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# Editorial – “Politics of Shine”

e-flux journal #61 — January 2015 Tom Holert, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
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Shine and shininess are characteristic of surface effects, of glamour and spectacle, of bling-bling contingency, of ephemeral novelty, value added, and disposable fascination. Shine is what seizes upon affect as its primary carrier to mobilize attention. Shine could be the paradoxically material base of an optical economy typically (mis)understood as being purely cognitive or immaterial. Even at an art fair or Hollywood gala, surface effects are widely deployed while being categorically condemned to the domain of inconsequential superficiality, for shine is also persistently unwilling to compromise speed for substance, surface for depth, attractiveness for soul, effect for content, projection for stasis, inflationary wealth, success, and splendor for reality.

Shine and luster tend to block the view of things, while at the same time inviting fetishistic adherence. The architectures of finance and global management pretend transparency while offering glistening opacity. Likewise the impression management of art world glitz acts through the highly refined shininess of contemporary signature white cube buildings, containing tons of gleaming video equipment for costly multi-screen installations. Who's doing the polishing of high-end Poggenpohl kitchens (when the masters are at work) or outside at the skyscraper's window, in the limo garage or at the hairdresser's boutique?

Indeed, it is the particular materiality of declarative shininess that we now recognize as a clear sign of paradox, as it is so often used to mediate decay and divert attention away from oncoming collapse. And as we now start to recognize how lighting effects constitute a primary function of what can only exist through mechanisms and metaphorologies of visibility, recognition, refraction, and dissemination, we might start to ask whether there is another side to shine altogether. Does shine not also serve a core planetary function of giving life to our planet, through the solar capital of the sun? We cannot afford to be idealistic here, as the sun's light and heat do not always disclose and reveal. They cannot be geo-engineered through cool roofings at will, since they're equally cruel and unstable. The sun's radiance also subtracts life – it produces famine, drought, and night.

Edited together with Tom Holert, this first of a two-part issue of *e-flux journal*, though determined to focus on shine, surfaces, and light in all their aesthetic peculiarity and contemporary relevance, aims less at adding to the (still very slim) cultural history of the phenomenon than to rendering palpable the cross-sections of power and aesthetics in the material and immaterial discourses of shine – past, present, and future.

Although the physical behavior of smooth surfaces, the gloss of lips or the shiny coat of car metal, the hard body sheen of porn or the blaze of solar panels all continue to be experienced in the offline world of skin, glass, and steel, it would seem that shine is now predominantly produced and obtained on-screen, as a digitally calculated mimicry of (sun)light refractions and deflections, as mediated radiance. Yet, this virtual availability of shine and gloss, of Glanz and éclat, is deceptive in its awesome ability to simultaneously neglect and conflate the material, the political and economic, infrastructure of the production of today's fetish-artifacts.

Do we need a different discourse of light and exuberance, a counter radiance that outshines the sun that shines on the privileged, an insurgent technology of brilliance in the service of those who are doomed to do the rubbing? Perhaps this light could already be today's version of what Guy Debord described in his 1978 *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*:

A society which was already tottering, but which was not yet aware of this because the old rules were still respected everywhere else, had momentarily left the field open for that ever-present but usually repressed sector of society: the incorrigible riffraff; the salt of the earth; people quite sincerely ready to set the world on fire just to make it shine.

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