Intersections between Eija-Liisa Ahtila and Gilbert Simondon: imagistic experience in the associated milieu

Andreia Machado Oliveira

National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil/CNPq, Federal University of Santa Maria/UFSM/Santa Maria, Brazil

ABSTRACT
This article proposes intersections between the Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila and French philosopher Gilbert Simondon and puts forward a complex approach to experience relative to specific behavioral ecologies/environments (umwelt) in terms of the concepts of image and associated milieu. Conceiving imagistic experience as embodied experience, I go beyond the image as visual or pictorial or issues of interpretation and representation based on discursive language. The image is linked to biological, psychic and collective processes of individuation which conjugate individuals and milieus within techno-aesthetic experience. The viewer and the image are agent in imagistic experience, given that the individual and his associated milieu co-exist in a reciprocal relation which involves aspects of interiority and exteriority of the image. Containing aspects of interiority and exteriority, the image appears in the interaction between the human and world. On the one hand, images inhabit us and we create our worlds with them; on the other, images as quasi-organisms have their own life and signification. There is a recursive causality between the image's interiority and exteriority. Both philosopher and artist investigate the ways we see, perceive, feel, and assign meanings to the techno-aesthetic artifacts we produce and the associated milieus in which we find ourselves. Thus, based on the images that Gilbert Simondon reveals to us and those that Eija-Liisa Ahtila presents to us, I propose to problematize imagistic process as a process of individuation in which viewer, milieu and image co-emerge simultaneously as imagistic experience.

KEYWORDS
Imagistic experience; associated milieu; viewer; Eija-Liisa Ahtila; Gilbert Simondon

Introduction
Interdisciplinary dialog between diverse areas of knowledge has provided distinct theoretical crossovers in contemporary times. In this article, I bring together references from art, philosophy and technology in order to problematize what constitutes imagistic experience in an associated milieu resulting from practices of art making. I investigate intersections between the thought of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon and the audiovisual production of Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila, especially with the focus on the importance of the notion of milieu in Ahtila and Simondon, both of which incite us to think about the ways in which we construct the environment in which we find ourselves and how we move between these different milieus in our imagistic experiences.

In considering the relation between the viewer and the visual and sound images projected in Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s video installations, I call attention to the relation between individual and milieu in exhibition spaces. These relations indicate spatiotemporal experiences that range from the imagistic production effectuated by the artist, the operative functionality of the devices that project light and audio, the installation space of the projection, and the viewer who projects affective memories from their physiological and cultural structure, among other aspects. I recognize that all imagistic experience stems from relations between individuals and multiple natural and technological milieus. Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s artistic proposals aim other perceptual techno-aesthetic experiences to viewers, which according to American contemporary art theorist Kate Mondloch, change the mode of engagement with artworks:

The introduction of media screens into sculptural installations in the late 1960s implicitly reintroduced illusionistic and virtual space into a type of art practice that, drawing on the critical ambitions of minimalism, had aimed to eliminate modernist transcendentalism in favor of a present-tense perceptual encounter between the spectator and the art object.4

In particular, the artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila explored this mode of encounter when she returned to narrative installations in exposition spaces in the 1990s through a shift in “[. . .] the location of large-scale projection works from the theatre to art spaces (gal-
lery or museum) to renew images’ narrative spaces in different ways than cinema and to explore the images’ impact outside the normative cinematic apparatus. Her artistic proposals have been presented both in the context of expanded cinema and as computational art. Among them, I highlight: Me/We, Okay, Grey (1993), If 6 was 9 (1995), Today (1996), Anne, Aki and God (1998); Consolation Service (1999); The Present (2001); The House (2002); The Wind (2002); The Hour of Prayer (2005); Fishermen/Études n°1 (2007); Where Is Where? (2008); The Annunciation (2010); Horizontal—Vaakasuora (2011); Studies on the Ecology of Drama (2014); and Potentiality for Love (2018).

By making the moving images in the video installations communicate with each other on multiple screens of different dimensions, the artist encourages the viewers to wander through the exhibition rooms in order to change their spatiotemporal perceptions. According to Mieke Bal (2013), Ahtila’s artistic practices explore art and thought in and with space as a physical response to the images. It is the “thinking of” embodied process, that is, a corporeal experience actualized with the artistic proposal once the moving images and the installation connect viewers to the installation space. The artist seeks to effectuate changes in viewers’ habits through the use of various screens in the audiovisual installations, prompting the emergence of specific behavioral milieus (umwelt) within each artistic proposition.

Conceiving imagistic experience as embodied experience that involves biological, perceptual, psychological and social aspects, I aim at a broad and complex approach based on Gilbert Simondon’s concepts of image and associated milieu, going beyond the visual, the pictorial and interpretive issues based on discursive language. The image is linked to biological, psychic and collective processes of individuation which conjugate individuals and milieus within techno-aesthetic experience. This experience constitutes the different phases of imagistic process in relation to the milieu: conditions of adaptation to the milieu through motor development as an anticipation of the milieu itself; adaptation to the milieu through the perception of signs, being a cognitive experience in relation to the milieu; systematization of an analogy of the external milieu to the internal milieu with emotional/affective experiences preserved in memory and symbols; and invention of objects collectively propagated in the milieu generating new cultural habits and behaviors.

Therefore, I am interested in investigating other ways of thinking imagistic experience within artistic proposals established between individuals and associated milieus, based on the thought of Gilbert Simondon and the production of Eija-Liisa Ahtila. In this sense, I foreground two aspects for consideration throughout the article on the relation of individual and milieu: first, that the viewer is not merely a passive onlooker but an active participant within imagistic experience given that the individual and his associated milieu co-emerge and coexist in the same relation, creating private and collective imagistic worlds; and second, that the image, as an intermediary reality between individual and milieu, is active in the imagistic experience by presenting aspects of interiority and exteriority not being a merely subjective construction of a single individual.

In this perspective, I raise some questions to guide this writing: How can an investigation into Gilbert Simondon’s processes of individuation broaden notions pertinent to imagistic experience and milieu in Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s artistic propositions? How Simondon’s and Ahtila’s ideas, milieus and imagistic experiences intertwine? Why is a more complex understanding of imagistic experience and milieu in current art relevant? These questions permeate some of the proposals I chose from Ahtila and some of Simondon’s concepts brought here.

**Imagistic experience between viewer and the associated milieu**

Perception and meaning processes related to the human condition are investigated in the audiovisual productions of Eija-Liisa Ahtila. With themes related to human dramas, such as childhood, adolescence, memory, sexuality, family conflicts, confusion of desires, emotions and affections, Ahtila creates non-linear narratives without a specific representative meaning, discussing the thresholds between what I define as fiction and reality.

Eija Liisa Ahtila has chosen a semi-documentary form, telling stories with real characters but bringing surreal twist into the narrative content. Through this shift her works touch a place where time and space are confounded in many ways that speak to her viewers.

The intention of the artist is not to tell a story as a sequential narrative, but to create conditions for a certain imagistic experience to be established so that the viewer becomes an actant in the situations proposed by the audiovisual projections.

Her video installations problematize the relation between viewers and projective milieus by demanding different attitudes relative to images and by rendering audiovisual projection in a given space more complex. They urge us to think about two aspects present in imagistic experience: the viewer plays the role of an observer who participates within the structure and modes of functioning of the activity of projection;
and the multiple milieus that house and constitute the projection are both its producers and are produced by it, thus opening a shared collective space. As Gilbert Simondon exhaustively explains, processes of individuation inseparably combine individuals and milieus, subtended by a pre-individual plane. Consequently, imagistic experience is seen as part of a process of individuation, involving the individual observer, the multiple associated milieus and a pre-individual plane that provides potentialities to be actualized in a given encounter. In this sense, imagistic experience goes beyond purely subjective experience, as it concretizes in the exteriority of the associated milieu and accesses the potential of the pre-individual plane.

