

Remote Work as Deleuzian Cinematography: Organizationality Beyond the Frame

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Abstract

Increasingly, work and management happen in remote and decentered ways. The Covid-19 crisis has both made visible and amplified this trend. While they are in front of their computers, trapped between the frames of their screens, workers are more and more part of a cinematographic experience they cannot act upon (yet). They become mere activities in a broader assemblage of images. Work and management become signs, flows, activities at the surface of screens. How to describe this cinematographic experience? Here, we propose to come back to the philosophy of cinema offered by Merleau-Ponty and most of all, Deleuze. We stress their differences and complementarities while introducing cinematography as a key dimension of organizing remote work. In the context of remote work, we show how the concept of depth (in particular in Deleuze's philosophy) can be particularly helpful to understand the temporalities and spatialities at stake in decentered new work imageries. In the world of images, subjectivities are not really at stake yet. A new organizationality that makes it even more difficult than ever to reach a true, agentive self at work.

1. Introduction: from cinema screen to computer screen. What is directing the movie of our work?

Now I feel like in front of a movie. Often a boring one, with a very predictable script. I speak one time every fifteen minutes. With all these black boxes on the zoom wall, I feel like in the dark room of this cinema I do not go to anymore. The best part is when people put their cameras. Or when something happens in the background of one of us. Then, the 'movie' is becoming better. (A remote worker, May 2020).

Increasingly, the world of work is becoming fragmented, remote and decentered (Aroles et al., 2019; Czarniawska, 2018; Leonardi, 2020; Hultin et al, 2021), a long-term trend emerging

from the inception of the network society that has accelerated with the appearance of a global pandemic in 2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic has both strengthened and made visible this trend: we spend more and more time “alone together” (Spinuzzi, 2012) in front of our laptops, tables, and smartphones which have become the windows of our lives. Indeed, screens are increasingly pervading many aspects of our daily lives. Whether at the grocery store, at home or engaged in entertainment, there is an “implicit colonisation of the everyday world” by screens (Introna & Ilharco, 2004: 222). Beyond that, considering people as individuals, with a clear well-defined body involved in a specific time-space at work, is more than ever irrelevant. Work is becoming a set or bundle of activities mediated by online algorithmic platforms. Our individual lives become a set of time slots, micro-activities continuously assembled and re-assembled. This new organizationality is the generalization of a loosely coupled world of activities likely to become quickly and ephemerally nodes involved in a project or specific productive activity.

These evolutions¹ have conducted some management scholars to move beyond an actor-centric view of organizations and organizing. Instead, they adopt processual and relational ontologies to consider the indivisible flow of temporality as well as the possibility of multiple agencies in the happening of organizational life (Introna, 2019; Manning, 2016). Hultin et al. (2021), for example, rely on Tim Ingold’s (2015; 2017) vision of flow as the ground conditioning social interactions to develop an alternative, decentered approach to organizing. Today, as we experiment work environments and colleagues from afar, with the help of digital technologies, it seems that we are all-the-more captured in a transformative flow of agentic possibilities.

Furthermore, the world of work we enter is more and more multimodal, as it is for the cinematographic experience. It simultaneously constitutes a visual, auditory and narrative experience. The images we encounter on the web have increasingly cinematographic dimensions (Bruno, 2014). What could appear at first sight as a major break with cinematographic experience is the possibility to interact and choose our experience, beyond the binary choice of watching a movie or not. But even in the context of a traditional movie theater, our passivity is relative. We can close our eyes, change our location in the room, comment on what is happening. We can restrain some emotions or dive into them without hesitation. And interactivity is there as well as in a projection room. We can laugh with the others, comment on what is going on, clap or not with the others. A movie, like many tools we can use on our laptop, is a social mediation. And our immediate passivity towards close others is obvious. A remote worker using a laptop at home will be in the same relative loneliness as the watcher of a movie. The worker is herself more and more watched while in her own home. By whom? Her colleagues? Sometimes, she will use a visual background or blurring effects – as in a sci-fi film – often to protect her privacy. Likewise, the movie’s spectator watches specific contents from streaming platforms such as Netflix or Amazon Prime on tablets and laptops. The movie is then lively commented and becomes an interactive experience by itself.

This also raises the question of “attention” and “attentionality” as separate from “intentionality” (Hultin et al, 2021). In the flow of our remote experiences of work, we are not just intentionally doing, but also attentionally underdoing remote work. We are driven by our

¹ Of course, this can come as a surprise, as most (process) philosophers mobilized to make sense of this transformation are more metaphysicians than historians. The world is nothing but change and process. Novelty by itself is not a justification of the use of Deleuze or any other process philosophers (Chia and King, 1998; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002).

flanerie much more than we guide it. But as pointed by Manning (2016), to be attentionally underdoing does not imply a state of passivity. Rather, it is constitutive of a continuously emergent practice that requires “responsiveness and activity” (2016: 154). Watching a movie constitutes an attentional process that animates us: it is “both directed (intentional) and being-directed (attentional), something we do and something that is actively happening to us.” Similarly, remote work seems to provoke the same kind of ambivalent passivity in that while we are the ones working, it simultaneously works us. Agency thus becomes more than human and decentered; we may even feel trapped in a “dance between the intentional and the attentional, along many heterogeneous lines of flow” (Hultin et al., 2021: 595). Attention has also become an object of exploitation in the “attention economy” (Williams, 2018; Wu, 2016). Seymour (2019: 51) describes the introduction of “like” buttons, emojis, and continuous pings to social media to alert us that someone or something is trying to communicate with us and catch our attention is “the economic organization of addiction.” These features are all designed to increase in user engagement, user addiction and increased time in front of our screens.

