

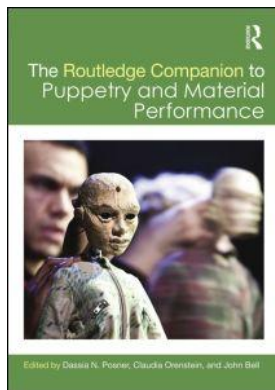
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Movement Is Consciousness

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8

Movement Is Consciousness

Kate Brehm

I recently had to make new business cards. And I thought, you know, when I tell people I'm a puppeteer, although they are excited about it, I never feel like they know what I do. Oh *they* think they know what I do, but I ultimately feel misunderstood. So I decided to put something else on my business cards. But what? What do I *really* do? Here is my solution:

Movement is Consciousness.

That's what puppetry is, right? The movement of an inanimate doll breathes life into its soul; the translation of objects through space tells a story; a sudden break in a crescendo of objects swaying together makes meaning. So where did that phrase come from? I derived it from *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* by Gilles Deleuze (1983 [1986]: 21). But Deleuze isn't talking about puppetry; he is talking about the eye of the camera.

Camera-consciousness/visual storytelling

When a movie camera travels through space while filming, it dictates a viewpoint, a consciousness. The eye of this camera, the camera-consciousness (Deleuze 1983: 77), provides an opportunity for an objective viewpoint outside of the scene. The audience can relate to a character's viewpoint, or they can relate to this outside, godlike viewpoint, which moves through the scene, zooms in on details, or follows the trajectory of a particular character. This is the first law of cinema, the mobile camera. The storytelling possibilities created by this camera-consciousness are fantastic.

As I slowly became obsessed with *Cinema 1*, a realization hit me like a bolt of lightning: film theory has created 100 years of critical writing on visual storytelling, and what is puppetry if not visual storytelling! I was very excited. Diving into film theory, I read and reread *Cinema 1* as a sort of manual of techniques to be applied to live puppetry. And as a puppeteer, I couldn't help but start to conceive a new show. The first thing I did was pick a title: *The Eye Which We Do Not Have*. It was easy; it came straight from the book (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 83).

Frames

The first concept to catch my attention was framing (something very viable to and already utilized in puppetry). What elements are inside the frame? Outside the frame? Is the frame saturated with elements? Or does it produce a “rarefied image,” where the “accent is placed on a single object,” like Hitchcock’s all-white close-up of a jar of milk? (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 13). As I got excited about framing, I realized that I had read quite a bit about it in another context: comics.

The discussion about visual storytelling and frames in the world of comics is, most notably, led by Scott McCloud in his book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (McCloud 1993: 60–117). Here, too, the discussion addresses content inside and outside a frame, but it also addresses the frame itself. What storytelling capabilities do frames have by how they are arranged, their distance from one another, and their size and shape? A long frame can suggest a long time! An excessive amount of space between frames can suggest an excessive amount of time between moments.

I was gripped by inspiration! I started to design a puppet stage for my new show (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2). The stage would itself transform to create constantly

