

Diann Bauer's Transubstantial Parallax

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Commissioned and Published for The 2006 Showroom Annual

Diann Bauer's work is often talked about in terms of its references, the diversity of which is there for all to see: from the illustrations in Manga comics, the architecture of Lebbeus Woods, Oriental scrolls, discourses on cinematic spectacle and media representations of violence. It is evident that the work touches on all these points very openly. But whilst this 'reference-spotting' may describe how the parts *look*, it does little to elucidate the function of multiplicity that demands their simultaneous inclusion. These points of stylistic interest exist as nourishment for the energetic system of Bauer's universe, rather than dominate its articulation. For something greater and more powerful is taking place, centered on the conception of vision in the work, which is critical to how we understand the role of stylistic reference in Bauer's imagery. The use of a single language to give the impression that continuity can be achieved between unrelated phenomena is the governing principle of *Bludgenerator*. What matters most here is the visual process, and the way it implicates scale in the impossible synthesis of pictorial differences.

Separations of perspective and ontological difference coming together within a single language are familiar from historical narratives. Opposing views on the same event can coexist in a single account with no trouble at all, coming together but also maintaining separate identities. And in time and space, in the world of the physical and biological sciences, the notion of vantage points or viewer perspective has long since redefined the 19th Century thermodynamic model of closed systems. The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle tells us that the observation of a system is a measurable factor implicit in the outcome of the observance, so therefore no system is in effect a closed entity. If we study any living system, then the position of the viewer is implicated in the generation of meaning and needs to be accounted for as a part of the system in the results of the enquiry. In this case, the duality is the relationship between observer and observed. The account of the two only becomes constructive once the position of one to the other is defined, even if they are separated by great size or distance.

It's a seductive idea in general. Kant called it the 'Transcendental Illusion', and more

recently Zizek has described it as the Parallax view, the ‘constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible (1).’ Its a familiar theme from science fiction too, where realities exist alongside yet unaware of one another in the idea of parallel worlds. And this theme has its antecedents in the wave-particle duality of quantum physics. A good image of parallax is given in Zizek's discussion of neurobiology as ‘the realization that, when we look behind the face into the skull, we find nothing; “there’s no one at home” there, just piles of grey matter (2).’ These are all examples of ways in which mobility of vision has been the consolidating method in the creation of content.

We are struck straightaway by the plenitude of ontological differences in Diann Bauer's *Bludgenerator*. Guided in by the rays of a black and white sunburst to our left, it becomes clear from the epic wall painting surrounding us and pulling us into a narrow aperture ahead, that this is not an altogether happy profusion. We have arrived at the tail end of a disaster. Futuristic canopies of glass are disintegrating, ejecting globules of fleshy ectoplasm that ribbon out into strands as they gather velocity. Some of the other strands describe the trajectories of smaller, faster projectiles – fragments of building materials from the scatter-bomb that has just detonated above our heads. There is a conflation of structural sense between architecture itself and that architecture's dramatic unraveling. As parts are flung across space they ultimately crystallise themselves back into new building forms, albeit to impossible purpose. The looping pipes and dynamic sightlines of these parts could be traveling at immense speed, or existing as calcified monuments to a motion 100 years past. The bubble gum-like ectoplasm performs a similar crossover game, at one point abject and formless (gluing shards of building material together in a random clump), at another trailing off to form strange deformed or ‘dysmorphic’ beings. Among these are a sinewy biped threaded around a grasping, yellowy human arm, and a vertical flesh pile that seems to have developed breasts. Discovering these entities requires a physical journey: walking along this mural-sized frieze, getting in close, and ultimately forgetting where one has been in order to take in new events. As we are drawn down the space towards the narrow doorway, the explosions and looping pipes are replaced in the mind by new combinations of matter and energy. As we change our physical position, the work changes with us. The transubstantiation is accelerating – not only is the bubble gum

now morphing into more complex figures, but an enormous shadow seems to have grown a foot, tendrils of hair dangle like wires from a stricken fuselage before spiraling off to describe an implosion of metal and black gas. Like a parody of evolution, randomness governs change and life and destruction become energetically synonymous. And whilst this supernatural growth is accelerating, so is the volume of physical mass and force of the 'event' unfolding.

