

Stefanie Kiwi Menrath / Alexander Schwinghammer (eds.)

What Does a Chameleon Look Like?

Topographies of Immersion

Herbert von Halem Verlag

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

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Köln: Halem, 2011

Cover image

So sieht ein Chamäleon aus. von Tomas Schmit, 1986

Source: FRIEDRICH, J. (ed.):

Tomas Schmit: Können Menschen denken? / Are Humans Capable of Thought? Köln 2007

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ISBN 978-3-938258-51-4

TYPESETTING: Herbert von Halem Verlag

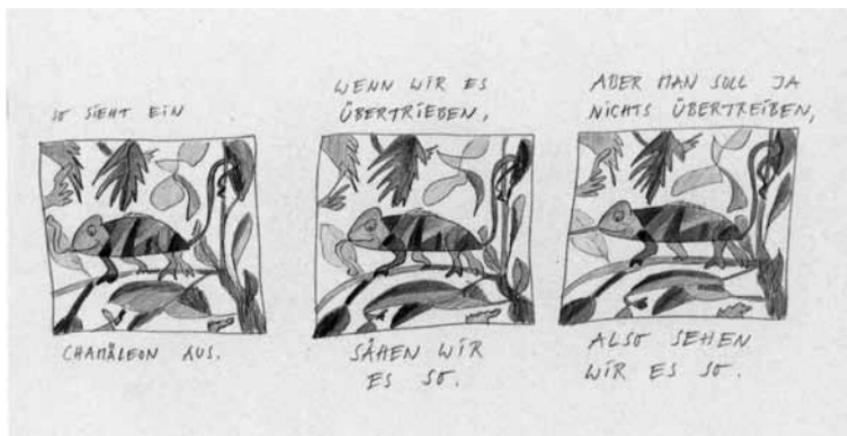
PRINT: docupoint GmbH, Magdeburg

COVER DESIGN: Claudia Ott Grafischer Entwurf, Düsseldorf

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Translation cover image



*This is what a
chameleon looks like.*

*If we were to overdo it,
we would see it like this.*

*But since one ought not to
overdo,
we see it like this*

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Fig. 1: *Swimming pool*, Leandro Erlich

STEFANIE KIWI MENRATH / ALEXANDER SCHWINGHAMMER

What does a chameleon look like? Topographies of immersion

The entrance. Immersed in reverse

If one stands in the hallway of the gallery building of P.S.1, New York, one can catch a glimpse of what looks like a pool. The wooden floor panels that frame the body of water and the ladder that seems to lead down into it all contribute to the overall appearance of a swimming pool. While the watery surface is in constant movement, there is no clear view of the bottom of the pool. When people stare down into the water they appear on the floor of the pool. They walk around it in a manner typical

of museum visitors; that is, until they become conscious of the fact that they have walked into the lower part of an art installation. This installation is entitled *Swimming Pool*, and was devised by the Argentinean artist Leandro Erlich. Realizing that they have become part of an installation, and seeing the blurred outlines of the spectators standing at the pool's edge, the visitors begin to interact with them by waving, jumping around or by making typical swimming movements – even though they are of course dressed for a day at the museum.

Leandro Erlich is known for working with architectonic elements like windows, store façades and staircases. Each installation involves a witty, and usually an optical twist that challenges the day-to-day usage of these objects. This particular watery installation relates to the debate concerning interactivity and immersion as aspects of contemporary culture. Taking the idea of immersion literally, *Swimming Pool* does not only provide an environment that enables the recipients to ›dive into‹ the installation; in addition, it creates a liquid interface that can be playfully explored by the participants as they interact with each other. Delving into the notion of immersion, Leandro Erlich's *Swimming Pool* expands this notion beyond its more obviously electronic-media related implications. Taking into account the performative engagement of participants necessarily raises questions related to the boundaries of the notion of immersion, as regards its status as a term applicable to cultural theory.

