

New strategies—Printmaking as a spatial
process, as a transmissional process,
and as a spatial-transmissional process

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I. The idea of *printmaking in the expanded field*, aims to define the process with new concepts, therefore to integrate it into the art field as a part of contemporary art. Because the idea is to remove the artificial borders around printmaking, to really understand the process, a conclusion is reached: the expansion originates consistently from the essence of printmaking – the definition of printmaking expands, and this expansion is based on the real processes of printmaking.

This is a collective process, and I mean this in the sense of Bruno Latour, that all parts in the process are included in this collective as equals: presses, corrosives, plates, printing inks, tarlatans, stones, rolls – depending on what is under process. The final print, or edition of prints, is only equal part of this collective, which forms a network of mobile relationships. It is also possible to use parts of this collective simultaneously, in artistic activities. From this perspective, a single print is also a collective, co-operational, a part of the mobile relationship.

In the discourse of a traditional printed art process, the key concepts are in line: first, from the code to the matrix; second, through transmission, transference, translation; concluding with the output, proof, or print. The description of this chain of events, that we call printmaking, is a projection.

Generally, the process includes polarity and spatiality. Perceptions of my own artistic practice have led me to think that we cannot limit ourselves to visual surface (the actual proof) when looking at printed art; the entire printmaking process, or a part of it, is an essential aspect of its contents or substance.

Matrix

The first matrix of this three-dimensional installation is the photo of a hand; the second is a halftone digital film, which is exposed to ImagOn; and the third, is the matrix. The halftone stencils have holes through which sand is blown (sandblasted), therefore the picture is mechanically engraved on the surface of the stone. The even surface of the stone is a possible fourth matrix – the print is merged with its origin, the polarity of the matrix and the print are intertwined. A matrix can be considered the conceptual turning point, a moment when the transmission or translation takes place.



Päivikki Kallio, *Meetings*, 2009.
Detail of installation, photo, ImagOn
sandblasted onto stone.

The concepts of printed material can also be applied to works that are not obviously “printed art.” During the workshop, *From Surface to Space*, at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Salla Myllylä completed a work in which the trajectory of light was marked using tape, approximately every twenty minutes. Entitled *Winter Light*, this work utilized a process of transmission where the form of the window acted as matrix. The light-tracks were defined (or “printed”) using tape to mark the floor as a way to translate and document a conceptual print-of-light. The Earth’s motion is the source of power (the “press”), and the floor acted as the printing surface.



Salla Myllylä,
Winter Light, 2012.

And if we expand this story – the idea of projection and spatiality – we come to the following interpretation. In Myllylä’s work, she creates a structure of projection in which the form of the window works as a mask, a projector lens,

and a matrix. The sun is the projector light, the Earth's motion is the source of power, and the floor acts as the printing surface. She has documented the projection of motion with tape – the proof. At the same time, Myllylä has produced animation frames and made a site-specific artwork. Light is fixed; it is tagged.

Myllylä's work can be regarded as printed matter, even though there are no materials or methods of the printing process. It reveals to us the projection and the spatiality that is built within printed art.

There is structural spatiality between the matrix and the proof, and it will always be there. A print is indexical; it has a direct relationship with the matrix, but an indirect conceptual relationship with reality. The matrix may continue to exist after printing, or it can be disposed of or merged to the print.

In the work by Sanna Kumpulainen, photographs are digitally separated into tone layers that are then carved into wood panel using the disappearing-block-strategy. To explain this in detail: first, the top lights are cut, and then, descending from the lightest to the darkest areas, each tone is printed separately on translucent papers that are re-assembled as a multi-layered image. Each print works like a meta-matrix: it gives an optical contribution to each successive layer. The matrix is separated into layers and becomes un-materialized. The effect, results in the appearance of a three-dimensional, and out of focus, photographic image.

As a form of contemporary art, printed art often reflects the printing process, especially when making the polarity between the matrix and the print visible. This occurs in countless ways in which spatial distance can vary from the zero point to abstract infinity.

Twilight of the Idols, is the installation work by Qiu Zhijie, at the Haus der Kulturen in Berlin. The installation is of a huge screen directly in front of the viewer, like a spectacle, or widescreen movie, in which the image area is in quiet motion. The work can be viewed from two directions: seen from the front of the gallery, where the space is large, or from the back, where it resembles a backstage feeling. The matrix consists of various materials such as cut cardboard, objects, and fabric. Using light, the installation is projected onto the surface (imprinted), resulting in a sharp or blurry effect dependant on the proximity of the installation material to the projector – the closest areas are sharp and those more distant are blurry, imitating an aerial perspective. Together, they form a tableau.



Qiu Zhijie, *Twilight of the Idols*, 2009, Detail of installation.



Sanna Kumpulainen,
Installation project for MFA degree, 2015.
Woodcut and light.

The previous works illustrate how the relationship between the matrix and the print resembles a projection. If we realize the print is a polar way of thinking – a projection at the core of the printed – it reveals new strategies for printmaking as a contemporary art practice. Polarity may be expressed in many ways, and in many forms. It can be a referent, a presence of a causal consequence, an index, a focus, a performance, a limited state, or a temporal transition.

Roland Barthes wrote of the photograph as a trace of the past. I think one might consider a print to be only half of a whole, since we do not see the matrix. A multilevel mode is created within printed matter, which is deeply conceptual. We feel a longing for the unknown that we can only see as an imprint. This gives rise to melancholy, a longing for the matrix. Visual delight will follow, and it is secondary.

