Liv Hausken (ed.)

Thinking
Media Aesthetics

Media Studies, Film Studies and the Arts

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and the Arts

PETER LANG

Contents

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Acknowledgements

It is amazing to finally see this book completed and objectified, to have become an aesthetic object or an object to be approached aesthetically. For a period of about five years, the interdisciplinary research project *Media Aesthetics. Materiality, Practice, Experience* at the University of Oslo explored current media practices in order to generate cross-disciplinary theoretical and analytical insights into the impact of technical mediation on the experience of materiality, media and sociality. It started as an idea, or an urge, to conceptualize certain awarenesses of sense and sensibility, a way to approach the subject with an open mind, perceptible to more than what is explicitly told in current cultural expressions. We were juggling with names, Arild Fetveit and I: medium theory, rhetoric, mediology, media philosophy, yet none of them precisely covering what we were after. We wanted to include a concept of perception, experience, concrete practices, and suddenly the word just appeared: Media Aesthetics. Later we discovered that this had happened at several places in the world more or less at the same time, and before we knew it, some of the most obviously relevant essays by Walter Benjamin were collected and published in German as *Medienästhetische Schriften* (Media Aesthetic Writings). Our group then also included Ina Blom, as well as Susanne Østby Sæther and Eivind Røssaak, our two doctoral candidates at the time. In the course of this project and its various conferences, we had fruitful collaborations and exchanges with a number of important experts on this emerging field of research, and some of them were invited to contribute to this volume. Herewith, I warmly thank all contributors to this volume*:* WJT Mitchell, Samuel Weber, Mary Ann Doane, David Rodowick, Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann, as well as Arild Fetveit, Ina Blom, Susanne Østby Sæther and Eivind Røssaak. Special thanks go to Ina Blom for her generous, efficient and knowledgeable response to my questions and suggestions along the way. I am solely responsible for all editorial decisions made, but I am grateful for your support during the process.

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Liv Hausken

Foreword
Media Aestehetics

W. J. T. Mitchell

For those of us who like to think with our ears (as Adorno once put it), the phrase "media aesthetics" has a slightly jarring quality.[1] It is not just the awkward conjunction of Latin and Greek; it is the forcing together of modern and ancient concepts, a term associated on the one hand with mass society and information theory, while the other evokes the world of elite taste and fine art. As McLuhan would have put it, medium implies "message," while aesthetics is about the *massage* of the body, its extensions, and its senses. Of course McLuhan went on to write and design a graphically experimental book entitled *The Medium is the Massage*.[2] He was not bothered by the shocking little pun; in fact puns, with their foregrounding of the nonsensical and hypersensuous character of speech itself, may well have been his favorite figure of speech. So aesthetics, the study of the senses and the arts that massage them, constituted the central hub around which issues such as communication, technology, and social forms circulated in his unified field theory of media. He thought that the only people who could really comprehend the impact of a new medium would be artists who were willing to play with and upon its sensory capabilities – to think with their ears, their fingers and toes. Those concerned primarily with content or messages, by contrast, would never be able to see (or hear or feel) how the medium was altering the ratio of their senses. And feeling, for McLuhan, was never merely a matter of sensuous apprehension, but of emotional and affective *com*prehension, of a body bathed in hot and cool media. Never mind which medium (television, radio, newspapers) is to be labeled hot or cool: the point is to take the temperature of a medium, which is to say the temperature of a body – individual or collective – in a world of sensory ratios.

McLuhan's visionary legacy was, I think, largely forgotten in the decades after his death. McLuhan himself was debunked as a crank who had been seduced into nonsensical proclamations by his rise as a media celebrity who could upstage the likes of Truman Capote on the Dick Cavett show. Filmmaker David Cronenberg, who had been in McLuhan's classes at the University of Toronto, pronounced the epitaph for the father of media studies in his classic horror film,

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1   This was the opening observation of Adorno's essay, "Cultural Criticism," and of course he was much more emphatic, describing this phrase as a barbarism.

2   Co-authored and designed with Quentin Fiore (1967).

Videodrome. The great media theorist, Dr. Brian Oblivion, a transparent caricature of McLuhan, is portrayed as the only person in the world who truly understands what media are doing to the human sensorium ("the television screen has become the retina of the mind's eye; therefore, television is reality, and reality is less than television"). Dr. Oblivion is therefore singled out by the evil Videodrome corporation as "its first victim."

After McLuhan, media studies were quickly balkanized into academic specialties that had little awareness of or interest in each other. Schools of communication, ruled by quantitative sociological discourse, paradigms of mass media advertising and journalism and technical gadgetry did not talk to departments of art history; art history turned its back on philosophical aesthetics in favor of historicism, and only grudgingly came to acknowledge its constitutive relation to language and literature; and literary studies, driven to distraction by overly literal readings of Derridean sayings such as "there is nothing outside the text," settled into a linguistically centered semiotics that began to rival Renaissance rhetoric in its proliferation of technical terms and distinctions. Meanwhile, McLuhan was eclipsed by the rising star of Walter Benjamin, whose concept of "mechanical reproduction" took over the humanities at precisely the moment that mechanistic paradigms were being replaced (as McLuhan foresaw) by electronic and biocybernetic models. One could say of media studies in the wake of McLuhan what the evil prison warden says of the stubborn inmate played by Paul Newman in *Cool Hand Luke*: "what we have here is a failure to communicate."

A new synthesis in media studies seemed to be offered, however, in the 1990s by the appearance of Friedrich Kittler's magnum opus, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, a lively, experimental collage of stories, jokes, songs, and gadgets, woven into a dark narrative of the end of humanity and the rise of the computer (Kittler 1999 [1986]). Kittler offered media theory as Gothic romance, a tale of media history driven by war, "the mother of invention," of "situation rooms" in which Dr. Strangeloves ponder the calculus of destruction, and McLuhan's sensory ratios are wired up to keyboard interfaces, headphones, and optical scanners.

Kittler's brilliant intervention in media studies had the effect of opening up a whole new media archaeology for historical investigation, and re-oriented attention to computer software and hardware, and (to a lesser extent) to the new networks of interactive machines. Arriving along with the rise of the internet, it provoked a wave of studies in so-called "new media" (led by Peter Lunenfeld and Lev Manovich, among others) that announced a "digital turn" in which the old analog-based "mechanical" media (especially photography and cinema) were to be replaced by binary codes, data bases, and self-executing algorithms. Reality, especially the kind delivered by analog photography with its supposedly "indexical" relation to the referent, along with notions of representation and mimesis,

were all to be consigned to the dustbin of history.[3] As Kittler put it, the sensory outputs provided by computers were to be regarded merely as "eyewash" and "entertainment" for the stunned survivors of humanity, something to keep them distracted "in the meantime" as they approach their final replacement by the machines they had built.

Ill 1: Still from The Matrix*, 1999, d. Andy and Lana Wachoski.*

While this story, popularized by films like *The Matrix* and *Johnny Mnemonic*, was beguiling, one can see immediately how it tended to minimize the question of aesthetics as a merely superficial matter that conceals the Real (understood in the Lacanian sense as trauma) of ones and zeros, of alphanumeric code. The return of something called "media aesthetics" to our attention, might be understood, then, as a re-focussing on the superficial "eyewash" that was so central to McLuhan's

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3   For an argument that digital photography has lost the indexical relation with the real offered by chemical-based photography, see William J. Mitchell (no relation) (1992), *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era.* For a critique of this view, see my essay, "Realism and the Digital Image," in *Critical Realism in Contemporary Art around Alan Sekula's Photography,* Jan Baetens and Hilde van Gelder (2006) (eds.).

vision of media. One could already see this return coming in the key moment of *The Matrix*, when Neo ("The One" sent to save us from the Matrix) sees through the eyewash into the Real world of streaming alphanumeric code. As the still from this moment reveals, however, this revelation is simultaneously a return to the analog. The agents of the Matrix are *not* merely programs or amorphous clusters of digits: they have recognizable human forms.

The digital turn will never be properly understood if it is not placed in a dialectic with the analog, and with what Brian Massumi has called "the superiority of the analog."[4] The digital is NOT an invention of the 20th century, nor is it equivalent to computer codes. The digital has always been with us in the form of finite sets of discrete characters (e.g., alphabets and number systems) and in the graphic media, in everything from the Ben Day dots of newspaper photos, to the medium of mosaic tile, to the material equivalent of pixels in Australian sand painting. Eyewashing and brainwashing have to be understood in their mutual interactivity. Every turn toward new media is simultaneously a turn toward a new form of *immediacy*. The obscure, unreadable ciphers of code are most often mobilized, not to encrypt a secret, but to produce a new form of transparency.

Another problem with Kittler's narrative is launched in the opening sentence of his book: "*Media determine our situation.*" This is followed by a detour into the "situation room" of the German high command in World War II, plotting the trajectories of air strikes in the battle of Britain. When Mark Hansen and I were writing the introduction to *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, we immediately thought of using Kittler's sentence as the opening epigraph (2010). But our first *second* thought was to introduce a strategic revision, and to insist that "media *are* our situation." The implicit aim of this revision was to put into question the seductive rhetoric of media as outside agencies that cause things, the language of determinism and determination. Are media really the "determining instance" of a situation? Or are they better pictured as themselves the situation, an environment in which human experience and (inter)action take place? Would it not be better to see media, rather than as the determining factor in a cause and effect scenario, as an ecosystem in which processes may or may not take place? Like the old notion of God as the element "in which we live and move and have our being," media surround us on every side. But it is a "we" that inhabits them, a "we" that experiences every medium as the vehicle of some form of immediacy or opacity.

I would want to qualify the notion of medium-as-situation or environment even further by suggesting that it is never *all* of a situation. One of the deepest temptations of the concept of media is its tendency toward totalization. Even the old model of media as communication device had this as a built-in tendency.

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4   See the chapter with this title in Massumi (2002).

Like an accordion, the model of sender-medium-receiver (call this the "telephonic" image) immediately expanded to include the sender/receiver function as components of the medium.[5] Pretty soon everything is a medium, the old Derridean mantra comes back to haunt us, and there is nothing outside the media. I would prefer to say that there is *always* something outside the medium, namely, the zone of immediacy and the unmediated that it both produces and encounters. McLuhan, again, was a wise guide to this aspect of media, noting that the new media of his time, television especially, were arriving in a wide variety of cultural, political, and social situations. Television in Africa, he noted, did not produce or encounter the same situation that it did in the United States in the 1960s (for one thing, collective viewing situations were much more common, as distinct from the private domestic sphere of American households). Today the internet encounters quite a different set of circumstances as it crosses national borders, at the same time that it facilitates McLuhan's long anticipated "global village." What people failed to understand in McLuhan's time (and our own) is that a village is not necessarily a utopia. Real villages, as those of us who grew up in rural America can testify, can be very nasty places.

Media aesthetics, then, promises to provide a salutary resistance to the all-or-nothing tendencies of media theory, and of that form of media history that treats everything as a consequence of some media invention. My version of media aesthetics would not treat the widely heralded "digital turn," for instance, as a jettisoning of the analog, or a reduction to dematerialized and disembodied experiences. The digital is experienced in the ten fingers tapping on a QWERTY keyboard interface and moving a mouse, or brushing across a touch-pad or touch-screen. The computer introduces a new form of tactility, accompanied by new maladies such as carpal tunnel syndrome. The codes and algorithms of informatics are also encoded in the molecular structure of living organisms, so that the cybernetic model of "control" and the figure of the cyber as "steersman" is resisted by the stormy seas of life itself. The technical revolution of our time is not merely cybernetic, but biocybernetic, producing a world of machines infected with viruses, and engineered life forms tethered to increasingly complex prostheses.[6] Smart bombs and suicide bombers, drones and clones populate our imaginary universe of "extensions of man," and of highly ambiguous models of "agency." What counts as a "free agent" in the age of biocybernetics? Consider, for instance, that one of the dominant espionage narratives of our time portrays the secret agent as

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5   For a further account of the accordion effect in media theory, see my chapter, "Addressing Media," in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (2005).

6   For further development of this idea, see my chapter, "The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetics," in *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images.*

an orphan (James Bond in *Skyfall*) or as an amnesiac (and "rogue agent") who has escaped the control of his agency as in Matt Damon's *Bourne* series. Or that the Cold War figure of the brain-washed automaton who has been turned into an assassin (Laurence Harvey in *the Manchurian Candidate*), has been replaced in the War on Terror by the religious convert (Sergeant Brody in *Homeland*) who is motivated by moral outrage and true blue patriotism (his suicide video shows him affirming his identity as a U.S. Marine, festooned with all his decorations). *Homeland* transfers the position of madness to the prescient, Cassandra-like CIA agent, whose bipolar paranoia and mania allow her to see impending threats that are invisible to everyone else. She is herself a medium, in the old sense of the seer at a séance, in the grip of intuitions that she cannot prove, but that hold her with obsessive certainty.

The model of the free agent versus the agent of a higher power, free will versus determinism, shimmers with ambiguity in the environment of contemporary media systems, which is why it is so difficult to settle the question of whether (to re-cite Kittler) "media determine our situation," or whether they serve as a passive, neutral background of potentials, as Niklas Luhmann (2000) would argue. But perhaps contemporary media, the "extended sensorium" or global nervous system that McLuhan predicted, is simply the latest version of that image of the divinity in which "we live and move and have our being." Perhaps that is why the rhetoric of religion is so deeply woven into the discourse on media, why concepts like media and mediation so easily turn into god-terms even in secular, technical contexts, why the concrete materiality of a medium is so easily abstracted and spiritualized by the terminology of media and mediation.

Media aesthetics, finally, produces an interesting convergence of the problem of singularity and multiplicity. We see this in everyday parlance in our tendency to describe "the media" as if they were a kind of collective body, like Hobbes's image of the sovereign as a single monstrous body containing multitudes. In mass media, the figures of "talking heads" speak as agents of radically heterogeneous interests – corporate sponsors, administrative hierarchies, journalistic canons, market shares. All this condenses into something called "the media," or (more prejudicially) the "Liberal Media." Meanwhile, each medium is spoken of as if it were a unique, essential constellation of materials, techniques, and practices – its "medium specificity." This singular concept of the medium, a central feature of modernist aesthetics from Clement Greenberg to Michael Fried, is widely regarded now as a relic of the time when media aesthetics was a quest for purity – pure painting, music, poetry – and a rigorous avoidance of hybridity and multi-media interplay among the arts. "What lies between the arts is theater," insisted Fried (1998 [1967]), and that sort of theatricality is the enemy of any art form that aims to remain faithful to and compete with the great aesthetic

achievements of the past. Postmodernism in the arts, then, was a movement that renounced the medium as a singular, essential formation in favor of the media understood precisely as the spaces between the arts, and as artistic practices that situated themselves between images and words and music, between concepts and performances, between bodies and spaces. That is why postmodernism was so deeply linked to the rise of interdisciplinarity, the emergence of relations between the disciplines that study the arts and sciences. All the more paradoxical, then, that media studies itself was so balkanized, with so little communication between the study of mass media, artistic media, and technology. When Mark Hansen and I set out to produce a collection of *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, then, one of our central aims was to produce a conversation among the different disciplines that engage with media. We wanted to imagine a universe where Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* would be read alongside Paul Starr's *The Creation of the Media* alongside Adorno and Horkheimer on the culture industry alongside David Graeber's analysis of the history of money and exchange alongside Rosalind Krauss's account of the "post-medium" condition in the arts (see Graeber 2010). Media aesthetics would be, we hoped, a catalyst for that conversation.

The concept of media aesthetics has a personal resonance for me as a landmark in my evolution as a scholar. In the early 1990s I began to teach a course entitled "Visual Culture" and to write about this nascent field as a kind of "indiscipline" that would link art history to film, media studies, physical and psychological optics, and anthropology. Starting with a review essay entitled "The Pictorial Turn" (prompted by the publication of Jonathan Crary's (1990) *Techniques of the Observer* at the same time as the first English publication of Erwin Panofsky's classic "Perspective as Symbolic Form") I found myself working directly against the tendency to "linguistify" art history led by Norman Bryson and Mieke Bal in the 1980s.[7] As an alternative to Richard Rorty's "linguistic turn," I turned in exactly the opposite direction, by way of a re-reading of philosophy and theory grounded in an obsession with – and fear of – the image. My ambition for art history was to promote its primary theoretical object, the visual image, from its status as a secondary and subordinate element of culture, always to be explained by reference to language, into a primary datum of the human sciences. Rather than colonize art history with methods derived from the textual disciplines, I wanted to strike back at the empire of language, and insist on the image or icon as a "firstness" (as Charles Sanders Peirce called it) in the production of meaning and emotion.

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7   Panofsky's, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* was published by Zone Books in 1991 with an excellent translation by Christopher S. Wood. My review essay, "The Pictorial Turn," appeared in *ArtForum* in March of 1992.

Around 2000 I began to re-orient this initiative around the concepts of media, medium, and mediation, and to teach a course entitled "Theories of Media" that aimed to trace the specific development of media studies from Marshall McLuhan to Friedrich Kittler, with ample representation of earlier key texts on media, from Aristotle and Plato to Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School. Several things motivated this transition. First, it had become increasingly clear to me that the emphasis on *vision* and *visuality* (which I still find very productive for the study of culture) needed to be extended with a consideration of the other senses, particularly hearing and touch. Second, it had struck me that the role of visual culture all along had been to produce a series of mediations among disciplines that would ordinarily not be talking to each other. Since I had come to the study of the visual arts from the sphere of literature and literary theory, spurred on the one hand by a general interest in theory, and on the other by a particular interest in the composite art of painter-poet William Blake, it began to be increasingly obvious to me that the real subject of my work was the relations among different media, art forms, sensory modalities, and codes of signification, as well as the disciplines that addressed them.

As for theory as such, I was mindful of Fredric Jameson's canny remark that theory was nothing more than a form of philosophy that is conscious of its own embeddedness in language, including rhetoric and poetics. But it quickly dawned on me that one could extend Jameson's observation by postulating a notion of *medium theory*, a form of philosophical reflection that is conscious of its embeddedness in non-linguistic media, such as music and the graphic arts. Medium theory is not the same as media theory. It does not come at media from outside, as an explanatory meta-language. It is an immanent metalanguage – or more to the point – a set of "metapictures" that show us what pictures are, how they work, what they want. Instead of a "theory of pictures," medium theory requires a *Picture Theory*,[8] in which "picture" is ambiguously both an adjective and a verb.

It became clear to a group of my colleagues at the University of Chicago that media, understood in this sort of interdisciplinary framework, were essential to the fabric of a liberal education as well. As a result, around 2005 we set about designing a new "common core" curriculum based precisely in the concept of media aesthetics. The idea of a common core of "great books" has been a fixture of undergraduate education at Chicago for many years, one that has been modified periodically to reflect new movements in the humanities. For instance, during the rise of "cultural studies" in the 1990s, a new freshman core called "Reading Cultures" was developed by a group of young faculty members: it divided the

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8   See my 1994 book, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, especially the chapter on "Metapictures."

three term academic year into thematic emphases on "Travel, Collecting, and Capitalist Cultures." "Media Aesthetics" emerged in a similar way, as a collaboration between literary scholars, art historians, film scholars, philosophers, and musicologists. The thematic triad for the freshman year was divided into "Image/Sound/Text," the fall term focusing on visual culture, the winter on music and orality, and the spring on reading and textuality. Needless to say, there was reading in every term!

It is probably also needless to say that there was something deeply inevitable about the specific triangulation of media aesthetics that emerged, that it was not merely an artifact of Chicago's three-term quarter system. One hears immediately the echo of Roland Barthes' classic *Image/Music/Text*, with "music" demoted to the status of a mere medium (sound), rather than an art form, to put it at the same level with images and words. But the logic of this triad goes even deeper than its resonance with Barthes. It echoes Friedrich Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, with its division of the new technical media of the late 19th century into sound recording, optical recording, and the tactile/textual keyboard interface for the recording of writing. Even more deeply, perhaps, it echoes Aristotle's division of the "means" or "media" of drama into the elements of *melos* (music), *opsis* (spectacle), and *lexis* (words).

There is something deeply conservative, then, about the logical divisions generated by media aesthetics. Instead of an endlessly proliferating list of "new media" accompanied by a breathless (and presentist) enumeration of all the new sensations offered by the new gadgets, we find a continual process of remediation of older forms. The great orders of aesthetics, classically represented in painting, poetry, and music, persist even in the most hyper-mediated digital worlds: videogames consist of spectacular visual images, sound effects, and verbal elements such as speech and writing. The proportions of these elements of media aesthetics may vary, but their necessary co-presence does not. For media to change fundamentally, to move outside these persistent aesthetic registers, would require a radical transformation in the sensuous universe that we inhabit. We would have to be creatures with an entirely different kind of sensorium, blind, deaf, and mute or illiterate, but capable of communicating in other modalities – perhaps by means of heat impulses (a variation of McLuhan's hot and cool media?) and ultra-violet rays. Even in the wildest science fiction fantasies, however, the most exotic aliens seem to use media remarkably similar to our own. The ferocious mother of the *Aliens* saga recognizes that she shares DNA with Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) by means of her sense of smell.

We would also have to be creatures with entirely different ways of making meaning and feeling emotion. The triad of image/sound/text is not only grounded in fundamental sensory/aesthetic modalities, but in basic semiotic and psycho-

logical registers. Consider, for instance, that Kittler grounds his gramophone/ film/typewriter triad in the Lacanian registers of the Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic. The Imaginary and Symbolic are, of course, the domains of the visual and verbal media, the phenomena of the mirror stage and the scopic (seeing/showing) drive, on the one hand, and the law of the Symbolic, the "non/nom" of the father and the vocative (hearing/speaking) drive on the other. But why should music be associated with the Real? Is it because, like the Real, it is the least articulate and representational of the arts, expressing a longing for meaning that can never be fully satisfied?[9] Or does it have to do, as Kittler argues, with the physiology of the ear, and the physics of sound recording as a direct physical trace or index, an automatic writing in which the stylus traces sense and nonsense, music, speech, and noise with the same slavish fidelity.

Kittler's emphasis on the indexical quality of sound recording leads us inevitably into the great triad of semiotics mapped out by Charles Sanders Peirce (1955), the icon, index, and symbol.[10] Here the sensory and aesthetic modalities have been replaced by relations of signification and the production of meaning. Thus, the icon is *not* restricted to the sphere of *visual* imagery, but covers all sign-functions of likeness, similitude, resemblance, and analogy. So a metaphor, a simile, or an algebraic expression of equivalence or congruence can be an icon as well as a picture. The index includes the physical trace, the sign by cause and effect like tracks in the snow, but it also circulates in the domain of language in the form of deixis, signs by pointing that depend upon the "existential context" of the utterance. Thus the temporal indices "now" and "then," the spatial indices "here" and "now" join the demonstrative pronouns "this" and "that" and the personal pronouns "I" and "you" as *shifters* whose meaning depends on who is speaking to whom at what time and place. The verbal index, like the physical trace, the wound inflicted on the body, is the closest that language comes to the Real. Peirce's symbol, by contrast, is an artificial, arbitrary, and conventional sign. Like the signifier in Saussure's linguistics, it has no basis of resemblance to what it stands for (the word "tree" does not resemble a tree in any respect). It is what Peirce calls a "legisign," a sign produced by a law or code, and thus a premonition of the Lacanian Symbolic as Law.

A Peircean reading of Saussure's famous diagram of the linguistic sign, then, would reveal that language itself is a mixed medium, constructed out of the three

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9   This is the basic claim of Michael Steinberg's marvelous essay, "Music and Melancholy," forthcoming in *Critical Inquiry.*

10 Peirce's famous remark that a photograph is both an index and an icon, since it is a sign by cause and effect, as well as a sign by resemblance to what it represents, has been cited *ad nauseum* as his most important contribution to aesthetics. It is arguably his least important contribution.

elements of all possible signs. The signifier is a symbol, the word "tree"; the Signified is an icon, the picture of a tree; and the entire structure is held together by a system of indices, including the arrows that indicate the circuit of meaning between the symbolic signifier and the mental image or signified, and the bar between them.
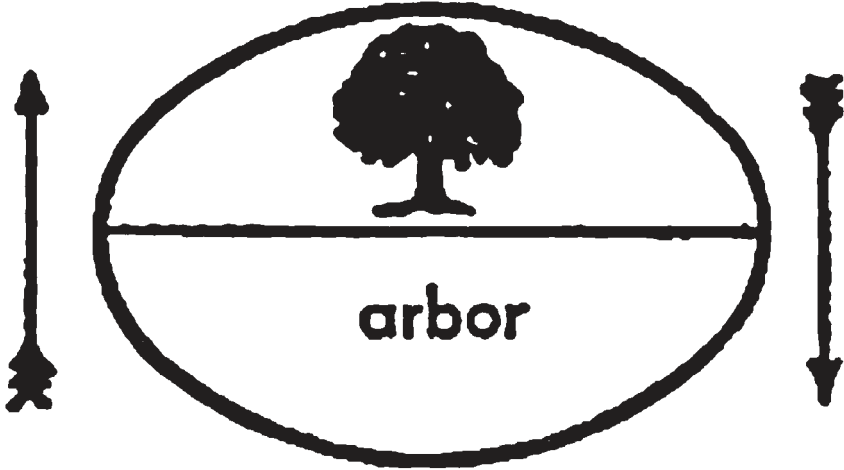
Ill 2: Saussure's diagram of the linguistic sign.