In the end, it is tempting to draw a parallel between this experience of remote work and the cinematographic experience, especially contemporary cinematographic experience. Several philosophers, including Bergson (1934), Merleau-Ponty (1945a) and Deleuze (1983, 1985), have written rather extensively about visual arts and on the cinematographic process and experience. We want to focus here on the early Merleau-Ponty (1945a) and his stress on Gestalt theory as a “new psychology”, and Deleuze processual perspective on cinematographic immanent happenings. Indeed, through exploring their respective views on the cinematographic experience, we believe this paper brings “an original focus” on the phenomenon of remote work and its management (Griseri, 2015). More specifically, we believe that using the cinematographic experience as a conceptual lens to explore remote work and decentered, rhizomic organizing may help us to further understand the disparities and paradoxes it brings forth. In addition, our goal through this paper is to contribute to the literature in management theory that relies on either phenomenological (Sheard, 2009; Rolfe & Segal, 2011) or processual views (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Dibben, 2009; Gärtner, 2011; Langley et al, 2013). Such views enable us to develop novel approaches in studying contemporary organizational as open, decentered, fluid, and plural processes. In continuation of that, we intend to overcome some philosophical divides found in management theory through outlining possibilities of intersections between Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ontology and Deleuzian process philosophy.

At the end, we want to compare remote work as an experience concealing the discontinuity of the screen (and what could have come with the continuities) with remote work as a rhizomic² set of “time-images” overlapping, conflicting in what sometimes becomes a shared experience in a common world in the process of images themselves. Firstly, we will detail Merleau-Ponty’s (1945a) vision of cinematographic experience³, and its tropism towards a new psychology and gestalt theory. Then, we will explain what Deleuze’s (1983; 1984; 1985) metaphysics of “movement-images” and “time-images” consist of in. Lastly, we will draw

² A rhizome is a philosophical term used by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) to describe the relations and connectivity of things in a way similar to the connected roots of the subterranean plant, from which the term comes from.

³ Indeed, while we offer a strong contrast to our reader, the late Merleau-Ponty (1964) and his “indirect ontology” certainly shares continuities with Deleuze (1983, 1984) (see e.g. Lawlor, 1998 or Reynolds and Roffe, 2006). But here, we will focus on the first, phenomenological Merleau-Ponty.

implications for the description of remote work as they occur in today's (post)-pandemic organizationality. This extrapolation will be an opportunity to discuss implications for animation and management techniques. Following Deleuze's (1983) advice, theorizing directly from cinema itself, or better, understanding the philosophy produced by the cinematography of remote work and the specific images at stake in it, we will try to further explore these "new ways of working" (Aroles et al., 2021) which are neither passive nor interactive or controlled.

2. Merleau-Ponty: Cinematographic experience as gestalt and discontinuities of 'temporal forms'

In March 1945, Merleau-Ponty delivered a famous conference in Lyon (France) at the *Institut Louis Lumière* where he was invited. It was a short keynote about the experience of cinema. He used this talk as a way to present what he called the "new psychology" and also point out some of its limitations. From the *Structure of Behavior* to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty resorts to the notion of form, which he borrows from Gestalt psychology or "psychology of the form", a Germanic school that takes the human mind and behavior as an indivisible whole rather than a sum of individual components. In a note from 1945, Merleau-Ponty states that "it is necessary to understand how that (any opening to the world) or any Gestalt is a "perception being made in the things" (1945: 53). The notion of form is what authorizes to think of the perception and the body in a transcendent manner. Forms and shapes are always recognized, pushed ahead of us. The very notion of Gestalt - if we want to define it according to itself and not *a contrario*, as "what is not" the sum of the elements - is that" (*Notes de cours*, 1996). Throughout his work, this idea of indivision will have nourished and oriented Merleau-Ponty's thought: "every picture, every human undertaking is a crystallization of time, a cipher of transcendence." (1945a: 67)

For Merleau-Ponty (1945a), the cinematographic experience re-enacts forms we have internalized, and projects numerous continuities to the continuities offered by our experience of the screen. A movie is as much *in* as it is *out* of us. It is in-between perceptively. And it is discontinuous to our usual experience of life at large. The "force of cinema", according to Merleau-Ponty, lies in its power to make us feel "the coexistence, the simultaneity of lives in the same world" as actors and objects present themselves to us (1945a: 18). Also, in everyday life, we internalize numerous continuities to the discontinuities around us. We feel that this person in front of us has a face we do not see while we see her walking in front of us on the street. We feel the coming from and the going to of all these movements around us, crossing us, because we have an embodied history of them, we share their presence and their present, and their past or future inside this present. In the context of the cinematographic experience, we are more than ever thrown in the world, but in situations that cannot immediately rely on our usual, habitual, embodied memory of what is going on (Morris & Maclaren, 2015). What is not in the frame is produced by our own past frames or habitual memories mobilized by the movie. Watching a movie is thus a very productive exercise involving a permanent continuation in the past or the future of what is immediately on the screen.

