

There is no Algorithm, introduction by Antonio Casilli

« (...) The algorithm, on the contrary, isn't nowhere. It isn't in a exact place, isn't kept in a safe place, not even defined in an only page or an only community.

When the algorithm works properly, we don't make it out of the human decision : « I'm going from A to B, because it's my choice, not Gps's » ; « I'm gonna buy a product, because I want it and not because the adds/spams suggests me to do it. » ; « I'm gonna watch a police heroic film because I like it, and not because films about police brutality have been referenced anymore by the filtering view. »

Il n'y a pas d'algorithme

LE LIVRE d'Olivier Ertzscheid que vous tenez entre vos mains est un chasseur qui traque deux proies : l'une est la généalogie des grandes plateformes, l'autre cet attrac-teur d'inquiétudes politiques connu sous le nom d'« algo-rithme ». Les deux thèmes de sa quête intellectuelle sont on ne peut plus différents. Le premier est par trop sur le devant de la scène, l'autre furtif.

Les grandes plateformes recherchent activement des occasions de visibilité. Leur communication luxuriante, leur *storytelling* désinhibé façonnent l'esprit du temps. Même le choix d'un acronyme pour les désigner est plé-thorique : GAFA ? GAFAM ? Ou alors AFAMA (Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft et Alphabet ex-Google) ? Les plateformes numériques sont multiples parce qu'elles sont partout. L'algorithme, au contraire, n'est nulle part. Il n'est pas situé à un endroit précis, pas gardé en un lieu sûr, pas circonscrit à une seule page ou à une seule communauté.

Quand l'algorithme fonctionne comme il faut, on ne le dis-tingue pas de la décision humaine : « je vais me rendre d'A à B et c'est mon choix, pas celui du GPS » ; « je vais acheter un produit, parce que je le veux et non pas parce que la publicité ciblée me le suggère » ; « je vais regarder ce film de policiers héroïques parce que je l'aime bien, non pas parce que les films sur la brutalité policière ont été déréférencés par le filtrage de contenus ».

Qu'elle soit envisagée dans la littérature universitaire de référence comme un dispositif producteur d'opacité¹, ou comme un jeu d'opinions et de croyances cristallisées², ou encore comme la énième manifestation de l'idéal-type weberien de la bureaucratie impersonnelle et impénétrable³, une entité algorithmique est surtout un simulacre. En la poursuivant, chacun se trompe.

La deuxième proie d'Olivier Ertzscheid est l'ombre même. Ainsi, pour être certain d'en saisir les traits distinctifs, l'auteur se doit de multiplier les prises de vue en adoptant un double regard, de chercheur et de blogueur militant. Ni florilège ni abrégé, son ouvrage constitue, par rapport au blog affordance.info qu'il anime avec succès depuis plus d'une décennie, une sorte de propriété émergente – une synthèse qui offre davantage que la somme des billets. L'arbitrage qui a régi la logique de composition et le passage du site web au livre, fournit aux lecteurs un outil analytique

1 *The Black Box Society, les algorithmes secrets qui contrôlent l'économie et l'information*, Frank Pasquale, FYP Éditions, 2015.

2 *Weapons of Math Destruction. How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*, Cathy O'Neil, Crown Publishing, 2016.

3 « Rule by Nobody. Algorithms update bureaucracy's long-standing strategy for evasion », Adam Clair, *Real Life Magazine*, 21 février 2017.

I.

An “internet of things” describes a world embedded with so many digital devices that the space between them consists not of dark circuitry but rather the space of the city itself. The computer has escaped the box, and ordinary objects in space are carriers of digital signals. This capacity seems to finally fulfill the dream of artists and architects of the mid- to late twentieth century, among them Jack Burnham, Cedric Price, Archigram, and Christopher Alexander, who experimented with a cybernetic apparatus for modeling space. It might also be the practical answer to quests by Nicholas Negroponte’s *Architecture Machine Group* and architects exploring Artificial Intelligence, who rehearse interplay between digital machines and the space of the city and the body—reciprocal modeling that enhances the capacities of each. On the contemporary scene, manifestos like Carlo Ratti’s “Open Source Architecture” imagine that in digitized space—this web of things—architecture can be constructed in much the same way that a wiki is assembled.