Just as the viewer is constituted by projected images and propagated audio, these images and audios are not finished works when exhibited since there is a creation of worlds in each act of projecting. As previously mentioned, the viewer projects his sensory and mental images onto the screens, creating his own world within the artistic proposal. According to Von Uexküll: “The external world is adorned with colors that are nothing more than the sensations that we project. These colors then become for us characteristics of the outside world”—characteristics that we determine as realities outside of us and that constitute the interface of the interior and the exterior.

In Ahtila’s video installations, there are empty spaces in the images and gaps in the audio to give the viewer time to compose imagistic experience, a moment to incorporate visual images and the audio. As Merleau-Ponty writes: “Quality, light, color, depth, which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 164). Yuk Hui, speaking of Merleau-Ponty, writes that “The color red doesn’t exist as merely abstract and homogeneous, as there are different reds, and every red is perceived in juxtaposition to other reds distributed in its milieu and stored in our memory: perception is thus both intersubjective and interobjective” (Yuk 2021p. 134). Ahtila’s installations shelter viewers’ bodies and invite them to engage with other people, trees, houses, cities, animals, through their colors and lights, as well as through narratives and audios that dismiss ready listening and opens to the unexpected. This is Ahtila’s need to build space-times for perceptual encounters.

When I say that the viewer projects their memories onto images, I offer a different explanation of the opening of images to their multiple readings from what Umberto Eco indicates in The Open Work (2015). Here, I am not referring to multiple readings and interpretations but to multiple worlds that coexist simultaneously given that “to each experience a subject corresponds to it who actualizes it and an object with which this experience can be actualized”. In this way, I understand that subject, object and milieu co-emerge in the same processes of individuation, creating unique worlds through biological, psychic and collective aspects. We can only live an experience based on our motor, sensory, and perceptual possibilities. For example, for the sound experience to occur, “before everything else, the sonic sensation is needed. It must already exist in the subject, albeit in latent form, before the experience happens. Only in this way can the experience be made possible.”

In Ahtila’s works, I can say that the projected images result from the relation between the visual and sound images offered by the artist on the screens and the projections regarded in light of the particularities of viewers within imagistic experience.

When I mentioned above that the viewer participates in the act of projecting with their individual physiological and psychic dispositions, and their ways of functioning, I have as basis references that start from tropist stimuli and motor and perceptive structures. “Even before sensorimotor structures, there must be chronological and topological structures, namely the universe of tropisms, tendencies and drives”, that is, tropisms are the basis for our sensations and aesthetic perceptions. According to Simondon, our bodily experiences are ceaselessly polarized into high and low, hot and cold, far and near, dark and light, and so on. Our sensations respond to external physical/chemical stimuli that determine our orientation in the world, or rather in the worlds we create, and their relative sensory coordinates. For example, what is high for one individual may be low for another; what may be a stimulus for one goes unnoticed for another. What Simondon has shown us is that our response as primary orientation precedes sensibility and perception, that is, tropism precedes motricity, motricity precedes sensibility, sensibility precedes perception and perception precedes signification. However, I clarify that there is no physiological determination, since the motor, sensory and perceptive responses are linked to the interests and meanings attributed by the subject. For the milieu to provoke a reaction in the individual, the physical-chemical stimuli of the milieu are not enough, since the individual needs to be able and interested to perceive such stimuli. As such, the milieu is not reduced to an external geographic environment or habitat: there is an inseparable reciprocal relation between the living being and the milieu, and there is no autonomy of the living being in relation to the milieu. The living being organizes its milieu significantly from its point of reference, seeing that there is no universal milieu.
Eija-Liisa Ahtila disjoints our universe of tropisms in the video installation *Horizontal—Vaakasuora* (2011) by showing a portrait of a majestic spruce tree eleven meters high in the horizontal position on six vertical screens (Figure 1). Ahtila creates a milieu for the spectator to get closer to this other being, sharpening a motor, sensory and perceptive experience. The tree moves with the wind and the viewer can hear the sounds of the forest environment: gusts of wind, birds, branches, etc. The projection of this essentially vertical living being, displayed horizontally with all its vital functions active, confronts the viewer’s memories with a certain sensory discomfort. By placing the viewer before the tree, the artist places two different beings side by side thereby producing a perceptual estrangement regarding proportion and direction.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila problematizes the conceived vision of a unitary world and incorporates the dimension that we are inserted in different worlds that dialogue with each other. Through vision we unite with others, since “vision alone makes us learn that beings that are different, “exterior,” foreign to one another, are yet absolutely together, are “simultaneity” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 187). We can say that vision renders explicit the Spinozist idea that a body can only exist in the presence of another body. For Merleau-Ponty, seeing and thinking constitutes the presence that unites body and mind: “There is no vision without thought. But it is not enough to think in order to see. Vision is a conditioned thought; it is born “as occasioned” by what happens in the body; it is “incited” to think by the body. (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 175). Referring to Paul Cezanne, Merleau-Ponty, writes about the embodied imagistic experience of painting:

>in-deed we cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending is body t to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transsubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement. (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 162)

We can say that bodies attract and mix together in Ahtila’s installations. Mixtures are the voluntary and involuntary affects between bodies in associated milieus. Attractions speak of an art that shows us the potential of the milieu and the affects of bodies. The body here referred to includes not only the human body, but any non-human body as well—animal, vegetal, technological, immaterial—formed by the speed or slowness of matter-taking-form. Such bodies embody life through technicities that do not dissociate the natural and the artificial, the analog and the digital, matter and form. The nature of a body formed by a technology—thinking, walking, seeing, typing—is essentially artificial (Oliveira, Palazuelos, and Fonseca 2017).

Thus, by positioning the viewer facing the large tree, Ahtila alludes to perceptual issues in relation to moving images: there is human perception from our senses, perception from image capture devices and perception from image and audio editing devices. She prompts us to question what we see, how we see it, what we would like to see and the manner we see it through the devices that capture visual and sound images. To reduce the optical distortion on the geometry of the spruce tree during filming, she erected a scaffold and used sophisticated lenses on a high-resolution camcorder to capture the details of each part of the tree. She also recorded audio of the different sounds specific to each height. From this
technologically mediated experience, she had an intimate sensory experience with nature; as Simondon (1989) points out, when technology really mediates our relation with nature, the relation becomes closer and more intimate. In projecting the portrait of the spruce tree, she asks us how technological devices can capture what the tree is in the forest, and how each viewer is capacitated to feel the forest and the treeing of the spruce. Ahtila’s proposals make it clear that the audiovisual capture and subsequent projection, become technological aspects enfolded in the viewer’s imagistic experience, as Simondon also points out.

Ahtila does not simply position us in front of the spruce tree, but creates an artificial/natural environment with it that enters us, and through technology brings the tree to us from the forest. We can think of Ahtila’s experience as similar to Cézanne’s as she paints with her camera lets the tree into her, the same way that Cézanne lets the mountain into himself. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “It is the mountain itself which from out there makes itself seen by the painter; it is the mountain that he interrogates with his gaze”. (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 166). This “makes itself seen” of the mountain in Cézanne and the tree in Ahtila arises a moment before language, before the objectification of being, and refuses to be a mere representation of that which is invoked by the direct sensory relation with the body. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that we need to return to perception, to ways of feeling the world. Returning to perception is to go beyond the representation of the image and to understand it as a system of exchanges, in which the world is around us and not before us. The body embodies the world and the world embodies our body.