The movie relies on an assemblage of various modal movements made of sounds, lights, shapes, that all together produce meaning to us: "the meaning" of an image depends on those which precede it in the film, and their succession creates a new reality which is not the simple

sum of the elements employed.” For Merleau-Ponty, it is the “auditory rhythm” that “fuses” cinematic images together” e.g., when a “more intense sound intensifies the colors” of the movie whereas a “low sound renders blue darker or deeper” (1945a: 66). And a gap in the process, a shape missing for instance, is always projected in accordance with the visible and sensible other movements. All it takes is for one element to change, and the entire meaning can be changed accordingly. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty (1945a), a movie is not a succession of images but rather a “temporal form”, a perceptive form assembling continuities and discontinuities, past and future into a coherent experience in the present of the projection (Merleau-Ponty, 1945a: 16). Indeed, it is not a mere superimposition of images producing a sense of movement, but a temporal form produced both internally and externally, in the cinematic process and its imprint. Our perceptions continue to fill numerous gaps between images, between past internalized images and projected sensed images, between the different visual blocks inside the watched movie. Therefore, for Merleau-Ponty, the “sense of the movie” is incorporated in its rhythm; it “means nothing but itself” (1945a: 22). *It is the different perceptive perspectives, the depth that may contribute to its phenomenological becoming.* Here we might also observe that the “pings” and little noises emitted by our communications devices to capture our attention are part of a general restructuring of the auditory rhythm of everyday day, which is increasingly structured around such auditory interruptions that demand our attention and require us to engage in immediate “screen” work.

The screen and its borders discontinue our experience. We are in the movie, but also in the whole gestalt of its projection that is illuminated at the end, when the room’s lights come on. Likewise, remote work organizing mainly happens beyond what’s in the frame.

3. Deleuze: beyond or before subjectivation, cinema as movement-images and time-images

Now if we look at Deleuze’s views (1983; 1984; 1985)⁴, cinema is not a subject for a philosophy, should this be phenomenology or something else. It is philosophical as such. Deleuze considers the two activities, philosophy and cinema, as specific spheres of creation: it is not then a question of subordination but “rather of a possible meeting or crossing” between them. Thus, in a Deleuzian conception, cinema is about world-making and conceptualizing at the same time.

To consider the nature and meaning of cinema, Deleuze draws on both Peirce’s Pragmatism (Dawkins, 2005) and Bergson’s *Matter & Memory* (1896). More precisely, Deleuze builds on Peirce’s logical study of signs while rearranging his categories very freely. He is also very influenced by Bergson’s authentic description of cinema through the concept of “image-movement”, which Deleuze will reformulate into two cinematic concepts: “movement-images” and “time-images.” Both are specific multimodal events at the heart of the cinematographic experience. A movie is made of images which are actions-reactions. Image is a world of various reactions. Visuality is responsive, in quite a linear way. Sequence-shot A is responsive to sequence-shot B, in a physical way (e.g. question-answer, pushing-falling, coming in-coming out...).

⁴ Spoken, recorded version available here (in French): https://www.webdeleuze.com/cours/image_mouvementi_image_temps

But beyond that, images can be more narrative, enacting various events, and numerous in-betweens inside the image. These in-betweens, whatever the perceptive situation of viewers, are productive of meaning and experience in the very depth and plans at stake in a cinematographic image as a coherent semiotic unit. Time-images are the matter of a happening, a temporalization. They are a happening in-between, an interstitial meaning. Deleuze would probably speak of this in-between as “le pli” (the fold), which he refers to as the “reciprocal determination of differentials” that entail the determination of an object “as perception” and the determinability of space-time “as a condition” (Deleuze, 1988). For Deleuze, the space-time ceases to be a pure given to become the nexus of differential relations in the subject; he thus considers space as the “continuous medium that allows sensation to pass into the body”; the fold being the dynamic that “informs space and makes it act on bodies.” (Regnauld, 2012: 2013).

According to Deleuze, the cinematographic movement expresses a modern paradox that is the decomposition of space. The concept of “movement-images” allows us to understand the movement, not as something that’s added to the image, but constitutes it as such: “cinema gives us immediately an image-movement.” (1945a: 62). Coming back to a famous scene from a movie by Alain Resnais, Deleuze (1984) explains what is at stake in the various layers and plans of a specific plan-sequence hosting three main events. A scene viewed from a window, a scene in front of it and a scene at the back. The univocal and irreversible movement from the first scene to the last one, the tensions between the events, the meaning produced in-between, is precisely at the depth⁵ of a time-image or field of time-images in the same present of a plan-sequence. Such tension in the image, according to Deleuze, “is based entirely on the coexistence of heterogeneous durations” (1984: 32).