The back room. History of the term

As a term, immersion first appeared with the study of spatially expansive media such as the panorama, stereoscope and the cinema. The word ›immersion‹ itself was used by Béla Balázs ([1938] 1995), although visual and aural strategies of spatially immersing an audience were also analyzed by other early theorists such as Sergej Eisenstein ([1947] 1988), albeit without making use of the term.¹ With the arrival of com-

puter technologies the old phantasm of total immersion received new stimulation, culminating in the idea of cyberspace so vividly described by William Gibson in his 1980s science fiction novels. Yet it was not before the late 1990s that the term ›immersion‹ gained popularity in academic discourse. Notably, it is Oliver Grau's merit for having developed an integrated notion of immersion. His work deals with illusory image spaces; from the panoramas of the 18th and 19th centuries, up to the human-computer devices attached to the body in the present day (GRAU 1999, 2003, 2004). Through depicting virtual technologies as immersive aesthetic practices, Grau's work points towards a history that spans centuries of aesthetic and illusionary practices. His work thus fits into recent trends within academia, insofar as it attempts to free virtuality from the aporias of media, digitality and from discussions of virtual reality, and to conceive it instead as an anthropological constant.²

The consequent of this approach is that the techniques of virtuality not only gain a new history (such as that of cultural images, and the anthropological constant of the imaginary), but also a new future: rather than merely pacifying mental illusion, aesthetic illusion and the deliberate surrender to the senses become a new subject for research (cf. KOCH/VOSS 2006).

The hallway. Illusion, interaction, and immersion

Through the topos of immersion this anthology explores the blurring of oppositions such as active and passive, real and virtual, mental and sensual. Rather than presenting it as a universally valid term, by which immersion would be conceived as a state of total illusion, we instead pursue the notion of varying degrees of immersion; as might be used, for example, in indicating a decrease or increase of distance. We thus suggest describing immersion in the terms of a topography; as Huhtamo (1995: 60) puts it, the quest for immersion, which »has been activated – and even fabricated – now and again in culturally and ideological-

ly specific circumstances«. We will try to map the transmission of this cultural topos in themes and styles throughout a variety of cultural traditions«. When immersion became a ›buzzword‹ in the technoculture of the early 1990s (HUHTAMO 1995: 159), the experience of immersion was frequently described as »›plunging into water‹, ›breaking through the screen (or mirror)‹, [...] [or] ›losing oneself in a simulated world««. In these descriptions, recorded by Huhtamo, we find immersion identified as the passive counterpart to interaction; it depicts the process of ›letting your self be drawn into‹ another world. On this view, immersion is a result of a (more or less) voluntary passivity, a surrender.³ In the Latin root ›immergere‹ we can track an implosion of the active/passive dichotomy. According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary (GLARE 1982: 834ff.) it means, ›to dip or plunge into‹ (a liquid or other things) but also reflexive to ›immerse oneself‹ and to ›plunge (into an activity)‹. The term immersion therefore depicts the ›action‹ of immersing as well as the ›state‹ of being immersed in an activity (cf. HAWKINS 1986: 41). More recently, the term immersion has been employed not only for situations that explore ›active passivity‹ or ›virtual reality‹, but also deliberate, emphatic illusion.⁴

In seeking to describe immersion as a cultural technique, which manifests itself in constantly new and historically specific forms, this publication scrutinizes questions of immersion in cultural and critical rather than psychological and physico-biological terms.

*Passing through the chameleon gallery.
Immersion as tactical illusion*

In several cultural mythologies the faculty of immersion is attributed to a particular animal: namely, the chameleon. The chameleon is an animal of the African continent and Madagascar, and it is here that the largest varieties of fables of the chameleon are told. In African mythologies the animal is characterized as being clever and savvy, although its

wisdom is said to come with certain slowness.⁵ The chameleon is also god's messenger (PARRINDER 1967: 20, 40, 83) and its slowness – which causes delays in relaying such messages – can become dangerous, or even deadly for men (SCHEUB 2000: 147).⁶ Many writers have taken up the motif of the chameleon as a smart and deliberate character within fables (MAPANJE 1981; ELLIOTT 1963).

The chameleon, then, is said to be smart and slow; characteristics ascribed to the animal by virtue of its smallness and protective capability of changing its colouring. This ability to change colour is generally understood as a means of defence, by which the chameleon blends into its surroundings in order to elude predators. The chameleon is a master of disguise, but it tricks its enemies for the sake of survival rather than malicious deception. Its strategies are long ranging but non-invasive. The chameleon employs perceptual illusion tactically, for long-term goals.

Throughout animal fables and urban myths the chameleon has become the personification of tactical illusion. Recently, social psychologist Bernard Rosen (2001) has even termed a type of personality ›chameleonic‹: The ›chameleon personality‹, rising with the American post-boomer generation of 1990s, engages in ›chameleonism‹ as a protective strategy in a highly unpredictable world, in which blending in helps to fool enemies.

