The Passage - Combining Analog and Digital Photographic Techniques for Artistic Expression

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1 Topic

The topic of this work (see figure 1), also represented in its titel, is the idea of a passage. The photograph shows an aisle of a building in an acient town in Europe. Large parts of the scene sink in darkness and ambiguity. Time has left visible marks of decay on the walls. However, as the photograph has been taken in the early morning, a small but central part of the image is filled with the light of the rising sun, and not completely by chance a first human appears at the end of the aisle. The columns at both sides not only divide the space of this tunnel-like alley. They also phase the passing time while pacing them of, as if they where dunning instances deciding over your progression. An ambivalent effect of the artwork is intendet. Whether it evokes feelings of gloom, isolation, or even imminence or whether hope prevails, depends on the observer. The ancient and mystic impression of this work is achieved by an estrangement of the original photograph, which has been taken nowadays, by stylistic devices such as coarse grain and artificial colorization.

Digital art first of all has to be art. A work of art, either digital or not, has to express an artistic statement. Shining examples for artistic statements and a source of inspiration for *The Passage* has been the Russian filmmaker Andrej Tarkowskij. Tarkowskij takes the view that a work of art should suggest something inexpressible. It can evoke a memory of a personal emotional incident and has the intention to arouse an own spiritual state in the observer. By giving an account of a hopeless world an artist can arouse the feeling of the opposite ideal [2]. *The Passage* tries its hand at this.

2 Formal Composition

The image is composed according to stern compositional restrictions. Several visual primitives for images have been identified, which are able to evoke an aestetic appeal, i.e., the choice of monochrome colors, the exploitation of the dynamic range, clarity of the spatial organization of the image components, the rhythm of repeated forms, or the impression of depth by linear perspective (see [1] for a survey of aesthetic primitives of images). In *The Passage* a number of them has been applied. For example, the viewer's eye is drawn into the depth of the image by the central perspective composition and the progressive rhythm of the repeated columns of the aisle. The film grain, the artificially added grain, and the subtle, artificial colorization should give the photograph an appeal close to painting, because it may evoke an anticipation of former times. Summarizing, *The Passage* aims at the correspondence of an aesthetic appeal, the formal compsition, and the intended statment.

3 Technique

The technical process to generate this image is a hybrid one, combining old (analog) and new (digital) techniques. The photograph has been taken on panchromatic film. The negative has then been scanned with high resolution (4000 ppi). After applying the usual image enhancement techniques, artifical grain is added to the images to further exaggerate the effect of the film grain. Only after this the image is scaled up to its final size. It is important that the grain is added before the enlargement, because otherwise the pointilist effect, especially interesting from different viewing distances, is missed (see detail of *The Passage* in figure 2). Finally, a triplex filter with yellowish and purple tones is applied to the black and white image for atmospheric reasons.

References

[1] Peters, G.: Aesthetic Primitives of Images for Visualization. Symposium on Design and Aesthetics in Visualisation (DAViz 2007), 2007.

[2] Tarkowskij, A.: Die versiegelte Zeit. Gedanken zur Kunst, zur Ästhetik und Poesie des Films. Ullstein Taschenbuchverlag, 2000.
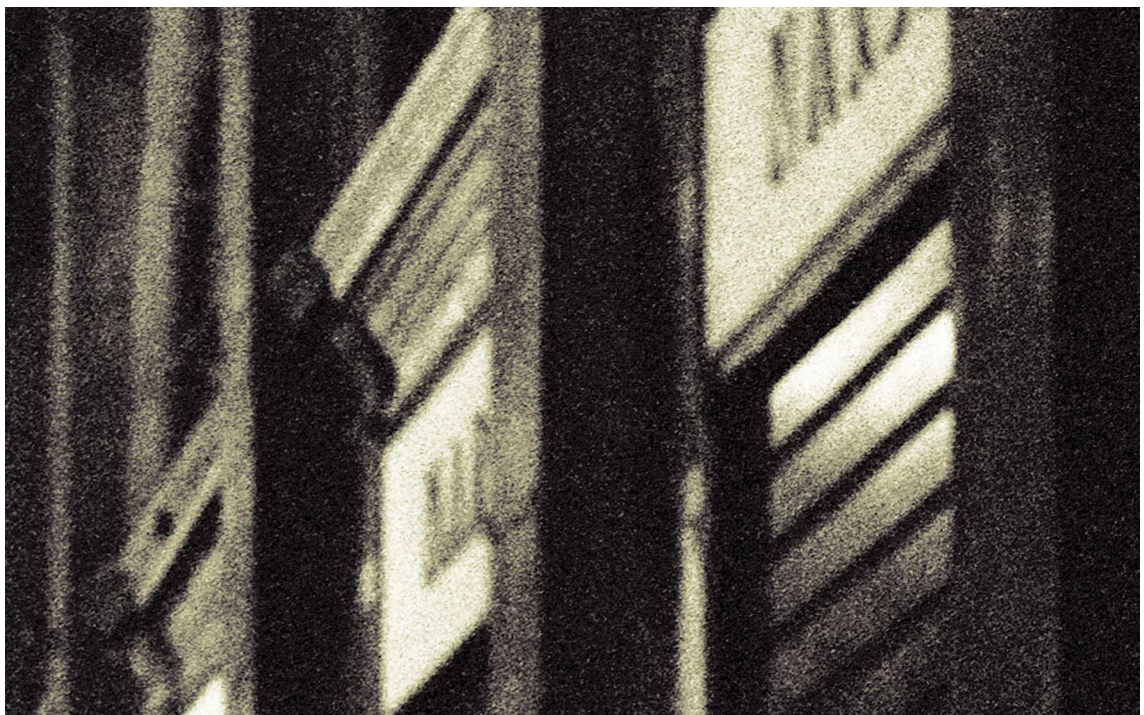
Figure 1: *The Passage*

Figure 2: Detail of *The Passage* as it appears in the original print.