

Impure Cinema: Political Pedagogies in Film and Theory

by

Nico Baumbach

Literature Program
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Jane Gaines, Co-Chair

Fredric Jameson, Co-Chair

Negar Mottahedeh

Michael Hardt

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Program in
Literature in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2009

ABSTRACT

Impure Cinema: Political Pedagogies in Film and Theory

by

Nico Baumbach

Program in Literature
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Jane Gaines, Co-Chair

Fredric Jameson, Co-Chair

Negar Mottahedeh

Michael Hardt

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Program in
Literature the Graduate School
of Duke University

2009

Copyright by
Nicholas Gower Baumbach
2009

Abstract

In 1969, the influential French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinema*, reemerged following the upheavals of May 68 with a statement expressing a commitment to “the scientific criticism of capitalist ideology.” Once known for passionate impressionistic celebrations of filmmakers working within the Hollywood system, the editors of *Cahiers* announced at this time that all films should be analyzed in terms of their relation to the dominant ideology, an approach that would provide a template for much Anglo-American film studies in the following decades. In 1996, two well-known American film scholars edited a volume called *Post-Theory* announcing the end of “Grand Theory.” Theory, the authors countered, should be limited to piecemeal empirical investigations of normative viewing practices. The discipline of film studies, as they saw it, could only be salvaged by being liberated from the sterile dogmas of ideology critique and identity politics.

Impure Cinema: Political Pedagogies in Film and Theory asks what are the ways that the politics of film theory have been conceptualized since the era now known as “70s film theory.” In particular, it analyzes the writings on cinema, politics and art by contemporary French philosophers Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière in relation to the influential approaches of Louis Althusser and Gilles Deleuze and to theories of documentary cinema. I argue that unlike the political modernism of 70s film theory and the post-theory turn of 90s film studies, Badiou and Rancière offer an approach to film theory that neither assumes that all films are political, nor that politics underdetermine theory, but rather suggests that we analyze both theories and films in terms of how they

construct connections between cinema and politics. Following Deleuze, I call these connections “pedagogical” not because they transmit knowledge but because they always involve a new kind of connection or relation that seeks to transform habitual ways of seeing, saying or doing. For Badiou and Rancière this is based on a conception of cinema as “impure.” Cinema, they argue, is never free of elements from other arts or daily life, but it is this impurity that is the grounds for linking its artistic and political possibilities. I look at various film forms that highlight cinema’s impurity, in particular the “actuality” and how it has been reappropriated in various forms of documentary and essayistic practices as a way of giving cinematic form to questions of political equality.

Dedication

“The exercise was beneficial.” -- *Moonfleet* (Fritz Lang, 1955)

For Carolyn. And for my father.

Contents

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction: After Political Modernism.....	1
Chapter 1: Rancière and the Politics of Film Theory After Althusser	29
Chapter 2: Badiou and the Philosophy of Cinema After Deleuze.....	75
Chapter 3: Nature Caught In The Act: On the Transformation of an Idea of Art in Early Cinema and Beyond	133
Chapter 4: Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary	172
Chapter 5: Cinematic Equality: From Vertov to Warhol to Kiarostami	249
Works Cited	282
Biography	295

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the members of my committee: to Jane Gaines for all her valuable comments over the years, her commitment and whimsy, and for always favoring risky, adventurous work; to Fredric Jameson for being such a generous reader and teacher as well as being a great, if largely unacknowledged, influence on my own thinking about the relation between aesthetics and politics that I develop in this dissertation; to Negar Mottahedeh for her time and care and for being an ally and supporter as well as an invaluable resource on Iranian cinema; and to Michael Hardt for being a model of clarity, and for demonstrating how critical thought should always be tied to affirmation. Thanks to Danette Patchner and the rest of the Lilly library staff for helping me find the films I needed to see. Thanks to Tiwonda Johnson-Blount, Literature's Program Assistant, for making so many things easier than they otherwise would have been.

Introduction: After Political Modernism

Impurity, Politics, Pedagogy, Cinema: On a Constellation of Concepts

The title of this dissertation links together three terms in relation to cinema studies: impurity, politics and pedagogy. Each deserves a preliminary explanation though I'll be developing these terms over the course of the dissertation.

First: Impurity. Alain Badiou derives his concept of cinema as an impure art from André Bazin's 1952 essay "Pour Un Cinéma Impur: Défense de L'Adaptation," known in Hugo Gray's standard English translation as "In Defense of Mixed Cinema."¹ Bazin because of his famous essay grounding cinema in the "ontology of the photographic image" is known as a theorist of medium specificity who defines cinema's ontology by the fact that it embalms the real in duration, but he proposes that once we think in terms of film's "aesthetics" as distinct from what he calls its "psychology," there is always an impure relation to the other arts and to non-art.² It is this impurity that Badiou elevates to the status of cinema's ontology. Jacques Rancière calls it cinema's "thwarting logic." As he puts it, "the art and thought of images have always been nourished by all that thwarts them."³

This non-teleological, anti-essentialist conception of cinema is central to thinking the politics of cinema's aesthetics and a dynamic relation between theory and cinema.⁴

¹ See Andre Bazin, "In Defense of Mixed Cinema," *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. Hugo Gray, University of California Press, 2005, 53-75.

² *Ibid*, 11.

³ Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battsista (New York: Berg Publishers, 2006), 19.

⁴ Of course, Badiou's theory of cinema could be considered essentialist since, as we said, for him cinema's lack of medium specificity in some sense defines its specificity, but, as we shall see, for Badiou's

But more than merely another anti-essentialist claim demonstrating the limitations of the modernist doxa that grounds the aesthetics of an art in terms of its capacity to be in some way “about” the very medium itself, I wish to use “impurity” as a positive not a negative category that I claim is central to thinking the politics of cinema. Politics for Badiou and Rancière cannot be realized by cinema, but cinema like theory or philosophy is “metapolitical” because it has the capacity to transform logics of appearance and the divisions of what counts as sensory data or experience.

I have enlisted Rancière and Badiou to propose a new way of conceiving the thinking of cinema’s politics today in part because of their relation to a history of French thought that has been so influential in defining the politics of cinema and of film theory itself. Badiou and Rancière are uniquely situated to allow us to reevaluate still prevalent conceptions of cinema and film theory’s relation to the political deriving from Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan as well as the more recent turn toward Gilles Deleuze in film studies. Despite their differences, what Badiou and Rancière share is a critical distance from Althusserian, Lacanian and Deleuzian film theory as well as an engagement with and fidelity to certain questions and problems posed by the writing on cinema linked to these three figures. The most important of these questions or problems for our concerns is that of cinema’s relation to politics. Indeed, where the influence of Lacan, Althusser and Deleuze is no longer felt and their projects repudiated in

prescriptive philosophy, with cinema as with all the other arts, their truths are defined by fidelity to artistic configurations already in existence. In the Sartrean terms of Badiou’s youth, an art’s “essence” is an effect of its “existence.” It should be noted, for Rancière, in contrast to Badiou, painting and literature are “impure” in the same way cinema is.

contemporary film studies, we tend to see a retreat from the very idea of politics as central to the project of thinking about cinema.⁵ Badiou and Rancière offer us the tools to critically reevaluate the legacy of what D. N. Rodowick following Sylvia Harvey has called film theory's "political modernism"⁶ as well as the reductive dismissal of thinking the politics of film form today.

Politics is simultaneously the most ordinary and the most difficult term in our constellation and for that reason the question of how politics has been conceptualized in film theory will be the central concern of the remainder of this Introduction as well as Chapter 1. In what may be the most canonical statement of so-called "political modernism," Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni claimed in 1969 that "every film is political."⁷ For both Badiou and Rancière, politics, on the contrary, is defined by its rarity rather than its omnipresence. Politics is the rare inscription of an axiomatic equality by a collective subject. But the specificity and rarity of *politics* does not mean the erasure of *the political* or *metapolitical* as a question or problem for any critical engagement with any subject, be it art, science, education or history. On the one hand, art, culture and film are not then to be confused with politics. On the other hand, as

⁵ I am not proposing that one *needs* Althusser, Lacan or Deleuze to think film in relation to politics. Nor, on the other hand, am I proposing that all film theory that is influenced by any or all of these three figures is necessarily political. Rather, as will be discussed below, I am making an historical claim; film theory and criticism as it was pursued in journals like *Screen*, *Cahiers Du Cinema* and *Cinéthique* in the late 60s and 70s and in academic film studies tended to use vocabulary derived from Althusser and Lacan for a discourse that presumed that film theory was part of a political project. More recent use of Deleuze for film theory tends to make this same assumption. Meanwhile, critics of these French theorists and their followers have tended to assume that, as Noël Carroll argues, "theories underdetermine political commitments." See, Carroll, "Prospects For Film Theory," in *Post-Theory* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 47.

⁶ See D.N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1.

⁷ Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Criticism/Ideology," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7th Edition, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 688.

Rancière in particular argues, modern art is defined by enabling this very confusion. Art in what he calls “the aesthetic regime of art” is torn between identifying aesthetics and politics and separating them though it is never able to fully realize either the identification or separation. The multiplicity of ways of thinking or imagining this paradoxical linkage between art and politics in both art and discourses about art is what I am proposing to call *pedagogy*.

More specifically for our subject, pedagogy, as derived from Deleuze by way of Serge Daney, is the method that links aesthetics and politics in film and film theory. It is the term I will use for the specific ways of marking the politics of cinematic aesthetics. I am using pedagogy first as a descriptive concept for delineating a wide range of metapolitics of aesthetics often opposed to one another that can characterize both film practice and film theory. But I am finally prescribing certain forms of pedagogy that grasp cinema’s impurity in favor of constructing dissensual forms of equality.⁸ This

⁸ On the one hand, as Badiou and Rancière argue, the link between pedagogy, art and politics goes back to Plato. On the other hand, the pedagogical politics of cinema and art in general has become more explicit and is even thematized in much art of the last 15 to 25 years. See, for example, Nicholas Bourriard’s influential *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses Du Reel, 1998). Or as Fredric Jameson put it in 1992, “My own feeling is that new forms of political art—if not a postmodern political art, then at least a political art within postmodernity—are so far to felt dimly stirring in the general area of the didactic. By weakening the older forms of aesthetic autonomy, by breaking down the barriers, not merely between high and low culture, but also between literary language and other forms of discourse, by dissolving the fictional into a whole immense world of representations and image-spectacles which are henceforth as real as any referent, the postmodern situation has, perhaps unwittingly, released new possibilities, and in particular enabled new and different uses of the art object, owing to the heterogeneity of its contents—some intrinsic in the older aestheticizing sense, some ‘extrinsic’ in ways that go well beyond the older conceptions of collage, montage, cine verite or newspaper novel. As an astute observer has noted, we are not adverse to learning things (facts, recipes, history) out of postmodern books and even postmodern novels, in a readerly impurity hitherto taboo and excluded from the practice of the high modernist classics. Reading having been redrawn in contemporary theory, it is now time to restructure our conception of learning itself.” See Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 188. Following Jameson, it would make sense that we call what comes after “political modernism,” in both film and film theory, “political postmodernism.” However, in this dissertation I generally avoid use of the term “postmodern” in keeping with the arguments of Badiou and Rancière, who, as we shall see, have their own reasons for avoiding the language of both modernism and postmodernism. Also, the common use of variations on the word “postmodern” by journalists but also certain high profile academics including some within film studies, as an epithet for a wide range of theory not only has imbued the term with so many unhelpful connotations

more prescriptive form of pedagogy is in a sense a kind of anti-pedagogy. As Rancière has put it, “My view of emancipation is that art emancipates or literature emancipates when it doesn’t tell us how to use art or to use literature—how we have to understand, how we have to see, how we have to read, and what we have to understand.”⁹ This negative definition sounds deceptively simple, but what Rancière means by emancipation cannot be understood as neutrality but on the contrary, as a suspension or neutralization of the symbolic logic and protocols of reading that are inscribed in films understood as politically neutral as much as those that have explicit political messages. Pedagogy refers then as much to methods or styles as lessons or messages. In the remainder of this Introduction, I offer a brief outline of the political pedagogies that have shaped the thinking of cinema in film studies. Then I offer a more programmatic way of thinking cinematic pedagogy today and conclude with an outline of how the chapters of this dissertation will develop these concepts.

The Politics of Film Theory and its Discontents

In 1936 Walter Benjamin published the essay “The Work of Art In The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” that confronts us with the following claim: the “function” of the work of art is, for the first time in history, political. The evidence:

that Jameson’s Marxist conception of postmodernism as “the cultural logic of late capitalism” tends to get obscured.

⁹ Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetics Against Incarnation: An Interview with Anne Marie Oliver,” *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 2008, 181.

cinema.¹⁰ In the words of Giorgio Agamben filtering Benjamin's argument through Deleuze, "cinema essentially ranks with ethics and politics (and not merely with aesthetics),"¹¹ which in turn forges a resonance or "proximity" between cinema and philosophy.

What came to be known as "film theory" in the American academy kept faith with this claim of Benjamin's by way of a vocabulary that has its origins in the French theory that emerged out of structuralism. Though now a reversal had taken place. "Theory," as opposed to philosophy, claimed cinema, as a signifying system, must be grasped politically, but as a cultural product, cinema's politics were thought to be obscured by ideology. It should be added that cinema was not just any signifying system or cultural product; film theory's wager in concert with Benjamin was that there was something special about cinema as a mass art that made it a locus for this struggle between ideology and politics. Cinema needed politics but its essence was not political so much as anti-political.

We can grasp this line of thought in a sentence by Christian Metz that can be seen as a succinct statement of the guiding assumption that united the heterogeneous project of 1960s and 1970s film theory: The role of film theory, Metz claimed, is "To disengage the

¹⁰ "The Work of Art In The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" in *Walter Benjamin Selected Writings: Volume 3 1935-1938*, trans. Edmond Jephcott and Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 106. "But as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics." Film "emancipates" art from authenticity and ritual because: "Film is the first art form whose artistic character is entirely determined by its reproducibility." Ibid, 109.

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 154.

cinema-object from the imaginary and win it for the symbolic.”¹² This is where semiotics, Marxism as rewritten by Louis Althusser and psychoanalysis as rewritten by Jacques Lacan all seemed to find a point of convergence in the fruitful moment that began in continental Europe in the 1960s, especially France, and spread throughout the Anglo-American academic world in the 1970s. Cinema was a machine of the imaginary and theory by imposing questions of representation and the subject onto a phenomenological experience that effaced those questions was a political intervention. The “symbolic,” in Lacan’s sense, not to be confused with how the word is normally used in English, was political because, as the domain of the circuit of signifiers, it was another name for the material conditions of our seemingly transparent, and hence “imaginary,” lived experience of reality.¹³ As Pier Paolo Pasolini claimed, the work of theory was to add something to our knowledge of its object and hence to separate itself from “the obscure ontological background” that arises from “explaining cinema with cinema.”¹⁴ By thinking in terms of the symbolic or structure, theory produced what Althusser called a “knowledge-effect” to wrest cinema from the ideological immediacy of the cinematic experience.¹⁵ As the example of Pasolini should remind us, this period was not anti-cinema, but was firmly committed to a cinema of the symbolic, whether in the “camera-stylo” of Nicholas Ray or John Ford in which the mise-en-scène functions as écriture to

¹² Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 3.

¹³ As Lacan himself put it, “The structures of society are symbolic.” See *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 108. It was by way of Althusser however, that Lacan’s concept of the symbolic was used for ideology critique.

¹⁴ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 197.

¹⁵ For Althusser’s conception of the “knowledge-effect,” see Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* (New York: Verso, 2008), 62.

reveal the contradictions of the film's official narrative or in the more overtly oppositional cinema of a Godard or Pasolini in which the cinematic-imaginary is perpetually under erasure.¹⁶ The concern, according to Godard, was not with the reflection of reality, but the reality of reflection;¹⁷ that is, not with the imaginary, but the symbolic.

It is this presumed link between cinema studies and politics grasped in terms of the symbolic or, rather, in the terms more typical of cultural studies—a critical relation to dominant ideology—that is now viewed with suspicion and underwrites the market for books and articles from the 1990s on that reevaluate the tradition of film theory as problematic and dated if not faddish, obscurantist and incoherent.¹⁸ Film studies is now in a period of restoration or revitalization depending on one's perspective in which a wide range of new research projects tend to share a marked distance from this moment in 70s film theory. A new consensus about the future of film studies has not emerged but we can note certain tendencies. A book published in 1998 entitled *Post-Theory* edited by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll hoping to usher in a new era by dethroning “Grand Theory” in favor of a more modest “piecemeal” approach offered cognitivism as its most

¹⁶ For the way that the auteur cinema celebrated by an earlier generation of cinephiles manages to, in effect, say what it does not want to say, see in particular: Editors of *Cahiers du cinema*, “John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*,” trans. Helen Lackner and Diana Matias, in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 444-482. For an influential example of an analysis of oppositional or “counter-cinema” in this mode, see Peter Wollen, “Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent D’est*,” reprinted in the same volume, 120-129.

¹⁷ The often-cited statement is from a line of dialogue in *La Chinoise* (Godard, 1967).

¹⁸ The most well-known is probably *Post-Theory* discussed below. See also, Noel Carroll, *Mystifying Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). These books should probably be understood with the broader context of debates about theory across the humanities, as well as the even broader context of the so-called “culture wars.” In a less combative tone, see, for example Rodowick’s aforementioned *Crisis of Political Modernism* or *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (London: Hodder Arnold, 2000). These latter books are, for most part, in critical dialogue with the period of 70s film theory and they wish to situate it, not dismiss it. My work could be seen as part of this project. If I choose these two titles as examples, it is because I think that the words “Crisis” and “Reinventing” are symptomatic not only of trends in publishing but the perceived state of film studies.

promising new avenue of investigation.¹⁹ If cognitivism seems not to have had the traction within film studies programs the authors may have hoped, the polemical dimension of their book seems less and less like the contrarian position it was announced as at the time. A stated polemical distance from “Theory” (with a capital ‘T’) should be familiar to anyone having read the introductions to books on film put out by academic presses in the last twenty or so years. All too often anti-Grand Theory might rather be called Grand Anti-Theory in that it turns Theory into such a monolithic project that once a little common sense is offered to undermine some of the most provocative claims that have been influential, then suddenly a vast range of philosophical inquiry and scholarly research can be swept under the rug. But it would be unfair to lump this tendency in with more nuanced critiques that seek to shake off the most sterile tendencies of academic theoretical doxa in favor of new avenues of thinking about film form and history.

While the *Post-Theory* volume may not have inaugurated a new dominant paradigm in American film studies, and indeed this would have gone against its stated intentions, it can, at the very least, be seen as marking a turn that was already in place toward more modest and circumscribed scholarly ambitions within the academic study of film and the “piecemeal” approach could be used to characterize the work of many who may not share the same antipathy to psychoanalysis and Marxism as the contributors to the book. Bordwell’s own pursuit of formal and stylistic histories provide one example of a not explicitly cognitivist “piecemeal” approach as do turns to analytic philosophy,

¹⁹ See *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, eds. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). Bordwell and Carroll refer to “the Theory” as “top-down,” “homogeneous,” “univocal” etc. If I use Metz’s statement to unite “70s film theory,” it is not to support these characterizations. Rather, I wish to isolate a tendency that I believe connects a complex range of material that had its own internal divisions and debates.

ordinary language philosophy, as well as more empirically based histories focusing on regional and/or national cinemas, “early cinema” and so on. Since interpretive and scholarly work cannot so easily do without theory (as Bordwell and Carroll would agree) we have also witnessed various “returns” to interesting and not so interesting avenues of the history of film theory that may have been forgotten about or dismissed in its Althusserian-Lacanian phase—phenomenology, Henri Bergson, Andre Bazin, to questions of bodies and embodiment, to aesthetics and beauty, to ethics and morality.²⁰

Yet at the same time as the more piecemeal approaches, one cannot help but notice a completely antithetical strain invading film studies in which Agamben’s claim about cinema’s ethico-political essence is seen as realized by digital technologies in the information age of which the feature film becomes only one player among many. If the post-theory turn was often justified by a necessity for a clearer delineation of the film object against such extrinsic concerns as politics and culture, the increasing lack of clarity about what the object of moving image studies is today becomes an opening for a new more expansive theory of mediation in relation to transforming notions of body and mind in a post-human age. Here we find a subsumption of film theory into media and technology theory that do Benjamin one better by announcing the convergence of philosophy, politics, science and aesthetics in the cultures of technology and the

²⁰ An influential book in the return to phenomenology is Vivian Sobchack, *Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Deleuze’s *Cinema 1* is likely the main source for a renewed interest in Bergson, though not all current Bergsonian theories of the image are strictly Deleuzian. For Deleuze and questions of the body, see Chapter 2. These trends along with more classical approaches to aesthetics and ethics get folded into new market for books on film and philosophy. See the readers, *Thinking Through Cinema: Film As Philosophy*, ed. Murray Smith and Thomas E. Wartenberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), *Philosophy of Film Motion Pictures*, ed. Noel Carroll and Jinhee Choi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) and *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). As for Bazin, a provocative reappraisal of his work can be found in Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

technologies of culture without being weighed down by troubling questions about “the base,” or mode of production, that for Benjamin made this thinking possible. One advantage of the technology centered global perspective, to the extent that it still is interested in the moving image, is that it can incorporate a large range of new objects from video games to artist videos to QuickTime and YouTube.²¹

Within this new pluralism however, both piecemeal and global, there is a turn away from analyzing the logic of the film text or film work and toward the imaginary realm of the viewing experience. The rapidly proliferating English-language books on Deleuze and cinema as well as the recent returns to phenomenology in both film theory and New Media studies, privilege what is no longer called the imaginary, but is now referred to as affect or sensation. These writings would likely wish to separate themselves from Bordwell and Carroll’s “Post-Theory,” but if the cognitivists’ studies of perception and comprehension grounded in “biological propensities” and “cognitive universals” would strike the Deleuzian as too normative and not properly nomadic, let’s identify what they have in common: a refusal to see media in terms of either the subject of enunciation or representation and an unqualified dismissal of the utility of concepts such as identification, ideology or any terminology derived from psychoanalysis or Saussurian

²¹See, for example, much of the field of New Media Studies or at least the component of the field that concentrates on moving images, including Lev Manovitch, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1998) and Mark Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 2006). See also the influential work of Bernard Stiegler and Friedrich Kittler. Gertrude Koch argues, I think rightly, that this approach, which takes technology to play much the same role that structuralists accorded to language can be traced to Heidegger. Here is her gloss on this premise of New Media theory: “Technology encompasses the idea of *techne* in the sense that at its base it is not only a tool for constructing objects in the world but also a construction of a world in the radical sense that Martin Heidegger read the Aristotelian conception of *techne*.” Gertrude Koch, “Carnivore or Chameleon: The Fate of Cinema Studies,” *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 2009), 921.

linguistics.²² In short, the tendency is simply to reverse the Metzian dogma. Today, the dominant assumption of writing on the moving image is that the goal is to wrest it from the symbolic and restore it to its immanence as a heterogeneous bodily and/or cognitive experience.

In this wide range of approaches, Lacan's use of "symbolic" is just as out of favor as his concept of "imaginary" so it might be better to say that what is rejected is the logic of interpretation contained in Metz's call for winning cinema for the symbolic. Broadly what is rejected is a certain Marxian tradition of critical thought in which the analysis of film proceeded deductively from the political premise that the hierarchies of a class divided patriarchal western culture are embedded in the viewing practices we take to be normal. Noël Carroll claimed that Film Theory "mystified movies"²³ but it might be more accurate to claim that what he was rejecting was the *demystification* of movies or the modes of discourse that took as their premise that movies *could be demystified* and that they were not the sum of their parts. Indeed, as Rancière argues, demystifying requires an element of mystifying since it is a literary as much as philosophical or theoretical gesture,²⁴ a point we will pursue in Chapter 1. As Marx claimed about the

²² In a sense, we might identify this as a kind of turn to the spectator's experience with a new emphasis on the body, perception and affection from Deleuzeans and neo-phenomenologists, or perception and cognitive processing from cognitivists. The "subject" in 70s film theory referred rather to how the subject was interpellated by the apparatus or dispositif of cinema. It was an effect of the film text or film work and the economic conditions it emerged out of. It should be added that Deleuze himself makes no mention of spectators. In his writings, affects and percepts are not presented in reference to either empirical or transcendental spectators. For the difference between Deleuze's Cinema books and certain tendencies in Deleuzian film theory, see Chapter 2.

²³ See Carroll, *Mystifying Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

²⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 34.

commodity form, it does not *appear* mysterious; its metaphysical dimension, not its use-value, is revealed by analysis.²⁵

While there has been a general turn away from psychoanalysis, the use of Jacques Lacan is kept alive in an eclectic Lacanian cultural criticism associated primarily with Slovenj Žižek. Here, too, there is a shift away from the symbolic, but it is toward the failure of symbolization—not a materialism of the body, but the way that films and generally filmic narratives reach an impasse in the traumatic void of the third prong of the Lacanian triad—the Real. The Real for Lacan is not the “reality-effect” focused on by 70s film theory, which for Lacan is imaginary, but rather, the void or “object-cause” that is both absent from being counted within, yet sustains the functioning of any machine, language-game, logic of coherence, reality- or subject-effect. Žižek explicitly attacks the Post-Theory turn for renouncing the promise of film theory. He seizes upon Bordwell and Carroll’s claim that psychoanalysis is *the* fundamental problem with film theory as a discipline, but those of us still faithful to psychoanalysis might notice here a displacement. Psychoanalysis is a convenient scapegoat for a rejection of 70s film theory, because the assumption is that it is a scientifically dubious hermeneutic without any necessary political valence. Post-theory’s attack on the vacuity of theory is, true to their logic, necessarily conceived on epistemological and not political grounds. The politics of Theory, they claim, are a smokescreen; hence, the emphasis on psychoanalysis. What is dismissed is that its use in 70s film theory was explicitly part of a feminist project as well

²⁵ In the famous passage from Chapter 1 of *Capital Volume One*, Marx states, “A commodity appears as first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.” Karl Marx, *Capital Volume One: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage, 1977), 163.

as firmly within the tradition of Marxist ideology critique. Indeed, what is ignored is that theory as one of the ways of talking about and experiencing film, itself has a history that is not extricable from its object.

This entwining of theory and practice is what Rodowick grasped in his diagnosis of 70s film theory as “political modernism.” As we have suggested, ideology critique was tied to an idea of a counter-cinema that performed within film practice the function of theory by other means. Yet while Žižek insists on preserving the political project of film theory against the post-theory turn, there’s little trace of the “political modernism” of his predecessors. Like them he privileges the symbolic over the imaginary, theory over aesthetics, but the logic of exposing mediation through mediation is now on the side primarily of theory rather than art. I’d say that what limits the newer Lacanian writing on film is neither the absence of Marxism (Žižek situates himself firmly within a Marxist tradition) nor the turn to the Real, but that too often the relation between film and theory is viewed as just that, a relation, and not a non-relation in the Lacanian sense. In regard to his use of Krzysztof Kieślowski, Žižek says that his aim is “not to talk about his work, but to refer to his work in order to accomplish the work of Theory. In its very ruthless use of its artistic pretext, such a procedure is much more faithful to the interpreted work than any superficial respect for the work’s unfathomable autonomy.”²⁶ In Žižek, the tendency is for film to have only an instrumental function in the illustration of Lacanian concepts. It is part of his charm to have made this so explicit. These are not then the concepts cinema gives rise to, as they are for Deleuze, but mere repetitions of the same.

²⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 9.

Žižek is right that theory should not lie prostrate before the work of art as autonomous entity, but this should not mean relegating it to a pretext for theory. Indeed, for Žižek, the effect of the work of art is finally imaginary in Lacan's sense or rather ideological in Althusser's sense. For Žižek, film like all art is indistinguishable from the cultural product in that it illustrates an ideological impasse. The Real in his uses of cinema is then an imaginary Real,²⁷ a figuration of the traumatic void occluded by what passes for common sense about our shared culture.

In this often brilliant adventure, it is as if the unsymbolizable Real must be found everywhere in an endless process of generating meaning out of inconsistent common sense by attributing a lesson to its rhetorical inversion. For all the canny insights and love of the game, the mixture of discourses and taste for paradox, the self-canibalizing and proliferation across media, Žižek's machine works too well for a philosophy ostensibly predicated on short-circuiting the symbolic order.²⁸ In Zizekian fashion it might be asked whether this discourse isn't precisely Lacan's discourse of the university,

²⁷ As Zizek points out, Lacan multiplies the permutations of the Real, Imaginary, Symbolic triad by proposing that there is an Imaginary Real, a Symbolic Real, a Real Real, a Real Imaginary, a Symbolic Imaginary and so on, See Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2002), xii. Despite pointing this out, Zizek rarely makes explicit use of this in his analyses. I think it is useful to recognize that when he offers a filmic example of the Real such as the alien bursting through a man's stomach in *Alien* (1979), this image may provide an example of the Real as traumatic void that cannot be properly symbolized, but if we are talking about the scene in the film, it remains in some sense imaginary. We might add that insofar as it serves as an example for Žižek himself, it is also a "symbolic Real."

²⁸ Lacan's own style, so different from Zizek's, combining formalization with a hermeneutic of cryptic word play and constant deferral of meaning, might be seen as another more self-conscious solution to performing what he called the analyst's discourse. This point has implications for our larger argument regarding the impossibility of separating aesthetic and political thought, which is that theories of form must in some way account for the form of theory and vice versa.

in which everything must be counted and in which *objet petit a* is continually brought into the fold of the big Other?²⁹

It is with this surely incomplete constellation of the recent history of film theory in mind that I turn to contemporary French philosophers, both former students of Althusser, Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière, to help think the linkage of cinema and politics today. If Althusserian-Lacanian film theory in its most dogmatic form has become “saturated,” in Badiou’s terms, it is due to its institutionalization, a different historical moment, and not least the discovery of Deleuze’s influential *Cinema* books that have questioned many of its methodological assumptions. Nonetheless, the position of my own investigation starts with a fidelity in Badiou’s sense to 70s film theory against its detractors which means reviving the question of the political thinking of cinema. It also means recognizing this period as historical. In other words, it is the contention of this dissertation that if we are now in a position to reevaluate some of the most influential moments of 70s film theory, it should not be to denounce them as academic obscurantism but to recognize what conditions of possibility made this thinking possible. A criticism of 70s film theory should focus not just on whether the logic of its claims are convincing but also on the way that its polemical interventions got turned into uncritical assumptions. When viewed from an historical perspective we find that many of these analyses far from being divorced from cinematic objects, as is often claimed, bear an affinity with certain attempts to think a relation between cinema, politics and theory within films of the

²⁹ There is, it must be said, a more resistant strain to Žižek’s use of Lacan in the attempt to always turn dominant ideology against itself, but the point here, is that in relegating art but not theory to the status of symptom, however central it may be as a form of illustration, the model he provides for thinking the linkage between cinema, politics and theory leaves cinema with only an instrumental function.

period. The project of thinking the relation between cinema and politics is one that must always be renewed in both “theory” and cinema itself. Badiou and Rancière provide a way of rethinking the applications of Althusser, Lacan and Deleuze to cinema by, like Benjamin, placing the thinking of cinema in the context of the history of thinking about art and aesthetics more generally. I use Badiou and Rancière to offer a way to think about the politics of cinema in terms of the ways that cinema’s aesthetic possibilities are tied to a pedagogical dimension.

Toward a Cinematic Pedagogy

It has been famously argued whether the cinema screen should be more accurately conceptualized as a window or a frame.³⁰ Does it cut out an image from a reality with a history that extends out into off-screen space or does it enclose a delimited autonomous space?

Let’s clarify this debate through the image of the classroom.

Let’s picture a classroom in a movie. There is a familiar scene that can be found in many films. There is a frame at the front of the room called a chalkboard and on it the teacher dispenses knowledge. But there is also a window and we are reminded of this because it is through this window that our hero stares daydreaming, ignoring the frame at the front of the room.

³⁰This is how the split between the realist and formative traditions of film theory, as exemplified by Bazin and Eisenstein respectively, is often conceptualized. See, for example, J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press), 54.

The authority front and center dispenses knowledge telling us what we should know and retain, what is important, but on the periphery our attention is drawn elsewhere and not necessarily to anything in particular. We “stare into space” drawn to something outside, perhaps a lovers’ quarrel, or an image of play (another class has recess at the same time as our class and we can see other students goofing off in the school yard), an indifferent nature (wind blows in the trees), or merely the void as images lose definition and our thought devolves into unthought or triggers a fantasy or memory that is ours and ours alone.

But we are not this student, we are watching him or her and we have been given this image to watch and we are one of an indifferent many watching it. And the film is not on the margins of our perception but it is the only thing we can see in the darkened theater. Cinema, according to writers as diverse as Béla Balázs and Edgar Morin, is a medium of projective identification. As film theorists of 60s and 70s who were readers of Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage As Formative of the I-Function” would tell us, the screen is both a mirror and not a mirror. Our already misrecognized image of ourselves, our ego, finds a repetitive series of substitutes on the screen. Hollywood cinema, as viewed by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1942, had not developed into a means for escapism as was and is so often claimed, but rather offered a surrogate for escapism making escapism impossible. Cinema became a means for the commodity form to colonize our daydreams and fantasies. Distraction had paradoxically been rendered as a mode of attention, leisure time, an extension of the mindless work that it was supposed to relieve us from.

Of course, there has always been another side of cinema that opposed itself to escapism—films that were designed to educate, often falling under the category of documentary, but also social dramas or films with important themes that were designed to convey a moral, a message or even just the catharsis of Art with a capital ‘A.’ Adorno noted that these films tended to be only the flipside of the “escapist” films. The “message” that the culture industry offered was always none other than “escape.” As Adorno put it,

There is nothing more practical than escape, nothing more fervently espoused to big business... The escape is full of message. And message, the opposite looks like what it is: the wish to flee from flight. It reifies resistance to reification. One need only hear experts praising a celluloid masterpiece for having, beside other merits, moral seriousness, in the same tone as a glamorous actress is certified as having personality too.³¹

Badiou proposes in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* that the link between art and philosophy tends to be tied up with a third term: “the education of subjects.”³² This goes back to Plato in what Badiou calls “the didactic schema” and Rancière, “the ethical regime of art.” In Plato, the vocation of the arts is pedagogy and therefore all arts that do not educate are rejected. But education in this case means only that which will make individuals into upright citizens or more efficient workers. This original linkage survives into the 20th century most explicitly in both Socialist Realism and the religious right. To

³¹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections On a Damaged Life* (New York: Verso, 2005), 202.

³² Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 5.

take one example that has specific relevance for my last chapter on Abbas Kiarostami, Ayatollah Khomeini shortly after taking power in Iran used a major speech to make Plato's point in regards to the cinema: "We are not opposed to the cinema, to radio, or to television; what we oppose is vice and the use of the media to keep our young people in a state of backwardness and dissipate their energies... The cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake of educating the people, but, as you know, it was used instead to corrupt our youth."³³ This is the logic of Socrates's claim in the *Republic* vis-à-vis the mimetic arts: if they do not have a useful and educational role in the order of the city then they run the danger of corrupting the youth and must be banned.

Classroom or place for corrupting the youth—one or the other. We might say that capitalist liberal democracy reverses the ideology—cinema is a place where we express our freedom to consume, where we experience escape, nostalgia, shared cultural values and even edification and but it will not tolerate propaganda. Hollywood will not tolerate any message that does not serve as a reminder of something we already know. The 'message' or prestige film of the sort typically honored at the Academy Awards is not didactic or educational so much as it conveys "moral seriousness," as Adorno remarked. Message films within the culture industry may "raise awareness," but the explicit message in mainstream American cinema is always finally no more than a fable of responsibility in which it is revealed that the spirit of individualistic enterprise is consistent with good will and common sense; in opposition to the heirs of the Platonic

³³Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 258.

tradition, film in the culture industry is not to be seen as a vehicle for training, knowledge or instilling belief.

Film theory's political pedagogies have their own version of message and escape in Althusser's "knowledge effects" or Deleuze's "lines of flight." Meanwhile, the cognitivist and analytic approaches seek a body of knowledge that will offer training in how film functions while rejecting the significance of the political or aesthetic dimension of theory itself; in other words, they take theories to produce knowledge composed of explanations that clarify and refine our comprehension but do not reveal its structuring absences or invent the concepts that correspond to its creative practice. All these positions accept that there is something we could call pedagogical about cinema aesthetics itself—that films create the conditions for their viewing or reading. For Bordwell and Carroll we can see this at the level of narrative comprehension. Carroll, for example, hypothesizes that the narrative of most movies is structured on a question/answer model. The plotting generates questions internal to the narrative and the viewer's interest is maintained by the expectation that the answers to these questions will be learned.³⁴

In a very different register, Comolli and Narboni suggest that we can show the precise ways that a film text ensures or obstructs the smooth passage of ideology. Rodowick has argued, this logic of "political modernism" is not a theory so much as a discourse common to both theorists and filmmakers following 1968.³⁵ I would add that at root its concerns are pedagogical. Althusser declared in *Reading Capital* that the great

³⁴ Carroll, *Theorizing The Moving Image*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89.

³⁵ Rodowick, *Crisis*, 1-2.

revolution in modern thought initiated by Marx and Freud was the “discovery and training in the meaning of the ‘simplest’ acts of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading...”³⁶ Radical pedagogy then becomes a way of tying together aesthetics, politics and theory. Despite their different conception of pedagogy, the same is true for Deleuze and Guattari. As they announce at the end of the “Introduction” to their final book *What Is Philosophy*, “pedagogy” is the name for what can “safeguard” us from “the disaster” of the reduction of thought to “commercial professional training.”³⁷

In his essay “Le Thérorisé: Pédagogie Godardienne,” Daney envisioned Godard as a schoolmaster who sought to instruct the viewer on the link between questions of film form and revolutionary politics.³⁸ The so-called “*films tableaux noirs*” made by Godard either alone or with Jean-Pierre Gorin sometimes literally merged the film screen with the blackboard. Deleuze, acknowledging Daney, proposes a more expansive concept of cinematic pedagogy as the basis for the modern cinema of the time-image. He argues that a new regime of images emerged after WWII that undoes the use of images for training, propaganda, consumption or corruption and makes cinema about the function of thought—its power and limitations. “The new regime of the image is constructed on this *pedagogical* base... images and sequences are no longer linked by rational cuts” and “have a disjunctive, and no longer a conjunctive, value.”³⁹ For Deleuze, in the post-war cinema of the time-image, visual and sound elements are endowed with an autonomy that

³⁶ Louis Althusser et al, *Reading Capital*, 15

³⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 12.

³⁸ Serge Daney, “Theorize/Terrorize (Godardian Pedagogy),” in *Cahiers du Cinéma Volume 4 1973-1978: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, ed. by David Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2000), 116-123.

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 248.

requires a cinematic pedagogy to put them back together or to develop new forms of disjunctive relationships. In the time-image, the image becomes legible not visible and “a whole pedagogy of the image becomes possible.”⁴⁰ Benjamin, in the 1930s, had already proposed that cinema was political because it was composed of a series of *tests* that measured “the alignment of reality with the masses and of the masses with reality.”⁴¹

So to return to where our narrative of the political pedagogies of film theory started, if Benjamin’s “Work of Art” essay retains an interest for us despite the efforts of endless commentators to transform it into dogma, it is because it points to developments in the relation between art and politics that remain no more resolved for us today than they were when he wrote the essay. In the final lines Benjamin announces: “[Mankind’s] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.”⁴² This may sound like a revolutionary imperative composed of a proscription and a prescription: “No” to the aestheticization of politics, “yes” to the politicizing of art. But we can only read it this way if we fail to recall the more tempered claims that open the essay. The call to politicize art only has a meaning in a society in which capital no longer dictates production. Communism’s response occurs only from within a Communist society; that is, after the end of property relations.

⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 52.

⁴¹ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version)” *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 255.

⁴² Benjamin, *Selected Vol 3*, 122.

The stated goal of the essay is only a “neutralization of concepts” not an aesthetic program. Nonetheless, if there is a tendency in the development of capitalism—the intensification of its contradictions in its simultaneous expansion and undoing—that can be read in the superstructure and that tendency is found in “adjustment of the masses to reality and of reality to the masses,” then the habits and modes of perception of the masses is at stake in films themselves. In other words, if we accept that the development and uses of technology and forms of aesthetic practice not only reveal but also affect changes in sense perception, this “neutralizing of concepts” must have implications for art that cannot be deferred until after the revolution even if art can only engender demands and not realize new forms of life.

If the ethical regime of art, in Rancière’s sense, identifies the arts by whether or not they are an effective means of education for citizenship in the republic, what he calls the “aesthetic regime of art” that emerges in modernity and makes possible a new art called cinema also brings art and politics together through a conception of education though the terms have changed their meanings. Here Rancière identifies the original scene in Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in which aesthetics is identified as a specific sensorium separate from everyday life that in turn becomes a germ for a new form of life, a new humanity. Aesthetic education is then political education but only because art brings a new common world into being that is not identical with what is normally understood as politics, the realities of power and domination.⁴³

⁴³ Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran, (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 36. For Rancière, this paradoxical regime of art splits into two different politics of aesthetics derived from the same contradictory core: one sides with the conception of art becoming a new form of life;

The claim of this dissertation is that the political dimension of cinema has not been assured by the abolition of aura (which, as Adorno rightly objected, never truly occurred), nor, on the other hand, is distance always the necessary remedy for ideology understood as co-extensive with all unreflective consumption. The word pedagogy in this dissertation is a synonym for the metapolitics of cinema, for operations of measuring distance or proximity, attention or distraction, the link between word and image or cinematic form and political content, that provide resources for imagining a world to come. Measuring or “testing” (as Benjamin called it linking the destruction of the aura in art to increased use of statistics) is what a metapolitics of cinema seeks to affirm only as a way of undoing what these terms normally imply; because pedagogical testing, in our sense, verifies the failure of successful quantification. Cinema, according to Badiou, is “the great impurifier” and it is to art what anti-philosophers are to philosophy. “At the cinema, as in Plato, genuine ideas are mixtures.”⁴⁴ Cinema’s impurity is what ties its aesthetics to a pedagogical dimension that can allow for ways of questioning and transforming the rules and divisions that frame a common sphere of sense experience without succumbing to the “disaster” of “commercial and professional training.” At the heart of this project is the political question of equality. This, at least, is the hypothesis that the following chapters will seek to explore.

the other sides with the politics of resistant form in which the autonomy of the aesthetic contains the mark of art’s failure to realize the new forms of life it promises. We will discuss Rancière’s idea of the “aesthetic regime” in more detail in Chapters 1 and 4.

⁴⁴ Badiou, *Inaesthetics*, 88.

Outlines of Chapters

Chapter 1 proposes that we read Rancière's conception of the politics of cinema in relation to Althusser's conception of art, theory and politics as a way of rethinking the uptake of Althusser in 70s film theory. As we saw, Althusser made aesthetics in the broad sense (seeing, hearing, reading, listening...) central to his conception of theoretical practice. On the other hand, as we shall see, art for him, was not subject to the same revolutionary imperative as theory. Althusser wrote little about art and it may seem to be an insignificant part of his theory, but as I will argue, we can locate the limitations of his reading practice and in particular how it has been appropriated by film theory by looking at the distinction he makes between science and art. Rancière helps us reconceive the politics of cinema as well as the politics of film theory itself by also thinking the aesthetic dimension of politics and theory.

In Chapter 2, we will look at how the relation between art and philosophy is thought within Badiou and Deleuze. While in Chapter 1, I argue that the Althusserian-Lacanian conception of the politics of film and theory tends to equate politics with distance, in Deleuze I argue, politics becomes the elimination of distance. Whereas Bertolt Brecht provides the model for much of the political modernism of 70s film theory, here Antonin Artaud provides an inverse model though we are still within a larger paradigm of political modernism that we can trace back to modernist theater. At stake again is the thinking of the relation between art, politics and theory or philosophy. As I attempt to show, since both the Artaudian and Brechtian model are premised on the same paradoxical conception of art, we can show that Deleuze's model is closer to the

problematic of 70s film theory than many of his followers seem aware. Rather than arguing for one paradigm over the other, I propose that we conceive of what Deleuze calls cinematic pedagogies as singular ways of resolving the dialectical relation between these two paradigms. Using Badiou's conception of art's relation to philosophy, we can take these pedagogies to be ways of thinking or imagining how art, politics and philosophy "condition" one another.

The approach of the first two chapters is largely theoretical and by investigating the relationship between aesthetic and political philosophy, they may appear to take us far afield from cinema itself. Indeed the subject of this dissertation is not cinema per se so much as the conceptualizing of its politics. Nonetheless, the remaining three chapters turn to the question of cinema's politics seen through a genealogy of its impurity that allows for thinking the conditioning of art by politics in terms of pedagogy. Chapter 3 looks at the actualité as way of showing how the medium's relation to non-art is central to how it is understood as art. In particular I show how cinema emerges out of a 19th century concept of art that ruptures the old Aristotelian separation of art and nature that we still find in Kant. In discourses on actualites that capture natural phenomena, in particular "the wind in the trees," I show the origins of a persistent conception of film art as that which reveals the truth of nature. I show how Walter Benjamin recognized the reactionary dimension of this conception when "nature" was not grasped in dialectical relation to history.

Chapter 4 takes a look at how Rancière helps us think the documentary.

Following from my reading Chapter 3, I show how the documentary by taking the

actualité as its raw material, can be conceived as the pinnacle of the aesthetic regime of art not because it resolves its paradoxes but on the contrary, because it is grounded in its impure logic. This means conceiving of the documentary outside of the logic of representation that it tends to borrow from the so-called fiction film. In this chapter, I attempt to show how we can think the pedagogy of film form in two instances—the essayistic practice of Chris Marker and the direct cinema practice of Frederick Wiseman.

If Chapter 4 shows how the politics of cinematic aesthetics can be imagined in two documentary forms, Chapter 5 approaches the question of political pedagogy specifically in terms of equality. Politics for Rancière and Badiou is defined as axiomatic equality but there is nothing about the ways of inscribing equality in art that guarantee new ways of imagining political equality. The goal of Chapter 5 is to show different ways of thinking the inscription of equality through moving images over time, from Vertov to Warhol to current discourses on moving images in the information age. I conclude by showing how the Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami has developed a series of different pedagogical forms of cinema that productively reveal the contradictions of these practices to open up new possibilities for imagining a community to come.

Chapter 1: Rancière and the Politics of Film Theory After Althusser

The Politics of Cinema, The Aesthetics of Theory

Writing in *October* in 2007, D. N. Rodowick proposed “An Elegy For Theory.” The “Theory” whose loss was being mourned was a “certain idea of theory” associated with the institutionalization of film studies in the United States and Europe that tended to be grounded in an Althusserian mode of reading which viewed theory as producing knowledge not reducible to the imaginary effects of ideology.¹ This idea of theory we have been repeatedly told is no longer with us in the same breath that it gets killed off once again. The current interest in Rancière’s work in art theory and cultural criticism² might be seen as part of this tide—another name to signify our suspicion of the hermeneutics of suspicion. I’d like to offer a different approach that uses Rancière to rethink the very problems and questions about this legacy that still persist in contemporary cinema studies. I’d like to suggest Rancière’s thinking about the relation of art, theory and politics in relation to Althusser’s own thinking about that relation as a way of rethinking the terms that dominate the current retreat from an Althusserian film theory which all too often seems coupled with a retreat from politics.

Once a student of Althusser and a contributor to the *Reading Capital* volume, in 1975 Rancière published *La Leçon D’Althusser* dramatically announcing a definite break

¹ See D. N. Rodowick, “An Elegy For Theory,” *October* 122 Fall 2007, 91.

² As I write this, there is little available in English on Rancière and cinema, but the last few years have seen a proliferation of translations, commentaries and journal issues devoted to him most commonly around the issue of the relation between aesthetics and politics. He is also known to have acquired a certain cache in the art world, having lectured at the Frieze Art Fair in 2005 and having been the subject of a special section of *Art Forum* in March 2007 in which that lecture, “The Emancipated Spectator” was published along with an interview and a series of pieces on him by critics, curators and artists.

with his former professor by revealing the “lesson” of Marxist reading as defined by Althusser to be none other than the effacing of politics by the discourse of the university.³ Introductions to Rancière usually begin with the story of his parting of ways with his Althusserian past over what he detected as the position of mastery in the mode of reading attributed to Marxist science. What is interesting about this story, however, is how its consequences have unfolded over the course of Rancière’s writing. It is not just a simple narrative in which the king is revealed as naked—the radical politics of the intellectual master shown to be enhancing his own power while excluding the excluded he claimed to be speaking for. This gesture of unveiling is no more emancipatory than the discourse that absolves itself of vulgarity through a theoretical edifice designed to ensure the rigorous separation from bourgeois ideology. Rather, politics defined as axiomatic equality must, as Rancière’s more recent work has made clear, be conceived of in relation to aesthetics.⁴ I’d like to propose that his disagreement with Althusser over science and politics was from the very beginning a disagreement over aesthetics.⁵ More broadly, I’d suggest that what’s at stake for Rancière, like Badiou and Deleuze, is the compossibility and entwinement of aesthetics, politics and theory, but as we shall see, his way of addressing this problem has generated a more dialectical reading of this relation as opposed to the more cutting subtractive method found in Badiou and Deleuze.

³ See Jacques Rancière, *La Leçon D’Althusser* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). For “the discourse of the university,” see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Book XVII)*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007). Rancière makes no reference to Lacan in this context but Lacan’s concept of the “discourse of the university” as a discourse in which knowledge subsumes everything else accurately accounts for Rancière’s critique of Althusser.

⁴ See in particular Rancière’s various works on the politics of literature and images since the 1990s, in particular *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

⁵ I am using the word “disagreement” as a reference to the concept (a translation of “la mésentente”) developed by Rancière in his book of the same title: *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

In approaching what constitutes the politics of cinema for Rancière, it is worth starting with an essay he wrote called “The Politics of Literature.” In this essay, Rancière starts off by making clear that he is referring neither to the politics of writers nor to the representation of what is normally understood as political content. Rather what is at stake is a politics of “literature as literature” or what is political about the literary as such.⁶ Likewise, my title is not meant to indicate an emphasis on the extent to which films represent the politics of their scenarists or directors nor films that take either social struggles or the machinations of government as their subject. Finally, I’d like to reject the framework for the debate about a politics of cinema that tries to affirm or deny a direct or indirect causal connection between films and changes in policy or people’s attitudes or opinions about political issues. Indeed, the politics of cinema, Rancière might say, would be better sought in the very distance cinema takes from these issues. This is not to endorse art’s autonomy from the realm of human interests so much as to suggest that the very play between art’s autonomy and heteronomy (the two lodged in an unsolvable but productive contradiction) is the terrain in which a politics of aesthetics imagines a world to come. Rather, I will take up Rancière’s terminology to say that there is a politics of cinema as cinema because both politics and cinema are ways “of framing among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience.”⁷ They are both forms of what Rancière calls “le partage du sensible” or the sharing and partition of the sensible or sensory. There is a politics of cinema because cinema like literature “is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing and saying

⁶ Jacques Rancière, “The Politics of Literature,” in *SubStance* 33.1 (2004), 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*

that frames a polemical common world.”⁸ Politics has its own framing, mise-en-scene and montage. This is not to say that politics is cinematic so much as meta-cinematic, just as cinema is meta-political.

The politics of cinema as cinema is a paradoxical politics in that there is something about cinema that withholds a relation to what is normally understood by “politics” and yet it is only through this withholding that we can grasp the political dimension of cinema. This “something” might be grasped in terms of cinema’s muteness. Cinema as cinema shares with literature as literature what Agamben calls an “essential muteness... which has nothing to do with either the presence or absence of a soundtrack.”⁹ Using Badiou’s terms, I am calling it cinema’s impurity. This impurity, as we will see, complicates both Badiou and Deleuze’s theories of art’s difference from philosophy. For Rancière, this complication is not intrinsic to cinema but belongs to a regime of art, which makes cinema as art a possibility in the first place. Cinema’s muteness must first be understood through literature’s muteness even as it provides another twist to the logic of aesthetic modernity from which literature as a concept emerges. Literature has a double muteness—the muteness of the dead letter without addressee that made Plato reject writing in favor of speech guaranteed by the presence of interlocutors and a second muteness attached to the body of things that emerge through literature as so many symptoms of history and poetic signs that undo the field of politics that speaks only through representation of “the struggle of wills and interests.”¹⁰ These

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Agamben, *Infancy*, 156.

