



DIANA THATER

immersive video

Diana Thater's approach to video installation is sculptural in the expanded sense. Her work maps the filmic surface onto architectural space. She tailors her video projections to specific architectural spaces and often places monitors and projectors on the floor in a scatter-sculptural fashion. She typically creates multiprojection video installations in which the infra-thin, immaterial video surface saturates every nook and cranny of the material world around it, including the viewer's body. Her multi-projector installations are often designed so that the viewer intersects the projection beams thereby becoming part of the (im)materiality of the work.

In an early work, *Late and Soon*, 1993, she projected a video onto the front window of the David Zwirner Gallery, New York. The artist had coated the window with a colourless gel to act as a translucent screen so that the image could be seen from the inside and the outside of the gallery. Crucially the three-lens projector was set out of register. Concerning this particular installation Thater remarked:

Only in projection does the work become what it wants to be: simultaneous, multiplicitous and resonant. The images both envelop and penetrate the viewer as she/he enters the space of the projection, interfering with the imagery and



Diana Thater, *Knots + Surfaces*, 2003

casting her/his own shadow into the work. {in \Zwirner, 1993 #896}

The idea that the viewer's shadow becomes one with the work emphasizes the shadow-nature of the medium of video projections that Thater employs. Can such a medium be sculptural? It can when it becomes part of the fabric of a room or when the projectors are arranged so that the viewer's shadow becomes part of the work. The interactivity of the human body with Thater's floor scattered projectors serves to point to an immateriality latent in what we usually take to be the solid, physical world. That immateriality is part of the modern consciousness, and is integrally connected with the rise of science.

As Immanuel Kant pointed out at the beginning of the modern era, the armature of perception lies in the abstract, mathematical-like fabric of space and time. But Kant's concept of space and time came before non-Euclidean geometry which introduced spatial dimensions beyond the three dimensions of classical geometry. Such meditations are directly relevant to Thater's *Knots + Surfaces*, 2003, which was inspired by the mathematician Barbara Shipman's discovery that the dance of the honeybee operates in *six* dimensions. Shipman explains:

Inside an active beehive, honeybees perform dances to communicate to their sisters the location of sources of nectar or pollen. This dance contains information of both distance and direction, and its geometry changes with the location of the food source. It turns out that the patterns of the

the more instrumentation extends
our vision beyond our five senses the
less sensible nature appears to be



dance are found in the geometry of a six-dimensional space known as a flag manifold. The geometry reflects the transition from the waggle dance, used for more distant sources, into the round dance, used for nearby sources. It also has a physical interpretation that suggests that the performance of the dance may involve processes that are quantum mechanical. {Shipman, 2002 #897}

The mathematics of flag manifolds (where a ‘flag’ is a sequence of nested subspaces) are used by physicists to understand some of the phenomena associated with quarks, fundamental particles that constitute the ultimate fabric of matter.

Thater’s *Knots + Surfaces* is a poetic meditation on Shipman’s theory that points to the fact that in a scientific age we have every right to question the sense of our senses. Science has shown very clearly that the more instrumentation extends our vision beyond our five senses the less sensible nature appears to be.

Thater is interested in using new technology to push the boundaries of perception. This is evident when in a conversation with Kelly Mason Thater in 1993 when she complained about the romanticism of video art (one thinks here of Bill Viola):

video artists turn away from the machine and turn toward narrative—it’s so much more user-friendly. I guess we could trace this techno-phobia partly to the great failed works of Experiments in Art and Technology like “Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering.” I mean these things didn’t fail, they were like big labs where new things, which often went



awry, were being fleshed out in public. entertain the possibilities of a techno-utopia. ??

It would appear that Thater remains faithful to the experimental tradition and is by no means shy of the technical nature of her medium. Interestingly, most of her work concerns natural subject matter, but this is primarily because she wants to communicate the notion that the distinction between nature and culture is less than clear cut—as the concept of culture as *second nature* indicates.