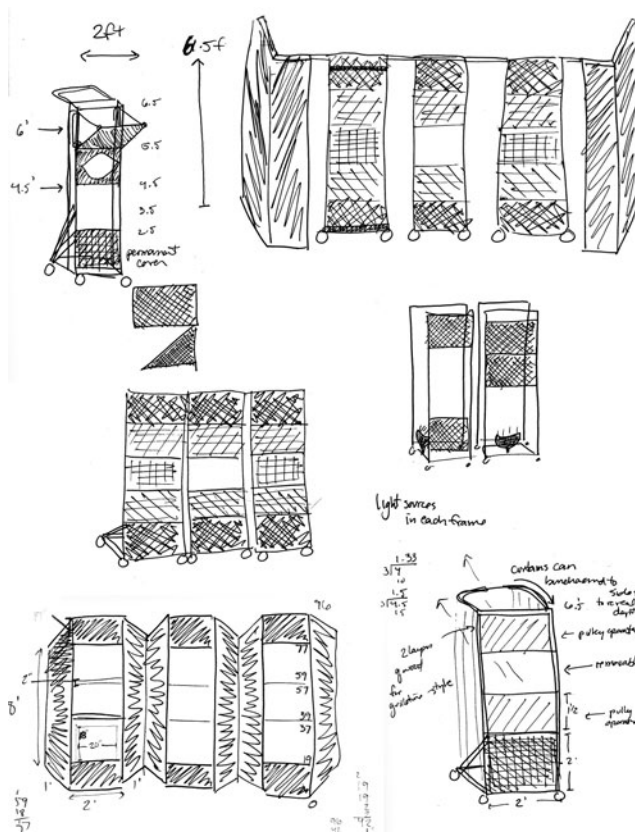


Figure 8.1 Early sketches of the performing scenery (which itself functions as a puppet) and its transformational frame: designed by Kate Brehm. Image courtesy of the author

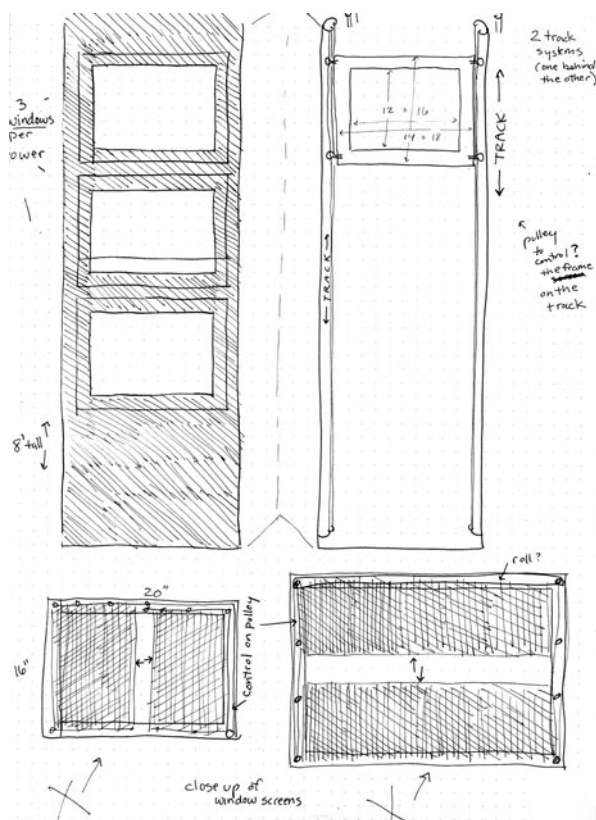


Figure 8.2 Later sketches of the performing scenery, including a wall of windows: designed by Kate Brehm. Image courtesy of the author

different framings. Ultimately, it was designed with six windows, which can each be blacked out individually, so as to create frames of various shapes and sizes. A column of three open windows reads like one long frame. Carefully choreographing the closing and opening windows reads as one frame moving through space. The action behind the windows can move with the frame, as if translating through space, or the frame can reveal different aspects of one large scene, like the roving eye of a camera.¹

Character

I wanted to use other cinematic techniques discussed by Deleuze too: affection images, action images, and montage. In order to do this, I'd need some objects and people. I really like objects, and cinema theory helped me to realize that I don't need to have characters in my puppet show to drive its action. The consciousness of the camera itself, the viewpoint created by the movement of the camera, can drive the action. But it also convinced me that the connection one can create between an anthropomorphic figure puppet and an audience is nothing to be sniffed at. An audience can

relate to a character in deep, meaningful ways. Even though part of me wanted to make an entire puppet show only about furniture, I decided a woman would be the main character of *The Eye Which We Do Not Have*.