¹⁰ Rancière, “The Politics of Literature,” 19.

two forms of muteness, the democratic letter detached from a fixed subject of enunciation and poetic signs that were markers of historicity, Rancière links to literature were both noted by early theorists of cinema as specific to this new medium. As Benjamin proposed, cinema as an art of mechanical reproduction eliminates the work's "aura" thereby detaching its "exhibition value" from presence, ritual and tradition.¹¹ Meanwhile, writers like Jean Epstein and Louis Deluc insisted on a new power that objects on screen acquired as hieroglyphs, a kind of mute speech that they called "photogénie."

Rancière argues that literature as literature like aesthetics is only a couple of centuries old. The aesthetic regime of art, the regime of art from which literature emerges, is an overturning of the representational regime of art in which particular forms demanded particular contents and vice versa. Hence the muteness is the absence of message demanded by the equality of subject matter. But it is the absence of message that is the basis for the politics of aesthetics. Art is political within this regime because it uses sensory data to establish a community without foundation. It reframes the field of subjectivity impersonally and anonymously and therefore at a distance from existing communities that function through a distribution of sensory experience, while always blurring that distance at the same time. According to Rancière, literature as literature is therefore not as the modernist narrative would have it, the discovery of the materiality of the written word. In the same way, painting as painting is not the discovery of its own medium, the materiality of the paint and the flat surface in abstract art. Rather what tends to get called modernism, according to Rancière, is only a small and rather limited

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art In the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 106.

component of the new relation between text and image in the aesthetic regime of art. The “aesthetic regime of art” is, it must be said, essentially co-extensive with modernity, but it is a way of framing the questions about what qualifies art as art in the modern age that avoids some of the confusions that tend to crystallize around discourses of modernism. The flatness of modernist art and the use of the page in symbolist poetry are as much about impurity as purity, an interface of painting and text in an era of commodities, design, posters and typography in which a new link was developing between art and the everyday. Rancière states, “Such is the paradox of the aesthetic regime of art. It posits the radical autonomy of art, its independence from any external rule. But it posits it in the same gesture that abolishes the mimetic closure separating the rationale of fictions from that of facts, the sphere of representation from the spheres of existence.”¹²

We can turn to Hegel for the articulation of this transition from the representative regime to the aesthetic regime of art and the paradoxical link between autonomy and heteronomy in the aesthetic regime:

Bondage to a particular subject-matter and a mode of portrayal suitable for this material alone are for artists today something past, and art therefore has become a free instrument which the artist can wield in proportion to his subjective skill in relation to any material of whatever kind. The artist thus stands above consecrated forms and configurations and moves freely on his own account [*frei für sich*],

¹² Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007), 123.

independent of the subject-matter and mode of conception in which the holy and eternal was previously made visible to human apprehension...¹³

In other words, once art is freed from the jurisdiction of all but its own immanent criteria then anything can be art—both the fabric and refuse of everyday life. In Rancière’s reading Hegel’s famous “end of art” was in fact the beginning of the aesthetic regime of art. The concept is intended to highlight a constructive paradox that gives meaning to the various “ends” of art in the two hundred years since Hegel while at the same time neutralizing their polemical rhetoric of catastrophe or salvation. As I will propose, this concept of the aesthetic regime of art for Rancière must be grasped in relation to his disagreement with Althusser over the nature of theoretical practice. How is this possible?

Althusser wrote little about art and aesthetics, but he did have an interest in Brecht, which has informed much of the uptake of Althusser in film and literary theory. In a piece from 1968, Althusser draws an analogy between Brecht and Marx. This analogy is established on the basis that they both generate within their respective domains, philosophy and theater, a new kind of practice based on a knowledge of the repression of politics that founds both their practices. Althusser makes clear that for both Brecht and Marx this not a new philosophy or new theater but a de-mystification of philosophy and theater within their respective places. Politics, which according to Althusser determines both theater and philosophy, is repressed in favor of enjoyment—

¹³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Lectures on Aesthetics,” trans. T. M. Knox in *Continental Aesthetics: Romanticism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, eds. Richard Kearney and David M. Rasmussen (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 122.

aesthetic enjoyment or enjoyment of speculation. One must put philosophy and theater in their true places but to do this one has to carry out a “displacement” within philosophy and within theater.¹⁴ Through the displacement of the point of view of philosophy and theater we can in Althusser’s words, “yield the floor to politics” but we can only do this by showing that philosophy or theater are not politics and that they are only philosophy or theater.¹⁵ Politics in both cases is conceived as the ground of these practices, but it speaks only when its silence is revealed.

But this analogy between Brecht and Marx, Althusser suggests, can only go so far because not only is philosophy not politics and theater not politics, but the theater is not philosophy. Here Althusser makes clear that he is unsatisfied with Brecht’s explanation because it turns out that the specificity of theater, its difference from philosophy, politics, science and life is that it shows and entertains but showing and entertaining are the very things that disguise theater’s difference from philosophy, politics, science and life. To show what theater is, we have to betray what it is but it must remain theater and only theater in the process without generating a new mystification. Althusser asks rhetorically, how is it that theater can still provide entertainment through mere showing while also thwarting this logic at the same time? He excuses Brecht for not solving the problem, because he is finally a man of the theater and not a philosopher and insists that the

¹⁴ Louis Althusser, “On Brecht and Marx,” in Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser (Transitions)* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 141.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

importance of Brecht is not his theory but his theatrical practice that takes ideology for its raw material.¹⁶

The essay remained unfinished, but its paradoxical logic can be found smoothed over using Althusser's Lacan-inspired definition of ideology throughout 70s film theory. As I've proposed, Christian Metz provides us with the formula: The role of film theory, according to Metz, is "To disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and win it for the symbolic." Peter Wollen linked this logic explicitly back to Brecht to advocate for a materialist cinema that countered ideology. According to Wollen, "Brecht wanted to find a concept of 'representation' which would account for a passage from perception/recognition to knowledge/understanding, from the imaginary to the symbolic."¹⁷ Here we see how the Althusserian-Lacanian language is used to account for the logic of separation, both as problem and then through the Brechtian V-effect as solution. Whether conceived of as an immanent break within the artwork itself or through the intervention of theory, the goal is a passage or break out of appearance or sensory experience and into knowledge. In film, like theater, distance is perceived as immediacy, but once we become aware of the distance through distancing we are restored to real immediacy in the form of cognition.

In contrast to the apolitical Greenbergian modernism that he detected in the American avant-garde, Wollen insisted that for Brecht knowledge was important because it corresponded to the "workings of society" and was not simply a matter of being aware

¹⁶ Ibid, 145.

¹⁷ Peter Wollen, "'Ontology' and 'Materialism' in Film," *Screen* 1976 #17.1, 18-19.

of the “artifice of art.”¹⁸ Althusser’s theory of ideology was mobilized to tie the awareness of the artifice of art to the mode of production. As Jean-Louis Baudry put it in his influential essay “Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus”: “Thus disturbing cinematic elements –similar precisely to those elements indicating a return of the repressed—signify without fail the arrival of the instrument ‘in flesh and blood,’ as in Vertov’s *Man With a Movie Camera*. Both specular tranquility and the assurance of one’s identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism, that, is of the inscription of the film work.”¹⁹ The appearance of the production process within the film itself functions as an intrusion of the Real to rescue the imaginary for the symbolic. The film work or “the apparatus” was taken to be “primarily economic” and include “the mode of production and the process of ‘work’ in its multiple determinations.”²⁰ Or, as Comolli and Narboni put it, “The film is ideology presenting itself to itself, talking to itself, learning about itself. Once we realize that it is the nature of the system to turn the cinema into an instrument of ideology, we can see that the filmmaker’s first task is to show up the cinema’s so-called depiction of reality.”²¹ In each case we see that there was a political value attributed to knowledge or awareness in both theory and filmmaking achieved as the result of what amounted to variations of the same operation: mediation made present was to break us out of the illusions of mediation.

¹⁸ Ibid, 17. “Greenbergian modernism” refers, of course, to the modernism of Clement Greenberg which for Wollen is not to be confused with the more political modernism found in Brecht.

¹⁹ Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 295-296.

²⁰ Ibid, 296.

²¹ Comolli, Narboni, *Film Theory and Criticism*, 689.

I take it that this logic was the dominant political pedagogy of so-called 70s film theory. To be clear, I am not accepting the description of this “certain idea of theory” as Grand Theory, in Bordwell’s terms—monolithic, totalizing and constrained by enforced consensus. Philip Rosen in his history of the influential British journal *Screen* offers a more useful characterization of the era:

Today it is possible to identify something we can call 1970s film theory. This was a self-conscious attempt at renovation by rethinking the fundamental terms through which cinema was experienced and understood in classical film theory and in the standard modes of criticism and analysis. The term “70s film theory” is not only a periodizing label but also a collective one, because it was constituted through a tissue of intersecting, sometimes mutually contestatory arguments and discourses about cinema written by many individuals. So it was always under development. Nevertheless, its common concerns made it a recognizable intellectual constellation, which set the terms for advanced debate in film scholarship for over two decades, arguably even for those who rejected it.²²

Rosen is right to stress that the period was a dynamic collective project the terms of which were being contested within the project itself.

I am going further than Rosen, however, by suggesting we can identify the dominant logic of critique that defined this discursive formation. If this conception of ideology critique was taken as an unfinished project, it may have been because it was an

²² Philip Rosen, “Screen and 70s Film Theory,” in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 264-265.

inconsistent project in which an idea of cinema, an idea of theory, and an idea of politics all over-determined one another at the cost of losing the initial specificity of the three realms that the analysis relied on. This Brechtian-Althusserian logic in both cinema and theory was torn between merging politics, cinema and theory and separating them. But this logic, as Rancière has argued, was also part of the larger logic of the aesthetic regime, the contradictions of which were constitutive of its productive operations. It was not the contradictions themselves, but the formulas that sought to obscure them that led to dogma. Still the didactic polemical form taken by the major essays of 70s film theory, with their emblems of political commitment and appeals to theoretical authority, might also obscure the fact that the basic parameters of “scientific criticism” were constantly being revised and rethought within a framework that allowed for it.

Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” first published in *Screen* in 1975 is perhaps the most obvious example of the way a theoretical essay could remain within the basic logic of political modernism and dramatically reframe it at the same time. Mulvey’s essay made explicit the claim that theory as a radical “political weapon” could break us out of the unreflective pleasures of classical cinema and like many of the other writers of *Screen* that came before her, she saw this process as part of a larger project that it shared with new forms of avant-garde filmmaking practice. But, at the same time, she showed that managing and controlling the trauma of sexual difference in a phallogocentric society in which “woman” signified castration was not merely one among the many forms of repressed ideological work done by mainstream cinema, but rather, the basis for its very codes and conventions. The symbolic here was identified with the law

and the patriarchal language of cinema in which woman is confined to the imaginary as a way of repressing the woman as real or castration threat. Meanwhile, film itself should “free the look of the camera into its materiality... and the look of the audience into dialectics.”²³ But if the role of woman in mainstream film is premised on a contradiction, as Mulvey demonstrates, so too is the solution.

For Mulvey, herself a filmmaker, “a politically and aesthetically avant-garde cinema is now possible but can still only exist as a counterpoint.” We need theory to put us on the road to a “new language of desire.”²⁴ But why? Because we are “still caught within the language of patriarchy. There is no way we can produce an alternative out of the blue, but we can begin to make a break by examining patriarchy with the tools it provides.”²⁵ Appropriating psychoanalysis as a weapon meant strategically using the tools of the patriarchal symbolic order to “challenge” the pleasure of “mainstream cinema” by “break[ing] down... these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures.”²⁶ Mulvey was blunt about the costs of this approach: “It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intension of this article.”²⁷ What she must destroy, with the cruel knowledge accorded by theory, is the “satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the ‘invisible guest’” afforded by the classical narrative

²³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 206.

²⁴ Ibid, 200.

²⁵ Ibid, 199.

²⁶ Ibid, 208.

²⁷ Ibid, 200.

cinema.²⁸ But breaking down and ultimately destroying the passive object of pleasure was the very procedure of the patriarchal order that must be broken down and destroyed.

For Mulvey, active theory destroys the imaginary pleasure of the spectator very much like Jimmy Stewart's character Scotty in *Vertigo*, as she analyzes it, destroys Madeleine by revealing that, like Hollywood cinema, her lure conceals a threat. Mulvey repeats the very trauma that she wishes to free herself from. As she puts it regarding *Vertigo*, because the pleasure of voyeurism harbors the threat of castration, Scotty first forces the desired object to tell her secret through "persistent cross-questioning." When this doesn't work, he must remake her in his image and repeat the trauma. Mulvey argues that that ultimately, "repetition... does break her down and succeeds in exposing her guilt."²⁹ Mulvey casts classical Hollywood narrative in the role of the woman that must be destroyed for the sake of liberation and theory in the place of the law that exacts the punishment. Theory is needed in addition to new forms of cinematic practice because only knowledge is thought to harbor the power of destruction, whereas imagining that a truly feminist or feminine *écriture* was already possible within the existing order would fall into ideology. Therefore, the only way to expose that ideology through knowledge is by appropriating that ideology and turning it against itself. Mulvey effectively reframes the discourse of political modernism by showing how, up to that point, the use of psychoanalysis for ideology critique in *Screen* had tended to absent the theory of sexual difference it was predicated on, but the goal of passing from the imaginary to the symbolic was caught in the same contradictory logic. If Mulvey escapes incoherence it is

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 207.

by acknowledging the centrality of contradiction within the project but the powerful polemic left the underlying conception of what theory could do versus what cinema could do under-theorized.

One strategy for avoiding the contradictions was to side with the separation of cinema, theory and politics, rather than their over-determination. Indeed, neo-formalism shows that if we isolate the logic of theoretical inquiry insofar as it sought to “produce knowledge,” we can see that it was not a necessary result of the “common concerns” evoked by Rosen, if we take these concerns to be those of radical politics. Instead, art could be understood as an object of theory in a project in which theory’s operations were not to be blurred with those that it sought to explain. Meanwhile, politics could be bracketed entirely. This meant a more traditional mode of theoretical inquiry, of course, but given the stakes generated by 70s film theory, it could not go about its business in peace and bore the brunt of undoing the knot of political modernism. David Bordwell tends to theorize based on the hypothesis that theorists and filmmakers function through the same general cognitive processes—as rational actors doing problem solving—but the problems they are solving are defined by inherently different ends. Films “are designed to achieve certain effects,” whereas film studies should be motivated to achieve plausible explanations of the “principles” by which films are designed to achieve those effects.³⁰ One cost of this approach was that the blurring of art, theory and politics was no longer thinkable. To claim that theory itself could operate on the principles of historical materialism to achieve distancing-effects or knowledge-effects or that a film like

³⁰ David Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005,) 265.

Godard's *Vent D'est* could, in Wollen's words, "make the mechanics of the film/text visible and explicit"³¹ would only be to bring confusion to the project of historical poetics.

Nonetheless, if Rosen is able to include the 1970s work of Bordwell himself as a component of the "intellectual constellation" of 70s film theory, it is because Bordwell subscribed to at least part of the same logic of theory. Showing up the depiction of reality, in Comolli and Narboni's terms, or the "imaginary," meant revealing the codes and textual systems that ground the experience of film. Bordwell and other writers often associated with the University of Wisconsin and influenced by the formalist tradition were engaged in this practice but without the language of critical unveiling or ideological analysis. Bordwell's later critiques of what he calls Grand Theory are not anti-theoretical so much as concerned with advocating theoretical examinations of the codes and systems through which films achieve effects purged of political posturing and the hermeneutics of suspicion. For Bordwell, theory should *show how films work* rather than "showing up" the "film work." In effect, he shares the assumption that film is on the side of the imaginary and theory is on the side of the symbolic, but unlike Metz, Mulvey and Wollen, he does not see this a problem so much as a fact that it is theory's job to enforce.

Tellingly, Carroll and Bordwell have no problem with the logic of critical unveiling when it is applied to film theory itself. So the attempt to reveal the unconscious sexual, racial and class politics of a Hollywood film is seen as an unproductive avenue for a film scholar to pursue, but Slavoj Zizek is unmasked as using

³¹ Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent D'est*," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Rosen, 122.

“political correctness” to divert attention from close scrutiny of “strategically vague” arguments that likely conceal a view of intellectual work as “a struggle for power.”³² It is symptomatic that for Bordwell and Carroll, films and filmmakers are never accused of practicing this kind of deception.

Politics Against the Police

I have proposed that this privileging of the symbolic as inscription of mediation gives authority to its reversal in the bodily or affective turn so prevalent in contemporary discourses on the moving image and New Media. Rancière’s work, on the other hand, suggests that we need not side with the symbolic over the imaginary or vice versa. The thwarting logic that Althusser found in Brecht’s theory is only a theoretical impasse if we also wish to ensure that the work of theory or art accomplishes the passage from identification to knowledge. As Rancière has proposed, constitutive of art and the thinking of art over the last two centuries is this very thwarting logic, an identification of the unity of contraries. And the images of cinema and art, are not defined by their destiny in either the symbolic or the imaginary, *studium* or *punctum*,³³ but rather they invent new possibilities out of their capacity to play with these contradictory functions.

In other words, as Althusser himself recognized in the case of Brecht, this linking of art, politics, and theory in a common project of political modernism reaches an

³² See David Bordwell, “Slavoj Zizek: Say Anything,” <http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/zizek.php> (Accessed August 15, 2009).

³³ For Roland Barthes’ influential use of the concepts *studium* and *punctum*, see *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982). To be clear, *studium* and *punctum* do not form a precise analogy to symbolic and imaginary. Whereas, I take *studium* to be roughly analogous to the symbolic, *punctum* is closer to the Lacanian Real.

impasse unless we rethink the very relation between the imaginary and symbolic, art and philosophy. The impasse that Althusser recognized in Brecht is the same impasse Rancière recognizes in Althusser. Philosophy, art and politics must all maintain their places to ensure the passage from ideology to knowledge-effect and yet this very passage is impossible if these places remain unmoved. For Rancière, aesthetics is a name for the blurring of these places.

For Rancière then, art in the aesthetic regime is political to the extent that it is a locus for reconfiguring what he calls baldly “the police.” The term police is perhaps derived from Althusser at the same time as it is a marker of their opposing conceptions of politics. In what is likely his most influential essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser uses “the police” to provide an image of what he calls “interpellation” or “hailing” by ideological state apparatuses that produce “you” as the “subject” you always already are. When you hear the police say “Hey you,” you respond immediately, unconsciously identifying the “you” with “yourself” as a sediment of identity-formations that cohere to make your situation in a class-divided capitalist society seem natural.³⁴ Rancière takes this figure of the police and transforms it into the symbolic order itself. The police for Rancière is a metonymic term for the entire “set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the system for

³⁴ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-186 in particular, 174-175.

legitimizing that distribution.”³⁵ It is both the evacuation of politics and what is normally understood by the term “politics.” “Police,” in Rancière’s usage, should not evoke men with guns or batons, but rather be understood as a generic term roughly equivalent to order and the precise opposite of politics. Another word that might be substituted for “police” is “policy” which Rancière chose to use in an essay written in English, “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization.”³⁶ As I understand it, the word “police” like policy is chosen for sharing the same root as politics because police is always trying to define politics so as to neutralize it; meanwhile, politics itself always involves a disagreement over what constitutes politics. Politics proper for Rancière (though from the point of view of police politics is always improper) is reserved for what Badiou would call a “truth procedure” in that it cannot be conceived of within the existing situation or the discursive frameworks that determine the visible, sayable and doable. Politics exposes the contingency of the police. “Police” encompasses business as usual, Lacan’s “service des biens,” including significantly everything that explicitly or implicitly goes by the name of politics but is actually about neutralizing politics—namely, all the modes of achieving consensus or struggling for power.

For Rancière the role of the police is not to say, “Hey you” and thereby generate unified subjects of ideology. On the contrary, if we are going to anthropomorphize the symbolic order, the function of the police is to say, “Go about your business. There’s nothing to see here.” In this way, Rancière shows us the limits of the problematic of

³⁵ Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) 28.

³⁶ In “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization,” October 61.

imaginary identification so central to Lacanian-Althusserian film theory by highlighting the centrality of appearance as a contested terrain. The police in Rancière's work shares with what Althusser calls "Ideological State Apparatuses" the function of generating identification, but Rancière uncouples the "police" from "the state" and identification from subject-formation. The police is no longer localizable to the state and its various institutions because it encompasses the entire realm of what is understood to be common sense, the unconscious rules governing the distribution of sensible and sensory experience. The primary function of the police today is not to instill paranoia by calling you to attention, but returning you to your place as a particular part of a whole to ensure the logic of the division of labor, a delimitation of temporal and spatial arrangements and experiences. This is not the form of discipline analyzed by Foucault; rather, its primary technique is dispersion and generating modes of indifference. "There's nothing to see here," the maxim of the police, does not refer to a police cover up or conspiracy, it means only the tautological claim that appearance is identical to itself—that there is no legitimate space for disagreement.

Identification then is equivalent to distraction and not attention. Subjectivization or becoming-subject, on the contrary, is not interpellation and identification but their failure. "Subjectivization is the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other."³⁷ Subjectivization is a disidentification because it posits an impossible unity, a collectivity that cannot be recognized as a part of the whole from the perspective of the police or policy. The point is not simply that the collectivity that becomes a

³⁷ Rancière, "Politics, Identification and Subjectivization," in *October* 61, 60.

subject *is not* recognized but rather that it *cannot* be recognized by the modes of identity that structure society. Political subjectivization is on behalf of some group denied equality—be it workers, people of color or women—but not on behalf of the particular properties of the group or in favor of inclusion or recognition in a formal universal equality already on the books. It constructs a paratactic logic that cannot be accommodated by common sense understanding. In this sense, a political subjectivization always posits a virtual collectivity that cannot be counted. Cinema, as a way of framing aesthetic experience, is a screen that can provide the resources for imagining new virtual collectivities through creating a gap in appearance.

The police may function through identification in the sense that one identifies with the way he or she is counted within the prevailing modes and structures of consensus, but it is an identification that is a result of a de-subjectivization. The police, according to Rancière, despite what appears to be the inescapably pejorative connotations of the term for any discourse on the left, is intended as a neutral term. It is, as we said, to be understood as order or even structure or appearance rather than a mechanism of discipline or repression. It is both “le partage du sensible” and the “symbolic constitution of the social.” The social is symbolically constituted through the various mechanisms by which sensible or sensual experience is both shared and divided, distributed and recognized.

We have suggested that police is a synonym for distraction. Rancière’s use of the term “distraction” can be found in his book on pedagogy, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. We could say that distraction is the opposite of what Badiou calls “fidelity.” Distraction

is another name for what returns people to their place; it is what is permissible, what is sayable and doable, the range of possibilities for change and the available means for attaining change understood as equivalent to reform. There is a potential misunderstanding that could come from Rancière's identification of police with distraction and politics with attention if we, as is often done in critical theory, associate attention with a mechanism of control and distraction with a form of resistance, however unconscious. But it is a misunderstanding that goes to the heart of Rancière's project and has precisely to do with the stakes over appearance and the relation between words and images. Rancière's project is to create contestation over the common. His use of "attention" like his use of "politics" or "democracy" is in deliberate antagonism with the connotations of the ordinary use of these words in the discourses his own work circulates within. This can sometimes lead to rather unproductive misunderstandings in commentaries on his work, but these misunderstandings tend to be symptomatic of what Lacan has called "the discourse of the university," precisely the discourse in which everything must be counted—a discourse that Rancière's work proposes we should be recalcitrant toward.

Politics as disagreement or dissensus "is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it or does not understand that the other is saying the same thing in the name of whiteness."³⁸ So when Rancière identifies the political axiom of equality with "attention," this is also to say that

³⁸ Rancière, *Disagreement*, x.

there is a concept of attention that has nothing to do with responsiveness to orders. Responsiveness to orders and expectations, the kind of uncritical attention required at school and at work, Rancière is claiming, is actually a mode of distraction because it distracts from a foundational equality that makes the understanding of those orders possible in the first place.

The disagreement between two people who both say “white” must be distinguished from the understanding of this disagreement by some analytic or pragmatist philosophers that would see the disagreement as a question of clarity in which the differences can be elucidated through unpacking the construction and context and elucidating the misunderstanding. At the same time, for Rancière, the subaltern *can* speak.³⁹ Indeed the speech of the subaltern or the speech of those who cannot speak is the basis for politics. Or if we prefer, Rancière’s concept of disagreement is in disagreement with both sides of the so-called Habermas/Lyotard debate.⁴⁰ On the one hand, politics emerges where Habermas’ model for communication is thwarted, where the framework of what constitutes communication, rationality and validity claims is contested. On the other hand, Rancière’s concept of dissensus rejects Lyotard’s concept of the *differend* in which the antagonism over the stakes of the common gets severed in favor of the acceptance of the irreconcilability of language games.

³⁹I am referring to Gayatri Spivak’s influential essay “Can The Subaltern Speak?” in which she concludes by answering the question posed by the title in the negative. See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 271-316.

⁴⁰ See Jurgen Habermas’ critique of Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: 12 Lectures*. (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1990). In opposition to Lyotard, Habermas argued that we need to preserve the enlightenment project in the face of what Lyotard dubbed “the postmodern condition.” The opposing positions of Habermas and Lyotard is often referred to as “the Habermas-Lyotard debate.”

In the *Ignorant Schoolmaster* the attention/distraction binary is a way of reframing questions of intelligence against the “police” conception of intelligence that believes intelligence can be quantified. Rancière is not explicitly concerned with the sinister, usually racialized conceptions of an innate universal measure for intelligence, but rather with the more pervasive and seemingly more benign liberal view that understands intelligence in terms of material and cultural conditions that can be overcome through progress. In this view, intelligences may be plural but they are still quantifiable albeit unfairly distributed due more to social factors than innate capacities. Rancière instead preaches the dissemination of a message courtesy of a forgotten 19th century French pedagogue, Joseph Jacotot, that intelligence be defined exclusively in terms of an axiomatic equality. This means that equality of intelligence is assumed a priori and at the same time, intelligence only becomes actualized through the verification of the equality of intelligence. “Equality is not a goal to be attained but a point of departure, a supposition to be maintained in all circumstances.”⁴¹ The axiom of equality is an “opinion” and while it can be demonstrated or verified in an act that proceeds from the consequences to the fidelity to the axiom of equality, it is not provable and rests on no foundation.

This does not mean that all work is of equal value. The pedagogue who preaches the uselessness of the pedagogue’s knowledge does not wish to preach the uselessness of intelligence. He must preserve some term of evaluation to distinguish the verification of intelligence from the use of the same word to construct a hierarchy of power. For

⁴¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 138.

Rancière, ventriloquizing Jocotot, quality of work can be differentiated through the question of attention.⁴² Attention is not measured by our ability to sit still or how efficient we are as workers, as the pharmaceutical companies would have us believe, but it is merely an intelligence equally available to everyone in the service of a will. Attention is the opposite of “contempt”—it is precisely attention to equality as the foundation that makes intelligence possible. But, at the same time, it must also be attention to the task at hand as it is realized only in the act of will that tests the assumption of equal capacity. Distraction is defined as “the opinion of inequality.” Distraction is the belief as a form of motivation that certain people can do certain things that others cannot; that probability determines possibility. Distraction can take the form of acceptance and resignation or indeed ambition and the will to succeed if success is equated with superiority.

The importance of attention and distraction for Rancière’s conception of the political should point us not toward, as we might think, a moral or ethical role in politics, but rather an aesthetic one. I mean “aesthetic” in the broad, etymological sense as sensory experience. What is at stake is not so much an individual’s will toward attention, but rather how we can frame a common sensory world. The axiom of equality will necessarily intersect with and expose the rules governing appearance that inhibit conceiving of an equality that reality everywhere denies. The question of an aesthetics of politics is the question of the difference of the sensible from itself—the gap, in Badiou’s

⁴² See Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*: “I will not say he has done less well because he is less intelligent... I will say he has brought less attention to his work. By this I may not have advanced very far, but far enough, nevertheless, to break out of the circle,” 50-51.

terms, between presentation and representation or the heterogeneous sensible or sensory world and the available modes of communicating about it.

Rancière's emphasis on the sensible as the locus for the stakes of political thinking is not a simple reversal of Metz's dictum that we have used to frame our discussion. Here it is worth mentioning that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of Lacan's devaluation of the imaginary that pervades the accusation that Lacan's work enforces a tyranny of the signifier. The imaginary is a negative term only to the extent that it is conceived without supplement or lack, as long as the imaginary's fragmentation and heterogeneity are ignored. For Lacan, the imaginary tends toward a fictional unity, but is always marked by its own failure. The imaginary's difference from itself is precisely what it attested to by the symbolic and the real. *Police* is a term for when the imaginary and symbolic coincide without remainder or on the other hand, when one falsifies the other. Another word for *police* in Rancière's sense is saturation. It is any sensorial or conceptual orientation that offers no room for supplement or lack. Rancière's reading allows us to see both Metz's call for winning the imaginary for the symbolic and the reversal that claims affects and sensations must be liberated from their interpretive territorialization as but two modes of policing the uses and meanings of images.

If we follow the Lacanian schema, politics is on the side of the Real, but for Rancière it would be a Real without the connotations of death drive or subjective destitution or the intrusion of the impossible Thing that can be found in Lacan. The political subject is a subjectivization that interrupts identification by inscribing a subject

(a part with no part) that has no place within the community's symbolic constitution.

This is not a struggle for recognition or inclusion, but by making an equivalence between the singular that is not identical to any particular and the whole it constructs a paratactical new world that cannot coexist with the police logic. Politics brings into being a new world which is incommensurable with the inegalitarian logic of the symbolic order.

Recent turns to "the body" in film and media studies are often thought to address the limitations of the Lacanian discourse that placed language as the level of materiality against the phantasmatic body of the imaginary. It is said, often with reason, that this position pitted a good modernist asceticism against a bad emotional response and thereby enforced an elitist valorization of oblique high modernism against the unreflective pleasures of mass consumption. According to Noël Burch, "those were the halcyon days when for many scholars, including myself, identification and distancing were like Hell and Heaven."⁴³ For Burch, the formalist reborn a Marxist, in retrospect, this was in a reactionary Sadean tradition that was based in contempt for the feminized masses.

While Rancière emphasizes the importance of heterogeneous appearance against the symbolic level of law and order that structures appearance, for him there is nothing necessarily political about promoting the materiality of the body against disembodied images and information. On the contrary, Rancière emphasizes how the requirement of bodily presence, from Plato through to Habermas, has been a way to assure that certain information can only be the property of certain individuals. Rancière locates the egalitarian dimension of the aesthetic regime in the dead letter. Literature is predicated on

⁴³ Noël Burch, "The Sadean Aesthetic," in *The Philistine Controversy*, eds. Dave Beech and John Roberts (London: Verso, 2002), 193.

the fact that “the arrangement of words was no longer guaranteed by an ordered system of appropriateness between words and bodies.”⁴⁴ As for film, this does not mean that there is anything liberating about the “imaginary identification” of disembodied cinema spectators, but only because identification is but another way of fixing the spectator to a body. “The channels for political subjectivization are not those of imaginary identification but those of ‘literary’ disincorporation.”⁴⁵ “Disincorporation” is the putting into play of the dead letter, the establishment of a community to come, a collective body that, to borrow a phrase from Wallace Stevens favored by Badiou, is a “description without place.”

Politics is a matter of inscription and therefore not a matter of refusing the symbolic, but rather, of creating a gap or supplement in the symbolic order. The point is not simply to oppose the literary and poetic to rational discourse in a reversal of Jurgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action. Rancière rejects Habermas’ firm distinction between open poetic speech acts and closed speech acts that initiate validity claims. A political statement is always both. The political construction of validity claims is also simultaneously the construction of a virtual community in which that validity claim gains its force. It is the argument for the existence of an imaginary or virtual world that eludes its symbolic constitution. The notion of paradox so often dismissed in analytic philosophy and ordinary language philosophy after Quine must be understood in its literal sense as outside or beyond doxa. Paradox is central to ordinary language use and not

⁴⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), 57.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

some aberration from it because the ordinary is never equal to itself. Politics is paradoxical because it posits within a real material situation something that does not exist and follows through on its consequences. It is paradoxical because it introduces a supplement or lack into a situation that cannot be grasped from within that situation. Politics is beyond what can and cannot be counted within prevailing modes of discourse.

At stake for Rancière is always appearance. But he wants to say that appearance is not identical to the imaginary world of ideology in Althusser's sense. Ideology in Althusser's sense rewritten by Rancière might be understood as the symbolic constitution of the imaginary or appearance within the police order. What it excludes is not the real or Marxist science but appearance itself—appearance defined as the heterogeneous sensible that splinters reality and marks the gap between the distribution of sensible modes of being and a reality that is never equal to the sum of its parts. Hence the “loss of the real” in the so-called “society of the spectacle” in its Situationist or Baudriardian variants, is in fact, a “loss of appearance.”⁴⁶

So to return to the distinction between Rancière and his former teacher Althusser, what is opposed to the always already transparent subject is no longer Marxist science but rather the political subject that exposes a fissure in the equivalence endorsed by Althusser between subject and subject of ideology. It would be misleading to suggest that this means Rancière is saying that there are subjects outside ideology if we understand subject the way Althusser defines the term. Rather, Rancière reserves the term subject precisely for that which is nonidentical to what Althusser calls the subject of ideology. His use of

⁴⁶ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 104.

the word “subject” is closer to the late Lacan and the way the Lacanian subject has been taken up by Badiou. This is not then the subject of identity and not the subject as individual but the subject as a collective and divided subject in the process of becoming.

Rancière’s retains the critique of the Feurbachian “humanism” of the early Marx and its uptake in 20th century western Marxism initiated by the Althusser led *Reading Capital* project of which he was a part. But for Rancière, the dismissal of the discourse of alienation is no longer tied to the affirmation of theoretical anti-humanism as the proper position of Marxist science. The problem with alienation or separation is that it presumes in advance what the consciousness of a subject who is not alienated looks like, or, at least, does not look like. But for this very same reason, when Rancière found the discourse of “Man” in the archives of French workers in the 1830s, he decided not to read it as “the necessary subordination of the oppressed to the dominant ideology,”⁴⁷ which would imply humanism is itself a form of alienation. Rancière’s Althusserian history can be detected in the insistence that the difference between police and politics, whatever may appear to be the connotations, is not the difference between alienation and self-consciousness. Rather it is the difference between the symbolic order and that which exposes its contingency.

The logic of contingency as central to politics and the equation of teleology with reactionary thought, has placed Rancière at odds with much received wisdom from figures identified as left wing or Marxists. Though, ironically, it brings him close to the

⁴⁷ Rancière, *La Parole Ouvrière*, (Paris: La Fabrique, 1976), 19.

“aleatory materialism”⁴⁸ of the late Althusser. He has diagnosed a tendency in critical theory that operates on the presumed mastery of the critic and consistently reveals its trump card to be the impossibility of transforming reality. In this variant of Marxian logic, the critic’s authority is tied to a method of reading that is evoked to denounce as naïve or reactionary the views of anyone who does not assume class divisions are immutable. For Rancière, nothing exemplifies this more explicitly than the codification of historical materialism in the form of sociology. In *The Philosopher and his Poor*, Rancière finishes with a savage polemic against Pierre Bourdieu as the model of a certain tendency in which the banner of progressive sociology becomes another way of repeating Plato’s attempt to justify the order of the city in which the worker is locked in to his place. In Rancière’s interpretation Bourdieu’s inverted Platonism takes the side of the “low ranked” only to further ensure their confinement. Bourdieu “proclaims that that it is the illusion of their freedom that binds artisans to their places.”⁴⁹ Emancipated knowledge is then the reminder of the impossibility of freedom. The “sociologist-king” in the guise of emancipated pedagogue is only the “disenchanted banality of the bourgeois world that cries out, at every street corner, the great secret everyone ignores: class struggle has become an eternal truth possessing the double credit of no longer killing anyone, but also lending to science the eternal denunciation of its eternal forgetting.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*, trans. by G. M. Goshgarian (New York: Verso, 2006).

⁴⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster and Andrew Parker (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 179.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Rancière is decidedly not in league with the argument that critical theory cannot affect practice, which can be found in certain attacks on academic Marxism. On the contrary, he wishes to thwart the moral judgment that tends to accompany the dogmatic separation between theory and practice. To say that theory is impractical or that some not immediately decipherable political act is not properly theoretical are both ways of ignoring strategies of creating a polemical world. Critical theory, if we can still call it that, from this perspective must proceed from a double refusal. It must refuse both the claim that the intellectual has access to something the worker does not—knowledge of the system—and the claim that the worker has access to something the intellectual does not—knowledge of the irreducible experience of being a proletarian. At the same time, it must preserve a fidelity to the struggle for emancipation and equality against the division of labor and indeed more broadly, the divisions in sense experience, the unconscious rules governing what counts as visibility, speech and action. Marxist science or, on the other hand, the deferral to the pure or silent speech of the subaltern are both ways to reinforce stratification, but this is not a reason to abandon theory or interpretation but to free it from its dogmatic strictures, to grant its literary dimension and ability to act as *porteur*, while still preserving a vigilance regarding the ways inequalities tend to get reaffirmed as normative even and often in discourses marked as resistant.

The Dialectics of Aesthetics and Politics

Indeed, Rancière's critique of Althusser is that Althusser reinscribes the binary (alienation/self-consciousness) he had dismantled through advancing a concept of

subjectless science not reducible to ideology. According to Althusser, the production of the Marxist theorist is not outside ideology but rather it is the only standpoint from which to properly say “I am in ideology.” But in Rancière’s reading, here we have merely another twist on the discourse on alienation by drawing a distinction between good and bad forms of knowledge. The good Marxist no longer says “I am outside ideology but the masses are not, he says “We are all in ideology. The difference is I *know* it, but the masses (and the bad Marxists) do not.” Knowledge as production, the symbolic, is posed against knowledge as sight, the imaginary. Politics for Rancière is not exterior to ideology (or police) but, to borrow another term from Lacan, “ex-timate” to it. The point is not so much that politics is irreducible to ideology, but that it is an inscription of ideology’s irreducibility to itself.

For Althusser, what is ignored by ideology is that it is dependant on the reproduction of the relations of production. Marxist science in the end is nothing other than not ignoring the relations of production and thereby “taking the point of view of the class struggle,” which is also to say of history.⁵¹ Rancière’s definition of politics equates it with “class struggle” but not with *knowledge* of class struggle or solely with the analysis of class divisions from the point of view of the relations of production, i.e. historical materialism. Does Rancière then take leave of Marxism by abandoning the economic dimension of the “class struggle” as the final instance? Rancière’s intervention is not to affirm or deny the “final instance” of the economic base but to take the point of view not of the class stratification but equality itself. The question then is not whether

⁵¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 184.

Althusser is right or wrong but rather what kinds of practices are made thinkable or foreclosed by a discourse that makes a distinction between “conceptual knowledge” as rendered by science (or theory or critique or philosophy) that draws our attention to the “final instance” and other forms of discourse that can at best function as symptoms by drawing our attention to the effects of a lived-experience that they fail to conceptualize and therefore understand. To take the position of equality is not to ignore the reality of class stratification but to initiate dissensus through adopting a position marked by its very distance from this reality. It is a paradoxical equality, the construction of a common stage that is odds with the managing of common interests. Like Foucault, Rancière seeks out heterotopic spaces. We might say that Rancière injects some productive hysteria into a kind of Foucauldian discourse analysis. Or with an unhealthy mixture of Lacan and Deleuze/Guattari, we could say that the political subject, in Rancière’s reading, forecloses inequality in favor of a schizo non-personal individuation. Here we grant an unlikely emancipatory power to foreclosure as a way of marking the tension of dissensus and paradox absent from Deleuze and Guattari’s Spinozist mechanosphere.

When writing in 1969 that “in Althusser’s discourse, metaphysics arranges the promotion of revisionist ideology to the rank of Marxist theory,” Rancière was taking particular exception to Althusser’s statement that “It is not accidental if, in every manner, a reactionary or ‘technocratic’ bourgeois government prefers half-truths, and if, on the other hand, the revolutionary cause is always indissolubly linked to a rigorous

knowledge, that is, to science.”⁵² Rancière’s polemical bent is clear and in 1973 he’d claim he had been targeting “right Althusserianism” and not “Althusser” as a unified group of texts or Althusserianism as a single ideology. As Rancière was well aware, Althusser did not define science as a single entity that could be opposed to ideology in the way truth was opposed to illusion. Still Rancière latched on to a position which would persist as a guiding thread of his work: that the theoretical discourse that absolves itself of “vulgarity” is a discourse of mastery whatever emancipatory banner it holds up or however “rigorous” its separation from “bourgeois ideology.” Rancière labeled as metaphysical the “not accidental if” which sought a link between knowledge as science and the class struggle that should be impossible in a theory that eschewed what it diagnosed as the historicist teleology that was shared by bourgeois ideology and Marxist humanism. In 1969, Rancière claimed that Marxist/Leninist ideology must be opposed to bourgeois ideology without converting the former into a transmissible science. Knowledge of the system cannot be taken as a content separate from its “forms of appropriation (acquisition, transmission, control, utilization.)”⁵³ In other words, Althusser’s discourse was tied to his own relation to the French Communist Party as well as his distance from the real movements of 68 and perhaps most crucially it was aligned with the university where Rancière himself had been hired to implement Althusserian pedagogy and provide access to the community of those in the know.

⁵² Rancière, “On the Theory of Ideology—Althusser’s Politics,” in *Radical Philosophy Reader* (London: Verso, 1985), 114.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117.

As we suggested above, the basis for the rejection of 70s film theory is often the rejection of a certain logic of interpretation that is derived from Althusser. It should be clear that if Rancière too questions this logic of interpretation it is from a perspective opposed to the one we have identified within contemporary film studies. The problem with this logic of interpretation, for Bordwell and Carroll for example, is not its belief in science and knowledge but rather the opposite—that its deductive procedure stymies research into progressive knowledge of how film functions. For Althusser himself, of course, reading was also not simply a question of right and wrong. The science he endorsed was not “bourgeois science.” For Althusser, bourgeois science is “right” in the same way political economy is right but its rightness is predicated on a constitutive blind spot or “unasked question.”

We need to look more closely at the logic of the symptomatic reading in the form endorsed as proper Marxist reading practice by Althusser so central to 70s film theory. Althusser found in Marx a way of reading that recognized in political economy a ‘right’ answer to an unposed question. The question of the value of labor power (and its corollary “surplus value”) is an absent question in political economy but it “produces” without “seeing” the answer to this question, because this absent question is a blind spot constitutive of the text and not exterior to it. What is at stake then is not a question of right and wrong but rather a good and bad kind of reading that correspond to two conceptions of knowledge. As Rancière puts it, “A myopic reading corresponds to an empiricist theory of knowledge as sight, as sampling an object from the reality of vision.

A symptomal reading corresponds to an idea of knowledge as production.”⁵⁴ This is the meaning of Metz’s dictum. The imaginary is the level that links knowledge to sight. The symbolic level is the material conditions of this “picture thinking” in Hegel’s terms. But if the myopic reading equates knowledge with sight, this leads, according to Althusser, not to a failure to *produce* knowledge, but rather a failure to *see* the knowledge it has produced. The symptomatic reading produces knowledge by restoring a missing signifier to its place, to grant visibility to the invisible. The missing signifier stands in for an unasked question or absent cause (like the mother the child spots behind him or her in the mirror), a place-holder for the repressed subject of the enunciation and its conditions of production.

The title of Rancière’s statement announcing his break from Althusser was “La Leçon d’Althusser.” Althusser was literally Rancière’s former teacher but even after the “break,” Rancière continues to identify Althusser’s work with a kind of pedagogy—a pedagogy that inverts that of the progressive educational doxa. No longer do we say that every question has a right or wrong answer but rather that every answer has a right or wrong question. The wrong question is the one the text itself asks and supplies the answer to, while the right question is produced in the margins through the constitutive absences of the stated answer. Althusser’s lesson “saturates the field of the *said* like a field of proliferating answers to questions still too rare.”⁵⁵ Only the notion of a collectivity defined by knowledge or know-how can support this adventure of reading

⁵⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 122.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

that presumes the ability to identify the occluded questions from the ideological text. According to Rancière, Althusser presupposes “a certain vision of the community of knowledge [savoir], a certainty that knowledge makes community.”⁵⁶ This poses a basic theoretical problem within Althusser’s own discourse. The identification of the unseen or unthought in the seen or thought cannot mark an “epistemological break,” as Althusser claims, because it hinges on a textual continuity that is necessary for an idea of “science as power of community.”⁵⁷

In Althusser, the Marxist intellectual’s practice must be such that it cannot be confused with discourses that do not produce knowledge by returning the reader to the class struggle as the motor of all discourse. Only science can avoid this confusion and ensure transmissibility. For Rancière, literature (or art) is the name of this confusion. Literature is a letter without an addressee; its egalitarian basis means that there is no ground that can guarantee its transmissibility. At stake then is the relation between politics, science and art—a relation that we might say, remained the unthought in Althusser’s own theory of reading. In Althusser’s “A Letter on Art,” he states “the real difference between art and science lies in the specific form in which they give us the same object in quite different ways: art in the form of ‘seeing,’ ‘feeling,’ ‘perceiving’, science in the form of knowledge (in the strict sense, by concepts).”⁵⁸ He continues, “Art makes us ‘see’ ‘conclusions without premises’, whereas knowledge makes us penetrate

⁵⁶ Ibid, 135.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 136.

⁵⁸ Althusser, “A Letter On Art,” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, 223.

into the mechanism which produces the ‘conclusions’ out of the ‘premises’.’⁵⁹ For Rancière, the importance of the aesthetic regime of art is that it undoes this distinction between sight and knowledge. This does not mean that art is now indistinguishable from politics, science or philosophy, but only that what makes art identifiable as art is found in its construction of a relationship to non-art that puts its own status in question.

Rancière’s own pedagogy is not divorced from a kind of symptomatic reading that seeks to think constitutive absences or, in his terms, “the part with no part” but it no longer identifies this practice with production of knowledge or science but rather with a fiction, theater, montage or mise-en-scene. Rancière sees the symptomatic reading itself as only possible through a poetic revolution in which literature and art of the 19th century overthrew the hierarchies of the representational regime of art in favor of a discovering a mute speech, a world of hieroglyphs, written on the body of material things. According to Rancière, the Marxist theory of fetishism and Freudian theory of the symptom inherited this revolutionary aesthetic logic. In line with this aesthetic conception of anonymous speech, the “part with no part” for Rancière is not so much the “excluded” but is better conceived as the capacity or power of *anyone*. It is the expression of that which has no qualification for expression.

As the theatrical metaphor often adopted by Rancière indicates, aesthetics is always central to politics but it is an aesthetics of politics precisely opposed to the equation of spectacle and power that Benjamin grasped as the affective dimension of fascism as well the injunction to “enjoy!” that Žižek has identified as the dominant

⁵⁹ Ibid, 224.

ideology in the west today—the affirmation of bodies and pleasures. Rancière’s project has been to restore a dialectical relation between aesthetics and politics against the apocalyptic and utopian fantasies about aestheticized politics and politicized aesthetics. According to Rancière, this dialectical relation is at the very core of the modern regime of art whatever the attempts to divert attention away from it. Rancière’s metapolitics of aesthetics is always a matter of reframing the conditions of possibility on the side of generating future possibilities for making dissensus visible.

Cinema’s Two Political Modernisms

But the logic of critique is only one aspect of the aesthetic logic that defines the framework through which the art of cinema gets understood. Indeed, there is another pole of political modernism in which politics, theory and cinema are not over-determined by a logic of critique, but rather by a logic of sensation. As we saw, Althusser’s “symptomatic reading” meant defining knowledge as production distinct from pseudo-knowledge in the form of sight. As Metz recognized, cinema from the start seemed to offer a kind of knowledge in the form of sight. Benjamin gave this a name: the optical unconscious. In his book *La Fable Cinématographique* or *Film Fables*, Rancière begins with a long quotation from the filmmaker Jean Epstein written in 1921 that concludes succinctly: “Cinema is true. A story is a lie.” For Epstein, cinema’s essence is found in suspense and anticipation, in a pure power of the image grasped in anonymous objects—curtains, the tip of a pen, specs of dust—that narrative (or “histoire”) tames and distorts. Epstein writings in the 1920s and 30s play an important role in Deleuze’s Bergsonian

taxonomy of the movement-image. According to Epstein, “There is no film that ends badly.” In this narrative, pure cinema, as Rancière puts it, “cannot cheat.” It just records and it’s not about reproduction of things—likeness or similarity—because “it changes the very nature of the real.” It does not double the real world but offers an optical unconscious. It overthrows the Aristotelian model that privileges mythos over opsis. The story and its “dramatic progression” is belied by the “infinity of micromovements” captured by the machine as automaton. The machine’s power is not mimesis or verisimilitude but making the invisible visible. Cinema “reduces the communication of ideas and the ecstatic explosion of sensory affects to a common unit of measurement.”⁶⁰ It abolishes the “problem of mimesis” so central to the historical thinking of what constitutes the arts, because as Andre Bazin will claim years later in a famous essay, “the photographic image is the object itself.”⁶¹ As Hugo Munsterberg’s pioneering theory claimed, the mechanical eye does not reproduce but writes with matter, light and movement and is “equivalent to mind.”⁶²

Rancière makes two points about this narrative of cinema that was especially common in the silent era that emphasized film’s link to automatism. First, is that it is linked to an historical moment and a particular utopian vision of artistic modernity. Second, is that it is itself a narrative or fable even as it is extolling anti-narrative, the pure power of pre-signifying intensities. To say what cinema is, Epstein “has to say what it is not.” The images he discusses are from a narrative film of an especially formulaic and

⁶⁰ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 25

⁶¹ Andre Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 6th Ed., ed Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 169.

⁶² Hugo Munsterberg, *The Film: A Psychological Study* (New York: Dover, 1970), 58.

melodramatic kind and his theory is only possible through subtraction. He extracts his vision of cinema as pure intensities from a melodramatic narrative much the way Joseph Cornell would do more literally in *Rose Hobart* (1936), his re-edit/mash-up of *East of Borneo* (1931). This de-figuration has a long 19th century tradition. It is for Rancière central to the aesthetic regime of art, “which is distributed between two extremes: a pure creative activity thenceforth thought to be without rules or models, and a pure passivity of an expressive power inscribed on the very surface of things, independently of every desire to signify or create.”⁶³ Cinema, in effect, actualizes a dream of aesthetic modernity through the passivity of the recording device, but this passivity is an empty void without the invention of operations to restore creative power to the automaton. This leads cinema ironically to a return to the representative regime with its focus on genres that correspond with specific narrative codes and conventions as a way of making these operations visible.

Rancière suggests that there are two responses to this period of Gance, Epstein and Eisenstein. The first is nostalgia. In this view, pure cinema was killed off by sound, Hollywood and/or commercialization. We find examples of this in both Benjamin and Rudolph Arnheim. And of course, we could extend this narrative to more contemporary writers who discover the final nails in the coffin in television, video, or later, digital and information technologies. The second response is condescension. In this view, cinema was part of a larger inconsistent utopia from 1890-1920s that revolved around the dream

⁶³ Ibid, 8.

of matter dissolving into energy. In this narrative, it is said is that what Epstein welcomed about cinema not only doesn't exist today, but never did.

On the other hand, there is a third response to this period unmentioned by Rancière and it is the position of much writing on New Media today that I proposed would be more aptly termed Grand Theory than the political modernism and cultural studies approaches that acquired that appellation in Bordwell's critical evaluation. The third position sees this period not as an inconsistent utopia or a no longer possible utopia, but rather as a genuine utopia that had yet to find, or is only now finding, its moment. In this narrative, we discover a link between 1895 and the 21st century in which much of the 20th century film history, with its focus on classical and modernist narrative cinema, turns out to be something of a detour and a distraction. Epstein and Benjamin become theorists of the digital age by way of Deleuze and Kittler. Lumière and Méliès anticipate Bill Viola and YouTube by way of Vertov and Warhol. In this narrative, the reign of digital simulation and the dispersion of moving images across cell phones, ipods and museum walls freed from the ritual of the darkened theater liberates us from a locating the ideological underpinnings of the apparatus in the invention of an idea of the viewing subject born in the Quattrocento, the photological ideology of actuality, the material substrate of film that creates movement out of static images and an imaginary subject that misrecognizes itself on the screen.

Rancière's proposal is significantly more modest and flexible than all three of the above. According to him, "there is no straight line running from film's technical nature

to its artistic vocation.”⁶⁴ The attempt to define cinematic specificity can only be consistent to the extent that it recognizes that its consistency is always built on an inconsistency. Cinema always puts into play a “thwarting logic.” What this allows Rancière to do is to dispense with questions of the end of cinema or of mournful or ecstatic claims that all image production has been rendered indifferent by the age spectacle and information, by suggesting that “the art and thought of images have always been nourished by all that thwarts them.”⁶⁵ This claim provides a basis for thinking images in terms of what Badiou has called operations. These operations are always dialectical or as Badiou might say, subtractive.

