



Notes on Designing Surficial Elegance

Mastery of technique is as essential as design ability to the production of elegant works. Elegant features can only be realised through an understanding of the systemic logics of the digital environment and a full working knowledge of generative techniques. Benjamin H Bratton of The Culture Industry and Hernan Diaz Alonso of Xefirotarch describe Xefirotarch's wholly visceral, but exacting, approach to the design process.

Mayan Cinema

Xefirotarch's design obsessions are based on an appreciation for the perversity of elegant form, a taste learned from the movies and set to work on architecture. This said, perhaps its architecture is itself elegant. Perhaps when the projected figure is frozen in a sufficiently dense, opulent articulation it does achieve a resonant state of elegance. But if so, such an achievement derives as much from the act of designing the figure as it does from the intensity of the extant form.

It is produced in the act of design, less through special techniques or processes than through the focused sensation of pointing and clicking. Here, the sensation is more like painting than engineering – driven by personal, idiosyncratic gesture more than an application of systematic procedure to material condition.

The genesis of this is internally driven, but not intuitive. Having watched hours, weeks, months of Bad Hitchcockian cinema, Hernan Diaz Alonso's microtechniques for combing the thresholds of the horrific-becoming-elegant and the elegant-becoming-horrific have imprinted themselves as visual-temporal cues on his design retina. These codes (cut here, blend there, match-on-action, shot-reverse-shot, false POV, staccato violins, and so on) are processed, mashed up and reprojected back onto the screen space of animation software.

Here, image forms are densely layered and then pulled back from themselves, balanced and unbalanced, so that their formal 'architecture' within the frame always competes with the strictures of the edit – the latent seam – for the organisation of the screen event. In the course of such moments, Diaz Alonso is director, editor and audience all at once, watching the form materialise and interacting with this emergence. His decisions to speed up and slow down, slice and blend, fuse and separate, are repetitions of the scenic rhythms he has learned from a lifetime of being awed by cinematic effect.

This is visceral. Like the film-goer engrossed within the cinematic apparatus of yore (see Baudry, Deleuze and Penley), this well-immersed designer sweats and squirms and grunts over what he watches before him. This is an exacting processing behaviour, like the subconscious mind during the dream state, cycling through the raw data of everyday life, cutting and pasting, iterating towards multiple provisional renders on the mind's eye.

The designer settles into the liminal consciousness of productive concentration, into an unfolding practice that is also a kind of cinema played out on the cameras obscura of his glowing monitors. Any elegance that is read within the final render is an index of the precision of such processing. **D**

Xefirotarch, Art Hotel, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, 2005

The Art Hotel is a luxuriously unlikely form, a frothing precious metal emerging from the profit (excess) of the multiple economies of exclusivity, leisure and refined exclusion that would enable it, and be cited (sited) through it.

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