Ahtila questions us as to what we do when we are faced with another living creature that differs from us, whether it is a majestic tree or human beings from different cultures. According to the artist, we just need to stand next to them and give them existence by just being there, nearby, projecting our cultural context, our history, language and diverse milieu of expression. We stand to the side, unable to prehend everything that is there, seeing how we live in different worlds simultaneously.

We live in worlds, in milieus that associate individuals so that “it is through the intermediary of this associated milieu that the being is connected back to what is larger than it and to what is smaller than it”. Such a proposition not only withdraws the human from the center of the world, but also shows the impossibility of conceiving that different beings live in the same world. Uexküll’s example of the tick, mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari as well as Hui, helps us to understand the idea of milieu: “The tick does not live in the word of plant, wind, mammal, and so on; rather, it lives in the world as world. This world as a world is an unthematized environment, which is to say, there is no representation of things but the things themselves.”

We inhabit specific behavioural milieu (umwelt), since each being constructs and constitutes itself within its milieu, such as the multworlds of trees, ants, frogs, amoebas, fish, bacteria, humans, machines, etc. In terms of the complexity of the behavioural milieu, I observe that each species inhabits its own world, where they inhabit the particular worlds of each being, as well as how in each being other worlds particular to other beings inhabit.

Uexküll demonstrates that each species has its own surrounding world, that each animal actively builds its associated milieu from specific perception regimes, that each living being inhabits according to its own sphere of space-time and is related to a limited number of signals.

According to Uexküll, umwelt is the surrounding environment governed by reciprocal causalities and directed by a certain conformity to the plan that governs all beings. Even though species and beings establish particular worlds—“thousands of surrounding worlds of men and beasts”—there is a higher law which Uexküll mentions as conformity to the plan. Like the example the author offers of the wasp and the flower: it is not the active wasp that extracts something from the passive flower, but the active flower that seduces the active wasp, both conforming to each other. Thus, “milieux are unique and differential, but also interconnected”. For Simondon, the individual and the milieu coexist in the same process, the milieu being unique and particular for each individual, becoming differential in each experience; Ahtila makes this differential explicit for us and simultaneously proposes moments of interconnection between the different milieux, as well as the construction of a common milieu.

Ahtila brings to the projections the moment when she was seduced by the monumentality of the spruce tree, leaving that moment of seduction open on a continuum for the viewers. As she puts it, her projections create in viewers a feeling that they are surrounded by things, yet they cannot feel them all. In this game of seeing, feeling and acting, Ahtila’s images and audio surround us and make us feel like we belong to that situation. When looking, I include myself in the world. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me. Light is viewed once more as action at a distance” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 178). The world of the spruce tree on the screens and each viewer facing the projection complements each other in the imagistic experience.
Something from the spruce tree resonates with something in the viewer and takes hold of him/her from within and binds them to the tree, somehow altering the viewer’s own perception. Such resonance does not happen by chance, there is a sense of complementarity in each experience.

Each animal, each living or non-living being builds its world, its umwelt as a surrounding environment given by the subject. For Yuk Hui, “The Umwelt is what lies in between the environment and context, in which the subjectivity of the living animal interprets the significance of the Umgebung (the objective space) to produce its world.” In considering that we share worlds (umwelt) with viruses, bacteria, minerals, plants, animals, etc., Jakob von Uexküll sees biology as something intuitive and attributes a holistic and systemic approach to reality.

The concept of umwelt has been referenced by various French philosophers, such as Georges Canguilhem, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze. Through Simondon, I relate the concept of umwelt to that of associated milieus. For Simondon, the milieu needs to be understood not only as a geographical milieu, but as one that houses the experience of living and non-living beings, including the technological milieu as well. This mutually causal conditioning between technological and geographic milieus is what Gilbert Simondon designates as an associated milieu. The descriptive term “associated”, applied to express the interdependence of both milieus, refers to elements, individuals and assemblages interconnected by participation in a process of individuation, through permanent exchanges of information, energy and matter. To think the milieu is to think the constitution of the individual itself, its ways of functioning, its operations and established connections. Thus, the milieu is active and defines itself as a source of energy, perceptions and actions.

Gilbert Simondon conceives individuals and milieus as two distinct phases of a process of individuation that defines being. He states that being is not substantialized, but rather is the temporary result of a metastable system that comprises matter, form and energy. “Simondon demonstrates, in effect, that the individual, whether it concerns a subject or a being of any kind, is never given substantially, but is produced through a process of individuation.” The study of individuation refers to the ontogenesis of systems containing energetic potentials, where substance does not belong to the individual but arises from the relations within a temporary and metastable system. In this sense, imagistic experiences are processes that involve different elements, individuals and assemblages in multiple associated milieus, in that they occur in systems of relation between non-substantialized individuals (artist, projections, viewers, devices, etc.).

As such, I refer to Ahtila’s video installations as phases of a process of individuation and not as finished artworks object. According to Simondon, “We must start with individuation, with the being grasped in its center according to spatiality and becoming, and not with a substantialized individual facing a world that is foreign to it.” By creating a projective space amidst the installed canvases, Ahtila allows viewers to open up to other phases of their own processes of individuation, coming to being themselves with other elements and significations present in the production as a shift whole. When moving through the installation, the viewer perceives something happening, something that crosses and individuates him, something beyond his direct experience. The various screens of

Figure 2. Eija-Liisa Ahtila, The Hour of Prayer, 2005. Video installation.
Source: “Eija-Liisa Ahtila at Marian Goodman” by hoggardb. Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.
the installation encourage one to shift one’s gaze and walk through different milieus and by “Being transfixed by the experience, the viewer no longer has a unique and privileged point of view”.

By creating various milieus in her projections, Ahtila challenges the viewer to go beyond the unique viewpoint, subjectivities and worlds that have been substantiated over time. In the video installation *The Hour of Prayer* (2005), the viewer is provoked to reconstruct worlds when faced with a discontinuous visual narrative about the death of a dog and the owner’s subsequent grief: pain, attachment, loss, anxiety, panic (*Figure 2*). There is a voice-over narration relating the correct chronological order of the events which is out of sync with the moving images, thereby diminishing the importance of the sequential story and foregrounding the discontinuity of the visuals. Shot on location in three countries (USA, Finland and Benin), a chronological history is presented in a setup of four contiguous screens that alters the spatiotemporal perception of the facts.

On the one hand, the video installation maintains coherence of the passage of time over eleven months through the voice-over narrative as oral history; on the other hand, it introduces discontinuity by offering visual elements that are not in sync with the narration. The video images fragment the narrative in such a way that the viewer realizes that there is a constellated discursive continuity being created as the visuals jump from one interrupted image to another. As in a dream, scenes appear and vanish according to reticulated temporal associations. A Manhattan winter scene, a frozen lake, a veterinarian’s office, the sounds of church bells, etc., follow each other without any obvious linear logic, ending with a woman humming a prayer (*Figure 3*). According to Mieke Bal, “Standing between Elisa’s images, we are caught in this history of the present. Here lies the relevance of the mix of past and present tense, of simultaneity and of the present’s failure to shed light on the past.” As the visuals unfold, the canvases juxtapose moments of events happening in the present, with others that may have already happened or that may happen in the coming to being of the event, thus building an experience of life, loss and death.

In the discontinuities between the visual and sound images, time is a central element in Ahtila’s work, confronting us with how relations and situations become and change over time, how we construct the temporality of experience beyond a chronological timeline, how rhythms arise within our bodies from her artistic proposals.

Temporal experience has a marked subjective character, like the rest of experiences, since, for the sensation of external time, there is no organ that is rhythmically excited by external stimuli. Rather, rhythm is created by the internal organ that frames the body’s stimuli.

There is no first moment, no last moment, just temporal concatenation and leaps from one moment to another. She creates new temporal experience once “we transform the sensations of the moment into properties of the external world”. We attribute our temporal sensations to a reality we determine to be external.