The Persistence of Theory

To return to where we started, while Rodowick’s elegy does not wish to salvage this idea of Althusserian-Lacanian theory, he does wish to critique the critique of it that in the name of cognitivism or analytic philosophy attempts to restore film theory to a model based on the natural sciences. Using Wittgenstein, Rodowick proposes that theories of culture are not properly analyzed empirically, but can only ever be matters of soliciting agreement about sense and meaning. Therefore he poses a third way, a philosophical turn, in which Deleuze is recruited for an ordinary language philosophy that is separated from empirical investigation in favor of an approach defined by an “ethical” commitment to “epistemological self-examination.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

⁶⁶ Rodowick, “Elegy,” 100.

In the same issue of *October*, Rodowick's essay is followed by a dissenting response from Malcolm Turvey. Turvey also appeals to Wittgenstein's work to suggest that these ethical and epistemological commitments are just as extrinsic to the theory of film as psychoanalysis, Marxism and, pace Bordwell and Carroll, cognitivism, as well. Theories, according to Turvey, should stick to explanatory "generalizations about film" that proceed within a community with shared standards toward progressive knowledge of how film functions.⁶⁷ In this debate over methodology, hinging finally on a conflict over what the late Wittgenstein does or does not authorize we can say about film, we find only brief mentions of Marxism, feminism, or political analysis, reduced to examples of so many *ethical* commitments that we should, depending on who you believe, Rodowick or Turvey, either be responsible to through self-examination if and only if they happen to inform our approach or should dismiss because they underdetermine workable explanatory hypotheses about what cinema is and does. That this debate should take place on these terms in a journal that still bears the name *October* should impress us with its irony.

If I offer Rancière's writing to signal a fidelity to the era of Althusserian film theory, it is primarily in terms of one aspect of it: the thinking of the relation between film theory and politics. The persistence of film theory today should not mean shoring up a disciplinary practice by determining the contours of the object and delimiting the shared criteria for generating knowledge and debate. Nor, on the other hand, should it mean a

⁶⁷ See Malcolm Turvey, "Theory, Philosophy and Film Studies: A Response to D. N. Rodowick's 'An Elegy for Theory,'" in *October* 122, Fall 2007, 120. Despite his resistance to cognitivism, in this respect, Turvey defends the terms of Bordwell and Carroll's "Post-theory" turn.

wholesale return to often problematic now-dated dogmas of political modernism. On the contrary, it means a break from these logics of consensus. I say “break” but Rancière avoids the tedious language of the “break” or “rupture.” In Rancière, there is no muscular assertion of deep temporality or emphatic will. Possibilities for thought are found in a montage of associations and disassociations not in the signaling of commitment. An investigation into the conditions of possibility of thinking about cinema in cinema and in film theory is no longer in the service of resting on knowledge of the system, but of dissociating the very logic of cause and effect that gives theory and cinema its specifiable places.

It is with this in mind that I propose that we pursue Badiou and Deleuze’s axiomatics of cinema in terms of kinds of pedagogy predicated on cinema’s impurity in relation to art, the arts, language, bodies, and culture.

Chapter 2: Badiou and the Philosophy of Cinema After Deleuze

We have seen how Rancière helps us rethink the terms of “film theory” as it developed in the late 60s and 70s out of an Althusserian conception of theory as “knowledge effect” in relation to film as ideology. For Badiou, in contrast, the terms of thinking cinema’s potential are those of philosophy rather than “theory.” (The latter might be assimilated with what he calls anti-philosophy.¹) In this, Badiou follows Deleuze despite what is often taken to be his adversarial relationship with the thinker he once referred to ironically as “Saint Gilles.”² Deleuze concludes *Cinema 2* with the statement: “There is always a time, midday-midnight, when we must no longer ask ourselves ‘What is cinema?’ but ‘What is philosophy?’ Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice. For no technical determination, whether applied (psychoanalysis, linguistic) or reflexive, is sufficient to constitute the concepts of cinema itself.”³ If theories of film typically seek to explain or analyze it or aspects of it, philosophy for Deleuze as for Badiou doesn’t explain cinema but is *conditioned by it*. According to Badiou, the thought of cinema begins in the shadow of Deleuze. As he puts it, “Today, which is to say ‘after Deleuze’ there is a clear requisitioning of philosophy by cinema—or of cinema by philosophy.”⁴

¹ Though a defender of philosophy, many of the figures Badiou most admires fall under his category of anti-philosophers—Lacan, Nietzsche and Pascal, for example. The anti-philosopher seems to constitute a more worthy opponent than the figures Badiou dubs “sophists.”

² See Alain Badiou, “The Flux and the Party,” in *Polygraph* 15/16, 2005. For a more nuanced, but perhaps even more controversial critique of Deleuze by Badiou written in a rather different context and idiom, see *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

³ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 280.

⁴ Alain Badiou, “Cinema as a Democratic Emblem,” trans. Alan Ling and Aurelien Mondon in *Parrhesia* #6, 2009, 1.

Like Rancière, Badiou approaches film by way of the broader question of artistic configurations, but whereas Rancière's method is to interrogate how art is grasped as art, Badiou attempts to delimit precisely how we can think art as an exception to the distribution of the sensible. If we can use Rancière's vocabulary to define Badiou's project, it is because there is a distinct overlap to their conception of art but whereas Rancière focuses on the conditions of possibility of art, Badiou's philosophical position takes art as a distinct mode of truth. Therefore, before we examine how Badiou reads film as "the plus-one of the arts" we must first understand how art conditions his philosophy.

Badiou on Art

"Something else is possible." For Badiou, this is what art today must say.⁵ What is at stake in asserting that an indefinite thing that is not has the possibility of being? Why is this the domain of art?

The reader of Badiou will need to entertain, if provisionally, the forgotten game of philosophy, that is, in Badiou's definition "thought thinking itself," and take seriously the question of "what is possible" in relation to "what is." For Badiou, this is the question of how to think an *event* in relation to *being*. Badiou rehearses two alternative responses that he views as symptomatic of the refusal to really confront this question. The first alternative is: *everything is possible*. This position sees no limit to what can be expressed or imagined today. Not content with a mere "something else," this position

⁵ Alain Badiou, "Fifteen Theses On Contemporary Art," *Lacanian Ink* 23 (2004), 110.

embraces the open, unequivocal affirmation of unlimited possibility. The second alternative is an inversion of the first: *everything is impossible*. This position responds to our distance from this sort of abstract speculation by suggesting that we turn our backs on the seductive but illusory gesture of trying to think that which is not, and declare once and for all that there's nothing beyond our finite experience. Badiou in his reflections on art suggests that both these latter claims, although contradictory, are simultaneously behind most artistic production today and, what's more, to his mind, they are the same claim.⁶ Together they announce a world of progress and a world without events: the desire for infinite innovation within an essentially closed world. To say that everything is possible—there is no end to novelty, variation, the realization of latent consumer fantasies—means only that everything is impossible—there is no new thing that is not made up of a series of effects that cannot be calculated or assimilated to a certain conception of the world that remains fundamentally unaltered.

Mallarmé, in a letter explaining his refusal to write an introduction for a friend's book, explains that art cannot tolerate introductions. Art, he claims, is “like a woman with her lover and has no need for the third party—the husband.” What Mallarmé calls art illustrates Badiou's conception of “the event,” and it is fitting that the event take the form of art through the metaphor of love, as art and love are two of the four loci of events for Badiou, which include the additional realms of science and politics. No husbands needed, but are we left then with something that has no ramifications outside the finite experience of a single individual—the woman, the reader of the poem? If we must lean it

⁶ Ibid, 111.

can only be, as Paul Celan would have it, “on inconsistencies.” Badiou’s philosophy proceeds from two disjunctive fidelities. He insists on the adherence to the conception of the event as that which is subtracted from the third party, any and all places of support. In other words, the event and its truth is that “something else” which cannot be subsumed under any of the figures of what we could call husbandry: namely, according to Badiou, any form of historicism, contextualization or categorization. At the same time, however, Badiou insists upon the importance of maintaining the third party. So what is this third party, free of all foundation, but keeping vital watch over its own uselessness? The third party is what Badiou calls “philosophy.”

If there are signs in the English speaking world of an encounter with Alain Badiou’s “return to philosophy,” we would have to say that the encounter remains in a period of latency. There is no shortage of introductions, but they tend to focus on the question of what, for Badiou, it means to do philosophy, whereas the actual practice of what Badiou calls philosophy is still relatively unexplored. Yes, the question of what it means to do philosophy is part of the process of actually doing it; that is, it is philosophy’s business is to define its own terrain. But to approach Badiou’s work with the will to fidelity, no matter how skeptical or critical, we must confront the realization that merely to mark and categorize Badiou’s contributions or attempted interventions to the history of philosophy would be—by Badiou’s own insistence—strictly non-philosophical. Moreover, the terrain of philosophy itself, as Badiou has presented it, is one of essential dependency on its four conditions. If the project of fidelity to Badiou is to take place, it should proceed not simply from commentary on his own work, but in two

ways: through the production of more actual philosophy in the mode that he claims for it, and outside philosophy through the independent procedures called art, math, politics and love.

While philosophy's existence, for Badiou, is dependant on the existence of truths, philosophy itself does not produce truths. Philosophy is thinking the mutual but disjunctive construction of truths, which fall under four "procedures" of which philosophy itself is not one. By Badiou's standards the test of philosophy's own legitimacy should come under these four headings. That is, the test is not within the four procedures themselves, nor in philosophy itself as a truth procedure, but in philosophy's relation, or in Lacan's sense "non-relation," to the four procedures of truth.

Of Badiou's "generic procedures," I would suggest that his philosophy of art has received the least attention from critics. Commentators on Badiou have, for obvious reasons, focused on the more provocative of his fidelities: his identification of ontology with mathematics, his Maoism and political militancy, and his striking inclusion of love as one of the specific conditions of philosophy. If Badiou's understanding of art has received less engagement, the obvious reason is that what Peter Hallward calls "his broadly modernist conception of art"⁷ may appear comparatively familiar in relation to the other three procedures. In addition, though Badiou's use of certain poets remains a consistent motif throughout his writing, the sense that art as a procedure of truth is ancillary to the other procedures, if not philosophy itself, may derive from the fact that when Badiou "summons" the events constituted by the generic procedure of art the truths

⁷ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject To Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 193.

are most often utilized for thinking philosophy itself, and more specifically the philosophical problem known as “the event,” rather than art.

Badiou warns against collapsing art and philosophy, though he does insist on knots, imitation and sharing, and even necessary, localized sutures that exist between the two. To look then at the encounter between philosophy and art in Badiou’s thinking, we cannot simply bracket the other procedures, nor can we work by analogy, but rather we must think the two together. “Thinking the two” is the project of the truth procedure of love, but here the two in question are not like two lovers who cannot be thought from the position of a third party; philosophy itself is the third party. Thinking philosophy and art is like thinking both a star and its constellation.

The Intraphilosophical Effects of Art

What can we say about this relation that is not one in which the four independent procedures converge without finding a point of contact? Badiou’s insistence on the necessity of philosophy to retain what we could call a hard notion of truth, provocative as it may be, is a more immediately comprehensible intervention than understanding what precisely philosophy’s relationship to truth ultimately is. Badiou’s attacks on the various proclamations of the end of philosophy or the reduction of philosophy to a matter of relativism or pragmatism (for him amounting to the same thing) are centered around a Platonic conception of truth as radically heterogeneous to fact, knowledge, common sense, understanding, and opinion. So while philosophy does not produce truth, its role is also significantly not production of knowledge. So what does philosophy do?

“Philosophy is the locus of thinking wherein the ‘there are’ truths is stated, along with their compossibility.”⁸ The “il y a” highlighted by Badiou is to insist that philosophy involves an affirmative practice. It is not a place for equivocation, but axiomatic expounding. The word compossibility, derived from Leibniz, suggests that the philosopher is something like a non-dialectical mediator. In other words, the four types of truth are placed in what Deleuze might call an “inclusive disjunctive synthesis;” the task is to think them together in their mutual coexistence, while at the same time, preserving their autonomy. Given this claim, it may come as some surprise that Badiou also insists that philosophy is fictional and its relation to the other truth procedures is one of imitation. “As a fiction of knowledge, philosophy imitates the matheme. As a fiction of art, it imitates the poem... it is like love without an object... political strategy without any stakes in power.”⁹ This is evocative of Lacan’s “analytic discourse” in which the analyst assumes the locus of the object cause of desire, which is a matter of the excess or the place of the void where truth emerges of the form of a fiction, but not from the analyst himself. Truth must emerge from the analysand, or in the case of philosophy, from lovers, artists, scientists, or political activists. Philosophy is, then, like psychoanalysis for Lacan, a matter of ethics: staving off the sophist who refuses to recognize any affirmative truth, yet simultaneously “staving off disaster,” which means not doing away with the sophist by assuming truth is substantial and can be produced by the philosopher herself.

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. by Norman Madarasz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 141.

⁹ *Ibid*, 142.

To do art one does not need philosophy. If philosophy's role is seizing the truth of these procedures, it is decidedly not doing the procedures. This is not to say that a philosopher cannot, as Badiou himself has done, write plays and novels, but only that when writing a play, he is no longer a philosopher or, for that matter, a political activist, mathematician, or lover. Hence, Badiou's philosophical reflections on politics, he calls meta-politics and his reflections on art, "inaesthetics." Inaesthetics "describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art."¹⁰ We should understand by this not the description of the effects of the works of art themselves, but a description of the "intraphilosophical effects," which insofar as art is concerned is a matter of "localized prescription, not description."¹¹ (In his *Ethics* he claims there is no "ethics in general," and indeed it would seem that for him there is no aesthetics in general.) This is primarily a matter of making any aesthetic reflection a matter of what Badiou calls situation. "Every philosophical enterprise turns back toward its temporal conditions in order to treat their compossibility at a conceptual level."¹² Philosophy is then a matter of the historicity of the relationship to the generic procedures themselves.

Desuturing Philosophy and the Poem: Historicity Versus Act

The sophistic position of anti-philosophy exists either as the refusal of the possibility of truth *tout court* or as a blockage caused by the handover of truth to some other generic

¹⁰ Alain Badiou, *Inaesthetics*, xiv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, transl. and ed. by Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens (London: Continuum, 2003): 91.

procedure. This last is what Badiou calls, using Jacques Alain-Miller's term derived from Lacan, *suturing*. The question of compossibility is then a matter of *desuturing*. We must separate Badiou's position from the more familiar insistence that despite the claims of the various postmodernisms or poststructuralisms, one must maintain the status of the Kantian diremption model or the semi-autonomy of art's claim to truth production in relation to politics or philosophy.

For this reason we must look at why Badiou rejects this model as his own. Unlike Habermas, for example, Badiou does not see the question about the relative autonomy of artistic truth in relation to other forms of truth as one about the inheritance of the enlightenment, but rather he views it as a classical question. Like Rancière, Badiou continuously returns to Plato and Aristotle in his reading of politics and aesthetics, but unlike Rancière he does not observe a radically new regime of art emerging in modernity. Indeed, we can identify Badiou's separation from Kantian aesthetics in his rejection of Aristotle's conception of art. Badiou provides three models for understanding philosophy's relation to art. The models emerged with the inception of philosophy, but he sees them as carrying over into the twentieth century. "Three possible relations of philosophy (as thought) to the poem are *identifying rivalry* [Parmenides], *argumentative distance* [Plato] and *aesthetic regionality* [Aristotle]. In the first case philosophy wants the poem; in the second, it excludes it; and in the third, it categorizes it."¹³ It should come

¹³ Ibid, 95-6. These are, in effect, analogous to what Rancière calls the aesthetic, ethical and representative regimes of art, though with a significant difference. Even though, like Badiou, Rancière sees all three regimes as still present, he would say that it makes no sense to speak of the "aesthetic regime" in the age of Parmenides. It is telling that Badiou speaks here of the "poem," because as Rancière argues art could not be in rivalry with philosophy until modernity because it wasn't until modernity that a concept of "art" in the singular (as distinct from "arts" in the plural) existed.

as no surprise to anyone familiar with Badiou's insistent fidelity to Plato (in part a tactical gesture stemming from a rivalry with Nietzsche, Heidegger and Deleuze over the stakes of philosophy) that while not sanctioning it, Badiou finds more philosophical purchase in Plato's ban on poetry than Aristotle's categorizing of it. "For Aristotle—as little a poet as is possible in his technique of exposition (Plato, on the other hand, and he recognizes it, is at every moment sensible to the charm he excludes)—the poem is no longer anything but a particular object proposed to disposition of knowledge... With Aristotle, the foundational debate is finished, and philosophy, stabilized in connection to its parts, no longer turns back dramatically on what conditions it."¹⁴ Hence, Badiou's philosophy of/on art is significantly not an aesthetic philosophy. According to Badiou an aesthetic model leads to what Lacan calls "the discourse of the university," which is strictly opposed to Badiou's own conception of philosophical thinking. Philosophy's role is not interpretive—it is not about making "sense" of the four generic procedures. On the contrary philosophy's role is "founding a unique place in which under the contemporary conditions of these procedures, it may be stated how and why a truth is not a sense, being rather a *hole in sense*."¹⁵ Philosophy like the four procedures subtracts itself from both sense making and sensual experience; the "how" and "why" must be stated through reason. "Philosophy is an insensate act, and by this very fact rational."¹⁶ Badiou is therefore defending the philosophy of art as not aesthetic or poetic, nor, on the other

¹⁴ Ibid, 94.

¹⁵ Badiou, *Manifesto*: 102.

¹⁶ Ibid, 142

hand, a matter of making sense of art by understanding it, categorizing it or defining its parameters. Philosophy is restricted to the “rational act” of seizing the truths of art.

Badiou indicates several suturings that have historically blocked the practice of philosophy. Positivism sutured philosophy to science. Marxism in certain formations sutured philosophy to the political in fidelity to Marx’s claim that philosophy’s role is no longer to “interpret” but rather to “change” the world. If there is a particular sophist that is situated as the enemy when it comes to the relation of philosophy and artistic truths, it is Heidegger. Heidegger, according to Badiou, sutured philosophy to the poem. Nonetheless Heidegger remains a great sophist and in regards to philosophy’s relationship to the poem, he cannot be ignored. Badiou sees Heidegger’s act of suturing as on the one hand a failure in regard to philosophy, but on the other hand, as possessing a saving grace that endows it with a “ground of historicity”¹⁷ since Heidegger rightly identified the “Age of Poets.” Badiou grants that an “Age of Poets,” spanning from Hölderlin to Paul Celan, marked not so much the death of philosophy, but a historical sequence in which philosophy lost its “free play” and poetry became the “locus” of enacting the truth of “being and time.”¹⁸ This epoch, characterized by “inconsistency and disorientation,” was articulated in a kind of subtractive metaphysical poetry. “The scintillating dryness of these poems cut open a space... of historical pathos.”¹⁹ Heidegger’s work, despite its failure, grasped the event. “The reformulation of that

¹⁷ Ibid, 74.

¹⁸ Ibid, 69.

¹⁹ Ibid, 71

which both joins together and separates the poem and philosophical discursivity is an imperative which, thanks to Heidegger, we must submit ourselves to.”²⁰

Heidegger is, then, the end of aesthetics, though not the end of the co-existence of art and philosophy. “Until today, Heidegger’s thinking has owed its persuasive power to having been the only one to pick up what was at stake in the poem, namely the destitution of object fetishism, the opposition of truth and knowledge and lastly the essential disorientation of our epoch.”²¹ Still, because Heidegger failed to grasp the *matheme*, he turned artistic truth into something sacred. In regards to Heidegger’s claim of an “original indistinction” between the poem and the *logos*, Badiou claims that Parmenides is “not yet philosophy.” Badiou continues, “for every truth that accepts its dependence in regard to narrative and revelation is still detained in mystery; philosophy exists only through its desire to tear the latter’s veil.”²² If philosophy exists as a certain desacralization and denarrativization, these turn out to be precisely true of artistic truth as well. That is, art, while having access to narrative and the iconography of the image, finds its truth in an immanent interruption with “the sacred authority of the image or the story.”²³

The placement of both narrative and the image as heterogeneous to the rational and the capacity for truth evokes Lacan’s distrust of the imaginary. In order to desuture philosophy or the poem from narrativization, both must borrow from another truth procedure: mathematics. As we’ve seen, compossibility means we can’t think of these

²⁰ Badiou, *Infinite*: 92.

²¹ Badiou, *Manifesto*, 74.

²² Badiou, *Infinite*: 92.

²³ *Ibid*, 93.

procedures in isolation. It is a matter of nondialectical relationality. Badiou is adamant about not confusing different procedures and claims that any given truth procedure itself involves a process of purification. Still, the purification is never complete; every procedure will remain permeated by the other procedures. Badiou freely acknowledges that each procedure will find reason to borrow from the others and occasionally they will get tied in knots. Indeed, philosophy's role as thinking compossibility would lose its force if the autonomy of each procedure could be delineated in advance of any event within one of the procedures. This is central to Badiou's philosophical project in its relation to the different procedures—a denial of rivalry, an assertion of independence and yet an ever renewed tension or conflict that demands a subtle and cutting precision to renew the integrity and vitality of each procedure and of the philosophical project more generally. So, for example, fidelity to mathematical truth is not restricted to the domain of mathematics. Not only philosophical but also poetic, political and indeed amorous practice (thanks to Lacan) must be presented from an “imperative of consistency... which turns out to be incompatible with any legitimation by narrative, or by the initiated status of the subject of enunciation.”²⁴ This is of course adamantly not a version of positivism. In *Being and Event*, Badiou constructs an ontology on the basis of the axiom “The One is Not.”²⁵ Badiou finds in figures like Gödel, Cantor, and Cohen a way to think inconsistency as that which underlies consistency, but the mathematical paradigm that permeates philosophy and the other procedures is used to undermine all manner of doxa

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 23.

and what we could loosely call aestheticization. We find ourselves confronted with a mathematics of beauty and a poetry of near-pure abstraction and logic.

Wounds, Knots and the Law

As we've seen, Badiou's attack on the poetic suture concedes quite a bit to Heidegger, which is to say not the end of philosophy but the end of aesthetics. Aesthetic reflection as a productive discipline, he seems to be saying—despite the indication that he would never have endorsed the Aristotelian model—comes to an end with Heidegger. It is striking that, despite all the persuasive attacks Badiou makes on what he calls the sophistic position that holds that the traumas of the twentieth century have put an end to philosophy, he clearly supports the notion that modernity has seen an end to both moral and aesthetic philosophy, and even to ontology in so far as it is to be thought as within the domain of philosophy. It makes one wonder whether the return to philosophy isn't to a rather impoverished form. And indeed Badiou makes such a claim: "philosophy is under the conditions of art, science, politics and love, but it is always damaged, wounded, serrated by the evental and singular character of these conditions. Nothing of this contingent occurrence pleases it."²⁶ All the procedures of truth, not only condition philosophy, but also put it into question. Plato, he suggests, recognized that philosophy suffers from the "wound" of art to the concept. Badiou insists that all the conditions of

²⁶ Ibid, 101.

philosophy are also its wounds. “Poem, matheme, politics and love at once condition and insult philosophy. Condition and insult: that’s the way it is.”²⁷

When philosophy’s role cannot be interpretative, journalistic or literary and cannot be reduced to the status of algebra, it may seem unclear what language philosophy is written in. Badiou’s answer is that while philosophy maintains its distance from the generic procedures, since they condition it, it must have recourse to the effects of their truths. While philosophy desutures, it preserves and even engenders tangles. So philosophy does not place a ban on art even within philosophy itself. What saves philosophy from becoming art is a matter of jurisdiction. This is the position that might lend credence to Deleuze’s alleged accusation that Badiou is a secret Kantian.²⁸

Maintaining the category of truth seems to necessitate the adherence to an impersonal law, one determined by reason or rationality as distinct from sense or understanding.

Badiou says this about “occurrences of the literary” in philosophy: they “are placed under the jurisdiction of a thought that they do not constitute. They are localized in points at which—in order to complete the establishment of the place in which why and how a truth hollows sense and escapes interpretation is stated—one must precisely through a paradox of exposition, propose a fable, an image or a fiction to interpretation itself.”²⁹ This claim is striking as a weak point in Badiou’s philosophy not because philosophy should not have recourse to the literary, but rather in the broader sense of what is meant by

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Badiou in his book on Deleuze claims that Deleuze often tried to “pin on” him the label “Kantian,” but he does not go into detail about Deleuze’s justification for the criticism. See, for example, Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* transl. by Louise Burchill (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1999), 77.

²⁹ Badiou, *Infinite*, 104-5.

compossibility. It reads as a rather strained attempt to smuggle literary devices back into philosophy without conceding anything to so-called anti-philosophy.

Beyond this “paradox of exposition,” poetry plays another more specific and more necessary role in philosophy. The nomination of an event “is *always* poetic [emphasis Badiou].”³⁰ When philosophy attempts to present what in the poem constitutes its truth, what he calls “truth’s proving of itself” within the poem, it “falls under the imperative of having to propose to sense and interpretation the latent void... This presentation requires within language the deployment of literary resources; but under the condition that it occur at this very point; thus under the general jurisdiction of an entirely different style.”³¹

The act of naming the void so central to Badiou’s conception of the philosophy is itself literary but in such a way as to be marked as a gesture that refers back to another authority.

Philosophy is therefore knotted up with art, but it must rigorously subtract itself from art’s aim. Philosophy’s duty to art is to “envisage... the poem as truth of sensible presence deposited in rhythm and image, but without the corporeal captation by this rhythm and this image.”³² It reduces the material of representation to nothing, leaving only presentation. The impoverishment of philosophy is that it must seize the truth of art (and each of the other procedures) but without the *jouissance* attached to them.

Philosophy is characterized by simultaneous impoverishment and excess—deprived of the power to create truth while granted jurisdiction over all truth.

³⁰ Ibid, 100.

³¹ Ibid, 104.

³² Ibid, 102.

As for philosophy relinquishing the *jouissance* of art, it is not clear to what extent art itself has access to this *jouissance*. “Imaginary captation” is hardly prescribed to art by Badiou.³³ On the contrary, it is precisely what needs to be subtracted. Rhythm and image seem ultimately to have a similar role in art to the one they have in philosophy—extrinsic to truth, they subsist as only residue or the site of deposition. And if, as we saw earlier, while philosophy may “imitate” art, in a peculiar reversal, artistic truth must subtract itself from all fictional or mimetic aspects. Like philosophy, both anemic and revitalized, Badiou characterizes poetic truth alternately by lack and excess, as figured correspondingly by Mallarmé and Pessoa.³⁴ “Excess,” of course, is not the discourse of the university, universality as encyclopedic, but rather an inverse method of breaking from particularity toward the impersonal through a kind of infinite dispersion. We could think of Beckett’s distinction between himself and Joyce: “He was always adding... I realized that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than adding.” The cinematic equivalent might be Bresson and Godard.

The emphasis on impersonality and abstraction may corroborate Hallward’s claim that Badiou does not distinguish himself from the familiar tenets of modernism. And excluding his writings on cinema, Badiou’s canon, if we can call it that, or the names that recur as emblems of artistic truths, are largely still within the framework and period of the so-called Age of Poets. When Badiou writes about art, he is usually writing about the

³³ Of course, for Lacan, *jouissance* is not identical to “imaginary captation,” but when Badiou speaks of the *jouissance* of art that must be subtracted from philosophy, he aligns it with the pleasures of narrative, image and rhythm.

³⁴ See Hallward, 198.

poem or about literary works more generally with work on theater and the inclusion of figures like Beckett and Proust among the names that are evoked for their “intraphilosophical effects.” One of the four truth procedures listed in *Manifesto for Philosophy* is “the poem” not art.³⁵

Common examples for him in realms of music and painting include Schoenberg and Malevitch. He has suggested that dance and cinema are the two key arts of the 20th century, though specific examples from these realms are more infrequent in his work.³⁶ He has also explicitly insisted that there is a “plurality of arts” and “there is no imaginable way of totalizing this plurality.”³⁷ In addition to an argument against the Wagnerian “total work of art” as a necessarily anti-subtractive conception that would ignore the necessity of the void intrinsic to any truth (a false “excess”) or indeed its contemporary variant in the will toward an all-encompassing virtual reality or multimedia experience, we can see Badiou here making an argument against the suturing of the truth of art to any particular form of art, including poetry.

As we’ve mentioned, he also sees truth as historically defined. Given Badiou’s classicism and anti-historicism as well as the fact that his examples tend to come from an earlier era of aesthetic modernity, it is important to note his insistence on the situatedness of every philosophical project. This goes for art as for the rest. In Badiou’s “Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art,” the word “contemporary” is essential. Badiou’s

³⁵ Badiou, *Manifesto*: 61.

³⁶ Badiou, *Century*, 160

³⁷ Badiou, *Polemics*, 144

foundationless ontology allows for a conception of the universal and eternal that is inseparable from a confrontation with the historical moment.

The subject to an artistic truth is a configuration that ruptures the regime of some particular form of art. Such a configuration should not be equated with either a great work or a great artist. Badiou insists that neither single artworks nor the names of artists are equivalent to events. The single work subject to a truth remains for Badiou a “finite fragment.”³⁸ As for the artist, she may lend her name to the event constituted by her formal invention, but the subject to the truth is composed of the works (always multiple) themselves and not the individuals who were instruments of their creation. Indeed, the artist is “finally, what disappears in art.”³⁹ Badiou is proposing an ethic radically antagonistic to the cult of the artist in which the artist is identified with the work and subsequently rewarded. For him there is a kind of martyrdom to artistic creation. He claims the ethic of art is “desperation.” We must separate this ethic from its simulacrum, the fake martyrdom of the romantic artist. Of course, the “desperation” should not be marketable, like David Blaine suspended over the Thames, but nor should we be seduced by more subtle variations in which the apparent disappearance of the artist as creator only draws more attention to the elusive figure behind the work, rather than to the work itself.

Diagnosis and Prescription

All of Badiou’s philosophical prescriptions emerge out of a diagnosis. If artistic or aesthetic production is to be within a truth procedure, it must say something other than

³⁸ Hallward, 196.

³⁹ Badiou, *Lacanian Ink* 23, 109.

what counts as art within the art world, the accepted discourses surrounding contemporary aesthetic production and the culture at large. The diagnosis identifies what gets counted as art—call it art’s sickness. He provides two dominant tendencies for art and calls them “romanticism” and “formalism.”⁴⁰

What Badiou identifies as romanticism, a tendency that he claims still dominates artistic production, is itself a kind of subtractive aesthetic in which sublimation is viewed as oriented toward abjection—exposing the finitude of the body and sexuality. It’s not hard to think of much recent work that in the guise of provocation offers up the body as the limit of experience. According to Badiou, this is “only the reversal of the ideology of happiness”⁴¹ and is but another figure for resignation. In other words, the ever-present reminder from consumer culture that happiness and fulfillment are within our grasp, as figured in the still-powerful, if dated, tradition of the “Hollywood ending,” finds only corroboration in the romantic gesture that seeks to expose mortality as the final word on human experience. In Badiou’s view, dominant practice, obsessed with finitude as the marker of substantial truth, places infinity on the side of formal innovation. Badiou makes it clear that he believes art will inevitably create new forms, but as a motivation for art, this drive is only a kind of complicity with capitalist progress. In this sense he is decidedly not modernist as the term is usually construed.

Art’s main political value is to resist the new sensible relations to the world proposed by globalization and to provide a “proposition about a new definition of what is

⁴⁰ Badiou, *Lacanian Ink* 23, 103.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

our sensible relation to the world.”⁴² Art’s value today is about political emancipation because “without art, without artistic creation, the triumph of the forced universality of money and power is a real possibility.”⁴³ The “something else” posited by an artwork must be other than what is allowed or understood by capitalist experience. The singular abstracted from any particularity is the only meaning of universal address for Badiou. Badiou is, of course, well aware that what gets called globalization or empire comes with its own form of universalism. His proposal is that whereas the representation of the particular—be it an ethnic group or community or some form of so called “personal expression”—might be conceived of as one form of opposition to this “abstract universality of money and power”⁴⁴, what we need is a different form of universality that is concrete.

For Badiou abstract art is not the evacuation of content, but of particularity. Art for him is matter of pure presence and this is what links it to political equality: it does not “distinguish between types of people.” Badiou opposes the notion of art as ever being a matter of asserting the truth of any particular subject position. Art as presentation but not representation should intervene at the edge of the void of the situation, which means, for Badiou, not being able to be included in the meta-structure or state of the situation. All art is like Mallarmé’s book: “it is the one that comes into being by itself; it is made, and exists, by itself.” For Badiou, Mallarmé’s seemingly extreme assertion of art’s autonomy means that the event constituted by an artwork is that part of the artwork that cannot be

⁴² Badiou, *Lacanian Ink* 23, 107.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

counted or claimed. What has been called Mallarmé's hermeticism is for Badiou precisely the statement of universalism and a figure for democracy, though one contrary to any notion of consensus or the common denominator. That which is addressed to everyone equally will, like a star, necessarily seem elevated, distant and strange, qualities that should not be mistaken for hermeticism or elitism.

Indeed, the star is a key figure for Badiou. In one of his twelve theses on contemporary art, Badiou states, "Non-imperial art must be as rigorous as a mathematical demonstration, as surprising as an ambush in the night, and as elevated as a star." Here we see the analogy to the other procedures—their sharing or imitation. We can also see Badiou's localized use of the literary for philosophical purposes. Art is informed by the other procedures with which it must be made compossible. From mathematics it borrows rigor and consistency as well as a certain irreducibility. The ambush evokes surprise and political risk and the star suggests both distance and authority, a sensual aura and material reality but one untouched by worldly interests. All three may indicate the "new" and Badiou would like to maintain the importance of the new in what could be considered a modernist vein. But again we must recognize that he is not talking about new forms. He says art must "create a new possibility" but he insists this is not to "realize" a new possibility.⁴⁵ Again, this latter is the philosophy of the market—there are infinite possibilities within our finite world. Art should say "something else" is possible. Dominant art insists that all is possible because all is impossible. That is, within our closed, globalized, liberal, capitalist world innovation is infinite. For Badiou, art should

⁴⁵ Ibid, 111.

on the contrary refuse innovation but say that another world is possible. Art should render visible “that which, as far as Empire is concerned, doesn't exist.”

Using the set-theory-inspired language of *Being and Event*, Empire⁴⁶ is the state of the situation, but not the situation itself. The gesture of art is to present that which Empire cannot count. From this vantage point we can understand Badiou's insistence on abstracting from particularity. The assertion of the particularity of a specific group, however oppressed, is a matter of making it countable within the state.⁴⁷ The oppression itself is what the state ignores and what must be made visible by abstracting the particularity on which the state relies. Art is always giving form to the void of the current configuration of sensible experience or more specifically what passes for artistic production. Badiou reverses what he takes to be Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical claim that “everything that can be expressed can be expressed clearly. Everything else must be passed over in silence.” For Badiou, only what is passed over in silence must be given expression.

We see in Badiou's theses or axioms on art the way in which diagnosis is followed by prescription, but in way that may not immediately seem obvious. The diagnosis merely marks the empty space for what is missing that an artistic configuration that can constitute an event would offer. If Badiou is proposing a kind of aesthetics of resistance, it cannot be a simple matter of reversal or inversion of dominant forms or

⁴⁶ In a later reworking of his “Theses on Art,” Badiou replaces the word “Empire” with “the West,” to distinguish his conceptual framework from Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's concept of “Empire” that had initially inspired his use of the term. See *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2001). I use the word “Empire” because “the West” seems to open to additional confusions considering it seems clear that Badiou means to adopt a generic concept for what he will later in *Logic of Worlds* call “democratic materialism,” the dominant logic of life in contemporary global capitalism, not confined strictly to the geographic west.

⁴⁷ *Being and Event*, 522. To avoid confusion, “State” does not refer to (or does not only refer to) the state component of a nation-state. Rather, “state” refers to any counted situation that excludes the void.

mere avoidance of the symptoms. The prescription must involve some element of forcing. We can view here the philosophical importance of the void in Badiou's work. It marks a place for resistance both immanent to dominant and oppressive practice, but also necessarily unacceptable to it and unanticipated by it. Subtraction is the elimination of the terrain of the opposition, but it must be a rigorous and rational procedure and not the sort of confident indifference that more often than not repeats what it sought to ignore. This is a point which sharply separates Badiou from the strain of post-Deleuzian aesthetics that seeks justification for artworks based on the notion that they exhibit unconstrained raw affect.

What makes art its own generic procedure, what gives it its "evental and singular character," is that it is the truth of sense or, as Badiou says, "of the sensible." Since as we saw, all truth is a matter of making a hole in sense, rupturing the regime of sense making, art has the peculiar position of presenting the truth of that which truth itself interrupts. Sensual material is reduced to its "minimal image." Art is then the self-negation of its own material, a breaking of its own mirror. As Badiou says, "to make something appear (swan, star, rose) to appear only insofar as it is canceled out is constitutive of the poetic act."⁴⁸ Inaesthetics is then not simply meta-aesthetics but, as Rancière has countered, closer to anti-aesthetics. As pure presence, an immanent singularity, art is indifferent to differences, which connects it to a conception of political

⁴⁸ Badiou, *Inaesthetics*, 161.

equality. Like politics, art “must be received in the egalitarian anonymity of its presentation as such.”⁴⁹

The Plus-One of the Arts

This may seem to leave few opportunities for cinema beyond perhaps certain avant-garde gestures. But cinema turns out to be a supplement to Badiou’s inaesthetics that threatens the logic of his conception of art. If art is a condition and insult to philosophy, cinema is a condition and insult to art. As we have discussed, cinema is, according to Badiou, not one art among many but the “plus-one of the arts.” The notion that cinema is an impure art that combines the other arts is not a new idea. Badiou gets it from Bazin but it can be found at least as far back as Vachel Lindsay’s 1915 *The Art Of The Moving Picture*. But “plus-one” suggests that cinema is not a proper art so much as a supplement to the very division of arts. For Badiou, cinema does not totalize the plurality of arts but is conditioned by them, patrolling their borders, subjecting them to its impure operations. Contaminated by the other arts, cinema is also contaminated by non-art. About its relation to non-art, Badiou states, “This is... what politicizes cinema: it operates on a junction between ordinary opinions and the work of thought.”⁵⁰ This relation to politics is also a relation to theory or ideology critique—cinema performs work on the common and ordinary. Cinema is then not pure presentation like Mallarmé’s book. What Badiou calls the “proletarian aristocratism” of art—“Art is made, and says what it does, according to its own discipline, and without considering anybody’s

⁴⁹ Badiou, *Conditions*, 174.

⁵⁰ Badiou, “Cinema as Democratic Emblem,” *Parrhesia*, 4.

interests”⁵¹—is undercut by cinema which is for Badiou both a democratic and mass art. The other arts as truth procedures are indifferent to “commercial laws of circulation and democratic laws of communication,”⁵² and rather necessitate a “differential education” and preserve a “proximity to the history of the art concerned and the vicissitudes of its grammar.”⁵³ Cinema is the opposite in that it addresses itself to a “generic humanity” unconcerned with the logic of artistic truth only with a shared sensory world.

This is not to say cinema’s truths can be simply judged in term of their mass appeal but rather that cinema must engage in a rigorous subtractive mode with the “vulgar” productions of the culture industry. Unlike the other arts, cinema is not indifferent to the culture of consumption. Badiou proposes that one direction of the purification process of cinematic truth should be directed toward what Adorno and Horkheimer called the prudish pornography of Hollywood film. It could be argued that Hollywood has since become less prudish, but as Badiou points out, it was the proscriptions of the Hays Code that lead to the use of metonymic desire in classical Hollywood, its saving grace, but a process that has become saturated through Empire’s progressive ban on censorship. Since the classical period, the culture industry has taken the direction of explicit use of “extreme violence, cruelty” and “the motif of erogenous nudity”⁵⁴ while remaining as prudish as ever in regard to desire. These forms constitute raw material that need to be submitted to artistic purification. This process should be directed “not through an aggressive posture with respect to inherited forms, but through

⁵¹ Badiou, *Polemics*, 147.

⁵² *Ibid*, 148.

⁵³ Badiou, “Cinema as Democratic Emblem,” *Parrhesia*, 2.

⁵⁴ Badiou, *Infinite*, 116-7.

mechanisms that arrange these forms at the edge of the void, in a network of cuts and disappearances.”⁵⁵

Film Ideas: Badiou and Deleuze

In a chapter on cinema in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou identifies two ordinary ways of talking about film. The first is our immediate stupid (in Lacan’s sense) reaction, which he calls the “indistinct judgment.” “I liked it,” “I was bored,” and so on. This is how it made me feel. Opinions. The norm of judgment is obscured.⁵⁶

The second way of talking about film attempts to preserve something that gets lost in the immediacy of the indistinct judgment, to rescue our pleasure from the lazy habits of consumption. Here, we propose a norm and a system of evaluation. Filmmakers are emphasized rather than actors, plot, or isolated effects—the name of the auteur providing an emblem of the effect of a certain style. Badiou calls this the “diacritical judgment”⁵⁷ and by it he means to include not only the more sophisticated film criticism but also some traditional academic writing on film.

What both these two ways share is that they are judgments and presume the necessity of evaluation. Therefore Badiou proposes that the link between film and philosophy should be pursued through a path that is indifferent to judgment and not normative. Not acknowledged by Badiou in this context is that much academic writing

⁵⁵ Quoted in Hallward, 196.

⁵⁶ Alain Badiou, “The False Movements of Cinema,” in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 83. Stupidity, for Lacan, it should be made clear, is not a bad thing, as is argued, for example, by Dany Nobus and Malcolm Quinn in *Knowing Nothing, Staying Stupid* (London: Routledge, 2005). Badiou himself is not scornful of “opinions”; he considers them necessary but not the province of philosophy.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 84.

also tends to avoid evaluative distinctions. But Badiou sees this academic tendency as part of what Lacan calls “the discourse of the university,” which says that everything can be counted or categorized. This discourse can dispense with evaluation because it says that there is only knowledge and not truth. According to Badiou, philosophy and indeed thought more generally has a meaning only because there is something other than just language and bodies. This is what he calls “truth,” a word that when presented in this affirmative form would make many aligned with the theoretical tradition blush. As I have suggested, a recent trend in film studies has been to correct the attempt to privilege film’s symbolic dimension by insisting on the importance of the body and the spectator’s emotional or cognitive response. For Badiou, if film has meaning for philosophy, it must also threaten philosophy, which means it cannot be grasped only in terms of its effects on language and bodies, but must construct a new relation (or non-relation⁵⁸) between language and bodies by way of the fragile consistency of a subject. Truth, according to Badiou, is not substantive; rather, it is what punctures a hole in knowledge or sense. Truth cannot be fixed or eternal because that would make it indistinguishable from knowledge. The “classical” link between art and philosophy developed by Aristotle, what Badiou calls “aesthetic regionalism,” and continued in academic scholarship may eliminate evaluation but only because evaluation is considered too subjective and therefore to have no place in a normative mode of classification.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Badiou takes the concept of a “non-relation” from Lacan as a relation defined by difference without any form of synthesis in the faux-Hegelian sense. This is how Badiou interprets Lacan’s famous formula, “There is no sexual relation.” In the Maoist language of Badiou’s youth, it is a relation in which two does not make one. In Deleuze’s terms, we could call it a “disjunctive synthesis.”

⁵⁹ See *Inaesthetics*, 3-4. Badiou highlights two other possible schemata that link art to philosophy that also have their academic variants. One is the didactic schema, which follows Plato’s lead in treating art

Badiou proposes a way of thinking or talking about film that avoids all opinion and diacritical evaluation, as well as the converting of all the effects of film into objects of knowledge. Rather than knowledge, philosophy is concerned with the effects of films on thinking the exception to dominant regimes of sense. He calls it “axiomatic.” This position “asks what are the effects for thought of such and such a film.”⁶⁰ This is a way of conceiving of film as a mode of thought, which is not to say that it demonstrates already existing theoretical concepts, but that it produces its own new constellations or operations that can lead to the generation of new concepts.

If there is a work that could be used as a model for an axiomatics of cinema, it is none other than Deleuze’s two-volume *Cinema* (1983/5). I take it that the importance of Deleuze’s *Cinema* books for contemporary theory and the challenge they pose to a certain traditions of film theory is not primarily the rejection of psychoanalytic and linguistic models, but rather the attempt to submit philosophy or theory to the conditions of cinema. Deleuze proposes a reversal of the traditional relation between film and theory. The attempt is not to think a theory of film but instead to think of film as theory—to think of how film itself is creative and can give rise to the creation of new concepts within philosophy.

If the name Deleuze is thought to authorize a rejection of 70s film theory still disingenuously labeled as dominant in favor of a rhetoric of subversive flows, bodies and

as incapable of truth but of value to the extent that it can educate in truths external to art. Unlike “aesthetic regionalism” art is no longer treated as an object of knowledge but rather, an instrument for knowledge. Finally, the romantic schema assumes *only* art is capable of truth. Here we say that knowledge of art is limited in importance compared to our ability to appreciate it.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 85.

sensations affirmed through a patchwork of Deleuzian concepts and neologisms and exhibited more often than not in contemporary Hollywood films, this is directly connected to what is ignored in Deleuze—his auteurism. Auteurism, it is sometimes claimed, is the elitist and conservative practice of cinephiles since it amounts to a list of great names and separates cinema from its more immanent pleasures, which are connected to what makes it popular. But if cinema is an art in Deleuze's sense, then it must stand up on its own,⁶¹ which means that there must be names attached to the signs it produces. His use of auteurs is not diacritical because the names are not tied to individuals so much as they are signifiers for singular modes of creative production. The name of the auteur is the name of an individuation that is better conceived of as an event or an ascesis than a subjectivity. As he puts it: "The proper name... is precisely not a reference to a particular person as author or subject of enunciation; it refers to one or several assemblages."⁶²

Beginning most explicitly in *Difference and Repetition* and continuing most influentially in *Anti-Oedipus*, written with Félix Guattari, Deleuze has attempted to construct an "image of thought" that inverts the basic methodology of Freudo-Marxism in French structuralist and post-structuralist theory by proposing that the "critique of representation" already gives priority to representation over the singularities that representation appropriates. "Schizoanalysis," as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, starts with desire and affect as forms of production and not with the modes of power and

⁶¹ See Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 164.

⁶² Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 120.

dominance that thwart it. Schizoanalysis is the “war-machine” of a new philosophical ethics posed against a psychoanalysis that provides a diagnosis of the repressive mechanisms of power at the same time as it derives its explanatory power from the assumption of the inevitability of Oedipal triangulation. Deleuze and Guattari’s intervention provides an antidote to Laura Mulvey’s provocative assertion so influential in film studies that theory was a weapon necessarily destructive of pleasure because it exposed the mechanisms of power on which our pleasure was predicated.⁶³

Yet the importance of the proper name for Deleuze should remind us that schizoanalysis, like psychoanalysis, is working toward a form of organization. Art for Deleuze is not, as is sometimes suggested, equivalent to unmediated affect and sensation; rather, the link between art and hysteria or schizophrenia is a complex one that needs to be grasped in relation to a concept of individuation and not asserted in some pre-theoretical affirmation. Indeed, “desire,” which for him is primary, should not be mistaken for the “visual pleasure” of narrative cinema. Though he approaches cinema from a different direction, Deleuze, no less than Mulvey, is interested in thinking about the ways cinema separates itself from the reactionary habits and pleasures that get recycled and renewed by a medium given over to the laws of commodification. This is why the break with auteurism, according to Deleuze, is an attempt “to deny any distinction between the commercial and the creative.”⁶⁴ It is a falsely democratic move that places all authority in the hands of the theorist. To understand Deleuze’s *Cinema*

⁶³ See Mulvey in *Narrative*, ed. Rosen, 199.

⁶⁴ Deleuze quoted in *The Brain Is The Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 369.

books we must understand his auteurism not only because it allows for thinking what constitutes art for Deleuze but also because the logic of his thought implies that the specific proper names that he is invested in form the basis of his philosophical concepts.

Far from developing the possibilities opened up by Deleuze's axiomatics of cinema, the current tendency in American academic theory that seeks authority in Deleuze, Bergson or, in a related but separate move, phenomenology, and places its emphasis on affect or "the body" might be said to be an attempt to debunk the diacritical judgment, in favor of the indistinct judgment now recuperated for the discourse of the university. Let's suggest instead that the project of 70s film theory is not saturated, but where it is most limited (which is where Žižek is most limited as well) is when film and filmmakers are substitutable pretexts to illustrate theory's concepts.

It will be objected that my claim that film theory has switched from a devaluation of the imaginary in favor of the signifier to a reversal is to presume in advance the efficacy of the Lacanian triad—Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. Readers of Deleuze will be quick to point out that mapping these terms onto Deleuze's work or equating the imaginary with affect or sensation is not so easily maintained without distortion. As we have suggested, Deleuze's *Cinema* books though they engage with film theory are not within the lineage of film theory because they have no interest in film as cultural production but only as a way of thinking—as a specific aesthetic way of realizing ideas through percepts and affects or more specific to cinema, movement and time. By affirming Bergson's identification of image and matter and offering cinema as, contra

Bergson, the actualization of this identification, Deleuze treats the problematic of representation that much of 70s film theory revolved around as a false problem.

The field of the symbolic, of signifiers, that needed to be wrested from the imaginary was understood as a locus for grasping the reproduction of the relations of production. To win the cinematic object for the symbolic was to restore to cinema its absent causes and conditions of possibility. The assumption was that the image was whole only because of a hole. Lacan's 1949 essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," the basic tenets of which were often rehearsed in *Screen* and other film theoretical journals of the 60s, 70s and 80s, offered "the imaginary" as a relation of a subject to the image that was central to the formation of the bodily ego. This was a relation defined by transparency and identity that is the same time a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), a relation that misses its mark. Before Metz identified the cinema as composed of imaginary signifiers, the imaginary in Lacan was already cinematic. Film gives us an image of gestalt or "good form" like the child in the mirror who sees himself as whole only at the cost of identifying himself with his image. The child's "mirror-stage," Lacan claims in the early essay, remains the formative prototype of the ego or "I-function" as a necessarily regressive and rigid structure in which a primary identification with an imaginary signifier undergirds all future identifications. As Lacan says, "It suffices to understand the mirror stage... as an *identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives this term: namely the transformation in the subject that takes place when he assumes an image [emphasis Lacan's]."⁶⁵ Once

⁶⁵Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2004), 4.

Althusser used Lacan's concept of the imaginary to define the subject's "relation" to his or her "real conditions of existence" as represented by ideology, Marxist critical theory could be rewritten in post-structuralist language that offered cinema, the so-called first mass art, as a privileged locus for ideology critique.

In this narrative, our experience of cinema as cinema was predicated on the effacement of what produced the image which manifested itself in various forms: the properties of the apparatus itself and modes of perception embedded in it, the material substrate of the film, the photogram, the subject of enunciation and finally History itself. The heterogeneity of this list made for numerous arguments and sometimes slippages about what constituted materialism in cinema. Was what Jean-Louis Baudry called "the revealing of the mechanism" or the "inscription of the film work"⁶⁶ better sought in an agit-prop anti-imperialist call for revolution like Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas' *Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) or in a structural materialist provocation like Tony Conrad's *Flicker* (1965)? Should a Marxist French film journal after May 68 be writing about the *Méditerranée* (1963) or *Battle of Algiers* (1966)?⁶⁷ Even if there was no unanimity in the response to these questions there was at least a framework for debate that presumed that there was nothing natural about cinema or narrative conventions and both film theory and the new waves and avant-gardes needed to rescue cinema from the illusion of transparency.

⁶⁶ Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Phil Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 296.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Peter Wollen's "The Two Avant-Gardes" in *Studio International*, Nov/Dec 1975 or the various debates between Positif, Cahiers du Cinéma and Cinéthique. For the English reader a good introduction to these debates can be found in Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: BFI, 1978).

Turning our attention to these effaced mechanisms—be it through breaking down the illusion of movement, the return of sprocket holes or the return of the gaze—is of no interest to Deleuze, because for Deleuze nothing has been effaced. Deleuze announces in the introduction to *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* that “cinema is always as perfect as it can be.”⁶⁸ The identification of matter and image is also an identification of matter and its movement and temporality, being and becoming. As Agamben suggests, Deleuze grasps that the movement-image undoes the distinction between psychical and physical reality.⁶⁹ There are no components of the movement-image that can be isolated to reveal how cinema works because, “Cinema begins with the movement-image—not with any ‘relation’ between image and movement; cinema creates a self-moving image.”⁷⁰ Deleuze takes the famous maxim of Husserl’s phenomenology that “consciousness is always consciousness of something” and argues that Bergson goes farther by proposing that “consciousness is something.”⁷¹ Hence an image, as a form of consciousness, has an autonomy and materiality that is only obscured by bringing in questions about a “subject of enunciation.”