Media aesthetics, then, may have the potential to reveal a transhistorical structure that is congruent with the insights of media semiotics, not to mention Aristotle's *Poetics*, Lacan's psychic registers, and Kittler's technical media. It has not escaped my notice as I type these words on my computer, that the interface in front of me consists of words and typographic symbols, visual images and icons, and an ever-elusive pointer (the index) that shows me where I am located in the text. None of this would have surprised David Hume, who codified the fundamental laws of the association of ideas in terms of resemblance, cause and effect, and arbitrary connectedness. Or the philosopher Nelson Goodman, who rigorously restricted himself to a description of notational systems in his *Languages of Art*, and came up with the alliterative triad, "Score, Script, and Sketch" (1976). I offer the following table (with an additional nod to Foucault) as a way of showing at a glance the triangulation of media aesthetics, semiotics, and psychology I am proposing. Of course I recognize that these terms have their life in radically different systems of thought, articulated by thinkers who could not be more different in their ambitions. For me, the strong elements are the horizontal rows laying out the basic elements of these systems. The weak elements are the columns, each of which would re-

quire much more thorough argumentation to stand up as the supports of a theoretical architecture.

Aristotle	Opsis	Melos	Lexis
Barthes	Image	Music	Text
Lacan	Imaginary	Real	Symbolic
Kittler	Film	Gramophone	Typewriter
Goodman	Sketch	Score	Script
Peirce	Icon	Index	Symbol
Foucault	Seeable	[X]	Sayable
Hume	Similarity	Cause and Effect	Convention
Saussure	(Signified)	Bar	Arbor (Signifier)

Ill 3: Media Aesthetics, Semiotics, and Psychology.

And of course I recognize that the claim to have uncovered a transcendental schema underlying media aesthetics will be deeply unpopular in an age when we are admonished to "always historicize" and to respect the diversity, particularity, and specificity of cultures. I confess that I have never understood this fetishization of particularity, and that as a theorist, my deliberately perverse advice is "always anachronize." We cannot see or sort particulars, in media or anything else, without generalities and universals. We cannot analyze mixtures and hybrid formations without an understanding of the elements that go into them. And we cannot historicize, much less respect cultural diversity, or the multiplicity of media aesthetics, without some framework of differentiation and comparison, some way of thinking the relation of now and then, here and there. If you find this degree of systematic schematization toxic, consider it nothing more than a McLuhanesque "probe."

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Introduction

Liv Hausken

All through the 20th century, there have been rich and complex interchanges between aesthetic practices and media technologies. Along with the arrival of mass media, new technological forms of culture were gradually added to the old typologies of the arts. Photography, film, television, and video increasingly appeared in the curricula of art schools and were given separate departments in art museums. With the introduction of digital media technologies in the 1980s and 1990s, the means of production, storage, and distribution of mass media changed, and eventually, so did its uses. As artists adopted the technologies of mass media, the economy of fine art (like the economy of limited editions) was confronted with the logics of mass production and mass distribution. Thus, when visiting a contemporary art museum one might find, for example, such conceptually contradictory displays as "DVD, edition of 3" (see for instance Lev Manovich 2000). The increasing centrality of digital tools and technologies in all sorts of social practices has changed the media as we have known it. These social, cultural and technological changes in everyday life have also influenced artistic forms, as well as modes of imagination, expression, and critique.

In these complex interchanges between aesthetic practices and media technologies, *media aesthetics* has emerged as an interdisciplinary field of research between media studies and the aesthetic disciplines. This field grew out of earlier attempts at theorizing about the relations between aesthetics, technology and media, such as media philosophy (Friedrich Kittler), medium theory (Joshua Meyrowitz), mediology (Régis Debray) and critical theory (most notably Walter Benjamin), and is influenced by current, aesthetic theories of what has been termed "new media" (Mark Hansen) and "visual culture" (W.J.T. Mitchell). During the last decade, the word "media aesthetics" has been used as a label for advanced art or media productions (often with the notion "applied media aesthetics"),[1] and as an alternative marker for textual analysis and more generally for humanistic media studies. However, early examples of a more specific use of the term "media aesthetics" that are more in line with the current project can be found in the media philosophy of

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[1] One of the most influential being Herb Zettl, SIGHT SOUND MOTION: APPLIED MEDIA AESTHETICS, Sixth Edition, 2010, describing major visual and auditive elements of television and film and presenting in-depth coverage on how they are creatively used.

Wolfgang Schirmacher (1991)[2], and in attempts at preparing the ground for what was called "A New Media Aesthetics" (Tim Jackson 1998) or a "Post-Media Aesthetics" (Manovich 2000).[3] It is also interesting to note how the term has been used retrospectively for a collection of texts by Walter Benjamin published in 2002 with the title *Medienästhetische Schriften* (Media Aesthetic Writings).[4] This indicates the field of research on media aesthetics that we hope to identify and further develop with the contributions in this volume.

The *aesthetics* of media aesthetics is not viewed as a philosophy of art. Rather, aesthetics is understood as a theory of culturally and historically embedded sensation and perception, conceptually developed from the original Greek sense of the term, as *aisthesis* or sense perception. The human perceiver is considered as embedded in the sociocultural environment and interacts with it continuously in an engaged and multisensory fashion (see Berleant 2005). This general model of aesthetic engagement is equally applicable to works of art and popular culture, and to the built and natural environment. Hence, aesthetics is not confined here to a particular kind of object, like art. Neither is it characterized by the specific properties of the object of inquiry. Rather, the perspective by which the objects are approached defines it. The perspective incorporates the perceptual engagement described by Arnold Berleant as well as the influence of conceptual information and the ways in which conceptual knowledge may direct our perceptual scale and framing of the objects (see Carlson 2005). Aesthetics is seen as a critical reflection on cultural expressions, on technologies of the senses and on the experiences of everyday life. The studies of perception in this volume share an interest in the reciprocity between the senses and an ideal of a non-hierarchical view of sense perception. In contrast both to the separation of the senses in neuroscience and cognitive psychology – treating each sense as individually linked to one single physiological organ and one particular part of the brain[5] – and also to the ranking of the senses so common in philosophies of art, the media aesthetic perspectives

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2   In a paper called "Media Aesthetics in Europe", given in Paris as early as in 1991, the German philosopher Wolfgang Schirmacher discusses what he considers to be the differences between European and American media aesthetics.

3   Note that these writings must be read more as attempts at an aesthetic for "new" media or for "post-media", rather than a media aesthetics as such.

4   The Benjamin collection contains 51 of his essays, including "The Storyteller", "The Telephone", "On the Minute", "Short History of Photography", as well as "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility".

5   Research on brain plasticity and the recent development of the idea of neural reuse as a fundamental organizational principle of the brain (see the target article on the subject by Michael L. Anderson 2010) may be considered a parallel conceptual development in neuroscience.

presented here attempt to understand the complexity of sense perception and its embeddedness in the cultures and histories of technologies of mediation.

Thinking Media Aesthetics brings together contributions from different disciplines from both sides of the Atlantic and from several generations. It stages a conversation that introduces important questions, and ways of thinking about those questions, around basic concepts in the field, preeminently what we mean by the "medium" and "media" in the present, and how we might best go about studying these terms.

The media aesthetic program presented here will not reduce all the different media concepts to their least common denominators. Rather, we intend to clarify important conceptual tensions and present a collection of suggestions regarding the direction the discussions about the conception of medium and media should go. What is shared – initially and in a very basic fashion – is the wish to move beyond the idea of a medium as something rather fixed, like an object or apparatus, toward a concept of mediation as a process, as the performance of a task. The media aesthetic program presented here refocuses the study of medium from object-oriented questions like "what is film? and "what is photography?" common in both communication studies and historical studies of the arts, to questions regarding social practices and experiences of media technologies. This implies a refocusing from 'medium' to 'mediality' or 'mediation'.

The move from medium to mediation also represents a shift from medium and media as predefined objects of study: Taking a particular medium as a point of departure often involves a tendency to naturalize media. The idea, for example, that the distinction between art and documentary has vanished, is often based on such a naturalized conception of medium. However, using the same media technologies or expressive resources in different contexts does not make the aesthetic practices the same. Different contexts, discourses, spheres or cultural systems situate the practices differently.[6] Like any practice, aesthetic practices cannot be reduced to, or deduced from, the techniques used and the technologies in which they take part. The shift from medium to mediation does not only represent a shift in focus; it also represents a shift in perspective from medium as an object of study and media as collections of artifacts and technologies, to medium and media as concepts, ideas, models for understanding practices, articulations and experiences. Hence, a medium may be something other than what we – caught within the currents of the current examination of media – take it to be.

The shift from medium to mediation represents a shift from medium as a predefined object, to mediation as a complex perspective for understanding. Most basically, and in accordance with the fundamental insight from the linguistic turn

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6   See for example Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (1995 [1984]).

in the humanities during the 20th century, perception is understood as symbolically mediated by signs, rules, and norms (see Ricoeur 1990 p. 57). Language in the broad sense of the term, or symbolic systems and forms, constitute reality insofar as we would not even be able to recognize a particular object, situation or phenomenon as something particular without simultaneously recognizing that it is not everything else. In other words, a particular object, situation or phenomenon is defined as being a specific collection of characteristics that are themselves defined in certain ways, all of this within the symbolic systems of culture and history.

Secondly, following as a consequence of perception being symbolically mediated, there is an internal relation between a social practice and the changing circumstances under which it is performed and experienced. Translated into the language of mediation, there is an internal relation between a medium and what it mediates: Each is what it is by means of the other. They mutually refer to each other and make a unity without being identical (Østerberg 1988). Just as there is no single 'sociality' out there that can simply be mediated by artistic activity (see Blom in this volume), there is no 'content' that can be passed on, understood or experienced without a complex set of cultural and historical competences. The media aesthetic program presented here underscores the importance of studying the fundamental relationality of the irreducible role of mediation in the history of human being (see also Mitchell and Hansen 2010, p. xii).

In the media aesthetic field, mediation represents not just one perspective on understanding, but a set of perspectives, which I will return to below. What they share – in addition to the very basic principles of mediation stressed above – is a move beyond the paradigm of communication and the idea that a medium first and foremost should be seen as a vehicle of communication. This does not imply that communication cannot be studied from a media aesthetic perspective. Rather, it suggests that the conceptions of medium and mediation should not be seen as dependent upon a theory of communication. This reflects a more general wish to open up the conceptions of meaning and sensation so often subordinated to a perspective of communication between senders and receivers in studies of media.

The shift from media as a collection of artifacts to mediation as a perspective for understanding indicates the importance of the theoretical dimension of the media aesthetic field. All the essays in this collection contribute to this thinking of and about media aesthetics, some very explicitly, some more inherently in their analysis. They bring forth questions from an encounter with concrete phenomena or empirical situations, yet the answers to these questions have theoretical relevance beyond the concrete analysis.

In other words, the objects encountered in this book are studied both in their own right and as objects of theoretical reflection. Some of them may be characterized as theoretical objects, be they concepts, like that of theory (Rodowick), of medium of

reflection (Weber), of sociality (Blom) or photography (my contribution), or specific conceptual relations (like for instance sound-image relations in Daniels' and Naumann's chapter). Some of the objects encountered may be considered art or perceived as media aesthetic practices (inside or outside the art discourses as such), while others again may normally be thought of first and foremost as commercial objects, like for instance the movie trailer (discussed in Doane's contribution). In this volume, they are considered as technological arrangements, as objects of experience and as opportunities to think through and rethink basic ideas in the field.

Further, while the questions posed in the different essays come from problems and sticking points in the contemporary moment, the answers to these questions emerge within an historical framework. Hence, the volume is opposed to recent tendencies – on the part of critics and also of a culture oriented to the present and very near future – to segregate contemporary media experience from the history of media.

A proper understanding of and appreciation for media aesthetics would thus introduce a shift from the static concept of medium/media to the dynamic process of mediation; it would move beyond the paradigm of communication to mediation as a perspective of understanding, and it would combine theoretical argument with analysis of individual artworks or media phenomena. Finally, it would insist on the continuity, rooted in the long history of aesthetics in its more general sense, between so-called old and new media.

Rather than present a unified theoretical front or create an inevitable historical trajectory, this book will affirm that media aesthetics represents an interdisciplinary *arena* more than a unified field of research on media and aesthetics. It does not belong to any one discipline, but is rather a set of perspectives that may inscribe themselves into a very great number of disciplines and has done so most notably in art history, media studies, film studies, and to a certain extent, comparative literature and humanistic informatics, as well.

As inscribed (rather than inserted) into different disciplines, these media aesthetics perspectives are influenced by the acknowledged discourses in and about these disciplines. The media aesthetics perspectives therefore vary partly by the disciplinary discourses from which they arise. The term 'medium' may illustrate the historical difference between two disciplinary discourses of importance in the field of media aesthetics.

Being one of the key concepts in modern art, "the traditional media" referred to "painting, sculpture, drawing, architecture" (see Krauss 1999, p. 296). As an even more basic term in media and communication studies, "the traditional media" refers to television, radio, and newspapers, and sometimes also film.[7] The

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7   We also find the concept of medium sketched here with reference to the discourse of mass
     communication in everyday language.

difference between these two basic terms is not just a question of culturally separate objects of reference. It is a conceptual discrepancy between what we may call a modernist art discourse and a discourse of mass communication: In the art discourse in question, "a medium" was seen as a set of conventions derived from "the material conditions" of a given "technical support", conventions out of which to develop a form of "expressiveness" (Krauss 1999, p. 296). In the tradition of mass communication research, on the other hand, "medium" was treated as a channel of communication, a technical apparatus for the mass distribution of "content" or "messages" (Fiske 1982, ch.1; O´Sullivan 1983, p. 134).

This conceptual distinction between the two discourses contains differences in importance and in function. As a key concept in modern art, distinctive media laid the foundations on which the typology of artistic practices was based. This media-based typology of art structured (and to a certain extent still structures) the organization of museums, art schools, funding agencies and other cultural institutions. In the discourse of mass communication on the other hand, the medium was just one concept among many subordinated to a model of mass communication. The differentiation of media was based on several dimensions, such as forms of distribution, structures of ownership, economic terms, sociologies of readers, and public concerns about unwanted moral effects on children (see for instance McQuail 1987). The medium was less in focus as an expressive resource. This stands in stark contrast to the discourse of modern art.

This discursive discrepancy has some very basic consequences that can be illustrated with the different concepts of *medium specificity*. Without going into detail on this highly sophisticated issue, let me just roughly indicate that in the discourse of mass communication, medium specificity is a *descriptive* term referring to the technical and communicative capacities of one medium compared to the technical and communicative resources that can be shared by most media. In the discourse of modernist art, on the other hand, medium specificity often worked as a *normative term* referring to an ideal of artistic purification and specialization that harks back to the theories of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and that found its most radical expression in modernist painting and sculpture. Conceptual divergences like these must be discovered and clarified if we want to understand what is at stake in interdisciplinary discussions, especially if we have the ambition to theoretically develop the field further.

Conceptually unrecognized assumptions continue to influence the discourses even after the historical circumstances that produced them may seem to have changed. The ideas of *a post-medium situation* may briefly illustrate this, as these ideas directly follow the conceptual disparity outlined above. In response to the growing integration of information, of communication networks, of media platforms and of different markets, the simple model of communication between

senders and receivers based on an idea of separate media must give in. In media studies, this is often referred to as "the culture of convergence" and is characterized as "a post-medium situation". While this "post-medium situation" challenges the basic conceptions in the models of mass communication and therefore the very premises for a mass communication discourse as such, "a post-medium situation" has a different meaning and impact in the discourse of fine art.

The modernist ideal of artistic purification and specialization belongs to an historical past along with the idea that art forms are dependent on specific, physical materials. With site-specific happenings, installations, conceptual art and other artistic forms, the typology of arts based on the materials used challenged the concept of medium in the arts long before digital technologies became available in the 1980s and 1990s. In the discourse of fine art, therefore, "the post-medium situation" has several layers of meaning, referring to the critique of normative aesthetics of artistic purification and specialization, to the death of art objects as defining art forms, as well as to technical convergence as part of "the culture of convergence" discussed above.

These conceptual disparities (medium, medium specificity, post-medium situation) are parts of different historically important discourses that, in various ways, influence the disciplines that media aesthetic perspectives inscribe themselves into, that is, the participants in the media aesthetic arena. The *discourse of mass communication* has been of major importance in media studies, particularly in the United States, Britain and Scandinavia, as well as most countries on the European continent. The medium theories from what has been called the Toronto School in Canada and the interest in medium theory in Germany as well may be seen as exceptions to this dominance of mass communication in media studies (see Wintrop-Young 2010, pp. 187-188). The discourse of mass communication has also influenced a range of other disciplines, such as sociology and pedagogy, and a variety of fields of research have submitted to the paradigm of communication. The *discourse of fine art* has been of major importance in art criticism and art history and all disciplines concerning the arts. However, the conceptions of medium and medium specificity discussed above did not quite find their way into the modern discourses of literary scholars (see Mitchell 2005, p. 205; Hayles 2004). Despite being a discipline primarily occupied with the study of works of art, the technical and material *medium* of this verbal art of literature (print, paper, book) has hardly (and until recently) been in focus since Gutenberg's mechanical printing press. The critical discussions of the concept of the *work* of art in comparative literature during the 1960s and 1970s, exemplified by Roland Barthes' essay "From Work to Text" (1971), had more to do with "The Death of the Author" (see Barthes' 1977 essay) than with the death of the art object as such. Roland Barthes' *écriture*, Jacques Derrida's *grammatology* and other conceptions of

writing may seem to complicate this rather simplified sketch. But even if this interest in writing represents an interest in the mediality of literature, it seems fair to say that studies in comparative literature until recently – and generally speaking – have been less occupied with the medium of the art works of study (see also Mitchell 2005, p. 205). Hence, comparative literature has been less influenced by the critique of the concept of the art medium and therefore has also been less absorbed with the idea of a post-medium situation.

In film studies, however, the conceptions of medium have been influenced by the discourses of both modern art and mass communication discussed above. Throughout its history, film has struggled to become accepted as art and as a field of academic research, and scholars have defined film both as a specific art form (in accordance with the discourse of art) and a medium of communication, the institutional result being that film has been included in art schools, departments of literature and rhetoric, and departments of media in addition to having departments of its own. Conceptually, the result has sometimes been rather confusing, as can be exemplified by the influential film philosopher Noël Carroll's criticism of medium specificity in *Theorizing the Moving Image* (1996). In Carroll's presentation, we may recognize the normative, modernist aesthetics from the discourse of art mentioned above, which here is termed "the doctrine of medium specificity" (p. xv). However, the object of critique is primarily what he (synonymously) calls "medium essentialism" which dominates classical film theory, according to Carroll (see p. xv and pp. 49-50). This medium essentialism is explained as a striving toward defining one, single essence of a particular "medium, and a keystone, and, with them, the promise of a unified theory" (p. xv). Hence, without taking a stand for or against Carroll's critique of this "medium essentialism," his argument seems to confuse attempts to define the essence of a medium with a normative aesthetics of modernist art. This may illustrate how the discourse of film studies, for better and for worse, has historically been influenced by the medium conceptions from both the discourse of art and that of mass communication.

The field of film studies is also strongly influenced by a third discourse, which I will introduce here because it has had an important influence on several of the disciplines in the media aesthetic field: *the textual discourse*. In contrast to the two other discourses mentioned above, this discourse of textuality historically did not include a concept of medium, at least not in the sense that we find in the discourses of modernist art and of mass communication discussed above. The discourse of textuality must be seen as a part of the "linguistic turn" in the humanities. The most important characteristic of the "linguistic turn" during the 20th century is the focusing of the relationship between philosophy and language. Although several of the very different intellectual movements associated with the "linguistic turn" have discussed language as a medium of thought, the con-

cept of medium has been quite different from the ideas of "technical support" in the discourse of art and the "channel of communication" in the discourse of mass communication. The models of the text were developed according to an ideal of semantic autonomy independent not only of author and reader, but also of medium (see for example Barthes 1966). This reflects the earlier attitude of Russian formalism (and its attempt to describe poetry in mechanistic and then organic terms) and of New Criticism, a formalist current of literary theory that dominated Anglo-American literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century and emphasized close reading (particularly of poetry) to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object. However, with the development of French structuralism of the 1960s and the ensuing movement of poststructuralism in the 1970s, we may speak of a textual paradigm for understanding across disciplines (social anthropology, psychoanalysis, the history of ideas, literary theory), media (visual, auditive), different semiotic systems (like images, language, fashion), and from top to bottom in the hierarchy of cultural expressions.

The structuralist impact on the humanities and social sciences during the 1960s, followed by the theoretical shift "from work to text" as well as the "death of the author" made it easier to transfer theories from literary theory and linguistics into film studies and eventually also into humanistic media studies, disciplines in which both the concepts of "work" and of "author" made little or no sense (except for the so-called art film and the auteur theory of the 1950s and 1960s). Equally important for this theoretical inheritance – although less recognized – is the ideal of media-neutral theories, that is, models of texts, of narratives, of sense making, considered neutral to expressive resources, semiotic differences and materialities of mediation.

For film studies, the textual paradigm offered useful models of texts and narrative discourses that could be adopted, adapted, and adjusted to the ideas of an artistic medium as well as of a technical apparatus for the communication of narratives and the maintenance of ideology. The interest in film adaptations of literary works among literary scholars also contributed to the discussions of film as a distinct medium with a complex set of expressive resources and genre conventions. Even the influence from literary theories of the modernist novel on film studies seems to have stimulated a high level of reflection about basic distinctions between different media (here, the entertainment film and the novel). This appears most clearly in theories of film narratives in the U.S. (like for instance Chatman 1978). Here, we may recognize a model of communication which is less a result of theoretical inheritance from American media studies (and its theories of mass communication) than a result of the institutional and theoretical influences from the field of comparative literature in the U.S., where film studies

are often placed in English or Rhetoric departments. In some of these departments, narrative theory has been strongly influenced by what we may call the rhetorical tradition from Wayne C. Booth (1961), which important theoreticians like Seymour Chatman developed into a theory of narrative communication (1978). Chatman's model may illustrate how the field of film studies has been developed between disciplines and between discourses from different disciplines. While introducing French theories of narrative to American readers and incorporating these theories (i.e. Barthes' structuralist model from 1966 and the notion of 'the implied reader' (Der Implizite Leser) coined by the German literary scholar Wolfgang Iser in 1972) into his own theories (influenced by Booth, among others), Chatman also discusses differences between film and (the paper-based) novel in order to develop a model of narrative that is sensitive to the medium in question. This may represent a basic trend in the history of film studies. In sum, the influence from both the discourse of art and the discourse of mass communication, as well as from the discourse of textuality and its ideals of medium neutrality, seem to have contributed to the development of film studies as an aesthetically, technically and rhetorically rich and theoretically complex discipline. To a certain extent, one may be tempted to say that the field of film studies has been a media aesthetic discipline from the start.

The influence of the discourse of textuality on humanistic media studies is quite a different story. Compared to film studies, it is a young discipline (some may even argue it isn't really a discipline). Like film studies, it adopted the concepts of text and narrative, reading and interpretation, as well as theories of meaning (semiotics, hermeneutics, rhetoric) from comparative literature. Due to a rather abstract and easily expandable concept of text, theories have been adopted and applied to the study of televised news, advertising, movie posters and record covers. In contrast to film studies, however, this theoretical inheritance did not involve the same amount of conceptual work. Historically, the discourse of mass communication employs a rather verbally-oriented, almost abstract conception of meaning. To the extent that Shannon and Weaver's theory of information has influenced the concept of communication, the question of abstraction (and immateriality) in communication may be even more radical, because this model was not about communicating significance, but simply about optimizing the ratio of signal-to-noise in message transmission. Conceived in this way, information was independent of context, a probability function with no dimensions, no materiality, and no necessary connection with meaning (see Hayles 1999, p. 52). The introduction of theories from a discipline historically devoted to verbal texts, reading and writing (i.e. comparative literature), was not met with much conceptual resistance. The level of abstraction associated with concepts like "content" and "message" (central to the discourse of mass communication) easily fit the methods of

hermeneutics or close reading, as did the tendency to assimilate technical and material phenomena into linguistic models of literary theory (important features in the discourse of textuality). Either combined with, or dominated by, a model of mass communication, the textual model contributed to the development of media studies as a discipline belonging not only to the social sciences, but also to the humanities.[8] However, the influence of the discourse of textuality on media studies did not bring along with it a proper theory of aesthetics. Just like the development of cultural studies (in media studies as well as in sociology, ethnography, etc.), the unfolding of a humanistic dimension to media studies extended the scope of legitimate objects of study to include so-called low culture and popular aesthetics. But these objects were studied as *textual* expressions in social and cultural contexts, and considered important as objects of study due to the way people used them (producing identity) or were abused by them (ideologically). Only to a very limited extent did it involve aesthetic concepts like sensing and perceptual experience.