With Deleuze, we move to a decentered, immanent world, in which the movie itself becomes experiential. Subjectivation is not (yet) at stake. Everything happens visually and audibly. It just flows without legitimation or justification. It is just going on, inevitably, and producing a world far beyond the frame. Only at some point, watchers can feel part of the story, possibly becoming agentic in it, e.g., when Chaplin looks at the camera and stares into our eyes... But this cinematographic experience is beyond legitimation and subjectivation. Nothing is judged to go on. In contrast, some cuts can happen. Folds in which the spectator can occur in the delegitimation of a scene, whose techniques, sense, texture, values are questioned.

For Deleuze, cinema is then productive of its own theories that can be the beginning and the end of a philosophy, not a detour, neither an illustration of an exogenous argument. Here, the movie is the matrix of events which is itself the event below. And each event prehends all others and the matrix at large. A movie is a world by itself, and like any world, it keeps expanding, settling boundaries that will be overcome very soon. Each image self-contains all the possibilities of the world in their process of becoming. For Deleuze, sequences of a movie are often paradoxical and go beyond the simple association of images: “Cinema, precisely because it puts the image in movement, or rather endows the image with a self-movement, does not cease to trace and retrace cerebral circuits” (1984, p. 26)⁶.

⁵ There are here interesting commonalities with the late Merleau-Ponty (1964), and the concept of depth in his indirect ontology (Mazis, 2016).

⁶ Deleuze G., (1984). *Le cerveau c'est l'écran, entretien avec Gilles Deleuze*. Cahiers du cinéma, n°380.

4. Exploring differences and complementarities between Merleau-Pontyan and Deleuzian views on the cinematographic experience

At this point, we are already asking ourselves: what are the differences and complementarities between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze ideas? If we could establish a dialogue between them, what would it be like?

Initially, we agree that Deleuze does not offer a philosophy of cinema, but more a philosophy from cinema and inside cinema. In his turn, Merleau-Ponty (especially in his early writings) is interested in the experience in-between, the relational world of the cinematographic experience. For Deleuze, cinema emerges inside and beyond experience. A movie occurs, with or without spectators ‘contributing’, adding to it. It is more than temporal forms or a temporal form at large. It settles a temporality, it temporalizes (it is obvious with the time-image). For Deleuze, the cinematographic image is not settled in the present time. Instead, it is a set of time relations from which the present only follows. These time relations, according to Deleuze, are “never seen in the ordinary perception but in the image itself and its creative capacity” (1984, p. 32). The time-image is what makes sensible and visible the time relations that are irreducible to the present time.

For Deleuze, a movie is one of the things that is actively “producing” time in our lives. Most of the time, our lives take place in a linear way. Yet, with cinema comes the experiential fold inside the cinematographic movement. A movie locates life and is happening inside of our lives. Watching a movie makes things happen, through the affects it provokes before, during and after watching it, through what is felt all around during a movie. A movie can even become a powerful affective landmark in one’s life, for example by watching it in the cinema when it is released. It is rediffused on TV or online, which makes it possible to relive a powerful emotion, or to experience it differently. That of a first kiss, a last encounter, a before something, a general period of our lives. For example, one of the co-authors watched the first Matrix film during his PhD with all the other PhD students of the research center.

When taking Merleau-Ponty’s point of view, cinema can restore the fabric of our lived experiences. It is a form that abolishes theoretical positions according to which interiority and exteriority are opposed and separated. So much that cinema enables us to reconsider our relationship with the world through acknowledging the “reciprocity of an interiority towards the outside and an exteriority towards the inside” (1945a, p. 55). Also, for Merleau-Ponty, we can apply how we perceive such reciprocity or chiasm in a movie to everything that we perceive in general. The cinema thus becomes a field of application or verification of a phenomenological or chiasmatic apparatus which pre-exists it. According to Deleuze (1985), this is where Merleau-Ponty’s approach finds its limit: to use cinema to theorize on the general conditions of perception is to disregard its singularity. On the contrary, for Deleuze, one must think of cinema without reducing it through the production of concepts created originally for cinema. Even if Deleuze has formed certain concepts philosophically; he insists that cinema has never been a pretext for theorizing, but rather a basis to think from cinema.

More fundamentally, Deleuze considers that phenomenology is compromised to its core in that it seeks to discover transcendence within immanence. Thus, for Deleuze, phenomenology can never actually return to pure immanence nor pure transcendence because of its “presupposed commitment to an orderly, intrinsic and natural meaningfulness” (Reynolds & Roffe, 2006, p. 231). Doing so, it would exclude many kinds of subjective experiences that rely on the unconscious, like the cinematographic experience, from revealing such pure

immanence. In *What is Philosophy* (1994), Deleuze & Guattari suggest that “whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent to something else, pure immanence is lost, transcendence is reintroduced” (1994: 45). They explain more thoroughly how what they call the “plane of immanence” constitutes anything that is pre-philosophical i.e., that does not exist outside of philosophy but presupposes it. This is notably the case in Deleuze’s description of the cinematographic experience, when he considers that philosophy is putting thought into motion as cinema puts movement in images.