To say, as I have, that cinema for Deleuze actualizes the identity of matter and image may seem paradoxical since the identity of matter and image is not an identity and not actual in Deleuze’s terms. The image is rather virtual in Deleuze’s sense—an immanent plane of potentiating fields that create signs out of blocks and movement and

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. High Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), x.

⁶⁹ *Infancy*, 153.

⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 65.

⁷¹ *Cinema 1*, 56.

time. It is a grin without a cat, an event-sensation without body or object.⁷² To preserve the creative power of the new sign grasped as image, Deleuze rejects the Saussurian distinction between signifier and signified, which means he also rejects the distinction between imaginary and the symbolic. Deleuze's natural history of signs forms something like what Charles Sanders Peirce calls "pure grammar." Deleuze has claimed, pitting Peirce against Saussure, that he is interested in a semiotics not a semiology of signs⁷³ but it should be added that he is primarily interested in the first of Peirce's three branches of semiotics and on principle pays far less attention to what Peirce calls object or interpretant.

If Brecht was the model for political art for the Althusserian reading of film in so-called *Screen* theory, the Deleuzian reading might be understood in terms of another major figure of modernist theater, Antonin Artaud. Artaud, who wrote some suggestive short pieces on cinema, like Brecht offered a method for breaking from the representational logic of more traditional theater, but through an inverse process. Rather than creating distance or separation between the audience or spectator, he sought to eliminate it. Brecht's "A Short Organum For The Theater" prescribes techniques of distancing "designed to free socially conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today."⁷⁴ Artaud similarly appealed to "unhabitual ideas" in order to rescue theater from "psychology and 'human interest'"⁷⁵ or

⁷² See Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 168.

⁷³ See *Cinema 2*, 27-30.

⁷⁴ *Brecht on Theater*, trans. John Willet, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 192.

⁷⁵ Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards, (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 90.

“the present and its events” but rather than techniques of alienation, he demanded immediacy.⁷⁶ As he put it, “Between life and theater, there will be no distinct division, but instead a continuity. Anyone who has watched a scene of a movie being filmed will know exactly what we mean.”⁷⁷

The *Cinema* books repeat Deleuze’s philosophical project more generally. Jean-Luc Nancy draws out the link between cinema and philosophy of Deleuze’s work as a whole. “Deleuze’s interest in the cinema is not just appended to his work: it is at the center, in the projective principle of his thought. It is a cinema-thought, in the sense of having its own order and screen, a singular place of presentation and construction, of displacements and dramatization of concepts (the word concept means this for Deleuze—making cinematic.)”⁷⁸ Cinema does not precisely produce concepts in Deleuze’s terms, but what Nancy exposes is that cinema does appear to realize the image of thought that Deleuze requires of philosophy. Using Deleuze’s terms, the screen is “the plane of immanence” from which haecceities emerge. According to Nancy, Deleuze’s philosophy is “a philosophy of nomination not of discourse... The point is not to signify things but to index by means of proper names the elements of a virtual universe.”⁷⁹ This is why his work is a taxonomy, not a history nor even a theory. This is also why auteurism is intrinsic to his philosophy. The virtual universe is, as Deleuze says, “meta-cinematic.” Philosophy is still needed for the creative power of nomination.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁷⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Deleuzian Fold of Thought,” in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 110.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 111.

But if Deleuze's *Cinema* books do not constitute a history, they are organized around two modes of images—the movement image and time-image—that are divided by an historical break located at World War II. And the argument made for Deleuze's analysis of cinema and the corresponding abandonment of 70s film theory is often given an historical justification. Deleuze's *Cinema* books are thought to speak to the contemporary moment in a way that the film theory that came to dominate the American academy of Metz, Baudry, Mulvey and Heath does not. It would be unfair to merely explain this negatively but certainly part of the appeal of Deleuze comes from a desire to separate from a discourse that once provocative and new had begun to become codified and assume an orthodoxy in the academy and film journals. Deleuze, meanwhile, developed a vocabulary for ways of thinking about cinematic images largely free from the Althusserian-Lacanian language of the era of burgeoning film theory, without falling back on the language of other disciplines or the vocabulary of more traditional film studies that focus on the techniques, technology and formal conventions that have been applied to generate successful conventional products and acceptable deviations. Indeed the explicit repudiation of psychoanalysis and any structural-linguistic inspired semiotics to read cinema as “representation” is repeated in most Deleuzian inspired books about moving images before the second claim is made about Deleuze's relevance in the digital age.⁸⁰ What tends to get critiqued, dismissed⁸⁰ or ignored is what Deleuze shares with the

⁸⁰ See, for example, Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working With Deleuze In Film Theory* (Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2003). “With respect to film theory, I hope to have shown concretely that with Deleuze a new wind is blowing... Deleuze's conception of cinema as a pure semiotics of movement, sound, and images offers an alternative for the traditional conception of images as representations or as language systems. The increasing digitalization of the audiovisual seriously jeopardizes the ontologic argument of photographic analogy... In traditional representational thinking, this

60s and 70s French film theory (which he is well versed in and influenced by, despite the marked differences) and that is: a shared canon of auteurs that frames his analysis. He is then not only auteurist—the names of various directors are the privileged as the site of the production of specific kinds of image—but also modernist—the time-image which realizes the virtual essence of cinema is identified in a series of post-war mostly European and American auteurs who break from the classical mode of narration constructed around the action of a protagonist toward a free indirect discourse that liberates time from what Deleuze following Bergson calls the sensory-motor schema.

One explanation for these dimensions of Deleuze's work is that he was writing at a specific time and didn't live to see full-blown postmodernism. This is of course, in part, what authorizes many of these recent books and essays that take Deleuze as a starting point. We have Deleuze himself on Hitchcock, Godard or Antonioni, but are still in need of the Deleuzian analysis of Mathew Barney, the Wachowski Brothers or David Fincher.⁸¹ In Andras Balint Kovacs words, "ultimately Deleuze's insight suggests how

confusion leads to panic... Deleuze's Bersonian/Peircian semiotics demonstrates that there is no reason to panic," 216-217. Pisters adds that "Deleuze confined himself strictly to the masterpieces of cinema history," but that she will take him to "unknown territories"—in other words, "more popular and commercial cinema," 8.

See also: Barbara M. Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000). At the beginning of the new millennium she says, "We need to rethink a post-semiotic space, a post-linguistic space, which provides new ways of understanding the screenic experience as a complex web of inter-relationalities. The look is never purely visual, but also tactile, sensory, material and embodied," 3.

Or: Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) who looks to Deleuze and Guattari because "The psychoanalytic model for film theory is at this point utterly bankrupt; it needs... to be discarded." (ix) He also insists that we must think of "bodies and pleasures" without reference to "language, signification and representation" if we wish to grasp "postmodern cinematic practice."

⁸¹ Why certain artists are thought to be Deleuzian that bear little relation to the artists Deleuze himself favored is an interesting subject for further research. I'd mention Laura U. Marks's *The Skin of the Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) which focuses on range of third world diasporic filmmakers

narrative develops from classical to modern to postmodern cinema and digital culture. The concrete historical contribution of Deleuze's approach is a new analysis of modern cinema whereby the latter is shown as a transitional stage between prewar cinematic art and the aesthetic possibilities offered by a subsequently evolving digital audiovisual form of communication."⁸²

My claim is that one should be skeptical about the hasty adaptation of Deleuze as someone who offered a way of thinking that is readily adaptable to affirmation of the potential of cinema as digital art. My skepticism is not about the value of Deleuze today nor do I wish to say that Deleuze cannot be used to talk about objects he himself might not have recognized to be relevant to his project. My interest is not in policing what Deleuze's work does and does not authorize but what I wish to suggest is that by highlighting certain ambiguities and dimensions that get overlooked in Deleuze's thought on cinema we can restore certain problems and questions about how we might most productively think of images today that too often get elided by certain trends in contemporary film and media theory that may seek an authoritative ally in Deleuze.

My skepticism is first of all Deleuze's own. In his "Letter to Serge Daney," Deleuze in reflecting on Daney's work develops three (rather than two as we find in the *Cinema* books) ages of the cinematic image. He bases these on Alois Reigl's chronological categorization of tendencies in the artwork: the embellishment of nature,

and video artists such as Walid Ra'ad and Rea Tajiri, as a heartening exception to some of the more unfortunate trends in Deleuzian film theory.

⁸² Andras Balint Kovacs, "The Film History of Thought," in *The Brain Is The Screen*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 166.

the spiritualization of nature and the rivalry with nature. This involves transposing a classical and romantic history onto a twentieth century one, which already seems to pose a problem for the linking of Deleuze's ages of cinema to twentieth and twenty-first century stages of capitalism. The first two phases correspond with Deleuze's movement-image and time-image. The first is the cinema of montage and the "encyclopedia of the world" in which the movement image dominated and cinema was through various national configurations thought to grasp the open whole. The second era is the post-war "writing of disaster," to use the phrase from Blanchot that Deleuze adopts, in which the whole is no longer accessible, narrative structure collapses and movement becomes subordinated to time rather than the other way around. This is cinema's version of the Kantian revolution in philosophy in which the problem of time emerges as central and thereby questions its very foundation. Therefore, this period demands a new "image-pedagogy." The third era, according to Deleuze, is when the image becomes mere information, a cinema for the society of control in which pedagogy gives way to "professional training of the eye." Let's call this the "data-image."⁸³

Like Daney then, Deleuze writing in 80s, without being nostalgic or elegiac, still views the essence of cinema to be within the second age. There is no sense that the time-image will exhaust itself. The resistance from film within the "society of control" is what Daney calls "mannerism." The lack of supplement in the television or computer screen is confronted by a new pop expressionism in which cinema's history as a medium that

⁸³ The coining of the term "data-image" has been credited to Kenneth C. Laudon in *Dossier Society: Value Choices In The Design of National Information Systems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). I did not have Laudon in mind when I chose this term but his use of it is consonant with my understanding of Deleuze and Daney's third regime of cinema images.

explores beauty and thought confronts the purely social function of television. We get then De Palma instead of Hitchcock or Peckinpah and Leone instead of Ford. The classical elements still present in an earlier generation of modernist auteurs are now subtracted in favor of the heightened visual expressivity that is now drawn out and emphasized; meanwhile, classical elements return only to be falsified in the iteration of clichés in what Deleuze calls “the power of the false.” Despite Deleuze’s lack of interest in television as medium, he suggests that new cinema, and here Syberberg is offered as a prime example, is within the battlefield of film and television and one must assume of course that today this would have to incorporate all the modes of image dissemination and information processing that go under the banner of “New Media” from the dvd to video games to the internet.⁸⁴

We find this periodization repeated in *What Is Philosophy?*, written with Guattari, in this case with regard to philosophy itself. In the “Introduction,” Deleuze and Guattari announce three “ages of the concept” which correspond to the ages of cinema found in the “Letter to Daney.” Again, it is clear that Deleuze privileges the second age for its power of resistance against the leveling of creativity with instrumentality. “If the three ages of the concept are the encyclopedia, pedagogy and commercial professional training, only the second can safeguard us from falling from the heights of the first to the disaster of the third—an absolute disaster for thought, whatever its benefits might be, of course, from the viewpoint of universal capitalism.”⁸⁵ In other words, for Deleuze, it would

⁸⁴ See Deleuze, “Letter to Serge Daney: Optimism, Pessimism, Travel” in *Negotiations*, 68-79.

⁸⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 12.

seem that the “society of control” does not involve embracing the concept or image as pure information or the philosophy of proliferating language games or the montage of postmodern pastiche but, rather, we still need to reinvent the pedagogical image and concept.

In the “Conclusions” section of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze points in the direction of what would be *Cinema 3*—an analysis of the “electronic image” of TV and video that he says would be “beyond our aims.”⁸⁶ The images in the third age, images as data, are “worthless... if not put to the service of a powerful, obscure, condensed will to art” and he leaves open whether this would be “based on still another will to art, or on as yet unknown aspects of the time-image.”⁸⁷ The new forms of this will to art must be found in new modes of cinema themselves. This is the task of the Deleuzian film critic-theorist today.

There are many attempts to seriously pursue this project, but if we remove all elements of dissensus and pedagogy, then Deleuze’s claim that cinema is always as perfect as it can be readily adapted to something called *Filmosophy*, as a 2006 book by Daniel Frampton has it. This book is of interest to the extent that it demonstrates an impasse when grasping film theory/philosophy’s role once it has shaken off the shackles of any form of hermeneutics, historicization or ideology critique. The concept of filmosophy (which the book’s cover informs us is trademarked and the use of it is subject to copyright laws) is meant to be a way of writing about film as a purely immanent

⁸⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 265.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 266.

thinking and feeling. No source, no outside, no recourse to a “language of representation,” to filmmaker or spectator needs to be appealed to speak of the cinema-effect. Each film is its own perfect cybernetic machine. Cinema for Frampton cannot be thought of as reflexive or in terms of excess, supplement, void or lack because all these concepts betray the film’s own immanent expression. The language of production and technology adopted by film studies is therefore taking what a film does or is and recoding it in a language of representation that refers only to how it was made. “We should not be taught to see zooms and tracking shots but led to understand intensities and movements of feeling and thinking.”⁸⁸ This may sound Deleuzian (or Lyotardian), but what does it mean to be “led to understand” something that Frampton will have to claim that we already understand? In Frampton’s words, “We do not need instruction in how to read film, we only need a better language of those moving-image sounds—we are already well suited to understanding film.”⁸⁹ Ultimately, Frampton’s argument can only affirm a kind of transparency of images in the pure self-sufficiency of what he calls the “filmind.” But then why do we need a language for these images at all if language applies a representational over-coding to images that are always already their own “filmosophy”?

To get out of this tautology that would seem to negate the need for his own project, Frampton affirms a poetics of interpretation. “The film... might be said to be crying in empathy, sweating out loud, feeling pain for the character. The concept of the

⁸⁸ Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy: A Manifesto For a Radically New Way of Understanding Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 169.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

filmind should provoke these kinds of interpretations.”⁹⁰ What Deleuze attempts to create is a semiotics of moving images that presupposes an importance for philosophy as a creative practice separate from cinema; Frampton’s Deleuzian reading anchored in a new age of information and fluid digital images is finally interested only in a descriptive language (generously termed poetic) that is still analogical and vague. Before we start “sweating out loud,” this “better language” can be deferred in favor of a back and forth between speculative utopian claims that consciously echo writings of the 1920s about film’s equivalence to mind and a repetitive insistence on the way academic “film theory” reterritorializes the immanent singularities or intensities of film’s own creative power.

This is why I claim that, following Badiou, we need to insist on a concept of *impurity* in relation to cinema that makes its pedagogy possible if we are to stave off the disaster of the reduction of the image to techniques of control or advertising for advertising’s sake. As I will argue is the case with Bazin, when Deleuze speaks of “pure images,” the purity is tied to an essential impurity. What Deleuze calls “pure optical and sound situations” are about grasping something unbearable, limit-situations. There is a link to the romantic discourse that Rancière highlights in “the aesthetic regime of art.” This is not a question of shocking imagery or exhibitionist display but more often than not a kind of subtraction or emptiness. We find these limit situations in Ozu or Rossellini and not in the flirtation with the pornographic. The intolerable is not the extreme in a sense that would register for the MPAA Rating Board but rather, the quotidian and diurnal—the affliction of pure time comes from an inhibition of movement.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 174.

The so-called pure time images are not pure in the sense of autonomous or without relation to context or the history of visual representation. On the contrary, they are operations deriving from a subtraction or torsion of dominant modes. The time-image in Deleuze still bears the marks of what Rancière calls a “dialectical” relation to heterogeneous elements. That is, its goal is dissensus. Rancière observes a shift from a dialectical to a symbolist relation in contemporary art in which consensus replaces dissensus, which we could loosely connect to what is often theorized as the shift between modernism and postmodernism or indeed the “time-image” to the “data-image.” In the “symbolist” mode that has succeeded the “dialectical” mode, differentiated spheres, heterogeneous elements, high and low, art and politics, art and commodity still get juxtaposed in the name of artistic gesture and provocation, but the meaning of this juxtaposition has been transformed. It no longer marks an unveiling or even a tension, but rather the “mystery of co-presence” in which the meaning of the juxtaposition hovers in a state of undecidability or what Rancière calls “mystery.” This is perhaps a more contemporary corollary to what Daney in the 70s and early 80s called mannerism in which art retains the reworking of the classical or representational arts characteristic of so-called avant-garde, critical or pedagogical arts of the past while subtracting their political dimension in favor of a new aesthetic rendering of consensus. As I am suggesting, something similar can be found in film theory itself.

Deleuze’s objection to Metz and semiology more generally is that it subordinates movement-images to narrative and structure. Deleuze argues that cinema is narrative and has structure but movement images are primary and make up narrative. There is for

Deleuze a language of objects in the cinema but they are not utterances. According to Deleuze, to make cinema into images composed of utterances is to “immobilize the image.” And yet, at the same time, the pedagogical time-image itself reveals movement to be “false movement.” In *Cinema 2*, we learn that the essence of cinema is discovered once movement is subordinated to time and not the other way around.⁹¹ Deleuze’s project in the *Cinema* books is no less redemptive than Bazin or Kracauer or Metz. The motive force is ambiguously located between an emphasis on the creative production of new images but also on a restoration of perception and affection to a world from which it has been obscured. Deleuze makes this most explicit when he starts to speak of digital and electronic images. “Redemption, art beyond knowledge, is also creation beyond information.” What is needed according to Deleuze is a pedagogy that works against infomatics by setting up “the question that goes beyond it, that of the source and its addressee.”⁹² What is “the source and addressee” but a way of reinventing the question posed by 70s film theory in so-called linguistic or psychoanalytic terms of the subject of the enunciation (the utterance) and the subject of the text, which Deleuze so explicitly rejects? What is this but the basic Lacanian insistence on the fissure marked by the object-cause that breaks the symbolic order, an order that as Kittler has emphasized, was described by Lacan as early as the 1950s, not in terms of language as understood by

⁹¹ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 43. About the time-image Deleuze says, “To use a formula of Nietzsche’s, it never at the beginning that something new, a new art, is able to reveal its essence; what it was from the outset it can only reveal after a detour in its evolution.”

⁹² *Ibid*, 260.

linguistics but in terms of signifiers understood as information, as 1 and 0s, through his reading and critique of cybernetics.⁹³

This should turn us toward an ambiguity in Deleuze that gets ignored by some of his commentators. The cinema that gives us a direct movement-image is cinema as art. He excuses Bergson's misreading of cinema in terms of "natural perception" by acknowledging that the origins of cinema disguised its true novelty by aligning the screen with a view. It is only when cinema can be attached to the name of an auteur can cinema be cinema. Cinema should not be tied to natural perception nor should it be tied to the information table. The cinema privileged by Deleuze, the cinema of the time-image, is a cinema between ordinary or natural perception and information table.⁹⁴ The cinema of the time-image, is the immobilization of the direct movement-image. It is the place of the "in between" that for Deleuze is always the source of art, philosophy and science. The Deleuzian natural history of images derives its invention from a dialectical operation that can only be paradoxically understood in terms of an historical reading about the transformation of the image over the course of the 20th century.

Cinema as Art's Relation To Non-Art

⁹³ See Friedrich Kittler, "The World of the Symbolic," trans. Stefanie Harris in *Literature, Media, Information Systems* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: G & B Arts International, 1997). See also Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1991), 294-308.

⁹⁴ It should be acknowledged that Deleuze insists that the time-image is *not* privileged over the movement image. "It cannot be said that one is more important than the other, whether more beautiful or profound," *Cinema 2*, 270. But my claim is that the logic of his thought suggests otherwise. When he addresses the specificity of cinema he says "But the essence of cinema... has thought as his higher purpose, nothing but thought and its functioning," (*Cinema 2*, 168) and he goes on to propose that, as Artaud realized early on and Jean-Louis Schefer has articulated, "thought in cinema is brought face to face with its own impossibility" (Ibid) as a result of the change in the image that has emerges after the crisis of the movement-image.

Both Deleuze and Badiou think it is necessary to affirm cinema as art before we can talk about what cinema's link to philosophy or theory is. Benjamin when declaring cinema's destiny was found in politics proposed that this was not because cinema was not art, but because cinema was the evidence for the very transformation of what art is. For Deleuze and Badiou, philosophy's consideration of art is wrested from the sociological questions of movies or cultural practices as ideology. Art unlike ideology is the concern of philosophy because it is a specific creative mode of thinking. Both Badiou and Deleuze get subsumed into the tradition of "theory" against philosophy, but it could be said that one of the things that marks them as philosophers is their belief that art is irreducible to one signifying practice among many.

Deleuze and Badiou both see art as a locus for production that gives rise to concepts. The concepts are neither art's nor philosophy's. Art cannot create concepts and philosophy when thinking about art cannot apply its concepts to art. Philosophy when thinking about what art thinks about creates the concept that it derives from art's sensual production. For Badiou, philosophy seizes hold of or submits itself to the conditions of art's truths. For Deleuze, philosophy's creative practice lends the consistency of the concept to art's logic of sensation. Both Badiou and Deleuze thereby seek to get beyond the binary proposed by Žižek in which the work of art is either ungraspable by theory or a mere instrument for theory's purposes. For Badiou and Deleuze, philosophy's relation to art is not a respect for the work's unfathomable autonomy or a subsumption of the one by the other, but a non-relation, because artworks are the real and not an effect or performance of the real.

But, as I will be arguing, we should not take the affirmation of cinema as art for granted or indeed art's separation from culture, opinion and ideology. As Benjamin's famous essay observed, cinema becomes a locus for evaluating the boundaries of these very categories. Indeed, for Badiou himself, cinema's relation to art is a precarious one. The autonomy of cinema is inextricable from its heteronomy. As he claims, the singularity of the cinematographic procedure is tied to its essential impurity; what is intrinsic to cinema is that it bears the traces of non-art as well as all the other arts. It is, as he says, not the seventh art, but the plus-one of the arts.⁹⁵ Like Theodor Adorno, Badiou's skepticism about cinema as an art comes from identifying in it a social function that cannot be evacuated from its aesthetic dimension. As Adorno claimed: "There can be no aesthetics of cinema... which would not include the sociology of the cinema."⁹⁶ For Badiou this means a cinematic truth procedure, unlike Mallarmé's book, cannot exist in itself, but must perform its operation as an intervention into dominant tendencies in the circulation of moving images. This impurity is double in relation both to non-art and to the other arts. Cinema cannot completely purify itself of its history as mode of communication and as a recording device that can function in the absence of an author's will to art. At the same time it subsumes all the other arts. As an example, we can think of Dziga Vertov's attempt at creating a sui generis language of images⁹⁷: the subtraction

⁹⁵ Badiou, *Handbook*, 83.

⁹⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," trans. Thomas Y. Levin in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), 157. Adorno's assumption is that film is "primarily representational" and that this is "the retarding aspect of film in the historical process of art." But more interestingly, he proposes that this limitation is also intrinsic to film's potential as an art: "The aesthetics of film is this inherently concerned with society," 157.

⁹⁷ *Man With a Movie Camera* opens with the following statement: "The film Man With a Movie Camera represents AN EXPERIMENT IN THE VISUAL TRANSMISSION Of Visual phenomena WITHOUT THE USE OF INTERTITLES (a film without intertitles) WITHOUT THE HELP OF A SCRIPT (a film without

of any leaning on the literary, theatrical or painterly is only possible through the creation of a rhythmic montage that ultimately finds recourse to music as an analogue for cinematic language. If Vertov did create new cinematic ideas, in Badiou's sense, it was only by revealing the explosive power of cinema's impurity.

So we should not pass lightly over this peculiar role Badiou assigns to cinema. He wishes to preserve its status as art, as capable of immanent singularities, but immanent singularities are for Badiou, as they are for Deleuze, dependant on the claim that there is something proper to art and to each art, whereas what is proper to cinema is precisely its impropriety. The subtraction of art from ideology in Badiou finds a limit in cinema. In Deleuze as well, cinema is not merely the creation of percepts and affects, his definition of art, but what Kant saw as their a priori foundation—space and time or, in Deleuze's terms, blocks of movement and time. As Badiou is aware, preserving the distinction between art and philosophy is something Deleuze struggles with as well. He must keep reminding us and himself that what Mallarmé does is not the same as what Nietzsche does—a sensation of the concept is distinguishable from the concept of a sensation.

I propose that Badiou's thesis that cinema is the plus-one of the arts should not be isolated from Benjamin's recognition in the 1930s that all arts are now under the

script) WITHOUT THE HELP OF A THEATER (without actors, without sets, etc.) This new experimentation work by Kino-Eye is directed toward the creation of an authentically international absolute language of cinema –ABSOLUTE KINOGRAPHY—on the basis of its complete separation from the language of theater and literature." Painting like music has never been considered the same kind of threat to film's autonomy as an art. Commercial cinema has of course relied heavily on narrative, as well as theatrical and literary conventions, which is one reason that like music, painting has played an important role in much cinema that is identified as avant-garde.

condition of cinema; that is, cinema is symptomatic of a particular moment in the decline of art's ability to mark its separation from non-art. Hence, Benjamin's claim that cinema realized for art what dada anticipated. Cinema's impurity should be seen in the context of the intrinsic impurity of all the arts in what Rancière has called "the aesthetic regime of art." Badiou's tendency, like Adorno's, to find the truth of all art in a subtractive poetics evacuated of rhythm and image, may come from the refusal to fully accept the truth content of cinema. Inversely, for Deleuze, as Nancy suggested, philosophy itself becomes cinematic. What's left of this project in much Deleuzian writing on film is—through a disavowal of the symbolic—a return to that obscure ontological background that Pasolini declared it theory's role to cut through.

Rancière and Badiou: Romanticism Versus Modernism

Rancière's concept of the aesthetic regime of art is a polemical or pedagogical intervention. One of the primary assumptions guiding it is that the persistent discourses around and debates about "modernism" obscure our ability to think about the future of art. Rancière claims that by according a break in the concept of art to the emergence of such tropes as intransitivity and the "end of the image" is to close down the thinking about a politics of aesthetics by missing what is essential about a new thinking of art that emerges at the beginning of the 19th century and makes the idea of intransitivity possible. Intransitivity or Greenbergian modernism is thinkable only by siding with one pole of a new dual image function that emerges in the 19th century. It is an attempt to save art from contamination by the commodity form through effecting a realization of an idea of

art that cannot be realized without losing the ability to identify it as art in the first place. Following Badiou, but keeping within the general thrust of Rancière's discourse, we might recognize in modernist practices a "passion for the real" enacted through "operations of purification."

Badiou rarely speaks of modernism, but the artists on which his philosophy most consistently leans—Mallarmé, Celan, Pessoa, Malevitch, Schoenberg—are all figures that could be tied to what Rancière calls "the inconsistent utopia" of aesthetic modernity in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, or witnesses to its failure. Badiou's emphasis on poetry indifferent to, in Mallarmé's words, "universal reportage" and his claim that no art production at all is preferable to participation in art that can be recognized by the language of commodity exchange, puts him, as Rancière suggests, in "the anti-aesthetic consensus" that is often used to characterize high modernism. Badiou refers to certain procedures as "saturated," which means that the procedure has become consistent with the regime of sense. It is from the point of view of an event, emerging out of the process of purification, that this saturation comes to light, inaugurating a break or rupture within the history of artistic practice—e.g. after Schönberg, classical music is no longer a viable truth procedure. The question of exhaustion should probably be pushed further however, since it seems that all art for Badiou is itself a kind of art of exhaustion, pushing the sensible to its limits. And since this art of impersonality is to a certain extent modernist or more specifically Mallarméan, when will the art of exhaustion exhaust itself?

But Rancière's concept of "the aesthetic regime of art" is arguably even more anachronistic if it suggests that we have never left the era of romanticism. According to Badiou as well, romanticism is still very much with us, though for him it is a name for a problem in current art and thinking more generally. For Badiou, romanticism and formalism persist as the two main ideologies of art and aesthetic theories. Formalism he equates with the belief in novelty for its own sake—that formal innovation is consistent with artistic creation. This he identifies as the logic of commodities. Romanticism, on the other hand, is for Badiou a synonym for finitude. It is the belief that the truth of art or politics is ultimately the truth of death; for example, when the abject body is offered as the only guarantor of the real. For Badiou, this is the last form of religious thought even if it often takes ostensibly secular guises.

Rancière's romanticism bears little resemblance to the romantic disposition attacked by Badiou. As we have seen, what is important for Rancière about German romantic philosophy on art is the inauguration of an egalitarian principle at the core of aesthetic thinking. Rather, what Rancière's work fails to think within Badiou's framework is militancy and the *matheme*. Both Rancière and Badiou seek ways of thinking an immanent break from an always inconsistent situation that determines what counts as art or politics. Both view the axiom of equality as the political principle that ties the singular to the universal. But for Badiou the emphasis on the event and its truth sutured to a subjective fidelity emanates from an imperative of consistency and a cold distance from the ordinary practices of business as usual. For Rancière, on the contrary, what's at stake is the gesture that reframes the ordinary itself, the blurring of borders that

opens up the conditions of possibility of thinking the common and not, as in Badiou, the affirmation of the new in its singularity in way that cannot be appropriated by critical thought.

Both Rancière and Badiou have sought a path that keeps faith with an experience of 68 that put each of them at a certain distance from his Althusserian background, which came to be associated with the revisionism of the Communist Party. For Badiou, a belief in science was not the problem. On the contrary, the problem was thinking art, science, politics and sexuality together without making all truth a matter of one these four arenas. He found in Lacan the beginnings of research into the use of mathematics, or more specifically set theory, to construct a non-romantic concept of the subject to provide the link between an ontology based on an unprovable axiom affirming inconsistent multiplicity—the one is not—and the thinking of the new, of change, or what he calls “the event.”

Rancière for his part remained on the terrain of aesthetics and politics. To draw out the aesthetic or literary dimension of both politics and philosophy was a way of upsetting the assumptions of what made the linkage of politics and theory possible and the silences that accompanied these assumptions. This was not a handover of truth to art in the way Badiou accuses Heidegger, but something more like a handover of philosophy to aesthetics. Aesthetics for Rancière is first of all a regime of art but it is a regime of art that ties art to thinking about what makes art art. It thus ties art to philosophy and politics because art in the aesthetic regime calls into question art’s relation to non-art, the very fabric of what gets called life—either ordinary or extraordinary—and constructs a

community in response. Politics and philosophy are aesthetic to the extent that they too are free from foundation and must find the means for generating their own unstable identification.

Rancière is guided by an egalitarian principle that is not progressive but a priori and, in Badiou's sense, "generic." For Badiou this principle demands an affirmative and prescriptive militancy. For Rancière, rather it means a kind of minor philosophy that occupies spaces in between discourses. Rancière is then a kind of restrained and ironic anarchist or, as Badiou puts it, there is "in Lacan's sense, a brilliant hysteria to Rancière" that submits the philosopher-master "to the local expressions of non-mastery of the dominated who contradict, at each and every moment, the guarantees of the master's existence."⁹⁸ For Badiou, Rancière is too lodged in an aesthetic paradigm, in what he sees as the explosive but ultimately confused "poetico-political" avant-gardism that belonged to many of the most creative figures of the twentieth century who believed that politics "vaguely designates every radical break, every escape from consensus."⁹⁹ In Rancière's philosophical project, Badiou's anchoring of truth in a concept of militant fidelity directed at the rarity of events might be viewed as running the danger of being yet another way of policing what counts as thought versus what is deemed to be the mere chatter of the mob.

Rancière, Badiou and Deleuze: Impure Montage

⁹⁸ Badiou, *Metapolitics*, 109.

⁹⁹ Badiou, *The Century*, 150.

It may be fairly asked at this point: How do we preserve something from the axiomatics of Deleuze's natural history or typology of cinematic signs and at the same time remain faithful to the Freudo-Marxist critique of representation in 70s film theory? And if cinema's specificity is precisely its *impurity*, its subsumption of the other arts, and its proximity to non-art, as Badiou claims, then how do we square this with Rancière's claim that this paradoxical meaning of cinema was already contained in the very definition of art given by Hegel, Schelling and Schiller that preceded cinema by nearly a century?

Without minimizing the differences between Deleuze, Badiou and Rancière, it is my contention that they find a meeting point in cinema. Cinema for each one becomes a site of ambiguity in their larger theories. For Deleuze, cinema actualizes his theory of perception and affection yet its essence is realized in a moment of crisis when this theory undergoes a kind of involution. As we have seen, Deleuze tends to be posed as an answer to Althusserian and Lacanian film theory because he reverses its central move. Deleuzian film theory announces immanence rather than distance or separation as cinema's vocation. And again a modernist theater tradition provides the missing link. Instead of Brecht, Artaud may be seen as the model of a cinema that erases rather than increases the distance from the spectator, but, as Rancière would suggest, this logic must be surreptitiously thwarted to mark the political potency of its pedagogy.

For Rancière, cinema's technological means realize "the aesthetic regime of art" but only at the cost of erasing the tension in it that made art possible; therefore, it has to return to the outmoded representative regime of art to develop its aesthetic possibilities.

For Badiou, cinema incorporates all the arts and therefore is not capable of truth in quite the way of the other arts; rather it patrols the border of art and non-art. For Badiou, cinema is impure. For Rancière, it always puts into play a “thwarting logic.” For Deleuze, cinema is pedagogical.

From here we turn to a genealogy of cinema’s impurity—from the actuality to the documentary—to establish a conception of pedagogy derived from Deleuze, Badiou and Rancière, as a way of thinking cinema’s politics. This concept of politico-aesthetic pedagogy is in opposition to the romantic and formalist conceptions of art and it affirms the possibility that cinema can show us “something else.”

Chapter 3: Nature Caught In The Act: On the Transformation of an Idea of Art in Early Cinema and Beyond

In a well-known anecdote, Georges Méliès, an audience member of the first public screening of projected film in the Grand Café in Paris 1895, is said to have encountered the potential of cinema and his own destiny as a filmmaker in the detail of moving leaves in the background of the Lumière film “Repas de Bébé” or “Baby’s Meal.”¹ In 1944, in what was to be his final interview, delivered from a hospital bed, D.W. Griffith claimed, “What the modern movie lacks is beauty—the beauty of the moving wind in the trees...”

What do Méliès, the figure most associated with the introduction of illusion, special effect and fantasy into cinema and Griffith, the figure most associated with the development of film as a story-telling medium and the introduction of narrative codes and conventions see in this detail whose attraction may seem to derive from precisely its resistance to manipulation or codification?

Before we address this question, let’s first note the gap between Méliès and Griffith. For Méliès, the wind in the trees was an image of the future of cinema, a sign that the new medium offered something that needed to be harnessed and explored. For Griffith, nearly 50 years later, this same image has come to stand in for what the cinema had lost. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore how this image of nature is, at the same time, an image with a history.

¹ There are no fixed or official titles for the early Lumière films. “Le Dejeuner de Bébé,” “Le Goûter de Bébé,” “Baby’s Lunch” and “Feeding the Baby” are some of the more common alternate titles that can be found in French and English. As for Méliès’ response focusing on this particular film, see for example, Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 177 or Dai Vaughan, “Let There Be Lumière,” in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London, BFI Press, 1990), 65.

As often as the “wind in the trees” is cited in the folklore of early cinema history, the attention from scholars it has received remains minimal in relation to the famous story of hysterical crowds fleeing the theater when viewing another Lumière film, “L’Arrivée d’un Train” (AKA “La Ciotat Station”).² The train arriving in the station remains the archetypal image of early cinema as the primal scene and an image of the shock effect of the early attractions. Even as Tom Gunning’s influential analysis of early cinema in terms of “an aesthetic of astonishment” has effectively debunked the myth of the naïve spectator running from the theater to escape the oncoming locomotive, the train persists as the exemplary image of a more aware spectator’s delight in the “illusionistic capabilities” of early cinematic attractions.³ Perhaps it should be unsurprising that the interest in the incidental detail of the leaves would remain of marginal interest compared to the dramatic scene of the train, but it is precisely the persistence of this image as a marker of the cinematic in relation to its apparent inconsequentiality that I propose can ground our understanding of discourses linking cinema to what Siegfried Kracauer calls alternately “material reality,” “physical existence,” “camera-reality,” “actuality,” “nature” and “life.”⁴

Georges Sadoul in the first volume of his *Histoire Générale du Cinéma* of 1946 comments on the fact that in the surviving reports from the 1895 screening at the Grand

² For an overview of this “founding myth of cinema,” as Ian Christie’s calls it in *The Last Machine: Early Cinema and the Birth of the Modern World* (BFI, London, 1994) see Stephen Bottomore, “The Panicking Audience? Early Cinema and the ‘Train Effect,’” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19.2 (June, 1999).

³ Tom Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Cinema and the [In]Credulous Spectator,” *Art and Text* 34 (Fall 1989), 43.

⁴ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 28-29. Kracauer makes this list to distinguish film’s essential raw material from the “visible worlds” of a painting or stage production.

Café seemingly minor details tended to be of greater interest to the audience than the supposed main attractions of the ten films of Lumière program. Sadoul is struck by the fact that newspaper reports of the time made repeated reference to minor, peripheral details like smoke, waves and especially “the trembling of the leaves through the action of the wind” (“le fremissement des feuilles sous l’action du vent”)⁵ when, as he claims already in the mid-40s, these are images that would no longer make an impression.⁶ The attention drawn to the moving leaves had to be at least minimally at the expense of a focus on the main attraction of “Baby’s Meal.” That a relationship between figure and ground was in play in the 30-second film complicates Gunning’s description of the aesthetic of early cinema as delivering “a brief dose of scopic pleasure.”⁷ Smoke, waves and the wind in the trees seem to provide a rather different sense of the viewing habits of early spectators if one just as unavailable to us today.

The phrase Sadoul highlights from an 1896 write-up singling out the leaves is: “C’est la nature même prise sur le fait”/“Nature caught in the act” and he claims it was a common expression in response to these early screenings.⁸ Unlike Griffith, Sadoul does not lament the loss of this experience but explains it by proposing that it derived from sheer amazement at the novelty of cinema. But this does not take us very far. Why would the novelty of cinema be made visible in images of smoke, waves or leaves moving in the

⁵ Georges Sadoul, *Histoire General Du Cinema: L’Invention Du Cinema 1832-1897*, Paris, Denoel, 291.

⁶ Sadoul, 294.

⁷ Gunning, “An Aesthetic of Astonishment,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th Edition, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 825. For a more detailed discussion of Gunning’s “attractions” paradigm, see later in this chapter.

⁸ Sadoul, 291. The French journalist responsible for the phrase is Henri de Parville.

wind and not in the images of people moving or, for that matter, anything else? And why, on the other hand, would cinema be needed to “catch nature in the act?”

On the surface, Griffith’s claim looks just as mysterious. Whatever his opinion of the value of location shooting over sets, surely he didn’t mean in any literal sense that nature was not and could not be filmed anymore, that one could not find wind in the trees (even if sometimes in the form of rear projection) in the background of films being shown on screens across America in 1944. Let’s take a look at precisely what he says: “What the modern movie lacks is beauty—the beauty of the moving wind in the trees...” He continues, “That they have forgotten entirely. The moving picture is beautiful; the moving of wind on beautiful trees is more beautiful than a painting...”⁹ What Griffith claims that movies have lost is beauty, a specific form of cinematic beauty, exemplified in the wind in the trees that exceeds the beauty of painting, presumably even the painting of the same image.

Griffith makes no distinction between “the moving picture” and “the moving of wind on beautiful trees.” The beauty of the moving picture is equivalent to the beauty of nature in movement. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant makes a categorical distinction between the beauty of art and the beauty of nature. It is often remarked that Kant reserved the sublime for nature and denied it to art and how modern art can be demarcated by the introduction of the sublime as an effect of art. The train entering the station in the Lumière film “L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat” or Edison’s “Black Diamond Express” can be used to link early cinema to this development of aesthetic

⁹ Ezra Goodman, *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 19.

modernity. But Kant's definition of the sublime was based on a more fundamental distinction between art and nature that was equally significant for the question of the beautiful. For Kant, an interest in the beauty of nature directs the individual to the ultimate purpose of humanity, the morally good. This is decidedly not the case for the beauty of art, which commands only a judgment of taste but has no bearing on morality. The nature/art distinction highlights the fact that aesthetic experience for Kant is not a matter of mere appearance but is dictated by the origins and ends of the aesthetic object. Indeed Kant goes so far as to claim that if the man of good soul who has been taking a direct interest in the nature around him were to discover that the wild flowers he contemplated were actually fake flowers artfully crafted to deceive him, his direct interest and the accompanying moral feeling would "promptly vanish" leaving him either without interest and just a judgment of taste or with a vain interest that comes from society.¹⁰

Kant explains the distinction: "Art is distinguished from nature as doing (*facere*) is from acting or operating in general (*agere*); and the product or result of art is distinguished from that of nature, the first being a work (*opus*), the second an effect (*effectus*)."¹¹ Art is a matter of doing or making and it takes the form of a work. Nature is an effect of acting or operating in general. Art has an end other than itself unlike nature. Art, grasped as developing out of mimesis, with its double meaning of both semblance and play, from Aristotle to Schiller, implies an intention or as Kant would say,

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 166.

¹¹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 170. The distinction between *agere* and *facere* can be traced back to Aristotle's distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140b 7,8. According to Aristotle, making [*poiesis*] and acting [*praxis*] are different: "For while making has an end other than itself, action cannot; for good action itself is its end." See *Introduction To Aristotle*, trans. W. D. Ross (New York: Random House, 1947), 428-9.

“the concept of a purpose.” As Hans-Georg Gadamer proposes even the avant-garde’s gesture of offering an “effect” as a “work” implies intention because in play “something is *intended as something*, even if it is not something conceptual, useful, or purposive, but only the pure autonomous regulation of movement.”¹² Duchamp’s ready-made is a “work” because there is a minimal difference between the object as effect and the “something” it is intended as that makes it a work even if this “something” is not readily specifiable. This idea of art in terms of mimesis does not imply resemblance, as is often claimed, but rather a minimal difference between *agere* and *facere*. The distinction between effect and work, art and nature, does not so much disappear in capitalist modernity as undergo a transformation that gets thematized within art itself.

We translated “*la nature meme prise sur le fait*” as “nature caught in the act” but the English word “act” is on the side of *facere* and not *agere* in the context of Kant’s distinction, because “act” as a translation for “*le fait*” in the phrase “caught in the act” implies the intention of doing, as in a crime. The statement literally means nature grasped as fact or deed—as that which was done or made, nature apprehended as (art)work. This is then another way of stating André Bazin’s cryptic claim in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” that “Nature at last does more than imitate art: she imitates the artist.”¹³ In the cinematic image, making and operating, work and effect, approach a point of indiscernibility. Bazin went on to claim, “All the arts are based on the presence of man. Only photography derives an advantage from his absence.

¹²Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 24.

¹³ “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 15.

Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are inseparable part of their beauty.”¹⁴ For Bazin, photography takes on the beauty of nature not just because it shows nature as it is, but because it takes on the qualities of nature itself. Photography, he claims, “contributes... to natural creation.” Bazin continues by saying, “photography can even surpass art in its creative power”¹⁵ suggesting that photography is not an art, not because it is not creative, but because the creativity is out of man’s hands.

In the image of the moving leaves, nature was confronted as doing or making itself. As Béla Balázs declared, “A new personage is added to the dramatis personae of the photographed play: nature itself.”¹⁶ Art, at the same time, became an effect rather than a work through the automatism of the film camera. The spectators of the first films were not like Kant’s fictitious spectator thrust out of their moral contemplation of nature by the recognition that what they were watching was only a movie. Instead, they were encountering a simultaneous transformation of both nature and art, but one that remained (and remains) undefined. It is here that we can start to grasp why Méliès may have seen in film’s exhibition of nature, or nature’s seeming exhibition of itself through film, new possibilities for magic. According to Bazin, the photograph and film “have the irrational power... to bear away our faith.”¹⁷ The faith or belief in the image exemplified by the moving leaves opened up a whole new realm for what Edgar Morin identified as not only

¹⁴ Ibid, 13.

¹⁵ Ibid, 15.

¹⁶ Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover, 1970), 24-25.

¹⁷ Ibid, 14.

a component of film's mode of exhibition, but its basic psychological mechanism: projection.¹⁸

This "irrational power," what Morin called cinema's "charm," was given the name "photogénie" by Louis Delluc. Photogénie, Jean Epstein, Delluc's friend and fellow filmmaker, claimed in the 1920s, could be defined as the enhancement of the "moral character of things, beings or souls" through their "filmic reproduction." He continued by saying that anything that is not photogenic, "plays no part in the art of cinema."¹⁹ Like Bazin, Epstein saw the power of the photographic arts as derived from their automatism and the absence of human intervention and yet insisted that not all photography or film had this power. Automatism had to somehow be fused with the creative act. The "moral aspect" that the French filmmakers known as Impressionists recognized in images on film can be traced to Kant's definition of natural beauty. The beauty in nature inspires moral reflection for Kant because nature is the realm of necessity and it is in our individual perception of nature that subjectivity can link to universality. The automatism of the film camera, what Bazin called "the absence of man," is precisely what gave the natural and manmade world in its most ordinary aspects a moral dimension. As Epstein stated, "If we wish to understand how an animal, a plant or a stone can inspire respect, fear and horror, those three most sacred sentiments, I think we must watch them on the screen,

¹⁸ See *The Cinema or the Imaginary Man*, Edgar Morin, trans Lorraine Mortimer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Morin highlights the dual function of "projection-identification"—anthropomorphism and cosmomorphism. As human qualities are projected on to things and animals, humans themselves take on a cosmic dimension as "stars."

¹⁹ Jean Epstein, "On Some Characteristics of Photogénie" trans. Tom Milne, *Afterimage N. 10*, Autumn 1981, 20.

living their mysterious, silent lives, alien to human sensibility.”²⁰ But this moral aspect was not Kantian attunement to beauty but something more uncanny. For Epstein, the inanimate given life was mysterious. Photogénie and its moral dimension was not the result of art and nature finally realizing each other in what Eisenstein called “non-indifferent nature,” but rather a surplus of affect that emanated from the fact that projected animated nature was finally still indifferent and mute. Epstein’s conclusion was that, “The cinema is essentially supernatural.”²¹

It was not only the nature of plants and animals and the classical elements, but ordinary objects from daily life that seemed possessed by photogénie. As Louis Aragon remarked about cinema, “Objects that were a few moments ago sticks of furniture or books or cloakroom tickets are transformed to the point where they take on menacing or enigmatic meanings.”²² René Clair declared that “the screen gives a soul to... a room, a bottle, the wall.”²³ Or Antonin Artaud, in a piece tellingly titled “Sorcery and the Cinema,” observed that in cinema “the smallest detail, the most insignificant object takes on a meaning and a life which is theirs alone, aside from the meaning of the images themselves, or the thought which they translate and the symbol which they constitute... By isolating objects cinema gives them a life of their own which becomes increasingly independent and detaches them from their ordinary sense. A leaf, a bottle, a hand, etc are

²⁰ Epstein in *Afterimage*, 22

²¹ *Ibid*, 16.

²² Louis Aragon, “On Décor,” trans Paul Hammond in *French Film Theory and Criticism Volume 1, 1907-1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 166.

²³ René Clair, “Coeur Fidèle,” trans, Stanley Appelbaum, in *French Film Theory and Criticism Volume 1, 1907-1929*, 305.

imbued with a quasi-animal life which begs to be used.”²⁴ In each statement, objects are animated and take on a kind of vitality and force that is not theorized but left to appeal to our own experience of the screen. These testimonies to film’s powers all take place well into the silent era after the development of montage. It is objects, both natural and manmade, but always anonymous, that get emphasized. The anonymity and lack of particularity is worth highlighting. The question of which bottle or whose room was never an issue. This suggests that the automatism of the film camera was not necessarily connected to the photographic index as marker of an historical past. The image of the world on film for these writers, as much as for Bazin, was both singular and generic. Human beings get mentioned but only as part objects, as in the “hand” that Artaud highlights, or the “microphysiognomy”²⁵ that Balázs extols in close-ups of the human face.

Walter Benjamin would grasp in film this same quasi-inversion of the Kantian categories of nature and art, but derive a different conclusion. For Benjamin it wasn’t that art has acquired a moral aspect by becoming nature, but that nature had lost its moral aspect by becoming art. Art in turn lost its residual links to natural *beauty* through its very entwinement with nature. Art became a question of politics because what Epstein identified as photogénie was in fact the “optical unconscious,” which was not a revealing of the mysteries of nature through art, but a neutralization of the mysteries of art through an elimination of art’s distance from nature. This is how I grasp Benjamin’s famous claim that the film destroyed the “aura” of the work of art. Recall that the “aura” of the

²⁴ Antonin Artaud, “Sorcery and the Cinema,” in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed and trans. by P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 49

²⁵ Balázs, 65-66.

work of art defined as a “unique existence in time and space” has its origins for Benjamin in man’s experience of nature. In a fragment Benjamin writes, “Derivation of the aura as the projection of a human social experience onto nature: the gaze is returned.”²⁶ If we read Epstein or Bazin or many other early responses to cinema, it would seem that far from eliminating aura from the artwork, film inverted the relationship between aura and artwork. What film did was introduce aura into a world from which it had been lacking. Balázs, for example, wrote of film’s “mighty visual anthropomorphism.”²⁷ But for Benjamin, the photograph and then film did not bring art closer to natural beauty, the old aesthetic value of beautiful semblance, but rather, the opposite; it severed the relation between the two.

How do we reconcile these apparently opposite conclusions? It is worth returning to Griffith’s claim that the moving image of the wind in the trees was more beautiful than any painting. This desire to preserve transient nature unadorned was already part of late 19th century painting before the invention of the Cinématographe. In 1878 Theodore Duret in his study “The Impressionist Painters” wrote that Monet “has succeeded in setting down the fleeting impressions which his predecessors had neglected or considered impossible to render with a brush. The thousand nuances that the water of the sea and rivers take on, the play of light in the clouds, the vibrant coloring in the flowers and the checkered reflections of the foliage in the rays of the burning sun that have been seized

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” in *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, trans. Edmond Jephcott (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 173.

²⁷ Balázs, 26.

by him in all their truth.”²⁸ For the so-called Impressionist painters, not to be confused with filmmakers who bore the same label several decades later, fidelity to nature meant a turn away from the sublime landscapes of mid-19th century French painting and toward nature in its diurnal or ordinary manifestation. To use the terms adopted by Deleuze in *Cinema I*, nature was to be conceived as any-instant-whatever rather than a transcendent pose and was subject to the same interest as man-made spectacle and fashion. As Meyer Shapiro and T. J. Clark have emphasized²⁹, the subject of Impressionist painting was often the bourgeoisie in nature—not only the play of light on the leaves of trees but picnics, promenades and boat trips—but these images of bourgeois leisure were to be rendered *as nature* in so far as nature was understood as the transient world of appearance.

Monet made no distinction between completely surrendering to nature and painting what was on his retinas. The Impressionists adopted an anti-representationalism in the name of optical truth. For Monet, line was to be dispensed with in favor of vibrations of color to, as Jules Laforgue put it, “render nature as it is” not in its permanence “but in the fleeting appearances which accidents . . . present to him.”³⁰

But how pure was the seizing of sensation in such a way that preceded cognitive processing or, as Bergson might say, cinematographical perception? As T. J. Clark has

²⁸ *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism 1874-1904: Sources and Documents*, ed. and trans. by Linda Nochlin (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 30.

²⁹ See Meyer Shapiro, “The Nature of Abstract Art,” *Marxist Quarterly*, January-March 1937, 83 and T. J. Clark’s comments on Shapiro’s essay in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 5. “The few lines [in Shapiro’s essay] devoted to Impressionist painting still seem to me the best thing on the subject, simply because they suggest so tellingly that form of the new art is inseparable from its content—those ‘objective forms of bourgeois recreation in the 1860’s and 1870’s.’”

