

Unit 2 - Brief 2: Positions through contextualizing

Critical analyses:

1. Textual reference

In *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*¹, Laura Marks theorizes a sensorial relationship to images in the digital age. She encourages a more embodied lecture of images, a view that is not prevalent in the West.

She introduces her book by distinguishing two concepts that will serve as the basis of her thinking: "optical visibility" and "haptic visibility." According to her, in Western culture, legible, frontal, purely "optical" images are often considered as the only path to knowledge. However, there is another approach to grasp images, "haptic visibility," which involves the viewer's body and senses. For her, the gaze can also be tactile, leading to a more embodied apprehension of the observed object, enabling an intimate perceptual experience. She situates this thought in the digital age, and recalls, while "digital video seems to have given up its body", that a video is above all a material object, governed by sensitive transformations.

In the introduction, Laura Marks shares the challenge at stake in her writing: "When translating from one medium to another, specifically from the relatively more sensuous audiovisual media to the relatively more symbolic medium of words, the task is to make the dry words retain a trace of the wetness of the encounter". How can she express the materiality of the medias she invokes without slipping in an overly analytical explanation? How can she involve the reader's body in a purely theoretical work? Marks responds to these difficulties by undertaking what she calls "haptic criticism". She invokes her own sensations, develops a lexical field of the body and touch, shares her own memories, and thus deliberately frees herself from the conventional academic framework: "This writing is deeply theoretical, but it is theory taken personally, tasted, embodied in my own encounters with artists' media". She not only explains the concept of materiality, but makes her reader feel it.

Marks's work resonates with my own emerging animation practice, where I explore how to reintroduce materiality into digital processes (via rotoscoping, for example) to tell more sensitive, human stories. The author seems to precisely describe my impulse when she evokes the phenomenon of "analog nostalgia": the desire among young filmmakers born into an all-digital world to reinject grain, wear, and defects into modern media. I really identify myself in this movement, investigating an aesthetic gesture, but also one of resistance to the stream of digital images that foster passive scrolling and reduce attention to visuals. How can we truly capture the eye in an environment saturated with flat, fluid, fast-moving visuals? I believe that the tension between analog videos and the immaterial channels they circulate on creates an immediate effect of astonishment for the viewer. I'm particularly drawn to the fact that Marks does not suggest a haptic visibility to totally overtake an optical one, and that it's the oscillation between the two that generates what she even qualifies as "erotic". In my own making process, it could refer to constant ways back and forth between analogue and digital, figurative and abstract...

In that spirit, I aim to create embodied videos, works that don't only speak to the eye, but also to the skin, to memory and sensation. Through interplays of textures, I seek to create a space for pause, affect on digital media, offering more tactile and human narratives.

¹ Marks, Laura U. (2002) *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. University of Minnesota Press. Available at:

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ual/detail.action?docID=310595&query=laura%2520marks%2520>

2. Formal reference

*Summer '96*² is an animated short film directed by Mathilde Bédouet, which depicts a boy enjoying the beach with his family in Brittany, until they suddenly find themselves caught by the rising tide.

The director initially intended to make a documentary by revisiting old VHS tapes from her childhood, full of vivid memories. Among them, the footage mentions the recurring local news story she used to fear most during her vacation on Callot Island in Brittany: a road was often submerged by the tide, regularly trapping travelers and their cars in the middle of the water. This real-life event would have provided the basis for her documentary, enhanced with interviews and additional testimonies. But instead, she decided to draw inspiration from it to establish the framework for a fictional story. She chose to recount the emotions of Paul, a boy caught between two ages, neither a child nor a teenager, wrestling his doubts and insecurities in a situation that seems both literal and metaphorical: the sea isolating him from the shore.

Mathilde Bédouet narrates this story using rotoscoping, an animation technique that consists of redrawing, frame by frame, real-life videos. This choice of technique allows her, first of all, to maintain the connection with reality that she originally sought in her documentary project. Indeed, rotoscoping enables her to start from a real base, grounded on plausible ambiances, acting, and real movements. In *Summer '96*, a preliminary shoot made it possible to capture each shot, and to record the sound of the waves, the laughter of the children. This realism is striking even in the details, when we perceive, for example, the folds of a sarong that the wind prevents from spreading. The trembling movements of the camcorder in the car, the wide shots of the beach recall the film's cinematic roots. In this sense, rotoscoping anchors the story, places it on credible, truthful foundations.

But Mathilde Bédouet also chooses this technique for the narrative freedom it grants her. She breaks down the video and alters each of its images using colored pencils: a medium that reminds her of childhood and supports the film's fictional intentions. Her color palette is vibrant, almost like drawn from a cartoon, and the textured pencil strokes introduce grain, warmth, and emotional depth to the moving story she is shaping. She also isolates certain aspects of the frame to direct the viewer's gaze. White space is used generously, guiding the eye, holding its attention towards fragments of life that guide the story.

Mathilde Bédouet uses rotoscoping as a tool for selective memory, fragmenting and reframing her own stories and the ones she creates to share to a broader audience her childhood memories. I am very interested in the approach of using rotoscoping to commemorate, transmit stories. I feel like incorporating moving material on archives make them alive again. As a graphic designer, using rotoscoping could help me synthesize past scenes and focus on the essence of a particular memory.

² Bédouet, M. (2024) *Summer '96*. Paris: L'heure d'Été & Tita B Productions
Making of available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FV0OcJHSd-I>