Yet, despite their divergent views on what the cinematographic experience expresses and entails, Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty share certain commonalities and are inter-related in some ways. Most notably, a parallel between Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the flesh and Deleuze’s “univocity of being” may constitute a first step towards a rapprochement (Reynolds & Roffe, 2006). In *The Visible and the Invisible* (VI) (1964), Merleau-Ponty argues that “immanence and transcendence are ontologically indistinguishable” (1964: 89) as his theory of reversibility and chiasmatic approach sought to elaborate. In many senses, this joins Deleuze’s plane of immanence as the univocity of being, where “higher” and “lower” no longer have “any ontological value” (Reynolds & Roffe, 2006: 244).

For the two philosophers, experience seems to remain ontologically ambiguous i.e., in between planes of immanence and transcendence. The Merleau-Pontyan “flesh” – as a “general manner of being” (VI: 147) – is indeed more related to Deleuze’s “univocity of being” than with other phenomenologies, like Sartre’s for example. They both aim to provide an analysis of the transcendental as the “real condition for actual experience” (VI: 33). In addition, if we follow Deleuze in designating immanence as the relations between things that co-exist on the same level, we find multiple similarities with the Merleau-Ponty’s later ontology. As he criticises Sartre in a note, Merleau-Ponty indicates, like Deleuze would do, that the concepts of being and nothingness “ignore density, depth, the *plurality of planes*, the background worlds” (VI: 68). In the end, Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty’s very similar ontological position makes us question the apparent opposition between the two authors and their respective approaches to the cinematographic experience. It also opens up avenues for exploring the organizationality of remote work using a philosophical and cinematographic perspective.

5. From cinematographic experience to remote work as a new organizationality

What are the implications of Merleau-Ponty’s and Deleuze’s philosophies of or from cinema to explore new modes of organizing? How does it translate the experience of remote workers alone in separate rooms, watching the same movie?

From Merleau-Ponty’s experience of cinema, we, who look at computer screens in our apartments and houses (another discontinuity), in the uneasiness of our immobility, are probably close to what he described in his 1945 conference. We must extrapolate numerous continuities of faces, discussions, gestures, body parts, past and future events inside the present of our Zoom or Teams meetings. Forms and their differences produce meaning. More than ever, organizing happens beyond the screen. But now, more than ever, and quite sadly, we are cut off from our embodied memories and projections of the world. We simply flow, or we are ephemerally produced (sometimes in a surprising way) by an evanescent event turning the camera to us. We look for our own voices, lost in the small black boxes of Zoom in which

we are placed. Most of the time, we do not feel dehumanized. In contrast, we feel the most human part of us being exposed to the world. In this seated world, our complex personas and identities are reduced to our faces and what is primarily expressed by our faces. We have to express things this way, or to avoid producing things this way. This can be exhausting, even leading to “Zoom fatigue” (Fauville et al., 2021; Richter, 2020). Such cases may have happened, not because we cannot ‘be ’human. But because we are precisely stuck in the human expressions of ourselves. *In a way, we are too human here-now*⁷.

Furthermore, Deleuze addresses the image of remote work itself, this screen produced by numerous agencies and controlled by neither of them. A Zoom meeting is just a set of temporal-images interwoven in a complex, emergent way. Events, the in-between events, their differential depth, is constitutive of the meeting. The whole world of work is becoming cinematographic. Nothing else is shared. Time-images express a never-ending temporality. Everything just flows without any need of justification or legitimation⁸. The standardized Zoom sessions makes all temporalities close to each other. This paradoxical happening makes that nothing truly happens. The project is for sure “going on”. Decisions are sometimes validated (in silence). Conversations are highly choreographed. But the affective space of the Zoom session is deprived of intensity⁹ and peripetia i.e., these true narrative accelerations, adventures, serendipitous and unexpected encounters that make “work happen”. Hopefully, the immediate environment of each small boxes, these square time-images, can bring a peripheral event. Someone’s child can come and ask her/his parent, the project manager to play with her/him. The noise of a car can disturb a discussion. But this is just a “distraction from” what is happening in the planned movie. It is obviously not part of the visual, auditive, and textual narrative. Yet, this “incident” very much contributes to the “movie” of remote work. It becomes part of the story that’s being told, most often as a minor element, but it can also monopolize the attention of participants. For example, when one Zoom user accidentally puts on a cat filter during a supposedly formal meeting (de Vaujany & Bancou, 2020). These kinds of incidental time-images should be part of the depth of the whole “movie”, but the cinematic process of Zoom, or Teams or Skype keeps them at the surface of the screen.

The screen is the focal point of a global “attention economy” (Williams, 2018; Wu, 2016). This can be understood in terms of the Deleuzo-Guattarian (1980) concept of “machinic enslavement”. Machinic enslavement concerns the increasing integration of the powers of the human body into cybernetic systems of control, where Deleuze and Guattari give the TV as an exemplary technology. This technology is deigned not simply to sell products to audiences, but to capture and commodify the attention of human audiences and sell these audiences to advertisers. They explain that “one is enslaved by TV as a human machine insofar as the television viewers are no longer consumers or users... but intrinsic component pieces, ‘input’ or ‘output’, feedback or recurrences that are no longer connected to the machine in such a way as to produce or use it.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 533). The cybernetic commodification of

⁷ In one of his introductory lectures about images-affection, Deleuze stress the importance of face among the semiotic of images. He comes back to Descartes (*Traité des passions*) to build his argument (see this sequence: <https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/303>), in particular his view of “animal spirit”, face, admiration, and “expressive movements”.