The close-up

I'm interested in affect because I want to provoke in my audience an experience of pure sensation, of understanding, of "getting it" and connecting. The affection-image as described by Deleuze "is power or quality considered for themselves, as expressed. ... These are qualities or powers considered for themselves, without reference to anything else, independently of any question of their actualization" (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 99–100). In other words, the affection-image is about feeling a particular way – for example, feeling driven or inspired to action. However, the affection-image is not about the action, it is about that feeling of inspiration itself. Pure affect is out of time and place; it belongs to the category of the possible. "It expresses the possible without actualizing it" (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 101). The affection-image values the power of simple expression. The expression of qualities is itself the point of an affection-image.

The reason I need both objects and people to fully explore affection-images is because they come in two variations. First there is the close-up, which requires a face or a character. It is the definitive way to express affect in cinema. Deleuze spends a lot of time clarifying two different kinds of close-ups: the face can reflect *qualities* or express *powers*. A reflecting face gazes upon something, "thinks about something, is fixed on an object," and *reflects* the qualities of admiration, astonishment, or wonder. "Sometimes, on the contrary, [a face] experiences or feels something" and *expresses* itself through an intensive series of "micro-movements." For example, a face might first express fear, then understanding, and finally acceptance, taking the viewer through an internal experience (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 89–93).

But with puppets? How is any reflecting or expressing accomplished with the fixed face of a puppet? Well, we've all seen it happen, seen a puppet think and feel. Subtle movements, a change of angle of the face, a slow blink of the eyes: these all allow an audience to project an internal experience into the face of a puppet. Deleuze seems to understand the ability of a fixed face to change, as puppets do. "A very small change of direction of the face varies the relationship of its hard and tender parts, and so modifies the affect. ... It is by turning towards – turning away that the face expresses the affect, its increase and decrease" (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 108).

The "qualisign"

So what about objects? I am excited about objects! Can they produce affect? Yes. The affection-image is not specific to faces. The close-up of a face successfully creates an affection-image not because it is human but because it is outside of a specific space or time and therefore able to purely express. Even though an expressed affect may be caused by or extracted from a particular space-time (like an empty school in the summer or a quiet hospital at night), the "power" of anger, for example, or the "quality" of victimhood is not actualized in the determined space-time.

This brings me to the second kind of affection image, the “qualisign”: a scene or object that expresses pure powers and qualities. To accomplish this expression, the scene or object needs to become disconnected from its determinate space-time. The stereotypical onset of rain when a main character is crushed by emotion is not meant as a description of the science of rain. Rather, reflections in puddles, an endless downpour, or a slow drip express affect. This rain is eternal rain. It is out of space, out of time. It conveys affect, not action (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 113–114, 123).

An affective object is an exciting way to think about object puppetry. An example of typical object puppetry would be a fork that walks around and looks at things or a pail that loses its shovel. These are thinking and feeling characters that happen to be objects without traditional faces or body parts. Alternatively, I’m excited to explore object puppetry where conveying affect, rather than character, is the intent. In *The Eye ...*, I use a staircase, central to the representation of the main character’s psychosis, and disconnect it from reality by presenting it as a large white sheet with only parallel black lines to suggest steps. Rotating it while the main character hovers in front separates it from functionality and a determinate space. And, hopefully, it conveys affect.

How a character handles an object is another way to derive emotional impact. In such instances, the object functions as a symbol. The way it is handled reveals something about the character, the puppeteer, the object, or even the director of the piece. In *The Eye ...*, the central woman cuts out paper dolls.² Her handling of the scissors reveals something about her character (she is destructive). It also reveals something about the story (she has and will destroy something). And perhaps it reveals a viewpoint of the director (repression of female sexuality is destructive). The scissors create an emotional link between a “permeating situation and an explosive action” (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 163). Importantly, though, handling the object is an action, therefore making it not an affection-image. We have arrived at the action-image.

Action-images

At this point I can no longer ignore something I often try to ignore: story. I admit I am, and have been for a long time, averse to story. Narrative is never the first thing I think about when I’m making a new show, never the driving force behind my inspirations. But Deleuze is very analytical about it! He discusses story like an entertaining puzzle or blocks that I can rearrange. No gooey mess. He calls these blocks the “action-image.”