In terms of space, the artist is concerned with crucial elements of the milieu of projection, such as: size and shape of the location, luminosity, light or dark contrasts, color palette, quantity, size and location of screens, presentation formats (Film, DVD, HD) and sound-design. With multiple screens, the viewer can select which screen to look at and for how

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*Figure 3. Eija-Liisa Ahtila, The Hour of Prayer, 2004. Video installation. Source: "The Hour of Prayer" by topgold is licensed under CC BY 2.0*
long, thereby becoming the director and editor of the film they end up creating⁴¹: “This means that the viewer has to choose”.⁴² Ahtila mentions that she proposes installations in which there are screens around the viewer so the projections cannot all be taken in at the same time and the spatial separation between the screens become part of the narratives, in the time of the projections. There are no explicit directions to the viewers as to where to direct their gaze, no specific place for viewers to position themselves, or move, or sit. The installation repudiates a certain type of point of view, or a certain hierarchy of knowledge, or even a certain truthfulness to the story, all the while emphasizing the need for viewers to exercise subjective choice⁴³ in the moment of immersiveness. As Ahtila puts it: “Making films and installations became a matter of identifying the links between images, sounds, rhythms, light, characters, and words, and using them to approach and construct the story”.⁴⁴

In the same direction, Kate Mondloch points out the importance of examining “[…] the modes of spectatorship proposed in artworks that have incorporated viewer-screen interfaces over the past forty years”.⁴⁵ Principally turning her analysis to the works of Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Doug Aitken, Peter Campus, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman and Michel Snow, Mondloch urges us to think “[…] what kind of spectatorship these works propose in their specific cultural, individual, and artistic contexts rather than to argue that a single model unfailingly ‘works’”.⁴⁶ Proposals in video installations have amplified certain aspects of the image by providing particularities in the space-time experiences of the viewers, thereby heightening the very act of projection and, consequently, the imagistic experience. Theories of the image and spectatorship already point to peculiarities of the gaze, asking us “how they (spectatorship) understand the setting and their experiences”,⁴⁷ they apprehend the situation in which they are bodily immersed.

The installation site is taken as the milieu that allows cohesion, aggregation, where things can be conditioned in order to form the relational concreteness of the milieu. “The medium allows for a reciprocal recursive relational causality between the elements, so that we can conceive of space-time as an immanent plane from which the subject and object emerge as activities, as operational coherence”.⁴⁸ Consequently, there are associations between multiple milieus: the milieus we produce, the milieus that produce us, the milieus that we carry in our bodies, the technological milieus of the devices, etc. The milieus constitute, sustain, unite and communicate collective bodies.

**Imagistic experience between exteriorities and interiorities**

In galleries’ black boxes, Ahtila creates characters that move through various locations, in fragmented sites that play with our spatiotemporal perceptions on different canvases of diverse proportions (sometimes larger, sometimes smaller): interior and exterior, near and far, recent and bygone. In her artistic proposal, “It’s not space plus time, but space-time. An emerging event that manifests its own space-time where participants become associated to an experiential milieu that involves them”.⁴⁹ For instance, in the *House* (2002), Ahtila again proposes games which play with spatial and temporal continuity and discontinuity, making the viewer imbricate herself/himself in such games (Figure 4). Understanding that the inside and the outside are only variations of perception, the artist intensifies these variations by presenting stories of a woman who listens to inner and outer

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43. Proposals in video installations have amplified certain aspects of the image by providing particularities in the space-time experiences of the viewers, thereby heightening the very act of projection and, consequently, the imagistic experience. Theories of the image and spectatorship already point to peculiarities of the gaze, asking us “how they (spectatorship) understand the setting and their experiences”, they apprehend the situation in which they are bodily immersed.

44. The installation site is taken as the milieu that allows cohesion, aggregation, where things can be conditioned in order to form the relational concreteness of the milieu. “The medium allows for a reciprocal recursive relational causality between the elements, so that we can conceive of space-time as an immanent plane from which the subject and object emerge as activities, as operational coherence”. Consequently, there are associations between multiple milieus: the milieus we produce, the milieus that produce us, the milieus that we carry in our bodies, the technological milieus of the devices, etc. The milieus constitute, sustain, unite and communicate collective bodies.

45. In galleries’ black boxes, Ahtila creates characters that move through various locations, in fragmented sites that play with our spatiotemporal perceptions on different canvases of diverse proportions (sometimes larger, sometimes smaller): interior and exterior, near and far, recent and bygone. In her artistic proposal, “It’s not space plus time, but space-time. An emerging event that manifests its own space-time where participants become associated to an experiential milieu that involves them.” For instance, in the *House* (2002), Ahtila again proposes games which play with spatial and temporal continuity and discontinuity, making the viewer imbricate herself/himself in such games (Figure 4). Understanding that the inside and the outside are only variations of perception, the artist intensifies these variations by presenting stories of a woman who listens to inner and outer

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**Figure 4.** Eija-Liisa Ahtila, *The House*, 2002. Video installation.

*Source: “CA2M 2012—EXPOSICIÓN CONTARLO TODO SIN SABER CÓMO” by CA2M is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0*
voices. This narrative is based on conversations that the artist had in the past with women suffering from psychosis. By mixing fiction and reality once again, it aims to deconstruct the coherence and substantiality of reality, the sense of continuous spatial experience and sequential, linear chronological time.

In the coming and going of a woman to and from her house, the viewer, while moving through a different world/house, deconstructs his own world/house in a game of interiority and exteriority. The artist fabulates stories from the imagination of this subject-house, as if our own unconscious floated through its doors and windows, without any boundaries between reality and fiction. The imagination opens the reality to reality. The house becomes the most intimate and challenging place to be—objects are no longer mere utensils and begin to make the spirit speak. In this intimacy, Ahtila’s house meets Bachelard’s house:

The intimacy of the room becomes our intimacy. And correlatively, intimate space has become so quiet, so simple, that all the quietude of the room is localized and centralized in it. The room is very deeply our room, it is in us. We no longer see it. It no longer limits us, because we are in the very ultimate depth of its repose, in the repose that it has conferred upon us. And all our former rooms come and fit into this one. How simple everything is! (Bachelard 2014, 181)

We embody the house and the house embodies us. A house cannot be a simple aggregation of utilitarian objects, rather it is an assemblage of various bodies in relation through their associated milieus.

How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one’s entire life. (Bachelard 2014, 180)

We become subjects by objectifying objects, we imbue agency to objects that address our perceptions, thoughts and emotions. For example, when sewing a curtain for the living room, the woman finds herself in space-times that alternate between misperceptions and lapses of memory: a dark space to be in or a moment to float among the trees outside the house. The house, the artist, the surrounding landscape, the objects, the wind, the animals all compose the imagistic experience as fragments. Everything becomes fragmented, leading us to realize once again that there are no coherent wholes even though we refer to them as a single house, a story, a subject, an object. There are small fragmented narrative units that provide information that transit between the screens, between the inside and the outside:

A cow that appears on her television ambles through the room. At one point, she finds herself levitating and tries to grasp a pillar to bring herself down to earth. In general, Ahtila’s discontinuous narrative style allows her to find formal equivalencies in experiences ranging from losing a coherent sense of space and time to a breakdown of perceptive logic (Documenta and Klemens Gasser and Tanja Grunet Inc., New York City). 50

Ahtila proposes to break with the false linear narratives of rationalism and reminds us that we function mentally with emotions that constantly jostle us side to side—we jump from one discontinuous thought to another, not only when we are in dream states, but also in our waking states and in objective consciousness. So much so that we are often surprised by thoughts that pop into our minds without apparent direct causal relationships. Thus, she renders explicit the rationalistic fallacy of an ego whose raison d’être is to control thoughts, emotions and imaginations. By diverting the viewer’s apprehensions, Ahtila releases the imagination for other affective/emotional flows of memory and frees the senses for other sensory experiences. “Every personal, individual memory, touches— or is indexically bound to—memories of others”. 51