⁸ Interestingly, the world of Deleuze is far beyond any organizational legitimation or justification. What can happen is sometimes a fold, a cut into which a delegitimation can occur. But the world just comes without any need to come into presence.

⁹ It is precisely what team leaders try to re-build when people come back at the office and meet again.

attention is now as crucial to the system of exploitation as the commodification of work. James Williams' (2018: 33) analysis of modern social media explains that, "In the attention economy winning means getting as many people as possible to spend as much time as possible with one's product or service. Although it's often said that in the attention economy 'the user is the product'." With the increased use of communications networks and social media platforms to mediate and coordinate work, there is a convergence between the screen consumer hooked up to his laptop and mobile phone, and the screen labourer, which underpins the communicative flows - clicks, views, likes, downloads, uploads and engagements - that make up the attention economy.

Under the regime of remote work our personal interactions have become flattened, reduced to the square of the screens of mobile phones and personal computers. The human senses that are required by remote work - in particular the visual become increasingly exploited, exhausted and strained - where the other senses that are so essential to rich human interaction and life in common - touch, smell, taste - are neglected. The depth and texture of human corporality and the flesh is flattened onto the surface of a "screen-flesh". During Covid-19 related lockdowns, the danger arose that remote workers became flat - quarantined talking heads - characterized by a strictly limited form of human interaction with a tendency towards emotional autism. The emotional autism of remote work reaches its limits when the screen becomes blank, and the remote worker themselves are unaware of the nature of their interaction or whether they have an audience at all. Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 198) also commented upon the peculiar role that the "face" plays in society, where it "is produced when the head ceases to be part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body". They observed how the face "removes the head from the stratum of the organism", serving to reterritorialize the head in order to connect it with forms of subjectivity and spiritual control that are associated with the apparatus of power (e.g. systems of despotism, discipline, and racism) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 201). This face is very much a part of the new forms of exploitation that are emerging in the new regime of remote work and the "new" organizationality described here.

This kind of in-betweenness has a strong phenomenological resonance, particularly in the world of the first Merleau-Ponty (1945a ; 1945b). One's "corporeal schema" is obviously stretched, and the field of presence is in tension. At some points, the edges of our screens may become something that limits co-presence, thus affecting our capacities of communalizing and preserving collective activity. Multiple presences and multiple temporalities are at stake in the embodied, affective present of remote workers. Building a harmonious co-presence, expressing the values likely to help necessary arbitrages, interrogating the co-presences, are everyone's responsibility, in particular that of the project manager or the manager leading the team. More than being simply another "given" in the clutter of organisational life, creating new modes of co-presence has become an essential issue for scholars, managers and workers alike (Berger, 2020; Cunliffe et al., 2020; Christensen and Foss, 2021). Whether one experiences the "movie of work" together with colleagues, completely alone or surrounded by family life, finding the right "corporeal schema" in remote work may have important consequences on how to share common spaces and temporalities.

6. Towards a central cinematographic concept: depth

Let us now take a closer look at the concept of depth, which we have been using until now in a rather intuitive way. Yet, this notion is central to understanding Merleau-Pontyan and Deleuzian views of the cinematographic experience.

Decentered sensing (beyond a distinct, well-defined body sensing the world) is an important aspect of the « indirect ontology » elaborated by Merleau-Ponty (VI, 1964) before his sudden death. Through the concept of flesh, he wanted to emphasize that sensibility is mainly in-between. For him, viewing (an object we act or want to act upon) means increasing the vertical and horizontal distances between this object and ourselves. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, we must ask what is the nature of the screen-flesh? It is through this sensible event in-between, this happening, this “fold”, which Merleau-Ponty understood as chiasm or interlacing in a different meaning than Deleuze’s (Cormann et al., 2005), that both the object and ourselves take matter, texture, and power.

To explore this in-betweenness of our world, Merleau-Ponty has introduced another concept: “depth” (Mazis, 2016). The depth of our perceptions is made of its imaginary foundation as much as its ‘clearer’, ‘closer’, fine-grained perception. Still further, depth is also about the multiplicity of in-betweenness themselves, these openings and how they respond to each other in our present. For Merleau-Ponty, numerous in-between, pasts and future, inhabit our present the same way different absences inhabit our presence to the world. And sometimes, a situation makes all this depth sensible. Like with the famous madeleine of Proust, a gesture opens, makes visible this in-between, these past events and memories, below our mood, inside our relationship with the world. In a social world, this in-betweenness is largely shared, part of the continuities inside the discontinuities of our activities. This aspect is at the core of Merleau-Ponty’s intent to “find a naive contact with the world” through our “perceptual faith” (VI: 65), that is to say to rethink our embeddedness in the depth and richness of the world.