This potential for revaluing perceptual illusion vis-à-vis mere deception and epistemic illusion might have been the reason why Fluxus-artist Tomas Schmit incorporated the chameleon into his fauna. Since the 1960s he repeatedly used the chameleon in word games and puzzle pictures for analyzing aesthetic illusion (see cover image of this volume).⁷

In his drawings and texts Schmit »tackled the question of whether [the chameleon] must have a representation of green in order to assume that colour« (RIPPLINGER 2007:32). Narrowing Schmit's question, we could ask: Does the chameleon possess a critical conception of green? Does it actually change its colour, or does it merely dupe our perception? If we consider the chameleon, its environment and the observer as an ecology, it becomes difficult to detect an ›absolute‹ green that the

chameleon might adopt. Rather, to ›become green‹ the chameleon requires an ›imagination‹ of green; namely, the respective observer's imagination of green.

The hall of mirrors. The chameleon on the mirror

Schmit's exploration reminds us of a riddle that biologist and cyberneticist Steward Brand posed to his tutor Gregory Bateson in the early 1970s: ›What colour is a chameleon placed on a mirror?‹ Bateson's answer to Brand was that ›the creature would settle at a middle value in its colour range‹ (Brand, Steward. Whole Earth Catalogue 1974, cited after Kelly [1994: 69]), and thus find an equilibrium between the conflicting colours. Brand himself envisioned the chameleon as failing to fully adapt to its environment, its colours fluctuating chaotically and creating a ›psychedelic paisley‹ (KELLY 1994:70). Yet another student of Bateson, Gerald Hall, argued that the chameleon would ›stay whatever colour he was at the moment he entered the mirror domain‹ (KELLY 1994: 70). Hall's argument was that the coupling of chameleon and mirror was too tight for an adaptation to take place; the lizard and glass had together formed a larger system that would act differently from the manner in which either element would were they in independence from the other. Hall's system thinking presented the chameleon as an intrinsic part of a lizard-glass-system. The chameleon emerges from its environment and takes resources from it; there is no chameleon without its reflection path on the mirror. Such ›co-evolution‹ models have become the basis for network thinking (KELLY 1994: 74ff.): not the backward path of linear logic, but a field of causes that reflect and bend each other, constituting the circular causality of a network.

We propose to discuss the chameleon as such a ›responsive mirror, in part reflecting, in part generating‹ (KELLY 1994: 69). Rather than working with the notion of an absolute green, the chameleon operates with differing imaginations of green. The chameleon then becomes a

figure of immersion rather than deception. Its strategy of tactical illusion might resemble the strategies of a virus. Yet, there's a notable difference: unlike viral strategies, the tactics of the chameleon are non-aggressive and non-invasive. And most importantly, chameleons have stamina. In the end – just like in the story of the chameleon beating the elephant in a race (KOHL-LARSEN 1976: 37) – they might outlive us: in biological research the chameleon has long been of interest due to his exceptional ability to adapt its colouring to its environment. Yet the chameleon has even proven biologists wrong and led them to subscribe to its mythologies: in recent scientific research the colour-change of the chameleon has been found to serve a rather different purpose: neither deceit nor disguise, but rather animal *communication* seems to be the reason for the chameleon's colour change. Now, what does a chameleon look like?

The stairway

With the technological inventions of the last decades, scientific and technological studies have frequently employed the term ›immersion‹ as a means of conceiving the momentum carrying the interaction of man and technological device. As a result of the influence and prevalence of the concepts and terminology of computer related discourse, the term ›immersive environment‹ is now generally assumed to only denote a technologically induced virtual environment. We propose to open up this notion and to provide a cultural topography of immersion. Following a spatial metaphor, we have organized this topography into five rooms:

While the human-machine relationship has long been one of fascination and utopian positivism (Room 1), we have seen the advent of new visual technologies such as television in the 1960s creating a certain uneasiness towards immersion, or indeed an outright fear of it (Room 2). As our societies become increasingly technologically determined, im-

mersion has become a pervasive phenomenon. In the 1990s the topos of immersion merged with discussions on artificiality and the *aestheticization* of everyday life. The focus of this discussion of immersion has been less technology *per se*, but rather the consumer worlds that it constructs and the reality that they give rise to (Room 3). This apparent ›society of immersion‹ leads into a field for critique linked to Debord's society of the spectacle, and brings up the figure of the embedded chameleon (Room 4). Since the 1990s technology became conceptualized as a second nature, albeit one that is both internal and external (HUHTAMO 1995: 171). As a result, debates around human-computer-relationships (HCI) returned – although this time with immersion taken as a basic human capability (Room 5).