The fourth and final discourse of key importance to the outline of media aesthetics can be referred to as *the historical discourse*. This is a discourse of basic importance for all the disciplines involved as far as they are humanistic disciplines. They all have an acute awareness of the historical dimension of their subject of study. They all present the histories of their academic disciplines as part of their curricula and consider their conception of theory as historically constituted (as Rodowick demonstrates in an exemplary way in this volume). It may nevertheless be wise to be aware of the important difference between historiographic disciplines like art history and departments devoted to the history of literature on the one hand, and on the other, a sociologically-influenced discipline mainly occupied with modern mass communication like media studies. In media studies, all media are digital media in the sense that digital technology is involved in one or more stages in the process of production and distribution. New media are no more than 20 years old and no medium is more than 200 years old. In art history, there still exists artistic media with little or no binary code involved. The media of media art goes back at least one hundred years and old media goes back more than 2000 years. In art history, it is hard to neglect the historicity of the world of art and media. Admittedly, the field of media studies does count in historiography, especially the histories of media institutions and of media technologies. It seems nevertheless reasonable to suggest that the tendency to overestimate the sociocultural and theoretical importance of *new* technologies, followed by a rather simplistic treatment of the "old" or "traditional" that we

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8   Historically, the other major contribution to the development of media studies as a humanistic discipline is historiography, which I will come back to below.

witnessed in this field particularly during the 1990s, can at least partly be explained by the relatively low degree of historical awareness in the field. In comparison, the introduction of digital technologies in the production, distribution and reception of *film* seems to have stirred up previous discussions (among film scholars) of the relations between the technical apparatus, matters of style (like for instance realism) and spectatorship, as well as revitalizing an interest in early cinema. The rather strong historical dimension of film studies (concerning the history of the cinematic institution, of film technologies, of film genres and styles, as well as the interest in filmography) seems to imply a certain attentiveness towards historicizing and relativizing the specificity of digital media technology. Briefly put, the influence from the discourse of historicity varies considerably among the disciplines involved in the field of media aesthetics.

Although these four discourses – the discourse of modern art, of mass communication, of textuality, and of historicity – do not form an exhaustive list, their various degrees and forms of influence on the disciplines involved in the media aesthetic arena must be taken into account if we are to understand and develop the field further. The media aesthetic arena may be seen as a meeting place for different conceptual cultures. It represents a plurality of contexts for the questions posed. If we are to understand the general questions to which media aesthetics seems to be an answer, the specific questions must be identified as embedded in different disciplines influenced by diverse ways of thinking. Based on the short outline of important discourses briefly indicated above that have influenced the disciplines in various ways, let me suggest – as a rule of thumb – that a media aesthetic that arises from a history strongly influenced by the discourse of modern art may endeavor to produce a critical thinking about the politics of the society of modern media. A media aesthetic critically employing a textual paradigm, on the other hand, may advocate concepts like medium and experience. Moreover, a culture that has put aesthetics in the shade and has focused on mass communication may stimulate a media aesthetic interest in a conception of perception and materiality. Of course, neither disciplines nor discourses in and about them determine the questions posed and the interests involved in the development of media aesthetics. The differences in questions between the disciplines involved may nevertheless cast light on some of the challenging and thought-provoking distinctions in the field.

The different questions, interests and approaches in the media aesthetic field explore the complexity of the concept of 'the media', referring both to the plural of *medium* and to a collective singular noun, a class considered as one unit: the media. As W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen suggest in their introduction to *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, media in this latter sense "also names a technical form or formal technics, indeed a general mediality that is constitutive for the human as a 'biotechnical' form of life" (Mitchell and Hansen 2010, p. ix).

This conception of the media is somehow tied to the advent of mass media in general and inexpensive newspapers and magazines in particular (see Chun and Keenan 2006, p. 3), forms through which "information itself is mediated", as Mitchell and Hansen put it (p. xi). Media in this sense of the term is regarded as "an environment for the living" and "an ontological condition of humanization – the constitutive operation of exteriorization and invention" (Mitchell and Hansen 2010, p. xiii). We may call this the *environmental* or *ecological* (in a non-normative sense) interest in media aesthetics.

In the media aesthetic program presented here, the media are social practices or assemblages of materials and perspectives. They are also very specific technological arrangements that can be identified as such through the way they activate experiences with different media technologies. In this second conception of media, particular objects, situations or phenomena are studied as complex expressions of mediation and are considered as tools for the investigation of cultural preconditions and theoretical assumptions. The plurality of media is of interest not so much as a collection of narrowly technical entities or systems (cf Mitchell and Hansen, p. xiii), but rather as a reservoir of different technical premises, semiotic systems, modes, genres, and stylistic conventions, as well as of scholarly interests, academic discourses and kinds of knowledge. As N. Katherine Hayles and others have demonstrated, comparing media can make us recognize theoretical premises that are otherwise hard to see. Hayles refers to the field of comparative literature as she argues that "Literary criticism and theory are shot through with unrecognized assumptions specific to print" (Hayles 2004, p. 68). Years of interest in film adaptation among literary scholars has stimulated theoretical work on the distinctions between verbal language versus film language, but they have shown only a very modest concern for the conception of the material differences between the printed page and the projected image in the experience and interpretation of the work. As also noted by Hayles, "Only now, as the new medium of electronic textuality vibrantly asserts its presence, are these [unrecognized] assumptions [specific to print] clearly coming into view" (Hayles 2004, p. 68).[9] The media aesthetic interest in the plurality of media critically discusses how some sensuous experiences seem neglected while others are seen as pertinent in certain social and cultural situations. We may call this the *rhetorical* or *phenomenological* interest in media aesthetics.

These two interests in the media should not be considered schools or traditions. The media aesthetic field is too young and too heterogeneous, both in and across disciplines, to identify specific long-standing practices. It is nevertheless

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9   One important result of this is the growing interest in studies in book history. See for instance Finkelstein and McCleery (2005).

important to note that the two interests indicated above, although not mutually exclusive, represent slightly different sets of questions, refer to diverse lines of thought and seem to develop their vocabularies in somewhat disparate directions.

The *environmental* or *ecological* interest in media aesthetics envisions media as an encompassing system and environment as combined with a local system that points to the specificities of particular "ecosystems" inside and outside of it, in order to understand what goes on between and in the meeting of these different systems (see Mitchell 2005, p. 213; Heise 2002, p. 165). We may identify this interest in Susanne Østby Sæther's contributions to this volume, as well as in the chapters by Samuel Weber and Ina Blom. The two latter contributions represent what may be considered a particular interest in the politics of the senses in media aesthetics as they address situations where human perception is the object of political and economic exploitation. Historically, Walter Benjamin's work as well as that of the Frankfurt school are particularly important predecessors for this interest in media aesthetics. These perspectives have been further developed by Michel Foucault) (biopolitics), Gilles Deleuze (on film) and Deleuze and Felix Guattari (social machines) and Friedrich Kittler (*Aufschreibesysteme*, a notion that tentatively can be translated as 'notation systems').[10] Important names for this line of thought are Jonathan Crary, W.J.T. Mitchell, Miriam Hansen, Samuel Weber, Rosalind Krauss, and Alexander Galloway, as well as Mary Ann Doane and D.N. Rodowick.

The *rhetorical* or *phenomenological* interest in media aesthetics should historically be seen in relation to a reorientation toward rhetoric in humanistic disciplines (particularly since the 1960s)[11] and the renewed interest in the materiality of mediation in the 1990s (most notably from Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer). Historically, Walter Benjamin's work has been of major importance here, as well. Perspectives from what is often referred to as the Toronto School of Communication (originating in the works of Eric A. Havelock and Harold Innis in the 1930s, and growing into prominence with the contributions of Edmund Snow Carpenter, Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan) have also been significant.[12] Equally important is the revitalization of philosophical hermeneutics

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10 Kittler seems to have borrowed this notion, *Aufschreibesysteme,* from Daniel Paul Schreber's *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* (1903). The notation system, writing board, or "writing down system," as Schreber called it, became the title of Kittler's book, translated into English as *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (see Van Der Haven 2009, p. 93).

11 Arguably, there is a complex relation between rhetoric and aesthetics through history. See for instance, John Poulakos' (2007) evocative discussion of the impact of rhetoric on the aesthetics of the eighteenth century.

12 The importance of McLuhan is also pertinent in current media ecology. See for instance The Media Ecology Association, or the worldwide celebrations of McLuhan (commemorating "100 years of McLuhan") in 2011.

(Gadamer, Ricoeur) and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, Lyotard), particularly in studies of film and photography during the 1990s and the growing interest in the philosophy of science and technology (N. Katherine Hayles, Don Ihde) in literature, media studies and humanistic informatics. Mary Ann Doane and D.N. Rodowick are important names here as well, along with Mark B.N. Hansen, Noël Carroll and Mieke Bal. The phenomenology of Roland Barthes, as well as his desire to give voice to "the third meaning" (1987 [1970]) or "the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" as he puts it in "The Grain of the Voice" (1987 [1972], p. 188) are also of relevance here. In Arild Fetveit's contribution to this volume, this grain of the voice is studied as an aesthetic ideal. The rhetorical and phenomenological interest in media aesthetics is also of basic significance in my essay (referring to Ricoeur, Ihde, Barthes) as well as the contribution from Eivind Røssaak (inspired by Hansen).

These two interests in media aesthetics are equally important, both historically and theoretically. They should both be considered humanistic in a very basic sense. They are – to coin a phrase from Mitchell and Hansen – occupied with the "existential stakes" of how the "operations of mediation tie in with the form of life that is the human" (Mitchell and Hansen 2010, p. xiv). They both represent a basic interest in human experience. This interest is explored through concrete studies of cultural expressions or situations. In several of the contributions to this volume, the cultural expressions or situations analyzed can be considered works of art. The main reason for this is methodological. Artworks often seem to alert us to the functioning of social practices or assemblages of materials and perspectives, even as they isolate and fixate on highly specific or peculiar media functions. This is not only because (as Kittler once claimed) the artistic media of any given society are less formal than its systems of knowledge, and therefore present their regulatory operations in a crude shape, so to speak. It may also be because (as Tom Gunning has suggested) modern artworks tend to actively defamiliarize technology, reintroducing sensual awareness toward aesthetic relations that are neutralized by everyday familiarity. Aesthetic practices like these – – be they so-called high or low culture, inside or outside the discourses of art as such — may be considered media aesthetic practices. However, because media aesthetics concerns the character of experience itself and is not confined to a particular kind of aesthetic object, it is not restricted to art objects or media aesthetic practices, but can involve any object or practice whatsoever. The collection of investigations into the character of experience in the field of media aesthetics springs out of a diversity of disciplines influenced by a complex set of historically important discourses. This intricate interdisciplinarity can be observed, not only between the contributions to this volume, but also within the different essays. It seems therefore fair to say that this is not a collection of essays from different

disciplines, but is rather a range of interdisciplinary approaches toward questions of interest in several disciplines and in the field of media aesthetics in general. Several of the scholars come from interdisciplinary schools of research or have an academic history from different disciplines. Some of these scholars approach objects normally associated with disciplines other than their own. The result is a dense network of concepts and ideas ranging across the volume. With the interdisciplinarity of the media aesthetic program presented here, this volume intends to provide the research with a productive distance to the disciplines involved and a reservoir of different attitudes and kinds of knowledge relevant for the research issues in question.

In the first chapter of this volume *Samuel Weber* turns to Walter Benjamin and his way of thinking and rethinking the conditions of human perception and sensation in the realm of media technologies and information machineries. Weber demonstrates how one of the things that makes the writings of Benjamin so intriguing is the way his thoughts on what was then considered the new media emerge from a very distinctive interpretation of the old. According to Weber, the most elaborately articulated instance of this emergence can be found in an early text, namely, Benjamin's doctoral dissertation, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism." Although Benjamin has become one of the most cited critics in recent decades, his dissertation has not attracted the same attention, even in literary-critical circles. And where his dissertation has been discussed, one aspect of it has been almost entirely ignored. In this dissertation, Benjamin introduces a term that is not to be found in any of the writers he is discussing: 'medium of reflection.' This term, Weber argues, anticipates Benjamin's later interest in the new media, by retracing a movement that leads from Romantic 'reflection' in Schlegel and others, to an awareness of 'repetition' as exemplified in the poet Hölderlin's practice and in his notion of 'sobriety.'

In the second chapter, *Ina Blom* presents a critique of the idea that the proliferation of so-called social, relational or participatory practices in contemporary art attests to a 'postmedial' condition in art production. She argues that the widely-used distinction between artistic medium specificity (modernist formalism) and post-medium art productions has severe limitations when it comes to understanding the social thinking generated through artistic productions. These terms and distinctions all essentially depart from a preoccupation with the definition of the work of art, its ontological and phenomenological aspects, and terms of interpretation. This preoccupation tends, explicitly or implicitly, to frame all discussions of artists said to work in and with the social, whether they are lauded for activist or interventionist acuity or accused of bad immediacy or a return to naïve realism. The medium status of the artwork is the key frame of reference, while the question of social contents, strategies or operations emerges as a secondary frame,

arrived at as if by special effort: art and sociality are, in other words, pitted against one another as incompatible entities. In order to present a counter-model, Blom engages in an analysis of Liam Gillick's *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* – a multifarious art project that includes sculptural and architectural constructions, fictional personae, theoretical and political literature, audiences and institutions. This work challenges us to think differently, not only about the notion of artistic media or mediation, but – just as significantly – about the concept of 'the social' itself. In Gillick's work, 'the social' – defined as instances where the sense of collective being is up for questioning or negotiation – is something that emerges with the mediation of a connection between previously separate objects.

Mary Ann Doane presents us with yet another challenge. Through careful discussions of several works and aesthetic phenomena, she develops a theoretical argument concerning the spatialization of time Spatialization of time. Theorists and philosophers from Henri Bergson to Fredric Jameson have argued that the process of spatializing time is characteristic of modernity and/or postmodernity, producing a loss in which the experience of time as duration, flow, and historicity is replaced by the quantification or mathematization of time and hence, its transformation into a static, spatial, divisible entity. Doane asks what this can mean in relation to a time-based medium such as the cinema? By concentrating on the figure of the filmic ellipsis (and its exaggeration in the movie trailer) and an analysis of work in or about cinema by Hiroshi Sugimoto, Tsai Ming-Liang, and Jim Campbell, this third chapter explores a crisis in and around the commodification of time in a culture characterized by intensive and extensive mediation.

From spatialization of time, we move on to what *Eivind Røssaak* calls 'slow space'. Through discussions of works by Bill Viola, Douglas Gordon, Tobias Rehberger and Olafur Eliasson, Røssaak argues that the moving image has turned the museum space into an experimental 'slow space' conditioned by techniques of delay or barely moving light particles where the human confronts mediated time or 'technical moments' through a specific choreography of experience. "Technology *appears* as an 'invisible' force (movement, spacings, 'real-time') codetermining the aesthetic experience," he writes. The concept of editing in architectural space emerges as a key metaphor, and the 'slow space' presents a particularly good starting point for a renewed analysis of the interaction between the spectator and the image in the museum. The author demonstrates how the slow spaces produced by these art installations render the interaction between the human and the non-human, or what Bernard Stiegler has called 'technogenesis', *visible* and tangible in new ways. Røssaak's approach in this fourth chapter describes a widespread tendency present in the museum, as well as a new tendency in a certain theoretical development within phenomenology and media philosophy.

The time-space dimension and the spectatorial position are also a subject in the fifth chapter. Discussing the spectatorial position established in artist Douglas Gordon's video work *through a looking glass*, based on the so-called mirror scene from Martin Scorsese's neo-noir film *Taxi Driver*, *Susanne Østby Sæther* proposes that Gordon's work stages key conditions of contemporary media spectatorship,. The work articulates a fundamental tension between image, vision and narrative, on the one hand, and embodiment, activation and spatial extension, on the other. This tension is seen to negotiate current spectatorial experiences of handling and controlling media technology on an everyday basis, while simultaneously being fully enveloped by the mediascape these different media comprise. In order to acknowledge the complexity of the spectatorships, offered in recent video and post-cinematic work, the author argues that we have to look both at the precise ways in which its various medial elements are internally organized, yet also acknowledge that each and every one of them points out of the gallery space and into the mediascape from which they are culled and of which they continue to be constituent parts. As the discussion of *through a looking glass* suggests, this allows us to perceive more precisely the complex ways in which the media apparatus and subjective experience of it are connected, as explored in recent video and post-cinematic art.

In this sixth chapter of this book, I look into Alice Miceli's video installation *88 from 14.000* (2004), a 56-minute video presenting 88 b&w portrait photographs of victims from one of Pol Pot's most infamous death camps – the S-21 at Tuol Sleng – on a screen of falling sand. What has this video installation to say about photography? Inspired by contemporary phenomenology, I discuss how the technical arrangement of Miceli's work, especially the way it reuses and remediates existing photographic material, changes its purpose and context, and may activate rather specific media technological experiences. Through critical analysis, I explore multiple dimensions of photography that are normally not considered in the same theoretical discourses. In this chapter, I attempt to contribute to a reflection on conceptions of medium and mediality, as well as to further develop a phenomenologically-inspired media aesthetic tool for the investigation of cultural preconditions and theoretical assumptions.

Arguably, a screen of falling sand is an unusual medium for presenting photographs. Being uncommon and both visually and auditively rather noisy, a screen of falling sand is hard to ignore. The *noise* of the medium is the subject of *Arild Fetveit's* chapter. In this seventh chapter, Fetveit investigates the contemporary aesthetics of noise – prevalent in the auditive as well as in the visual realm. The author asks what this aesthetics of noise has to offer as a means for expression in the auditive as compared to the visual realm, and how can its present surge be explained. He argues that the advent of digital media is a key factor both in

grounding the expressive potential opened up by this aesthetics of noise as well as in its evolution in the first place. The chapter ends by considering why it is that the current aesthetics of noise affects the visual as much as the auditive field. By re-actualizing Walter Benjamin's essay on art in the age of its technological reproducibility, Fetveit attempts to localize the structural kinship between the visual and auditive which contributes to making the aesthetics of noise so pervasive. This move aims to clarify that medial noise is grounded in mechanical recording and the parallel, but different, complications to which it is heir in the auditive as well as in the visual realm.

In the eighth chapter, *Dieter Daniels* and *Sandra Naumann* attempt to trace 150 years of image-sound relations in the interaction between art, technology, and perception. Today, the connection between the visual and acoustic worlds is so close and diverse that it is difficult to imagine how separate these areas were before the arrival of the media age. It was not until the nineteenth century that audiovisual media enabled the time stream of sounds to become storable and that images 'learned to walk,' so that today, we perceive their synthesis almost as a matter of course. Thus from the outset, Daniels and Naumann argue, the question arises in all media forms of art as to the relation between image and sound, namely in terms of both technology as well as aesthetics. However, the interfacing of image and sound made possible by media technology not only corresponds with a logic of machines but also with the fundamental need for synesthesia embedded in human culture. Tracing the development of image-sound relations through the long series of historic predecessors to today's everyday audiovisual world, Daniels and Naumann attempt to examine the close relationship between the innovation of technical processes and new forms of artistic expression.

In the final chapter of this volume, *D. N. Rodowick* critically examines the history of the concept of theory in general, and the history of film theory in particular, to argue that theory has no stable or invariable sense in the present, nor can its meanings for us now be anchored in a unique origin in the near or distant past. If the currency of theory is to be revalued conceptually for the present, we need a history that attends critically to the competing sites and contexts of its provenance in the past, and which can evaluate the forces that shape its diverse and often contradictory conditions of emergence and its distributions as genres of discourse. Hence, Rodowick strongly underlines the theoretical ambition of the current volume, to think and rethink the intersection between aesthetics and mediality as a question of thinking and perception, history and technology.

This program for thinking of and about media aesthetics investigates the field between media studies and the aesthetic disciplines that have witnessed very creative and fruitful growth and interaction during the last decade. In this volume, we attempt to consolidate these diverse developments into a focused interdisciplinary

program that combines theoretical argumentation with exemplification and analysis of individual artworks and media phenomena. A key strategy has been to think the fields of film and media theory and art history together, not by harmonizing the disciplinary differences but by sharpening the conflicts in and across the heterogeneous field of media aesthetics. In this way, we will be able to see more clearly what is at stake and take some steps further toward developing a critical media aesthetics.

We hope that the questions raised here will push the field forward.

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From Reflection to Repetition:
Medium, Reflexivity and the Economy of the Self

Samuel Weber

One of the things that make the writings of Walter Benjamin so intriguing is the way his thoughts on the new media emerge from a very distinctive interpretation of the old. The most elaborately articulated instance of this emergence can be found in an early text, namely, Benjamin's doctoral dissertation, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism." Although Benjamin, who aspired to become the leading critic of 20th century Germany, has in recent decades become one of the most cited of critics, his dissertation, perhaps because of its rather academic style and subject matter, has not attracted the same attention, even in literary-critical circles. And where the dissertation has been discussed, one aspect of it has been almost entirely ignored.

It is with this dimension of his text that I will be concerned in this chapter.

In order to interpret the different words employed in the title of his thesis, above all "art ," "criticism" and "concept," Benjamin introduces another term that distinguishes itself from almost all the other terms he uses, which are almost all taken from the writings that he is interpreting. But in this one case, the word is not used by any of the writers he is analyzing – not Friedrich Schlegel, not Novalis, and not even by the shadowy figure who appears briefly at the beginning and toward the end of the thesis both framing and transcending the text in its entirety, namely Friedrich Hölderlin. No, this word appears to have no history, to come from nowhere and yet plays a decisive role in the construction of Benjamin's overall argument. This word is, quite simply, or not so simply, "medium" .

That it should have come to play such a significant part in Benjamin's dissertation is both understandable and enigmatic. Understandable, since Benjamin himself had used the term, as well as its adjectival-adverbial variations (medial, mediality) extensively several years earlier in an important but in his lifetime unpublished essay on "Language in General and the Language of Man" (1916). In that essay he elaborates a notion of language as a "medium" in a very distinct sense, namely as a process that does not communicate anything external – a meaning, for instance. In other words, as Benjamin puts it in that essay, language is a *medium,* but not a *means* to any end external to itself. It is therefore not to be confused with any form of instrumentality, or of mediation. Rather, its function is that of imparting itself *immediately – unmittelbar –* i.e. without the mediation of anything external to itself:

> Each language imparts itself in and of itself [*Jede Sprache teilt sich in sich selbst mit*], it is in the purest sense the "medium" of imparting. The medial, i.e. the *immedi*acy [*Unmittelbarkeit*] of all spiritual imparting is the fundamental problem of all theory of language [...] (GS 2.1, p. 142).[1]

Mediality is thus not to be confused with *mediation,* in the Hegelian (dialectical) or any other sense: it is neither a function of dialectical negativity nor of any relation to an outside. It is precisely its immediacy that anticipates the main concern that Benjamin will identify in his discussion of Schlegel and Novalis in his dissertation, as the opening sentence of its first chapter makes unmistakably clear:

> Thinking reflecting upon itself in self-consciousness is the fundamental fact from which Friedrich Schlegel's epistemological deliberations, and most of Novalis' as well, take their point of departure. The relation of thinking to itself as it is found in reflection is considered to be the most proximate form of thinking as such, out of which all other forms [of thought] develop (GS 1, p. 18).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Benjamin would reintroduce the term "medium" in order to describe the Romantics' valorization of reflection, even though this concept is associated first of all with *thinking* rather than with *language.* However, Benjamin's early conception of language as essentially naming already entailed a strong reflexive element. In describing language as a medium that imparts itself, and does so immediately, Benjamin was already construing language as a process of self-reflection, a word that is a pleonasm insofar as "reflection" generally implies the return of a self to itself. This however is precisely the question that will tacitly inform Benjamin's discussion of Schlegel and the Romantics: namely, that of the link between "reflection" and the "self". As we will see, in his discussion of Schlegel Benjamin will seek to problematize that link and, in his strong but unelaborated allusions to Hölderlin, point to an alternative in which a certain repetition will come to replace reflection, and the first person singular – the I – will replace the "self," albeit in a very different way from the Fichtean notion of a self-positing Ego.