II.

Spatiality is one strategy to integrate printmaking into the field of contemporary art. Other concepts that could become new strategies within the process of printmaking are transference, transmission, and translation. Especially now, during the digital-age, these concepts are practical and descriptive for matrixes as immaterial codes that could define different types of outputs – electrical or material. Meanwhile, the digital process has destroyed the idea of editions, or proved its commercial extensions. Digital printers do not press, they transmit pigments onto different materials. Instead of speaking about printed proofs, we could use the concept of transferred tracks, instead; as this would expand the dimensions of understanding printed art. Compare the inkjet pigment print to the late 1800s

carbon print, both images are transferred by pigment onto coated paper.

Code and transmission.

Experimenting with a process, which is always based on code and transformation, open up new possibilities for inference. The code is monochromatic: black/white, or transparent, and is generally of halftone and, nowadays, often digital. Almost every matrix includes this on/off structure, except perhaps monotypes, but transmissions take place in these cases as well; therefore there is no crucial difference in the meaning between traditional and contemporary print.

Digital code often refers to photography, which has close connections to printed art from a historical perspective. A photograph transfers into printed art through conceptualization; in other words, through encoding, usually through a halftone process. These processes transform countless tones into a monochromatic system of black and white. An encoded photograph is a picture of the essential, of the idea; the raster is for transmitting the meaning, information, and the copy. An encoded photo matrix transfers data onto the output, and the distance between the matrix and output is dynamic. The contact gives shape to the results and allows for repetition.

The photo print is regarded as having a direct relationship with reality, whereas the printed proof has primarily an indexical, direct proportion, to the matrix; even though in both processes, something is transmitted, and something is transformed, whether the process was a chemical reaction or an image produced by printing ink. Markus



Markus Lampinen,
Nameless 1, 2004,
Woodcut.

Lampinen's work, *Nameless 1*, reveals the origin of the print by its surface structure of the print – we understand that this is not a photograph (although due to the artist's skilled cutting, its similarity is obvious).

In Tatu Tuominen's work, tones are cut, one at a time, to separate the layers and then combine into layered-low-reliefs. When light shines directly in front of the displayed work, we see the matrix and the relief, but when the light comes from behind, the work appears to be of a three-dimensional black and white photograph. The light "prints" the matrix onto itself, and a photograph occurs, but only in the viewer's mind. In this work, the code acts like a punch-card; information is saved into the order of holes, a method used during the early digital age.

The "real metaphor" when printing halftones, is exemplified in Shiro Takatani's installation, *Water Matrix, Art and Robots*. Takatani's installation consists of two layers separated by a distance of two meters: one hangs from the ceiling, the other which is placed on the floor. Both layers have a grid of holes from which water pours from the upper plate. The robot conducts the "rhythm" of the pour, as well as defining which holes are activated. In this exhibition, we witness the encoded halftone matrix transmitting the material message/information/data. Use of the word "transmission" suggests spatiality, which is flexible, infinite, and conceptual; and punch-cards can also be seen as a connection to the idea of digital code.

Material matrix is followed by melancholy – but my tentative question is whether it is possible to think of the digital, immaterial, and matrix, as something almost



Tatu Tuominen,
*Coming Straight from
the Boondox*, 2005,
Cut paper-light installation.

Shiro Takatani, *Water Matrix*,
Art and Robots,
Cite des Science, Paris, 2014.





Jarkko Räsänen, "28/09/2008 (Stronghold)" 2010–2012, pigment print from the series *Ordered Dance*.

non-existent. Even though there is a code, the inner structure is like a projection – it is flat, merged, and non-spatial in the sense of a material matrix. Is this the reason why the digital "aspect" (as it stands, in the lack of a melancholic dimension), and the surface, is of more importance, and of visual delight?

There is also an expanded field coming from examples where a purely digital printing process works spatially. Jarkko Räsänen's, *28/09/2008 (Stronghold)*, is a pigmented print from the series, *Ordered Dance*, which comprises of snapshots cut into narrow strips using self-made software that analyzes the amount of light or special colours. The strips are reorganized according to different attributes; for instance, the order consists of increasing brightness from left to right. Original digital information is preserved; the material quality is more visible at the expense of the original narration. It forms nearly-abstract surfaces, however, it retains the reference of a photo-mode. Could it be speculated that digital inkjet printing, and working with code, will bring photography conceptually back into the discourse of printed art?

At the core of the printmaking process, transmission and code form the intellectual content – the conceptual dimension. Each transmission in printed art, as in photography, brings a new conceptual and spatial level. It gives meaning, which is involved with the material aspect, but also forms an essential part of the substance.

The multiplicity of an edition, suggests one way in which printmaking is democratic. The concept of multiplicity originates from the seventies, but has since failed to be



a strategy, or reasoning, for a conceptual argument in printmaking; thereby printmaking was discarded from discussion in the contemporary art field. Edition without purpose, as such, is meaningless without content. In the digital universe, multiplication is meaningless, because everything can be transmitted and shared through different platforms; therefore, printmaking is rather participatory than democratic. When considering new strategies for the printmaking medium, we should examine: what the printed art consists of; how it is being used; how it could exist as contemporary art; and, how should it be presented to the field of Contemporary art – it is important to understand the difference between these positions. In the expanded field of printmaking, my prediction, paradoxically, will see the edition being reborn, as an indefinite mode.

Päivikki Kallio, *Exit*, 2015.
Installation, pigment transfer
onto manipulated gyproc.