Room 1.

Virtual voyaging. History of the cultural technique immersion

The quest for technologically induced immersion has been related over the years to the motif of travelling (cf. HUHTAMO 1995: 160). The cultural and technical roots of virtual voyaging stem from ›early system(s) devised for losing ourselves in another world‹ (SCHWARTZ 1996: 362). Consequently, for Oliver Grau, those forms of immersion that are based upon an engagement with the visual have their conceptual origins in the idea of the panoramic (cf. GRAU 1999).

While the diorama and panorama worked with the conception of a 19th century audience, envisioning a rather passive ›armchair traveller‹, virtual voyaging has since been relocated to interactive video and computer games. Such contemporary voyages involve an ›active-passive‹ relationship and a second virtual body ready for interaction (HUHTAMO 1995: 177), thus outlining a classic example of immersion.

KRISTIN MAREK considers panoramic wallpaper as a medium of television and insulation, and the extent to which it generates a ›sheltering technique of privacy‹ (MAREK, p. 31). As the subjects and designs

YOU'LL BE AN ARMCHAIR COLUMBUS!

You'll sail with television through vanishing horizons into exciting new worlds. You'll be an intimate of the great and near-great. You'll sit at speakers' tables at historic functions, down front at every sporting event, at all top-flight entertainment. News flashes will bring you eye-coverage of parades, fairs and fashions, of everything odd, unusual and wonderful, just as though you were on the spot. And far-forged industry will show you previews of new products, new delights ahead.

All this—the world actually served to you on a silver screen—will be most enjoyably yours when you possess a DuMont Television-Radio Receiver. It was DuMont who gave really clear picture reception to television. It will be DuMont in whom you will turn in peacetime for the finest television receiving sets and the truest television reception...the touchstone that will make you an armchair Columbus on ten-thousand-and-one thrilling voyages of discovery!

DUMONT Precision Electronics and Television

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Fig. 2: You'll be an armchair Columbus!

of panoramic wallpapers were certainly linked to idyllic parks of the time and orientalist depictions of Persian walled gardens, their common cylindrical arrangement provokes a certain allegory of immersion insofar as it places the viewer in the picture. Yet whilst referring to Giorgio Agamben (1998), Marek argues that the enclosure of an extract of the world does not entirely follow the idea of an »isolating exclusion«. Rather the reframing of performative subjects is shifted in accentuating the momentum of their agency within the choreographed images.

JULIE WOLETZ offers a historical overview of techniques of spatial illusion from antiquity to current 3D image effects. Woletz argues that a concept of immersion should not solely be defined by physical models but should rather include cognitive, emotional and cultural aspects

(WOLETZ, p. 57). She thus proposes that the concept of immersion should be located alongside contemporary conceptions of spatial media interfaces. In line with Grau (2003) Woletz argues that recent virtual environments draw on century-old visual techniques of immersion, yet she categorizes them as pursuing two major strategies: Firstly, surround strategies allowing the viewer to change perspective to a degree; and secondly, peep-throughs that restrict the spectator's field of view. By addressing the body, recent virtual environments also recall an older cultural topos that forms a possible third strategy: that of surrogate travelling. With the rise of motion pictures, artificial travelling has become a topos that is today largely employed in interactive and kinaesthetic 3D applications.

MARTIN SCHULZ explores the immersive image by creating a connection between the 16th century winter landscape by Pieter Breugel and the immersive possibilities of film. Referring to cosmography and cartography Schulz, argues that the winter landscape paintings of the late 16th century do not represent natural perception, but rather a »field of visual experience« (SCHULZ, p. 82). This field does not solely provide its historical viewers with points of departure for any imaginary voyages in space and time but gains a momentum that persistingly influences the immersive gaze through the medial forms. Referring to the linkage of inner and outer images (cf. BELTING 1999), Schulz expands the trajectory of this argument to films in which the viewer experiences a »compression of time« (SCHULZ, p. 89). This connection to the Bergsonian »durée intérieure«, as well as to Gilles Deleuze's concept of the »time-image«, is notably made apparent in Andrej Tarkowski's *Solaris* (1972).