³⁰ In Nochlin, 17.

proposed it came at no small effort in which the “normal habits of representation... must somehow or other be outlawed.”³¹ In other words, the Impressionist painter was not merely the neutral vehicle for seizing the immediacy of external appearance. As Laforgue put it, “one’s work will never be the real equivalent of the fugitive reality but rather the record of the response of a certain unique sensibility to a moment which can never be reproduced exactly for the individual, under the excitement of a landscape at a certain moment of its luminous life which can never be duplicated... In the flashes of identity between subject and object lies the nature of genius.”³²

Indeed, the legibility of Impressionism as art derived from the very impossibility of the stated project. It was the impossibility of a surrendering toopsis and evacuating representation or muthos that was both mobilized by its detractors to suggest the paintings looked unfinished and seen by its defenders as making possible the expressive mark of the artist and revealing his genius. According to the latter, what was recorded ultimately was not nature in some generic sense but rather the unique sensibility of the artist. In Laforgue’s comments we can see two reasons for the impossibility that makes Impressionism an art: time and movement. The artist is always limited by the fact that nature and sensation are always in flux and the attempt to seize hold of the transient in a static painting is never pure. No matter how many paintings Monet makes of haystacks or the cathedral at Rouen, he will never have a movement-image. But this becomes a strength not a weakness of Impressionism. Ultimately, objective nature and subjective genius are seen as inextricable, but if these contraries could be identified, the

³¹ Clark, 20.

³² In Nochlin, 18.

identification was justified by a tension thought to be captured in the paintings themselves. In other words, if a Monet painting was said to seize the beauty of ephemeral nature without interpretation or adornment, it nonetheless remained clear that it was Monet and not, as Bazin claimed about film, nature that was the artist.

What happens with the advent of cinematography is that film actualizes an impressionist axiom to render the artist passive in the face of nature. But if this is true, if nature, as Bazin claimed, truly becomes the artist in film, and if nature here is what the Impressionists mean by nature, which is nothing other than transient optical appearance, then why isn't this equally true of all films? What is special about a cinematic image of wind blowing through leaves and how is it that whatever is special about this image is visible in the 1890s in a way that it is no longer visible in the 1940s?

The image of wind in trees also has a history in romantic poetry and literature. According to Thomas Pfau, it was a generic image of familiar romantic tropes: interiority, melancholic longing and temporal dislocation. In Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, he uses the word "Rauschen" or rustling as an example of the kind of word in the German language mistakenly thought to have profound implications because it evokes what is "sensuous and insignificant." Pfau suggests that the recourse to rustling trees had become so overtly clichéd in the German romantic lyric that repetition of that image in Joseph Von Eichendorff's poetry of the 1820s and 30s functions as a thematization of the lyric form—that is, as a kind of proto-modernism that draws our attention to the rustling not of leaves, but, in Roland Barthes phrase, of language itself. Pfau emphasizes that in Eichendorff it is an acoustic-image and, without referencing Benjamin, describes it in the

precise terms used to explain mechanical reproduction: “the poetic sign here assumes the character of a simulacrum, a copy (or pseudo-memory) for which no original can ever be produced.”³³

If Eichendorf and Monet may seem to have little else in common, in both examples rustling or moving leaves and other images of transient nature were indexes for the returned gaze or mute speech of the material or physical world that found their truth in aesthetic abstraction. Whatever their vast differences, both German Romantic poetry and French Impressionist painting share a 19th century idea of art that believes in an interiority and subjective perception that was only grasped by the murmur or gaze of an indifferent external world. Both Eichendorf and Monet, or at least their critics, attempt to neutralize this belief without escaping from it by returning us to the materiality of their respective mediums. In the German lyric, the rustling of leaves was to be reduced to an acoustic image indexing the materiality of language and in French Impressionist painting, transient nature was to be reduced to pure varying intensities of color. In the minimal difference between the index of wind as absent mark of both movement and time and the pure play of sound or color lies the aura of the work of art.

If the image found its truth in sound and color, these were both absent from the earliest Lumière films. Sound and color were, as Deleuze emphasizes in his reading of Kant, the “free materials of nature.” Nature caught in the act was nature denatured; that is, deprived of its sensuous raw material. Maxim Gorky’s famous response to the Lumière program emphasizes precisely this fact: “Last night I was in the Kingdom of

³³ Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 255-6.

Shadows. If you only knew how strange it is to be there. It is a world without sound, without color. Everything there--the earth, the trees, the people, the water and the air--is dipped in monotonous grey... Noiselessly, the ashen grey foliage of the trees sways in the wind...”³⁴ Colorless and noiseless, for Gorky, cinema drained nature of its beauty. For this very reason, it was an artless medium. Yet for Benjamin this loss of “beautiful semblance” was the key to what cinema could reveal about the transformation of aesthetic experience. Following Benjamin, we might see that Gorky’s image of cinema suggests its potential to go further than Eichendorf or Monet to neutralize a proto-Fascist Romantic idea of art that sought in the link between art and nature a mysterious beauty that harbored the secret to authentic interiority. If so, it did this not through what it added to the image of transitory nature but what it subtracted from it: not only sound and color, but the expressive hand of the artist.

But there was much evidence was to the contrary. With reference not to Epstein directly, but rather to Abel Gance, whose work Epstein described as “the theft of light from God”³⁵, as well as Séverin-Mars, one of Gance’s leading actors, Benjamin identified the “reactionary authors” who found in film “if not actually a sacred significance, then at least a supernatural one.”³⁶ He attributed this to “the desire to annex film to ‘art’.” What Benjamin meant by ‘art’ here was a conception of ‘art’ that was no longer applicable. Film (and photography before it) was not to be excluded from art any more than they should be included within it. The debates around whether film and photography were

³⁴ Maxim Gorky in *In The Kingdom of Shadows: a Companion to Early Cinema*, ed. Colin Harding and Simon Popple (London: Cygnus Arts, 1996), 5.

³⁵ Epstein, *Afterimage*, 27.

³⁶ Benjamin, *Selected Vol 3*, 110.

arts was a symptom of the very transformation of what art now was. Art's ritual or cult value, which Gance and Epstein and others, uncovered in film was for Benjamin premised on an idea of art as "beautiful semblance" [schöner Schein] that was rooted in a mode of perception that was in the process of "coming to an end."³⁷ But if this mode of perception was coming to an end, it was film itself that demonstrated this—the very medium that was the site of this metaphysical speculation.

Benjamin's primary evidence for this comes from a description of the human being in front of, not behind, the camera. "The fact that the actor represents someone else before the audience matters much less than the fact that he represents himself before the apparatus."³⁸ All acting, for Benjamin, can be reduced to something like what we could call "screen tests," following Andy Warhol, in which the actor is deprived of his aura and reduced to raw material that can then be further broken down into fragments and reassembled to be evaluated by a mass audience, which is made up of individuals with the same "primary entitlement to be reproduced"³⁹ as those who count as actors. Cinematography itself is likened to a surgical operation in which the camera operator like the surgeon remains anonymous in relation to his subject at the same time as he eliminates all distance between the two by way of equipment. This is in contrast with the painter who maintains his authority by keeping his distance from reality and thereby obtaining a total rather than fragmentary image.⁴⁰ Painting for Benjamin, is analogous to magic because the authority of the painter like the magician is predicated on maintaining

³⁷ Ibid, 127.

³⁸ Ibid, 112.

³⁹ Ibid, 114.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 116.

a distance from reality rather than penetrating into it. What film does is it analyzes the unconscious dimension of shared reality. The close-up, slow-motion and so forth by expanding or contracting space and time reveal to us an “other” nature beyond consciousness, but one neither mysterious nor sacred, but rather intimately part of a collective everyday life. Film, we could say, following Benjamin, is not supernatural, but hetero-natural. For Benjamin this is intrinsic to film’s mass reception. Film is linked to collective psychosis but one materially defined. As Bazin claimed about photography, film offered a “hallucination that is also a fact.”⁴¹

In Jean-Luc Godard’s *La Chinoise* (1967), Guillaume (played by Jean-Pierre Léaud) claims that while Lumière is considered the first documentarist and Méliès, the inventor of film fiction, that the opposite is true. His proof is that if we look at Lumière’s subjects—worker’s leaving the factory, a train entering the station—we see that they were the subjects of painting. Lumière was the last Impressionist, “a contemporary of Proust,” whereas Méliès was “the inventor of the weekly news.” Méliès offered the extraordinary (a trip to the moon, a beheading and so forth) as fact, whereas Lumière seized the gestures of the ordinary in its, to use a phrase of Benjamin’s, “eternal transience.”

Indeed, if it is claimed the peripheral detail of the leaves was an attraction because it is somehow ordinary, it is worth noting that the main attractions, the subjects of the Lumière films, were themselves essentially mundane, everyday subjects from the lives of both the working class and the bourgeoisie. According to Mary Ann Doane, “The first

⁴¹ Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol 1*, 16.

films could risk banality in their subject matter, since their fascination was indissociably linked with their sheer representation of movement through time. The more familiar, everyday and recognizable the activity, the more appreciable the pure act of its representation.”⁴² The argument suggests that the quotidian subject matter was intended to ensure the legibility needed to brace the viewer for the experience of the apparatus itself. This legibility was sought in scenes thought to provoke a certain feeling of familiarity, recognition and repetition. A film of an unfamiliar event might distract from the experience of the novelty of the phenomenon of moving pictures.

Dai Vaughan suggests that the promise of early cinema was tied expressly to revealing spontaneous moments outside human control, which meant that human beings were essentially uninteresting to cinema at least in the era that preceded montage. According to Vaughan, the use of cinema’s automatism needed an aesthetic that could make use of it, which was the particular genius of the Lumières. “People were startled not so much by the phenomenon of the moving photograph, which its inventors had struggled long to achieve, as by the ability to portray spontaneities of which the theater was not capable. The movements of the photographed people were accepted without demur because they were perceived as performance, as simply a new mode of self-projection; but that the inanimate should participate in self-projection was astonishing.”⁴³ The inanimate’s participation in self-projection is nature caught in the act. But while it is true that the Lumière brothers did not see themselves as documentarists recording

⁴² Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 62-3.

⁴³ Dai Vaughan, *Space/Frame/Narrative*, 65.

historical events, they equally refused the label of artists. Rather, all their work, inventions as well as films were understood, as Noël Burch has shown, in terms of their position “as researchers, as scientists.”⁴⁴ These films, following the tradition of Muybridge and Marey, were intended for the analysis of movement. Louis Lumière’s framing, according to Burch, “that allows ample space for the development of the action in all directions... reveals a quasi-scientific attitude.”⁴⁵ While this ostensibly scientific approach may also share some similarity to certain claims by the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, there was no indication from the Lumières’ own statements that they viewed the final result as anything like art. This is most pronounced if we consider art as something made. As Louis Lumière claimed, “I never did what they call direction.”⁴⁶

As Benjamin reminds us, while nature’s self-presentation may have been the key to photogénie, man’s self-presentation, his ability to perform or act on film may not as Vaughan proposed, have been “accepted without demur,” but rather posed something of a problem. It is here that we should mention that during the early years of cinema, the era dominated by what Tom Gunning refers to as “the cinema of attractions,” no film was ever made in which wind moving through leaves was the express attraction. The film that Méliès saw and remarked on was called “Repas de Bébé” or “Baby’s Meal.” Far from being a film centered around nature, “Baby’s Meal”—a film of Auguste Lumière, his wife and child dining outside on their country estate—distinguishes itself from the other nine films on the first Lumière program by being the only film in medium shot as

⁴⁴ Noël Burch, *Life To Those Shadows* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

opposed to long shot and the only film to feature human figures facing the camera for its duration. Sadoul remarks how much “Baby’s Meal” resembles family photographs found in Louis Lumière’s attic. Though the theatrical staging evokes the family snapshot more than any genre or tradition in painting, its subject matter bears some relation to those images of bourgeois idylls so common to Impressionist painting.

Attraction Versus Narrative

It is a testament to the success of Tom Gunning’s theory of a cinema of attractions introduced over twenty years ago, that it now comes under repeated criticisms. It remains a fruitful and provocative concept for thinking about the dominant tendencies of early cinema as not deficient in relation to “the cinema of narrative integration,” but rather as simply different with their own immanent criteria for what cinema is and does that need not be judged in relation to what was to come. Gunning broke from the teleological model that had dominated film history that viewed Lumière, Méliès, Edwin S. Porter and so on, as so many primitive innovators of the codes and conventions that would become integrated in the language of narrative feature films over the coming decades largely due to the mixture of genius and canniness of D.W. Griffith. Early cinema, according to Gunning’s theory, had a different mode of address to spectators that does not simply die out but persists at the margins of mainstream narrative cinema both in certain lowbrow genres as well as modernist and avant-garde practices. The concept of “attraction” brings early cinema into proximity both to the circus and vaudeville as well as Eisenstein’s

“montage of attractions” and can be linked today to practices as diverse as video art, YouTube videos and the special effects dominated contemporary blockbuster.

But while Gunning’s paradigm has effectively undermined the limited reading of early cinema that focuses on the teleological development of narrative codes and conventions, it still hinges to some degree on the binary attraction/narrative which is the terrain around which much of the evaluation of the paradigm has focused. Criticisms of the “attraction” paradigm tend to focus on the importance of narrative within specific early films. For example, Charles Musser, who has provided perhaps the most historically grounded critique of Gunning, has insisted that the Gunning’s analysis relies too heavily on the decontextualized viewing of early films as autonomous entities and ignores the crucial role of the exhibitor as narrator. As Musser states, “One of my principle goals has been to show how exhibitors took these short films and transformed them into something... more complex and sophisticated—to open up a dimension of early cinema that has been not only neglected but virtually suppressed.”⁴⁷ Musser’s point is that even though the narrative function may not be legible in the images viewed outside of their original exhibition context, the images were still presented and produced as part of a narrative. The images functioned as illustration for a narrative that the exhibitor filled in.

Gunning, who was well aware of the exhibitor and has used his function to support his paradigm of attractions, might respond that the images were still “exhibitionistic” rather than “voyeuristic” because the images themselves were the attraction rather than the narrative frame. In response to claim that he minimizes the

⁴⁷Charles Musser, “Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity,” in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 403.

narrative element in early cinema, Gunning has tended to reiterate that when he defines the attraction as the dominant mode in this era, he is not claiming that there was a complete absence of narrative, only that the narrative drive was subordinated to the spectacle of the attraction, much the way attraction would get subordinated to the narrative in classical cinema. The exhibitor, Gunning proposes, was not primarily a storyteller (and even less like a novelist) but was more like a ringmaster in a circus offering up objects of curiosity for display. There was no narrative absorption because the narrative supplied support for the images and not the other way around.

Other critics have maintained that even restricting our attention to the films themselves, the central attractions had narratives however minimal. According to André Gaudreault, “Baby’s Meal” is exemplary of the archetypal “simple narrative”—the basic building block of the more complex rendering of narrative form that that would be introduced by montage. “Baby’s Meal,” he says “must surely be the visual expression of the simple narrative (in Greimas and Courtes’ sense) ‘Lucie (Lumière) eats her porridge.’”⁴⁸ For Gaudreault, the simple narrative, a single shot, is the visual equivalent of a sentence, a process that involves “a transition from a former state (before the consumption) to a further state following the consumption effected by an action or process.”⁴⁹ This is a level of narrative that both precedes and makes up “filmic narrative in the generally accepted sense.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ It is telling that even in this “simple” distillation of the narrative a rather bold liberty is taken with the story’s documentary dimension. The baby girl in the film is named Andrée not Lucie.

⁴⁹ André Gaudreault, “Film, Narrative, Narration: the Cinema of the Lumière Brothers,” in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London, BFI Press, 1990), 70.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 71.

But Gaudreault's condensed summation is hardly born out by any literal attempt to describe the film. The baby is being fed something that may very well be porridge, and as Gaudreault acutely points out, this action is presented to us in a direct manner that eschews the implicit position of an external narrator. The baby is between an adult man and woman we take to be his parents (indeed Auguste Lumière, the filmmaker, and his wife, the actual parents of the baby) and all three sit on one side of a wooden table probably in their backyard and face the camera without looking directly at it. The table that fills the bottom of the screen contains several items. The father at the baby's left attempts to feed the baby with a spoon with only occasional success. He offers the baby a biscuit, which the baby then holds out as if offering it to the camera or someone behind or around the camera not visible within the scene. The mother at the baby's right drinks tea and observes. Words are exchanged that we don't hear. The house in perspective can be seen on the left side of the screen in a diagonal that that is common to the composition of many of the Lumière films. The trees are visible on the right above the mother and the leaves move in the wind. This description is of course just as reductive and just as much a way of narrativizing the film as Gaudreault's, but I want to give an indication of how the film might be grasped as more complicated and less compact than the Greimas/Coutés definition of a simple narrative. Yet in a certain sense it is also simpler. No action is completed, nothing is resolved. Like a number of Lumière films, "Baby's Meal" involves what within a more complex narrative would be called a cut on action. The film ends at a moment of irresolution, predetermined perhaps by the length of the film, only slightly more than thirty seconds, but would be abrupt and disconcerting

nonetheless for anyone anticipating the completion of an action, though there is no reason to suppose that anyone would. The father's spoon is raised, in motion, the branches of the tress are moving, the mother is turning and it ends, only to start again or to be followed by some other "view." "Consumption," according to Gaudreault, the action of all simple narratives, is denied the viewer in more ways than one.

If there was something seemingly incomplete about the early Lumière films from the point of view of narrative expectation, this may explain why it was common for the exhibitor to repeat the same films within the same program. In one of the first American showings of the Lumière program, a newspaper cites the wind in the trees as not something immediately noticed but a reason that the films repay repeated viewings.⁵¹ According to Burch, the films were like photographs and postcards, not only in subject matter and framing but because they were designed to be reviewed repeatedly not to be consumed in one sitting.⁵² According to Doane, this desire to repeat viewings suggests the "temporal hold over meaning existing in films not yet saturated with narrative linearity."⁵³ In other words, it was precisely the lack of "simple narrative" that drove the desire to repeat these fragmentary percepts. She connects this desire to repeat films with the use of reverse motion in early films as examples of an attempt to challenge the irreversibility of time in a way that corroborates the dominant temporal experience of time in modernity as fundamentally irreversible. The blowing leaves are fascinating in this regard because the difference between forward and reverse movement of the wind in

⁵¹ Doane, *Emergence*, 109.

⁵² Burch, *Life to...*, 17.

⁵³ Doane, *Emergence*, 109.

the trees is indiscernible from the image alone. If “Baby’s Meal” were shown in reverse, it would of course be the actions of the human figures that would make this legible. The leaves are not an index for the direction of time and therefore they mark a fundamental ambiguity about the legibility of the cinematic image in relation to narrative linearity.

When confronted with the claim that movement automatically entails narrative, Raymond Dugnat objected that: “All the leaves moving around on a tree don’t constitute as many narratives as there are leaves.”⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the exhibitor’s role that often placed early attractions in a narrative context, or indeed Gaudreault’s reading of “Baby’s Meal” as a “simple narrative,” lead us to a key point: no films are divorced from narrative to the extent that all films *can* be viewed or read as narrative. This may seem like a banal truism, but it leads us to a larger point that has implications for the relation between aesthetics in politics in moving images. Films from the very start find their attraction in an impure operation, in an antinomy between the making of meaning and the accursed share, or—to evoke some of the familiar binaries that theories of film and photography have repeatedly rehearsed—between studium and punctum, view and gaze, narrative and spectacle.

The look for Jean-Paul Sartre is the sudden sensation of being seen that annihilates the view of the subject. Sartre insists that the impression of a look from the other is not conditional on the presence of another human being. His example is illuminating for us: “But the look will be given to me just as well on the occasion when

⁵⁴ Raymond Dugnat, David Ehrenstein and Jonathan Rosenbaum, “Obscure Objects of Desire,” *Film Comment* (July-August 1978), 61.

there is a rustling of branches.”⁵⁵ Lacan’s theory of the gaze, as taken up by film theory, is derived from Sartre even as it departs from him. The gaze as an object of the drive is in antinomic relation to the view or eye. According to Lacan, “The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic—it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness sets in.”⁵⁶ Early cinema, according to Gunning, is exhibitionistic as opposed to voyeuristic. These views that constituted most early films were displayed for the spectator. As Gunning points out, the camera in effect mimed the act of looking. For Deleuze this was the problem of early cinema, and why Bergson was unable to appreciate it; it was too tied to “natural perception.” With images of humans (mother, father and baby, for example) the direct address is more explicit because of an awareness of the camera undermines the sense of catching the world unawares. To use the language of Michael Fried referenced by Gunning, this “theatricality” denies the spectator the possibility of absorption. Nature, be it moving leaves or waves, or indeed trains, because of their automatic movement generated more suspense. The same can be said for other common subjects of early cinema: children, animals and crowds. For nature to be caught in the act, it cannot be exhibited for our gaze. The gesture must always be subtracted from another body. The deliberate exhibition of gestures is often grotesque as can be seen in certain videos by Bruce Nauman or Hannah Wilke, for example, or in the ticks and rhythms of most video blogs (or vlogs) on YouTube by teenagers which oscillate between the will to sincerity and a deliberately strained

⁵⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 346.

⁵⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 75.

mimicry of their own gestures. For the world to provoke our gaze, for the experience of aura, there is always an aesthetic operation at work however minimal it may be and whether or not it can be attributed to an auteur or the spectator.

This is not to undermine Gunning's attempt to periodize early cinema as an era dominated by "the cinema of attractions," but we should emphasize that it is "attractions," plural, and that they could be found within the same film. Musser's complication of Gunning is more to the point when he suggests, "Spectatorship for early film generally involved a dialectic. If cinema produced, as Tom Gunning has suggested, an aesthetic of astonishment, it also offered an aesthetic of discernment."⁵⁷ In this era of a more disperse or fragmented viewing experience, the dialectic of an aesthetic operation is no less in play than it is in the cinema of narrative integration. What early cinema shows is that the aesthetic operation is not intrinsic to the film as an autonomous entity.

Benjamin highlighted "technological reproducibility" as the key factor in photography and cinema's transformation of the concept of art. What was significant about technological reproducibility is that it freed the artwork from a unique existence in time and space because no photographic print is, in principle at least, any different than any other. Therefore, Benjamin claimed, authenticity is no longer a meaningful category in evaluating the artwork. The concept of indexicality, on the other hand, is also often used to mark the specificity of the photographic arts, but is seemingly opposed to what Benjamin emphasized. Cinema is indexical *because* it captures a unique existence in

⁵⁷ Charles Musser, "A Cornucopia of Images: Comparison and Judgment across Theater, Film, and the Visual Arts During the Late Nineteenth Century", in *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film 1880-1910*, ed. Nancy Mowell Matthews (Hudson Hills Press, 2005), 6.

time and space. This seeming paradox might be easily untangled by appealing to a distinction between the pro-filmic and the film itself, to the effect and to the work. But if discourses about film in its first fifty years show us anything, it is that this distinction is not so clear cut.

Many recent studies of early cinema have emphasized the importance of the indexical sign to an idea of cinema that was especially relevant to the genre of actualities that dominated the first ten years of cinema and of which the Lumière films are the prototype. The claim is that cinema by bearing the trace of the profilmic, a past event that precedes the viewing of the film and exceeds the control of the filmmaker, harbored an anarchic potential through what Doane calls “contingency” or Vaughan calls “spontaneity.” The index, as formulated by Charles Sanders Peirce, signifies through an existential bond between the sign and the object. It is directly caused by its object but cannot be mistaken for it. According to Doane, the index is “evacuated of content; it is a hollowed out sign.”⁵⁸ It testifies to an object’s existence, but offers only its effect. Not only is a film an index for a pro-filmic event but moving leaves are an index of the wind. Hence the film of the moving leaves is an index of an index. According to Peirce, “An index is a sign which would, at once, lose the character that makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet hole in it as a sign of a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the

⁵⁸ Doane, *Emergence*, 94.

sense to attribute it to a shot or not.”⁵⁹ In other words, the indexical dimension of a sign is tied to its object, in this case the dual automatic effect of the apparatus and the wind, but it is absolutely indifferent to the percepts, affects or concepts of the spectator. Nature leaves its mark whether or not a subject perceives it. To modify a familiar riddle, wind blows the leaves of trees even if no camera is there to film it. To catch nature in the act is evidence of mere brute fact, but says nothing about meaning.

The wind arrested by the film is an index of an index and drew attention to the potential of this new medium. The inscription of the moving leaves visible in the projection of the filmstrip provides an image of cinema’s ability to make visible an absent cause—Spinoza’s definition of history—but no recipe for what to do with it. It is a signifier that makes visible invisible mediation, a trace of the void that might serve to mark a dream of aesthetic autonomy and is at the same time open to occult or theological projection. Art acquired the qualities of nature at the same time that nature lost the capacity to testify to an experience outside the life of man. The fascination of this image that is now lost to us was tied to the potential of cinema and as such, its meaning could not be explicitly stated because it remained to be determined. If the image is now an image of loss, it can be resuscitated to still harbor a certain potential as long as we don’t return to Griffith’s Victorian sensibility and link that potential to a nostalgic desire to restore natural beauty to art, but rather see it for the opposite effect—the linking of art to politics by freeing art from both the sacred and from property value. The importance of this image is its transformation over time; its role in the history of film and the meaning

⁵⁹ Charles S. Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” in *Philosophical Writings* (New York: Dover, 1955), 104.

derived from film in the history of aesthetic experience. We can revive its potential only by deflating its mystery. It testifies to a certain muteness in cinema's time and movement images that cannot be fully integrated into a semiology of cinema, but can also not stand for what Bazin called its "virgin purity." Rather it is the ground for its aesthetic operations. Louis Lumière famously claimed that cinema is "an invention without a future" and so it is no accident that the moving leaves can be found in a film depicting the domestic comfort of one of cinema's inventors, lodged in the margins of the frame outside his field of vision.

The Myth of Pure Cinema

The myth of total cinema, the desire for an ever-increasing cinematic approximation of the real or natural, was, according to Bazin, the persistence of a "psychological" and hence "pseudo"-realism that film had the ability to dispense with by its ontological link to the real. What I wish to highlight is the *myth of pure cinema*, which is the aesthetic corollary to the psychological myth of total cinema. The myth of pure cinema suggests that cinema through that ontological link to the real is capable of retuning art to nature. As Bazin claimed about the myth of total cinema, it may be that the myth of pure cinema is intrinsic to the medium, but what we can do is recognize that it is a myth and that "purity" is never a realization of cinema's essence, but, as Alain Badiou claims, derives from a process of purification that can never be completed. Indeed all the great theories and fantasies of pure cinema involve aesthetic operations. Pure cinema must always be wrested away from impure cinema. Cinema can only realize itself once it

divests itself of its false friends—the theatrical, the literary, painterly and so forth or, and this becomes clearer as we get into the second half of the 20th century, the logic of commodification and new media modes of communication or information transmission.

We began by suggesting that by the mid-40s, the great synthesizer of the codes and conventions of the cinema of narrative integration, D.W. Griffith, and one of the first major historians of the cinema, George Sadoul were witness to the disappearance of an image: the wind in the trees. But cinema history is as short as it is forgetful and the disappearance of this image only means that its reemergence can have the force of anamnesis. It resurfaces as a trope throughout post-war cinema though new aesthetic operations are needed to make it visible. It no longer will be spotted in the margins of the frame; instead, it needs its close-up. Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) provides a particularly telling example for the era of the so-called society of spectacle. A fashion photographer, apparatus in hand, confronts the wind in the trees before being distracted by a human interaction only to become convinced later on that there may be something behind these images— an image of political and historical importance as well as an image of death. To get behind the image he must continually expand the surface, but the evidence derived from the optical unconscious of the photograph remains obscure. We might say that the image persists as a blind spot in films in which mediation emerges as a problem. It is crucial to the materialist pedagogy of Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet as well as, as we shall see in the final chapter, the films of Abbas Kiarostami. But it also reemerges as a continuation of the reactionary romanticism that Benjamin identified in some of the giants of silent film.

From this perspective, Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* (2005) provides a useful symptom of the persistence of cinematic romanticism in the 21st century. Herzog assembles his film from the body of another—the footage of the late Timothy Treadwell who documented himself with a video camera as self-appointed caretaker of grizzly bears in northern Alaska until he was killed by one or more of the bears. Much of Treadwell's footage features himself in front of the camera directly addressing the viewer. This footage Herzog explains in voice over is Treadwell's attempt to make a movie. Herzog emphasizes the irony of the performative dimension of a man who has ostensibly dropped out of civilization for the sake of nature. We learn that Treadwell was a failed actor and Herzog highlights his many takes that make both his sentimentality and paranoia a matter more of perverse fascination than identification. Indeed, Treadwell's proto-vlogs might be seen as naïve exemplars of what Rosalind Krauss called in the context of 70s video art, “the aesthetics of narcissism,” in which neither scopophilia nor identification are applicable any more in our relation to the image.⁶⁰ This aesthetics is highlighted by Treadwell, the self-proclaimed “kind warrior”'s sexual ambivalence in front of the apparatus as the feminine role he assumes as caretaker and mother is filtered through an aggressive masculine posture of adventurer and loner. A film that relies so heavily on “found” footage must make the case that the footage is both the ground for art and not yet art. The footage serves as evidence for a story whose meaning is saturated by a fact that Treadwell, the narrator of the footage, does not know: His own story of protector of the wild will contradict the story that the viewer knows—that he was killed by the bears he

⁶⁰ See Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism” in *New Artist Video: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1978), 43-64.

thought were his family and salvation. For Herzog, this irony cannot stand on its own and we need a second narrator, Herzog himself, to bring home the point that Treadwell's misunderstanding of nature is also a misunderstanding of filmmaking and in the process to turn a bad film (Treadwell's) into a good one (Herzog's). Herzog purports to make the case for Treadwell as a filmmaker in his own right, but while so much of the Herzog's film is Treadwell's image-personality, the true filmmaker, we are told emerges when he stops acting and stops directing. Herzog's voice over tells us, "He probably did not realize that seemingly empty moments had a strange beauty that developed its own life, its own secret stardom." He tells us this right after showing Treadwell's many takes of the same scene and then, in contrast, providing an extended shot by Treadwell in which he gets up and leaves the image for twelve seconds in which time we see only the wind in the trees and tall grass.

This "strange beauty" of the wind in nature is directly tied to the narrative frame, which is Treadwell's death. Treadwell we learn early in the film had his video camera on when he was killed but had not been able to take the lens cap off. We never hear the preserved audio of this event but instead watch Treadwell's ex-girlfriend watch Herzog (we see the back of his head) as he ostensibly listens to it over headphones and then tells her that she must never listen to it and must destroy it. These sounds which we don't hear share with the shot Treadwell took in which he leaves the frame, the fact that they are both moments in which Treadwell is no longer performing or directing. They are scenes in which the man who loved nature is silenced and nature itself speaks. As Herzog makes clear, both scenes are marked by an "indifferent nature" characterized by

“chaos, hostility and murder” in stark contrast to Treadwell’s “sentimentalized view of the harmony of nature” that pathetically and tragically repeats itself in his video performances.

One indicative review praised Herzog as “scrupulously nonjudgmental”⁶¹ as if Herzog were the sober realist countering Treadwell’s romanticism. But as Badiou has proposed, romanticism, a discourse he believes is very much still with us, is not a sentimental belief in the harmony of nature, but the opposite. It is an equally religious belief in finitude, the body and death, as the only guarantor of the real. Romanticism, according to Badiou, is also the belief that only art is capable of truth. In a manifesto Herzog wrote called the “Minnesota Declaration” he proposes that cinema vérité is “the truth of accountants” and that “Mother Nature doesn’t call, doesn’t speak to you.” On the other hand he claims, “There are deeper strata of truth in cinema and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth.”⁶² Herzog, to borrow the polemical language of Badiou, is one of the great sophists of cinema. His project is to take cinema’s accursed share and redeem it as the property of the auteur. Catching nature in the act and affirming the purity of cinema can only be linked to the genius of the auteur indirectly, because nature’s indifference can only become a poetic truth through the failure of the auteur’s quest for truth. Herzog derives the evidence for his argument as well as his own genius from another auteur who is not aware that he is an auteur. The romantic theory of art encounters the truth of art when the necessities/accidents of nature emerge unbidden. If

⁶¹ See *The Village Voice*, 8/2/05. *The New York Times* called it a “sympathetic inquiry” and “generous to a fault.” *The Wall Street Journal* said, “Herzog’s perspective is an invaluable balance...” And so on.

⁶² See http://www.wernerherzog.com/main/de/html/news/Minnesota_Declaration.htm

we think of Herzog exhibiting himself being watched while listening to Treadwell's death then the "strange beauty" of the moving leaves and Herzog's lesson becomes clear: the truth of film art takes the form of a knowledge the auteur cannot reveal. This is the romantic theory of art revived for the age of the aesthetics of narcissism.

Benjamin saw the reactionary response to film as the attempt to transpose an antiquated idea of art on to the experience of capitalist modernity. This antiquated idea of art as ritual or cult had its roots in a concept of nature as mythic. For Benjamin, cinema was the culmination of what he called "second technology." "The origins of the second technology lies at the point where, by an unconscious ruse, human beings first began to distance themselves from nature. It lies, in other words, in play."⁶³ But this distancing from nature was ultimately an obliteration of distance. Nature was no longer a mysterious other. "The first technology really sought to master nature, whereas the second aims rather at an interplay between nature and humanity."⁶⁴ The second technology aims in other words at second nature, which is to say, habit, or, as Benjamin insists, anticipating Marshall McLuhan's claims about television, a more tactile mode of perception that absorbs the film without being absorbed *by* the film. Film no longer imitates nature but plays with it. Here is where Benjamin comes close to asserting a theory of cinema that is only the obverse of photogénie. As Adorno argued, once we banish aura, which is finally nothing but the artwork's non-identity with its "factual

⁶³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, 107.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

givenness”—the collapsing of *agere* and *facere*—we are left with only exchange value.⁶⁵ But Benjamin claimed to remain agnostic about what this meant for artistic production and insisted that the goal of his analysis was simply a neutralization of concepts, in particular: “creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery.”⁶⁶ Neutralization does not mean banishment; it means a lesson in disenchantment with an affirmative dimension. Let’s call the romantic theory of media, any theory that attempts to define the truth of second technology as a realization of first nature. Suturing the void of nature to the ontology of technology in the name of the aesthetic gesture is a way of short circuiting the political dimension of the aesthetics of cinema in favor of a return to the moral belief in the myth of pure cinema, or whatever “New Media” variations are currently afoot.

In contrast to the romantic theory, I propose the pedagogical theory as outlined in chapters 1 and 2. This concept of “pedagogy” is available for misunderstanding because its lesson is less determined than the romantic theory. To describe cinematic pedagogy we might turn to Benjamin’s dialectical concept of natural history. As described by Adorno, natural history takes an approach in which “the moments of nature and history do not disappear into each other, but break simultaneously out of each other and cross in such a way that what is natural emerges as a sign for history, and history where it appears most historical, appears as a sign for nature.”⁶⁷ For Benjamin, this materialist pedagogy is a cinematic pedagogy; it should involve a relationship between images and captions, a dialectical montage. Perhaps this cinematic pedagogy as natural history is most evident is

⁶⁵ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 45.

⁶⁶ Benjamin, *Selected Vol 3*, 101.

⁶⁷ Theodor Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History,” quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1991), 59.

Benjamin's analysis of Kafka. Kafka, for Benjamin, is the storyteller after the death of storytelling, a pedagogue for the age of information. Rather than giving up on tradition that has "fallen ill," he chronicles the effects of the ruins. "He gave up on truth in order to maintain its transmissibility." Benjamin explains Kafka's project by way of mechanical reproduction. "Experiments have proven that man does not recognize his own gait on film or his own voice on a phonograph. The situation of the subject in such experiments is Kafka's situation; this is what leads him to study, where he may encounter fragments of his own existence."⁶⁸

Benjamin anticipates the claims of 70s film theory. This encounter with fragments of one's own existence is not alienation but separation in the Lacanian sense, breaking, as Metz proposed we should, from view to gaze, from the imaginary into the symbolic or real. But, as we have argued, this project can become ideological if it only works one way—if it starts from the point of view of deprivation and fixates on the break or the encounter. And it can easily turn back into romanticism if the void emerges as poetic truth. Rather, I propose we should focus on what Benjamin meant by "study" and dialectical meaning of "natural history."

Much of film theory has treated the seemingly natural as historical in the form of ideology critique, but has ignored the logic of the ready-made. Deleuze's cinema books treat the historical as natural, creation as matter, but ignore the history internal to images. This is why Deleuze consigns early cinema, Lumière included, to the dustbin, because it is too close to "natural perception." For Deleuze there is no cinema without creative

⁶⁸ Benjamin, *Selected Vol 2*, 814.

works, without the chaos of the world being organized. And when this organization becomes a more overt problem, when a pedagogy of the time-image is needed to recreate links between images now cut off from their organic relation, this is a problem without a history and remains apart from a contested world of shared images.

Rancière, on the other hand, points us to the fact that constitutive of cinema and thinking about cinema is “making a film on the body of another.” We can see this aesthetic operation at work even in the mythic origins of cinema.

From here we will turn in the following chapter to two forms of post-war documentary, two modes of cinematic natural history to show that Herzog’s choice between accountant’s truth and mytho-poetic truth is a false choice. In Frederick Wiseman’s direct cinema, we see that the maligned mode of *verité*, of which we have been trained to develop a healthy distrust, is in this case a subtractive aesthetic in which the basic unit is the gesture. In Chris Marker’s work we see the development of a form, sometimes called the essay film, in which the single film loses its significance in favor of a minor cinema that extracts obscure signs from familiar events that thwart the lessons of official history in favor of ways of imagining new forms for future modes of collectivity.

Chapter 4: Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary

“The new art of narrative, film... brought to its highest potential the double resource of the silent imprint that speaks and the montage that calculates the values of truth and the potential for producing meaning. Documentary film, film devoted to the ‘real’, is in this sense capable of greater fictional invention than ‘fiction’ film, readily devoted to a certain stereotype of actions and characters.”¹ -Jacques Rancière

The purpose of this chapter is to take seriously this claim by Rancière and develop a politics of documentary in terms of its capacity for “fictional invention,” which means inventing ways of thinking about the future by way of the traces of the past. The claim that documentary is a politically important medium is, of course, as old as the concept of documentary itself. John Grierson, who is often said to have coined the term but more likely only played a large role in codifying it, saw documentary film as the most important modern vehicle for educating and informing the public in a democratic civil society. Subsequent champions of documentary have tended to follow Grierson’s lead by assuming that documentary “was not basically a film idea at all” but a tool or vehicle for “civic education” because of its capacity to make socially significant information accessible to the masses.² The novelty of Rancière’s intervention lies in locating documentary’s significance not just in a “film idea,” but rather more specifically in film’s capacity for exploiting the aesthetic potential of modern art. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the logic behind this claim and to show how clarifying the potential of documentary aesthetics may be part of the project of thinking political equality.

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2006), 38.

² John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. by Forsyth Hardy (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 250.

Thus far, we have argued that thinking the politics of cinema is not fruitfully restricted to films by committed filmmakers dealing with what is conventionally understood as political content. In this I follow one of the central tenets of the so-called political modernism of 60s and 70s film theory: there is a politics of film form. Writing in 1959, Godard declared that a tracking shot is “a question of morality” but ten years later it had become for him as for a new generation of film theorists, a question of politics. To take one well-known example: Comolli and Narboni in their 1969 taxonomy of political and ideological cinema listed Jerry Lewis’s ostensibly frivolous comedy *The Bellboy* (1960) as an “essential” film that became political through using formal devices to criticize the ideological system of which it was a product while relegating Costa-Gavras’s *Z* (1969), despite its explicit leftist leanings and political content, to the category of reactionary films.³ On the other hand, using Badiou and Rancière, we have separated ourselves from this tradition by arguing that the politics of cinema should not be thought of in terms of the political effects, either actual or potential, of specific films. Films, like theory, cannot guarantee the emergence of political subjects by merging thought and feeling as Eisenstein believed. Nor are there criteria for breaking us out of imaginary pleasure and into reflective knowledge. Nor finally is there anything inherently progressive or liberating about affects in themselves or collective bodily response as a new regime of post-Deleuzian theory sometimes seems to imagine. Rather, there is always a relation between aesthetics and politics in cinema because common regimes of sensory experience are generated and potentially transformed by all films.

³ Comolli and Narboni, “Cinema/Criticism/Ideology,” in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7th Edition, 690-691.

According to Badiou we need a new way to think the connection between philosophy and art, because the forms that have dominated both ancient and modern thought, which he calls the didactic, romantic, and classical schemas have become saturated.⁴ Following Badiou's schemas we can see that in contemporary film theory, classicism is continued in the Post-Theory turn, in Bordwell's poetics or the uses of analytic philosophy to maintain the borders between the thinkable and unthinkable in a film object defined in terms of the normative rather than the "confusions" instituted by thinking the contradictions of the politics of aesthetics. This return to the classical is posed against the purported epistemological inconsistencies of the didactic schema found in much academic film theory that emerged out of the heyday of political modernism. The logic of critique of this era of film theory sought to frame cinema politically. But as we have discussed in Chapter 1, the attempt in 70s film theory to wed Brechtian political modernism with Althusserian symptomatic reading became a limited project when reflexivity understood as revealing the conditions of production was no longer conceived dialectically, but rather thought to vouchsafe a passage from ideology to knowledge. Finally, certain modes of what is called affect theory suggest a renewal of romanticism in Badiou's terms.⁵ Like classicism and didacticism, romanticism has its correlate in contemporary cinematic practice. In Chapter 3, we saw in Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* the persistence of the romantic schema in the cinematic fantasy of poetic truth equated with the void of nature—the real shining through as ecstatic truth behind the lie of fact-

⁴ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 2-4.

⁵ This is not, however, how Rancière defines romanticism. What Badiou calls romanticism, Rancière would limit to a particular strain of the legacy of 19th century Romanticism such as the regime of images that finds its theoretical grounding in Lyotard's late writings on an aesthetics of the sublime.

images. For Herzog, ecstatic truth, sublime or romantic truth, is posited as the redemption from what he calls the “truth of accountants,” the tradition of sobriety. This is a familiar refrain in an ideology of art, but what is interesting about it here is that it is reasserted within the documentary form in a film composed largely of “found footage.” To reinvent romantic truth Herzog must wrest it from a mode that seems to exclude it.

Unlike Badiou, Rancière suggests that the link between philosophy or, more broadly, modes of interpretation and art, is not merely a concern of philosophy itself, but the thinking of what constitutes art in the aesthetic regime is part of art’s very fabric. Rather than pursuing Badiou’s own solution to the philosophical thinking of art, what he calls “inaesthetics,” we are adopting a dialectical conception that pursues ways of short circuiting these various conceptions of the destiny of art diagnosed by Badiou without realizing a new destiny for the truth of art. In this, we are at least following the path Badiou allows cinema in its anomalous impure relation to the other arts. For Badiou, the material of cinema is non-art, and the other arts and he sees its artistic potential in operations on this impure material, in particular the “ideological indicators of the epoch”⁶ but he restricts these largely to the images of mainstream fiction films and leaves out the images of the news, of advertisements and daily life. Despite cinema’s position of anomaly in Badiou’s separation of the artistic spheres, documentary is not fully examined because, for the Mallarméan Badiou, its proximity to journalism leads to a dead end. But we should extend Badiou’s thought to understand what he means by “impure

⁶ Badiou, *Infinite Thought*, 113.

operations on dominant motifs” to impure operations on, what Rancière calls, “the distribution of the sensory” in all of its many manifestations.

Applying Badiou’s *Logic of Worlds* to Rancière’s conception of aesthetics allows us to consider the ways that documentary films might reveal a supplement or lack in terms of the “rules of appearing.” Documentary can be a way to demonstrate or verify, what Badiou calls the intuitionist logic of appearance. At the level of existence or appearance, according to Badiou, the classical logic of the excluded middle does not hold and the elements of a world (or, in his earlier vocabulary, a situation) are not restricted to a binary logic of either appearing or not appearing but rather, they can appear with infinite degrees of intensity.⁷ It is the virtue of aesthetic images and documentary film in particular to play against the dominant modes of representation and demonstrate the visibility of something rendered weak or “inexistent” in terms of the situation both, let’s say, in documentary cinema itself, and any given documentary’s ostensible subjects. At the same time it can play on the gap between these two levels.

What Badiou calls the “inexistent,” Rancière calls the “part with no part” and it is this part with no part that comes into play in any political manifestation of disagreement according to Rancière. For Badiou, as we know, politics and art are separate truth procedures. Rancière does not adopt the language of “truth” and his investment in the politics of the uncounted or out of place means he is much more interested in the blurring of forms of practice than patrolling the borders, but like Badiou he maintains a separation of politics proper from the realm of art recognizing that the confusion of art and politics

⁷ See Alain Badiou, “The Three Negations,” In *Cardoza Law Review*, Vol. 29.5 (April 2008), 1887-1894.

is often at the cost of politics itself. Though he has taken issue with Benjamin's strict equivalence between "aestheticized politics" and Fascism⁸ as well as the discourses that seek the subversive potential of art in terms of its critique of the commodity form, he has acknowledged that Schiller's 18th century promise of a new "art of living" is experienced "as much in totalitarian attempts at making the community into a work of art as in the everyday aestheticized life of a liberal society and its commercial entertainment."⁹

So what is the precise relationship between political equality and the experience of art or film in Rancière's work? One of the keys to Rancière's method is to understand that this question cannot be answered with a simple formula because, for him, it should remain a question, or rather, a site of struggle and disagreement. The encounter with art, cinema, and documentary film in particular, in Rancière's larger project, can be understood by first appreciating the paradox posed by thinking equality. Equality without conditions, the political axiom, annuls itself if it remains a mere regulative principle; rather, equality acquires meaning when it is instantiated or inscribed.¹⁰ Rancière's conception of political equality is as a situated, localized intervention. But how is it possible that equality can be without conditions *and* situated, rooted in the concrete material world of political struggle? We could clarify by suggesting that equality *without* conditions, is in fact conditioned, but only by very the conditions it breaks from. This anonymous capacity of anyone, an equality without conditions, always means

⁸ For Rancière's critique of Benjamin see *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

⁹ Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes," *New Left Review*, 14 March / April 2002, 133. He says that this is a "caricature" but a "pertinent" one.

¹⁰ See Rancière, *Disagreement*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1999), 32. "What makes an action political is... the form in which confirmation of equality is inscribed in the setting up of a dispute."

inscribing something that cannot be accounted for, that both exists and does not exist, that is, in Rancière's terms, "the part of those who have no part."¹¹ This logic of the immanent break can only be thought or imagined through a paradoxical or paratactical logic. It is in this sense, as I have argued, that it is an impossible idea that is not thinkable without some recourse to the question of aesthetics.

The politics of axiomatic equality is a question of aesthetics because it always involves staging, making fictions, reframing, constructing a new *mise-en-scène* and montage¹² as an intervention into what Rancière calls "la partage du sensible," the sharing and dividing of sensory and sensible experience, what was once known as "the symbolic order" or "ideology."¹³ This is what has led Rancière to investigate regimes of images, textual and artistic production as arenas where equality gets inscribed and thwarted. A painting, novel or film, he has made clear, to many of his interlocutors' disappointment, should not be identified as a political act in itself, its very identification as art or entertainment precludes just that, but like a theoretical essay or philosophical treatise, it constructs ways of thinking what politics might mean through new arrangements of common images and ideas.

As Badiou puts it, "Art is everywhere, since every human experience is traversed by the gap between domination and the dominant ideology, between the real and its

¹¹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, 77.

¹² Peter Hallward in his essay "Staging Equality: On Rancière's Theatocracy" (New Left Review 37: Jan/Feb 2006) notes and critiques the importance of the theatrical metaphor in Rancière's political thought. Leaving aside Hallward's broader concerns, I just want to note here that I think it is a mistake to think that Rancière accords a privileged place to theater in particular and that the metaphor of "staging" is only one of the metaphors from various artistic realms that Rancière uses to think the aesthetics of politics.

¹³ See Chapter 1 for how Rancière's concept of "distribution of the sensible" relates to the Althusserian concepts of his youth and their uptake in the film theory of Christian Metz and Peter Wollen, among others.

semblance.”¹⁴ In other words, the gap in capitalist societies between ideology and the mode of production, between the appearance of the commodity form and its secret, already implies the ubiquity of art before the avant-garde declares that anything can be art. According to Badiou, art in the 20th century (like politics, science and philosophy) was characterized by trying to purge itself of this gap. This “passion for the real” that characterized the great adventures of the century always needed, in his words, a “mise-en-scene and montage” of semblance from which the destruction of semblance could be staged and the Real heroically extracted. On the other hand, the logic of “subtraction” which we will be pursuing in relation to documentary film, treats the Real not as identity but as the gap itself. It is the gesture that measures the difference between the symbolic and the imaginary.¹⁵ It is, in terms that both Rancière and Badiou would agree on, the space opened up by the failure of a world to be equal to the sum of its parts.

This notion that politics emerges from an excess of the sensible over its symbolic constitution leads Rancière to accord a special privilege to documentary cinema as a locus for experimenting with and creating contestation over the common. Cinema emerges within what Rancière calls “the aesthetic regime of art” in which art is no longer subject to the logic of representation but rather is grasped as merging two contrary conceptions of art: 1) Art’s pure power lies on the surface of the external world especially at its most ordinary and indifferent; 2) Art is grasped only in the pure autonomous

¹⁴ Badiou, *Century*, 50.

¹⁵ Ibid, 56. This is how he describes Malevich’s *White on White*. Badiou wishes to revive “the passion for the Real” against what he calls the “Restoration,” but through the protocol of subtraction not the violent logic of destruction that, as he analyzes it, can only be confirmed by death.

creative act or formal gesture.¹⁶ According to Rancière, the cinematic apparatus realizes the first pole of the aesthetic regime of art, but in effect, it does it too well. Anonymous automatic speech is intrinsic to the technical apparatus of cinema, but this does not ensure an ontological grounding for its artistic possibilities. Since the automatic recording machine is itself passive, the artistic gesture of becoming passive in the face of the world is no longer readily legible.¹⁷

As we saw in Chapter 3, the Lumière brothers' earliest films offer a fascinating test case in this regard. At the time few people viewed them as art, a position still found in Metz and Deleuze among many others, but they can be defended as art by citing Louis Lumière's method of framing or even the choice of subject matter. But if we subtract from an individual film an image within the film, for example, the wind in the trees in the background of "Baby's Meal" (1896) that fascinated so many early viewers: can we call this image art? And if it is not art, what is it? Its fascination is tied to the 19th century dream of art's self-effacement to yield to the expressive power of nature, but it is the new apparatus itself and not any single artist that makes this image visible. And once the novelty of the apparatus wore off, without the intervention of some legible form of framing, an image such as this would remain, as Mary Ann Doane aptly puts it, "semiotically insufficient."¹⁸

This may explain why historically so many filmmakers have turned to the representative regime to thwart cinema's powers. For Rancière, if there is something

¹⁶ See Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Berg Publishers, 2006), 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Harvard University Press, 2002), 178.

new about the art of cinema as it developed in the 20th century, it is this new function for the logic of representation. Rather than countering representational logic by surrendering to the pure play of light and color that comprises the optical impression of water lilies floating on the surface of a pond at a particular moment of time, or inverting and signing a urinal and hanging it on a gallery wall, cinema tends to reverse the operation of thwarting representation shared by so-called romantic, modernist and avant-garde aesthetics. With the exception of films that tend to get confined to the avant-garde tradition, dominant cinematic practice tends not to use the aesthetic gesture to undermine the logic of active form on passive material, but it returns to the representational logic of the conventional dramatic story or myth to thwart the aesthetic power of the pure becoming of movement-images. In Rancière's words, "the mechanic eye lends itself... not least to the illustration of old-fashioned stories of heartbreak and death... In the age of Joyce and Virginia Woolf, of Malevich and Schoneberg, cinema arrives as if expressly designed to thwart a simple teleology of artistic modernity, to counter art's aesthetic autonomy with its old submission to the representative regime."¹⁹ Or, in an essay on the "madness" of Eisenstein's *The General Line* (1929), he asks rhetorically, "what century we ourselves live in derives so much pleasure—our Deleuzes in our pockets—from the love affair upon a sinking ship between a young woman in first class and a young man in third."²⁰

Rancière offers no further explanation but the allusion here is, of course, to *Titanic* (1997), the highest grossing film of all time worldwide, which arrived at the end

¹⁹ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

of the 20th century as if to tell us that the “representative regime,” to quote the Celine Dion song that concludes the film, “will go on.” The global success of *Titanic* gives credence to David Bordwell’s claim in a 2006 book that the same modes of cinematic storytelling have persisted for “over 80 years and have formed a lingua franca for worldwide filmmaking.”²¹ If the aesthetic regime of art sought truth in the ephemeral such as Monet’s water lilies or Baudelaire’s swan, *Titanic*’s classicism or neo-classicism, returns the common or ordinary to its subordinate role in the mimetic order.