In this way, Ahtila brings together imagination and invention as processual practices within her artistic proposals. According to Simondon, 52 there is no separation between the imagination-image (symbolic, mental, oneiric, emotive …) and the invention-image (languages, practices, objects …). Images, in their dimensions of imagination and invention, have a certain autonomy, will and movement and which by virtue of being quasi-organisms formed in the subject, have the power to intervene in the conduct of life. There is an affective power to images produced in the imagination to be later shared collectively. Exteriority constitutes interiority, making it impossible to think of psychic individuation without the collective, and vice versa, since both belong to a transindividual process. As Yuk Hui explains, “this transindividuality is constituted by the two poles of interiority and exteriority, which consist of a recursive movement: the interiorization of the exterior and the exteriorization of the interior.” 53 In the relation between objective and subjective, between exteriority and interiority, the image has a regulatory function, since not only subjects produce images, but images also produce individual and collective subjects.

Upon entering Ahtila’s house, the viewer explores the nuances of the sense of being inside and outside, of being in the passage and on the threshold, attributing its own qualities and values to the space around it. According to Bachelard: “Space is nothing but a ‘horrible outside-inside’” (Bachelard 2014, 177). For him, the inside and the outside constitute a spiral in constant movement, in which we cannot
exclude any of the terms, they are always inverting themselves, not opposing themselves. For Merleau-Ponty, “They are the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside, which the duplicity of feeling [le sentir] makes possible and without which we would never understand the quasi presence and immanent visibility which make up the whole problem of the imaginary”. (MERLEAU-PONTY, 2014, p. 164).

For Simondon, the image is the encounter of the inside and outside, as the interface of the internal and external. However, it does not refer to consciousness, since the imagination does not emerge as the great unrealizable function of consciousness, as proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) in thinking the imagistic and symbolic function of the image, its conscience imageante; or, as for Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), that perception and imagination are antagonistic in an imaginative consciousness, imagination being the absence of the object and perception its presence. The image is not synonymous with conscious representation—such equivalence does not account for everything that takes place in immediate reality. “[…] Images arise within the living being prior to and independently of consciousness, intentionality and perception”. As in Simondon’s examples, mushrooms do not always appear on the surface, nor do they cease to exist nor lose their importance. Simondon locates the production of images before consciousness is formed by placing such production in the central nervous system of organisms at a preconscious biological level.

In this sense, I question the approach to the image as being only psychic interiority referring to imagination and subjectivity or as a collective external artefact that refers to invention and objectivity. Gilbert Simondon’s Theory of Image detaches the meaning attributed to the image from the consciousness of the subject that produces it, by attributing a primitive exteriority to the image. There is a synergistic compatibility (cooperation to reach a goal) in the production of images, which begins with the being’s capacity to engage the signs perceived in the milieu and ends with the generation of symbolic and inventive objects. Simondon emphasizes that until the nineteenth century there were objective explanations of the externality of the image; subjective description only arises later, since there was already meaning and power in the images. Thus, containing aspects of interiority and exteriority, the image appears in the interaction between the human and world. On the one hand, images inhabit us and we create our worlds with them; on the other, images as quasi-organisms have their own life and meaning. There is a recursive causality between the image’s interiority and exteriority.

Therefore, imagination is not just a mental faculty in which images are presented as the constructions of a subject. The image has a force in itself which is, for Simondon, beyond discourse and dialectics. He mentions book VI of The Odyssey, in which Odysseus is compelled to act as a result of the dream he has of Athena: the dream is not a subjective event, “it manifests a power, an intention, a reality that does not have its origin in the subject, but which, on the contrary, comes towards him and seeks him”. The dream, like a phantasm, “translates and concretizes this aspect of relative externality of the image” since it presents itself to the subject, and superimposes itself on the world. Religious apparitions, involuntary visions, statues, evocation rites, present such power to access experiences that are beyond our usual condition. The author regrets that “the current disqualification of the elderly is correlated with the weakening of the prophetic ways of collective thought and the official and public use of divination, replaced by a plurality of practical prospects”. Nevertheless, we currently discern attempts at cultural rescue to preserve the respect for the elderly and for the power of dreams and divination in indigenous and quilombola communities, or in practices that resort to notions of empathy and resilience, demonstrating attempts to open up to the externality of images.

When I state that imagistic experience results from the construction of particular worlds, I do not assign them to subjects with isolated worlds. In agreement with Simondon, I consider the image to be an action where the action unifies the perception and produces meaning that can be shared in the collective, given that “The collective is not merely the reciprocity of actions: within it, each action is signification, insofar as each action resolves the problem of separate individuals and is constituted as a symbol of other actions”. The actions shared by Ahtila, through the devices that capture technical images and audio, through the projection devices, through the actions of viewers circulating throughout the exhibition space, together create a collective dimension to her proposals. “It could be said that a second birth in which the individual participates is that of the collective, which incorporates the individual itself and constitutes the amplification of the schema it bears”. Viewers can attribute meanings when circulating among Ahtila’s projections because they are not substantialized individuals enclosed in their interiorities and neither are the video installations self-contained external realities to be discovered. “There is no difference between discovering a signification and existing collectively with the being relative to which the signification is discovered, since signification is not of the being but between beings, or rather across beings: it is transindividual”. Signification occurs in the movements between interiority and exteriority, which permeate the biological, the psychic and the collective in a transindividual movement.
The viewer is a collective subject because the subject is the individual who has the notion of the collective, who individuates with the collective through its actions and emotions, since “action and emotion arise when the collective individuates”. To be more than the individual means that the individual does not constitute a totality in itself, for there is no idealization of a total, perfect and unique being, separate from the Other: “The subject can only coincide with itself in the individuation of the collective”. Thus, by not being self-contained totalities in ourselves, we belong to a greater whole, to the collective. As Simondon posits, “the individual is not self-enclosed, and there is no destiny contained in it, for what it resolves is simultaneously the world and itself, the system of the world and itself”. In this sense, internal and external reality needs to be diametrically symmetrical and simultaneous: the more I can perceive externally, the more I can signify within and vice versa.

In the search for a rupture from normality and identitary world unity, the woman who inhabits The House transits through interiorities and exteriorities of herself and the world, courses through her psyche and the collective. “A young woman describes her house in the woods, and demonstrates the sliding shift from normality to psychosis when her house seems to melt down and the world enters her head.” Without intending to define normality or psychosis, Ahtila proposes experiences of moving between worlds, of a going beyond psychosis. In The House, it is not about proving any reality, “As the work itself offers clear indications that it is not realistic, such a reading will not only be false rhetorically; it will also fail to do justice to the inextricable bond between the work and reality”. Between a play of screens, the woman says: “I know people. One at a time, they enter me and fill all the space. Some for a moment. Others remain”—ideas which find themselves resonating with the viewer: who inhabits us? Who do we allow to inhabit us? Who stays and who leaves within us? The sound design offers multiple worlds such as birds singing and dogs barking which do not coincide with the images shown, but unite the reality inside and outside the house in the sound images of the video installations—a sentiment echoed in the phrase repeated by the woman in the video installation: “I am where the sounds are”. As Lovejoy writes,

Following the same approach, Bal mentions that “In The House, the two side wings are at a dull angle from the middle screen, directly invoking the altar piece of old, as well as inviting the viewer inside a space that comes into being only if the viewer yields to this call, so that the sound can become a fourth wall”. In addition to the sound being seen as the fourth wall, Ahtila creates a spatiotemporal interplay with images in the relations of interiority and exteriority, in the relations and limits between the self and the other. She affirms that “Using different voices, male and female, with one actor on screen, was a way of questioning the boundaries between self and other”.