Room 2.

Immersion as cultural topos. Cinema and the fear of immersion

Referring to the concept of the cinema, the filmic appears to generate focal spaces for cultural trajectories that become apparent on and with

the screen. While techno-scientific immersion (along with notions of interactivity, cyberspace and virtual reality) promised ground-breaking changes for human computer interaction, cinematic engagements with immersion happen to show darker and more distressing sides to this cultural technique. Creating different phantasms of literally ›being drawn into‹ another space, the cinema offers the space to stir up cultural trajectories (cf. ARNHEIM 2003 [1932]; KRACAUER 2001 [1947]) connected to societal issues, while the vivid surface of the screen itself exudes an uncanny appearance.

FLORIAN LEITNER follows the cultural topos of the fear of immersion in cinema and shows that this topic was explored in films as early as *Welt am Draht* (1973) and *Tron* (1982). He argues that this shifts significantly during the 1990s, with movies that tend to tell stories of immersion as the employment of a (primarily visual) aesthetic strategy. Here immersion is used in the aesthetic notion of a specific relation between a medium (mostly of moving images) and a user (LEITNER, p. 98). The themes of these films deal with the fear of immersion or surveillance. According to Leitner, this also expresses a (western) cultural characteristic: the entering of a subject into the symbolic order has to be paid for by a subjection to the big Other. Yet as society needs the fantasy of ideology as a mask for the real, this leads Leitner (LEITNER, p. 108) to the conjecture that current visual culture's incorporation into the symbolic order might not work by interpellation but immersion.

Within recent cinema studies that re-focus film as frame, phenomenological approaches bring the body as well as the senses back into consideration. Grounding her line of reasoning on these phenomenological approaches, BETTINA PAPPENBURG argues that it is exactly the representation of tactile experience that draws us into the filmic narration (physically and emotionally) by proposing a paradoxical intersection. The topos of immersion is represented in films as a moment of reflection through evoking situations of intersection of sight and touch. These break the prevalent analytic division of the sensorium: either by the motif of ›touching the mirror‹ or by ›haptic images‹ – the blurry

ness, graininess and blank spaces of which produce a flattening of the image, setting it apart from the principle of perspective and producing what amounts to an understanding of image as skin.

CHRISTIAN TEDJASUKMANA does not refer to the cinematic image, but rather to the experience that it provokes. As the cinema audience is faced with limited mobility and restricted types of action, together with a heightened perception, they encounter immersion and distance simultaneously. Tedjasukmana seeks to grasp this presence of a world in absence within the »allegorical montage of history« (TEDJASUKMANA, p. 151) of Todd Haynes's *Velvet Goldmine*. Cinema weaves its immersive threads through moving images that express its vitality. Yet according to Tedjasukmana, it appears »post-vitally cleansed«, as it becomes possible to experience the present at the same time that one experiences it as the past. Tedjasukmana does not explain this solely in reference to cinematic language and the experience of the cinema space; drawing on Judith Butler and Sigmund Freud, he links the specific union of immersive and distancing experiences with a politically productive condition of melancholia. Within the cinema, immersion into the living presence of a movie happens by way of a »mechanistic vitality« (TEDJASUKMANA, p. 138), and in this respect Todd Haynes's cinema provides us with a cinematic politics of mourning (TEDJASUKMANA, p. 154).

Following the exploration of cinematic experience RANIA GAAFAR expands the momentum of virtuality to filmic experience, leaving the traditional space of cinematic/filmic experience behind in order to enter the White Cube. In dissecting the transference of the specific medial condition and structure of film to the gallery space, Gaafar deals with the shifting relationships of desire traversed by cinema. By referring to examples from the so-called »Third Cinema«, Gaafar argues in favour of »sensorial and sensational networks« (GAAFAR, p. 157) that lead to a major re-conceptualization of the Expanded Cinema. The intertwining of mediality in the cinematic artworks produces an affective fusing momentum of material and psychological qualities that challenges the theoretical frame of the gaze.