Two major elements make up the action-image: first, the *milieu*, or situation that encompasses everyone and everything in a film – powers and qualities plus a state of things that actualizes them; and, second, *modes of behavior* – the way in which people behave naturally within this milieu and embody the powers and qualities associated with it. In a particular story, the milieu and the modes of behavior may function in a correlative way or antagonistically. The behavior of a character can serve the milieu and be at peace with it (a police officer walks into a police station), or the character’s behavior may be disjunctive to the milieu (a police officer walks into the station belligerent and drunk).

The action-image also includes *forces* that challenge the characters. The actualized powers and qualities from the affection-images become these forces. For example, in

The Eye ... , the lead character is silent, secretive, troubled, and anxious. These powers and qualities are actualized in her behavior when she is driven to repeatedly sneak up the stairs to a large looming door. She fearfully opens it to find a bed in various states of disarray. This obsessive action is a force that challenges her. She must reckon with her own drive to obsess.

Montage

The last essential cinematic technique I want to discuss is montage. The main thing to realize about montage is that it isn't only the scene set to go-get-'em music where the cheerleader pulls her act together. Montage is every single cut in a film. Early film-makers realized they could create a sense of movement and morph time by placing noncontinuous shots one after the other (much like comics were already doing). The mind of the viewer does the work to connect what is represented in one shot to the next. For example, the viewer discerns that a close-up of a face followed by a long shot represents what that character is seeing. This is very similar to puppetry: the audience fills in the unexpressed *why* when a puppet moves, thereby creating its thoughts and feelings.

But there's more. Montage takes cinema beyond the roving eye of the camera, the camera-consciousness, which was itself revolutionary. All of those images are in relation to one privileged viewpoint: the camera. With montage that singular viewpoint explodes. Montage allows the viewer to connect things and ideas that are otherwise beyond any singular viewpoint. An audience will make associations between the Swedish government and a butterfly, for example, if a film shows images of them in sequence. Montage is a viewpoint "without boundaries or distances." It is "the eye which we do not have" (Deleuze 1983 [1986]: 183).

Finally, time. I take particular interest in how one can convey a sense of time to an audience. This is where film and comics come together. These arts of sequence and framing can create simultaneous time, expanded time, contracted time, and eternal time. The shift from close-up to long shot must happen in sequence, but the viewer understands it as happening simultaneously. One single moment can extend and extend until it takes up an entire two-hour film. A sunset over the desert can represent a man's entire lifetime or the Earth's lifetime or the eternity of everything humans will never know in a lifetime.

This accumulation of shots and cuts creates change in a whole over time. This is montage. It is a film's consciousness. It is what feels different at the end than at the beginning. THIS. This is what I have been after for all of my life in the theatre, a discussion of the technical means for creating affective holistic change through design.³

Liveness

In conclusion, I'd like to address one question I never want to be asked: why don't you just make a movie? Answer: I don't want to work with the palette of a screen. I like three dimensions. I like to present an illusion and reveal its device simultaneously. But mainly, it's because I'm interested in *liveness*, that tangible sense of the

real, things in space, the present, the now. I don't want to make movies; I just want to steal all of cinema's tricks. Hitchcock said suspense is created when an audience knows something that the character in a movie does not (cited in Gottlieb 1995: 113). There is always suspense in live puppetry, because both the audience and the puppeteers know what the puppets do not.⁴

Notes

- 1 See <<http://tinyurl.com/k29yhyq>>, particularly from 1:15–2:00.
- 2 See <<http://tinyurl.com/ljf576j>>, particularly from 1:25–3:30.
- 3 I don't have space in this chapter to discuss the long list of specific montage techniques. However, I recommend reading Eisenstein (1949 [1977]: 72–83) and Deleuze (1983 [1986]: 30–57).
- 4 *The Eye Which We Do Not Have* premiered in May 2013 in Brooklyn, New York, at Standard Toykraft. Video footage of the completed puppet show is available online at <<http://tinyurl.com/mvmkb3r>>.

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