The imagistic experience emerges from relations that integrate viewers, screens, projections, sounds, oral and visual narratives, etc., that is, an integration of that which is in place in the present moment. Integrated to the collective, the viewer ceases to be a complete unit and enters into a psychic and collective experience. “The psyche is neither pure interiority nor pure exteriority, but an ongoing differentiation and integration [...]” The individuated viewer differs from the other and, at the same time, is integrated into processes of collective individuation within the pre-individual.

In her latest video installation, Potentiality for Love (2018), Ahtila returns to issues of collective integration, of the individual and the milieu, of the moving through different milieus, through human and non-human worlds. From different angles, the artist looks into the human emotions of empathy, love and alterity, aiming to break with hierarchical models that rank living beings and are marked by anthropocentric centeredness. The video installation combines sculpture and projection into three distinct constituents: the first one, Memory of Mother, an angular video sculpture of 22 DIP LED modules, features a woman floating in the Milky Way, drawing close and distancing herself from the viewer in order to explore the emergence of love in the mother figure: the collective space gains a galactic dimension that embraces viewers and their contemplations. In the second part, Research tables one and two, two tablets and a mirror monitor show the arm of a primate—by visually substituting the viewer’s arm with a primate’s, she questions the exclusivity (or not) of love for beings of our species, as well as our capacity to empathize with non-humans. By mixing bodies, it compels us to look at the different other that constitutes us, the collective that inhabits us and to which we belong, the emotions that bring us closer and distance us. The third part, On the Threshold—The Chimpanzee’s Space is a vertical projection where a female chimpanzee sits on a stool with her back to the audience, indifferently turned away from the observer to face her world. However, after a while, she turns around and looks intently at the viewer,
making her/him confront her/his animality. According to Ahtila, the idea is to activate lost, arcaic memories and how our potential for love in the face of pain can lead us to political and social questions in the present:

The intention is to raise a question of who we are and how we have learned to be what we are. In addition, it also tackles who we are as humans, and how we have historically defined ourselves through others. The piece will question how the other already exists in us and how the process of identification involves others.28

Transcending his early phenomenological training, Simondon goes beyond the understanding of phenomen- ena, spurred by what happens in the phenomenon’s materialization—its genesis—as a process of individuation that encompasses the pre-individual, insofar that the individual is contained within collective psychosocial existence. Even if we belong to the pre-individual, we do not always adequately effectuate our ability to connect to it and to the collective, being restricted by the affirmation of an ego identity and a collective limited to it. To go beyond the closed or self-contained individual and open up to the collective implies activating the potential of the pre-individual, participating in the multiplicity of associated milieus, and being receptive to the contagion of emotions and psychosocial affections.

Within the images of Eija-Liisa Ahtila and Gilbert Simondon

Thus, to speak of a certain notion of imagistic experience today, I invoke the concept of the associated milieu in order to complicate relations between viewer, technology, place, body, sensations, memories, emotions, and affections present relationally in an exhibition space. Neither the individual/viewer nor the artistic proposals can be seen as independent or dissociated from the environment within which they relate, individuals always appear conjunctively with and within their associated milieu. For Simondon: “The individual is the reality of a constituting relation, not the interiority of a constituted term” (Simondon 2020, 50). It is not substance, nor identitary unity relative to itself as a personal individuality, but rather a complex system of relation through which imagistic experiences take place. From the Simondonian perspective of a processual approach to imagistic experience in a milieu that combines the natural and the artificial, the internal and external, the subjective and the collective, the image presents itself as a temporary and intermediary reality between subject and world that permeates biological, psychic and collective aspects.

Throughout this paper, I have been considering Ahtila’s artistic proposals not as works isolated from the viewer, but as space-times that house various individuations and open the possibility for the emergence of new individuated subjects. As provocations, her proposals bring out other movements within the space, other rhythms to the body, other meanings to narratives, and other modes of individuation, since “Individuation is defined neither by its unity, nor by its identity, but by a cutting operation that detaches, in the mobile universe of forces, a provisional relation of variable speeds and affects”.79 In these encounters of open processes of imagination and invention individuated subjects act: sometimes the artist’s imagination is concretized in her inventive video installations, sometimes the inventions furnish other imaginations for the artist or the viewers.

Conjugating viewer and artistic invention, the viewer appears in imagistic experience when moving through biological tropisms, through perceptions of a sensory and knowable reality, not being separated from it, through visual and sound memories that cross the space-time of the video installations. I can say that, on the one hand, there is a correlation between the viewer and the world, that is, the observer builds his world as a subject that belongs to a certain species. On the other hand, existence is not limited to constructed worlds, since the pre- individual contains non-knowable realities, but also dictates the intensity of the information in a given experience. “The subject perceives to increase not the quantity of information signals nor the quality of information, but the intensity of information, i.e. the information potential of a situation”.80 In this sense, Ahtila creates conditions in which the potential of the pre-individual plane can be effectuated based on the information provided in each work, involving biotechnological and psycho-collective experiences.

In exploring the surfaces of projection, thoughts, emotions, habits and behavior are collectively shared through the various screens of the video installations. There are exchanges of glances and gestures between those who observe and those who act, and altered perceptions and behaviors which lead us to think about the “nature of the viewer on the screen”,81 seeing that projection, sculpture and architecture alter the viewer’s habits of traversing the space-time of installations.82 For Mondloch (2010), we need to consider the complexity of relations between the body and technological aspects in the installation processes of media productions as opportunities for viewers to undo conventional modes of relation. “[...] By asking us to ‘think through’ our thinking through media screens, these works of art immeasurably enrich our arena of contemporary cultural activity arbitrated by screens, both inside the art gallery and beyond.”83 The artistic proposals inherent video installation bring forth aspects of plurality and heterogeneity in their constitutions, interconnecting image and viewer in the same space. As Mieke Bal posits, between moving images and space, there is
a political potential aimed at difference, problematizing both the audiovisual artistic proposals and the observers.84

By proposing other imagistic experiences that go through other modes of perception, other embodied experiences, other accesses to memories, other sensibilities that lead us to the other, Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s artistic proposals also make us reflect on the political power of sensibility. Such displacements of sensibility are sustained under a dynamic ground of forms during processes of invention, since images within the associated milieu take form from the ground, since “ground is the mental milieu associated with the forms”.85 Simondon posits that in analyzing the inventive imagination, we need to consider the dynamic ground in which such schemes and operations participate in addition to the schemes of forms and operations. For Simondon, there is no supremacy of forms over the ground in a process of invention, as it is the ground that sustains the forms.

The ground, while perpetually marginal with respect to attention, is what harbors the dynamisms; it is that through which the system of forms exists; forms do not participate in forms, but in the ground, which is the system of all forms or rather the common reservoir of the forms’ [sic] tendencies, well before they exist separately and constitute themselves as an explicit system.86

For Simondon, form and ground participate in a dynamic in which the virtual acts on the actual, and invention results from virtual and actual systems.87 Jean-Luc Nancy,88 in referring to the image, points out that the image is everything that can be distinguished from the ground: the image is the intensity of an experience that brings forces that inhabit the experience itself rather than a representation elaborated and conceived by an individual human consciousness. For Nancy, the lines of an image are its intimate force and not its representation—the image is its own intimate force: “the image activates it (intimate force), builds it and extracts it via its retention, and it is with this force that the image touches us.”89 So that in art, the image is a complex experience crossed by intensive forces that belong to the pre-individual.

