Foreword to the Korean Translation of The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory

The brain becomes our problem or our illness, our passion, rather than our mastery, our solution or decision.[1]

When I was studying in Paris and first discovering Deleuze's cinema books in the early 1990s not much had been written about his work. When *The Matrix of Visual Culture* first came out in 2003 Deleuzian philosophy was gaining importance rapidly. But in the few years that have passed since it is amazing to see how Deleuze studies has developed into a world wide phenomenon of an enormous international network with journals, websites, annual conferences and a stream of book publications. A Deleuzian approach of cinema has now entered every film studies programme as an essential part of the curriculum. I have not (yet) had the change to get acquainted with Korean cinema and Korean culture. But of what I have read and the few films I have seen I can understand why an encounter between Deleuzian philosophy and Korean cinema can be very productive. To briefly motivate this impression, I will refer to just two Korean films and signal two of the latest tendencies in film studies that are already implicitly part of this book, but are becoming more clearly pronounced at the moment. These tendencies are on the one hand the further development of a schizoanalysis of cinema, and on the other hand an interdisciplinary encounter between neurosciences and film theory to develop the famous Deleuzian dictum 'the brain is the screen' further.

As a method of working with Deleuze in film theory I propose in *The Matrix of Visual Culture* always to combine Deleuze's cinema books with his other work, especially the books on capitalism and schizophrenia that he wrote together with Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Now, one of the latest tendencies in Deleuzian film studies is to make this more explicit and develop a 'schizoanalysis of cinema'. Where in the seventies and eighties a psychoanalysis of cinema was firmly established as a theoretical approach of cinema, a schizoanalysis of cinema starts to be developed more widely as a true paradigm. I'd argue that one of the ways in which a schizoanalysis of cinema can be defined, is by starting to look at the clinical conditions of schizophrenia. Obviously Deleuze and Guattari were not aiming at turning us all into pathological insane nutcases. Nevertheless the 'clinical' does say something about the 'critical' (a critical approach to the world). From observations of clinical

schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guatari have developed certain elements that can count as a more universal schizoanalytic approach, such as the world-historical characteristics of the delirium, and the machinic connections of desire and the creations of Bodies without Organs. A schizoanalysis of contemporary culture can also account for certain powers that are prevailing in our saturated media culture, such as the powers of affect and the powers of the false. In these respects it is interesting to see *I'm a cyborg but that's ok* (Park Chan-wook, 2006) not only as an example of 'clinical' delirium cinema of patients in a mental hospital, but also as indications of more general aspects of contemporary culture. On the level of the narrative of the film Young-goon (Su-jeong Lim), the young woman who believes she is a cyborg, creates an anorectic BwO by refusing to eat and wiring herself (quite literally) to all kind of machines and electricity. Il-soon (Rain), a schizophrenic patient himself, finds the right connection to her and convinces her that he has installed a 'rice megatron', a little device that converts food into electric energy, and hence saves her from the black hole of the self-destructing BwO. The powers of affect (connecting without explanations) and powers of the false (playing the game of madness) are everywhere in the story. But also on the level of the aesthetics of the film these schizoanalytic elements are emphasized: the opening sequence seamlessly inserts the credits into the film world, machinic connections are emphasized in the mise-en-scene and the affective dimension of the film's aesthetics is mainly felt through the saturated colors that have a rich Technicolor-like quality. I'm giving here just a sketch of what deserves deeper and also wider analysis in respect to Korean cinema, but it's just to indicate how films that literally deal with delirious characters (and there is a global increase in films with schizophrenic or otherwise 'brain disordered' main characters) point towards the more general delirious nature of contemporary audio-visual culture that seems to cry for a schizoanalysis where the main question has become: how to avoid that a breakthrough turns into a breakdown?