Given his own earlier use of this word, then, it is therefore not entirely surprising that Benjamin would invoke the notion of "medium" in his dissertation to describe the process of reflection itself. But if it is therefore not entirely surprising, Benjamin's use of this word in the dissertation nevertheless displays an enigmatic aspect, or at least one that is not simply self-evident. On the one hand, Benjamin contrasts Schlegel's notion of "reflection" with that of the philosopher, Fichte, who construed it as dependent on and limited by an Absolute Ego positing itself. For the Romantics, on the contrary, the positing of an Ego was only a subsidiary, not an essential dimension of reflection, and this because the latter

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1   Citations from Benjamin refer to the German edition of his *Gesammelte Werke* (1980) and are indicated by "GS". English translations are my own.

was conceived of not as the result of an act of positing, but rather as a process that Benjamin – not Schlegel – designates as that of a *medium*:

> Schlegel's concept of the absolute […] would most correctly be designated as the medium of reflection (*Reflexionsmedium*). With this term the whole of Schlegel's theoretical philosophy may be collected and designated […]. Reflection constitutes the absolute, and it constitutes it as a medium (GS 1, pp. 36-37).

What is surprising and intriguing about Benjamin's use of this word here is, as already suggested, that he explicitly emphasizes that this term is not to be found in the writings of Schlegel:

> Schlegel did not use the term "medium" himself; nonetheless, he attached the greatest importance to the constantly uniform connection in the absolute or in the system, both of which must be interpreted as the connection of the real not in its substance (which is everywhere the same) but in the degrees of clarity with which it unfolds (p. 37 – my italics – SW).

Schlegel did not have the one word available to him, which, according to Benjamin, more than any other designates the essential characteristics of his own system of thought – namely, of that absolute reflection with which he was primarily concerned. In a footnote, Benjamin suggests that the relation of "medium" to "reflection" is double, entailing a certain ambiguity (Doppelsinn), which however upon further examination resolves into a consistent account:

> For on the one hand reflection is itself a medium – by virtue of its constant connectivity, while on the other hand the medium in question is one within which reflection moves itself (*sich bewegt*) – for the latter, as the absolute, moves itself in and of itself (*bewegt sich in sich selbst*) (p. 36).

What then, exactly, does the word "medium" signify for Benjamin such that it becomes indispensable to him in his account of Romantic reflexivity? First of all, as we have seen, for Benjamin "mediality" signifies immediacy, the capacity to function without external mediation. The medium, whether as language in the 1916 essay or as Absolute Reflection in the 1920 dissertation, entails the potentiality, indeed the power of operating without external reference. The medium, whether language or thought, serves to develop only itself: it is a movement of the Self.

On the other hand, however, this "movement" is precisely never simply circular or self-contained: it may be "continual" or "constant" – stetig is the German word Benjamin uses – and it may also entail a kind of unfolding or development – *Entfaltung* – but it is also and above all, a transformation. In the first pages of his dissertation, Benjamin emphasizes this point: "Under the term 'reflection' is understood the transformative (*umformende*) – and nothing but the transformative – reflecting on a form" (p. 20). Form is already a reflective category that in reflecting itself further, alters and transforms itself. A certain alterity is thus essentially at work at the heart of the reflective movement.

The ambiguity or tension thus results between the medium as a dynamic of transformation and alteration on the one hand, and on the other as a movement of the self coming full circle in the notion of reflection. The nature of the movement itself "reflects" this constitutive ambiguity: on the one hand it is "*stetig*," continual, on the other it moves by leaps and bounds. Benjamin quotes Friedrich Schlegel asserting that the "transition (Übergang) […] must always be a leap [*ein Sprung*])" and comments this as follows:

> This immediacy, which is originary (*prinzipiell*) although not absolute but rather mediated (*vermittelte*), is that in which the liveliness (*Lebendigkeit*) of the connection (*Zusammenhang*) is grounded (p. 27).

The medium is thus defined spatially rather than temporally – as a *Zusammenhang* rather than as a *Fortgang* – but its spatiality is in turn not at all static. It involves not just a context – which would be the most common English rendering of the German word that plays such an important role in Benjamin's discussion of medium here, namely, *Zusammenhang*. Rather, what this word seems to imply is both a state of connectedness and a process of linkage in which connections are made and unmade through leaps and bounds rather than through continuous evolution or unfolding.

It is probably in order to elucidate this dual and conflictual conception of the medium that early on his dissertation Benjamin cites a name that will return throughout his study both to frame his discussion of the Romantic Concept of Criticism and at the same time to point beyond it. That name, as I have already indicated, is: Hölderlin. The citation seems at first sight flat and banal:

> Hölderlin, who without direct involvement with the early Romantics nevertheless spoke the final and incomparably profound word concerning certain of their ideas, writes at a point when he seeks to express an intimate, highly relevant connection (*Zusammenhang*): "infinitely (exactly) connected" [*unendlich* (*genau*) *zusammenhängen*. Schlegel and Novalis had the same idea when they understood the infinitude of reflection as a fulfilled infinitude of connectedness […] Today we would say "systematically" for what Hölderlin expresses more simply, as "exactly" connected (p. 26).

Throughout this text, as with many others of the same general period, Hölderlin will emerge as the poet who has the first and last word – although precisely because of this claim, the word or words that Hölderlin is said to speak will remain quite obscure in Benjamin's text. Benjamin will never discuss just what "infinite exactitude" might mean in respect to "connectedness". But his text allows us to make connections that address the question. And ironically or not, such connections emerge as soon as we direct our attention to the way in which Benjamin "connects" his text to the texts of Hölderlin. The reference Benjamin provides in a footnote – to a text entitled "Infidelity of Wisdom" – turns out itself to be unfaithful, or, as some might say, erroneous. The quote, which is taken from Höl-

derlin's gloss to his Pindar translations, "where," as Benjamin puts it, "Hölderlin seeks to express an intimate, highly relevant connectedness," is not from the gloss to Pindar's poem, "*Untreue der Weisheit*" but rather from the gloss to another Pindar fragment, which Hölderlin translates as "The Infinite" ("*Das Unendliche*"). Benjamin's connects to Hölderlin's text through a reinscription of "the infinite" as "infidelity of wisdom."[2] Since, as this reinscription suggests, Hölderlin's text, which includes both his translation of certain poems of Pindar and his commentary upon them, are cited by Benjamin as being extremely pertinent to the notion of the "reflection medium", allow me to venture a rough translation of Hölderlin's Pindar translation and then translate part of its equally short commentary. First the poem:

> Whether I scale the wall of Right,
> On high, or crooked deception,
> And so myself
> Circumscribing, beyond
> Myself live, of this
> I am of mixed
> Mind, to say it exactly.
>
> [Ob ich des Rechtes Mauer,
> Die hohe, oder krummer Täuschung
> Ersteig und so mich selbst
> Umschreibend, hinaus
> Mich lebe, darüber
> Hab ich zweideutig ein
> Gemüt, genau es zu sagen.]

That the poet should be of "a mixed mind to say exactly" what he has written in the poem, Hölderlin then glosses as follows:

> The fact that I then discover that the connection between right and cleverness must be ascribed not to these themselves but to a third (*nicht ihnen selber, sondern einem dritten*), through which their connection is infinitely exact – that is why I am of a mixed mind (Hölderlin 1969, p. 672).

The "intimate and profound connection" to which Benjamin refers has thus to do with – is "connected" to – the way things are linked for a finite living being – an "I" although hardly the Fichtean Ego, since unlike the latter it is the result not of a process of *Setzung* – of positing – but of a writing around and about, an *Umschreibung* through which the "I" "lives itself out," irreparably separated

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2   This "reinscription" however turns out not to have been the work of Benjamin, but of the Pindar edition that he was using, which published all of the Pindar fragments under the title "Untreue der Weisheit" – which is initially the title of just one of the fragments. I thank Peter Fenves for this information.

from its "me" (*hinaus/mich lebe*). The process of writing here is multiple: it takes place in the poem of Pindar, and then in and as its translation and commentary by Hölderlin. In the process, the "I" of the poet splits itself into the "it" of the poetic translation – "to say it exactly" – and the I of the commentary, each repeating the other and in the process displacing it. If we focus first on the I in the poem of Pindar, it is split between climbing "the high wall of Right" and descending into the crookedness of deception, which in the commentary is then associated with "cleverness" (*Klugheit*). In the poem, the "I" negotiates this conflict between Right and Cleverness by a process of writing: it writes about it and about himself. This process of "circumscribing" however does not lead the I back to itself as in a process of reflection, but rather outside "myself". Its life is forced beyond itself, a formulation that is left equivocal, since it is unclear just what remains of the I in this situation: Is it still alive or in some sense beyond life? The poetic I itself can only register this experience as a split, a "mixed mind to say it exactly". But what is the "it" that wishes to speak so exactly?

That question is addressed in the commentary, in which another "I" of another poet – Hölderlin as the translator of Pindar – takes up the discourse of the Greek poet and gives it an entirely new interpretation. The poetic I is of mixed mind not simply because it is torn between Right and Cleverness but because what holds those two together, what connects them, must be ascribed to a "third" – to another that cannot even be named properly. It is this third that becomes not the subject per se, but the subject of *ascription*, to whom is "ascribed" the connectedness of the other two. Through this third, this other, "their connection" is said to be "infinitely exact" – the phrase that Benjamin then cites in his essay, coming as the third in the relationship of Pindar and Hölderlin, of Poet to Translator, Poet to Critic or to Commentator, Writer to Reader. This relationship is never simply a dual one, but involves a third, who represents the alterity of a certain history, that shows itself to be quite different from that envisaged by the Romantics and by Schlegel in particular.[3] For Schlegel the work qua original is defined by its "criticizability," through which it is lifted above its limited singularity and into the medium of reflection as the unfolding of a unified Self. For Hölderlin, and for Benjamin, the process of reflection is supplanted by a process of writing – as ascription, circumscription, translation and commentary, in which

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3   As the previous note suggests, the process of editing and transmitting the Pindar poems involves much more than simply "three" persons : Benjamin's access to Pindar, like Hölderlin's, is mediated by countless editors and editions that constitute the history through which the text is transmitted. Nowhere is the apparent simplicity and unicity of the authorial name, "Pindar", more misleading than here. The same could be said of "Hölderlin ", and perhaps to a somewhat lesser extent of Benjamin as well. But this process of historical transmission can hardly be assimilated to the « reflection medium » construed by Schlegel (in Benjamin's reading at least).

reflection reveals itself to be a transformative process of repetition as reinscription. In this process the Self does not come full circle and thereby makes way for an "I" defined as singularity – which is to say, not simply as individual but as relational and differential.

It is this I in its movement beyond its own life – *hinaus mich lebe* – that discovers itself as historical. But this history is not that of the progress of self-consciousness. Benjamin's own practice of citation exemplifies this difference. As already indicated, it is based on a confusion of two poems of Pindar that Hölderlin translates and comments: "The Infinite" and "Infidelity of Wisdom." But this confusion, although it is far from constituting a medium of reflection, allows something to emerge that otherwise might have remained hidden. In Hölderlin's commentary to "Infidelity of Wisdom", there is a short phrase that suggests that Benjamin's ascription may not have been entirely arbitrary. Hölderlin writes:

> If the understanding is trained intensively/It will derive energy even from dispersion; insofar as it easily recognizes the foreign in its own honed acuity [*geschliffenen Schärfe*], it will not easily be led astray in uncertain situations (1969, p. 669).

In short, if the "understanding" is trained "intensively" – if it learns how to delve into itself properly, "it will derive energy even from dispersion" – because it will discover "the foreign" in its own ability to make distinctions, in a sharpness and acuity of mind that has been "honed" – sharpened – through contact with what is different and other than itself. It is this "training" in discovering the foreign within itself that allows it to navigate "uncertain situations" and not be led astray by them. Experience of the foreign in oneself prepares one to confront the foreign outside oneself.

Although the "medium of reflection" is the phrase in which Benjamin transcribes and translates Schlegel's effort to relate to the other and to the foreign, he also makes it clear that in Schlegel such "honing" and "dispersion" remain ultimately enclosed and encapsulated in a notion of Reflection as a function of Self. Ultimately this is also what limits the scope and significance of the reflection-medium as Benjamin construes it in this essay. As Benjamin puts it, Schlegel never discarded the basic axiom that "reflection does not dissolve into empty infinitude but is *in itself* [*in sich selbst*] substantial and fulfilled" (p. 31). Reflection, for Schlegel, qua Medium is ultimately and originally self-identical and self-contained, because it is there from the very beginning, as expressed in the term "*Urreflexion*": original or primary reflection. Whereas the practice of Hölderlin is historical in its process of transcription as reinscription – i.e. as a form of repetition – that of Schlegel ultimately looks back to an original beginning in which the process is already grounded. This means that what Schlegel calls "criticism"

can never really be negative or radically transformative: it must always continue and intensify what was present from the first.

It is this ultimately uncritical dimension of Schlegel's notion of criticism as reflection that provokes Benjamin in a long footnote to make the one explicitly critical remark that he allows himself in his entire dissertation.

> [For Schlegel and the Romantics] Reflection can be augmented but never reduced […] Only a breaking-off, no reduction of reflective intensification (*Reflexionssteigerung*) is thinkable. […] On the occasion of this isolated critical remark it should be noted that the theory of the medium of reflection will not be pursued here beyond the extent to which the Romantics elaborated it, since this is all that is required to deploy the concept of criticism systematically. From a purely critical and logical standpoint it would be desirable to elaborate this theory further, beyond the obscurity in which the Romantics left it. It must be feared however that such an elaboration would itself lead only to further obscurity. Whereas certain individual aesthetical (*kunsttheoretischen*) propositions can be extraordinarily fruitful, the theory as a whole leads to logically unresolvable contradictions; above all in respect to the problem of Ur-reflection (pp. 57-58).

What Benjamin valued in Schlegel was what he himself in a certain sense brought to him, namely the notion of a "medium" of reflection, in which neither the individual work, nor its critical reception could ever have the final word. What he criticized in Schlegel, and where he felt the need to point beyond him, in part though his references to Hölderlin, was a process of criticism – the medium of reflection – understood as a movement of self-fulfillment, a movement coming full circle. Whereas for Schlegel, in Benjamin's reading, critique remains a function of the reflection medium and hence ultimately of the Self, for Benjamin the mediality of critique carries it beyond the restricted economy of the self. Benjamin mentions translation as one form in which this process takes place. But although he cites Hölderlin's commentary to his translation of Pindar, he does not elaborate it further in his dissertation.

It is in the second section of his thesis, where Benjamin expands upon the relationship of the individual work to the medium of critical reflection, that he begins to suggest how a medium might be construed that does not simply serve the unfolding of self-consciousness. The paradox is that Benjamin's use of the word "medium" antedates his analyses of what we today associate with this term: photography, radio and film, for instance. Nevertheless, his use of the term, with and against Schlegel, anticipates certain salient features of those "new" media while also indicating why Benjamin later will avoid using this term. Schlegel's insight, which Benjamin in part endorses, involves a rethinking of the status of the individual work of art. By defining the significance of a work of art in its capacity to generate reflections – in its "criticizability" – Schlegel reinscribes the significance of the individual work in its relationships to what is outside of it – to the effects it produces. This entails a challenge to traditional aesthetics,

which sees the work of art as the instantiation of a genre, or as the expression of a genius, but in any case as the vehicle of something that is meaningful and self-contained. Whereas this notion of aesthetics is linked to the notion of a meaningful work, that of medium questions the self-contained quality of the work. It is no accident that in regard to broadcast media (radio, television), one rarely speaks of "works," but of "programs," in French: *emissions*, in German: *Sendungen*. This shift in terminology is significant: a media "event" is defined by a dynamic relation not to a fixed genre but to an ongoing process. In contemporary art, the notions of "performance" – taken over from theater, where also there are no works, but only "plays" or, in French, "pieces" – or of installation tend to replace that of the work of art. The emphasis here is on the singular event, rather than on the enduring self-same work. It is important here to distinguish the "singular" in this sense from the "individual," which often carries with it the literal sense of being "in-divisible". The singular by contrast is irreducibly divisible and relational, in the sense that Lacan, in his seminar on *The Purloined Letter*, finds in Poe's story: the singular is the "odd" – that which doesn't *fit in*. The singular involves the exceptional, the extraordinary, the unique. But its uniqueness is not self-contained. It is *relational* through and through, in contrast to the individual, usually understood as a *substantial* self-identity.

To be sure, it is not always easy to separate these two terms – and perhaps it is ultimately impossible to keep them entirely apart. The phrase "media event" can be used to designate a happening that is both individual and singular. As individual, it is understood, and usually disparaged, as being the fully predetermined product of a general machination. But a media event could also designate a happening that cannot be identically repeated, although this does not mean that it cannot be repeated at all. In a certain sense – Benjaminian or Derridean – it can only come to be *through* repetition, but it is a repetition that does not aim at producing fully identical copies; instead it acknowledges alteration as its greatest resource.

In regard to the early Romantics, Benjamin emphasizes that Schlegel's attitude toward the poetical work was ambivalent. On the one hand he sought to free the work from its domination by genre: the work was to be understood as a moment of the medium of reflection, forming part of a universal poetry, the essence of which was prose. But this also meant that the work was incomplete and required fulfillment through criticism as the continuation of its reflective essence:

> Because each singular reflection in this medium can only be isolated and contingent, the unity of the work with respect to that of art can only be a relative one; the work remains burdened with a moment of contingency (p. 73).

The singular is still understood by Schlegel as a property of the work, and hence as part of a self-fulfilling universal. For Schlegel it is the task of critical

reflection, which is to say, of criticism as reflection, to extend and complete the singular work beyond the bounds of its contingent "aesthetic" existence:

> The more closed the reflection, the more stringent the form of the work is, the more varie-gated and intensely (*vielfacher und intensiver*) criticism can fulfill its task of driving the work out of itself (*aus sich heraustreibt*), dissolving the original reflection in a higher one and continuing thus (p. 73).

As the word "drive" – in German: *treiben* – suggests, this process of transformation requires a certain violence to be done to the original work, which is altered in the process of transformation, driven beyond the boundaries of its initial and inherent form. A new singular event is thus produced, which in turn becomes the object of a new transformation and alteration. What however remains of the singular work or event in this process of medial transformation?

Ill 1: Der gestiefelte Kater. Kindermärchen in drei Akten *(Berlin 1797) by Ludwig Tieck. Title page of first edition. "Peter Leberecht" is Tiecks pseudonym.*

And it is here that Benjamin comes upon a category that has the potential to provide a powerful critical tool for the development of medial practices that could possibly contribute to the transformation of the new media as well as the old. It is what he calls "formal irony," which he emphatically distinguishes from all forms of subjective or authorial irony. Benjamin's literary example is, significantly, the comedies of the German Romantic writer, Ludwig Tieck, but for those more familiar with English literature, an excellent instance could be found in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (which Benjamin does not mention). Formal irony is distinguished from criticism, insofar as the latter, so Benjamin, "sacrifices the work entirely for the sake of the one single connection ("*des Einen Zusammenhanges*", p. 86). Formal irony, by contrast, preserves the work while redefining its significance. The latter no longer consists exclusively or primarily in its mimetic, thematic representational content understood as a self-contained referent, as what in Saussurian language would be called a "signified", but rather as itself *significant* of something that does not appear directly. Benjamin, following the Romantics, describes such irony as "the storm that raises (*aufhebt*) the curtain" exposing "the transcendental order of art," an order that reaches beyond the "borders of the visible work" (p. 86) In a footnote he offers a precious indication as to just what such a "transcendental order" could mean in artistic practice. It is no accident that his example is taken from theater, the sole traditional aesthetic medium that has to do not so much with works, but with "plays". In the note Benjamin describes the actual process by which formal irony functions in Tieck's comedies and perhaps, he adds, in "all literary comedies" as well: "The spectators, the author, the theater personnel" all "take part in the play" (*spielen ... mit*) (p. 85) In thus including spectators, author and theater personnel in the play, the generic framework of traditional aesthetic *form*, based on genre, is thus relativized and opened to its condition of possibility but which also functions as its enabling limits: audience, author, theater personnel, These factors, defining theater as scene, can themselves never be exhaustively predetermined or identified: they are singular in the sense of being always different, not just from others but also from themselves, just as the performance of one evening can never be fully identical to that of another – or even to itself.

That Benjamin uses the German word, *aufhebt*, here in its literal sense to describe the "raising" or "lifting" of the "curtain" of the work produced by formal irony is significant in at least two senses. First, it recalls the master term of the Hegelian dialectic, that which names the negative production of synthesis. Second, however, the word also underscores what is distinctively *non-Hegelian* in Benjamin's use of it. For the singular work is never simply destroyed by formal irony. In related, theological terms, one can say that the work survives – Benjamin writes of its "*Überleben*" (p. 86) – but it is never *resurrected*. Formal irony is no

simple remake of the original. The work survives formal irony but only by being transformed by it. Benjamin emphasizes that formal irony is incompatible with the modern idea of "progress" as a goal-directed becoming. Rather, what it presupposes is more like a "chaos," which he argues thereby emerges as the "sensual image of the absolute medium" – that is to say, a "continuum of forms" that do not depend on the representation of content for their significance. This is why the pure, "absolute" medium, lacking any determination through represented content, resembles a "chaos." Schlegel, for his part understands such "chaos" as the negative anticipation of a "harmonious world" that inheres in it, albeit in undeveloped form.

For Benjamin, by contrast, this attempt to articulate the medial interaction of chaos and harmony, singularity and connectivity, defines the *limit* of the Romantic concept of art criticism. Once again it is to Hölderlin that he appeals in order to open a path that leads beyond this Romantic limitation. As he puts it, whereas the Romantics could only point toward this realm, Hölderlin "surveyed and dominated" it. (105n). The realm that Hölderlin is said to "survey and dominate" also involves a different notion of "medium" from that which Benjamin has hitherto attributed to Friedrich Schlegel. The "medium of reflection" that Benjamin attributes to Schlegel, who we must remember does not use the word, is ultimately understood as homogeneous, grounded in a notion of the primal reflection of a unitary Self, returning to itself through, above and beyond its reflective movement in any of its individual moments. For Hölderlin, by contrast, the Self cannot be construed apart from a singularity that is inseparable from an "I" – but from one that never comes full circle, instead remaining irrevocably dispersed in the poetic act of writing and rewriting. Instead of *reflection*, therefore, we encounter *repetition*, instead of progression, *procedure* (*Verfahrungsart*), instead of prophecy pedagogy, instead of elation, sobriety or discretion (*Nüchternheit*). Benjamin quotes the following passage from Hölderlin to indicate the alternative his writing embodies, but as always with his references to this prophet-poet, without commenting or interpreting him in any detail[4]:

> In order to acquire a stable (*bürgerliche*) existence for the poets, including ours, it will be good if, subtracting the difference between times and structures, they return to the mechané of the ancients. […] Modern poetry is particularly lacking in schooling and craft (*an der Schule und am Handwerksmäßigen*), teaching and learning its way of proceeding, which once learned, can be reliably repeated and executed. Among humans *one has above all to pay attention to each thing*, above all to see how it is something, i.e. recognizable in its means (*moyen*) in which it appears, so that the way it is conditioned can be determined and

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4   Exception made, of course, for Benjamin's early (1915) essay, "On Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin". See my discussion of that essay in *Targets of Opportunity* (2005) and *Benjamin's –abilities* (2008).

taught. […] To this pertains first of all [*einmal*] precisely that lawful calculus [*gesetzlicher Kalkül*] (p. 105 – my italics – SW).

In Hölderlin's insistence on the need "to pay attention to each thing," repetition replaces reflection, but does not abolish it. Repetition, in the sense of transformative recurrence, is what arises when reflection is no longer governed by the homogeneity and unity of a Self, which means by a self-consciousness. Instead Hölderlin describes a calculation that seeks to count on the incalculable. The "Self" is replaced by "each thing", to which poets are called upon to "pay attention". Paying attention is not the same as critical reflection: it responds but does not assimilate or appropriate; it acknowledges without knowing.

From the point of view of a Self, bent on assimilating the other and the world as its property, such a call for attentiveness can look either like "chaos" or more likely like a waste of time. What counts for this Self are proper names, not the necessary anonymity of "each thing" in its resistant singularity. The media today are largely, although not exclusively, dominated by what can be called the Economy of the Self, defined as an instance that seeks to stay the same over time and space, by absorbing and assimilating all difference and alterity. For Benjamin, both Christianity and Capitalism have contributed to the predominance of this Self (in another essay of this period, "Capitalism as Religion", Benjamin portrays Capitalism as the Heir to Christianity). The integrity of the Self manifests itself in the audiovisual media through the unwritten rule that prohibits the conditions of representation from being shown in the representations themselves: for instance, the teleprompter during television news broadcasts. This contributes to the survival of what Benjamin was later to analyze as the aura – which seeks to manifest a distance in proximity that is ultimately grounded in the ostensible self-identity of what it surrounds. Benjamin pointed to the Hollywood "star" and the European "dictator" as two instances of the survival of the "aura" – but a less spectacular contemporary example would be what in American English is called the "anchor" of news broadcasts – who precisely serves to "anchor" a movement that might otherwise explode or at least crack the frame of the isolated images presented in the Evening News. The "anchor" person "presents" the "news" as the result of relatively isolated, ostensibly independent *individual acts and events*, aided by reporters who inevitably communicate by announcing their names and the names of their "anchor" (as a sign or cue that they are done speaking and their interlocutor can take over). In the U.S. individual news programs are increasingly named after the visible "anchors", who present an image of the news as itself the product of the individuals who present it. The isolated image that presents itself as being ostensibly transparent and self-evident – and hence as requiring neither knowledge nor thought to be understood – is thus the audiovisual correlative of the individualist conception of reality itself. Such self-

evidence proceeds by excluding what Schlegel, Hölderlin and later Marx, demanded *not* be excluded: the conditions under which events take place. (Parenthetically it is interesting to note that in cinema, the English word "producers" is today reserved for those who put together the financing of a program, show or film, rather than those who actually "make" it).