Once we move into the back space of the gallery, things go from bad to worse on this score. Negative space is blacked out and the action escalates beyond control as layer upon layer of transubstantiation takes effect in a Pollock-esque field of swarming lines. All this is marked out by cables and struts that puncture, support and bind up the 'life' that evolves perversely as –and *amongst* - the mayhem. In other words, the force motivating the destruction also organises the life into the same shapes. We are looking at a spectacular image that rhymes destruction with organisation, life with death. Like any message unit, the signal of this image gains identity by what is *not* there. The redundancy between the high-information signals – in this case the 'life', the action – is perversely taken up by what would usually represent the most immobile, concrete element alongside it: that is, the buildings. *Bludgenerator's* architecture remains frozen at the planning stage. Drained of colour and pictorial detail, they are propositions straight from the drawing board – graphic ciphers that are suggestive and notional. Whilst converting the destructive velocity of the scene into form, their *rendering* speaks of a kind of architectural futurism that is purely conceptual. These drawings move amongst the figures like ideas, suggesting the rehabilitation of the disaster into content, - like the model for an architecture based on the dynamics of a plane crash.

This cerebral dimension represents the summit of the hierarchies of value in Bauer's universe. It has the capacity to transform disaster into progressive abstract thought, and impossibility into visionary theatrical possibility. Yet as the 20th century thinker Georges Bataille reminds us, once we get these sort of 'vertical' projects – positive, progressive, ambitious – then we get their opposite effect by extension. What is excluded by civilised society returns as 'the accursed share (3)', that which cannot be incorporated into conceivable humanity. Whilst destruction gets recuperated into architecture, 'life' - viral, self-serving and consuming - reclaims and returns the process to its proper origins by hijacking the transubstantiation process.

Matter is put to task in unproductive ways, warping the linearity of earth-to-sky growth into new auto-destructive configurations. Everywhere we look, mutations and bifurcations of bio-chemical and manufactured form and function take place: the pollution of a black gas is inflating a pipe of flesh to bursting point, it's sore appendages swathed in a luxuriant baggy kimono from behind which peeps a lascivious froggy eye. The witness to this is a skinned face being comically stretched to tearing point, its eyes bulging in terror. An enormous quiff crests over something's patched-up backside; a dainty nail-varnished foot treads gingerly between planes of technical drawings whilst another entity drops its pants and lets rip a firewall of toxic bubblegum.

The accursed share for Bataille is the amount of surplus energy within a system that cannot be productively expended. If a system can no longer grow, cannot absorb more energy, the energy must be expended without benefit. These violent, erotic, explosive actions within *Bludgenerator* play this role. Yet in an added Bataillean sense, the mutual dependency of one to the other – the interbreeding of disaster and growth – affirms the oscillation between productive and unproductive expenditure fundamental to Bataillean economics.

The interesting thing here, though, is the way Bauer visualises this oscillation.

If the conception of vision in this work is to create continuity between unrelated phenomena, and mobility of vision has been the consolidating method in the creation of content, then the flavour of the imagery tells us how that content is formulated around the model of Bataillean economics. Could the work then be said to be operating one of the parallax models mentioned earlier in relation to this content? Things are more complex than that. Whilst *Bludgenerator* exploits the simultaneity (when things blend they remain distinct at the same time) of parallax in a visual way, its logic takes this process beyond a singular reading. The Zizekian image of raw matter supporting the sophisticated mechanisms of the human face is the kind of gulf of realities that this work *compresses* rather than compares. If life can construct a human arm and get it to wield a samurai sword, here it can also follow the example of a pipe bomb and distribute its affects in a radial scatter of living tissue that is no less of an organic necessity. This kind of parallax view is more paralytic, debasing ontological difference with recourse to knob-gags and

whoopie cushions *within* the high elegance of progressive architecture and Japanese fashion. There is a collapse of a range of internally established hierarchies. Corporeality and bodily functions humiliate the sophisticated constructs of high value. Rather than a binary contrast though, the transubstantiation implicates the features of one in the other - by nature. This parallax view – the *visualising* of unrelated phenomena within one language - here creates a disturbance in the identity of what each of those phenomena is all about.