As art and architecture adopt technologies to embrace a new imaginary or model a new relationship, digital technologies often become an essential prosthetic for an idea about form-making. Yet these nourishing and exciting projects also perhaps prematurely stop short of, or even foreclose on, a much more expansive investigation. Even when resisting the vampiric modernist impulse to declare a new regime, these projects may be drawn into a cul-du-sac; their production of artifacts risks being yet another anecdotal, even marginal, expression in a succession of ideas.

A non-modern question—the artifacts of which have always been with us, the boundaries of

which include but exceed all of the above experiments, and the answer to which we already know—is how space, without digital or media enhancement, is itself information.¹

We are not accustomed to the idea that non-human, inanimate objects possess agency and activity, just as we are not accustomed to the idea that they can carry information unless they are endowed with code/text-based information technologies. While accepting that a technology like mobile telephony has become the world’s largest shared platform for information exchange, we are perhaps less accustomed to the idea of space as a technology or medium of information—undeclared information that is not parsed as text or code. Indeed, the more ubiquitous code/text-based information devices become, the harder it is to see spatial technologies and networks that are independent of the digital. Few would look at a concrete highway system or an electrical grid and perceive agency in their static arrangement. Agency might only be ascribed to the moving cars or the electrical current. Spaces and urban arrangements are usually treated as collections of objects or volumes, not as actors. Yet the organization itself is active. It is *doing* something, and changes in the organization constitute information. Even so, the idea that information is carried in *activity*, or what we might call active form, must still struggle against many powerful habits of mind.

II.

The projects of Cedric Price and Christopher Alexander are on the threshold of designing an architecture that has become information. It is instructive then to examine why their practices are sometimes relegated to historical oddities or

Some articles on the Net about immateriality

<http://internetactu.blog.lemonde.fr/2016/03/19/technologies-la-perte-de-contexte-est-une-perte-de-controle/>

<http://www.rethinkingmatter.com/blog/2017/3/27/what-is-digital-materiality>

EXTRA FANTOMES, exhibition at La Gaîté Lyrique (2016)

« Le numérique ne rend-il pas le spectre plus présent mais il multiplie les équipements par lesquels les invisibles peuvent se manifester »

« Does the digital make the spectre more present ? It/he increases the equipments by which the invisibles can express/show themselves. »

« Les scientifiques n'aiment pas le Monde, mais plutôt résistent à sa désanimation (...) Refuser l'hypothèse du réenchâtement, c'est refuser un geste qui prétend que le Monde est désanimé à l'origine et que toute animation viendrait du fait qu'on l'anime. »

« Scientists don't love Earth, however they resist to its « depersonalization » (...) to refuse the idea of reanimate the spell, it's to refuse the action which turns down the unanimated Earth and any animation would come from this identical fact, to animate it. »

Also, in this exhibition, you can check the work of Vinciane Despret and Heonik Kwon they talk about spectres :

Vinciane Despret : <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/la-marche-des-sciences/vinciane-despret-au-dela-des-humains>

Heonik Kwon currently teaches at the Cambridge University. He wrote a book about ghosts in the Viet-Nam war. He thinks that the refugee ghosts can't be at the side of the living people anymore, but not at the side of the dead either, because something or someone prevent them to leave the living world.

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/ghosts-of-war-in-vietnam/DDC5E3701CB5A02F652B8FDFFD9E30FF>

Excerpt from Traleg Rinpoche's « Karma and Rebirth »

« Karma is about what constitutes the individual – it looks at ideas of what is inherent, what is co-produced and what is conditioned. We already have a great interest in these ideas in the West, in many disciplines, but none more so than psychology perhaps. Given our great appetite for such matters, it is unfortunate karma has drawn such faint interest, for it is a concept that looks squarely at the health of the conditioned individual. It places individual person-hood and self-understanding at its very foundation. The concept of Karma moves from analysis of the subjective situation toward methods of individual development; it incorporates ways in which individuals can work toward an idea of being a person of depth, of value, or of some significance. And yet, unfortunately, it continues to be interpreted as an abstract and non-personal entity, a natural law of sorts. This is a misreading of the concept. »

(I also asked my dad, who received many teachings about tibetan buddhism, to explain what is Karma)

« Karma is the acts and it's consequences. What you do daily has repercution about the future. Once you get that, you can learn about the way to Dharma, a way to wisdom »