Habermas glossing both Baudelaire and Benjamin offers the following formula for aesthetic modernity: “Eternal beauty shows itself only in the guise of the costume of the times.”²² *Titanic* reverses this logic. The claim to “eternal beauty” comes from the costume of *older* times. It exists on two levels: as the story of the Titanic, the “real” boat with its fateful crash, a story embedded in cultural memory with a claim to historical testimony and, represented by all the period details; but also the time-tested formulaic love story itself played out over the background of history in the making, and, of course, the even more venerable conventions of tragic form. Hence the review in *The New York Times* by Janet Maslin starts by comparing it *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and ends by evoking “the fall of Icarus, the ruin of Ozymandias.”²³ If there is something modern or new in *Titanic*, filling the role of the “costume of the times,” it is not, as it would be for modern art, the seemingly meaningless vestiges of common forms of life in late 20th century that could be wrested from their obviousness to become signs of the true. Rather,

²¹ David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (University of California Press, 2006), 3.

²² Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1996), 9.

²³ Janet Maslin, “*Titanic*: A Spectacle as Sweeping as the Sea,” *The New York Times*, December 19, 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/library/film/121997titanic-film-review.html>

it is the quantifiable power of technology and capital as a means for an impeccable grand scale recreation of yet another cultural artifact from the never depleted archive. Maslin, surely with the aid of publicity materials, explains that in this \$200 million dollar film, the most expensive ever, “sets match old photographs right down to the sculpture and woodwork; costumes incorporate fragments of vintage clothing; even the silver White Star Line ashtrays had to be right. A core group of 150 extras worked with an Edwardian etiquette coach throughout the filming, furthering the illusion that the privileged past had returned to life.” However, as is characteristic of the “representative regime,” spectacle and verisimilitude (and money) are subordinated to the logic of muthos. As Maslin puts it, “Astonishing technological advances are at work here, but only in the service of one spectacular illusion: that the ship is afloat again, and that the audience is intimately involved in its voyage.”²⁴ On the other hand, the critic misses an important element. Good old-fashioned story-telling plus state-of-the-art technology alone would not account for the phenomenon that was *Titanic*; rather, as Benjamin foresaw, the secret to maintaining the pleasures and audience attendance of classical Hollywood, is a new mutation of the aura in an age of “mass art” known as the *star*, in this case a young man to be known by his fan-base as Leo.

But the parenthetical insertion of Deleuze, in Rancière’s reference to *Titanic*, tells us that this is not the end of the story. The dream of cinema as the realization of the aesthetic regime of art is found not only in polemicists and critics from the heyday of aesthetic modernity such as Benjamin, Epstein, Vertov and Eisenstein, but also in

²⁴ Ibid.

Rancière's relative contemporaries, "postmodern" figures like Deleuze and Godard. If one of the interventions of Rancière's essays on cinema is to show the inconsistency of this logic that imagines that cinema can become a pure writing of sensations and affects indistinguishable from ideas, it is not to insist on the classical Hollywood model of the scripted feature film with its three act structure and typically happy—or romantically tragic—ending as the inevitable destiny of cinematic production. The inconsistencies revealed by the great theorists and practitioners of so-called pure cinema do not limit cinema's potential but are the very basis for it. As Ranciere states most succinctly, "The art and the thought of images have always been nourished by all that thwarts them."²⁵

The documentary cinema brings the "aesthetic regime" to its "highest potential" because of its capacity for mobilizing this thwarting logic for "fictional invention." Documentary is the very pinnacle of the aesthetic regime of art not because it resolves the paradoxes of the aesthetic regime but because it is capable of exploiting the resources of these paradoxes without restoring the old hierarchies of the representative regime. It takes the automatic silent speech of the recording device as the grounds for aesthetic operations that calculate, withhold, or construct meanings by playing with combinations of text and image, bodies and voices, fiction and fact, to offer reality and the very relation between cinema and reality, as an arena of contestation.

Disagreement over Documentary

²⁵ Ibid, 19

But, it will be objected, common sense and experience tells us otherwise. Isn't documentary cinema generally excluded from the category of art through the Aristotelian "separation of the idea of fictions and that of lies."²⁶ Documentary, we are told even today by film theorists such as Noël Carroll, cannot be conceived of as fiction. Using an "intention-response model of communication," Carroll defines the documentary as "the film of presumptive assertion."²⁷ According to Carroll, everybody knows²⁸ that when ordinary people watch films they assume them to be either assertoric (if they are watching a documentary) or fictional (if they are watching "the film of presumptive imagination" or films in which the propositional content is not asserted) and that the two are mutually exclusive. Carroll rejects a poetics of knowledge in favor of an approach that has the goal of pragmatic testable category distinctions. Carroll's definition rightly points out that the ordinary criteria to distinguish a documentary from a non-documentary comes not from the style or content of the film, which in specific cases can be identical—for example, in documentaries and faux documentaries—but from criteria extrinsic to the

²⁶ Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 35.

²⁷ See Noël Carroll, "Fiction, Non-Fiction and The Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis," in *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*, ed. Noel Carroll and Jinhee Choi (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 154-172.

²⁸ Everyone, that is, except mixed-up creatures Carroll calls "deconstructionists." Though Carroll would tell me that I am confused, I would suggest that these unnamed deconstructionists are fictions, while at the same time presuming that Carroll is asserting their existence. Indeed, all rhetorical figures are fictional in Rancière's sense whether or not they correspond to an empirical reality, but in this case it's hard to imagine actual authors in any way faithful to Jacques Derrida's work whose theoretical arguments would fit Carroll's description. "Deconstructionists," if we further entertain this fiction, must of course presume a distinction between the two terms in a binary opposition if they are to be "deconstructed." To say that the distinction between two terms in a binary opposition is unstable is not the same as conflating them. Carroll similarly misreads Christian Metz whose claim that "Every film is a fiction film" is taken to mean that he believes that there is no meaningful distinction to be made between documentary and films usually called fiction. See Metz's rather limited conception of documentary below as evidence that he believed no such thing. Of course, Rancière's definition of "fiction" that I am using is not the one Carroll is working with and so Carroll might claim that there is no real disagreement here, only a distinction between a clear and confused concept of fiction. Carroll is operating under the Aristotelian logic that places fiction in opposition to fact. This is the very logic that Rancière suggests was overthrown by the aesthetic regime of art. If Carroll is right that "the film of presumptive assertion" captures what is typically meant by the term documentary this may help clarify the limiting way that documentary tends to get implicitly codified, but it does not help us think of the potential of documentary to create contestation over what counts as reality.

film text itself—precisely it’s conditions of production and how it circulates or, in his more problematic assumption, the presumed intentions of the author.²⁹ And in this he provides a useful counterpoint to certain academic writings that view the fictions of documentary as a double bind that makes its operations no longer thinkable. Indeed, it is fair to say that Carroll’s definition does seem to correspond with the conventions of what is normally associated with documentary. As Bill Nichols has suggested, documentary might be included among “the discourses of sobriety” such as science, religion, economics and other discourses that “regard their relation to the real as direct, immediate and transparent.”³⁰ According to Carroll, there is no reason to be suspicious of these discourses or to suggest that they have a fictional component.³¹ By this logic, isn’t documentary then, as much or even more so than so-called fiction film, subservient to the hierarchies of the Aristotelian logic of representation described by Rancière, since its subject matter dictates the appropriate form and the visible is dependant on speech for its legibility?³²

²⁹ Following Comolli in seeing “documentary” as the “condition” of all non-animated film (see below), suggests that documentary need not be dependant on believing that the filmmaker (if indeed there is a single filmmaker) intended what we are seeing to be documentary. On the contrary, as we saw in the last chapter, we often take the documentary element to be precisely that which we do *not* attribute to the filmmaker’s intention. So many of the popular viral videos of the early twenty-first century make this explicit. It is the *real* of the slips that fascinate us and make us subject them to repetition. In a return of the repressed, media theorists may soon discover that Freud and Lacan still instruct us better than cognitive science.

³⁰ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3-4.

³¹ Carroll claims that documentary theorists who denounce the pretense to objectivity and insist that all documentaries are fictional and therefore ideological tend to take their examples from films that are explicitly political at the exclusion of the vast majority of documentaries. His example to undermine the implicit notion that all films are ideological is a nature documentary on coral, which he claims is obviously “objective.” The claims in an information-based nature documentary of the genre Carroll’s example seems to be taken from may not be controversial but this does not keep it from being fictional in Rancière’s sense—there is still a specific regime of knowledge and aesthetics that is constructed through the relation between words and images and between facts and meaning.

³² Rancière, *The Future of The Image* (London: Verso, 2007), 113.

In contrast to Rancière's definition, it would seem that in typical documentaries, the real is taken to be asserted or self-evident rather than a problem or question. Secondly, images serve the function of illustration providing the visible evidence for what we are told. And thirdly, documentary is taken to be a genre that even at its most shocking or spectacular tends to owe its pleasures to its "content," that is, something other than art. Many of the major figures in film theory have had little to say about documentary except to repeat one or more of these limitations concerning its artistic potential. If the politics of cinema are often sought in documentary because of its link to the real and its typically explicit social and pedagogical goals, film theory and film art have historically retreated from documentary for the same reasons. An example of this position can be found in Jean Mitry's pioneering semiotics of cinema:

The teaching film and didactic documentary (which has no other purpose than to present a reality whose power derives from itself, attempting meanwhile to present that reality as objectively as possible) cannot be described as language or work of art—even though certain craft skills are required to conceive and produce them. When what is represented is incapable by itself of conveying sufficient information, a commentary linked to the images takes on the task of explaining them. If there is a 'signifier' here, then it is in the text, not the images.

Conversely, when documentary presents an original and personal vision of the world and its objects, that is, when it becomes an eye, it also becomes a 'poem.'

And as a poem it is organized, dialectically composed; in other words, it becomes language.³³

Rancière's reflections on documentary were occasioned by Chris Marker's *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* (1993, known in English as *The Last Bolshevik*) and it will, no doubt, be proposed that the "documentary fiction" he is celebrating is an interesting anomaly, not a synonym for documentary *tout court* but part of a hybrid genre that might better be conceived of as a particular category of the "experimental" film, the "poetic documentary," that lumps together films as diverse those as *Land Without Bread* (Bunuel, 1933), *Man With a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929) and *Sans Soleil* (Marker, 1983).

Documentary, we are told by its historians and theorists alike, should be defined by its own history starting with its ur-form in the Lumières' actualités but only emerging properly in 1922 with Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. Grierson's definition of the documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality," expanding on a term he first used in 1926 in his review of Flaherty's *Moana*, tends to be taken as the point of departure in attempts to conceptualize the form. What follows in standard accounts of documentary are the particular modes and codes and conventions that can be delineated through a taxonomy of typical examples. Following from this, critical writing on documentary gets structured around questions of veracity and the legitimation of truth claims.³⁴ The aesthetics of documentary are conceived extrinsically as the methods of

³³ Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, trans. Christopher King (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 59.

³⁴ See, for example, David Bordwell and Kristen Thomson, *Film Art: An Introduction 8th Edition* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 338-355 or John Izod and Richard Kilborn, "The Documentary," in *The Oxford Guide To Film Studies*, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 426-433.

either serving and yielding to—or obscuring—the real, unless we are talking about certain “poetic” documentaries that are closer to the avant-garde than to the documentary proper.

If Rancière’s conception of documentary aesthetics is at odds with that of a self-proclaimed “epistemic conservative” like Carroll, he also bypasses the critical approach of the epistemic skeptics that are Carroll’s targets. From the latter, we can identify two tactics: films, filmmakers, modes and movements are criticized for *not* aspiring to the real, for distorting facts or perhaps more significantly the meaning of facts through subjective manipulation in the name of a predigested perspective on the subject; or, on the hand, documentary films are criticized *for* aspiring to the real and reinforcing the myth of transparency or the jargons of authenticity, neutrality and objectivity, the idea that “nature in the raw,” to use the words of Siegfried Kracauer, *can* be captured and is not always already marked by specific historically determined codes and conventions.³⁵ In the first version, a documentary tells us X means Y and we object because who is to say what X means and we feel the interpretation is being imposed on us. In the second version we are told X means X and only X and we object because we insist that the interpretation is being hidden from us by aesthetic procedures and conventions that are mobilized toward their own self-effacement. These two positions are not mutually exclusive and so Brian Winston will show us how the ideology of the real of the top down state sponsored liberal democratic propaganda of the John Grierson school of 1930s social documentary that relied on recreation and explanatory narration is not

³⁵ See, for example, the valuable critiques of ethnography and the ideology of documentary neutrality in books such as *Theorizing Documentary* and *Documenting the Documentary*.

challenged by, but in continuity with, the independent direct cinema filmmakers of the 1960s that sought to capture “uncontrolled” “life as it happens”³⁶ eschewing narration and recreation for an ethos of observation. For Winston, the main difference is only that the latter is *more* devious because at least the former acknowledged that the films used “natural materials” for a “creative” purpose and did not make the same kind of claims to science.³⁷

Documentaries, it would seem, have always said too much and yet they can never say enough. And yet these criticisms need not lead to an impasse. The contradictions, as Hans Richter argued, are not first those of cinema, but of the social reality in which cinema emerged and developed.³⁸ As Rancière suggests, images, whether moving or still, neither speak for themselves nor do they need to be explained, but to identify an image involves a minimal relation between its capacity to give way to meaning and its capacity to remain mute. The aesthetic regime of art is always playing with this dual capacity of the image in which mute things can become signs for history or withdraw as dumb marks of non-signifying presence. The sophisticated solution to this deadlock of epistemic skepticism is by now also familiar: reflexivity, performativity, dialectical or dialogical methods, Brechtian distanciation, open texts, blurring of boundaries between fiction and documentary, or Deleuze’s powers of the false. But these solutions are not solutions as

³⁶“The Frontiers of Realist Cinema: The Work of Ricky Leacock,” *Film Culture*, 22-23, Summer 1961, 15. “Uncontrolled” was not thought to be equivalent to neutral or objective. In this interview by Gideon Bachmann, Robert Drew makes the distinction between the filmmaker’s personality or subjectivity as part of the “recording” of the scene as opposed to the “directing” of the scene. He emphasizes the filmmaker’s “understanding what we have to get as it happens.” Leacock draws a distinction between controlled and uncontrolled cinema. He advocates for the filmmaker as “selecting, arranging but never controlling the event.” *Ibid*, 25.

³⁷ See Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Tradition and its Legitimations* (London: BFI, 1995).

³⁸ Richter, *Struggle For the Film*, 81.

long as they are treated as such. Rather, they are aesthetic operations, a capacity of documentary film that can be developed in singular projects or instances.

As Michael Renov noted in 1999, a new regime of documentary that counters the “the stable fiction/nonfiction distinction” can be found both in “exciting new work of independent film- and videomakers” as well as more dubious forms of mainstream television, such as talk shows, news programs and infomercials and other forms of what Renov calls “edutainment.”³⁹ Indeed, this was just as true in the heyday of 60s and 70s film theory. As we saw in Chapter 1, film theory under the influence of Althusser, whether in the writings of Baudry, Metz, Wollen or Comolli and Narboni tended to identify the critique of ideology with reflexivity. However, if we turn to an example of theoretical cinema emerging from the same background as this era of film theory, we learn that “reflexivity” is not only a strategy of experimental documentary, but a feature of mainstream media at its most ideological. Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin’s *Letter to Jane* (1972), their open cinematic letter to Jane Fonda, the star of their *Tout Va Bien* (1972), is a film that examines within a particular context how words get plaited to images for both political and ideological purposes. The film contains no moving-images in the traditional sense; rather, through spoken language, text and juxtaposition with other images, it interrogates the photograph of Fonda published in *L’Express* documenting her trip to Vietnam. The photo’s caption in the newspaper tells us that Jane Fonda is listening to the Vietnamese but the photo, or so Godard and Gorin inform us, does not observe the Vietnamese itself but only observes Fonda observing. The Vietnamese man looking back

³⁹ Renov, “Documentary Horizons: An Afterward,” in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, 318.

at the camera is out of focus, literally a blur. To counter the newspaper caption they give the photograph the spoken refrain “No reverse shot is possible.” The image offers no access to imagining the Vietnamese returning the gaze on its Western observers. The observer, Fonda, the signifier for the compassionate celebrity, stands in for the observation. In this example at least, Godard and Gorin, good objects of Brechtian political cinema for film theorists, do not so much view transparency, realism, naturalism as *the* problems (though these are of course not terms they would endorse) but a certain kind of reflexivity. The problem in this case is not the obscuring of the subject of enunciation but rather that it replaces the statement. The “pedagogy” of Godard, according to Serge Daney, is not to return to the conditions of production of speech, but rather the opposite: the subtraction of the conditions of production in favor of the pure autonomy of the language of the other. Indeed, Godard like Brecht, the last remaining name of the chalkboard in *La Chinoise*, insisted on facts. And what both realized in their work was that the politics of aesthetics meant two contradictory things at once: the penetration of the conditions of production beyond second nature and familiar images and, at the same time, the subtraction of the contextual framing that provides meaning to the real. Natural history, as we discussed last chapter, as defined by Adorno following Benjamin and Lukacs, means a play between both contextualization and de-contextualization, showing nature as history but also history as nature.

What is a fact? Or rather, how might we understand what is understood as the factual dimension of an image in the aesthetic regime of art in which the logic of facts and logic of fictions are no longer mutually exclusive as they were in the representative

regime, but are constantly being blurred? Brecht famously declared that “the simple reproduction of reality says less than ever about that reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about those institutions.”⁴⁰ But this did not mean a rejection of facts, but rather, a recognition of the aesthetic component of how facts acquire meaning. For Brecht, a fact takes on an aesthetic value when it “records the difference between real life and bureaucratic estimates” like Caesar’s bald patch. “Realism” was not a bad word for Brecht as long it meant exposing the difference between material reality and ideological perception. As he put it, “Things are at stake not eyes.”⁴¹ For Godard and Gorin in *Letter to Jane*, a fact is not restricted to text and only illustrated by an image as it is still today in bad documentaries, but, on the contrary, a fact is the stubborn material dimension of an image that resists being assimilated into the function of mere illustration. For Godard and Gorin, in a sense following both Bazin and Brecht, the factual dimension of an image is its autonomy and materiality in its difference from both its socio-historical context and its self-evidence. They take the photograph of “Hanoi Jane” out of its context in *L’Express* and undermine its self-evident meaning of an American celebrity’s passionate and committed engagement with the plight of the Vietnamese by giving a close-up to the blurred image of a Vietnamese man in the background and highlighting this man’s inability to speak through the photo except through the absence registered by his silent presence. What the Dziga Vertov Group (Godard and Gorin named their collaboration so as to establish a link to a revolutionary documentary tradition) is interested in is what Rancière calls a “aesthetics of knowledge”

⁴⁰ Bertolt Brecht, *On Film & Radio* (London: Methuen, 2000), 164.

⁴¹ Bertolt Brecht, *On Art & Politics* (London: Methuen, 2003), 257-258.

which is a “redescription and reconfiguration of a common world of experience”⁴² through which knowledge and facts acquire their meaning. An aesthetics of knowledge, for Rancière, does not mean all discourses of knowledge are “nothing other than fiction or processes of metaphorization.” The question concerning the politics of documentary should not be about its explanatory power, its efficacy as a delivery machine for facts and information, but rather the forms of community that are implied by the regimes of identification through which art, facts and politics are perceived and recognized.

With the exception of certain documentarists themselves, most significantly Vertov, no canonical figure in the history of film theory has aligned documentary cinema with the potential of the medium itself. As is well known, André Bazin’s criticism was always guided by the idea that film has an ontological link to the real,⁴³ but the aesthetic realism he prescribed always meant transcending the conventions of verisimilitude, which first needed to be evoked to be subverted. We might say that for Bazin, as Jean-Louis Comolli has put it, all film is under the condition of documentary,⁴⁴ but this is why, as Rancière might argue, he needs the logic of representation to thwart that condition and make art visible. As Bazin argues, “Art aims to go beyond reality, not to reproduce it. And this is even truer of film because of its technical realism, its ability to reproduce

⁴² Rancière, “Dissenting Words,” *Diacritics* 30.2, 115.

⁴³ See “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. Hugo Gray, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 9-16.

⁴⁴ See “Documentary Journey to the Land of the Headhunters,” Jean-Louis Comolli, trans. Annette Michelson, *October*, Vol 90, (Autumn 1999), 36. Comolli defines the “documentary condition” as “the filmed encounter of body and machine” in a given time and place. According to Comolli, all but animated films are under this condition—not only the films of Flaherty and Vertov but those of the Marx Brothers, and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) as well.

reality so easily.”⁴⁵ Despite his many sensitive articles on new documentary forms such as *Letter from Siberia* (Marker, 1958), *Ferrabique* (Rouquier, 1946), and *The Mystery of Picasso* (Clouzot, 1956), among others, this is why he latched on to the sequence shot in Welles and Renoir and especially the “fact-images” of the Italian Neo-realists, not documentary itself as the essential examples of the aesthetic he endorsed. In these examples, a dialectic is at work: the documentary condition of cinema could be wrested from the residual traces of melodramatic narrative or a story of universal importance could emerge from an investigation of a specific time and place. To take but one example, writing about the largely forgotten neo-realist film *Two Cents Worth of Hope* (Castellani, 1952), Bazin says that the director “perfectly realizes the paradox giving us one of the most beautiful, most pure love stories in the history of film, evoking Marivaux and Shakespeare in the process, while at the same time he gives us the most exact account, the most ruthless indictment of Italian rural poverty in 1951.”⁴⁶

According to Bazin, “fact-images” in this new “aesthetic of reality” were composed of autonomous fragments of the real that exist prior to signification. The fact-image is no longer a sign predeciphered by the camera and editing but a “fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full of ambiguity, whose meaning emerges only after the fact, thanks to other imposed facts between which the mind establishes certain relationships.”⁴⁷ Bazin’s description fits the actuality, but he was not referring to the actuality or indeed to the documentary and its “creative treatment” of actualities, in

181. ⁴⁵ André Bazin, *Bazin at Work*, trans Bert Cardullo and Alain Piette, (New York: Routledge, 1997),

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 183.

⁴⁷ Bazin, *What Is Cinema Vol. 2*, 37.

Grierson's words, but rather to the films made by post-War Italian auteurs in or associated with the movement known as neo-realism: Fellini, Visconti, De Sica and most of all, Rossellini. The "concrete reality" of the fact-image was grasped not as an absence of intervention on the part of the filmmaker as it would in the rhetoric of the actuality or direct cinema but rather the most advanced means of film art. Its use meant a break from the codes and conventions of classical montage. In the Kuleshov effect, indicative for Bazin of classical editing, the subjective shot is not a fact but a sign and it is not "semantically independent." The 'image fact,' on the other hand, is not only part of the narrative created by the mind when brought together with other image facts but also "a fragment of reality existing before any meanings."⁴⁸ It is an image that existed *as if* independently from the ordered arrangement of shots that made up narrative cinema because something *transpires* or *happens* in the course of the shot. It is an event even if it is non-eventful in another sense because as Deleuze claimed "pure time" only emerges once "action" in the classical sense is inhibited. Pure time is the discovery of the eventfulness of the uneventful. As Rossellini stated, "things are there, why manipulate them." And it was Rossellini's *Paisan* that inspired Bazin's use of the term. "The unit of cinematic narrative in *Paisan* is not the 'shot,' an abstract view of reality which is being analyzed, but the 'fact.'"⁴⁹ The autonomy of the fact-image exists paradoxically not in isolation but in relation to other fragments, though there is always a gap between these fragments. Bazin uses the metaphor of crossing a river by jumping from stone to stone. Despite Bazin's well-known statements against the unnecessary use of montage inspired

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

by neo-realism, the emphasis on the fact-image presupposes an idea of montage, only one formed by gaps in the arrangement and the semi-autonomy of the fragment or fact rather than logically constructed ideas grasped in terms of the whole as in Griffith or Eisenstein. This is precisely what Deleuze means by a rupture in the sensory-motor schema. The causal relation between perception and affection and action codified in the relation between shots in classical narrative has been suspended, but the relation between “fact-images” takes on a new importance as a pedagogical process. To return to the example of Rossellini, for Bazin the ordinary in his films is never for its own sake but is always evoked to give meaning to its opposite, the extreme. The desultory wanderings of his characters make possible aesthetic moments of grace.

For Siegfried Kracauer, the other great film theorist of “an aesthetic of reality,”⁵⁰ the same logic persists, in which the real provides the very essence of film but the story is needed if only to be effaced in operations that make the real visible. Cinema, for him, is defined by its capacity to reveal and finally redeem “physical reality,” and while documentary would seem like the natural mode for this, it is, for him, surprisingly limited. Despite his insistence that the narrative film borrowing from the tradition of the novel and theater will always compromise the materialist dimension of film, he argues that the pure realism of “the film of fact” will in turn undermine the intrigue. So the documentary is rendered as problematic as conventional cinema in the theatrical tradition for the opposite reason. Unlike conventional narrative cinema, which abandons physical

⁵⁰ I use this term of Bazin’s rather than “realism” only because realism is often associated with the Aristotelian principles of the classical Hollywood model rather than films that are grounded in the documentary condition of cinema, which is what defines the cinematic for Kracauer as well as Bazin.

reality, the documentary is too dependent on physical reality and therefore unable to capture “the internal life of individuals.”

“The film of fact” takes up only a small section of his *Theory of Film*, despite the definition of cinema as a medium whose role is to “redeem physical reality.”⁵¹

He explains that facts are not enough:

Yet in the case of the film of fact it opens on only part of the world. Newsreels as well as documentaries feature not so much an individual and his inner conflicts as the world he lives in... factual films do not explore all aspects of physical reality; they omit for instance, those contingent on ‘private passions,’ as related by an intrigue.⁵²

According to Kracauer, cinema’s inherent affinity with the unstaged, chance, and the endlessness of the heterogeneous flow-of-life as opposed to the closed structure of a finite ordered cosmos, is what makes it modern and this leads to an interest in the “found story” such as “certain patterns in the water produced by the breeze or some eddy.”⁵³ But the very things that make the found story cinematic are also its limitations for art. “Since the found story is part and parcel of the raw material in which it lies dormant, it cannot possibly develop into a self contained whole.” Describing the documentary *In The Street* (Agee, Levitt, Howard, 1948), Kracauer says that it is “nothing but reportage pure and simple... As a notebook like assemblage of on-the-spot observations, the film is also expressive of an outspoken, very cinematic susceptibility to street incidents. These

⁵¹ The full title of the book is *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*.

⁵² Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 194.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 246.

assets, however are not without a drawback; the lack of structure that results is at variance with and weakens the film's emotional intensity."⁵⁴ Too much "susceptibility" to "nature in the raw," which for Kracauer is precisely the cinematic itself, means a loss of structure and emotion.

Like Bazin, Kracauer prizes the "loose composition" in Renoir and the "street world" in Italian Neo-Realism because films should be permeable to "camera-reality" or the "flow of life," but some tie to the literary or theatrical mode of narrative is needed to give this permeability its legibility even if only through contrast. According to Kracauer,

The true film artist may be imagined as a man who sets out to tell a story but, in shooting it is so overwhelmed by his innate desire to cover all of physical reality—and also the feeling that he must cover it in order to tell the story, any story, in cinematic terms—that he ventures ever deeper into the jungle of material phenomena in which he risks becoming irretrievably lost if he does not by great efforts, get back to the highway he has left.⁵⁵

Note that "the true film artist" first sets out to tell a story. Kracauer like Bazin sees physical reality as the materialist basis of cinema and yet physical reality must be held together by a story that it always threatens to undo.

The thereness of things, the silent speech of objects, for Bazin as for Kracauer, is found not primarily in documentaries but in "realist" narrative cinema. The realist conventions of narrative cinema must be retained to the degree that they can be subtracted so that the world can be "shown" through an aesthetic operation and not

⁵⁴ Ibid, 203.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 255.

merely “pictured” as it would be through the ambiguity of the unmarked silent speech of the anonymous camera. The importance of “an aesthetic of reality” for Bazin, as for Kracauer, is not just to distinguish the true possibilities of cinema from the overreliance on the formative or the “belief in the image” but also from documentary proper. Defenses of Bazin and Kracauer against the accusation of naïve realism might emphasize this very point—that realism is for both of them is an aesthetic concept, which is to say, a matter of form as much as content.⁵⁶ As Jane Gaines puts it about Bazin, “The critic who said that ‘some measure of realism must always be sacrificed in the effort of achieving it’ can hardly be considered a naïve realist. Also, in Sigfried Kracauer’s famous assertion that ‘what the camera captures is more real than reality itself’ one finds a subtle comment on aesthetics whereby the construction captures and even comments on its own constructedness.”⁵⁷ As she rightly observes, however, the impulse to redeem Bazin and Kracauer from the sins of “naïve realism” smacks of a defensive posture that works “to distance ourselves yet again from realism.”⁵⁸ And indeed not just from “realism” but from the real. It is for this reason that, using Bazin and Kracauer as examples it is necessary to observe that historically cinematic realism has been explicitly posed against a cinema of the real. The aesthetic of reality is both an acknowledgement of the “documentary value” or “condition” of film and a guard against it for the sake of art.

With the emergence of structuralist, semiotic, Marxist and psychoanalytic approaches, film theory turned against realist aesthetics. Realism or naturalism, as it was

⁵⁶ See for example, Philip Rosen on Bazin in *Change Mummified* or Miriam Hansen’s Introduction to Kracauer’s *Theory of Film*.

⁵⁷ Jane Gaines, “Introduction: ‘The Real Returns’,” in *Collecting Visible Evidence Volume 6*, eds. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

sometimes called, was identified with the unhampered advancing of dominant ideology. It was an aesthetic designed to efface its codes and conventions for the sake of transparency, which both theory and counter-cinema were designed to expose. But if the main target was narrative realism and not “non-fiction” films, documentary tended to be folded into this critique of realism and faced no serious reconsideration. Christian Metz’s *Film Language* largely repeats Mitry’s reading aligning documentary with films in which the “signifier,” as Mitry put it, is not in the images themselves. According to Metz, cinema began, in the Lumières’ films for example, as merely a “means of reproduction” but it was only with the development of narrative procedures that it became a language. “In the realm of the cinema, all nonnarrative genres—the documentary, the technical film etc. —have become marginal provinces, border regions so to speak, while the *feature-length film of novelistic fiction*, which is simply called a ‘film,’ the usage is significant—has traced more and more clearly the king’s highway of expression.”⁵⁹

In Comolli and Jean Narboni’s 1969 essay “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” the seminal statement of purpose for *Cahiers du Cinema* in the aftermath of May 68, they announce the goal of a “scientific criticism”⁶⁰ to show how films correspond to or disrupt cinema’s ideological function by exposing and subverting “the traditional way of depicting reality.”⁶¹ Yet they make no mention of the term “documentary” as a distinct mode. In their critique of direct cinema (‘category f’ in their schema), they write, “Reality holds within it no kernel of self-understanding, or theory of truth, like a stone

⁵⁹ Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 94. Emphasis original.

⁶⁰ Jean-Louis Comolli, and Jean Narboni, Cinema/Criticism/Ideology, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7th Edition, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 686.

⁶¹ Ibid, 689.

inside a fruit. We have to manufacture those.”⁶² Rancière would agree that “reality” needs to be “manufactured” or “fictionalized” before it can be thought, but Comolli and Narboni make no distinction between the imaginary production of verisimilitude in what they call “bourgeois realism” (of ‘category a’) and the real, the documentary condition of cinema that Comolli would define years later. They correctly point out that the discourse of “direct cinema” that champions the capturing of unscripted immediacy is by no means an escape from ideology, but by treating it as just another variation of “bourgeois realism” they fail to point out that the documentary begins with a different set of aesthetic problems regarding the relationship between reality and ideology than the cinema of novelistic verisimilitude.

Deleuze breaks from the focus on representation and language in Mitry, Metz, Comolli and Narboni, but preserves their assumptions about the artlessness of early cinema claiming that it only mimicked “natural perception.”⁶³ The question of film art for him is no longer about “signifying procedures” in terms of codes and conventions but, rather, the creative production of new signs composed of movement and time. In this he is closer to Bazin, but his problem with Bazin is that even though Bazin does not mark these new kinds of signs through an analogy to verbal language, he does it with reference to reality.⁶⁴ For Deleuze, as I’ve discussed, the movement-images that compose cinema

⁶² Ibid, 692.

⁶³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habbberjam, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3.

⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 1.

are immanent potentiating fields that do not need to be grasped with reference to anything external to the images themselves.⁶⁵

Indeed, the very word “documentary” is of little interest to Deleuze because for him so-called fiction films are not engaged in creating the “effect of the real” any more than documentaries are recording a *profilmic* reality or referencing an *afilmic* reality (to use Étienne Souriau’s terms).⁶⁶ Like Rancière he is interested in the fictional capacity of documentaries, but only when it comes to the “live cinema” of Jean Rouch and Pierre Perrault. In this form of “live cinema” the film does not purport to observe an already existing real, but participates with the subjects of the film in the creation of an immanent virtual real. Deleuze’s Bergsonian view of cinema means an indifference to questions of how images circulate and the problems opened up by remediation,⁶⁷ that is, how certain images can have a history both filmic and afilmic, how the same images can appear in different media and acquire new meanings through different contexts, arrangements and aesthetic operations. Deleuze recasts his anti-representational philosophy as a natural history of cinematic image-types and in the process sweeps aside hoary debates about realism, modernism, art and entertainment, but the cost is that he restricts “cinema” to films in which new images are created and ignores the circulation of common images as a

⁶⁵ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 2.

⁶⁶ See Étienne Souriau, *L’Univers Filmique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1953), 7-8. Souriau distinguished seven levels of filmic reality. His use of the terms “diegetic” and “profilmic” have been incorporated into film studies though the notion of the “afilmic” or material world that exists outside of that captured by the camera has been forgotten. As glossed by Warren Buckland, the profilmic reality “is the reality photographed by the camera.” The afilmic reality is “the reality that exists independently of filmic reality.” Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47.

⁶⁷ The term “remediation” has taken on a specific meaning in New Media studies as the way a new or *newer* media refashions or “remediates” old media. See Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). This is derived from Marshall McLuhan’s claim that the content of any medium is another medium. I mean to use the term in a larger sense that would include thinking about the way one film can remediate another film as well as how older media could also remediate newer ones.

possible grounds for cinema's "will to art." Symptomatic of this is the absence of either Chris Marker or Guy Debord⁶⁸ from the indexes of *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*. The cinematic potentialities of putting a *stop on the image*, in Daney's terms,⁶⁹ or *replaying* the image, in Marker's terms,⁷⁰ have no part in Deleuze's natural history.

What was the fact-image for Bazin, becomes for Deleuze, pure optical and sound situations that can combine into crystal-images. What we have are not fragments of concrete reality so much as banal or limit-situations in which the real and imaginary are no longer discernible but make up mentally constructed images of aberrant time. What Deleuze recognizes is that "reality" in Bazin is never tied to the specific time and place of the profilmic moment but rather to the generic and anonymous and a concept of the event. In other words, "reality" is first and foremost a different experience of temporality that is no longer dictated by the representative logic of cause and effect. A fact is an image delinked from narrative causality or the sensori-motor schema. At the same time, it must be grasped through a mental operation that puts its disjointed fragments together. This is the basis of aesthetic art, according to Rancière, what Schlegel called, "the poem of the poem." For Deleuze, it is no longer a question of reality but a virtual "real" understood now as pure time.

⁶⁸ We could add Alexander Kluge, Johan Van Der Keuken, Ester Shub, Joseph Cornell or any maker of compilation or found footage films, but Marker and Debord stand out as two filmmakers whose absence seems especially conspicuous considering that Deleuze surely had some familiarity with their work. Of course, Deleuze does have rich discussions of Godard, Eustache, Resnais, Duras and Ackerman, not to mention Flaherty and, of course, Vertov, among others whose work has engaged with documentary though he tends to skirt consideration of how the real, history, or remediation operate in these films.

⁶⁹ See Serge Daney, "The Tracking Shot in Kapo," trans. Lawrence Kretzschmar: http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/04/30/kapo_daney.html.

⁷⁰ See Chris Marker, "A Free Replay: Notes On Vertigo," from *Immemory* (1997): CD-Rom.

It is with this background of documentary's historical marginality, that we should understand Rancière's intervention. Rancière is not making a claim restricted to specific genres of documentary but rather proposes rethinking the concept of documentary itself in terms of the capacity for a cinematic form that stages contestation over the real, the common or rather, the distribution of the sensible. Traditional histories, common sense conceptions, and the dominant forms of documentary no more refute this concept of documentary than what counts as democracy for heads of state and political pundits refutes Rancière's conception of democracy. He is not defining the empirical reality of what counts as documentary but rather its potential as an aesthetic form. Documentary, perhaps more than any other "art form," can explore the capability of fiction in the aesthetic regime of art to play on the intertwining of art and forms of life.

For Rancière, documentary does have a different relationship to the real than films normally termed fiction, but this is an enabling difference, because unlike novelistic fiction the very question of what constitutes the real grounds documentary practice. In Rancière's definition we do presume a common real when watching a documentary but not one predetermined or necessarily restricted by the propositional content we take to be intended by the author. Rancière has proposed that:

We cannot think of documentary film as the polar opposite of fiction film simply because the former works with images from real daily life and archive documents about events that obviously happened, and the latter with actors who act out an invented story. The real difference isn't that the documentary sides with the real

against the inventions of fiction, it's just that documentary instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced, treats it as a fact to be understood.⁷¹

In other words, we need not think of the documentary as constrained by the logic of the real but rather as a mode of “fiction” freed from the logic that demands “the imaginary production of verisimilitude,” the real as effect. For the documentary, the real is not an effect, but an aesthetic problem. Facts, which is to say both what counts as a fact, but also how facts can be assembled to both construct or interrupt meanings, is the terrain of a kind of film fiction, which we can call documentary. Facts or documents, as Jean Marie-Straub has reportedly declared, are the tools of the police.⁷² Politics, as Rancière has argued, is that which interrupts the police. The documentary might be understood as a type of fictional film that is centrally engaged in the gap between police and politics, which is to say, sensory logic with its hierarchical divisions and methods of counting its parts, and ways of disrupting that logic.

We must be clear then, that when Rancière calls documentary a form of fiction, he is neither opposing “fiction” to the “real” nor is he suggesting that there is no difference between documentary and those films normally termed fiction. To highlight the potential of fictional invention of the documentary film does not mean that documentary films are fiction films like any other in which the real is nothing other than what counts as real, which is to say, just another fiction or narrative. According to Rancière, “It is not a matter of claiming that everything is fiction. The fiction of the aesthetic age defined

⁷¹ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 158.

⁷² See <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2009/03/a-documentary-i.html>. (Accessed on August 15, 2009).

models for connecting the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blurred the border between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction.”⁷³ Fictions, in the sense adopted by Rancière, are not opposed to facts that make up knowledge but are ways of constructing the arena in which facts and knowledge are given meaning. The root of the word “fiction,” *fingere*, he stresses, means not “to feign’ but ‘to forge’.”⁷⁴ Fictions, for Rancière, are not lies, dissimulations, or more neutrally, language games or narratives, but they are rather the ground for modes of expression. “Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct fictions, that is to say material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and can be done.”⁷⁵ For Rancière, this is not another statement about the age of spectacle, the digital or the loss of the real. To say then that documentary film is a form of fiction just like written historiography is a form of fiction is not to say that there is no distinction between a novel and a written historiography or a documentary film and what is normally called a fiction film, but just that these very distinctions are a question of aesthetics, which is to say, a regime of constructing meanings out of common sensory experience.

As Rancière has argued, cinema and documentary cinema in particular can play directly on the paradoxical development of modern art in which its autonomy, its separation from the interests and struggles of daily life was tied to its heteronomy, the belief that anything could be art and art could fuse with life itself. In documentary, montage can play on two inverse functions: the real becoming art and art becoming the

⁷³ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 38.

⁷⁴ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 158.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

real. Documentary film is then a more radical starting point for the aesthetic regime of art than so-called fiction film because it starts with non-art as its raw material and can play directly with the capacity of heterogeneous signs to be linked or delinked, to construct or withhold meaning. It can take “artistic work back to its essence, to a way of cutting a story [une histoire] into sequences, of assembling shots into a story [une histoire], of joining and disjoining voices and bodies, sounds and images, of lengthening and tightening time.”⁷⁶ It has the capacity to generate contestation over common images and meanings and interpretations of the real by highlighting the very work of montage without relying on the identification with the plight of familiar individuals that tend to be buttressed by the rigid unstated laws of spatial and temporal continuity and the causal logic that ensures the suspension of disbelief.

Documentary constructs what Rancière calls an “aesthetics of knowledge” which is a “redescription and reconfiguration of a common world of experience”⁷⁷ through which knowledge and facts acquire their meaning. The question concerning the politics of documentary should not be about its explanatory power, its efficacy as a delivery machine for facts and information, but rather the forms of community that are implied by the regimes of identification through which art, facts and politics are perceived and recognized. The aesthetic regime of art, according to Rancière, is also a new regime of historicity in which the future is defined by restaging the past. The traces of reality become poetic signs because they are wrested from the “empirical succession of

⁷⁶ Ibid, 158. By “story” or “histoire,” Rancière means “history” as well as “story” as in a fictional (in his sense) construct but not in the sense of an “imaginary world” that takes the real as an “effect to be reproduced.”

⁷⁷ Jacques Rancière, “Dissenting Words,” *Diacritics* 30.2, 115.

events.”⁷⁸ Cinema as documentary—by combining automatic silent speech with the resources of montage broadly construed to include not only editing in conventional sense, but sound, text, and manipulations within images—is perhaps the richest terrain for experimenting with an aesthetics of knowledge to reveal the contingency of the distribution of the sensory.

The word Rancière uses for the link between fiction and fact is “memory.” Documentary is not about information but rather memory, which according to him, is not the subjective experience of the past by an individual, but poetic arrangements of knowledge and sensibility that belie the storehouse of static information.⁷⁹ To align memory with fiction is not to relativize fact, but rather to suggest that production of meaning from fact is a capacity that belongs to anyone and the very province of documentary. Referencing Godard’s ironic claim, in *Ici Et Ailleurs*, that “[t]he epic is for the Israelis and the documentary is for the Palestinians,” Rancière’s gesture is to reverse this logic and offer the documentary as a fiction for those who are denied fiction, a fiction for the part who have no part. As he puts it: “The artistic work of memory is that which accords everyone the dignity of fiction.”⁸⁰ The potential of documentary is not to challenge lies and distortions with sober facts, but to allow for new kinds of histories to be told that create new common worlds heterogeneous to official narratives marked by inequality.

⁷⁸ Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 37.

⁷⁹ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 157.

⁸⁰ “Jacques Rancière and Interdisciplinarity,” trans. Gregory Elliot in *Art & Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 2008, 10.

“Nature caught in the act,” the phrase attributed to the wind in the trees, is nature grasped as fact or history, but it was the purpose of the last chapter to show that cinema does not realize a dream of aesthetic modernity by merging art, nature and fact, the beautiful, the good and the true, but discourses and aesthetic operations are continually harnessed to provide the effect of a rediscovery of the beauty, sublimity, ecstatic or material truth that gets obscured by the endless stream of meaningless commodified images or images subordinated to the representative function. These discourses and aesthetic operations, which are not extricable because we need one to grasp the other, can be in the service of reaffirming romantic or classical or didactic ideas of art and images. The actuality or, in the case of the leaves in “Baby’s Meal,” this image extracted from an actuality, is a sort of zero-degree movement-image but it becomes the basis for magic and effects in Méliès, the beauty in the recesses of the narrative for Griffith, a link to film’s materialist origins for Straub and Huillet, a mark of the sublime index for Antonioni, or a image of the mystery and chaos of nature for Herzog.

The wind in the trees can be grasped as a “common image” and it is the very meaning of common images that grounds the aesthetic operations that make up the documentary. A “common image” can be an image like the “wind in the trees” that Griffith lamented the loss of, or it can be the wind in the trees in “Baby’s Meal,” that singular profilmic moment on August Lumière’s estate in 1895 as his brother Louis cranked the camera, or it can be that image as we view it today, an image literally extracted from a film. The documentary can construct its poetics out of the gap between the generic and anonymous image, the image of historical testimony and the material

image in circulation as well as the gap between these images in their obstinate silence, the dialectical play of montage and the voice or text that explains or undermines these effects.

What documentary allows is a way of thinking of the relation between theory and cinema and a relation between text and image as well as the intermixing of aesthetic and pedagogical operations. Rancière reminds us that “image” even when it means silent speech or the “unrepresentable” always implies some relation between text and the visible even if by negation. This relation is precisely its pedagogy in the sense we are using it. According to Rancière, there is a sense in which all art “is made up of images, whether we recognize the form of identifiable characters and spectacles in it.” The images of art, broadly construed, are “not exclusive to the visible” but whether they are visible or made only of words they still construct a “relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship that plays in the analogy and the dissemblance between them.”⁸¹ Recently, there has been much valuable work in cinema studies to correct the old focus primarily on the visual through investigations of not only sound, but also touch and all manner of bodily and affective states other than sight or hearing thought to be activated by cinema.⁸² But accompanying this attention to the heterogeneity of the sensorium and a non-critical perspective on audience absorption in spectacles has been a retreat from thinking about the “studium,” the way images can emerge as hieroglyphs

⁸¹ Rancière, *Future of the Image*, 7.

⁸² Sound, of course, has never been completely neglected in film studies but the last few decades have seen a renewed focus on the aural after the largely visual-oriented approach of 70s film theory. See, for example, the work of Rick Altman or Michel Chion. As for the other senses, one needs only to look at recent books on film from academic presses or the paper topics at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies to see how often one encounters the words affect, body, bodily, embodied if not touch, skin, the tactile or haptic.

embodying socio-political realities, provoking a potential relation to thought and interpretation. Rancière brings our attention back to the question of words and language as a component of the images of art. But he is not like the structuralists interested in the syntagms of narrative cinema, which is to say the ways filmic codes function like a language, but rather the regimes of visibility, audibility and legibility through which images are intelligible. An image, cinematic or otherwise, is always within a regime of imageness that constructs images as different ways of connecting visibility and signification. Cinema emerges within a regime of art in which images are no longer subordinated to text which established a community defined by certain rules of intelligibility as they were in the “representative” or classical regime. “The text’s part in the representative schema was the conceptual linking of actions, while the image’s was the supplement of presence that imparted flesh and substance to it.”⁸³ Many if not most documentary films are still largely within this regime. In the aesthetic regime, on the other hand, “the image is no longer the codified expression of a thought or feeling. Nor is it a double or translation. It is a way in which things themselves speak and are silent.”⁸⁴

As we’ve seen, images in the aesthetic regime are silent speech in two senses: 1) They are the signs of history, inscriptions on the body of things, visual messages to be decoded. 2) They are pure idiocy and obstinate silence, non-signifying presence. In cinema they are the combination of the chance events of the pro-filmic and the mark of the auteur. For Rancière the operations of art in the aesthetic regime always have a third

⁸³ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 13.

term or operation which he calls the “phrase-image” another name for montage in the broad sense (though he argues that it exists in arts other than cinema) that links and disjoins the first two functions constructing a common measurement between incommensurables. The fictions of documentary, its politics of aesthetics, can be analyzed in terms of its phrase-images, the operations that give logic and form to the gap between symbolic and imaginary, police and politics. By limiting the documentary condition of cinema to that which can be subtracted from “the effect of the real” of verisimilitude, conventional narrative cinema limits the capacities of cinema’s politics of aesthetics that we can only open up through an expansive conception of documentary practice.

Actuality and the problem of presence

In a conversation with Rossellini and Bazin in 1958, Jean Renoir claimed: I have to say that the television shows I’ve found most exciting have been certain interviews on American TV. I believe that the interview gives the television close-up a meaning which is rarely achieved in the cinema. The close-up in the cinema is essentially a reconstruction, something prefabricated, carefully worked up—and of course, this has yielded some great moments in the cinema. This said, I believe that in 30 years we have rather used up this type of cinema and we should perhaps move on to something else.... I remember, for instance, certain interviews in connection with a political hearing... In two minutes we could read the faces on these people... I found this tremendously exciting ... and somehow

an indecent spectacle to watch. Yet this indecency came nearer the knowledge of man than many films.⁸⁵

This “moving on” is also a *return* to the actuality, albeit by way of television journalism, an engagement with the newest modes of mass reportage. But, as could be found in early cinema, it is an auteurless image, one that gains its potential power from its sheer presence and the affective dimension of its subject artlessly filmed in real time. Indeed, Renoir’s comments look forward to the experiments with *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema that would emerge in the following years. But in the age of tabloid and reality TV and the endless recycling of unintended sound bytes, narcissistic self-projection on internet sites like YouTube, are we to believe that the drama that Renoir witnessed signaled a new potentialities for cinema and not its degradation?

For both Badiou and Deleuze, good cinema cannot exist in the present and television is a dead end for the art of cinema. Cinema is about pastness. And despite their antagonism to realism, in this, they follow both Bazin and Kracauer. For Bazin and Kracauer, the preference for an “aesthetic of realism” over the real of the actuality comes from a recognition that the cinematic is achieved through impure means—not from the absence of style but its subtraction. As Deleuze puts it, “It is not enough to eliminate fiction, in favor of a crude reality which would lead us back all the more to presents which pass.” Indeed, it is not enough, but Deleuze acknowledges that a subtraction of narrative conventions can make possible a time-image. “We shall see that this is precisely the aim of *cinéma vérité* and of the direct cinema: not to achieve a real as it

⁸⁵ *Film Culture* 22-23 1961, 42

would exist independently of the image, but to achieve a before and after as they coexist with the image, as they are inseparable from the image. This is what direct cinema must mean, to a point where it is a component of all cinema: to achieve a direct presentation of time.”⁸⁶

But as Rancière points out the time-image is a kind of presence in the sense of immanence achieved against the crude presence of natural perception and the television image. And the notion of a direct or pure presentation of time not overcoded by representation is not simply a property of images themselves, but must be part of a regime of visibility in which this subtractive gesture can be made intelligible. “The phenomenological tradition and Deleuzian philosophy readily assign art the task of creating presence under representation. But presence is not the nakedness of the pictorial thing as opposed to the significations of representation. Presence and representation are two ways of plaiting words and forms. The regimes of visibility of the ‘immediacies’ of presence is still configured through the mediation of words.”⁸⁷

For both Badiou and Deleuze, if cinema is to be capable of art it has to differentiate itself from non-art. The image cannot create on its own unless that passive creation is paradoxically merged with the auteur function. As we’ve seen, realist film aesthetics has tended to reject documentary, but the fate of the actuality has been even more grim. As Philip Rosen points out, the actuality is repudiated not only by film theory and art cinema, but by the documentary tradition itself. Grierson opposes documentary proper to the newsreel and the actuality. The real for Grierson was not to be fetishized,

⁸⁶ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 38.

⁸⁷ Rancière, *Future of the Image*, 79

but rather “even so complex a world as ours could be patterned for all to appreciate if only we got away from the servile accumulation of fact and struck for the story which held the facts in living organic relationship to each other.”⁸⁸ According to Rosen, the documentary is bound up with modern historiography in which “the pertinence of documents is always imbricated a priori with the ex post facto significance of the historical sequence.”⁸⁹ Rosen reminds us that the documentary like modern historiography has consistently been defined against the document or actuality. But he says, “There’s something odd about a comparison of documentary and historiography that leads to differentiating documentary from less coherently sequenced constructions of the real; because it doesn’t differentiate documentary from another of its ‘others’, mainstream narrative film. Instead it suggests a conflation between the two because mainstream cinema also works on the sublation of document into sequence.”⁹⁰ Indeed, Grierson salvages documentary by bringing it in line with Bazin and Kracauer’s realist aesthetic but from the opposite direction. As Kracauer suggested, the real is the detour or supplement that makes the story cinematic at the same time as it interrupts it. For Grierson, it is the story that make the facts cinematic not by interrupting them but by organizing them.

Actualities are deemed primitive and artless from the point of view of both classical cinema and mainstream documentary, but at the same time, “the appeal of actualities is in the relatively extreme rawness of the real they present... in comparison to

⁸⁸ Quoted in Philip Rosen, “Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts,” in *Theorizing Documentary* ed. By Michael Renov, New York: Routledge, 1993, 70

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 72.

later kinds of filmmaking but also in comparison to various accounts of the real in other contemporary forms such as journalism, narrative prose, and historiography.”⁹¹ Indeed, it is for this very reason that the actuality, reconfigured as a component of the crystalline time-image or the fact-image becomes a way of hollowing out narrative cinema. The level of actuality becomes a way of contradicting the sequence that it has been inserted into in the traditional documentary film. The “rawness” of the actuality as silent speech plays on a tension within the sequence both within documentaries and within modernist narrative cinema.