Deleuze (1983, 1985) has extended and discontinued Merleau-Ponty’s view of depth, making it less perceptive, more immanent (see Wambacq, 2012). Deleuze’s philosophy is above all a thought of differences. As he explained in *Difference and repetition* (Deleuze, 1969: 28): “The difference ‘between’ two things is only empirical, and the corresponding determinations are only extrinsic. However, instead of something distinguished from something else, imagine something which distinguishes itself– and yet that from which it distinguishes itself does not distinguish itself from it. Lightning, for example, distinguishes itself from the black sky but must also follow it, as though it were distinguishing itself from that which does not distinguish itself from it... Difference is this state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction. We must therefore say that difference is made, or makes itself, as in the expression ‘make the difference’.”¹⁰

¹⁰ In continuation to this view, Deleuze prefers to avoid any view focused on diversity. He prefers a politics of differences: “Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse. Difference is not phenomenon but the noumenon closest to the phenomenon. It is therefore true that God makes the world by calculating, but his calculations never work out exactly, and this inexactitude or injustice in the result, this irreducible inequality, forms the condition of the world. The world ‘happens’ while God calculates; if the calculation were exact there would be no world. The world can be regarded as a ‘remainder’, and the real in the world understood in terms of fractional or even incommensurable numbers. Every phenomenon refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned. Every diversity and every change refer

The vision of depth in Deleuze's work derives from this conceptualization of difference. According to Deleuze (1969: 51): "Everywhere, couples and polarities presuppose bundles and networks, organized oppositions presuppose radiations in all directions. Stereoscopic images form no more than an even and flat opposition, but they depend upon something quite different: an arrangement of coexistent, tiered, mobile planes, a 'disparateness' within an original depth. Everywhere, the depth of difference is primary" (Deleuze, 1969: 51). The thought of Deleuze about depth is thus about the depth of differences themselves, the spatial and temporal thickness in-between the process of time and space in the present.

Depth becomes, in his view, more radically temporal and material, potentially more fragmented than Merleau-Ponty would have suggested. Depth is the general differentiability at stake in life itself, its productive and generative tensions, its paradoxes, its in-betweenness. Depth is in the conversation between past and future events, their generative tensions in the becoming of the present. Depth is the temporal thickness of any present and the presents (pasts and future) at stake in it. It is the general in-betweenness of any plane of immanence. Depth is thus not here part of a perspective, a pure spatiality (like the depth of a field). Neither is it a perceptive construct. *Instead, it is a temporality of temporalities, the general effect of all these (past or future) events making a difference in the present and giving a thickness to it.*

What are the interesting lessons of those interpretations of depth for examining the effects of decentered sensing in the new world of work? It means multiple explorations, encounters of various in-betweens (not different "points of view"). Exploring the narrative, the happening, the events, generative of the tension and auto-creation of subjects, objects, and agencies.

It also means accepting to be a multiple body, a multiple sensing of ourselves, dislocating the relationship with our identities to the dimension of the difference. This in-between is inside us, inside our experience. We are this person we saw at the back of the open space, nervous about the meeting taking place in the main room at the center. We are this secretary looking at the back of us to this guy and feeling to be seen. We are this other employee just walking through the space and generating short conversations about what is going on. We have to be in-between all these things going on and what they generate, i.e., bodies, agencies, postures, affects involved in this in-betweenness.

The writing process of the research itself should, then, explore this depth, the imaginary, the invisible, the in-between, the differential, the non-coincident. In-between the surface of our experience and the poetic world below. In-between the pasts and the futures alive, in the spatial and temporal thickness of our present. Exactly like someone exploring a set of tweets. Everything is smooth at the surface, quite readable (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). But once he/she explores the comments, the comments about the comments, the comments about the comments of the comments, what is also at the end of long threads, a disturbing experience can begin. It is then possible to identify the persons or the things behind this below, and what is below these other surfaces or events. *The process of this deeper exploration in this decentered, exploded sensing, is by itself meaningful.* What do "my selves" feel during this voyage? How can I make sense of this large labyrinthine experience? How can I describe the strange "affective atmosphere" (Michels and Steyaert, 2017) constituting this set of in-between I have touched, and have affected me? How can I build my self, an agentic self, through this agonistic

to a difference which is its sufficient reason. Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, difference of intensity. (Deleuze, 1969: 222)

experience (Revel, 2015)? What are these spaces at stake in my experience? What are the spacing inside the conflicting temporalization at stake in-between? Where do they push me, where do they locate me? In which imaginary or physical space am I pushed in the flow of my exploration of what is below this set of tweets?

7. Conclusion: Directing without direction, the organizationality of remote work images

As we consider the multiple disparities and paradoxes that exist in our remote and decentered world of management and organizing, how does the cinematographic experience enable us to understand more closely and to navigate through contemporary work practices and their organizationality? Throughout this essay, we have attempted to further the dialogue between two important figures, apparently quite opposed from each other, through examining their respective views of the cinematographic experience. On one hand, we have focused on the early Merleau-Ponty and his description of cinema as a perceptive and “temporal form” (1945a). This has enabled us to take a “sensible” approach to the many continuities and discontinuities experienced by the remote worker, whose immediate passivity is actually quite ambiguous. Such perceptive in-betweenness is further explored in Merleau-Ponty’s later writings (1964) as he describes an ontology constituted by different perceptive perspectives, depth, movements, all of which contribute to one’s phenomenological becoming. *Similarly, the cinema’s screen and its borders discontinue our experience the same way that remote – screen – working does.*

