Deleuze expressed it in his 1969 work *The Logic of Sense*: “Again, the horizontal can be executed in a prone body [...] where a flattening force is exerting on the sleepers [...] or coupled bodies following a horizontal diagram.” That is the first element of complexity, which proves the law of Nataša’s video project precisely with its complexity. Thus the reclining figures still have the [moving] remainders of activity and passivity, because of which they merge with the horizontal field, preserving the vitality and gravity, the contraction and relaxation that comes from within. It is akin to the opposition between *descent* – *ascent*, between being “naked” and “clothed”, between escalation and abatement. The choice of something that adds or subtracts is (according to Deleuze) extremely subtle: we penetrate deeper into the field of Rhythm, because what is added or withdrawn is not a quantity but a value defined by its own precision or “brevity”. This may only have to do with the fact that added value is a mere prosthetic, a hysterical image of the visible body, or a “re-awakening” that now demands its parts.

But ascent-descent cannot be equated with contraction-expansion, with *systole-diastole*: the “outflow” of bodies is certainly a descent, but at the same time also an

expansion - spreading. And yet there is also contracting and bending in the concept of outflow: the flesh descends from the bones, the Body descends from the extended arms and thighs. The feeling develops into a fall, into falling from one level to another. This is an active reality of the Fall that must not be interpreted thermodynamically, as if it is turning into entropy. To the contrary, the Fall exposes the difference in levels as they are. Each tension is experienced as the Fall. Feeling is indistinguishably connected with the Fall that creates its own inner movement or clinamen. The fall and the falling of the crawlers is an active Rhythm.

The marks on the wall in the video *Crawlers*, the stains – streaks, strokes, images – are irrational, accidental, and involuntary, as if they surfaced from another world. They are non-illustrative, non-narrative, non-representative. These are nonsignifying streaks and images of purified senses (if we follow Deleuze); above all, they are images of thought-hands, as if the thought-hand has become something independent and delineates the signs that are no longer dependent on our will or our gaze. The diagram is therefore the operative multitude of streaks and zones, nonsignifying, non-representative streak-strokes that delineate the possible facts but do not alone create the [visual] facts. In order for them to become and evolve into the Figure, they must once again be injected into the visual mass of the Body, but not into the mass of the optical organism, giving new power to the eye and to the object, which is no longer figurative. The diagram is the operative mass of the streaks and strokes and lines and zones, like the “streaming” of forms and nooses and knots. In truth, the diagram is chaos, catastrophe, but also order and rhythm. With regard to the figurative endowment, there is chaos in it; with regard to the new order, there is the call of Rhythm. There is no longer an artist who would not experience the moments when chaos crashes into and destroys the visual coordinates. Nataša’s images that include – “hysterically” – artistic and personal catastrophe are the only ones in art.

The entire picture from different pre-images is a diagram. The optical geometry collapses in favor of line generated exclusively from thoughts and hands. It is a space of active thought-hand strokes, thought-hand structures, rather than an exhibition of light. The diagram is never an optical effect, but an indomitably crafted thought-force. The eye can hardly follow. The revelation of Nataša’s depictions is a sort of “streak” that is not an outline; it is neither inner nor outer, neither convex nor concave. It is a “gothic” streak-line that doesn’t travel from one point to the next, but *between* points, changing direction, and achieving its climax when it synchronizes with the entire surface.

Nataša’s diagram is analog, in contrast to the indivisibility of the spiral-labyrinth, which is digital. Perhaps it is precisely this aspect, its optical and essential differences, that can be seen – in the diversity of *Crawlers* and images – in the video projections: “Stairs are like geometric volumes, rising on their marginal surfaces, to be found soon thereafter as bent, broken, spirally wrapped around pillars and immersed in the perspectives of shadows ... The transverse wall pierced by a giant arcade separates a kind of chapel, which is the main motif in the second plane, which is seen as the first plane, and which the light also crosses in the same way ... We seek the vanishing point, which is way beyond, outside the edges, some sort of line on the horizon, over which some sort of bridge extends, whose direction is just opposite from the vanishing point on the other parts of the building ...” /H. Focillon, *The Prisons of Piranesi*