Brian Winston’s critique of conventional documentary forms is concerned less with presence and more with the ideology of science. As he puts it, “It seems to me necessary for the documentary, in some way, to negotiate an escape from the embrace of science.”⁹² In this he shares something with Rancière who has attempted to show how the recourse to science and the proscription of literature in modern written historiography is “the sacrifice of history itself.”⁹³ Photography, Winston claims, has long been seen as constituting evidence and the camera as an instrument of inscription analogous to scientific instruments. For Winston, this relation to science is central to the ideological surplus of documentary films. But Rancière argues that not only do modern historiography and science have literary components but that modern art and literature has a scientific and historiographic component. Indeed, the tradition of nineteenth century novelistic realism, the modes of modern historiography and the experiments of

⁹¹ Ibid, 73.

⁹² Brian Winston, “The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription,” in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (Routledge, 1993), 57.

⁹³ Rancière, *The Names of History*, 102.

scientific research are being conflated by Winston. It is precisely cinema's capacity to play with these distinct functions which are often in tension that allowed for the dialectical games of aesthetic production, whether in the name of realism, modernism or avant-garde configurations. Winston uses Frederick Wiseman's claim about his films as "voyages of discovery," a phrase used by Barry Keith Grant as the title of his study of Wiseman, to show how the direct cinema filmmakers assume the ideology of science to justify their films.⁹⁴ But Kracauer approvingly quotes Bunuel and Fellini using the same metaphor to define their practices to demonstrate cinema's artistic modernity. Bunuel insists "I ask that a film *discovers* something for me."⁹⁵ Fellini remarks, "To do a picture is like leaving for a trip. And the most important part of the trip is what you discover on the way."⁹⁶ The terms "natural history" and "evidence" are also seen by Winston as part of this dubious legacy of quasi-scientific aesthetics. But natural history, according to Benjamin and Adorno as we have shown, is a dialectical practice that converts history into nature to thwart ideology's conception of history at the same time as it converts nature into history. As for evidence, we should remind ourselves of Benjamin's famous claim about Atget's "photographs of deserted Paris streets," that "he photographed them like the scenes of a crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs became standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquired a hidden political significance."⁹⁷ What is at stake here is, of course, not positivism, or indeed the "homogeneous empty time" of

⁹⁴ Winston in *Theorizing*, 46.

⁹⁵ Kracauer, 46.

⁹⁶ Kracauer, 248-9.

⁹⁷ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 108.

social scientists and historians attacked by Benjamin, but an aesthetic operation that seeks to link politics to a certain poetic conception of epistemology.

If we return to Bazin's concept of the fact-image, we might also remember that in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" Bazin explained surrealism's interest in the photograph by proposing that it offered a "hallucination that is also a fact." A fact, according to Bazin, is an autonomous unit of information not only like a photographic image of a flower but also a bus ticket or a piece of newspaper placed on a canvas. A fact is in relation to an aesthetic operation—something that retains the trace of a material and social existence beyond the context it has been placed in. And indeed it was precisely the avant-garde, not the traditional documentary that made the most literal attempts to blur science and art. Kracauer reminds us of this through reference to Germaine Dulac:

A 1927 statement by Germaine Dulac, one of the leading avant-garde artists, is particularly noteworthy for tracing pure cinema to Lumière and elaborating on the sad fact that the lessons of his 'unnarratable' *Arrival of a Train* had not been heeded. Instead of recognizing the new aesthetics inherent in the Lumière brothers camera, she argues, one was content with subordinating it to traditional aesthetics: 'One set out to group animated photographs around an external action... rather than studying for its own sake, the conception of movement in its brutal and mechanical visual continuity... one assimilated the cinema to theater.'⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Kracauer, 178-9.

One is reminded here of the surrealist nature documentaries of Jean Painlevé. It was the very fact that the film was an automatic inscription device, that the uncanny minimal difference between work and effect could be used for the shock effect of surrealist photography and film, in an aesthetic mode that radically undermined the ordered logic of actions that modern fact-based historiography depended on. As Dulac put it: “One could find the very subjects of pure cinema in certain scientific documentaries... dealing for example with the formation of crystals, the trajectory of a bullet.”⁹⁹ The documentary no more needs to separate itself from science than it does from art; rather, what it needs to do is to use one to reimagine the possibilities of the other.

Phrase-Image 1: The Essay

The purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to consider two post-WWII modes of constructing a relationship between text and image, which is to say two modes of connecting silent speech and images as signs for history, two kinds of phrase-images. I have chosen the work of Chris Marker and Frederick Wiseman because they can be grasped as exemplars of two apparently opposed new forms to documentary to emerge in the 50s and 60s—one that gives a central place to written or spoken text and the other that gives place of importance to the capacity for indexical audio-visual images to speak for themselves. Marker’s films placed by Bazin in the tradition of the literary essay are text-based films, often known as the “film essay” or “essay film.” Wiseman, on the other

⁹⁹ Quoted in Kracauer, 180.

hand, is perhaps the most rigorous practitioner of what is called “direct cinema” sometimes related to the practice of *cinéma vérité*.¹⁰⁰ Marker’s work is directly concerned with how images, in Rancière’s words, “play on the analogy and dissemblance between the sayable and the doable.” Therefore text in his films does not function as it did in the “representative regime,” where it was the very meaning of images. Rather, it becomes a way to add and subtract from images by making interpretation a filmic element. At the same time, images become a way of adding and subtracting from text. Wiseman’s films, on the other hand, are generally placed on polar opposite side of documentary practice since “text” in the sense of titles, information and voiceover narration are, in effect, taboo within his films. Besides the title of the film, a minimal generic indicator such as *High School*, *Hospital* or *Domestic Violence*, all language in his films, with very few exceptions, is within the concrete reality of the limited spatio-temporal world of the film’s subject. But, as I hope to show, these two programs of cinematic research or forms of natural history, the one reliant on the disembodied voice to play off the meaning of the image and the other organized around a refusal of this device, are both engaged in operations that expose gaps between the imaginary and symbolic and between text and image.

Marker’s work, which until recently, was threatening to vanish into obscurity, with the exception of the somewhat anomalous photo-roman *La Jetée* (1961), has been

¹⁰⁰ *Cinéma vérité* as understood by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, who used the term in their film *Chronicle of A Summer* (1960), was more explicitly self-reflexive; it did not minimize the presence of the filmmaker in the way of its North American variant that Richard Leacock called “direct cinema.” But the terms “*cinéma vérité*,” “direct cinema,” and *vérité* have been used interchangeably by many filmmakers and scholars to follow.

experiencing an enormous resurgence.¹⁰¹ The most obvious explanation for this is that Marker has always been oriented toward exploring the formal possibilities of what would come to be called “expanded cinema.”¹⁰² From his earliest films in the 1950s, he has been engaged in an essayistic collage aesthetic to explore the possibilities of cinema in relation to historical consciousness in a way that has never been oriented toward the demands of the narrative feature film. Over the years he has mixed archival footage with his own poetic journalism, musical compositions with sound collage and written narration, still photographs and animation; his films have run widely variable lengths from under 5 minutes to over 4 hours, and he has continually experimented with contractions and dilations of space and time in the image through the use of freeze frames, slow-motion, color-tinting and other forms of de-and-re-composition using synthesizers and often deliberately invoking televisual, computer and video game technologies. It is the very things that have made Marker’s films difficult to see over the years since they didn’t fit into the conventional definitions of the feature film or seem to easily accommodate the television clock, that have seen him emerge as a prophet of the new media age of hypertext and installation art. There is nothing of the *Gestamkunstwerk* in Marker’s “expanded cinema” but rather, following Metz’s dismissal of documentary but giving it a different connotation we might say that Marker’s work

¹⁰¹ In Catherine Lupton’s 2005 book *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), she mentions two recent books in French and one in German but says that there has been “no comparable book written in English.” Since then two additional monographs have come out in English by Nora Alter and Sarah Cooper. Following a long period of his films being unavailable, the last few years have seen the release of 5 DVD sets and there has also been increasing attention not only in film magazines like *Film Comment* but also *Art Forum*.

¹⁰² See Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970).

inhabits “border regions” in relation to the “majority” cinema, in Deleuze’s terms, that encompasses not only novelistic feature film, but also the mainstream documentary.

Marker’s name tends to mean two things. He is, if not the inventor, the archetypal practitioner of a certain form which tends to get called the “essay film.” This puts him in a category with filmmakers like Alexander Kluge, Johann Van Der Keuken, Harun Farocki and so forth. At the same time, he is connected to various idiosyncrasies: the cryptic ironic aphorism often presented through a first person female voice and a playful obsession with owls and cats. In Markerian fashion we might start with an obscure link and pose it as a question: What would it look like if one were to make documentary films if the model was not Grierson and Flaherty but Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*? Or what does a cat have to do with history?

To answer these questions, let me first suggest that the essay film, if we wish to call it that, as practiced by Marker is not a genre at all, but a form that situates itself in between genres and forms of art. The paradoxes of locating Marker’s work are the paradoxes of cinema itself and the essay film is a film that takes those paradoxes, cinema’s impurity, as a starting point. What is the essay film? The term is of interest to us because it bridges the so-called “poetic documentary” (which tends to be most associated with films that have either poetic narration and/or rhythmic montage) and the film of ideas or argument. The essay film is neither strictly poetic nor discursive. Its marginality or impurity of form might be grasped as the very basis of how it opens up the concept of documentary form.

But as the term “essay film” has started to gain greater currency, it is best to forestall misunderstanding. *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*, an edited collection on writings on documentary from the 1890s through to the mid-1990s opens its “Section 8,” “The Essayists” with the following:

In the 1950s a new generation of filmmakers began to reject the restrictive notion that documentary was merely a medium for mass communication and social betterment. Instead, they looked at documentary to express strong personal opinions and points of view. Directors like Alain Resnais, Lindsay Anderson, Georges Franju and Chris Marker developed idiosyncratic personal styles, suited to their individual tastes and modes of expression... Unlike most earlier documentaries –which generally aspired to, but failed to find, a wide audience— these films tended towards intellectual elitism.¹⁰³

If we are to take seriously, the essay film as a concept, it is significant to reject this description in its entirety. There is nothing about the essay as form that should imply the “personal,” either in terms opinions or taste, a narrowing of address to a more selective audience, or a retreat from politics. On the contrary, I’d like to propose that Marker’s body of work (like Resnais’ and Franju’s) be seen as impersonal, anti-elitist or rather, democratic and political. We said that the essay film takes cinema’s impurity as its starting point; it is premised on what we might call “the documentary impurity,” which is to say the documentary condition of all fiction and the fictional condition of all documentary.

¹⁰³Kevin Macdonald and Marc Cousins, *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

Philip Lopate in his 1998 essay “In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film” attempts to define this genre which he treats as a rare beast. Unlike *The Faber Book of Documentary* he sees the essay-film not as an aristocratic discourse but as an attempt at “conversation,” but he does insist on the essay as both “personal” and explicit in its intentions. He wishes to separate the essay film with its “single authorial voice”¹⁰⁴ from films whose formal methods are composed of “quotation, appropriation and collage.” An essay-film must “tell us what its author thinks”¹⁰⁵ and whatever its playfulness and use of digression it is unified by “a synthesizing personal voice with its old-fashioned humanist assumptions.”¹⁰⁶ For a film to qualify as an essay, the author cannot withhold “the fullness of his thoughts.”¹⁰⁷

For Lopate, Marker is seen as the “cinema’s one true essayist” and *Sans Soleil* “perhaps the one masterpiece of the essay film genre.” That *Sans Soleil* doesn’t conform to his idea of the essay as a clear statement of the author’s personal opinion is noted by Lopate but does not effect his definition. Remarking on the film’s emblematic status, he writes, “How ironic then, that Marker chooses the fictive strategy of a woman’s voice reading the letters of a friend.”¹⁰⁸ On the contrary, I would suggest that this is precisely what makes *Sans Soleil* emblematic; the “I” in it is not the coherent self of possessive individualism that directly tells us his opinion, but is rather an *impersonal* “I,” an “I” relayed through a multiplicity of voices. This does not mean an absence of the author

¹⁰⁴ Philip Lopate, “In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film,” in *Beyond Document*, ed. Charles Warren, 253.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

function, but rather it is an author function that is an arena or space for something to take place between the film and the viewer. Writing about the written essay Adorno captures this aspect of the concept of the essay: “Actually, the thinker does not think, but rather makes himself into an arena of intellectual experience, without unraveling it.”¹⁰⁹ This “arena of intellectual experience” is another way of talking about “montage” or the “phrase-image.”

The concept of the essay film goes back at least to the 1920s and Eisenstein’s “Notes for a Film on ‘*Capital*’” in which he refers to *October* as “a collection of essays.”¹¹⁰ Hans Richter is often thought to be the first to explicitly use the term “film essay” in a piece written in 1940. Before Bazin would use the term as if it were one he had invented to describe Marker’s *Letter to Siberia* (1958), Richter described a “new form of documentary,” which he called “Der Filmessay” that is not interested in “beautiful vistas” but rather representing “intellectual content.”¹¹¹ This type of film would not show things simply as they are but rather would “shape ideas on the screen.” The essay, according to Richter, opens to a larger “reservoir of expressive means” than the traditional documentary because it is not bound by external appearances or chronology.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Adorno, “The Essay as Form” in *Notes To Literature Volume 1*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Volymbis University Press, 1991), 13.

¹¹⁰ Eisenstein, “Notes for a film of Capital,” *October* Vol. 2 (Summer 1976), 4.

¹¹¹ Hans Richter, “Der Filmessay. Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms,” in *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film*, Eds. Christa Blumlinger and Constantin Wulff, Wein: Sonderzahl, 1992, 195-198.

¹¹² In *Struggle for the Film*, Richter includes the essay within his taxonomy of documentary, but the only example of a film essay he gives is Sacha Guitry’s *Roman d’un Tricheur*, which is not a documentary in any conventional sense. Guitry’s fictional memoir is episodic and its playful tone is derived from the relation between narration and image. Guitry might be seen as a precursor to the lineage of forger protagonists that Deleuze sees as central to the “power of false.”

Alexander Astruc's famous essay "The Birth of a New Avant-garde: La Caméra-Stylo" of 1948 is also cited as a precursor to the conception of the essay film. Film, according to Astruc, when it comes into its own and is no longer merely a record of a profilmic event, becomes a language "by which an artist can express his thoughts however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary novel or essay."¹¹³ As the example of the novel suggests, Astruc did not associate this new avant-garde with the documentary in particular; rather, the "metaphor," in Astruc's words, of the "stylo" refers to cinema as a medium "flexible and subtle" enough to directly express a wide range of thoughts and ideas without illustrating them. For Astruc, as for Richter, this new type of film implies a break from what Rancière identifies as a central component of the representative regime, the image as illustration, toward a combination of image and text for new forms of cinematic ideas. So Astruc insists that cinema will stop borrowing from the popular novel or theater and will "break from the tyranny of the visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate concrete demands of the narrative."¹¹⁴ Instead, "the most philosophical mediations of human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions will lie within its province."¹¹⁵ For Astruc this is directly connected to new modes of distribution that will allow anyone "to go to a local bookstore and hire films written on any subject, of

¹¹³ Alexander Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-garde: La Caméra-Stylo," in *The New Wave* (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc, 1968), 18.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

any form, from literary criticism and novels, to mathematics, history and general science.”¹¹⁶

Astruc sets the precedent for which the essay film, as Laura Rascoroli has observed, has been continuously theorized for over 60 years as a new form or a form to come.¹¹⁷ The essay in both Richter and Astruc is shorthand for film being able to directly express thoughts of any kind and an expansion of cinema’s capabilities beyond the narrowly representational one. If the essay is always a form to come, it is because it is an in-between form engaged in research on the difference between film as it is and film as it could be. We might say that once it can be limited to a certain set of codes and conventions like the first person diary film, for example, it is no longer essayistic. This is not to say that any new form is essayistic. What differentiates the film essay from other forms of cinema called avant-garde is that it thematizes the very process of its own attempt at testing the capacity of cinema to disrupt the logic of conventional forms. In other words, it explicitly tests the possibility of making theory through cinema or imagining cinema as a resource for theory.

Marker, who never liked the term “documentary,” compares his montage method to Pierre Schaeffer’s ideas of concrete music. Schaeffer defined “musique concrete” in terms opposing “the way musical work normally goes. Instead of notating musical ideas on paper with the symbols of solfege and entrusting their realization to well-known instruments, the question was to collect concrete sounds wherever they came from, and to

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “The Essay Film as Sublime Theoretical Paradox: Birth and Evolution of an Idea,” Laura Rascoroli, Udine Conference XVI, 2009.

abstract the musical values they were potentially containing.”¹¹⁸ The script as the starting point for musical composition meant going from the abstract to the concrete. Music concrete went the other direction, it created the abstract out of the concrete. This was possible according to Schaeffer because of the arts of technological reproducibility. “Repeat the same sonic fragment: there is not an event anymore, there is music.”¹¹⁹

This is the same logic as Rancière’s conception of documentary. It starts with the real as raw material for the effects of montage, or we could say, difference and repetition. Indeed, this is also the idea behind Astruc’s “camera stylo”—not finally the analogy with written language, as is sometimes claimed, but the simple idea that films are not derived or adapted from a script but create their own writing. But films creating their own writing, according to Astruc in 1946, no longer meant a pure cinema of the visual as it meant for the prophets of the silent era like Epstein and Deluc. Rather this concept of the essay film emerges from the idea that the means of film include not only actuality, both visual and sonic, but also written and spoken language.

If there were a filmic equivalent of concrete music, it would be something like Ferdinand Leger’s *Ballet Mechanique*, but the introduction of the word into cinema exponentially expands the potential for montage. Marker shares with Schaeffer both the idea of the semi-autonomy of the concrete fragment, which, in a sense, literalizes Bazin’s fact-image, or makes it concrete, and the interest in the transformation that occurs when the concrete event is repeated. According to Marker, “The starting point [is] the

¹¹⁸ “Pierre Schaeffer, 1910-1995: The Founder of Music Concrete,” Jean de Reydellet, *Computer Music Journal*, Volume 20, No. 2, Summer 1996, 10.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Carlos Palombini, “Machine Songs V: Pierre Schaeffer: From Reaseach Into Noises to Experimental Music,” *Computer Music Journal*, Vol 17 No 3, August 1993, 15.

independence of... facts” that are encountered.¹²⁰ The use in Marker’s films of photos, of synthesizers to transform the image, of narration and text are not as they are in typical documentaries a way of filling in information, generating continuity or jazzing up the potentially dry genre, but rather to freeze movement, repeat it, and thereby to question the temporality of the image. The title of Marker’s essay on *Vertigo*, found within his CD-Rom *Immemory*, “A Free Replay” captures what fascinates him about cinema, the ability to repeat. This is precisely what is afforded by the documentary, to revisit the same image, but to transform it in the process. The essay for Marker, whether film or text or something in between, is a space for remediation. The repetition for Marker is not merely to transform the event into music or rather rhythmic form in a broader sense, but to play the event against itself and against written or spoken text, other images, and indeed music. The aesthetic tension of documentary fiction is summed up by a statement by Cocteau that Marker was especially fond of: “Seeing as these things are beyond us, let’s pretend to be the organizer of them”¹²¹

Andre Bazin approaching Marker’s 1958 *Letter from Siberia* says that it “resembles absolutely nothing that we have ever seen before in films with a documentary basis—films with a ‘subject.’” He finally decides to call it “an essay documented by film. The important word is ‘essay,’ understood in the same sense that it understood in literature—an essay at once historical and political, written by a poet.” It is a “new notion of montage, which I will call horizontal... Here a given image does not refer to the

¹²⁰ R. Ritterbusch, “An Interview with Chris Marker,” in *Chris Marker*, Nora M. Alter (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 132.

¹²¹ Quoted in Lupton, *Chris Marker*, 105.

one that precedes it or to the one that will follow, but rather it refers laterally, in some way, to what is said... The montage flows from ear to eye.”¹²² While the verbal text, as Bazin suggests, is primary, the relation is still horizontal unlike the vertical relation between text and image Bazin had identified in a 1946 essay on the Capra-produced *Why We Fight* series.

Horizontality refers precisely to a new relation between words and images no longer in an arrangement of hierarchy. For Marker, the precursor here is Dziga Vertov. We have remarked how Vertov banished text for a pure language of images in *Man With a Movie Camera*, but for Marker the great film is the earlier *A Sixth of a World* (1926). In a short statement entitled “Let Us Praise Dziga Vertov” Marker pays tribute to Vertov for letting us see “not only the faces, the gestures, the segments of life, but words also, words suddenly alive.” Vertov emerges for Marker as filmmaker of equality not primarily because he propagandized for a classless society in mold of the Soviet Union, but because he instituted a new distribution of the sensible in which the Kino-Eye and Kino-Ear leveled the materiality of sensuous life. Marker’s poetic tribute continues: “Words achieving equality with images/ ideas achieving equality with facts/ art achieving equality with life/ How do you say that in Russian?/DZIGA VERTOV”¹²³ “Dziga Vertov” is, of course, the name signed by the filmmaker born Denis Kaufman, but this handle or marker, if you will, also means “spinning top” in Russian, which is to say, the name of the filmmaker as part object, the internal mechanism of disjunctive synthesis. As Bill Nichols reminds us, “Vertov did not need to coin a word like ‘documentary,’

¹²² Andre Bazin, “Bazin on Marker,” trans. Dave Kehr in *Film Comment* (July / August 2003), 44.

¹²³ See Nora Alter, *Chris Marker*, 136.

since, for him, his films embodied the essence of cinema.”¹²⁴ This should make us pause when we think of “cinéma vérité” (as a translation for kino pravda) as specific mode of documentary filmmaking.

But the Russian filmmaker most associated with Marker’s work is Alexander Medvedkin. The importance of Medvedkin is less his films themselves than an idea of how it was possible to make them by bringing the means of production to the people and allowing them to tell their own stories. Medvedkin’s kino-trains, according to Marker, “invented television,” but as a radically democratic medium. Medvedkin takes Vertov’s concept of cinéma vérité one step further as the director makes possible not the equal linking of concrete words and images from heterogeneous forms of life but a communal film studio in which communities are able to collectively create their own images. After May 68 and in implicit response to Godard and Gorin’s Dziga Vertov Group, Marker helped facilitate the Medvedkine Group that gave workers access to the means of production to create their own auteurless cinema.

The sequence of radical politics that produced the Medvedkine project became the subject of a retrospective film by Marker in 1977 called *A Grin Without a Cat*.¹²⁵ The English title of Marker’s *Le Fond de L’air Est Rouge* is a phrase that suggests the subtractive orientation of the image, the lingering enigmatic trace of that which had been but is no longer visible. The cat, which one of Marker’s narrators tells us, “is never on the side of power” is the vanished body behind the lingering affect. We can also think of

¹²⁴ Bill Nichols, *Introduction To Documentary*, 144.

¹²⁵ The title choice in English is Marker’s own. Marker has consistently made English language versions of his films.

Godard's subtractive claim about the violence in *Weekend*, "It's not blood, it's red," which should put us in mind of the French title of Marker's film which literally translates as "The Ground or Base of the Air is Red." The red is of course both blood and communism and the problem is one of our inability to see the image for what it is. It is a problem of figure and ground ("le fond") or not knowing where to look, or what to extract from moving images.

"You never know what you are filming," the narrator tells us more than once. The subtitle of the film "Scenes of the Third World War 1967-1977" covers the decade that roughly corresponds to the heyday of Marxist semiotic film theory. Marker does not directly analyze films or film theory but *Grin* is an analysis of the connections and disjunctions between theory, politics and cinema during this period. The film opens with a montage juxtaposing a sequence from *Potemkin* ending in a triumphant gesture of solidarity ("Brothers!") with images of mass protest from 1967. Then the Odessa Steps sequence is intercut with a series of images of police violence from the late 60s in each case rhyming the two images, the violent contemporary images are now tinted yellow as if they were outtakes from Eisenstein's film. The gap between these two moments is not merely the gap between representation and reality; rather the gap between history and cinema becomes highlighted in both sets of images in different ways. The "fact" of these scenes from *Potemkin* for the movements of 67 and 68 is their history as images of solidarity and repression. If the still raw scenes of recent events are in effect placed in a fictional film, it is to show the aura of myth that has surrounded them in the 10 years that

have elapsed since then. The montage suggests that a new image of hope needs to be sought in the obscure signs in the margins of these images that always end in repression.

Phrase-Image 2: Indirect Cinema

Frederick Wiseman's films are, in effect, the dialectical antithesis of Marker's. If, as Richter put it, the essay film has more expressive means than the traditional documentary because it is not bound by "external appearances" it is the strength of "direct cinema" to rigorously restrict itself to external appearances. This is not, as certain knee-jerk critiques of realism have it, an accepting of appearances or an unreflective belief in their veracity, but a testing of appearances to reveal the gap within appearance itself.

While Wiseman is often referred to as a direct cinema purist, among the filmmakers most often associated with the movement, he has perhaps been the most aggressive deflationist about the notion that the films provide direct access to either the real or "verité." He insists emphatically that documentary is a kind of fiction and rejects the legacy of documentary as part of a project for social betterment. As he puts it, "Documentaries like plays, novels and poems are fictional in form and have no measurable social utility."¹²⁶ Or taking a different tone in an interview he claims that his films are "totally subjective" and that the claim about objectivity in direct cinema is "a lot of bullshit."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ *Imagining Reality*, 282.

¹²⁷ Quoted in Winston, *Claiming the Real*, 161.

Brian Winston suggests that this is Wiseman, the former-lawyer's canny if disingenuous response, to the legal trouble of his first film *Titicut Follies* (1968)¹²⁸ as well as the sharp criticisms that emerged of the quasi-scientific discourse of non-intervention and a window onto spontaneous events as they transpire that came from Drew, Leacock and others. Did Wiseman learn his lesson making him switch from a rhetoric claiming a critique of institutional authority to one that is only looking for the pathos of human drama? And is this rhetoric extrinsic to the operations of filming and editing? For Winston, whatever Wiseman's rhetoric, the films themselves still participated in "culturally implicit claims to objectivity"¹²⁹ through the use of black and white, handheld camera, as well as "the long takes, the lack of commentary, music and post-sync sound effects, the absence of cinematic lighting, the understated titles."¹³⁰ His damning conclusion is that "Direct cinema hides its processes, as much, if not more, than Hollywood."¹³¹

It is worth pausing over Winston's argument, because it is a common one extending the political modernist critiques of "naïve realism" into a critique of "direct cinema." Why is the lack of narration and signifiers for the presence of the filmmaker immediate signs of ideology and deception? We know, of course, the answer: reality television or more broadly the tropes of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema as so many stylistic markers for the unmediated to dupe the masses who lack the literacy to recognize filmic conventions.

¹²⁸ From 1968 to 1991 *Titicut Follies*, Wiseman's portrait of Bridgewater, could not be legally distributed due to laws concerning "patient privacy."

¹²⁹ Winston, *Claiming*, 163

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 162.

¹³¹ *Ibid*.

But we should remember that the ideology of direct cinema as “uncontrolled” emerged within a specific context rejecting in particular two modes of dominant “non-fiction” narrative: 1) It was a response to suspicions over the meaning of narration overcoding images in a new age of television news; 2) It was a response to the limitations of a documentary cinema that had developed largely organized around reenactments or tightly controlled environments. Indeed, like the essay film, it was a response to any form of documentary filmmaking that, following the logic of the representative regime, was largely dependant on a script. We should add that this old regime of documentary was at least partially attributable to the economic and technological limitations of documentary filmmaking before the advent of handheld 16mm cameras and portable tape recorders. It is no accident that the recent digital revolution—which is less significantly about the disappearance of photo-chemical processes than new possibilities for production, exhibition and distribution of moving images—has seen a revival and transformation of both essayistic and direct cinema practices. Both direct cinema and essayistic cinema are forms of cinema from below, which is not to say that the tropes identified with them cannot be appropriated by hierarchical practices.

As for the common critique of these films, to point out that direct cinema only exposed aspects of life previously excluded from representation without in fact doing away with representation *tout court* in a, in Winston’s words, “Griersonian equivalent of ‘the end of history’” only places the justifications for it as “unmediated” in a venerable tradition of hyperbolic claims for new modes of aesthetic realism. Still Winston’s critique

might function more effectively were it restricted to a critique not of direct cinema itself but its discourse, the inflated claims for immediacy that accompanied the emergence of the movement. But why should we think of hand-held camera or the forgoing of narration and extra-diegetic effects, as an implicit claim that the film has escaped ideology?

The TV news is constantly interpreting what we see for us and reminding us of its position of enunciation, perhaps not its corporate ownership and dependency on advertising (but these too are sometimes acknowledged), but at least its star anchors (who with the influence of cable news are more and more allowed to be the proud bearers of “subjective opinions”) and the network that brings the news to us. Direct cinema might then simply be seen as the precarious negation of dominant modes of enunciation reliant on the very thing it challenges by buying into a concept of the real. And this negation is one that the dominant modes also rely on as “live” moments and raw footage are offered to us by the TV news as crisis moments when the real has intruded on to the scene of the news-as-usual. One only needs to think of news on September 11, 2001.

Winston connects Wiseman and direct cinema to the ideology of the Griersonian tradition, as the original sin of documentary and the tradition of sobriety. Though he is critical of it as well, he is willing to separate Rouch and *cinéma vérité* from this tradition, because *cinéma vérité* puts the filmmaker in the film, involved participation with its subjects, and questioned its own processes within the films themselves. We are reminded that *cinéma vérité* is a translation of Vertov’s *Kino Pravda* and therefore in a tradition of explicitly politically committed cinema rather than ideological neutrality. But Winston

fails to remind us that it was Vertov who first demanded a cinema of pure images freed from narration, intertitles and interpretive hierarchies. Vertov is often cited for the placement of cameraman and editing process within the film in *Man With a Movie Camera* but this can be grasped not as “the return of the apparatus in flesh and blood,” as Baudry put it, but an equation of filmmaking with other forms of life.

Paul Arthur, following Winston, locates direct cinema in a tradition of documentary realism that extends back to the nineteenth century novel.

Succeeding styles tend to repudiate the methods of earlier periods from the same perspective of realist epistemology attending the 19th century bourgeois novel’s ‘attempt to get beyond language,’ the absolute desire to uncover a truth not tainted by institutional rhetoric. Or as Brian Winston suggests of the cinematic conventions arising from this effort: ‘the need for structure implicitly contradicts the notion of unstructured reality’ and documentary movements are sustained by ignoring this contradiction.’¹³²

But if we see this contradiction, as Rancière does, as part of not only the realist, but also the modernist, novel and indeed the very concept of modern art then we can how the contradictions in Wiseman’s project are used as part of an aesthetic strategy to highlight the contradictions that structure the American institutions he documents.

And indeed, considering the familiarity of verité tropes, it is remarkable how sui generis Wiseman’s project is. What is this body of work? The subjects of his films—a mental institution, high school, police force, hospital, military unit, retail store, etc.—are

¹³² Paul Arthur, “Jargons of Authenticity,” in Renov ed. *Theorizing the Documentary*, 109.

all confined to a milieu, usually a public but sometimes a commercial institution. We are placed within this milieu without any explanation or context and though it is a particular place at a particular time, for example Northeast High School in Philadelphia during 5 weeks from March to April 1968, the particular is presented as the general by withholding the details of the specific time and place and through the title, merely *High School*. Wiseman's lightweight camera and shooting practices are used to assume as unobtrusive presence as possible. No one in a Wiseman film ever looks directly into the camera or acknowledges the presence of the filmmakers. Nor do the filmmakers ever acknowledge their own presence. Unless something in the profilmic gives a clue, the viewer is unlikely to know where or when the film takes place from the film text itself, nor would he or she be aware that Wiseman is shooting with only one camera or that the shooting ratio averages about 20:1.¹³³ But his films are not what Benjamin called an "equipment free version of reality." Rather they are all about "equipment," not primarily that of cinema itself, but of rules and regulations, forms and files. Wiseman is recording or registering moments that are not typically recorded by film, but are recorded in different ways through statistics. And while his films do not explain what we are seeing, what we are seeing are very often encounters that are about the generating of explanation. The struggle to control and define the meaning of what we are seeing is the very drama of the scenes in Wiseman's films. If Chris Marker stages this drama through calling attention to the filmmaking process as a way of interrogating the image, Wiseman interrogates the real through the speech and gestures of the subjects within his films.

¹³³ Barry Keith Grant, *Voyages of Discovery*, 24.

Wiseman functions as a test case for subtracting the voice of mastery. This, more than anything else, defines direct cinema and the contemporaneous movements with which it has a family resemblance. American direct cinema, British Free Cinema, French *cinéma vérité*, the Candid Eye films of the National Film Board of Canada or the “living cinema” of Quebec, whatever their differences, shared at least a desire for a kind of proximity to profilmic events as they transpire now enabled by the availability of portable cameras and tape recorders (and ultimately sync sound). But as Wiseman’s films show, this proximity is always in a dialectic with distance.

What Wiseman forgoes in relation to his well-known contemporaries, the other North American filmmakers most associated with the direct cinema movement, is the drama of the crisis and/or the aura of the individual as a structuring principle. The crisis format, explicitly acknowledged in the title of the film *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963), was intended by Robert Drew as less a new kind of cinema than a revolution in television journalism—dramatic inside access to how decisions within mainstream American politics take place as opposed to explication of what had transpired. The often remarkable films by Drew, Leacock, the Maysles brothers, D. A. Pennebaker, Wolf Koenig, such as *Lonely Boy*, *Grey Gardens*, *Meet Marlon Brando*, *Don’t Look Back* and *Gimme Shelter* tend to be studies of celebrity that, like Wiseman’s films, seize moments in which the indexical dimension of the films show the gaps in the iconic and symbolic dimensions. In other words, elements of concrete reality or fact-images are, pace Paul Arthur and Brian Winston, deliberately used to create a tension with the elements of structure both in the filmmaking processes and within society itself.

Of the works by these filmmakers, perhaps the Maysles' *Salesman* (1968) comes closest to being assimilable to Wiseman's project. *Salesman* does not follow a celebrity but rather an individual that stands in for an ordinary American occupation that finds its subtle drama in the transaction or negotiation of a contract between individuals, in this case the door-to-door Bible salesman and his many clients. But *Salesman* continues the Maysles project of portraits of the American personality in relation to success, whereas Wiseman's films never give a central place of importance to particular individuals.

Sticking to just the North American component of the movement, the obvious exception here would be Québécois filmmakers Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault. The most well-known collaborations between these two filmmakers, namely the remarkable Ile-aux-Coudres trilogy are not about individuals but collective subjects, yet they do share an element of the "crisis" format as the films are structured around the creation of an event. This is what accounts for Deleuze's interest in them and their connection to Rouch's films. The event is, in effect, created by the film rather than the film merely observing it. Wiseman, it might be claimed, is vulnerable to Deleuze's objection to films that film an "already existing reality" rather than a pure time-image. But what Deleuze says about Rouch and Perrault is true of Wiseman: the characters are not viewed either objectively or subjectively—they are neither objectified nor are they figures of identification. The reality in Wiseman's films does not "already exist" but nor is it capturing or creating events. Rather his films construct a sense of synchronic time outside of narrative linearity. For Deleuze, the significance of the "reality" of the characters in Perrault or Rouch is that the film documents their own fiction making or

story-telling capacity. This is the case with Wiseman too, but the fictions his characters create are within modern bureaucratic society rather than worlds on the edge of society as they tend to be in Rouch and Perrault and were in Flaherty. Wiseman maintains a distance that Rouch or Perrault try to breach, which may make him more susceptible to the claim that his style enforces a sense of neutrality. Rather, I think we should ask: what is cinematic about this distance? The automatism of the camera that lends itself to a mode of silent witness plays against the mechanical assemblage of life inside bureaucratic institutions. Wiseman plays on the weak intensities of gestures found in mindless habits within the logic of the economy of specific institutions.

His films are organized around a place rather than individuals, usually what would qualify as an “ideological state apparatus.” The institution as Nichols notes, provides “the diegetic plane of spatial and temporal unity” for the study of “an ensemble of social relations.”¹³⁴ By keeping the space and time unspecified, his films are never about crisis but always about business as usual. What Wiseman’s films are interested in finally is not just an “ensemble of social relations” but a litigious collective subject. The information we get in Wiseman’s films is about what counts as information. At the same time, the films also offer us gestures that don’t count as information. And it is in the space between what counts as information and what is rendered “inexistent” within it that the films find their phrase-images.

Wiseman’s cinema might more accurately be called indirect cinema. The fascination with the transpiring of events is marked by the camera’s silence, by a

¹³⁴ Bill Nichols, “Fred Wiseman’s Documentaries: Theory and Structure,” *Film Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 3, (Spring 1978), 22.

withholding of judgment. We should view the absence of the traditional explanatory devices of documentary, in particular narration and on screen text, not as facile indicators of immediacy and the real, but rather as part of a subtractive aesthetic that draws out the contradictions of activity and passivity that mark the history of cinema aesthetics.

Directness yields indirectness. A taxonomy of the uncountable is not a capitulation to positivist sociology, or the ideology of science, but part of a politics of aesthetics that might be just as easily linked to Painleve's surrealist science films or Godard's surveys.

Even when Wiseman's films seem most marked as "critical" this marking occurs through silence, the mute evidence of the unmarked gesture speaks for other unmarked gestures. The films are, as he claims, natural histories. Let's take a look at two scenes from his second film *High School* (1968) in which a critical perspective seems explicit.

In a medium shot a male gynecologist addressing a boys' assembly uses his pointer figure to demonstrate a gynecological examination of a young female patient and responding to laughter and hooting from the auditorium says, "I happen to be a gynecologist and get paid to do it." One result of the lack of commentary is to heighten awareness of the speech of the subjects of the films. Later in the talk as he starts to lecture the boys on their "responsibility" the camera closes in on his wagging pointer finger. The close-up of the pointer finger performs an explicitly critical act. It separates two points, the one the film is making from the one being made by the gynecologist. By linking the gesture of making a moral point to the obscene and rather violent pleasure of the gesture of the performance of the gynecological examination, a silent minority viewpoint is offered to undermine the reception he appears to be getting from the crowd.

In the process, the moralizing about men taking “responsibility” given their natural role as “aggressor” in relation to the “passive” sex is shown to be less a genuine concern for the welfare of young women who have to endure the results of unwanted sex and/or pregnancy than a rhetorical front for a kind of authoritative masculine posturing with a perverse underside. The cinematographic gesture of the close-up makes a physical gesture undermine its intentions.

In another scene, a youngish English teacher uses a Simon and Garfunkel song, “Dangling Conversation,” to teach poetry that she introduces and then plays for the class on a reel-to-reel tape deck. On the one hand, this marks a contrast to an older teacher in an earlier scene who stiffly reads the entirety of “Casey at the Bat.” In both cases poetry is being introduced to the students through a popular idiom that is perhaps meant to make it more accessible, but in the first case we have the monotone of the older lady reading a poem of questionable literary merit that has no discernible interest for either the reader or her audience and in the second a younger professor whose affect betrays the fact that she is introducing the students to something that has meaning for her and in a way that is more clearly meant to impress them. While the song plays we see close-up of silent students looking bored or tired. If this affect is not properly conveyed by the students’ slumped posture or glazed eyes that we know from the Kuleshov effect could be taken for pensive or even entranced, Wiseman clarifies his own interpretation through a close-up of a student’s watch. We do not see the student looking at the watch herself so the attentive viewer may find the camera’s gesture of questionable or even misleading motivation.

“Dangling Conversation” continues playing non-diegetically as we cut from the classroom to the hallway and view a female janitor mopping the floor.

The Simon and Garfunkel song, “Dangling Conversation” from their album *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme* also evokes and creates a contrast with the one other pop song we hear in the film: Otis Redding’s “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay” which opens the film. The opening is the only time we are outside the school, a tracking shot through Philadelphia. Wiseman’s films are typically either bookended or merely begin or end with these sorts of external establishing shots that function in the place of text to orient the viewer as to the environment of the particular institution whose walls we will remain within for the duration of the film. In *High School* we can surmise that this travelling shot is shot through a car window and the song might be interpreted as playing on a car stereo on a ride to the school.

Both “Dangling Conversation” and “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay” are songs about impotence or ennui but “Dangling Conversation” is a mellow folky pop song in a minor key about white bourgeois malaise that mocks the pretensions of literary but superficial adults while admittedly being implicated in them at the same time. As Wiseman’s watch shot suggests all-too-bluntly it’s unlikely that the students we observe relate to lyrics like “And you read your Emily Dickensen/And I my Robert Frost” or “Can analysis be worth while/Is the theater really dead?”; whereas, it is much more likely speaking directly to the English teacher herself who looks to be in her early twenties. “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay,” on the other hand, is also a mellow pop song about malaise and ambivalence but it’s a soulful lament that evokes the history of African

Americans and suggests a moment of resigned pleasure in escape from society following a period of disillusionment and struggle with impossible demands.

In 1968, Simon and Garfunkel on a film soundtrack also evokes *The Graduate*, the commercial and critical hit film, starring a young Dustin Hoffman and directed by Mike Nichols, from the previous year. “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay” is thus an emblem of an opposed idea of the sixties counterculture, one connected directly to the civil rights struggle rather than the stylized representation of ennui of a graduate from a top Northeast private college within his home environment in an affluent white suburb of Los Angeles. The continuation of “Dangling Conversation” following the cut to the janitor mopping the floor is a rare moment of seemingly non-diegetic music and can be grasped as another explicitly critical gesture. On the one hand, the young English teacher is distinguished from much of the more explicitly conservative forms of instilling unconscious discipline we see from most of the other authority figures we encounter in the school; but, on the other hand, through the shot of the janitor to the tune of Simon and Garfunkle, Wiseman suggests a critical approach to the other option she offers: a anodyne cultural form of resistance that whatever its advantages to the demands of “being a man” or “lady-like” from some of the older teachers and administrators we observe, similarly skirts the realities of class divisions that are right in front of the students’ eyes.

By relinquishing the voice of mastery, Wiseman has to find a way to cinematically punctuate to emphasize a point. As Ranciere points out, Marker too has to “double code” to make sure we can read how an image speaks for itself.¹³⁵ Wiseman, in

¹³⁵ Rancière, *Film Fables*, 168.

effect, does the same thing through the close-up of the wagging finger or the watch. Is this cheating? It is possible that Wiseman himself thought so. Compare *High School* to *High School II* (1994), in which these gestures of pointed close-ups or punctuated editing are abandoned as they are in all of Wiseman's late films. Wiseman tries in his later films to create a social gestus without recourse to cinematic modes of narrative economy. The increasing length of these films might be a symptom of the forgoing of more traditional cinematic strategies. What is needed in late Wiseman is more time to replicate an experience that he no longer wishes to abbreviate in the same way with montage and *mise-en-scène*.¹³⁶

For Rancière, the politics of art is found not in the struggle of wills and interests, which he calls “the police,” but in the distance it takes from it. Wiseman's films are centrally about struggles of wills and interests but we locate his metapolitics through his phrase images that counter the logic that equates politics and power by isolating gestures, both bodily and spoken, empty space and time and through associations drawn out by formal patterns in the synchronous mosaic structure. If there is diachrony in Wiseman's work it is over the course of his films. *High School II* becomes a comment on *High School* as we encounter a progressive school in the early 90s largely composed of students of color in New York City who are encouraged to organize their own projects and even their own punishments. If the long takes and reserved camera in *High School II* offers little of the pointed and humorous critique we find in *High School*, for the same

¹³⁶ For another interesting example of the need for increasing length in films that relinquish certain conventional forms of mastery, see also the late films of Peter Watkins, especially *The Journey* and *La Commune*.

reason it equally lacks more utopian or sentimental gestures. The restrained camera demands patience with the very project the school is engaged in. Both films end with speeches by administrators and the spoken dialogue that concludes each film might serve to reveal the differences that Wiseman captures. *High School* ends with the line: “We are very successful at Northeast High. I think you’ll agree with me.” In *High School II* the final words are, “So that’s, so that’s the idea we are struggling with: How to create a school that’s powerful enough to turn kids on to the possible power of ideas in their lives.”

Wiseman and Marker offer us two kinds of phrase-images. Marker’s films play with the capacity of text to add and subtract from images and for images to add and subtract from text to create contestation out of our shared relation to history. Wiseman’s films play with the capacity for gestures and unspoken associations to disrupt the logic of automatism and create contestation over our shared relation to bureaucracy. In both cases, the documentary is a means for new forms of film fictions that test the idea that the meaning of images is always a source of potential contestation.

Chapter 5: Cinematic Equality: From Vertov to Warhol to Kiarostami

Drawing from work fleshed out over the previous chapters, strongly indebted to Badiou and Rancière, I propose that we consider the politics of cinema not in terms of political content, either the machinations of government, the pursuit or exploitation of power, or the struggles of wills and interests, or in terms of how a particular film can be credited with calculable political effects by raising awareness or inciting a call to action, but rather in the ways that cinema can reorganize collective modes of experience and give form to an in-existent equality. For Badiou and Rancière, the axiom of equality is the basic political principle. Equality is to be presumed, taken as axiomatic, not seen as a goal, but equality is still in relation to inequality because political action posits something that does not exist and follows through on its consequences. It therefore opens up a gap between what exists and does not exist between actual inequality and virtual equality.

According to Rancière, art is not to be confused with political action but it has a politics, paradoxically, by virtue of its very distance from the realm of what is normally understood by political action. By suspending how sensory modes are shared and divided and the rules and organization of common sense and experience, art can offer resources to political imagination and projects of emancipation. It shares with politics an interest in rearranging the terrain of the seeable, sayable and doable, of making visible or conceivable a new framework of sensory experience in favor of equality, of affirming or inscribing capacity and possibility where it is usually denied. It is at this level that I want to raise the question of the politics of cinema.

In this chapter, which functions as a conclusion to this dissertation, I will propose a genealogy of “cinematic equality” as way of setting up the terms that allow us to look at how the work the contemporary Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami offers ways of disturbing the distribution of the sensible today.

The Three Terms of Cinematic Equality

Equality in cinema can be affirmed by linking three separate terms: 1) the filmmaker or auteur function; 2) the filmed subjects—people or objects, sometimes called actors, and; 3) the spectators or audience, both individually and as a collective. With this in mind, I’d like to propose three moments in a history of what I am calling cinematic equality, which is to say, specifically cinematic projects that affirm the equal capacity of anyone against a proper apportionment of sensory perception, understanding and capability.

Any Person Can Lay Claim to Being Filmed

The first moment comes in the couple Walter Benjamin/Dziga Vertov. And can be found in Benjamin’s statement that, “Any person today can lay claim to being filmed” or, as he also puts it, “every person has an entitlement to be reproduced.”¹ In the second version of Benjamin’s famous essay, “The Work of Art In The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” published in 1935, he proposes that the distinctions between amateur and expert, consumer and producer are breaking down. Using the example of letters to

¹ Benjamin, “The Work of Art In The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” in *Selected Writings* Vol. 3, 114.

the editor in daily newspapers, he suggests that the reader “as an expert... gains access to authorship,”² a process which, as he sees it, has been accelerated with the advent of cinema. Expertise, according to Benjamin, is inherent to the spectatorship of film, an artform that is understood immediately by the masses without the class requirements and higher education that are needed for the appreciation of a now waning experience of beautiful semblance in the bourgeois work of art.

This claim that anyone and everyone is entitled to be reproduced was at odds with most common understandings of what it means to be in a film. Leaning either on the old theatrical tradition of professional acting or the emerging discourse of celebrity, being in a film meant in 1935, as it still usually does, being an actor or a star. In contrast, Benjamin looked to Soviet cinema for his model that he insisted was in some sense inherent to the transformations in sense perception brought about by capitalist modernity. According to Benjamin, “Some of the actors taking part in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray *themselves*—and primarily in their own work process. In western Europe today, the capitalist exploitation of film obstructs the human being’s legitimate claim to being reproduced.”³

We might notice here a slippage from author to subject (from our first to our second term) in the analogy of the letter to the editor with the worker portrayed on film. The letter to the editor implies that anyone can be an author, whereas the worker portrayed on film is not him or herself a filmmaker. Indeed, this distinction is significant to critiques of ethnographic filmmaking in which the relation between filmer and filmed

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

is recognized as an unequal power relation. Nonetheless, it is a slippage that Benjamin would see as intrinsic to the new art of mechanical reproduction in which the image of the artist/author genius is no longer an appropriate criteria of evaluation. For Benjamin, the human body on screen also had a claim to authorship of the film as it made possible the capacity for self-representation or, as it he put it, “a productive use of one’s own alienation.”⁴

He added in a sentence removed from the third and final version of the essay, “The claim [to being reproduced] is also obstructed, incidentally, by unemployment, which excludes large masses from production—the process in which their primary entitlement to be reproduced would lie.”⁵ In other words, according to Benjamin, because social and political function is the very basis for the reception and understanding of the new arts of technological reproducibility, the subjects of film were naturally shared social space and the production process.

For Dziga Vertov, the Russian filmmaker Benjamin references directly in this context, labor is explicitly cited as the very basis for an equality or unanimity that cinema or what Vertov called the kino-eye, gives rhythmic expression. According to Vertov, evoking *The Communist Manifesto*, Kino-Eye establishes “a visual bond between workers of the whole world” without the mediation of “a teacher or propagandist.”⁶ The workers of the world are united by the communism of filmic expression. The artist or filmmaker does not stand above the others workers as a master, but in a horizontal

⁴ Ibid, 113.

⁵ Ibid, 114.

⁶ Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, 52.

relation as a producer among producers. The Kino-Eye for Vertov is not an eye of surveillance or fetishistic fascination as film theorists will later identify in the gaze intrinsic to the cinematic apparatus, but a democratic participant that in Vertov's 1929 film *Man With a Movie Camera* linked the equal movements of the factory worker, the telephone operator, the hairdressers in the beauty salon and the cameraman himself. Vertov was the self-proclaimed "first shoe-maker of Russian cinema." His colleagues still fettered by bourgeois narrative forms were merely shoe-shiners. For, Vertov this equation of filmmakers and shoe-makers was reciprocal. Artistry is a universal capacity available to anyone and the reception of the film was predicated on this idea. As Vertov put it, "Everyone has something of the poet, artist, musician. Or else there are no poets, artists, musicians."⁷ Art for Vertov, in Benjamin's terms, should be divested of aura, that sense of distance that separated art from the audience.

While acknowledging the limitations of capitalist film production and its use of the star-system to promote what he calls "illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations,"⁸ Benjamin also believed that the mass experience of cinema even in capitalist countries, and here Chaplin was the model, generated a progressive reaction from the audience through its collective reception by an audience of experts.⁹ In the logic of Benjamin's analysis of the superstructure, cinema could be seen as offering both a non-auratic mass art and under the sway of capital, recreating the aura at the same time. That this dialectical contradiction—capitalist modernity liberated the very forces it

⁷ Ibid, 162.

⁸ Benjamin, *Selected Vol 4*, 263.

⁹ Benjamin, *Selected Vol 3*, 116.

sought to reign in—tempered any claims for the emancipatory potential of cinema was duly noted by Theodor Adorno who was far more skeptical about the liberating dimension of mass art. Benjamin’s conception of equality as the basis for everyman’s claim to be reproduced received an answer in Adorno and Horkheimer’s chapter in *The Dialectical of Enlightenment* on “The Culture Industry” specifically in terms of the identification of spectators with stars. They saw not the weapons for a new theory of art, but only the triumph of instrumental reason as mass deception. As they put it,

Only one girl can draw the lucky ticket, only one man can win the prize, and if, mathematically, all have the same chance, it is so infinitesimal for each one that he or she will do best to write it off and rejoice in the other’s success, which might as well have been him or hers, and somehow never is... The lucky actors on the screen are copies of the same category as every member of the public, but such equality only demonstrates the insurmountable separation... Now any person signifies only those attributes by which he can replace everyone else: he is interchangeable, a copy.¹⁰

Adorno and Horkheimer carry Benjamin’s logic further to propose how it was the very elimination of distance engendered by the new arts of mechanical reproduction that through a ruse of reason only increased separation between the spectator and the star and finally the rich and poor. Virtual equality masked actual inequality. Like Benjamin, they saw the star-system as emblematic of the capitalist logic’s recreation of aura in mass media. Objects may no longer have a unique existence in time and place, but instead,

¹⁰ Adorno Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 145.
254

like stars, the celestial kind, it was as if they were infinitely distant. This cosmomorphism¹¹ centered around the human body, primarily the face, and found its cinematic form in the close-up. It was perhaps the soft-focus close-ups of glamorous Hollywood stars that Adorno unconsciously had in mind when he objected to Benjamin that the aura of the work of art had not disappeared in film but had been preserved in a “foggy mist.”¹²

Everyone can lay claim to being a star

It was Andy Warhol who would suspend this contradiction of the star-system with mass media’s egalitarian promise and propose, no longer that everyone merely has a claim to being filmed but that everyone has a claim to being a star. This is perhaps most obviously contained in his familiar, though often misquoted and misunderstood line that “in the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes,” but I suggest we look at a longer quotation from a 1972 interview in which Warhol explained his 1963 “Death and Disaster” series, in which silkscreened images of celebrities who had died were grouped with anonymous accident victims taken from an archive of photos that had been rejected by newspapers for their graphic detail.