*Room 3.**Engulfing immersion. Aestheticised encounters*

Whilst the topos of immersion in cinema digs up darker aspects of our engagement with the media, the cultural technique of immersion also refers to characteristic strategies for performing within societal structures of post-industrial production. Referring to the ›collective consumer‹ as a chameleon that blends in by consumption appears to be an all too simple trope. As a consequence of the difficulty of locating the bearer of agency, agents within immersive cultures can be characterised with a specific active-passive engagement with their environment. Immersion, in this sense, emphasizes an *aestheticized* takeover of the participants that can take the form of an active engagement with the culturally structured environment.

Examining the ideas of Romanticism that led to Wagner's groundbreaking theatre concepts, JÖRG SCHELLER expands and relates them to consumer culture, contemporary streamlined display shops and warehouses. Scheller proposes that an uncanny realization of Richard Wagner's concept of the ›Gesamtkunstwerk‹ can be found within consumer society. While he re-questions Wagner's ideas in line with critiques of consumer society, Scheller argues that the ›Gesamtkunstwerk‹ provides a »subliminal aesthetic syntax inherent to specific forms of organizing society« (SCHELLER, p. 184) whose lowest common denominator is the immersive promise of blending in through consumption.

In a manner related to the ›blending in‹ possibilities provided by consumer behaviour as well as to that of their suppliers, DAISY TAM discusses the evolution and self-stylization of what started as groceries and now appear as ›hypermarkets‹ or convenience food stores. Juxtaposing this with the results of her field trips into the world of farmers' markets, Tam takes up the motif of the chameleon in order to delve into the immersive strategies peculiar to the food business.

Roland Barthes's notion of the ›punctum‹ has been popular within academic discourse for over thirty years, yet the perhaps uncritical na-

ture of this reception arouses MIRJAM WITTMAN's suspicion. Barthes describes the punctum as being possessed of a subjective, individual quality, and yet as also corresponding to the objective conditions of photography. It is thus the »complex interlacing of two apparently opposite elements« (WITTMANN, p. 231) that marks the punctum. Wittman argues that it makes us aware of our paradoxical desire towards photography: »We want to believe in its authenticity but we know of its impossibility« (WITTMANN, p. 234). According to Wittman, the affective quality of Barthes's concept is not that it builds up a theory of photography, but rather that it represents our strong desire for a reality outside representation (WITTMANN, p. 231).

Room 4.

Camouflage and the critique of immersion

Whereas the cultural technique of immersion seems to offer an active engagement with the environment, there remains an uncertainty towards immersion's effects, and as to the dangerous qualities of the chameleon. Consequently, the critique of immersion can be linked to the idea of camouflage. Engaging with immersion entails entering to a contested political space, in which appearance is linked to illusion, the causing of passivity, or to the blurring of agencies. Immersion's attraction can be taken literally, insofar as it entails pulling the recipient into something; yet it also implies productive qualities in the provision of sensual frameworks, which show the viewer what he or she allegedly might want to experience. In this way camouflage points towards the tactical dimensions, in that what is hidden is not really there, and yet is also present in the same instant, unseen within its surroundings. Camouflage can be defined as being possessed of two fundamental aspects: firstly, there is something that is to be hidden, the concealment of which is crucial for strategic reasons; and secondly there is the intended recipient of the camouflage, who might react

by misrecognition. By way of the notion of camouflage a critique of immersion goes beyond the analysis of technovisual phantasms and points towards the haunting idea that there might be something more in the picture than is immediately perceivable. While the mobilization of fear certainly did not start with the 9.11 attacks, the concepts of the public sphere and of behaviour within it did become increasingly contested after those events. The chameleonesque thus refers to tactics and strategies that take place within a public sphere that is perceived as a transformed space of the political.

JOHN HUTNYK unearths the more sinister and disturbing qualities of the chameleon. In analysing the cultural phenomena surrounding the 2005 London bombings and the changing medial presentations that they gave rise to, Hutnyk argues that while the chameleon's ability to blend in to its background is usually taken as a passive adaptation (a chameleonic quality), it can also be depicted as an active scheme and as a tactic.

ANDREW CHRISTODOULOU points towards the activity within this assumed passivity, and towards the epistemic violence involved in acts of recognition. Considering what can be called the »radical *collapse* of camouflage« (CHRISTODOULOU, p. 257), Christodoulou analyzes the backlash that may result from the performative ascription of the status of camouflage. He suggests that René Girard's work is applicable to the analysis of processes of »violent contagion« (CHRISTODOULOU, p. 271) in crisis situations.