This brings me to the second point that I would like to signal as a possible new development in film theory. Deleuze argued that in order to assess images on screen, film theory should look at neuroscientific principles.[2] Although Deleuze himself never explicitly related his cinema concepts to neuroscientific findings, this invitation for interdisciplinary research is one that deserves further development, especially since neurosciences is going through so many new developments. The exact ways in which these connections can be made are yet to be established, potentially this could lead to infinite interesting connections and encounters. On a general level it can be argued that Deleuze's philosophy actually anticipated neuroscientific proofs in many ways. One striking example I can mention here, which is the

neuroscientific discovery of the so called 'mirror neurons', which seem to proof Deleuze's (Bergsonian) conception of movement-images. Mirror neurons are neurons that fire when we *do* something *and* when we *see* somebody else doing something (in reality or on a screen, that does not make a difference). Mirror neurons thus tell us that seeing is doing, at least at the level of our brain cells. Translated back into Deleuzian terminology we can thus understand how an action-image quite literally produces action in the brain and an affection-image produces affect. It proofs that images have an immanent power and are not second order representations of some other true dimension (reality).

This is only one connection between neuroscience and film theory, many more can be made. But for this short prologue, I'd like to address one other general area of neuroscientif research that can be very productive for film studies, which is the researches conducted within visual neurosciences that investigate questions of attention and awareness. Neuroscientif experiments demonstrate how deeply perception can be misleading by conscious attention and awareness. Without being able to enter into details here, I'd like to argue that *Bin-Jip* (Kim Ki-duk, 2004) is a film that at the level of the film's narrative emphasizes the mind-game that the main character Tae-suk (Jae Hee) plays with his surroundings. Tae-suk is a master in 'becoming-imperceptible' by playing with the limits of attention and awareness in perception. At the beginning of the film, he enters other people's empty houses, remaining out of sight for its actual inhabitants. When he continues this practice with Sun-hwa (Lee Seung-yun), gets caught and ends up in prison, the mind-game of making himself imperceptible becomes more serious. As the prison guard challenges him, Tae-suk starts anticipating the imperfect workings of the human mind, and practices in making himself unperceivable to the eye. This leads to the most beautiful moment of the film where Sun-hwa utters the only words she speaks in the film 'I love you', is embraced by her husband who thinks she is talking to him, and is kissed by Tae-suk who is right behind the unaware husband. Of course the film can be read (and has been read) metaphorically on many levels, but a Deleuzian neuroscientif approach allows us to see how very literally this film plays a trick with the mind's limits of perception (the husband does sense the presence of somebody else, but cannot see it; in fact the touch replaces the eye in this film). Again, much more could be said about this film and about the implications of this approach. But I would just like to point to the meta-implications of both the film, and the neuroscientific questions of attention and awareness. As the director indicates at the end of *Bin-Jip*'s final statement is that 'it is hard to tell if the world we live in is either a reality or a dream'. Again it can be argued that this is just a justification for the metaphorical and fantastic elements in the film (the characters becoming weightless at the

end). But it also refers to the fundamental questions about consciousness and the function of the brain as screen. If we have only limited or even distorted perception of reality, does reality exist or is it constructed in the brain? All neuroscientific evidence points towards the fact that both options are true, but that the borders between 'external' and 'internal' screens are continuously shifting, and therefore remain fundamentally ambiguous. But in any case, it seems that from the time-image onward, cinema has become a mental art, to the point where it becomes possible to speak of a new type of image, a 'neuro-image' that increasingly shows its connections to the mysteries of the brain.

I know I have only been able to touch upon a few of the latest developments in a Deleuzian approach of the filmic image. And I am sure the richness of Korean cinema relates in many more ways to Deleuzian philosophy. I am honored that my work is now translated and I hope it can make productive contributions to film philosophy in Korea. I am also curious to one day read translations from Korean into English. Judging from the rich and intriguing Korean film production those translations will be worthwhile reading and reflecting upon in transnational exchanges.

Patricia Pisters,
Amsterdam November 2007

---

[1] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. London: The Athlone Press, p. 211-212).
[2] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Prees, 1995, p. 60.