What is excluded by such a conception of reality is everything that cannot fit into a closed frame or recounted within the compass of a short, archaeo-teleological story: which is to say, everything that is impersonal, relational, differential and unspectacular.

In this sense, the Benjaminian notion of the "medium of reflection" is alive and well today, present in the "reality shows" that claim to show reality as it is, which is to say, as the reflection of individual Selves on the way to prominence or oblivion – albeit without the transformative "reflection" that Schlegel also envisaged. It is also present in the personalization of televised "news" in journalists who not only "anchor" their shows but tend to appropriate it, giving their names to the programs in which they first only participate.

But this notion of Reality is never as triumphant as it sometimes seems. A notable contrast in television broadcasting can be found in the English-language reporting of Al Jazeera International, which to date is still largely excluded from US broadcast television, although it is increasingly available on the internet to a more limited audience. Al Jazeera presents the "news" deliberately and explicitly as multifarious and multifaceted, "from all angles" as they put it in their self-promotional publicity, and not as a uniform series of self-contained and immediately intelligible images. In the reporting of Al Jazeera, one can catch a glimpse of what a medium would be that is organized not around self-reflection, but around the interplay of self and other as a process of differentiating repetition.

In a different way, the spread of the internet foregrounds the importance of "links" as much as of images, of relations as much as of spectacles, and thus reintroduces a dimension of reproducibility, as Benjamin might have called it, that can trouble the domination of the Present and of the Self. The crisis in which much of the world is increasingly involved raises the question not just of "debt" and "credit" but of the "credibility" of institutions in a way that can perhaps reopen spaces that have long since been closed or blocked. But that is another story, in the process of playing itself out.

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Mediating Sociality:
A Contested Question of Contemporary Art

Ina Blom

I

> The local area produces light bulbs, special light bulbs for films. Bulbs are to be used as lamps for particular situations. And all the workers drink a lot because the place where they are is basically the only place that's working; it's the only place that appears to be functioning like a factory. Everyone else in the area might as well be building their own vision of a hovercraft.

> The lamp factory lamps are used in the making of films. The only factory, the only place in this bar ridden environment where there is the memory and projection of an idea of productive work. Where there might be some echoes of earlier visions of how to get better. The factory is the first factory that has ever been seen in these parts yet it's a factory that produces unique things. It never produces the same thing twice, it makes lamps to order, it makes special lamps (Gillick 2002, pp. 33, 35).

The passages above – evoking industrial production, media production, customization, and the "productive" working of subjective imagination – belongs to a text that is indicative of the proliferation of artistic practices that turn around the concept of "the social". They are taken from *Literally No Place. Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* – a book by the British artist Liam Gillick presenting the fragmentary narratives of six nameless characters who conduct research on the participants of a utopian commune.

The book is clearly a piece of fiction. Yet it seems to resist full immersion in a fictional universe, among other things due to a number of "theoretical" quotations that are spread throughout the book and that seem to open up the fictional universe to a wider grid of relations. In fact, this wider grid extends well beyond the format of texts: it is further elaborated in Gillick's visual and spatial work, which plays off key ideas and figures found in the book. Gillick's book is then not so much a singular work of art as a nodal point in a network that includes the following elements: A group of fictional personae and their actions and reflections. A well-known body of writings in the fields of philosophy, political theory and utopian speculation, ranging from Marx and Adorno to B.F. Skinner and the Khmer Rouge. A series of colorful and stylishly designed architectural or quasi-architectural constructions set up in galleries, museums and public spaces. (Ill.1) A series of suggestions as to what type of managerial, pedagogical, communitarian or creative behaviors or actions might possibly be facilitated by these constructions.

And, finally, the people who may visit the museums or public spaces in question and may or may not feel compelled to engage in the sort of action proposed, implicitly or explicitly, by these constructions.

Ill 1:   Liam Gillick, Filtration*, 2001. Courtesy Eva Presenhuber, Zurich.*

None of these elements are reducible to one another, in the sense that real or imagined social behavior would be metaphorically represented by spatial constructions that have a parallel articulation in the field of fiction but that would ultimately be contained and explained by social and political theory. Instead Gillick's book is a part of an *assemblage* of heterogeneous elements that together make up what I will call a social site. In what follows, this particular assemblage

will be discussed as an *art-specific production of sociality*. This particular approach to the artwork as a social site may open up a discussion around the artwork as a medium or the mediatic status and function of art – since the concept of artwork as medium is invariably the point of departure for discussing the social and political dimensions of artworks. This is notably not just linked to the commonplace realist notion of a medium as a vehicle of communication – in the sense that the artwork is understood to transmit realities that lie outside of its art-specific or aesthetic concerns. Historically, the question of artwork as medium came to the forefront in conjunction with the introduction of new technologies of mass recording and distribution such as film, photography, radio and phonography. Confronted with the increasingly social power of these media, art production and aesthetic theory was forced to rethink the relation between art and social or collective issues: The understanding of these issues would now be informed by analyses of the specificity of the various technologies deployed – their specific ways of producing meanings and ordering sensations. Association with, or adaptation to, the new mass media technologies thus emphasized the close relationship between social technologies and artistic techniques: it was from this point of view that works of art could be linked to specific modes of production or to the various ways in which technologies discipline bodies and produce ways of seeing and thinking.[1] However, within the discourses of 20th century art, the question of the relation between art, medium specificity and sociality was handled in distinctly contradictory ways. A formalist and aestheticist conception of medium specificity – the idea that the artwork should primarily evolve out of and reflect back on whatever is specific to its material support and the specific sensorial register engaged by this support – was increasingly contrasted with a new mode of performative, interventionist or actionist work that seemed to have privileged access to social issues and processes precisely by eschewing the focus on the specificity of artistic media.[2] With the staging of this contrast came the idea that socially engaged art had no use for the "mediatic" function of self-referential aesthetic frameworks too often focused on an artificial separation and reification of the human senses. Instead, it would directly access the heterogeneous political

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1   In his 1943 lecture, "The Author as Producer", Walter Benjamin states that the social content of a work of art is related to its technique, not to its political attitude (Benjamin 1975, pp. 107-122.) In *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999), Friedrich Kittler documents the way in which the specificity of the new recording and distribution technologies provided not only new orders of seeing and saying, but also new connections between social technology and artistic techniques.

2   The best-known and most systematic articulation of this position is the one presented in the writings of the American critic Clement Greenberg, most significantly in "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940) and "Modernist Painting" (1961). Both republished in *Art in Theory 1900-1910 An Anthology of Changing Ideas*.

and psychological materials of "the real" – an artistic strategy that has, among other things, been dubbed "the post medium condition".[3]

The widely used distinction between artistic medium specificity and post-medium art productions has, however, severe limitations when it comes to understanding the social thinking generated in artistic productions. For the problem is that these terms and distinctions all essentially depart from a preoccupation with the definition of the work of art, its ontological and phenomenological aspects, and terms of interpretation. This preoccupation tends, explicitly or implicitly, to frame all discussions of artists said to work in and with the social, whether they are lauded for activist or interventionist acuity or accused of bad immediacy or a return to naïve realism. The artwork status is the key frame of reference, while the question of social contents, strategies or operations emerges as a secondary frame, arrived at as if by special effort or detour. In contrast to these ways of framing the issue, *Literally No Place Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* may serve as an instructive counter-model, a model that challenges us to think differently about not only the notion of artistic and aesthetic media or mediation in art practices, but – as significantly – about the concept of sociality itself.

II

To speak of artworks as social in one sense or another is to engage with what is today a contested topic in art production and criticism. If post-1960's art has renewed the historical avant-garde's focus on the social or collective aspects of art production and reception, the last 15 years have been marked by a certain shift in emphasis. The predominance of institutional critique and interventionist strategies has, at least to some extent, given way to a preoccupation with various forms of collaboration and co-presence as well as community-oriented approaches that seem to explicitly offer up the positivity of the social as an arena for artistic activity.

While there is nothing exactly new about this, the weight and visibility given to this type of practice is historically unprecedented. At the same time, it is precisely the meaning of the notion of "the social" that has become the contested core of contemporary debates. At the one end, practitioners oriented toward actionist politics and community work often question the relevance and necessity of the artistic context or the art-institutional framing of their activity. At the other end, less immediately actionist approaches – work that does not explicitly ad-

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3   The "real" here could be understood in the colloquial sense as well as in the more specific Lacanian sense of the word: In Hal Foster's (1996) account of avant-garde history, works of this type distinguish themselves by bringing up traumatic material that tears apart the "image screens" of official culture and history writing.

dress political trouble zones but simply seems to evoke interactivity and collaboration in a "softer" or "looser" sense – has come under attack for its supposedly harmonizing or conflict-insensitive take on the social. This type of work is now often critiqued as an apolitical idealization of social "networking" in the name of art. In any case, all such approaches have to face the question of why artists should work with social situations when this is obviously done more efficiently and convincingly by social workers, activists and politicians – not to mention party planners, bar owners, club hosts, etc., etc.

At stake here are both notions of the critical difference or autonomy of art and aesthetics *and* the autonomy of social/political activists vis-à-vis the interested but ultimately uncommitted embrace of agents whose final allegiance is with the field of art. The stakes are in other words construed around the question of art as a medium for some entity named "the social", with possible losses and gains calculated both on the "art" side and on the "social" side. This is why discussions of much avant-garde work tend to turn around the essentially legalistic question of the frames and limits of art and its institutions.

Yet, this type of focus tends to overlook the specific ways in which *the social here is produced through, or in terms of, artistic work and aesthetic situations.* At the actionist or community oriented end of the scale there is often a political/strategic *use of* the art institution: For visibility and funding, for instance, or because it may accommodate an exceptional type of ethical operation that depends on a temporary, disinterested or ritualized framework in order to come about. And, at the less explicitly problem-oriented end of the scale, the social may be evoked through self-consciously aesthetic or aisthetic operations, sensorially oriented frameworks that seem to complicate the very idea of the immediacy and self-evidence of "community", even as they draw actual audiences or participants into various forms of interaction. In both cases, the framework of art and aesthetics plays a fundamental role in conjuring up a particular social object, although in ways that may seem largely incompatible. Grant H. Kester's *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art,* and Miwon Kwon's *One Place After Another. Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* are to date the most influential attempts to discuss the political and ethical dilemmas that arise when what could well appear as social work is conducted or initiated from within the art institution.[4] And yet, even as they discuss similar types of work, these authors frame "the social" in very different terms. Kester's concern is with a type of artistic practice that too easily falls outside the purview of art

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4   In the same context Nina Möntmann's *Kunst als sozialer Raum* (2002) should also be mentioned: it is a thorough discussion of the various constructions of social space in the work of Andrea Fraser, Martha Rosler, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Renée Green.

criticism and his book is primarily an attempt to develop frameworks of explanation that allows the specific political achievement of this type of work to be understood and critiqued in aesthetic terms at all. "Dialogical Aesthetics" is the term suggested by Kester in order to indicate a practice of listening and intersubjective exchange alien to the presentational emphasis in most Western art and aesthetics. By picking up elements from Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics as well as ideas on how subjectivity constitutes itself through communicative interaction with others found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Mikhail Bakhtin, Kester conjures up an aesthetic ideal that is based in ethics. And ethics is seen here as fundamental to any thinking or philosophy since it is key to the very constitution of subjectivity. However, this ethical/aesthetic model or ideal must be brought into some strategic relation with the quotidian practice of human interaction in order to be of interest. It is this strategic relation, performed in a number of situational or activist artworks, which is ultimately the object of Kester's study (Kester 2004).

But it is also at this strategic level where Kester discusses the artistic engagement with what he calls "politically coherent communities" – pre-existing communities or communities created through the context set up by the artwork – that his work comes under the critical radar of Miwon Kwon's project. In her book, Kwon traces the shift in public art from large-scale sculptural objects to physically or conceptually site-specific works to audience-specific or issue-specific projects. This shift – described as a passage from an aesthetic function to a design function to a social function – is understood as a displacement of the very concept of "site" itself: Audience- or issue-specific works are understood in terms of a discursive virtualization of the site in the sense that the social identities evoked through such work are constructed within complex discursive fields. And it is from the point of view of this virtuality – theoretically underpinned by Jean Luc Nancy's non-identitarian theory of sociality presented in *The Inoperative Community* – that Kwon critiques Kester for harboring essentialist ideas of communitarian identity. In her view, such essentialism is politically dangerous in that it may reinforce prejudices surrounding existing and problematic social identities rather than focusing on future constructions of the social (Kwon 2002). Kester's response to this critique is that it is precisely the pragmatic and situational application of dialogical aesthetics that will determine the political validity of each project: a blanket charge of essentialism is simply too abstract given that the collective identities in question may well understand themselves as contingent or contextual rather than natural or essential. While Kwon seems to reject the very idea of coherent community, arguing that truly critical work must take place in the interstices between identities and communities, Kester believes that

unanticipated forms of knowledge can be produced through dialogical encounters with politically coherent communities.

For all their differences, however, Kester and Kwon seem to share one basic presupposition: Both define sociality in terms of community, in relation to which "art" has a tangential function: For Kester, art takes on a negotiating function, whereas for Kwon art ensures a discursive virtualization of community issues, against the threat of essentialist identity politics. Translated to the medium perspective, Kester treats art as a type of special intermediary, whereas Kwon relies on a concept of medium reflexivity derived from a formalist art criticism preoccupied with art's sustaining and differentiating relation to itself (the history of its own technical means): here, community issues are – so to speak – sifted through an interest in the framing devices or parergonal structures through which modern art's relation to its own "inside" and "outside" is negotiated.[5]

These community-oriented approaches could, however, be held against a different articulation of sociality in or through artistic projects, one that takes as its point of departure the specific social formations produced through modern art itself. It is a type of work where the social seems to be specifically evoked in terms of the kind of *forming* and *shaping* that is generally understood to be at the core competence of modern art, but also in terms of fashion, architecture and design. Here, sociality is in other words conjured up through those instances that are generally recognized as the "official" limit phenomena of art proper. For architecture, design and fashion continually emerge as instances in which art's spillover into general culture is either anxiously debated or euphorically celebrated. And, to a large extent, the anxieties and euphoria surrounding the art/design/ architecture boundary seem generated by the problematic issues of style that run through avant-garde practice: the dream of creating new styles of life on the basis of artistic creativity or the fear that genuine artistic style will bleed into the superficial stylistics of commodity culture. This complex boundary situation is now made into a site of artistic activity in its own right: what we may call a style site. Keeping these impulses in open tension against one another, this type of work establishes a site of activity where the contradictory sociality of 20th century art itself is produced as a space of play and projection. At this site, the utopian promise of the generalization and use-value of artistic creativity is held in check

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5   Kwon's account is based here on Rosalind Krauss's discussion of the artistic medium as a recursive structure, i.e., a structure in which some of the elements will produce the rules that will generate the structure itself. This opens for a view on artistic media as not given and fixed, but as continually made or produced. Medium specificity in art should thus be understood as a self-differentiating activity, not as a framework for an increasingly ossified reproduction of purely art-internal concerns (Krauss 1999).

against the experience of how such creativity is mobilized to great effect by contemporary life-style industries of so-called cognitive capitalism, not least in their contribution to the creation of the kind of infinitely mobile or malleable subjectivities that are both the raw materials and the products of this economy.[6] It is this conundrum that is brought up in Liam Gillick's *Literally No Place. Communes, Bars and Greenrooms*. And his handling of this conundrum does not just present us with a different artistic mediation of the social, but, more pertinently, with a wholly different understanding of sociality itself: for this reason it is worth tracing in some detail.

III

To begin with, the title itself spans the whole contradictory range of social spaces informed by notions of artistic creativity. On the one hand there is the commune, the utopian experiments in alternative living. From the early days of Soviet constructivism to the artist-created alternative societies such as those created by the Wiener Actionists or the present-day Atelier van Lieshout, there is no commune without a marked ideology of art, an idea of how art plays into the social economy. On the other hand there is the greenroom, the liminal space where participants in TV shows wait before they go on camera and where they mingle afterwards. It is a social space that frames televisual performance and thus demarcates the shaped and controlled nature of televisual real-time; the apparently spontaneous and unbroken flow of events that aligns TV time with lived temporality in general.

In between the two, mediating between them, keeping them both together and apart, there is the bar: The place of easy conviviality and togetherness, where the focus and purpose of "production" is temporarily and ritually suspended. And while the bar is often idealized as a space of real communality, a public place where social differences are supposedly laid aside, it is also a dream space of sorts. For more often than not the bar is also a heavily designed and stylized space, a space whose designs project other times and places in the midst of "ordinary reality" – not entirely unlike the type of everyday escapism facilitated by a medium like TV. So, in a very simple and basic sense, the bar could thus be seen as a space that mediates between the social utopia of the commune and the mediated sociality of the greenroom.

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6   This scenario is discussed in more detail in my book, *On the Style Site. Art, Sociality and Media Culture* (2007).

The bar – or its close equivalents, the lounge, club or party – is a key element in numerous contemporary "social" artworks: points of departure for audience interaction or the creation of temporary forms of togetherness. In a trenchant and not atypical critique of the work of artists like Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija (as well as the concept of relational aesthetics, launched by Nicolas Bourriaud in response to this type of work), Claire Bishop zeroes in on the use of bar/lounge situations, claiming that this approach to sociality rests too comfortably within a quasi-democratic ideal of community as immanent togetherness and consensus. What is produced in such work is basically a feel-good model of sociality that evades the actuality of social differences or antagonism and the need to understand democracy as a space where such conflictual relations are sustained rather than erased (Bishop 2004, pp. 51-79).[7]

This critique is relevant enough on its own terms, and would have to be taken to heart if the bar/lounge concept of "getting together" constituted the single, isolated and perfectly transparent core of Gillick's work. But, as *Literally No Place* indicates, the conviviality of the bar/lounge-situation is but one moment or function within a larger assemblage of elements. The point – missed again and again in the critical writing – is also that there is no one approach to artistic work with "the social", just as there is no one sociality "out there" that can simply be mediated by artistic activity. Unless one develops a more differentiated set of notions of the often incompatible *forms* of sociality produced in artistic activity, this type of criticism will unwittingly tend to reinforce entirely traditional realist and essentialist notions of both "the social" and "the artistic", notions that presuppose each sphere as a given: Sociality here seems accessible to artistic activity precisely because of its imagined separation from "art proper", generally meaning various types of formalist approaches etc. Moreover, this sociality only exists "for" art to the extent that it is primarily a field in which problems are to be solved, relations engineered. Here, the standard artistic and art critical approach to the social reflects what Bruno Latour has identified as the dominant trend in sociology since Emile Durkheim – notably the tendency to conflate the understanding of the social link with the need to solve specifically "social" problems: a sociology that understands itself as a political project devoted to the task of engineering modern society.

The key idea behind this take on the social is the notion that there exists something like a social context in which non-social activities take place: As Latour puts it, the social is presented as a specific domain of reality that always encompasses the agents that are "inside it", and that can be used as a specific

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7   Bishop responds in particular to Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998).

type of causality to account for the residual aspects that other domains (psychology, law, economics, art, etc.) cannot completely deal with (Latour 2005, pp. 3-17). Social science has managed to make this definition of society into the default position referred to by all other disciplines as well: This is why boundary problems arising in the field of art tend to be referred to as the problem-solving domain called "the social". It is along this line of thinking that issues of style, form or aesthetics are routinely separated from any discussion of so-called social art-works, whether that art is defined as context art, community based art or activist art. Style and aesthetics are what art and art history deal with "on their own"; a different set of issues "belongs" to the social.

In order to think beyond this framework, art criticism has to open up its own concept of the social – for instance by paying attention to the small subfield of sociology that Latour calls "the sociology of associations", but that is more offi-cially known as actor-network theory. Inspired by the example of Gabriel Tarde who thought of the social not as a specific realm or context, but as a kind of circulating fluid or mobile webs of imitation and influence that should be fol-lowed by new quantitative and qualitative methods: The social here is not a thing among things, but a principle of connectivity between things that are not them-selves social. Focus is then less on domains, contexts or fields than on new con-figurations or associations between elements. While this might seem like a vague type of proposition compared with the relative fixity of the notion of a social domain, Latour argues that this principle of connectivity actually lies behind the most common experience we have in "encountering the puzzling face of the social", since these new associations –which we may encounter in the form of a new job description, a new political movement, a new form of medication, a new law – force us to question, in each instance, what it is that we are supposed to be doing with each other (ibid.). This concept of sociality is of course much wider than the usual meaning of the term, yet it strictly limits itself to tracing new as-sociations and designing their assemblages. There is no reason why the complex web of elements that come together under the title *Literally No Place. Com-munes, Bars and Greenrooms,* should not be seen as a new and puzzling "social surface" that poses a challenge to pre-existing definitions of social links. Only by tracing to the specific combination of things in these works can we discuss their equally specific way of not just handling but *producing or inventing* instances of tension, contradiction or antagonism. And this again has consequences for our understanding of the artwork as a mediator of social relations. Its role as a me-diator must obviously be distinguished from any residual ideas of the artwork as some sort of intermediary or communication channel. In Latour's definition, an intermediary transports meaning or force without transformation, so that when

defining its input one has also defined its output. It unifies and should be counted as one single thing (even if it may be made up of many parts). A mediator, in contrast, has a different function: Its input will never predict its output and the specificity of the connections it sets up has to be taken into account in every single instance. No matter how simple a mediator may look, it may become complex, leading in multiple directions that will modify whatever is attributed to its role (Latour 2005, pp. 37-42).

No simple mediation of any existing social object comes forth in the confusing web of literary, political, architectural, visual and sculptural elements through which Gillick's communes, bars and greenrooms are evoked. All one has to go by is a certain structuring principle that seems to inform the entire assembly. For each of its elements seems suspended between two great machineries of social production that each comes with its own spaces, formats, history and theoretical literature: Notably the utopian and the televisual. As it happens, the medium of television and the various historical instances of utopian imagination could all be described as time machines, in the sense that they all administer complex temporalities where the future or the past continually impinges on the present. In fact, Gillick's work is entirely organized around such issues of temporality: its specific take on "the social" cannot be grasped without reference to it**.**

One might start out by tracing this question of temporality in the presentation of the commune, more precisely in Gillick's extensive deployment of *Walden Two,* B.F. Skinner's novel about a scientific utopia, based on behaviorist engineering of human relations. You do not read far into this book before issues pertaining to art, architecture and design are brought up: In fact, these are among the first things discussed by the protagonists who visit the commune for the first time and discover the various design strategies and innovations that are described at length (Skinner 1962). There are, for instance, practical benches with tables attached as well as specially designed food trays that facilitate eating, and – even more importantly – save time and effort during cleaning. There are hanging tea-glasses that are practical both for keeping the drink warm and for helping yourself to several cups in one go. On the communal bulletin board, all information is given in plain typeface and with no glaring images, so as to avoid visual competition. A similar attitude is reflected in the dress code, where one tries to abolish the waste of time, effort and expense imposed by constantly changing fashions: A broadening of the tastes instead allows each woman (the emphasis in the text is here on women) to develop her own personal beauty rather than be constricted by irrational style dictates. A similar broadmindedness seems to reign in the architectural department:

> The rooms were decorated in various styles. It was possible to dine briskly in a white-walled room bustling with speed and efficiency or at leisure in a pine-paneled Early American dining room in beeswax candlelight, or in an English inn whose walls carried racing pictures or in a colorful Swedish rooms. Two carefully designed modern rooms, one with booths along one wall, came off well by comparison.
>
>   I was rather offended by this architectural hodge-podge […] Through some principle which I did not fully understand, it appeared that the ingestion of food had something to do with the development of aesthetic preferences or tolerances (Skinner 1962, pp. 46).