On the other hand, the cinema-philosophy developed by Deleuze (1983, 1985) presents a distinctive view of cinema. First, through the introduction of “movement-images” and “time-images” as conceptual categories able to describe the multimodality and paradoxical arrangement of events at the heart the cinematographic experience. While “time-images” are the expressions of a happening in-between, an interstitial meaning; cinema, for Deleuze, is thus productive of its own philosophy. Second, Deleuze insists on the issue of affects. Being affected or affecting does not necessarily imply a specific direction or intention. Without putting consciousness into question, this places the sensible inside and beyond experience. *The movie experience, just as remote work, settles a new temporality that is based on the co-existence of multiple temporalities;* for example, when a worker will need to attend to his children’s needs while working remotely. Therefore, for Deleuze, there are many events on the “surface of the present” i.e., many events happening inside and beyond the experience. This aspect is highly correlated with the “indirect” ontology put forth by the later Merleau-Ponty, who would consider the consciousness of events as an “epi-phenomenon.” In a sense, the writings on cinema by Deleuze seem to be in a clear continuity with *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964). Through this essay, one of our objectives was to highlight how, in the end, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze seem to be animated by very similar ontological positions in line with a processual post-phenomenology.

Our essay contributes to both the literature on new ways of working and organization theory (Aroles et al. 2021; Fayard, 2021). It stresses a key dimension of the new organizationality at stake in remote and mobile work: cinematography. More and more, images constitute and mediate moments of work and managerial activities. While using Zoom, Teams, or WhatsApp, workers and managers find themselves emplaced in a world of digital images in which their

own image is not agentive yet. Rather, they experience things in a way that isn't as immediate and agentive as in traditional, face-to-face settings; instead, their experiences of selves and others at work are constantly mediated by digital technology (platforms, tools, mobile apps). Joining a session on Zoom means that you don't know where you will be and what you will be to others or how you will touch them. And while you are able to direct your own cameo appearance – camera on or off, the virtual background you put on, certain facial expressions – you have but little control over others' appearances or attention. More than ever, this cinematographic process inherent to remote working becomes an uncertain duration. 3D spaces, the metaverse and the other strategic projects of Meta will make this exploration probably even more relevant in the next few years. While today we mostly work through the screens of our laptops and cellphones, being literally within the frame of virtual workspaces should have a lasting impact on we perceive ourselves and others at work. From being within the frame to being within "beyond the frame". The cinema-philosophy of Deleuze, probably more than Merleau-Ponty's work, is likely to make sense of such evolutions.

In addition, this essay also contributes to more metaphysical discussions about hard process-based view of organizing (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Langley et al, 2013; Hernes, 2014). Images are the material and affective events productive of the world. Beyond new ways of working (making this trend more visible and salient), images have always been at the centre of processes and practices that constitute organizations (Bell et al., 2014; Boxenbaum et al., 2018). Deleuze's work about cinema, which has been rarely mobilized in the process literature until now, is a way to push further this growing research trend.

Now, if we look at the limits of our essay, one could question the deliberate choice of focusing on cinematographic experience comparing to other types of experience (walking, reading, encountering...) and visual arts (photography, video games, ...). It seems to us the assemblage aspect of the movie form, as it is made of sounds, lights and movements that produce meaning, is more adapted to approach the multi-sensorial requirements of remote working. Moreover, while it is tempting to draw a parallel between remote work and the cinematographic experience, it seems that the experience of movie watching is changing fundamentally. Because theatres have been closed or made inaccessible during the pandemic, many people have become accustomed to watch movies at home, alone or with closed ones, thus questioning, and dislocating traditional cinematographic experience itself (Nhamo et al., 2020). The entertainment industry is also drastically changing as some directors known for the "big screen" (Ridley Scott, Danny Boyle ...) are now exclusively working on movies or TV series projects destined to online platforms. But who is the director of the movie in remote work? Does it matter? While working remotely, individuals rather need to compose with the overall sense of the movie, which they may influence or not.

Finally, the activity of work itself is changing. It keeps changing and reconfiguring itself. Management of work or work itself (i.e. a productive activity) is also in a continuous process of becoming. Many companies now employ a "project mode" to grow their business, adjust their strategic operations, or make new hires, The way we work has become heavily influenced by the digital tools that we use, especially collaborative platforms such as Zoom, Teams, or Trello, which constantly mediate work relations and exchanges thanks to their videoconferencing and messaging functions. This is why, in our remote and decentered ways of working, we need to extrapolate the multiple continuities of faces, discussions and gestures inside the present of our digitally mediated meetings and other professional encounters. As mentioned before, we are cut from our memories and projections of the world. Or do our

memories and projections take different forms? This shift constitutes a global phenomenon, which is also affecting our capacity to communalize whether it is in a class, through the course of a project, or at the scale of society. In contrast to what happens in a movie, images of the world of work do not necessarily gather people in front of them. Images can imprison us in the sense that we will never feel the need to become an agentive and emancipated 'I'. Unless contemporary assemblages (agencements) put aside some of their cybernetics process. But why would they do that?

Key words:

remote work, decentred management, cinema, organisationality, images, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, process philosophy

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