In this sense, Yuk Hui affirms the importance of turning to the dimension of sensibility. He points to the need for the Education of Sensibility in order to expand our experiences beyond the references of rationality. For Hui, there is a reciprocity between figure and ground in artistic practices that is based on intuitive thinking, beyond what we can rationally know since “art starts with groundless ground and defends its openness and immeasurability”.90 There is a return to the ground from the sensitive dislocations generated by art, i.e. “art attempts to make the ground sensible”.91 It can be said that the ground is not confused with the form, it cannot be replaced by it—as Hui writes, “the ground is not self-evident and refuses to be exposed as such”.92 There is no negation of form or rationality, but an indication to a movement of intuitive thought that extrapolates from form and rationality, in the sense of a “non-rational, which has to be distinguished from both the irrational and the rational”.93 Hui speaks to us of practices that belong to the field of art that do not reaffirm the phenomenal world of forms, but that access the ground that exists in all forms, and, in this sense, our own ground, our own potentials.

Thus, Ahtila, when working with the dimension of sensibility, by proposing a non-rational imagistic experience with her moving images and audios, she introduces cracks in the forms instead of affirming them—she allows the ground to emerge. She installs screens in the space for open narratives to be constructed by the viewers, installs moving images with information that are perceived in different degrees at each moment. In a world of open flows, people come and go through Ahtila’s video installations and worlds: in Mieke Bal’s words, “what enters into Elisa’s being is the world of others: refugees, people who come, some to stay, some to move on”.94 Ahtila provokes us to think which according to Hui, “In terms of thinking, individuation doesn’t imply personal individuality or any authenticity of an individual person—on the contrary, thinking is always at risk of becoming the other” (Yuk 2021, 24).

In Horizontal—Vaakasuora (2011), she captures the majestic spruce tree not as a landscape, but as a portrait, giving existence to a being from another realm who communicates in the exhibition space. It creates the conditions for the viewer to be beside this other being, in a moment of silence and recollection. The video installation becomes the associated milieu that brings together the spruce tree, the technological individuals and the viewer to an imagistic moment of invention. When narrating the story of loss and pain in The Hour of Prayer (2005), Ahtila contrasts the linearity of the passage of time and imagistic discontinuities in different situations and places. She makes the viewer open herself/himself to a sense of centerlessness through a different spacial-temporal experience and to the images’ lines of forces.

In The House (2002), she offers several perspectives on an everyday situation—playing with the inside and outside of thoughts through the intersection of sounds, images and memories of a place. Through the woman’s voice-over, Ahtila articulates the interiority and exteriority dynamics of the image where the non-rational dimension of the images dwells. In Potentiality for Love (2018), a woman, suspended in galactic space, opens her arms to envelop viewers in a loving motherly embrace; at another moment, the artist proposes that the viewer place herself/himself in the body of another being, seeing herself/himself with the arm of a chimpanzee as a feeling of empathy with the other. When placing another being with its back to the viewer, a female
chimpanzee who looks at her/him, causes a certain estrangement in relation to the other. The artist seeks to uncover the human, since the more centered it is, the more separated from others (beings, species and kingdoms) it is; she compels us to ask what we are, and why we should wish to be something different. Therefore, Ahtila’s image is not “a representation of consciousness or a psychological given internal to the brain” that is restricted to the optical perception of objects, but is directly linked to the different levels of relation between the individual, the milieu and the pre-individual, in the construction of experience itself through a process of individuation.

Between processes of imagination and invention, Gilbert Simondon deconstructs the outside and the inside of the image as separate moments. Imagination concerns a mental activity with functions that employ the images themselves. However, it is not only linked to mental images, it is also present in the search for meaning in image-objects—as in artistic practices. From “[…] a theory of imagination as a genetic development of psychic activity from the vital”, the image is thus understood as a temporary reality, within an evolving biological and technological multiplicity, materialized as techno-aesthetic objects/practices. The object-image, as an invented reality, is not assigned to the subject immersed in its interiority (fantasy, inspiration, genius), but to the result of a network of psychic and social actualizations that are contemporary with each other, contemporary with the culture. It is noticed that “the image is a resultant, but it is also a germ: it can become a site of accretion for concepts and doctrines”. Imagination and invention are contiguous moments, phases of a process of image genesis in living and non-living organisms.

Finally, based on the images that Gilbert Simondon reveals to us and that Eija-Liisa Ahtila introduces us to, I propose in this article to problematize the imaginative experience as a process of individuation in which viewer, milieu and image co-emerge at the same moment. Gilbert Simondon, with an ontological approach and a genetic method, offers us the elements to think how imagistic experiences are constituted. Eija-Liisa Ahtila, with her techno-aesthetic proposals, explores continuities/discontinuities through visual and sound narratives on multiple canvases, by providing us with unusual surrounding environments (umwelt). Both philosopher and artist prompt us to question the how and why of living and relating collectively, to delve into the ways we see, perceive, feel and assign meanings to the techno-aesthetic artefacts and practices we produce and the associated milieus in which we find ourselves. Ultimately, they urge us to think in ways of living that interact with subjects and their milieus, their biological and psycho-social dimensions, in order to glimpse other modes of sensibility within being being-together, other possibilities for us to move through different worlds.

Notes

1. Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989) was a student of Georges Canguilhem and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and a scholar in philosophy, technology, psychology, ethnology and cybernetics. His main works deal with processes of individuation and perception, concepts such as image, information, technology and aesthetics. In his Theory of the Image, he conceives the image not only as mental representations, but as actions that are produced via technological operations that combine different associated milieus. Today, Gilbert Simondon is considered a theorist of great relevance for studies of digital media and aesthetic in several areas.

2. Eija-Liisa Ahtila (1959-) is an internationally recognized visual artist who works with video art and cinema, received the following awards: Artes Mundi Prize in Cardiff, the Grand Prix of Fiction in Portugal; the Coutts Prize in Zurich; the Vincent Prize in Maastricht; Nordisk Panorama; Venice Biennale. Her work has been exhibited in major museums in Europe and North America, and presented in film festivals and art biennials.

3. Its working operationality as opposed to the discharge of its purpose.

4. MONDLOCH, Kate. Screens: viewing media installation art. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 62.

5. KANG, Yiyun. Casting: Investigation of Projection Mapping’s Spatiality in a Continuum of Projected Moving-Image Art. In: MENOTTI, Gabriel; CRISP, Virginia (Org.). Practices of Projection: histories and technologies. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 198.

6. BAL, Mieke. Thinking in Film: the politics of video art installation according to Eija-Liisa Ahtila. London/New Delhi/NewYork/Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013.

7. Idem.

8. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Imagination et Invention (1965–1966). Chatou: La Transparence, 2008, p. 12, our translation.

9. LOVEJOY, Margot. Digital Currents: art in the electronic age. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 304.

10. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

11. UEXKÜLL, Jakob Von. Cartas biológicas a una dama. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Cactus, 2014, p. 52, our translation. “El mundo exterior se adorna con colores que no son otra cosa más que sensaciones proyectadas por nosotros. Estos colores, luego, se convierten para nosotros en características del mundo exterior” (Uexküll 2014, 52)

12. ECO, Umberto. The Open Work. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

13. UEXKÜLL, Jakob Von. Cartas biológicas a una dama. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Cactus, 2014, p. 40, our translation. “A cada experiencia le corresponde un sujeto que la realice y un objeto con el que esta experiencia sea realizada”.

14. Idem. p. 43. “[…] se requiere, ante todo, la sensación sonora. Esta debe existir ya en el sujeto, incluso de forma latente, antes de que la experiencia ocurra. Sólo así posibilita la experiencia”.


15. From tropism in biology, referring to the diverse responsive movements of growth direction that occur in living organisms or their parts due to the stimulus of an external factor.

16. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, p. 255.

17. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

18. Idem.

19. AHTILA, Eija-Liisa. Eija-Liisa Ahtila: Paralella världar | Intervju. Downloaded from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=666&v=bg9IEa9uNGU&feature=emb_logo. Accessed: 20 February 2019.

20. Idem.

21. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020, p. 53.

22. HUI, Yuk. On the Existence of Digital Objects. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. 144.

23. In this article, I translate the term umwelt as milieu in accordance with Yuk Hui’s conceptual elaboration: (HUI, Yuk. On the Existence of Digital Objects. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. 145).

24. HEREDITA, Juan Manuel. Jakob von Uexküll, portavoz de mundos desconocidos. In: UEXKÜLL, Jakob Von. Cartas biológicas a una dama. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Cactus, 2014, p. 22. Uexküll demuestra que cada especie tiene su propio mundo circundante, que cada animal construye su medio asociado activamente a partir de regímenes de percepción específicos, que cada viviente habita en su propia esfera espaciotemporal y se relaciona con un número limitado de señales” (HEREDITA in Uexküll 2014, 22).

25. UEXKÜLL, Jakob Von. Cartas biológicas a una dama. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Cactus, 2014, p. 91, our translation. “…los miles de mundos circundantes de hombres y animales” (UEXKÜLL 2014, 91).

26. SAUVAGNARGUES, Anne. Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 47.

27. AHTILA, Eija-Liisa. Eija-Liisa Ahtila: Paralella världar | Intervju. Downloaded from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=666&v=bg9IEa9uNGU&feature=emb_logo. Accessed: 20 February 2019.

28. HUI, Yuk. On the Existence of Digital Objects. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. 143.

29. UEXKÜLL, Jakob Von. Cartas biológicas a una dama. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Cactus, 2014.

30. SIMONDON, Gilbert. On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2017.

31. Idem.

32. Idem.

33. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

34. SAUVAGNARGUES, Anne. Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 63.

35. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

36. Idem, p. 11. italics in the original.

37. AHTILA, Eija-Liisa. Eija-Liisa Ahtila: Paralella världar | Intervju. Downloaded from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=666&v=bg9IEa9uNGU&feature=emb_logo. Accessed: 20 February 2019.

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39. UEXKÜLL, Jakob Von. Cartas biológicas a una dama. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Cactus, 2014, p. 63, our translation. “La experiencia temporales tiene un carácter subjetivo marcado, al igual que el resto de las experiencias, dado que, para la sensación del tiempo externo, no existe un órgano que se excite rítmicamente por estímulos externos. Por el contrario, el ritmo es creado por el órgano interno que enmarca los estímulos del cuerpo” (UEXKÜLL, 2014, p. 63).

40. Idem.”convertimos las sensaciones de momento en propiedades del mundo exterior” (UEXKÜLL, 2014, p. 63).

41. SUPPLY, Sara. Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s Installation Artworks and Conservation Aspects. Downloaded from: https://vimeo.com/14609289, 2010. Accessed: 21 January 2019.

42. AHTILA, Eija-Liisa. Eija-Liisa Ahtila in Conversation with Chrissie Iles. In: Parkett, n. 68, pp 58–73, 2003. Downloaded from: https://www.parkettart.com/books/p/68. Accessed: 02 dez. 2019, p. 59.

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45. MONDLOCH, Kate. Screens: viewing media installation art. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. xii.

46. Idem, p. xiv.

47. Idem, p. xiii.

48. OLIVEIRA, Andreia Machado, PALAZUELOS, Felix Rebollo. Imagem como objeto tecnocéntrico no Arte e Tecnologia. In: Informática na Educação: teoria e prática. Porto Alegre, v.21, n.1,January/abr. 2018. Downloaded from: https://seer.ufrgs.br/InfEducTeoriaPratica/article/view/59085. Accessed: 22 June 2018, p. 33.

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52. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Imagination et Invention (1965–1966). Chatou: La Transparence, 2008.

53. HUI, Yuk. Recursivity and Contingency. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, p. 197.

54. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Imagination et Invention (1965–1966). Chatou: La Transparence, 2008.

55. Idem.

56. MILLS, Simon. Gilbert Simondon: information, technology and media. New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, p. 90.

57. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Imagination et Invention (1965–1966). Chatou: La Transparence, 2008.

58. Signs and symbols are not synonymous: signs are terms that add to reality in order to complement it, symbols maintain an analytical relationship with the symbolized, always occurring via symbolic associations that complement each other and result from an intense exchange between subject and situation that remains. Signs are related to perception-images and symbols to memory-images. The materialized memory-images result in symbolic objects (SIMONDON, 2013, p. 11–12).

59. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Imagination et Invention (1965–1966). Chatou: La Transparence, 2008.

60. Idem.

61. Idem. p. 8, our translation. “il manifeste un pouvoir, une intention, une réalité qui n’a pas sa source dans le sujet mais qui, au contraire, vient à lui et le recherche” (Simondon 2008, 8).

62. Idem. p. 8, our translation. “mais elle traduit bien et concrétise cet aspect de relative extériorité de l’image”, (Simondon 2008, 8).

63. Idem. p. 25, our translation. “Le déclassement actuel des vieillards a pour corollaire un affaiblissement des modes prophétiques de la pensée collective et de l’usage officiel et public de la divination, remplacée par une pluralité de prospectives pratiques” (Simondon 2008, 25).

64. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information, 2020, p. 243.

65. Idem. p. 240.

66. Idem. p. 344.

67. Idem. p. 281.

68. Idem. p. 280.

69. Idem. p. 237.

70. LUND, Jacob. An Ethically nonindifferent aesthetics: an interview with Mieke Bal. In: The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics, v. 23, n. 42, p. 69–86, 2011. Downloaded from: https://tidsskrift.dk/nja/article/view/5876. Accessed: 10 November 2019, p. 70.

71. Idem. p. 70.

72. Idem.

73. BAL, Mieke. Thinking in Film: the politics of video art installation according to Eija-Liisa Ahtila. London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013.

74. LOVEJOY, Margot. Digital Currents: art in the electronic age. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 304.

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77. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information, 2020, p. 272.

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80. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information, 2020, p. 269.

81. MONDOLOCH, Kate. Screens: viewing media installation art. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 13.

82. Idem.

83. Idem, p. 96, emphasis added.

84. BAL, Mieke. Thinking in Film: the politics of video art installation according to Eija-Liisa Ahtila. London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013.

85. SIMONDON, Gilbert. On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2017, p. 62.

86. SIMONDON, Gilbert. On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2017, p. 60.

87. Idem.

88. NANCY, Jean-Luc. The Ground of the Image. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

89. Idem.

90. Idem, p. 11.

91. HUI, Yuk. Art and Cosmothechnics. Minneapolis, MN: e-flux, 2021, p. 124.

92. Idem, p. 133.

93. Idem, p. 123.

94. Idem.

95. LUND, Jacob. An Ethically nonindifferent aesthetics: an interview with Mieke Bal. In: The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics, v. 23, n. 42, p. 69–86, 2011, p. 72. Downloaded from: https://tidsskrift. dk/nja/article/view/5876. Accessed: 10 November 2019.

96. SAUVAGNARGUES, Anne. Artmachines: Deleuze, Guattari, Simondon. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016, p. 86.

97. MILLS, Simon. Gilbert Simondon: information, technology and media. New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, p. 89.

98. SIMONDON, Gilbert. Imagination et Invention (1965–1966). Chatou: La Transparence, 2008, p. 12, our translation. “l’image est une résultante, mais elle est aussi un germe: elle peut devenir une amorce de concepts et de doctrines”.

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ORCID
Andrea Machado Oliveira @ http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8582-4441

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