In this controlled cultivation of variation and individuality, design is a critical instance, minutely described and evaluated. A plurality of styles is advisable since it seems to promote a form of "aesthetic tolerance" that is compared to food tolerance: You will not be bodily *affected* by it. Art, in contrast, remains curiously neutral in relation to the constitution of the commune itself. All one gets to know is that in an age of generally second-rate art, the art produced in the commune is of high quality. In fact, its production is basically the success symptom of a wide array of pragmatic design strategies that range from the design of cafeteria trays to the behaviorist design of minds and bodies – strategies that, taken together, procure the sum total of leisure time necessary for everyone to be given the opportunity to be artistically creative. "Leisure's our levitation", as the original creator of the commune puts it. Art is then mainly the signifier of "free time" – or the ability to enjoy "seeming to be free" as the creator also puts it. In sharp contrast to Joseph Beuys's romantic (and quasi-Marxist) suggestion that *all* forms of work be associated with the creative freedom and self-determination of artistic work, free time is now strictly a product. The utopian commune is a rational, economist, purveyor of free time, art time. And it is precisely access to this time, or rather to its imagined freedoms, that makes the steely discipline of the commune endurable.

   The objects, texts and images assembled around the title *Literally No Place. Communes, Bars and Greenrooms* insert themselves into precisely this separation between pragmatic design strategies and artistic creativity. Or – to put it more succinctly – into the separation between the potential "waste time" of fashion styles and the "spend time" associated with true artistic style and form. Evoking Skinner's utopian novel, they intrude in the entirely familiar economy of art that seems to subtend the sociality of Walden Two, an economy that dictates that in order to be able to freely spend time on art, time must not first have been wasted on the empty stylistics of fashion. For while *Walden Two* reiterates a typically modernist ambivalence about the relation between art, architecture and fashion, this ambivalence is not primarily sexual (as in the type of architectural discourse which vehemently protects the idea of construction from the feminine eroticism of fashion), but has to do with time management (Wigley 2001). Gillick's intrusion into this complex then first and foremost takes place at

a stylistic level – that is, at a level where the styles that may feed into either artworks or design solutions take on a certain independence or autonomy with respect to the two temporal registers.

The only thing that seems certain is the fundamental complicity between the two temporalities: The imagined freedom of "art time" is determined by a disciplinarian shaping and forming that produces surplus time and that could itself not be endured without these moments of freedom. The time of true art style and the time of fashion stylistics are reined in, controlled and connected in the same economic circuit. What Gillick seems to want us to remember, however, is the larger issue of the administration and mining of time that is a key factor in production in general. For, first among the series of quotes that frame and break up the main narrative of *Literally No Place* is County Magistrate Broughton Charlton's appalled speech on child labor, reported in the "Daily Telegraph" of 17 January 1860 and quoted by Marx in "Capital". And here, in this absolute grotesque of capitalist production, it is, above all, issues of time – the ages, the hours – that give offense:

> Children of nine or ten are dragged from their squalid beds at two, three or four o'clock in the morning, and compelled to work for a bare subsistence until ten, eleven or twelve at night, their limbs wearing away, their frames dwindling, their faces whitening, and their humanity absolutely sinking into a stone-like torpor, utterly horrible to contemplate (Marx quoted in Gillick 2002, p. 6).

To the extent that the minutely perfected economy of art time and design time at Walden Two has a recognizable, familiar, normalizing beat to it, it is perhaps because it could also be seen to have something in common with the no less persistent but far more variegated and subtle mining of time in contemporary production. The behaviorist utopia of Walden is the place where the very forces of desire are designed, and kept in check and productive, through sophisticated techniques of self-government: this is how Walden Two manages to do without more traditional governmental bodies. External forms of government and politics are not necessary since each person governs him- or herself without even noticing: the constant payoff (time for art) makes control seem like freedom. For the forces of desires that are controlled in this art/design economy are wholly associated with the forces of time and temporalization.

What all this means is that the utopia of *Walden Two* is maybe not all that far away from us. If anything, its obliteration of external forms of government may seem like a parodic extreme of the forms of self-disciplining characteristic of neo-liberalist control society. In fact the question of the actual distance to *Walden Two* – brought up through metaphors of finding, staying at, leaving or returning to the commune –returns as a key issue in *Literally No Place*. The main narrative

of Gillick's book takes off where *Walden Two* ends: that is, where Skinner's narrator describes his final decision to return to *Walden Two* in order to live there. He returns to its isolated location on foot, getting stronger as he walks: "My step was light and I could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down from me as I walked" (Skinner, 1962, p. 319). In *Literally No Place*, a group of people, walking for no clear purpose, seems to encircle a terrain that is recognizable as *Walden Two* only because of the repetitions that resonate between this text and Skinner's novel. While Skinner's narrator intently returns, Gillick's walkers, having no clear plan and only unresolved desires, seem to swing in an arc. However, their walking is described in the same optimistic metaphor as the one used by Skinner: *Their step was light and they could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down from them as they walked* (Gillick 2002, p. 7).

This sentence, which seems to express the desire invested in the very "ground" of this contemporary utopia (a strange type of ground since utopia "literally" means "no place"), triggers a series of ambiguous design solutions. Gillick suggests that it could, for instance, be reframed as a logoed beach towel – a true token of the free time exploited by the leisure industries – with the sentence woven into its fabric, as a corporate logo of sorts (Gillick 2001, p. 56). And in a 2003 exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, the same sentence was turned into a three-dimensional signboard made up of big colorful letters in modernist sans-serif typeface – a sleek corporate-style space divider cum signage system that was used – along with an abstract wall painting – to frame a bar/coffee shop area placed in the vast lobby area of the museum. Both letters and wall painting have strong elements of those orange colors contemporary designers seem to agree signal happiness, activity and optimism. The orange signage system served to draw you to the typically "social" place in the museum, the place where you relax and discuss the more solitary experiences had in the art spaces proper. But it would be more precise to say that the signage system overlays two different spaces; notably the museum bar and Skinner's commune. These spaces could be seen to represent reciprocal economies of art: In the commune, the time of art is the quasi-exceptional but necessary instance that keeps the checks and balances in order. The museum bar, in contrast, provides the momentary and necessary time-out from the demands of art (the museal demand that one has a productive relation with art). The time of art is in any case the common denominator between the two spaces: continually evoked, produced, framed or kept at bay by design that guarantees its "unproductive" productivity.

Such patching-together of different spaces – some articulated as real physical environments and others theoretical or fictional, some present and others distant – is a key strategy in Gillick's work. Phrases or objects or phenomena described

in a text may, for instance, inform design solutions that give an actual physical site, a place of real communal activity, its formal and functional specificity. While his texts repeatedly speak of discussions that are about to take place, or that should hopefully take place, Gillick designs environments that might seem to accommodate actual discussion situations: Metal-framed canopies made out of multicolored Plexiglas, lamp-like ambience creators that sift the light so as to provide a minimal prerequisite for a communal situation such as a discussion. Here, a mere change in the light quality equals the design of an "open" social space, as if a metaphor of free and open-ended exchange. Yet the optimistic orange glow produced by many of these discussion platforms also indicates the way in which the metaphorical association between open space and open exchange is also framed by a fear of the articulation of conflict. "Discussion" is always presented as benevolent – and, as in the fictional texts – a quasi-obligatory activity that never actually seems to go anywhere. In actual fact, discussion never really takes place, at least not under Gillick's explicit guidance. Gillick's design solutions remain elliptical and suggestive, never entirely devoted to the communal actuality of the present. His built spaces are invariably infused with the presence of an elsewhere: hence their "difficult" or puzzling quality. His corporate-style signage constructions – decorative and functional space dividers like the one demarcating a bar area at The Museum of Modern Art – typically present quotes from texts that could be said to be historically or ideologically related to this environment but not, perhaps, to the way this environment tends to understand itself. (Ill.2) In this way they tend to undercut the behavioral patterns, habits or ideals that are most readily associated with their visual/spatial signifiers – in fact with the whole concept of *habitus,* the usual "social" framework for understanding the non-social objects with which we surround ourselves, as developed in the art historical analysis of Erwin Panofsky and then transferred to the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu.[8]

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8   Bourdieu's concept of habitus was adapted from Erwin Panofsky's description of the relationship between Gothic architecture and scholastic culture. Panofsky claimed that scholastic principles had no *direct* effect on architectural design: if scholasticism can be traced in the construction of Gothic cathedrals it is mainly because it had turned into a general creative mindset that informed the work of the builders of the time. Bourdieu translated Panofsky's work on Gothic architecture into French and acknowledged this as the source of his own use of the term habitus in "The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field", 1985-86.

Ill 2: Liam Gillick Literally (Structure)*, 2003. Courtesy MoMA, New York.*

IV

It is at this point that it becomes possible to ask about the location or function of the third space evoked in *Literally No Place*: notably the greenroom. The commune and the bar have to some extent been evoked through the interaction between textual references and physical constructions, but the space of the greenroom – a space associated with televisual real-time production in the broad sense of the term – seems slightly harder to locate. It seems above all to present itself

as a specific ordering of time that enters into close dialogue with the temporal economy of the commune. The greenroom is then, in this specific sense, *literally no place.*

In the commune, the relation between time and production is that of a rational, no-loss system of exchange. The full and ideal present – the moment of pleasure and self-realization that is identified with the creation of art – is a guaranteed effect of an economy of time that both separates and connects work and play, useful pursuit and leisure. In contrast, the time of TV production evoked by the greenroom indicates a less rational temporal economy: the full and ideal present is quite simply harder to locate. While constantly promoted and fetishized, associated with ideals of immediate experience and new forms of co-presence and communication, TV presence is also what continually slips away. As a mass medium, television is construed around highly overdetermined notions of presence. The concept of the live media event – the most remarkable benefit of television's real-time technologies and its most characteristic format – connects disparate people and places in a communal experience: this is why it can be described as a new arena for ritualized behavior. And its new modes of journalistic presentation attest, as Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz have pointed out, to the concept of immediate co-presence: No longer an outside commentator cynically open to any meanings, the media event reporter tends to be actively involved in the official meaning of the event as it unfolds. Operating in the middle of TV presence, she *enacts* this meaning (Dayan and Katz, 1992, pp. 89-92). Yet the dispersed nature of TV audiences obviously challenges traditional notions of communality, and its transmissions across time and space radically change the very notion of the "presence" of perception itself.[9] The greenroom – the place where you wait before and after your TV presentation – frames TV live-ness with a nervous sense of the just-before and just-after: "Sitting in a greenroom […] thinking about how to present", as Gillick puts it in *Literally No Place*. In Gillick's work the greenroom is above all the metonym for this slippery and refractive presence.

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9 This point is discussed at length in Samuel Weber (1996). Weber is interested in what he calls the differential specificity of the medium of television – a medium whose live transmissions do not simply overcome distance but seem to somehow short-circuit the notion of distance itself. It renders distance invisible by *transposing it directly into the live vision it transmits*. This short-circuiting implies a split in the unity of the body's time and place – a well-known feature of both film and photography as well. But in television this separation is combined with a *presentness* associated with sense perception that involves the actuality of the body in a very different way. It sets up a surrogate for the body in that it allows sense perception to take place, but in a way no body can, for its perception takes place in more than one place at a time.

But if Gillick's text presents the greenroom as the place where people "circulate around the present", it is also presented as "a true place of debate that may be the perfect model" (Gillick 2002, pp. 48-49). More than just a space at the margins of live TV, the greenroom is actually the model for the contemporary public sphere. The consensus environment of post-corporate or postindustrial societies may thrive on certain values retained from the utopian commune: hence the idealization of participation, discussion, conviviality, etc. But the very definition of such phenomena is transformed by the "flickering relationships" instigated by the TV culture that subtends this environment. This overlay of rational construction and televisual flickering presents itself in terms of a concrete design solution, the so-called *Big Conference Center Relational Tool* (1998): A raw, "functionalist" pine wall inset with small halogen lights that glow like single pixels, intended to "highlight a location where it becomes possible to engage in constantly flickering relationships".[10]

It is through such overlays that Gillick creates a new instance of sociality, or new social surfaces: A – certainly controversial– association between utopianism and TV culture that opens onto the question of how utopianism figures in contemporary production. By playing off the ambiguous role of art and aesthetics in the economic distinction between work-time and free-time, Gillick's associations force us to confront the similarities between Skinner's government-free behaviorist commune and the emphasis on "free" self-production that plays such an important part in today's cognitive capitalism or consciousness industries. The commune idealizes the free time of art, but since this instance of freedom is here also presented at once as the pure product of time-saving design, *and* as that element that will make the general state of (self)control endurable and possible, art is in fact inscribed in a temporal economy that has a purchase on *all* human time. This general purchase on human time is a characteristic feature of a type of production in which televisual technologies – a synecdoche for all sorts of real-time technologies – keep us productive around the clock, largely thanks to their ability to intimately interact with human sensation, perception and memory (Lazzarato 2002). From the point of view of contemporary TV culture, the commune's attempt to distinguish between art and design comes across as irrelevant: *all that matters now are the uncontrollable forces of "style",* or the everyday aesthetics of self-styling or self-production. (Ill.3)

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10   This quote is taken from the website of Gillick's Paris gallery Air de Paris, www.airdeparis.com.

Ill 3: Liam Gillick, Literally No Place Bar/Floor, *2000. Courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York.*

These overlays – which depend on a principle of connectivity that brings together elements from a range of different contexts, material sources, technologies, disciplines and traditions – are the true mediators in this work: the agents that open up new definitions of what it is that we are doing with each other. This is the critical mediating operation through which at least parts of contemporary art's current "confusion" of art, architecture and design should be understood. It is a mediation that restages the historical relations between art, design and utopian desires, putting art's contradictory relations to both responsible planning *and* surprise invention, time management *and* temporal escape, into free play. It restages, in particular, the avant-garde's often-professed desire to break down the barriers between art and design, opening onto the duplicitous nature of this desire. These are, in fact, the antagonistic dimensions of modern art's own sociality, endlessly debated and fought over: the contemporary aestheticization processes only render them more acute. Here, Gillick's methodology differs fundamentally from the ordinary critical approaches to the social aspects of art, which tend to depart from analyses of the specific artistic media or of the institutions: such media or institutions are the default figures for the way in which the social envelops or contains "art itself". In contrast, *Literally No Place. Communes, Bars and*

Greenrooms traces an unpredictable transversal movement through various materials, contexts, and apparatuses of sensation and perception – an aesthetic movement that is unique to this project and that should in fact be defined as its true medium.

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Has Time Become Space?

Mary Ann Doane

The photograph rigorously centers its object (Ill. 1). A shadowy dimness surrounds that center, drawing the gaze to the brilliance of the screen itself, which seems to collect and return all the luminance of the scene in a small, interior frame that is a reiteration of the larger frame of the photograph. Nevertheless, the surrounding environment is legible, decipherable as a rather standard theatrical space with curved and tiered rows of seats and an ornamental architecture encasing the screen, lending it a supplemental value. It is a cinema, seemingly without a movie, simply holding a surplus of light shining forth from the place where that movie should be. The light is all intense presence, without the proliferation of differences that would generate meaning. From the cinema screen, and the photograph in its entirety, are evacuated the movement and duration that we believe to be the special, most salient characteristics of film as a medium. But in reality, rather than the lack/loss of a movie, the spectator is witness to all of a movie, all at once.

Ill 1:   Hiroshi Sugimoto, U.A Playhouse, New York, *1978; Gelatin silver print 20 x 24" (50.8 x 61 cm); Edition of 5. © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery.*

This 1978 photograph is entitled *U.A. Playhouse, New York* and is part of a series – *Theaters* – by Hiroshi Sugimoto, known for his technique of using an 8x10 large format camera and extremely long exposures.[1] In the series, spanning twenty years, Sugimoto chose a number of old American movie palaces, ornately decorated, as well as more austere outdoor drive-in screens, and left the shutter of his still camera open for the entire length of the movie (Ill. 2 and 3). According to Sugimoto, the series is a product of his own self-directed question, "Suppose you shot a whole movie in a single frame?," the answer being, "You get a shining screen."[2] What we are left with is an extreme condensation of time, its transformation into an overwhelming assault of radiance. The process seems to embody all the spectacle of cinema in a single instant. The frame, which is usually the condition of possibility of movement in film, becomes movement's totalizing container.

Ill 2: Hiroshi Sugimoto, U.A. Walker, New York*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 20 x 24" (50.8 x 61 cm). Edition of 25. © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery*.

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1   Hiroshi Sugimoto, 2000, *Theaters*. Some images are also available in the portfolio on Sugimoto's website, accessed March 18, 2009 <http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/portfolio.html>. See also the discussion of Sugimoto's *Theaters* series in Bruno, 2002.

2   Hiroshi Sugimoto, "Theaters," SugimotoHiroshi.com [accessed March 18, 2009] <http://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/theater.html>.
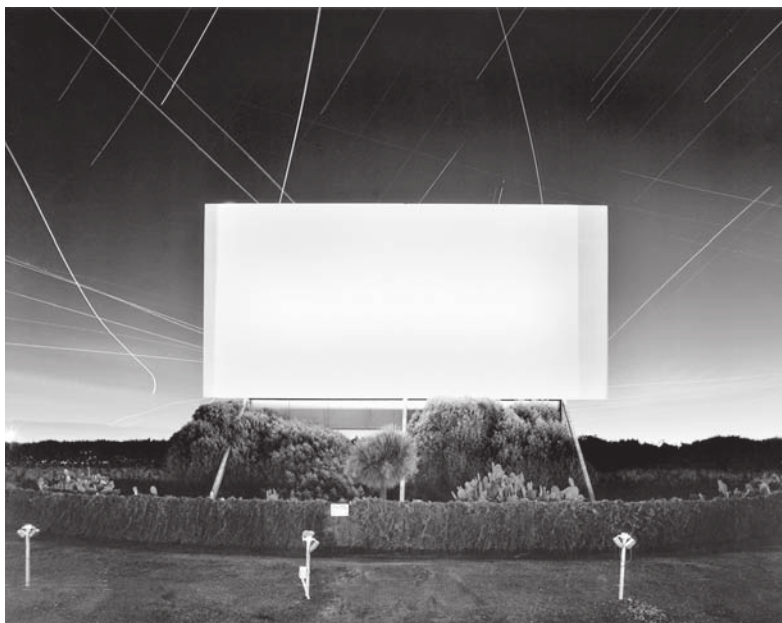
Ill 3: Hiroshi Sugimoto, Union City Drive-In, Union City*, 1993, gelatin silver print 20 x 24"*
(50.8 x 61 cm). Edition of 25. © Hiroshi Sugimoto, courtesy Pace Gallery.

A well-known shot of extremely long duration from Tsai Ming-Liang's *Good-bye, Dragon Inn* (2003) seems to work in multiple ways as a reverse-shot of Sugimoto's *Theater* photographs.[3] From the point of view of the screen, we see a shot of the auditorium of the movie theater, empty save for the slow movements of a cleaning woman, making her rounds (this takes about three minutes). After she leaves the frame, the shot is held for almost another two and a half minutes. The shot is introduced by an abrupt cut after the final shot of the film that has been projected. The lights come on, but the auditorium is already vacated, popu-lated only by row after row of empty seats (Ill. 4).

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3   Although this is not the longest (in terms of duration) shot in the film, it is an extremely crucial one. The sense of duration is intensified by the static camera, the emptiness of the room save for the appearance (and disappearance) of the cleaning lady, and the status of this shot as a type of culminating moment given that the turning on of the lights marks an emergence from darkness that will never take place again in this particular theatre (since it has been targeted for demolition).

Goodbye, Dragon Inn is set in a dilapidated movie theater, on the verge of de-struction, the attendance sparse on the final night, and the "narrative" a chronicle of missed sexual encounters. Present are two of the now older actors in the film that is being projected. Hence, the film is very much about pastness, memory, and nostalgia for a cinema that seemed to address a certain longing. Similarly, Sugimoto chose old movie palaces, reminiscent of a different era, and drive-ins, on the verge of cultural extinction, for his reduction of temporality to a static luminosity. However, the reverse shot, if it can be called that, constituted by the shot in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, is not head-on or centered, but somewhat awry, seemingly anchored by a canted point of view from the right half of the screen. The perspective of the shot seems skewed, the lights not quite in the right place, the seats somehow out of line, out of kilter. When the cleaning woman leaves the frame, this effect is intensified by the lack of movement, the usual marker of the passage of time in a film's diegesis. There is *too much* time (in this case, to study or analyze the space and its apparent deficiencies), but in a different way than in Sugimoto's *Theater* series, where the excess of time effects an ontological trans-formation (of time into light). Without the assistance of movement or sound (after the cleaning woman's footsteps diminish in the distance), the shot in Tsai Ming-Liang's film becomes *photograph-like* – it is very difficult to distinguish between it and a still image. One of the most important differences, of course, is that *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* dictates the duration of its own viewing while Sugi-moto's photographs cannot (the viewer can move on to the next exhibit when-

ever he/she desires). In the Theater series, time is absent but represented – it has a stand-in. In *Dragon Inn*, the experience of time is both intensified and abandoned. There is a sense in which both works translate time into space.[4]

I have dwelled on these two textual moments because both can be seen as responses to and instantiations of the recurrent theoretical and philosophical insistence upon the spatialization of time as a fundamental characteristic of modernity and postmodernity. Later in this essay, I will turn to what might seem to be a diametrically opposed and certainly more maligned form of representation – the cinematic trailer – that reduces time to space in an even more excessive or radical way, and argue that all three works participate in the same media system. From Henri Bergson to Fredric Jameson – two very different types of theorists – we can witness the chronicling of a loss in which the experience of time as duration, flow, historicity, is replaced by the quantification or mathematization of time and hence its transformation into a static, spatial, divisible entity. Ultimately, in Jameson, this becomes an argument about the contemporary investment in presence and instantaneity and a corresponding repression of history. Theorists of modernity generally link the spatialization of time to the processes of industrialization and its increasing technological sophistication – the development of train schedules, the need for a standardization of time, the conquering of space and time associated with imperialism, Taylorization and the relation between clock time and labor time. According to Henri Lefebvre, before modernity, time was embedded in space. It was experienced as the relation of the sun to the horizon, the position of stars in the sky, the passing of seasons, the temperature of the air, etc. However,

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4   Although I treat these two works as part of a transnational mediatic system (discussed later in this essay in relation to the work of Fredric Jameson), I am cognizant of theories of East Asian cinema that link this cinema's spatio-temporal forms to a history of Chinese and Japanese painting, itself often associated with the non-Western philosophical systems of Buddhism and Taoism. The categories of space and time in non-Western works are inflected by different philosophical and ideological systems as well as a non-perspectival tradition of visual representation, a framelessness associated with the temporality of the scroll, etc. The issue is complicated by the immutable aspect ratio, framing, and Renaissance perspective "built in" to the cinematic apparatus as well as the complex question of the relation between cinema and painting. One of the most intelligent treatments of this problematic is *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan*, Linda C. Ehrlich and David Desser, 1994, (eds.), especially the essay by Ní Zhèn, "Classical Chinese Painting and Cinematic Signification." However, the assumption of this essay is that these two works, as well as others discussed later, must be read in relation to a network of other works produced in anticipation of a global reception – i.e. that their legibility is a function of this transnational mediatic system. In addition, these works are treated as alternative texts that grapple with issues of space and time in ways that contrast with the mainstream media. It should be noted that within East Asian cultures, these works are viewed as "alternative" as well.

With the advent of modernity time has vanished from social space. It is recorded solely on measuring-instruments, on clocks, that are as isolated and functionally specialized as this time itself. Lived time loses its form and its social interest – with the exception, that is, of time spent working. Economic space subordinates time to itself; political space expels it as threatening and dangerous (to power). The primacy of the economic and above all of the political implies the supremacy of space over time […]. Our time, then, this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is consumed, exhausted, and that is all. It leaves no traces. It is concealed in space, hidden under a pile of debris to be disposed of as soon as possible […]. This manifest expulsion of time is arguably one of the hallmarks of modernity (Lefebvre 1991, pp. 95-96).

In a Western context, time has been traditionally analyzed as continuity *par excellence* – indivisible, lived, homogeneous and therefore irredeemably qualitative. It has also been thought as inevitably subjective, something that it is impossible to objectify or externalize, an inescapable attribute of the individual. Urban space, industrialization, and the era of the machine have all conspired to steal time from the subject and return it as a commodity. Georg Lukacs, in *History and Class Consciousness*, claimed that in modernity, "Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing, nature. It freezes into an exactly delineated, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable things […] in short, it becomes space" (1972, p. 90).

The ontological assumption undergirding this argument is that time is inherently indivisible while space is easily and efficiently divisible. Bergson was perhaps the first to explore and fully develop this idea, linking its necessity to the essential nature of time rather than the historical context of modernity. His philosophy locates the truth of time in its fluidity, its duration, its fullness and continuity. Yet, our everyday notion of time, its usefulness for us, results in "a sort of refracting of pure duration into space" (Bergson 1991, p. 185). Cinema, for Bergson, given its dissection of time into the static instants represented by frames whose movement through the projector only *appears* to represent real movement, is the technological incarnation of this false thinking about time. For Bergson, the basic unit demarcated here – the instant – is unthinkable, an impossibility. From his point of view, there is no real movement (or time) in the cinema. We can only generate the concept of the instant by translating time into space. In the case of movement as the most visible embodiment of time, the movement is confused with its trajectory through space, and it is by dividing that spatial trajectory into units that we arrive at the concept of the instant. But true movement is *between* static states and is not their simple accumulation. It, like time, is ungraspable, antithetical to divisibility. Hence, for Bergson, there is no such thing as the present: "*Practically, we perceive only the past*, the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future" (Bergson 1991, p. 150).