Here is Warhol explaining the project:

Actually you know it wasn’t the idea of accidents and things like that, it’s just something about, well it all started with buttons, I always wanted to know who

¹¹ Cosmomorphism, both inverse of and complement to anthropomorphism, is the attribution of cosmic qualities to the human. See Edgar Morin’s *The Stars*.

¹² Adorno, *Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1991) 88.

invented buttons and then I thought of all the people who worked on the pyramids... I just sort of wondered what happened to them why they weren't along, so I always thought it would be easier to do a painting of people who died in car crashes because sometimes you know, you never know who they are.... The people that you know they want to do things and then they never do things and they disappear so quickly, and then they're killed or something like that you know, nobody knows about them so I thought well maybe I'll do a painting about a person which you don't know about or something like that.¹³

We can discern here within Warhol's seemingly desultory response that like his work itself always seems to subtract the very thing it displays, a justification for the anonymous subjects of his works that evokes an unlikely source, Bertolt Brecht's poem "Questions From a Worker Who Reads." Brecht's exemplary political poem poses a series of questions from the worker who takes the time that is not granted to him or her to study history and read poetry. The questions ask the reader to identify with the figures that are excluded from official historical narrative, but, at the same time, made it possible through their labor. The poem begins: "Who built Thebes of the seven gates?/In books you will find the names of kings/Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?..." And continues: "Caesar beat the Gauls/Did he not have even a cook with him?"¹⁴ Brecht's poem echoes Benjamin's axiom on the worker's claim to reproduction--against the

27. ¹³Quoted in Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art", in *Andy Warhol*, (MIT Press, 2001),

¹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, *Poetry and Prose* (London: Continuum, 2004), 63.

history told by the victors, the capacity for readership, the dead letter of the poem, poses the promise and desire of a history in common premised on shared material production.

But for Warhol, the subject of his disaster series is not finally the builder of the pyramids or even the inventor of buttons but people who, in his words, “want to do things and then they never do things and then they disappear so quickly.” Unlike Vertov, Benjamin and Brecht, for Warhol the entitlement to be reproduced lies no longer in productive labor but in the very lack of entitlement—in the capacity for wanting to do things and in the capacity for doing nothing.

Warhol’s “stars” included, of course, the most familiar names and faces of the time and recent past, as well as literary figures and other artists, but also stars of his own devising, stars who he found or found him who fabricated their own personae. And when he made films or placed his imprint on films made by others, whether of acknowledged celebrities or his own so-called “superstars,” he eliminated the narrative elements of Hollywood film that support the star function. Quoting Warhol again:

I made my earliest films using for several hours of just one actor on the screen doing the same thing: eating or sleeping or smoking: I did this because people usually just go to the movies to see only the star, to eat him up, so here at last was the chance to see only the star for as long as you like no matter what he does and to eat him up all you want to. It was also easier to make.¹⁵

Stardom was reduced to an effect of the collective ritual function of the viewing experience and its objects need not even be human forms. In regards to his 1964 film

¹⁵ Andy Warhol, 28.

Empire, consisting of an 8hr and 5 minutes static seemingly continuous shot of the Empire State Building, he would claim that “The Empire State Building is a star.”¹⁶ At the same time, the author function was also reduced to a minimum. For *Empire* or the *Screen Tests*, for example, the films were shot from a tripod and discernable cuts were to be determined only by the length of the reels. Later Warhol films that offer more explicit evidence of directorial choices were credited to directors other than Warhol himself whose name became part of the title of the film. This does not make them any less Warhol films. The point is that when Warhol emphasizes the lack of labor involved in filmmaking it is not only a tease but also an idea of art. As for the subjects of the films, whether a person or a building, the claim to being reproduced lay no longer in productive labor nor even finally in the capacity or desire for recognition but merely in the very capacity for being reproduced and for having aura. Rather than restoring productive labor to aesthetic experience, as Brecht imagined, it was as if Warhol wanted to eliminate it. As he did with advertising logos in his Campbell’s Soup Cans or Brillo Boxes, Warhol did with the Hollywood star—to take the image as fetish and sever its residual ties to use value and labor time.

Everyone can lay claim to being a freak

This brings me to my third moment in cinematic equality, which takes the rather crude formulation: Everyone can lay claim to being a freak. I borrow this idea from documentary filmmaker Jill Godmilow who in a 2002 essay, “Kill the Documentary as

¹⁶ Quoted in *The Cinematic*, ed. David Company, (London: Whitechapel, 2007), 50.

We Know It,” constructs a series of rules to save documentary practice. Her third rule reads: “Do not produce freak shows of the oppressed, the different, the criminal, the primitive. Please do not make your compassion an excuse for social pornography. Leave the Poor Freaks Alone.”¹⁷ Documentary, “as we know it,” to use Godmilow’s terms, is, or was historically, the word for the type of film within capitalist production and the dominance of classical Hollywood in which we do get to see people portraying themselves in their own work process, but not precisely in the way Benjamin or Vertov imagined. The focus on unglamorous work has generally been at the cost of film’s claim to being a mass art. Rather, we associate documentary about real people working with the grayest offshoots of the Griersonian tradition that Bill Nichols has called the “discourse of sobriety,” films that are usually publicly funded and educational with minimal pretension to art or even pleasure. Yet Godmilow is writing at a time of a new commercial revival of documentary. And her target is not this tradition of documentary but the kind that seeks a mass audience not through sharing the common but exploiting the perverse.

The earliest uses of the word “freak” on record refer to an act or state of mind rather than a person; a freak was a capricious thought, a singular notion that had no discernable origin or use. The first recorded use of the term applying it to an individual is from 1854 in the *Illustrated London News* and it is worth highlighting: “Is it an Animal? Is it Human? Is it an Extraordinary Freak of Nature? Or is it a legitimate member of

¹⁷ Jill Godmilow, “Kill the Documentary, As We Know It,” *Journal of Film & Video*; Summer/Fall2002, Vol. 54 Issue 2/3, 5.

Nature's Work?"¹⁸ Here "freak" takes on the derogatory meaning for which Tod Browning's 1932 film *Freaks* provides perhaps the most memorable cinematic images. Still it retains the meaning of that which questions nature's economy or ability to work. The freak is both "of nature" but defies nature's logic at the same time. If it is not a legitimate member of nature's work, it is because the freak is a figure who does not work with nature, or at least, second nature. The freak is then a spectacle neither beautiful nor sublime; it is a star that has lost its shine, a fetish unveiled for its obscene underside in which the fascination persists despite, or because of, the object's loss of luster.

Writing when she is, Godmilow highlights critically successful mid-90s films like *Crumb* and *Hoop Dreams* in a tradition she traces back to Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. But we might also think of more recent films credited with helping to revive the documentary genre like *Capturing the Friedmans*, *Grizzly Man* or even Michael Moore's penchant for enlivening his working class manifestos with exhibitions of idiocy found among both the powerful and their victims and played for laughs.

But even more so, we should be put in mind of that bête noire of all guardians of culture, reality television and the more hotly contested terrain of YouTube and other video sharing sites. As we saw last chapter, in a familiar narrative for readers of contemporary documentary theorists, reality television has retroactively discredited the entire cinéma vérité and direct cinema traditions. In this narrative, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* of 1960—that used the new relatively cheap and portable 16mm cameras and tape recorders for a self-reflexive experiment on the capacity of film

¹⁸ *The Illustrated London News*, 29 August, 1846.

truth by bringing together students, workers and immigrants and forced confrontation with racial, sexual and class politics the legacy of Vichy and the Algerian War—was only a prelude to PBS's 1973 *An American Family*—a would be earnest sociological experiment descending into scandalous melodrama—and from here it's only a small step to the various tabloid-like reality shows organized around humiliation and cruelty.

The discourses in and around YouTube and other video sharing websites have continued the association of moving images of the real with artless cruelty while at the same time reviving populist claims for the democratic potential of cinema.

There are two dominant forms of discourses about YouTube. The first sees it as the destruction of the social bond: This is not always seen as negative. The destruction of the social bond gets affirmed from below in the name of freedom: The capacity of anyone to respond to anyone in any way they like may be the capacity for anonymous obscenity, bigotry and cruelty for its own sake without repercussions, but it comes with its own anarchic ethos.¹⁹

At the same time, of course, this destruction of the social bond is denounced from above in the name of standards and ethics: we see this not only in the discourse about YouTube but also about social networking sites, wikipedia and blogs. There is the anxiety about this unchecked obscenity and its violence especially in relation to children but a related argument extends to copyright, accounting for factual information and the inability to distinguish amateur from expert. As Rancière might point out, the fear is the same one that made Plato prefer the spoken to the written word. According to Socrates in

¹⁹ See, for example, the phenomena of 4chan and Anonymous for well-publicized versions of this ethos.

Plato's *Republic*, since the written word unlike the spoken word is not destined for anyone in particular and can fall into anyone's hands, it leaves language without any legitimate foundation.

The second dominant discourse on YouTube is the opposite position that affirms the new communal and democratic possibilities of the same anonymous capacity of anyone to contribute, produce, distribute and exhibit their ideas or themselves. For the so-called YouTube community, the webcam epitomizes this equality of everyone and anyone to be filmer, filmed and spectator all at the same time.²⁰ Here we see the precise inversion of the previous position. Rather than seen as the ruin of civilized communication, YouTube is celebrated for *repairing* the social bond in an age of fragmentation and global conflict still abetted by the residual power of the old top-down mass media. And the viral video phenomenon with its oddballs and accidents is not seen as just a freak show but as the affirmation of self-expression.

But whether YouTube is viewed in terms of the destruction or reparation of the social bond, the two discourses share an ethical perspective that erases politics. Ethics is understood in the first case as freedom or responsibility—either the *laissez faire* celebration of uninhibited self-expression and Darwinist competition or, from the other side, the conservative cultural insistence on enforcing standards and protocols. In the second case, ethics is grasped as equality through what Rancière calls consensus, the enemy of politics, in which the equal counting of parts leaves no room for supplement or

²⁰ This is evident from many of the most popular vloggers on YouTube. For a good example of articulating, codifying and promoting this discourse see Cultural Anthropology Professor Michael Wesch's very popular videos especially "An anthropological introduction to YouTube": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-IZ4_hU. Accessed August 15, 2009.

lack. Here the freak can be celebrated for the “normal” desire for community and self-expression within the bounds of a shared communitarian ethos. Indeed, if “freak” is losing its pejorative connotations in some circles, it is at the cost of no longer referring to singular entities that do not work within standard economic explanations, but on the contrary particular groups that are rigorous adherents to the protocols of what Deleuze dubbed the “society of control.” Witness all the self-proclaimed neat freaks, health freaks and exercise freaks.

Benjamin saw “letters to the editor” as a sign of the masses’ desire to eliminate the distance between amateur and expert, consumer and producer, but the analogue to this in cinema was the worker’s appearance as himself in a film; the idea of bringing film production to the people was scarcely imaginable at the time, the forgotten heroic attempts of Medvedkin notwithstanding. Video-sharing sites, of which YouTube remains the most prominent, as well as the relatively easy access to video cameras, simple editing applications and a huge archive of video and film transferred to video, presents the possibility of realizing with moving images this very merger of consumer and producer, synthesizer and analyzer, of moving images. But it remains a possibility not a reality, one that should be pursued through a new politics not a communitarian ideology of inclusion. As Bernard Steigler suggestively argues regarding the potential of digital television, public education should be focused on universal training of how to analyze (meaning how to breakdown and reorganize) audiovisual information and that accompanying this project should be a “politics of memory favoring the expression of cultural exceptions... and with these cultural exceptions, individual idiomatic

singularities.”²¹ The democratic potential of so-called “participatory culture” on the internet will be found in “individual idiomatic singularities” and not a new race of “prosumers.”²²

Kiarostami and the politics of the unfinished film

I offer this short history of cinematic equality as a prelude to the work of contemporary Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami. Kiarostami’s cinema may seem a strange turn from the already unlikely threesome of Vertov, Warhol and YouTube, but I want to propose that his work is unique in how it poses these very questions of equality through cinema. Kiarostami’s politics lie in the way he attempts to construct forms of equality between the filmmaker, the filmed subjects and the spectator and the way he pursues Benjamin’s now over seventy year old claim that everyone is entitled to cinema not as a passive spectator but as a participant. For Kiarostami the process of staging equality through filmic operations is political in the sense that it is not about reestablishing a lost social bond but about interrupting the ways that sensory experience is divided, shared and distributed. As Rancière has proposed, political equality and true forms of democracy cannot be seen as intrinsic to forms of technology and they are categorically divisive or litigious not inclusive or consensual. Equality in Kiarostami’s films is not posed as a property of new forms of production, reception and distribution; rather it must be constructed on this axiomatic basis and in the process pose the question

²¹ Bernard Stiegler, “The Time of Cinema,” in *Tekhnema 4* (1998), 110

²² “Prosumer” is an amalgam of “producer” or “professional” and “consumer.” The word was coined by Alvin Toffler in *The Third Wave* (New York: Bantam, 1980) and has become part of business, advertising and internet culture lingo.

of what it means to produce, receive and distribute moving images as equals without repeating the familiar critiques of power or appealing to apolitical forms of consensus and inclusion.

Kiarostami ended a short piece he wrote for the centenary of cinema in 1995 with the words, “for one hundred years cinema has belonged to the filmmaker. Let us hope that now the time has come to implicate the audience in the second century.”²³ For this purpose, he advocates what he calls “a half-created or unfinished cinema that attains completion through the creative spirit of the audience.”²⁴ The use of ellipses and indirection to elicit an active spectator may sound like a familiar modernist trope of self-suppressing mediation. But for Kiarostami, the unfinished film is not premised on a break in which the passive spectator is made active through an estrangement effect that produces a moment of awareness. As Rancière suggests, when a filmmaker like a professor sees it as his or her goal to create active or more knowledgeable spectators or students, he must reinstate the very gap that he is trying to erase, to assume that the spectators or students are passive or unaware to begin with.²⁵ On the other hand, this desire for audience participation may sound consistent with the new trend in contemporary art known as “relational aesthetics” in which artists offer an invitation to participate in some ritual. As Rancière has rightly argued this can be identified as part of an ethical turn away from critical art. Kiarostami’s films however cannot be assimilated to this ethical turn any more that they provide a return to the old models of critical art.

²³ Unpublished text distributed at a lecture by Kiarostami following a screening of *The Wind Will Carry Us* at New York University, 1998.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ See Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” in *Artforum* March 2007, 271.

Though his films are often thought to be slow and pensive, his unfinished films do not ask for participation or involvement from spectators as part of a new ethos of community, but rather divide the audience. For Kiarostami, the equality between filmmaker and spectator is assumed a priori, which means, in contrast that the response of the audience is not assumed a priori. Kiarostami frames it in explicitly political terms: "I don't think an ordinary spectator is less deserving than a filmmaker... My belief is more in a form of art that creates differences, a divergence among people, rather than a convergence with everyone in agreement... Engaging in war against great powers has to be done with a certain weakness, a lacking."²⁶ Therefore, if the spectator is lacking in any way it must be because the filmmaker is also lacking.

So to inscribe the spectator in the film, to take the film away from the master-filmmaker and give the cinema back to the audience, Kiarostami must also inscribe the filmmaker in the film. Many of his films feature a filmmaker character sometimes Kiarostami himself, sometimes an actor playing a filmmaker named Kiarostami, sometimes just a bourgeois figure, an outsider, or an intellectual. But this is never the heroic or humble filmmaker offering a gift to the audience for nothing in return but an immodest figure who imposes his will on others as it suits him who is also a spectator in a world he doesn't understand. The filmmaker is both a filmed subject and a spectator. We see this most explicitly in *Life and Nothing More*, *Through the Olive Trees* and *The Wind Will Carry Us*.

²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Abbas Kiarostami and Jean-Luc Nancy In Conversation," in *L'Evidence du Film: Abbas Kiarostami* (Bruxelles: Yves Gevaert, 2001), 89-90.

A second figure that repeats in many of Kiarostami's films is the child.

Kiarostami's career began in the early 70s before the Iranian Revolution working for the film division of the Institute of Intellectual Development for Childhood and Young Adults, but the focus on children as well as pedagogical themes have persisted throughout his career. His international reputation, as well as that of Iranian film more generally, reached its greatest heights in the 90s well into the Khomeini era; following this, many of the western articles on what has been dubbed the Iranian New Wave have questioned how this humanist cinema emerged out of a country often thought to be a nation of terrorists. This admiring but patronizing attitude toward Iranian cinema, has its corollary in a more critical approach. It has been claimed that the focus on children in Iranian film has been a way of skirting the censors and giving a public face of innocence to an oppressive regime.

This should remind us, that before it is a formal principle, it might be said that Kiarostami's films are "unfinished" for a very concrete reason: the restrictive conditions of making films within the Islamic Republic. These restrictions are especially pronounced in relation to how women and sexuality can be filmed. In Iran, the cinema was taken as an emblem of the west and the corruption of the Shah's regime. Theaters were torched in the months leading up to the Revolution and in Khomeini's first public statement after the Revolution he addressed cinema directly. Echoing Plato's *Republic*, he denounced the old cinema's "corruption of the youth" opposing to it the value of an educational cinema. Like Lenin before him, he suggested that cinema and mass media was not inherently corrupt but was a crucial tool for a post-revolutionary society. Of

course, for Iran the new cinema must be in strict adherence to Islamic law, which meant specifically a new system of modesty (hejab) in contrast to the old cinema of idolatry.

Given these conditions, it may be claimed that Kiarostami's formal experiments like his use of children merely make a virtue of necessity or worse yet, justify the logic of state censorship. But the child in his films is not, as the critics imply, a figure of innocence or a site of sentimental projection. On the contrary, he is what Gilles Deleuze calls a forger or fabulator. The use of children may be a way of evading explicitly political content, but the children in Kiarostami's films are themselves *evaders* and this they share with the filmmaker. They are both inside and outside the logic of society. The children in his films test the limits of often ambiguous imposed restrictions. And this for Kiarostami is the definition of both the filmmaker and the spectator. The spectator like the filmmaker is someone whose capacity is made possible by his very incapacity. Kiarostami treats his films as Benjamin once imagined them, as a series of tests.

In an essay on Jean-Luc Godard, from which Deleuze borrows the idea of cinematic pedagogy, Serge Daney suggested that political cinema tends to be pedagogical. But there was a paradox here because militant cinema thought of cinema in general as a way to avoid politics and pedagogy and so the cinema of political pedagogy must use cinema to reject cinema. Daney suggests that in particular, Godard's cinema of the early 70s in his period with the Dziga Vertov Group consisted of lessons in how to take leave of cinema by way of cinema. Jean-Luc Nancy, on the other hand, has aptly

called Kiarostami's films "an affirmation of cinema by cinema."²⁷ I'd like to suggest that this is what Kiarostami's pedagogy consists of in contrast to this era of Godard's cinema. But affirming cinema within cinema is no more paradoxical than taking leave of cinema by way of cinema. To affirm cinema by way of cinema, to affirm its potential for inscribing equality, means that the auteur function, as Vertov suggested, has to relinquish the role of master or pedagogue and become a "mediator" as Deleuze describes it. A mediator, according to Deleuze, is what allows someone to get outside his or her own discourse and falsify it through an other to create a new form of community through a new distribution of the visible, sayable and doable.

To make this more concrete, I'd like to look at Kiarostami's 1990 film *Close-Up*. *Close-Up* is an unlikely title for a film by a filmmaker whose mise-en-scene is most obviously distinctive for maintaining distance through long shots especially in those moments when we might anticipate or desire a close-up. The final shot of *Through the Olive Trees* is exemplary in this regard in which the uniting of two potential lovers, the desired happy ending, is staged at such an extreme distance that all we can see are tiny specks amidst the wind blowing the olive trees. Joan Copjec has described Kiarostami's cinema as "reserved," and in this respect at least, we could say that it reflects the ideology of modesty in Iranian culture. The close-up, on the other hand, as we have argued, is traditionally associated with the star, either with the iconic face or with the optical point of view. For this reason, in Iranian cinema, the close-up risked intimacy and a betrayal of the system of modesty. It could evoke the idolatry of western cinema, the fetish in all of

²⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Evidence of Film: Abbas Kiarostami," in *L'Evidence du Film: Abbas Kiarostami*, 10.

its obscenity, or the relay of looks that, at least as far back as Kuleshov, has been known to connote desire. The close-up is also for Benjamin central to what he calls the optical unconscious—as a way of expanding space it extracts visible elements from collective daily life that remain invisible through the force of habit in modern life. For Benjamin, there was a political significance to the close-up that separated it from idolatry or human perspective. For the same reason Eisenstein preferred the term “large shot” because he claimed that the close-up, as the term came to popular use through D.W. Griffith, was a “narrowly representational” concept. The large shot, in contrast, ‘designated’ or ‘signified’ but did not ‘show’ or ‘present.’²⁸ But ironically while Eisenstein’s vocabulary separates his use of the large shot from the representational logic of spatial and temporal continuity so too, as Warhol well understood, does the close-up of the star in which the fetish of the disembodied face exceeds the need for the close-up within a film’s narrative economy. Kiarostami’s title *Close-up* refers to both these possibilities, their interconnection and divergence. The close-up in *Close-Up* means the possibility of film to allow people and objects to speak, to give significance to what is seen on screen, evoking the educational value of a post-revolutionary cinema; at the same time, it signals the desire for stardom, the shameful desires of an immodest cinema of idolatry.

Close-Up tells the story of the court case of a man, Hossein Sabzian, who impersonated the filmmaker Moshen Mahkmakbaf for reasons that are being contested within the film. Sabzian using the name of the famous director told a family, the Ahankhahs, that he wanted to make a film about them and over the course of several

²⁸ Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith and Film Today,” *Film Form and The Film Sense*, ed. and trans by Jay Leyda (Cleveland: Meridian, 1963), 243.

visits to the family's home under the guise of planning the film with family, he borrowed a small sum of money that he never returned; but while the family suggests that Sabzian intended to rob them, Sabzian suggests that he was inspired only by "an interest in cinema." According to Sabzian, he wished to be the person he pretended to be and follow through on the plans for the film only he lacked the means to do so. This "interest in cinema" is precisely what allowed the family to be taken in (particularly the youngest son who is the least forgiving of Sabzian) and it is also what makes both Sabzian and the family participate in Kiarostami's film of their potentially shameful roles. Kiarostami's film becomes, in effect, the very film whose impossibility is the cause of the drama that we are viewing.

It may seem like a documentary about a fiction film that was never finished, but the documentary status of *Close-Up*, we are made aware, is just as impossible as Sabzian's fiction film of the Ahankhah family would be. In the title sequence of the film, we see the printing of a series of newspaper headlines "Arresting the Fake Mahkmalbaf." Two weeks later, we see Kiarostami, having read about this case, seeking permission to film the trial. Therefore, we know that the events that occur before the trial that will make up much of the film's action cannot be documentary in the sense normally attributed to the word. Yet since these scenes are not marked as reenactments we may also question the status of scenes in which Kiarostami's presence is accounted for by documentary convention. At the same time, we may consider the documentary value of the reenactments. These reenactments do not serve the same purpose as they do in conventional historical documentaries or Errol Morris films, of illustrating events that

cannot be seen in “real time”; rather, they are about the drama of people who have a desire to play themselves playing themselves.

Indeed *Close-Up* is often cited for the ways it blurs the distinction between fiction and documentary and since its subject is cinema itself, it tends to be described by phrases like “a hall of mirrors.” But as Jean-Luc Nancy rightly points out Kiarostami is not interested in a critical unveiling of cinematic conventions and his films are not fruitfully understood in terms of mise-en-abyme.²⁹ Like Vertov and Warhol before him, Kiarostami sees no useful categorical distinction between fiction and documentary and works against our apprehension of the film at that level because for him, not only are all films fiction, but also all films are documentary.

Close-ups in Kiarostami’s films are generally restricted to two uses: the necessity of physical proximity as when two people ride in a car together—the car being Kiarostami’s favorite location. In this case, it measures a precise physical distance. Or, as in the interview format, it offers speech to someone; it gives, in rare moments, someone or something the capacity for self-representation.³⁰ This is explicit in *Close-Up* in which we see Kiarostami explain to Sabzian that he is setting up two cameras in the court—one 35mm camera to film the proceedings from a distance and a 16mm “close-up” camera which Kiarostami tells Sabzian is for him to explain things that people may find hard to understand. This camera captures Sabzian making speeches testifying to his own benign motives, which spurs the younger son to accuse him of acting. The close-up,

²⁹ Nancy, *Evidence*, 10.

³⁰ It is only with *Shirin* (2008) that Kiarostami will explore the close-up in its more conventional use, as what Deleuze calls an “affection-image,” though he will do it, as we will see below, with radically unconventional means.

of course, is Sabzian's chance to be a star. Actor and star, Sabzian could also be called a freak since he is not is a worker in the proper sense. Not only does his plan for a film not work, but in addition to an "interest in cinema," Sabzian, divorced and living with his mother, shares one other crucial trait with the son in the family he conned: unemployment.

If for Benjamin and Vertov, productive labor was the very condition of a claim on cinema, for Kiarostami in contrast, an "interest in cinema" is shown to be a supplement for the failure to work properly. In a sense, Sabzian, in *Close-Up*, though in his mid-30s fulfils the role normally given to the child in Kiarostami's films. He creates through unproductive labor a film that does not exist. As he says at one point, he identifies with the child hero of Kiarostami's 1974 film *The Traveler* who pretended to take pictures of people with a camera with no film to collect money to go see a soccer game that he finally misses because he falls asleep. Kiarostami finds a way to affirm cinema through a series of substitutions and failures, through what Deleuze calls the power of the false. Just as Kiarostami substitutes for the socially conscious, explicitly Islamic filmmaker Mahkmalbaf, Kiarostami's film substitutes for the film Sabzian would have made.

When Kiarostami first interviews Sabzian he asks in what way he could help and Sabzian suggests that like Makhamlbaf, "you could express our suffering in your films." It this "our" that lies at the heart of the film. To what extent is Sabzian's suffering that of the anonymous spectator? To what extent is Sabzian's film the equal of Makhmakbaf's or Kiarostami's own or the son who also want to make and be in film? What would it mean to take seriously the Italian neo-realist screenwriter Zavattini's claim quoted by

Kiarostami in his film essay *10 on Ten*, that “the first person who passes by could be a subject for your film.”³¹

Kiarostami’s films are not films about film in the modernist sense of reflexivity or intransitivity. On the contrary, they are about the very possibility of making cinema sharable. And what is shareable in cinema must finally suspend not only the division labor but also the charismatic star and obscene unveiling of the star. It must be a sharing among equals. Sabzian is finally both a singular character and a universal one because he demands an impossible equality between author, spectator and filmed subject. He is a placeholder for Benjamin’s anonymous worker in a capitalist world of both stars and unemployment. He is not a populist figure, a hero for a new artform for a homogeneous mass. On the contrary, he is like Kiarostami’s camera, always out of place, not where it belongs.

As we have argued, to make a cinema sharable, to follow through on the idea of equality between the filmmaker, his subjects and the audience, Kiarostami inscribed his filmmakers in his films as a way of turning the filmmaker into subject and spectator. The discovery of digital video suggested a new possibility of radically subtracting the filmmaker. Following his use of video for “notes” that became part of the film in *Taste of Cherry* and the entirety of *ABC Africa*, Kiarostami made two films *10* and *5* in which directorial mastery was subtracted in a new way. *10* eliminated the presence of the director for the recording of the film itself. *5* has no camera movement, no dialogue and no characters in the traditional sense. But as Kiarostami subtracted many of the tools of

³¹ See Kiarostami’s *10 on Ten*.

montage or text through which to supply meaning to the silent imprint, the director's voice returns front and center in the supplementary pedagogical essay films *Ten on 10* and *5 on 5*. The master's voice returns in these "master classes" to ensure the legibility of "the unfinished film," the film without a master.

In *Shirin* (2008) we find yet another permutation on the substitution of filmmaker, audience and subjects and a new use for the close-up in Kiarostami's cinema. *Shirin* is entirely composed of spectators as subjects. We watch 113 actresses presumably viewing a film for which we hear only the sound. This use of the sound as the link between an absent image and a gaze is the organizing principle of the film shot entirely in close-ups. As of yet, there is no essay film to accompany *Shirin*, but Kiarostami has made no secret of how the film was made and this discourse is no doubt familiar to many of those who see the film—the women were all filmed individually watching only a piece of paper next to the camera.³² These are, in effect, re-contextualized Warhollian "screen tests" turning the figures of study into studying figures to thematize the shared viewing experience. We are spectators viewing spectators who are mediated by an image we don't see. The film itself is the off-screen space. But the missing reverse shot includes not only the images of a film whose soundtrack we hear telling the story of *Shirin and Khosrow*, but also the camera that films these women, and finally, ourselves, the spectators who have watched, are watching and will see the film. Spectator, filmmaker and filmed subjects all converge in the absent reverse shot.

³² See, for example, Maya Jaggi, "A Life In Cinema," in *Guardian*, June 13, 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/jun/13/abbas-kiarostami-film>. Accessed August 31, 2009.

The major difference with Warhol's screen tests, however, is that Kiarostami's method assures that the filmed subject never looks directly into the camera. Even though both the actual and virtual objects of spectatorship of the women we see on screen are denied us (i.e. both the piece of paper beside the camera and the film we presume to be projected on the movie screen whose soundtrack we hear), the women do not appear to look back at us because they appear absorbed. Diderot, as glossed by Michael Fried, claimed that the *dramatis personae* in a painting should be absorbed "in their actions and states of mind. A personage so absorbed appeared unconscious and oblivious of everything but the object of his or her absorption, as if to all intents and purposes there was nothing and no one else in the world."³³ By bringing together a multiplicity of absorbed figures to compose the experience of film spectatorship, Kiarostami is offering film as way of thinking autonomous individuals in a virtual community, a relation of a non-relation.

But we have not examined a detail that makes all the difference. Like *10*, Kiarostami's *dramatis personae* in *Shirin* are almost exclusively women.³⁴ Until *10*, women make few appearances in Kiarostami's films, but as Negar Mottahedeh has argued, the body of the veiled Iranian woman could be seen as a structuring absence; the rare appearances by women, functioning like a return of the repressed, can be suggestively linked to the "flesh and blood" of the cinematic apparatus itself.³⁵ But while *10* like *Close-up* and many of his other films used mostly non-actors, *Shirin* explores the

³³ Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7

³⁴ *10* does, of course, include the son of the driver and in *Shirin* male spectators can be seen in the background.

³⁵ Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 108.

aura of the actress or star now displaced as spectator. The images of spectators in *Shirin* do not provide a defamiliarizing contrast to the glamour we typically see on screen. Rather, these affection-images are lit and framed as portraits in time and movement of well-known actresses and thereby give to the figure of the spectator the very aura of the face of the female star. Following the system of modesty the women are all in head scarves (including the one identifiable face for Western audiences, French actress Juliette Binoche) that serve not to hide but rather to frame their faces. The absorption and display of a range of emotions then is not the absorption and reflexive response mechanisms of the “ordinary” cinema spectator but a performative absorption that functions like a taxonomy of affects, the expression of which is at least partially severed from the stimuli.

The 12th century epic Persian poem *Shirin and Khosrow* by Nezami Ganjavi is adapted for the film’s soundtrack though non-Iranian viewers who are unfamiliar with the story are not offered access to many of the specific plot points as the film makes no pretense toward generating suspense. Rather we are confronted with an evocative soundscape composed of what we might call, adapting Deleuze, affective-sounds: a female chorus of mournful wailing, dripping water, galloping horses and swords piercing flesh. As for the dialogue, the specific meaning of the words is attenuated by the sense that nearly every word seems to be spoken with a haunted sense of desperation. As in most of Kiarostami’s films, music is rare only making an appearance in the dénouement of the film. To know that the faces were not recorded responding to what we hear does not eliminate the Kuleshov effect but it merely verifies the gap that is already there

between what we see and what we hear, a gap that Deleuze traces back to the “rupture of the sensory-motor schema” that occurred after WWII. Indeed, it is as if *Shirin* literalizes Deleuze’s conception of the protagonist who has become a seer or spectator rather than someone capable of driving the action.

Nezami’s version of the story bears some strong similarities with the roughly contemporaneous legend of Tristan and Isolde, that Denis de Rougemont, and Lacan following him, have taken as a foundational text in the construction of the modern concept of romantic love in the West though, as Rougemont argues, its origins in Christian heresy are imbricated with Arabic and Persian connections. According to Rougemont, love as it has come to be understood through the “Tristan myth” is premised on its impossibility and more specifically on the idealization of the woman as unattainable other.³⁶ *Shirin and Khosrow* fits De Rougemont’s prototype of the story in which the lovers union is perpetually thwarted by society and circumstances as if the obstacles to love are its very conditions of possibility. (Until, that is, the “final obstacle,” death.) On the other hand, if there is a central difference between the typical version of Tristan and Isolde as described by Rougemont and the story of Shirin and Khosrow as heard in Kiarostami’s film, it is in the comparative role of the female and male figures; for whereas the male Tristan is the protagonist of Tristan and Isolde, Shirin herself, as Kiarostami’s shortened title indicates, is the hero of his offscreen film within a film.

³⁶ Denis de Rougemont, *Love In The Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 74.

According to Kiarostami, he chose the story because, Nezami “portrayed women as being capable and self-reliant. Such personalities are rarely seen even today.”³⁷

To be clear, I am not interested in arguing for Narami’s epic poem as a proto-feminist tract; what interests me is the choice of it as the soundtrack to Kiarostami’s film within the context of both Iranian and Hollywood cinema. It is a story of love preserved through words and images despite the series of circumstances that make up the plot’s intrigue that perpetually thwart or prolong the possibility of physical intimacy. Shirin falls in love with Khosrow after viewing a painting of him and then he later manages to gaze on her body while bathing, but their union is continually deferred. The image is central to this story that we hear only as words. The fetishized image of the body of woman is, of course, taboo in Iran but here it offered in its absence through spoken words and relayed through the gaze not of the man, who is also off screen, but the women who appear to be viewing the film.

Joan Copjec, focusing on *The Wind Will Carry Us*, offers the following insight: The question Kiarostami’s reserved cinema raises is this: how can there be any modesty, any shame, for women... if they are prohibited by custom, costume, or legal restrictions from appearing, from entering public space and engaging in the relations they choose? The system of modesty... obliged all Iranian filmmakers to limit themselves to exterior spaces. What makes the cinema of Kiarostami

³⁷ http://www.offscreen.com/biblio/pages/essays/shirin_kiarostami/ Accessed August 31, 2009.

uniquely interesting is the way he introduces interiority, privacy, into this all-exterior world, into the public spaces he almost exclusively films.³⁸

Kiarostami's pedagogy consists in aesthetic operations that are not concerned with unveiling appearances but in showing how they are not equal to themselves by linking the meaning of the image to associations and disassociations between the spectator, filmmaker and subjects on screen. In this way, the logic of what Lacan calls ex-timacy, the mark of the inside on the outside, becomes a way of imagining something other than the system of modesty that inhibits women's access to appearance as well as its opposite and logical corollary, the woman as restricted *only* to the logic of appearance, her ineffable being grasped through that logic though thought to be uncountable within it at the same time.

This accusation has been particularly strong among some Iranian critics. To take one example, in an article called "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema," Azadeh Farahmand, accuses Kiarostami for engaging in "consensual self-censorship" and "sanitized politics." According to this critic, the viewer of Kiarostami's films "can maintain his distance and remain uninvolved, be fascinated, securely appreciative of the exotic locales, as though viewing an oriental rug, whose history he does not need to untangle."³⁹ The writer of these words grossly misses her target as the kind of ahistorical Orientalism that exploits a visual fascination with the foreign is much more successful with the Best Foreign Film Oscars or mainstream

³⁸ Joan Copjec, "The Object-Gaze: Shame, Hejab, Cinema," in *Filzofski Vestnik* 2006, 181.

³⁹ Azadeh Farahmand, "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema," *New Iranian Cinema Politics, Representation and Identity*, ed. by Richard Tapper (New York: I. B Taurus, 2002), 101.

Western critical opinion than the far smaller and less powerful group of cultural and intellectual elites who comprise the taste makers at international film festivals and museums.⁴⁰ The fact is that Kiarostami's films cannot lay claim to being popular abroad any more than they can in Iran and if he is trying to either cater to western tastes or make apologies for the Iranian regime, it is falling on deaf ears, both at home and abroad. Nonetheless, Farahmand's critique has the virtue of pointing to the gap between the actual audience and the virtual audience of Kiarostami's films. But the lesson that should be drawn from this is not that Kiarostami's films are elitist or rarified, but only that the audience for his films does not yet exist, because his films do not address a particular audience either western or Iranian, male or female, but anyone who has an "interest in cinema" as suspending the various identities that entail appropriate responses commensurate with his or her, sexuality, gender, race or religion or place in the production of global capital, both cultural and monetary. The audience does not yet exist as a collective entity but the hope is that his films through the responses of his *actual* spectators participate in their own small way in creating it.

⁴⁰ Of course, the critique of the "festival film" or "art film" in the Bourdieuan mode is a common one and there may be interesting work to be done on how Kiarostami's work can be said to share certain elements with other contemporary international auteurs of distinction. But Farahmand should note that even the undialectical critique of Kiarostami at this level, while of limited interest, would do better to focus on his formalist and conceptual preoccupations rather than suggesting that the pleasures afforded by his work could be assimilated with the desire for global tourism.

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Minima Moralia: Reflections On a Damaged Life. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. New York: Verso, 2005.

“The Idea of Natural History.” Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984): 97-124.

“Transparencies on Film.” In *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, edited by J. M. Bernstein. Translated by Thomas Y. Levin. London: Routledge, 1991.

Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1996.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*. Translated by Liz Heron. London: Verso, 2007.

Alter, Nora. *Chris Marker*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.

Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987. Translated by G. M. Goshgarian. New York: Verso, 2006.

“On Brecht and Marx.” Translated by Max Statkiewicz, In Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser (Transitions)*. New York: Palgrave, 2003.

Althusser, Louis and Étienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. Translated by Ben Brewster. New York: Verso, 1997.

Andrew, J. Dudley. *The Major Film Theories*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Aragon Louis. “On Décor.” Translated by Paul Hammond. In *French Film Theory and Criticism Volume 1, 1907-1929*, edited by Richard Abel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Arnheim, Rudolph. *Film As Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957.

Artaud, Antonin. *The Theater and Its Double*. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

“Sorcery and the Cinema.” In *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, edited and translated by P. Adams Sitney. New York: New York University Press, 1978.

Arthur, Paul. “Jargons of Authenticity.” In *Theorizing the Documentary*, edited by Michael Renov. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Bachmann, Gideon. “The Frontiers of Realist Cinema: The Work of Ricky Leacock,” *Film Culture* 22-23 (Summer 1961).

Badiou, Alain. *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham. New York: Continuum, 2005.

The Century. Translated by Alberto Toscano. Malden, MA: Polity, 2007.

Conditions. Translated by Steve Corcoran. New York: Continuum, 2008.

Deleuze: The Clamor of Being. Translated by Louise Burchill. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Handbook of Inaesthetics. Translated by Alberto Toscano. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy. Translated and edited by Oliver Feltham & Justin Clemens. London: Continuum, 2003.

Logic of Words: Being and Event II. Translated by Alberto Toscano. London: Continuum, 2009.

Manifesto for Philosophy. Translated by Norman Madarasz. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.

Metapolitics. Translated by Jason Barker. London: Verso, 2005.

Polemics. Translated by Steve Corcoran. London: Verso, 2006.

“Cinema as a Democratic Emblem.” Translated by Alan Ling and Aurelien Mondon. *Parrhesia* 6 (2009): 1-6.

“Fifteen Theses On Contemporary Art.” *Lacanian Ink* 23 (2004).

- “The Flux and the Party.” In *Polygraph* 15/16 (2005).
- “Three Negations.” *Cardoza Law Review* 29, no. 5 (April 2008): 1877-1883.
- Balázs, Béla. *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*. Translated by Edith Bone. New York: Dover, 1970.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill & Wang, 1982.
- Baudry, Jean-Louis. “Ideological Effects of the Basic Apparatus.” In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, edited by Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Bazin, Andre. *Bazin at Work*. Translated by Bert Cardullo and Alain Piette. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- What is Cinema? Volume 1*. Translated by Hugo Gray. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005.
- What Is Cinema? Volume 2*. Translated by Hugo Gray. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972.
- “Bazin on Marker.” Translated by Dave Kehr. *Film Comment* (July/August 2003).
- Benjamin, Walter. “Central Park.” In *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*. Translated by Edmond Jephcott. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- “The Work of Art In The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” In *Selected Writings: Volume 3 1935-1938*. Translated by Edmond Jephcott and Harry Zohn. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version).” In *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*. Translated by Edmond Jephcott and Harry Zohn. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Bordwell, David. *Figures Traced In Light*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- The Way Hollywood Tells It*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

“Slavoj Zizek: Say Anything.” <http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/zizek.php> (accessed on August 15, 2009).

Bordwell, David and Noel Carroll, eds. *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

Bordwell, David and Kristen Thomson. *Film Art: An Introduction 8th Edition*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008.

Bottomore, Stephen. “The Panicking Audience? Early Cinema and the ‘Train Effect,’” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19.2 (June, 1999).

Bourriard, Nicholas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Paris: Les Presses Du Reel, 1998.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theater*. Translated by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992.

On Art & Politics. London: Methuen, 2003.

On Film & Radio. London: Methuen, 2000.

Poetry and Prose. London: Continuum, 2004.

Buchloh, Benjamin. “Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art.” *Andy Warhol*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 2001.

Burch, Noël. *Life To Those Shadows*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

“The Sadean Aesthetic.” In *The Philistine Controversy*, edited by Dave Beech and John Roberts. London: Verso, 2002.

Carroll, Noël. *Mystifying Movies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Theorizing The Moving Image. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

“Fiction, Non-Fiction and The Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis.” In *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*, eds. Noel Carroll and Jinhee Choi. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.

Clair, René. “Coeur Fidèle.” In *French Film Theory and Criticism Volume 1, 1907-1929*. Edited by Richard Abel. Translated by Stanley Appelbaum. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

- Clark, T. J. *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Comolli, Jean-Louis. "Documentary Journey to the Land of the Head Shrinkers." Translated by Annette Michelson. *October* 90 (Autumn 1999): 36-49.
- Comolli, Jean-Louis and Jean Narboni. "Cinema/Criticism/Ideology." In *Film Theory and Criticism, 7th Edition*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Copjec, Joan. "The Object-Gaze: Shame, Hejab, Cinema." *Filzofski Vestnik*, 2006.
- Daney, Serge. "Theorize/Terrorize (Godardian Pedagogy)." In *Cahiers du Cinéma Volume 4 1973-1978: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, edited by David Wilson, 116-123. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Haberjam. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Negotiations 1972-1990*. Translated by Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Mark Seem. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- What Is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues II*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- De Rougemont, Denis. *Love In The Western World*. Translated by Montgomery Belgion. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Doane, Mary Ann. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*. Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

- Dugnat, Raymond, David Ehrenstein and Jonathan Rosenbaum. "Obscure Objects of Desire." *Film Comment* (July-August 1978).
- Eisenstein, Sergei. *Film Form and Film Sense*. Edited and Translated by Jay Leyda. Cleveland: Meridian, 1963.
- "Notes for a film of *Capital*." *October 2* (Summer 1976): 3-26.
- Epstein, Jean. "On Some Characteristics of Photogénie." Translated by Tom Milne. *Afterimage 10* (Autumn 1981).
- "The Senses 1(b)." Translated by Tom Milne. *Afterimage 10* (Autumn 1981).
- Farahmand, Azadeh. "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema." In *New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, edited by Richard Tapper. New York: I. B Taurus, 2002.
- Flaxman, Gregory, ed. *The Brain Is The Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Frampton, Daniel. *Filmosophy: A Manifesto For a Radically New Way of Understanding Cinema*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006.
- Fried, Michael. *Courbet's Realism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Gaines, Jane M. "Introduction: 'The Real Returns'." In *Collecting Visible Evidence Volume 6*, eds. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Gaudreault, André. "Film, Narrative, Narration: the Cinema of the Lumière Brothers," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. Edited by Thomas Elsaesser. London, BFI Press, 1990.
- Godmillow, Jill. "Kill the Documentary, As We Know It." *Journal of Film & Video*, 54, no. 2/3 (Summer/Fall 2002): 3-10.
- Goodman, Ezra. *The Fifty-Year Decline and Fall of Hollywood*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961.
- Gorky, Maxim. In *The Kingdom of Shadows: a Companion to Early Cinema*, edited by Colin Harding and Simon Pople. London: Cygnus Arts, 1996.
- Grant, Barry Keith. *Voyages of Discovery: The Cinema of Frederick Wiseman*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

- Grierson, John. *Grierson on Documentary*. Edited by Forsyth Hardy. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971.
- Gunning, Tom. "An Aesthetic of Astonishment." In *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, 5th Edition*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: 12 Lectures*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1990.
- Hallward, Peter. *Badiou: A Subject To Truth*. St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- "Staging Equality: On Rancière's Theatocracy." *New Left Review* 37 (Jan/Feb 2006): 109-129.
- Hansen, Mark. *New Philosophy for New Media*. Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 2006.
- Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard, 2001.
- Harvey, Sylvia. *May '68 and Film Culture*. London: BFI, 1978.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. "Lectures on Aesthetics." In *Continental Aesthetics: Romanticism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, edited by Richard Kearney and David M. Rasmussen. Translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Geopolitical Aesthetic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by Werner Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987.
- Kennedy, Barbara M. *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
- Kittler, Friedrich. "The World of the Symbolic." Translated by Stefanie Harris. In *Literature, Media, Information Systems*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: G & B Arts International, 1997.

- Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*. Translated by Hamid Algar. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981.
- Koch, Gertrude. "Carnivore or Chameleon: The Fate of Cinema Studies." *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 2009).
- Kovacs, Andras Balint. "The Film History of Thought." Translated by Sandor Hervey. In *The Brain Is The Screen*, edited by Gregory Flaxman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000: 153-170.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Krauss, Rosalind. "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism." In *New Artist Video: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Gregory Battcock. New York: Dutton, 1978.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005.
- The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI)*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978.
- The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*. Translated by Sylvana Tomaselli. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991.
- The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (Book XVII)*. Translated by Russell Grigg. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007.
- Lindsay, Vachel. *The Art of the Moving Picture*. New York: Modern Library, 2000.
- Lopate, Philip. "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film." In *Beyond Document: Essays in Nonfiction Film*, edited by Charles Warren. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1996.
- Lupton, Catherine. *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*. London: Reaktion Books, 2005.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Differend: Phrases In Dispute*. Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Macdonald, Kevin and Marc Cousins, eds. *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

- Manovitch, Lev. *Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1998.
- Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume One: A Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Translated by Michael Taylor. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Translated by Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti. Bloomington: Indianan University Press, 1982.
- Mitry, Jean. *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*. Translated by Christopher King. Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1999.
- Morin, Edgar. *The Cinema or the Imaginary Man*. Translated by Lorraine Mortimer. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Mottahedeh, Negar. *Displaced Allegories*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. Edited by Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Munsterberg, Hugo. *Film: A Psychological Study*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004.
- Musser, Charles. "A Cornucopia of Images: Comparison and Judgment across Theater, Film, and the Visual Arts During the Late Nineteenth Century", in *Moving Pictures: American Art and Early Film 1880-1910*, ed. Nancy Mowell Matthews. Hudson Hills Press, 2005.
- "Rethinking Early Cinema: Cinema of Attractions and Narrativity." In *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "The Deleuzian Fold of Thought," in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- L'Evidence du Film: Abbas Kiarostami*. Bruxelles: Yves Gevaert, 2001.

Nichols, Bill. *Introduction To Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

“Fred Wiseman’s Documentaries: Theory and Structure,” *Film Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 15-28.

Nochlin, Linda, ed. *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism 1874-1904: Sources and Documents*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966.

Palombini, Carlos. “Machine Songs V: Pierre Schaeffer: From Research Into Noises to Experimental Music,” *Computer Music Journal* 17, no. 3 (August 1993).

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Heretical Empiricism*. Translated by Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Peirce, Charles S. “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs.” In *Philosophical Writings*. New York: Dover, 1955.

Pfau, Thomas. *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma and Melancholy, 1790-1840*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Pisters, Patricia. *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working With Deleuze In Film Theory*. Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Rancière, Jacques. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Film Fables. Translated by Emiliano Battsista. New York: Berg Publishers, 2006.

The Flesh of Words: The Politics of Writing. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2004.

The Future of the Image. Translated by Gregory Elliott. London: Verso, 2007.

The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation. Translated by Kristin Ross. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1991.

La Leçon D’Althusser. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.

The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge. Translated by Hassan Melehy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

La Parole Ouvrière. Paris: La Fabrique, 1976.

The Philosopher and His Poor. Translated John Drury, Corinne Oster and Andrew Parker. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2004.

“Aesthetics Against Incarnation: An Interview by Anne Marie Oliver.” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Autumn 2008): 172-190.

“The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes.” *New Left Review* 14 (March/April 2002): 133-151.

“Dissenting Words.” *Diacritics* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 113-126.

“The Emancipated Spectator.” *Art Forum* (March 2007): 271-280.

“Jacques Rancière and Interdisciplinarity.” Translated by Gregory Elliot. *Art & Research* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 1-9.

“On the Theory of Ideology—Althusser’s Politics.” In *Radical Philosophy Reader*. London: Verso, 1985.

“The Politics of Literature.” *SubStance* 33, no. 1 (2004): 10-24.

Renov, Michael. “Documentary Horizons: An Afterward,” in *Collecting Visible Evidence Volume 6*, eds. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Theorizing Documentary, ed. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Reydellet, Jean de. “Pierre Schaeffer, 1910-1995: The Founder of Music Concrete,” *Computer Music Journal* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1996).

Richter, Hans. “Der Filmessay. Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms,” in *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film*, Eds. Christa Blumlinger and Constantin Wulff, Wein: Sonderzahl, 1992: 195-198.

Struggle for the Film. Translated by Ben Brewster. Wildwood House, 2006.

Rodowick, D.N. *The Crisis of Political Modernism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

“An Elegy For Theory.” *October* 122 (Fall 2007).

Rosen, Philip. *Change Mummified*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

“Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts.” In *Theorizing Documentary*, edited by Michael Renov. New York: Routledge, 1993.

“Screen and 70s Film Theory.” In *Inventing Film Studies*, edited by Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Sadoul, Georges. *Histoire General Du Cinema: L’Invention Du Cinema 1832-1897*. Paris, Denoel.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1956.

Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Translated by Reginald Snell. New York: Dover, 2004.

Shaviro, Steven. *The Cinematic Body*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Sobchack, Vivian. *Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Spivak, Gayatri. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-316. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

Stiegler, Bernard. “The Time of Cinema,” in *Tekhnema* 4 (1998).

Turvey, Malcolm. “Theory, Philosophy and Film Studies: A Response to D. N. Rodowick’s ‘An Elegy for Theory,’” in *October* 122 (Fall 2007).

Vaughan, Dai. “Let There Be Lumière.” In *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, edited by Thomas Elsaesser. London, BFI Press, 1990.

Vertov, Dziga. *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Translated by Kevin O’Brien. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.

Winston, Brian. *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Tradition and its Legitimations*. London: BFI, 1995.

“The Documentary Film as Scientific Inscription,” In *Theorizing Documentary*, edited by Michael Renov. London: Routledge, 1993.

Wollen, Peter. “Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent D’est*,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, edited by Philip Rosen. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

“‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism’ in Film,” *Screen* 17, no. 1 (1976).

“The Two Avant-Gardes.” In *Studio International*. (Nov/Dec 1975).

Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970.

Žižek, Slavoj. *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*. London: Verso, 2002.

The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory. London: British Film Institute, 2001.

Biography

Nico Baumbach was born March 10, 1975 in New York, New York. He received a B.A. from Brown University in 1998.