In reading the work of Guy Debord against that of Jacques Rancière, both of which describe cinema and theatre as immersive cultural practices that produce »spectatorship«, JEFF KINKLE's paper takes spectators as a kind of responsive mirror. In Kinkle's view, the world of mirrors of the spectacle can be put to use not only for stultifying reflection but also for emancipatory creation. Kinkle departs from the active/passive dichotomy that Debord opened up in his writings on cinema and spectatorship, and critiques this by way of Rancière's notion of the aesthetic regime as a »distribution of the sensible«. According to Ran-

cière, this puts forward hierarchies of activity/passivity or capacity/incapacity within populations, places, senses, etc. On this basis Kinkle turns to Debord's praxis as a film maker, which offers a less categorical notion of cinema; and while moving away from Debord's writing and towards his praxis as a film-maker, Kinkle finds that it is not cinema in itself that Debord criticises, but rather only a certain quality of cinema: namely, its stultifying quality. Kinkle concludes that while there still remains an emancipating side to it, such emancipation cannot be studied without its application.

Similarly, TOM BUNYARD also engages with the work of Guy Debord, criticizing his theory of the spectacle. Bunyard provides a critique of Debord's and the S.I.'s theory of the spectacle by contrasting it with Debord's much more politically engaging concept of negation. Inheriting an avant-garde notion of negativity as limitlessness from Dadaism and Surrealism, Bunyard claims that Debord developed this into a notion of the human subject as being itself negative by virtue of an association between subjectivity and time. Although Debord develops an open and politically engaged model of the historical dialectic on this basis, his theory of the spectacle closes this openness off. With the theory of the spectacle – which presents human beings as mere spectators of their own lives – Debord effectively positions himself at the end of (pre)history (BUNYARD, p. 284). The theory of the spectacle – in which Bunyard finds strong influences by the work of writer and poet Ducasse – falls too easily into romantic and aesthetic notions of revolution.

Room 5.

The chameleon as responsive mirror and the quest for immersion

With the advance of digital technology humans encountered and generated a new logic of artificiality. This artificiality happens to be the sphere in which users become present through the movements of cur-

sors or avatars. The entry into shared audiovisual spheres becomes feasible through technologically processed media convergence. However, this not only entails an active engagement with media technology, but also expanded possibilities for expression and changes to sensitivity and perception. While immersion seems to hold the promise of a more intense engagement with media, developments within media itself have instigated new requirements for perception to act cooperatively with these new-means of expression and perception.

ASKO LEHMUSKALLIO develops a model for immersive settings that are not confined to virtual environments or to visually induced spaces with the help of Alfred Gell's theory of the art nexus. Gell's flexible communication framework provides the basis to model immersion as relational, context-dependent and in terms of individual experience (LEHMUSKALLIO, p. 309f.) rather than as a crossing of borders that have been pre-defined by technology. Lehmuskallio explores two examples of complex relations within the network which produce immersion: the panorama, which exemplifies the principle according to which artifacts and their producers overwhelm a receiver; and the laboratory, which exemplifies that by which a receiver actively engages with ›things‹ (LEHMUSKALLIO, p. 315).

SÓNIA MATOS embarks on an inquiry into the worth of immersion and constructivist theory for Human Computer Interaction. Whilst having concepts of immersion in the field of language learning are also considered, Matos proposes to link the subjective and cultural to the cognitive. Hence, she is arguing in favour of immersion, as opposed to the virtual, and contends that this is a more applicable model that enables the emphasis of the subjective in Human Computer Interaction.

YUK HUI explores the non-linear causality field of the net, where individual parts generate and reflect just like responsive mirrors. In a traditional understanding of ontology a thing is limited to representation only. This implies that a digital being would be rendered as purely passive and instrumental. Yet, what could a digital thing be? Embark-

ing on an inquiry as to the status of a digital thing, Hui refers to Martin Heidegger's phenomenology in order to suggest another approach to knowledge representation and digital entities, and to our understanding of online resource sharing practices.

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Figures

Fig. 1. *Swimming pool*, Leandro Erlich 1999, photograph © P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center New York

Fig. 2. *You'll be an armchair Columbus*, Corporate ad Allen B. DuMont Laboratories, Inc., *New Yorker Magazine* (1944), (29 x 21 cm.) © Cecilia Tichi (1991: 15)