The spatializing of time, for Bergson, is the effect of two urges that have their source in practicality or use-value: the desire to envisage time, like space, as

divisible, and the desire to conceptualize time (epitomized by memory) as storable, hence locatable in space. There is a predilection, according to Bergson, to perceive space as a container, faithfully preserving all of its objects in simultaneity. Time, on the other hand, vanishes as it passes, revealing a material instability and an existential frailty. The existence of space seems more assured precisely because it is external to the subject (consciousness); while time, because it is an internalized attribute of consciousness, is never quite as real. Bergson produces a diagram to explicate the forcefulness of this way of thinking (Ill. 5). The line AB represents all simultaneous objects in space, while CI contains successive recollections in time.
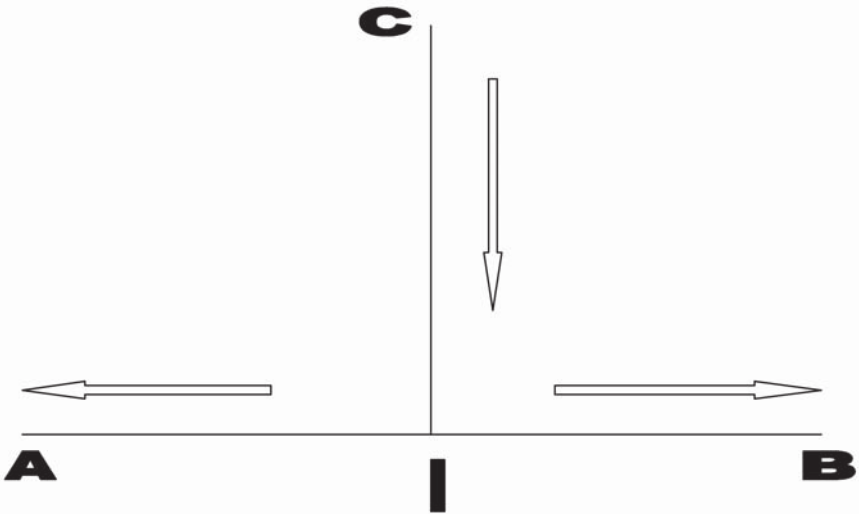
Ill 5: *Bergson's Graph from* Matter and Memory

Each of the lines is indefinitely extendable and therefore includes both actual and virtual perceptions of the subject. But the point I, on the line of time, is, according to Bergson, "the only one actually given to consciousness," and therefore, the present is the only form of temporality to which we attribute reality, existence, while we readily assume that the objects in the line AB that are outside the range of our perception do have reality, even though we might not be able to see them (1991, p. 143). In other words, we accept virtuality in space more readily than virtuality in time. Bergson asserts that the threads of the confusion and denial in this understanding are difficult to disentangle.

> In order to unmask the illusion entirely, we should have to seek its origin and follow through all its windings, the double movement by which we come to assume objective realities without relation to consciousness, and states of consciousness without objective reality – space

thus appearing to preserve indefinitely the *things* which are there juxtaposed, while time in its advance devours the *states* which succeed each other within it (Bergson 1991, p. 143).

Time disappears as it advances. This suggests an aporia in the thinking of a relation between time and storage and Bergson raises the question that also perplexed Freud – where are memories stored? Yet, for Freud the problem of storage had to do with the inevitable finitude and hence exhaustibility of the space of inscription of memories – a dilemma he solved by translating the question of space into one of time and its intermittency (in the "Mystic Writing Pad" essay) (Freud 1961, pp. 225-232). Bergson argues that the question of storage is from the outset a spatial one and cannot be applied to time and memory. Given the enormous influence of the spatial paradigm, we are inevitably led to assume that if the past is retained, it must be located somewhere. Bergson asserts that we mistakenly apply the spatial status of container and contained to the temporal phenomenon of memory.

Yet Bergson is ultimately interested, as the title of the book indicates, not in space and time but in matter and memory. And materiality, like time, is not divisible. Everything merges into everything else; there are no natural outlines or boundaries. According to Bergson, we deposit a divisible space beneath, and as a support for, the division of things and our action upon them. Because we tend to understand movement as only a variation of distance, space becomes primary and originary – it is thought to precede and lay the ground for motion. Divisibility for Bergson is merely a handy tool enabling human action. It has nothing to do with knowledge. True knowledge of time and matter would entail the acceptance of time as pure, indivisible duration, and matter as absolute continuity. Nevertheless, one gets the sense with Bergson that matter, due to its intimate relation with space, is inherently more subject to divisibility than time. The real epistemological crime is that against temporality.

For Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, temporality is significant primarily as historicity, and what is lost in postmodernity is precisely that sense of being *in* time and *in* history. Everything is presence, instantaneity, receiving technological assistance from – or perhaps produced by the technology of – computers, television, and cell phones. We are, as Jameson claims, "now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed" (1991, p. 413). Space is saturated and time can be represented, written, but it is no longer lived. For Jameson, the spatialization of time constitutes the "great transformation" of postmodernism: "the displacement of time, the spatialization of the temporal – often registers its novelties by way of a sense of loss [. . .]. [W]hat is mourned is the memory of deep memory" (1991, p. 156). Ironically, he argues that this spatialization is especially characteristic of media that we usually think of as "time-based": film, video, television.

For Jameson, there is a sense in which all of the media cannot refrain from absorbing and commenting on the other media. Mediation is not simply the insertion of a distance between subject and event, but the negotiation of relations between the various media, a form of reflexivity about the ontology of mediums. In the course of analyzing an installation by Robert Gober, *Untitled Door and Doorframe* (1987-1988), Jameson claims that "we may speak of spatialization here as the process whereby the traditional fine arts are *mediatized*: that is, they now come to consciousness of themselves as various media within a mediatic system in which their own internal production also constitutes a symbolic message and the taking of a position on the status of the medium in question" (1991, p. 162). Rather than dealing with history or time and memory, media tend to situate themselves within a synchronic spatial network of other media, redeploying and recycling the products of these other media.

Sugimoto's *Theater* series, in its exploitation and absorption of the cinema by photography, participates in this spatializing reflexivity. A film unrolling in time becomes the static concentration of a radiant light – light itself being in a sense the basic "material" of photography. What inevitably draws the eye in this series is a blank in the middle of the image, a nothingness that is the residue of the collapse of time into space. That blank also points to a forgetting that, according to Bergson, is crucial to the operation of memory, which only retains and activates that which is relevant to the present. Chris Marker, in *Sans Soleil* (1983), relates a story about a future race in which everyone remembers everything – there is no forgetting. But this absence of an absence entails the annihilation of memory and hence of time. Because everything is present, always, there is no past. Memory depends upon forgetting, loss. Perhaps we can understand the spatialization of time in relation to cinema not in terms of what is there and how it is represented but in terms of what is left out, absent: the off-screen time that is analogous to off-screen space. A temporal hiatus in film is made possible by editing, the operation of the cut – but not any cut, the cut that figures an ellipsis (and hence acts as a true cinematic trope). The cut does not necessarily signify a change in time; it may simply represent a variation in space that is characterized by simultaneity, rather than succession (in parallel editing, for instance, or through a change of angle within the same general space). However, a cut that does signal a change in time, or the loss of time, must almost always be accompanied by a change in space (indeed, it is difficult to imagine any other way of signifying that time has been lost when a straight cut rather than a dissolve or fade-out/fade-in is in question).[5] Here, in the ellipsis, the cut conjoins the operations (or categories)

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5   Assuming that the film adheres to the rules of the continuity editing system. Jump cuts within
     the same space can connote a loss of time.

of space and time. It is possible to see Sugimoto's *Theater* series as the meta-representation of this cut, the representation of that which enables lost time in the cinema. Time is here transformed into an illegible image, an empty diegetic space. And since an ellipsis in narrative is a condensation of time, the photograph is an extreme form of ellipsis, indeed hyperbolic, condensing all time to a moment.

We know ellipsis primarily as a grammatical operation of omission, an omission that is syntactical and hence linked to the temporal dimension of language.[6] It is also often defined as producing a meaning that is unfinished or incomplete, but nevertheless implied, understood. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the grammatical definition of ellipsis is "the omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction or fully to express the sense." Wikipedia defines a grammatical ellipsis as "a construction that lacks an element that is, nevertheless, recoverable or inferable from the context. The elliptical construction is a sequence of words in which some words have been omitted. Because of the logic or pattern of the entire sentence, it is easy to infer what the missing words are." A linguistic ellipsis is "meaning without form." Wikipedia also defines a narrative ellipsis as "the narrative device of omitting a portion of the sequence of events, allowing the reader to fill in the narrative gaps. An ellipsis in <u>narrative</u> leaves out a portion of the story. This can be used to condense time, or as a stylistic method to allow the reader to fill in the missing portions of the narrative with their [sic] imagination." In film, what is implied and understood by the ellipsis, is lost time. Often in the classical film, this time will be understood as inconsequential, trivial, a matter of transporting characters from one space to another, or as excluding "empty" time (sleeping, brushing teeth, etc.). In alternative cinemas, the question of empty and full time, what constitutes "significant time," becomes more complex (as in Tsai Ming-Liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*). The only etymology provided for the term "ellipsis" in the OED is, interestingly, an etymology corresponding to a rare or obsolete usage of the term – a geometrical usage in which the ellipsis is a conical section. "Ellipsis" is derived from the Greek and means, concerning an action, "to come short." Short of words, short of time, but itself figurative, the etymology effectively turns time into distance, space.

The ellipsis allows time to be contracted, condensed and is the condition of the possibility of cinema's aspiration to package, to commodify temporality. Despite its alliance with "real time," with flow, with continuity, cinema still strives for the reduction of time and space consistent, as I have tried to demonstrate elsewhere, with its understanding of the image in relation to the category

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6   For Jacques Lacan, the ellipsis generates meaning in anticipation, inducing the listener/reader to fill in the gap. See Lacan, 2006, pp. 412-441.

of the point (see Doane 2002, pp. 214-218). And the cut is the most exemplary cinematic operation in this regard. For the cut is the haunting echo of the frameline – its reiteration at a different level. The cut reasserts the instantaneity of the individual photogram. Time is subject to a miniaturization, a contraction. It becomes something that can be held or possessed in a metaphorical sense. This is why the cut as ellipsis is a crucial figure. Time becomes delimitable, commodifiable, object-like. The long take, in contrast, is a gaze at an autonomous, unfolding scene whose duration is a function of the duration and potential waywardness of events themselves. Its length situates it as an invitation to chance and unpredictability, an invitation that is abruptly canceled by the cut. The cut is the mechanism whereby temporality becomes a product of the apparatus, repudiating the role of cinema as a record of a time outside itself. If Bergson is correct in claiming that we tend to see space as "appearing to preserve indefinitely the *things* which are there juxtaposed, while time in its advance devours the *states* which succeed each other within it," then the spatialization of time contributes to the "thingification," the commodification of temporality (Bergson 1991, p. 143). Curiously, the representation of time as reproducible disavows any relation to temporality. A reproducible time pretends that it is liberated from temporality, from historicity.

This problematic is most strongly visible in a form of filmmaking that is generally maligned or disparaged, relegated to the margins of the cinema proper – the trailer. The trailer is, perhaps, the ultimate film about a film (even more so than "The Making of _____" genre), because it is composed primarily of shots from the film itself (as opposed to "behind the scenes" shots). In Jameson's terms, it would be the epitome of reflexivity insofar as reflexivity implies an acknowledgement of positioning within a mediatic system. But its function, unlike that of the works of contemporary high art that Jameson discusses, is to elicit desire for another work, desire for the film itself. The trailer is a very strictly coded, rule-governed form, even genre. It has a fairly limited set of conventions, not all of which will be activated in any particular trailer. In trailers for recent movies – *Gangs of New York* (Martin Scorsese, 2002), *Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002), *Vantage Point* (Pete Travis, 2008), *I'm Not There* (Todd Haynes, 2007), the materials utilized include graphics, music, voice-over, dialog, dissolves as well as cuts, and shots from the object-film. The shots are generally particularly tense or heavily emotive moments of the narrative, for example, a shot in the *Spider-man* trailer chronicling a falling drop of blood that might betray the protagonist clinging to the roof or the anxiety-producing knife throwing scene in *Gangs of New York*. There is a strong work of identification (paralleling the name brand of the commodity form), beginning with the marked announcement of the name of the producer or distributor (Miramax, etc.) and continuing with the listing, either through graphics or voice-over or both, of the film's stars/

director as lure. The fragmentation of the form is compensated for by an explanatory power that resides in the classic, heavy, and necessarily male voice-over (*Vantage Point*, *Gangs of New York*), or the narration of a character (*Spider-man*), or in graphics that are often redundant in relation to a voice-over, as though the extreme abbreviation of time mandated compulsive repetitiveness. A continuity that also works to counter the fragmentation is provided by dialog that often spans shots taken from different scenes (as in the five fingers and fist sequence from *Gangs of New York*). Shock value and spectacle are paramount.

Almost invariably, the first third or half of a trailer is devoted to a more or less coherent but highly condensed clarification of the narrative and introduction to the characters. It is in this section that devices to provide continuity and ward off the threat of meaninglessness are most in evidence (*Spider-man* seems to be most successful at this, perhaps because of its skeletal narrative or its origins in comics). But toward the end of the trailer, the speed of the editing is intensified and becomes a spectacle in its own right, often accompanied by dramatic music or choreographed sound effects. In the last section of the trailer for *Vantage Point*, there are seven shots in one second. Intelligibility is not the stake here; rather, what seems to be involved is a direct assault on the spectator's senses, particularly sight. *Vantage Point* self-reflexively refers to this visual barrage when both the graphics and voice-over proclaim, "If you think you've seen it all, look again," followed later by an extreme close-up of a pair of eyes (a shot so short that its perception is almost subliminal).

The trailer of the alternative/independent film, *I'm Not There*, counters this with a refusal – Cate Blanchett declaring "I can't watch this," seemingly referring to a huge pair of images of Lyndon Johnson but with hints of unwatchability and the failure of vision as a significant theme (Ill. 6). Despite its "independence," the *I'm Not There* trailer adheres fairly closely to the generic conventions of the trailer, activating graphics, music, and fast editing, and introducing its stars, but with the significant omissions of a deep male voice-over and any sense of a standard, conventional narrative. It also plays ironically with the conventions of the trailer (e.g., with the "Inspired by a true/false/authentic/exaggerated story" graphics). The concept of identity, so readily accepted and exploited in *Spider-man*, is problematized in *I'm Not There*.

These generic conventions of the trailer generate a rudimentary meaning, a sense of the film's narrative or theme. But what I am most interested in is the surplus, or excess over and beyond this meaning – the supplemental effect of the trailer. And this surplus/supplement resides ironically in the ellipsis – the intensification or magnification of the work of the ellipsis that defines these trailers.[7]

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7   The trailer has, of course, been subject to historical change. Trailers of the 1950s and 1960s make much less use of the ellipsis than those of the 1980s and beyond.

Given the trailer's tremendous temporal restrictions in relation to the length of the film it is advertising, its ellipses cannot carry meaning as the figure does in the film itself. For the elements that it bridges, that it is between, are undecidable. Meaning, usually seen as so easily inferred from or implied by the ellipsis – easy to "fill in," "understood" – is not recuperable here. The gaps are too large, and the trailer too saturated by its accelerating series of ellipses. This ellipsis is rendered inoperative, disabled by its very proliferation – it becomes sheer form or device without content. Or, perhaps more accurately, its only content is absence, lost time no longer propped up by meaning, but vacated, naked, exposed as a failed figure, a tropological ghost.

Ill 6: I'm Not There*, Todd Haynes, 2007. Screenshot from trailer.*

The trailer is the strongly honed art of ellipsis, but it activates an ellipsis deprived of its semantic dimension and intensified as the carrier of loss. It perfects the labor of the absenting, elision, disappearance of time marked by the ellipsis. In the space of (and the phrase is telling here) two or three minutes, the trailer must condense or contract the time of a two hour film, suggesting its pleasures or thrills – but it does not communicate them, it *mimes* them. This is why most (but not all) trailers are characterized by extremely rapid editing, each shot a matter of mere seconds or less. The fascination of the trailer is, at least in part, the lure of speed, of instantaneity and immediacy. As a microcosm of the film itself, the trailer replicates its condensation of time, generating an experience of an experience of

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temporality. What is omitted above all, and necessarily, is the ending, the narrative closure, precisely in order to leave open the question, the enigma that drives the film, to widen the tantalizing gap through which the spectator must fall.[8] For Bergson, our thinking insists that space is open; time is closed. For space is extendable, seemingly infinitely, and we readily accept the idea that there are horizons of objects beyond the horizons that bind our current perception. Because we measure time as distance, the future becomes a space that opens up before us, with a distance that we cannot anticipate, but know is there. Our perception of space appears to us as a content that is always included within a vaster container, invisible to us but nevertheless posited as actuality (and the unseen objects within it acquire the characteristic of actuality as well). For Bergson, "while we feel ourselves to be dependent upon these material objects which we thus erect into present realities, our memories, on the contrary, inasmuch as they are past, are so much dead weight that we carry with us, and by which we prefer to imagine ourselves unencumbered. The same instinct, in virtue of which we open out space indefinitely before us, prompts us to shut off time behind us as it flows" (Bergson 1991, pp.144-145). Trailers spatialize time, transform it into an object, by condensing and commodifying it, yet simultaneously leaving it open. As commodity, the trailer is never quite enough to satisfy desire, and inserts itself within a chain of commodities leading not only to the film it advertises, but to the cinema itself and its continual generation of more objects of desire. The trailer – any trailer – is selling the cinema itself. The trailer works by foregrounding and insisting upon the gap, the absence, the ellipsis that is the condition of possibility of the condensation of time in the cinema. It is a syntax of ellipses, where absence far outweighs presence, but absolute presence is simulated.

But what does the form of the trailer have to do with either Sugimoto's *Theater* series or Tsai Ming-Liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn,* especially since these works occupy different sides of the divide that is still with us, that between high and low culture? The relationships between time and space produced by these very different works are not the same, but they all address, in some way, shape, or form, modernity's spatialization of time. In the trailer, time is spatialized to facilitate its commodification – what the trailer sells is a particular experience of time, that of the film. It heightens and exemplifies the condensation, i.e., the packaging, of time that characterizes most Hollywood films, especially today. In comparison with the trailer, Sugimoto's photos are an even more extreme contraction of time (that of an entire film), into an instant, and an even more extreme transformation

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8   In the case of *Spider-Man*, the omission of an ending in the trailer does, indeed, suggest the
    ending of the film in its insistent withholding of closure, leaving open the possibility (or necessity)
    of a sequel.

of time into space, in another medium. They effectively accomplish what the trailer only strives for as a goal. The film here is completely divorced from meaning, from intelligibility, and reduced to a rectangle of light – a sheer special effect, spectacular in its excessive luminosity. The translation of cinema into photography also effects an altered temporality, since photography always connotes, as Roland Barthes has demonstrated, a "that has been," as opposed to the cinema's adherence to an experience of presence. This is a cinema – the cinema of ornate picture palaces – that has largely vanished, just as the cinema in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is about to be demolished. But perhaps it is also cinema itself, in the face of new technologies of digital representation, whose disappearance is being heralded as a future past.

Ill 7: Jim Campbell, Illuminated Averages #1: Hitchcock's Psycho*, 2000, averaged over 1 hour 50 minutes (entire film), 30 x 18 inches; Duratrans, lightbox; Photo credit: Sarah Christianson.*

There is another artist who has collapsed the time of film into a single moment, a single image, working not in photochemically based photography, as Sugimoto does in the *Theater* series, but in digital photography. Four of the photographs in Jim Campbell's *Illuminated Average* series utilize the same technique. In "Illuminated Average #1: Hitchcock's *Psycho*," Campbell scanned all of the frames in *Psycho* and then merged them all into a single image (Ill. 7).[9] The concern

9   The Illuminated Average Series includes Illuminated Average #3 Welles' Citizen Kane (The Breakfast Table Sequence), 2000; Illuminated Average #5 Fleming's The Wizard of Oz, 2001;

here is not so much with light, as in Sugimoto's photographs, but with the accumulation of data – all of the visual data in *Psycho* is in the image, but its legibility is compromised. It is as if the image were an incarnation of Freud's Mystic Writing Pad, his technical apparatus for representing memory, without the mechanism of erasure, which for Freud was equivalent to conscious forgetting (but opened up the possibility of unconscious storage). It is a demonstration of the dependence of legible memory upon forgetting, loss. Time is again spatialized, but this is a new space, a virtual space, whose code is generative but not visible. Sugimoto's intense, annihilating luminosity is in the center of the image, but in the dark edges, objects are, to some extent, still recognizable – a lamp, for instance, on the right side of the frame (perhaps demonstrating the significance of centering the gaze in the Hollywood cinema). Campbell was influenced by the Italian Futurists, particularly Umberto Boccioni (one of the works in the series is entitled "Dynamism of a Cyclist 2001 [after Umberto Boccioni]") and their attempt in the practice of photodynamism to represent movement by leaving the shutter open and hence layering image over image. In Campbell's *Illuminated Average* series, vision is subject to a mathematics of averaging brightness and contrast, reducing all of the film's time to a moment understood as an average but deprived of narrative or temporal meaning. The series is, like Sugimoto's, an extreme instance of the spatialization of time, one that activates cinema, but shatters its representation of temporality.

In the shot of the empty auditorium from Tsai Ming-Liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, the film within the film is also annihilated by the turn away from it to the auditorium. Extreme duration characterizes not only this shot but all of the shots in the film and the long take is characteristic of both Tsai Ming-Liang's work and that of the new Taiwan cinema in general. The length of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* could easily match that of the film shown in the theater, with no ellipses whatsoever. In fact, the use of shots of great duration – which convey "real time" in its technical sense – constitutes a refusal of ellipsis and an insistence upon experienced rather than abbreviated, highly condensed time. In Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), the use of extremely long takes covering everyday actions like shopping, cleaning, and making meatloaf, upsets the classical hierarchy of "full time" over "empty time."[10] This "real time" is not the same as

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and Dynamism of the News, 2001. See Jim Campbell's website, <http://www.jimcampbell.tv>, [accessed January 21, 2010].

10 It should be noted that "empty time," in this sense, is a fully Western concept and that the notion of empty time conveys something quite different in a Chinese context (see Ní Zhèn, op. cit.) The ellipsis is itself a component of a Western narrative structure. But again, my argument is that this film cannot be viewed in isolation from a cinematic repertoire that, in both Western and non-Western regions, valorizes heavy editing and the use of the ellipsis to condense time.

the time of the television reality show, where the marker of the real is not a formal or technical one but one of contents – real people, real, unscripted situations. In *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, however, we do not experience the real time of being a spectator, watching the film within the film. Instead, we are shown the activities and interactions that occupy the margins of the screen, its outside, everything except the film itself (which is shown only in glimpses) – spectators interacting through gazes or propped feet or seating choices, people wandering the hallways outside the auditorium or frequenting the toilets. The movement usually conveyed by editing or camera movement is transferred to the restless wandering of spectators who never quite make contact with each other. The space, however, is very intensely present. It is a space of exaggerated perspective, with long hallways leading back to a strongly marked vanishing point (Ill. 8-10). Perspective adamantly asserts, against all knowledge, the depth of the image. It is a marker of the very spatiality of space. Time is experienced as duration in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn*, but it becomes the time of a very intense sense of space.[11]

Ill 8: Tsai Ming Liang, Goodbye, Dragon Inn, *2003*.

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11   For the spectator. For the characters within the film's narrative, time is also constituted by waiting, schedules and a work routine, and a general sense of life passing by.

