

## Falls the Shadow

Deborah Stratman

There was a darkness; then a dizzy, sickening sensation of sight that was not like seeing; I saw a Line that was no Line; Space that was not Space: I was myself, and not myself. When I could find voice, I shrieked aloud in agony, “Either this is madness or it is Hell.” “It is neither,” calmly replied the voice of the Sphere, “it is Knowledge; it is Three Dimensions: open your eye once again and try to look steadily.”

— Edwin A. Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, 1884

The fixed gap that exists between our two pupils is, on average, 60 millimeters. In trying to reconcile the slight but resolute disparity between these tandem views, our brain produces the concept of depth. We can say that the gap is the difference that makes a difference. Given a void, the mind scrambles to fill it because the void is the place where reason fails. It’s the blind spot that makes reason retreat to another dimension—to the dimension of thinking, for which the indeterminate is a necessity.

In *Curtains*, two images, one blue, the other red-shifted, slowly approach, fuse, then separate along the horizontal plane. There are physiological by-products of trying to resolve these two images, between which the lacuna imperiously drifts, constricting before gaping wide again. When the two images are just shy of fusion, one experiences a kind of brain-bifurcating wiggle from the frustrated effort of reconciling difference. The unstable vibration throws off ghostly shimmers and solarized forms on otherwise-quotidian images. Then, at the moment of coalescence, we experience a depth charge where the ocular universe jolts and expands, and everything that came before seems a flatland. The combination is not an additive sum, but a multiplicative product—a value of another dimension. Each time those red and blue images coalesce, we get a phenomenological anchor for an artwork that is in all other respects intent on scrutinizing the manufacturing of an image.

Toronto, Vancouver, London, Los Angeles, Chennai, Mumbai, Beijing—urban hosts in a wide net of production nodes to which the fabrication of images is outsourced. Lucy Raven’s camera extracts still frames from these global office sites, each a bland analog for the next, where the common denominator is a seated worker whose underutilized corpus labors before a computer screen on yet another static frame. This isolated frame the worker produces will eventually join up with scores of other immobile frames-in-production and metamorphose into a Hollywood 3D juggernaut. In effect, *Curtains* offers up a divided stasis (of both the filmic frame and the worker’s body) in the ulterior service of careening, simulated embodiment and extra-dimensional profit.

In ancient China, when those in power colonized a new region, it was said the people there “received the calendar.” In Papua New Guinea, the colonial era was referred to as *taim bilong masta* (“time belong master”).<sup>1</sup> One could hardly conceive a more succinct epithet for the surrender of an idiosyncratic, local, indigenous time to that of a synchronized industrial capital. Subjecting people to a new measure of time is one of the

more subtly profound aspects of imperialist power because it represents a colonizing of the mind.

We might say that the division of film into individual frames is a colonizing of space-time. The illusion of motion, when produced from still images, demands that experience be subdivided into a specific number frames per second, 24 for example, separated by intervals of nothingness. The mind leans on these zones of interstitial black to settle the difference between adjacent frames, and in its efforts, comes up with the notion of movement. Which is to say, the industry of cinema regulates and subdivides time in order to mass-produce and distribute a spectacular time. With *Curtains*, Raven both points to and works against this colonizing disposition by producing a place for thinking within a lattice of protracted suspense. We await the red-blue superpositions, each a fleeting, somatic nod to the transnational enterprise of fabricating dimension.

The Chicago-based artist and filmmaker Deborah Stratman makes work that investigates issues of power, control, and belief, exploring how places, ideas, and society are intertwined.

#### **Notes**

The title of this essay is excerpted from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Hollow Men," especially: "Between the idea, And the reality, Between the motion, And the act, Falls the Shadow."

1. Jay Griffiths, *A Sideways Look at Time* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Penguin, 2004), 192.

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