Such a disturbance could imply an entity that achieves synthesis through a kind of entropic erasing of difference, a flatlining of radically different phenomena, cancelling the parallax model by extinguishing the idea of a *retained* difference. Yet there is more to the idea of parallax here. This is not merely a view on the opposing yet mutually dependent factors in Bataillean economics played out in images of destruction/construction. What makes the parallax model relevant is above all and precisely the work's recourse to *all* the visual mobility models detailed earlier. Do the other examples of 'extra-visual' simultaneity not also apply here? Given the operations of parallax going on, is there not a kind of 'parallax view of parallax models'?

In other words, what we are presented with is not only the transubstantiation of matter and energy but also, in effect, *the transubstantiation of different notions of vision.*

The layering of parallaxes enacts the transubstantiation of vision models through mobility. By moving around *Bludgenerator*, the viewer can engage with any of the parallax models mentioned above. We have already seen, for instance, the biological parallax, the 'grey matter behind the face', the magical transubstantiation that allows mammalian entrails to balloon out from endoskeletons and eyeballs to present themselves sentient and intact, separated in time and space from their staved-in skulls. At the same time, we have also seen how the work relies on historical multiplicity, where the prehistoric and the futuristic are spliced together as one event. There is within these two features the implication of parallel worlds, where in the former, as an extension of the above point, the reality of one section of the work cannot be seen alongside every other section, every other reality; they are exclusive, separate. In the latter, where figures travel in time between historical

styles, we have the more conventional deployment of temporal anomalies. This is along the lines of H.G Wellsian time travel: the 'life' takes the form of 'people' who find themselves having to adapt to strange environments in the past or future.

Above all though, it is how the viewer is physically motivated to walk around the image, to explore it in fragments and imaginatively edit together a narrative of cause and effect that counts for the work's proper 'parallax nature'. The observer has to be actively involved in the organisation of content, based on the mediation of subject and object, consuming information according to a matrix of personal preferences, interests and physical conditions. It is an open system in action, regulated by the conditions that the viewing subject brings with him or her, or finds in evidence, on the day. As Žižek says, in reference to the parallax gap, 'an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself (4).' And it is in this way that the notion of parallax becomes effective. The parallaxes operating at the level of drawn physical object/events (guts rhymed with explosions) cannot be dialectically mediated or sublated into a higher synthesis *on the primary visual level*. Whilst we are aware that the work has finite physical limits, these are not viewable once the viewer visually interacts with the parts. The parts maintain 'minimal difference' between the objects/events that they depict in that the difference cannot be 'grounded in positive substantial properties (5).' This glitch motivates a change in perspective that is *itself* constructive of a parallax gap.

What we are left with is *Bludgenerator's* presentation of a transubstantiation of vision models that access different temporal, material and energetic transubstantiations. The Bataillean non-linearity of the work's energetic economy in the pictorial dimension is continued in the physical dimension through the parallax model of looking. In intimately connecting our looking and thinking with our moving, we are contributing to the parallax network – we as viewers consolidate the multiplicity of parallax models by embodying the vision-led stage in this system. We reflect the transubstantiation of matter and energy happening in the work's imagery, as well as its organisation, in our role as content-formers. We are both a version of the pictured bio-energetic multiplicity and the authors of it as a narrative. In witnessing the doubling-up of parallax models we are in effect a component in their interrelation: we are the mobile bio-energetic system that enables the model to be

recognised as such. Within this multitude of crossovers, where foaming mouths become hairstyles and protoplasmic ninjas straddle centuries of cultural evolution, where festivity and catastrophe converge and grand spectacle and subtle minutiae oscillate, we are left with the ultimate crossover: that of ourselves into the deranged universe of the work.

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1. Zizek, Slavoj. The Parallax View. The MIT press, 2006. **4**.
2. Ibid. **7**.
3. Bataille, Georges. The Accursed Share: Volume One. Zone Books, 1991.
4. Zizek, Slavoj. The Parallax View. The MIT press, 2006. **17**.
5. Ibid. **18**.