Ill 9: Tsai Ming Liang, Goodbye, Dragon Inn, *2003.*

Ill 10: Tsai Ming Liang, Goodbye, Dragon Inn, *2003.*

Sugimoto's and Campbell's photographs as well as *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* cancel or collapse the work of ellipsis. All time is there, but illegible in the photographs; in the film, all time is there, but becomes only empty duration, a waiting for something to happen in a space whose spatiality is amplified. Trailers, on the other hand, hyperbolize the work of ellipsis, of lost time in the service of commodification. Yet, all of these works inhabit the same mediatic system, as Jameson would say, and refer to and reflect each other in myriad ways. The extended duration of *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* can only be experienced and attended to in relation to the fast paced time of the Hollywood thriller and the trailer. Filmic time can be contained and cancelled by photographic time in Sugimoto's and Campbell's photographs and *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* is just as susceptible to Sugimoto's open shutter or Campbell's illuminating averages as any other film. Trailers achieve their spectacular impact through an implicit comparison with the long take and its temporality of boredom. The works inhabit the same mediatic system, but each occupies a different point in that system, some straining more than others to not only instantiate it but to disrupt it, to put pressure on its weakest points, to theorize it, in short. For Bergson, the spatialization of time is a product of everyday thinking but does violence to the essential nature of time. Time, in his philosophy, is not subject to historical pressure – modernity cannot touch it. For Jameson, the spatialization of time is a negative characteristic of postmodernity because it contributes to the inability to think history and historicity. Has time become space? The question is ultimately unanswerable because the very act of posing it takes place within the same mediatic system and, in addition, assumes that these categories could have completely separable identities. As Jameson has said, there is no question of time completely disappearing under the assault of space. Each era produces and posits its own relationship between space and time, and understanding that relationship is crucial to even begin to interrogate the systematicity of capital. But the mechanical and electronic representation of time has, along with other factors, made time subject to a form of representation – highly reproducible, easy to transmit globally – that has undeniably transformed its status and effects. It is not immediately clear how aesthetic practice can counter or resist this systematicity, or even whether these are the terms that should be invoked. But it can contribute to the analysis of this system, not through the promise of nostalgically returning us to a prior condition in which time was authentically experienced, but by inhabiting in an extreme way and putting pressure on the logic of a spatialization that strives to take time and return it as object. Perhaps the only thing that can be said is that this spatialization is, quite literally, taking place.

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The Moving Image in the Museum:
Real-Time, Technology and the Spectator's Cut

Eivind Røssaak

The art historian Boris Groys has discussed the relationship between the museum and the moving image as a relationship between old and new media. In this model, old media (paintings, sculptures) are viewed as "motionless images" and new media as basically moving images (i.e., images where movement is no longer inferred, but automatic). In the traditional museum, viewers in front of a painting have total control over the time they wish to devote to contemplation. "They can interrupt their examination of a picture at any time and return to it later on […] the immobile picture will remain in an identical state and is thus constantly available for repeated contemplation," Groys writes, and continues:

> In our culture we have basically two fundamentally different models at our disposal that give us control over the time we spend looking at an image: the immobilization of the image in the museum or the immobilization of the viewer in the movie theatre. Yet both models founder when moving images are transferred into museum surroundings. The images continue to move – but so does the viewer (Groys 2002, p. 25).

There have been two widespread strategies to resolve the antagonism between these two forms of movement, according to Groys. On the one hand, the artist can make the individual video or film sequence as short as possible to ensure that the time the viewer spends in front of the work does not exceed the time a viewer might on average be expected to spend in front of a "good" picture in a museum. The other strategy is to create what Groys calls "motionless films" (2002, p. 25). Andy Warhol's *Empire State Building* (1964) is exemplary of this mode.[1] The latter filmic strategy "explicitly address[es] the uncertainty caused in the viewer by transferring the moving images into the museum," Groys contends, because "museum visitors will not be able to say definitively whether the film consists of a

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[1] Groys doesn't analyze Warhol's film any further, and that is perhaps also the reason for his somewhat imprecise description. It might be helpful to distinguish between camera movement, time frame, and the movement of objects within the frame. When Groys calls the film "motionless", he most likely refers to the lack of camera movement and the barely visible movement of objects. The time frame of the film is eight hours, and due to "invisible" editing and the use of high-speed inception, the film produces movement of objects in the form of changes of lighting transitioning from night to day. In addition, there are many particles and scratches in the film that create all kinds of vivid movements. For the sake of argument, however, Groys' point should be clear.

moving or a motionless image, since they will always have to admit the possibility that they might have missed certain events in the film" (Groys 2002, pp. 25-26).

My concern is not these "missed events" of "motionless films." Rather, I am interested in exploring the way the moving image in the museum has turned this space into an experimental environment where the human confronts mediated time or "technical moments" through a specific choreography of experience. My examples to this end are taken from works by Bill Viola, Douglas Gordon, Tobias Rehberger and Olafur Eliasson. The works represent a productive environment that allows a subject to emerge and unfold in accordance with a specific distribution of time and space. They are all examples of the "cinematic turn" in the museum, and more particularly of the turning of the museum into what I will call a "slow space" conditioned by techniques of delay or barely moving light particles.[2] I contend that the *slow space* presents a particularly good starting point for renewed analysis of the interaction between the spectator and the image in the museum. My approach will describe a tendency present in the museum as well as a new tendency within a certain theoretical development. As the role of the spectator has gained growing significance in the art encounter, phenomenology and its corporeal subject have enjoyed a renaissance.[3] Within art history, in particular, George Didi-Huberman's phenomenology of the art encounter has been influential. Phenomenology is important in this chapter, but this framework should not be seen as final. On the contrary, some of the works analyzed here, in fact, seem to drive us beyond phenomenology.

It moved, didn't it?

In recent decades there has been a widespread tendency in moving image practices to resort to techniques that alter or slow down the speed of motion in various

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2   Many have discussed the "cinematic turn" within the art gallery; it had a great impact around the centennial anniversary of the birth of cinema in 1995 and has continued with great intensity ever since. Today, large-scale cinematic modes of projection have "quantitatively surpassed traditional mediums such as painting and sculpture," as Tanya Leighton writes in her introduction to *Art and Moving Image* (2008). Thomas Elsaesser (2011) demonstrates this in an overview article. Curator Nicolas Bourriaud talks about the "cinematic mode" as the contemporary museum's primary "technological mode" (2002, p. 65f). Wik (2001) presents an overview and Birnbaum (2005) talks about "post-cinematic productions" and "the other cinema." See also the two large catalogs from ZKM (*FutureCinema* and *Iconoclash*), several catalogs from the Documenta exhibitions (especially *Documenta X*), and Giuliana Bruno (2007).

3   While phenomenology traditionally disregarded the role of technology, newer phenomenological approaches to media philosophy like Bernard Stiegler's and Mark B. N. Hansen's in particular have sought to renegotiate the role of technology.

ways. Bill Viola's work is exemplary in this regard. His video *The Quintet of the Astonished* (2000) shows five people undergoing intense emotional agony. The action unfolds in ultra-slow motion. It is shot on 35 mm high-speed film at the extraordinary rate of 384 frames per second. The action, which in real time takes less than 30 seconds, is stretched and extended here to last roughly 16 minutes when projected, that is, 32 times slower than normal speed. In feature films, this kind of extreme slow motion may be used for a few seconds to underscore important events; in the Viola exhibition, the slow motion is looped, never-ending and all-encompassing. The relationship to painting is not only activated through the use of ultra slow motion, but also through his use of a classical motif, a "painterly" use of shading and saturated colors, an LCD-screen size resembling that of an average classical painting and, for this particular piece, the screening room is illuminated, avoiding theatrical darkness. Thus, old and new media communicate on many levels.

Ill 1: Bill Viola, The Quintet of the Astonished*, 2000; Color video rear projection on screen mounted on wall in dark room; Projected image size: 1.4 x 2.4 m; room dimensions variable. Performers: John Malpede, Weba Garretson, Tom Fitzpatrick, John Fleck, Dan Gerrity. 15:20 minutes; Photo: Kira Perov.*

The piece was first presented at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 2003 and subsequently at the National Gallery in London.[4] Something strange happens when these extremely slow-moving images are displayed in museums which are usually devoted to traditional paintings by the old masters. Perhaps in the excitement of seeing the new work of Viola, the spectator rushes past the classical paintings and into the Viola room. At first, the Viola piece looks like a painting; the spectator moves on, and then, suddenly, she catches a glimpse of something out of place – she senses a slight movement. She asks herself, "It moved, didn't it?" The spectator then returns and places herself right in front of the image, to check one more time. She must "freeze" her body and, in an act of concentration, fix her gaze upon the liquid crystal display. And there it is! After a few seconds, the spectator realizes that what looked like a still image is actually moving.

This *turn* in the experience, which was literally accompanied by a turn of the spectator's head and body to reposition the eye, is epitomized in the phrase "It moved, didn't it?" The question addresses an aesthetic difference caused by the technically imposed difference between painting and video. At first, technology plays the role of the invisible component in the encounter. What was visible, something that looked like a painting, is suddenly undermined by the appearance of an "invisible" component, movement. While movement in paintings is inferred, the movement in these images is automatic. Paradoxically, it is the turn and the arrested body of the spectator that enables her to see the barely visible movements. The body's activity in front of the image grounds the impression of the image, so to speak. The arrested body makes the invisible mark of technology (actual movement) part of the visual experience. Thus, a conditional interaction is occurring between the technical, the invisible, and the bodies of both the spectator and the art work.

In an unexpected manner, the late Bill Viola exposes the ways in which a technical moment can become crucial in the art encounter. This view is actually contrary to two of the most common ways of perceiving Viola's later artworks. On the one hand, there are the critics who embrace Viola for not foregrounding the technical or constructed aspects of art, which allow it to remain open to spirituality and human emotions, and on the other, there are the critics who align his later works with kitsch, for the same reasons.[5] I think both positions underplay

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4   Bill Viola's *The Quintet of the Astonished* (2000) is part of *The Passions* (2000-2002), a series of video works which was shown at these events. My reading of Viola here continues my investigation from two previous publications, Røssaak (2009 and 2010).

5   While John Walsh, Hans Belting and Chris Townsend tend to belong to the former group, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh belong to the latter group. Krauss asserts that Viola "derealizes his medium" as he tends to create videos that look like paintings (see Ro-

the *finesse* of Viola's technical moment. A new phenomenological approach is needed to grasp this.[6] In *Devant l'image* Didi-Huberman sharpens Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "invisible" as that which gives the image "power" (2005, pp. 17-18). Art historians tend to disregard this force in their positivistic desire to "explain" art. They too often give us, as Didi-Huberman argues, "the impression of an object truly grasped and reconnoitered in its every aspect, like a past elucidated without a remainder. Everything here [in the art histories] seems visible, discerned" (2005, p. 3). Rather than finding certainty in the visible, Didi-Huberman explores the ways in which "the visible and the invisible" work together and condition the gaze (2005, p. 16).[7] In his examples, which are mostly taken from religious and historical paintings, the visible covers "elements of representation", and the invisible covers "elements of abstraction." In Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation* (1440-41), the invisible is what we first ignore, like the use of a white colored wall behind the figures, but to Didi-Huberman this "stream of luminous particles in one case, a powder of chalky particles in the other" is essential to understanding what he calls "the visual." Indeed, the invisible belongs to the world of representation, but it "intensifies it beyond its limits, it deploys something else, it reaches the spectator by other paths". The invisible doesn't have to be abstract; on the contrary, "it offers itself as an almost tangible blow, as a visual face-off." It strikes the spectator with a strong sense: "there's white" (2005, pp. 17-18). Didi-Huberman goes on to call its power "virtual" to suggest how "the regime of the visual tends to loosen our grip on the 'normal' (let's say rather: habitually adopted) conditions of knowledge". The role of the invisible exposes a "not-knowledge" crucial for understanding the phenomenology of

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salind Krauss on Viola in *Art since 1900. Modernism Antimodernism Postmodernism,* ed. Foster, Hal *et al.*, 2004, p. 656).

6 Merleau-Ponty's insights are useful despite his at times limited views on many of the pioneers of cinema and media-based art forms that foreground the technical. He mentions Marey, Muybridge, Duchamp and the art of cinema more generally as unable to find expression for Being's relation to itself in its primordial unfolding. They petrify the living. See Merleau-Ponty: "Eye and Mind" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader,* ed. G.A. Johnson, Evanston, IL, Northwestern U P, see also Lyotard's critique of these aspects in Merleau-Ponty's work, in Lyotard's "Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation" in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* p. 331f. That is why we need a new phenomenology concerning these questions. This kind of phenomenology is emerging in Mark B. N. Hansen's, Didi-Huberman's, Bernard Stiegler's and Daniel Birnbaum's work.

7 Didi-Huberman theorizes the gaze as an embodied eye, perpetually subject to projection and transference (in the technical sense of Freud's *Übertragung*). Significantly, Didi-Huberman seems to use a series of Freudian concepts, in particular "the symptom," to evoke what he calls "the process of figurability" which breaches the complacency of a unity of form. The subject and the object merge in these strange temporalities.

the gaze, "which the historian doesn't quite know what to do with because it is graspable only though his own gaze" (2005, pp. 18-19).

When I address the invisible as a technical moment in this phenomenology, I am pushing Didi-Huberman's notion into new terrain. But I believe Viola's use of motion, which is literally barely visible, has many parallels to Fra Angelico's use of white. The barely visible motion in Viola's work intensifies the representation beyond its limits and reaches the "spectator by other paths" – and to a certain degree, depends on the *path* taken by the spectator. And the discovery of this slow motion appears as a sudden, intermittent and returning event, because it is "there" and the next moment it is "not there". It is perhaps just the figure's blink of an eye. The barely moving figures in the video lead the spectator to be aware of her own motions in front of the screen. To see the image adequately, the spectator must work with her own body's orientation. Each step, each wavering of the body's position, gives the spectator a different aspect of the Violian universe, and these aspects are again dependent on the exact moment of entering the orbit of the piece.

In the beginning of the loop, the (moving) image looks completely still, like a photograph or a painting. It takes almost two minutes before a tiny movement becomes visible – a fearful grimace appears on the face of one of the five figures in the image. A few seconds later, a character blinks, but in this extreme slow motion, the blink is transformed to appear as the contemplative gesture of closing the eyes to think. The movements are so small that the spectator has to remain completely immobile to be able to see them. If the spectator moves too much, the movements caused by the spectator's body will make it impossible to observe the tiny increments of motion taking place in the image. Summarily, movement is pulled out of the spectator in two ways: first literally, because she has to pause completely to see the movements; it is as if the piece were saying: "If you move, you won't be able to see me!"; and second, psychologically or rather thermodynamically, because it is as if the energies from the spectator's own bodily movements as they come to a standstill are taken up elsewhere, up on the screen in front of her. It is as if the energies or the thrust of the spectator's own movements as they are slowed down and halted reappear in the movements on the screen, as a molecular continuation of the spectator's own bodily forces and energies. Right at the moment she is about to freeze completely, the spectator is imbued with a feeling of sharing, of coexistence, or perhaps of a communion with the other, with the figures on the screen. The exterior becomes interior. As the spectator halts, the inner energy that caused her to move is sucked up by the screen and is appropriated by what now seems to be the barely visible movements of the figures on the screen. But this is as much a technical transduction as an emotional transduc-

tion, because the "communion" between the spectator and image is instigated by a technically-induced motion that strengthens all the other "transportations".

Thus, the zone between the spectator and the screen becomes a *situation* and not simply an optical field to be discerned once and for all. It is an existential situation where energies circulate and are exchanged. The haptic force of the situation stems from the fact that the arrested body *realizes*, so to speak, what is going on, on a level beyond the reach of the eye alone. Energies that were felt or perhaps not felt, because they were unfolding on a level unattainable by conscious apprehension, appear in front of the spectator, as if they were embodied elsewhere, on a screen in a museum. The way the image is temporally stretched, enhanced and expanded on the screen through a radical act of slow motion takes care of and caresses these energies with a rhythm more graspable by the spectator's body than her eye. It is as if they engage in a *pas des deux,* but gradually only the image moves, not the body of the spectator.

The Spectator's Cut

In the Scottish video artist Douglas Gordon's most famous work, *24 H Psycho* (1993)*,* the technical moment reveals itself differently than in Viola's piece. The "invisible" is still related to manipulated movements, but we are instead now dealing with spaces and spacings – between frames and between screens. In *24 H Psycho,* Gordon "stretches" Hitchcock's 110 minute classic *Psycho* (1960) to monstrous proportions, now lasting 24 hours. Originally, Gordon used a prepared Panasonic Video Cassette Recorder. Its pause button was fixed by adhesive tape so as to replay *Psycho* at only 2 frames per second; and each of the film's 150,400 frames appears as in a slide motion show.[8] This explicit use of the VCR also reflects upon a new media culture's altered access to the moving image.[9] His reprogramming of found footage navigates through the contemporary technosphere in an archaeological way. How can we access the image today? Gordon's technical constraint confronts the old film culture of the movie theatre with the possibilities for time/space manipulation found in new media and installational practices on a technical (from film to VHS), aesthetic (from narrative cinema to art object), analytical (from normal speed to slow speed) and emotional level (from the memory of a specific film to a feeling of what film is or can do). His piece re-

8   The original installation of *24 H Psycho* has in all subsequent gallery installations been based on a DVD-version of this slowed down VHS instantiation of the film.

9   The curator Nicolas Bourriaud's term "post VCR art" is used to convey the fact that, like films (played on a VCR), exhibitions are also becoming "disparate, zappable little programmes" (Bourriaud, Nicolas [1998] 2002a. *Relational Aesthetics*).

flects a new film culture. Gordon said in an interview: "[We live in a] different film culture, a replay culture, and a slow-motion take on things" (Gordon quoted in Dodd 1996). This assertion refers to a media landscape in transition. Gordon's remediation of Hitchcock partakes of a reflection on a new image processing culture, where, to a large degree, access to the pause and freeze-frame buttons refashions our relations to time and the moving image.

While most narrative fiction films arrange the relationship between story time and narrative time according to long-standing rules and (Hollywood-style narrative) codes of time-control which most effectively convey the plot, Gordon shows how small changes in the tempo can totally displace an entire regime of time-control. Gordon himself calls the film "a time readymade". "In appropriating extracts from films and music, we could say, actually, that we are creating time readymades, no longer out of daily objects but out of objects that are part of our culture."[10]

Gordon's found footage material is given over to other modes of sensation not as easily available in a movie theatre setting. A cultural iconography is *differently* possessed. Indeed, his delayed cinema is a perverse cinephilia, but it is also an analysis of the mind in a new film culture. If the unconscious, as Jacques Lacan asserts, exists somewhere in between the personal and the collective, Gordon's spectator wanders in a high-tension zone between the *psyche* and society. Gordon turns the film, or rather the image, into a "rend", as Didi-Huberman would say. This untimely and perhaps painful rupture of the original's continuity edit installs an uncanny element of discontinuity in its midst, and renders the visible (normal motion and storyline) illegible. The technically constrained delay between images puts the spectator in immediate contact with something "invisible". The piece's slow pace doesn't simply reveal the film's invisible or hidden principle (24 "invisible" fps), but also an "invisible" aspect or the other side of the image – perhaps dream images, or remembered images.

Gordon evokes a slow coming-to-mind of an archive of emotions and lost traces. Here, the helplessly frustrated face of the fictional character Marion Crane is turned into a scopophilic slide-motion study revealing heretofore unseen dimensions of the already hyper-iconic apparition of a female superstar. The real (but now deceased) actress Janet Leigh tends to replace the character she plays in the film. It is as if the remembered version of the image is turned into an unfamiliar *return* of the repressed through a new aspect of the viewed image, which is now bereft of the safety of a narrative horizon. The image has taken on a new

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10 Douglas Gordon, "A New Generation of Readymades," interview by Christine van Assche, *Art Press,* No. 255, March 2000.

intensity and a new visibility that escapes scripting.[11] Janet Leigh's white female face is now accessible beyond the regulatory technique of a normal and thus narrative speed. Each arrest of the image foregrounds the film's photographic and indexical quality but, on the other hand, the machinic sliding of ever new frozen moments, has a hypnotic or regressive quality. The new tangibility of the evasive moments of Hitchcock's original is now emblematized into a rather dreamlike state. In a telling passage on how to regain a naïve and open encounter with the classical arts, Didi-Huberman writes something that is equally viable when confronting *24 H Psycho*:

> we must try, before the image, to think the negative force within it […] There is a work of the negative in the image, a "dark" efficacy that, so to speak, eats away at the visible (the order of represented appearances) and murders the legible (the order of signifying configurations). From a certain point of view, moreover, this work or constraint can be envisioned as a regression, since it brings us, with ever-startling force, toward a this-side-of, toward something that the symbolic elaboration of artworks has covered over or remodeled (pp. 142-143).

Gordon's technically produced regression opens up the image toward a new geography. Each tends to be split into an image seen and an image remembered, and the remembered image doesn't only refer to the memory of Hitchcock's *Psycho,* but as much to the picture puzzle Freud talks about in *Die Traumdeutung* (1900). The images remembered swell and conflate with the intense or evanescent visuality of dream images. The dream is, as Freud asserts, "differently centered."[12] This otherness breaches elements of meaning, objects and figures, and produces altered intensities and values. When this paralogic takes charge of the impression, the paradoxical law of "the insistent exception" or the "sovereignty of that which excepts itself in the visible as well as in the legible" invests everything, to quote Didi-Huberman (p. 147).

In the large Gordon retrospective entitled *Between Darkness and Light* at Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg outside Berlin in 2007, the dream-work dimension is taken even further. Here sixteen of his moving image works were shown simultaneously in what has been called Germany's largest black box.[13]

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11   Laura Mulvey writes about a similar transformation happening to Ingrid Bergman as she revisits Bergman's performance in *Viaggio in Italia* after her death (Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image,* 2006). Raymond Bellour's *Entre l'images* (1990) and Victor Burgin's *The Film Remembered* could also be conferred in this connection. Roland Barthes' discussion of the relationship between film and photography in *La Cambre Claire* (1980) is formative to these discussions.

12   Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 305f.

13   For details, see the catalog, *Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light,* ed. / curator: Holger Broeker, 2007. These large black box installations can also be analyzed in Viola's multiple screen installations, like *Angels for the New Millennium* or *Going Forth by Day*. While Viola's
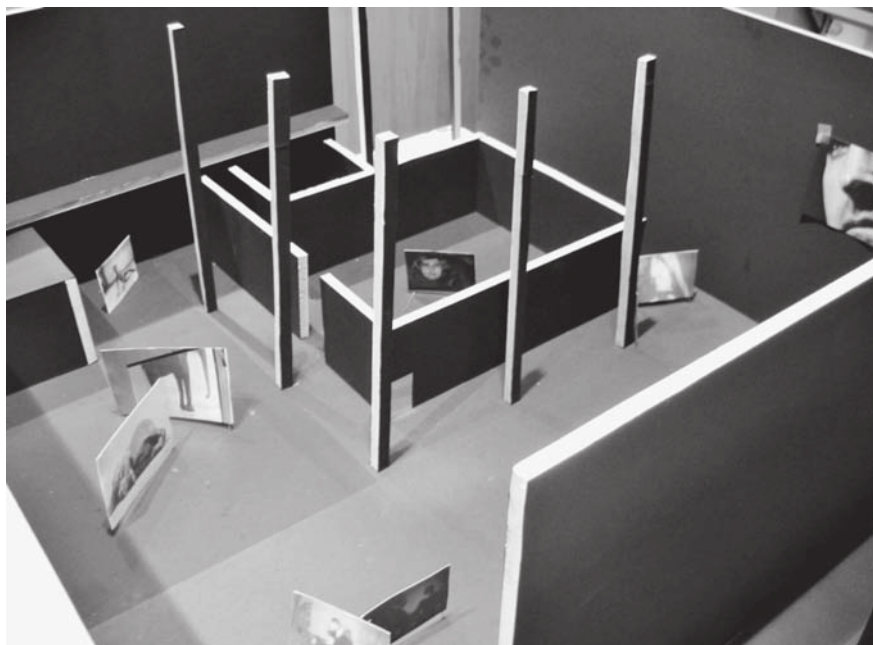
Ill 2: The Douglas Gordon Retrospective, Between Darkness and Light*, 2007. Exhibition design overview of Wolfsburg Kunstmuseum. Photo: Wolfsburg Kunstmuseum.*

The first thing that strikes the visitor is the stark darkness and one's subsequent confusion and loss of orientation. The walls, the floor and the ceiling are totally black, and all sense of ground is temporarily lost. The fact that the looped found footage video *10ms-1* (1994) of a shell-shocked man unable to rise up from the ground is the first image confronting the spectator only adds to this feeling of unease. As the spectator regains a sense of orientation, he is able to take in some of the large screens hanging from the ceiling, like *24 H Psycho*. The retrospective, which always implies a repetition, exhibits all the major works of Gordon, and they all relate somehow to the history of cinema (science, peep shows, and the silver screen). The technical moment, the constrained delay between images in *24 H Psycho,* is here repeated on a larger scale, as the spectator's contingent navigation between several films. As the spectator turns his head and moves in between the suspended screens, he edits an *oeuvre* of images into an expanded film of the "unknown," uncanny and fragmented, the never-seen-before – even if

installations (their mnemonic effects) relate to an early modern culture, Gordon's installations refer to modern or a postmodern popular culture.

each sequence taken separately is in itself "known." The "spectator's cut" in this situation resembles not only the technicity of the film edit, but also the technical constraint imposed on *Psycho* in Gordon's prepared version of the film. The spectator's cut between the screens instantiates, and thus embodies, the technical moment of *24 H Psycho*. This displaced technicity, the spectator as an editing machine, produces a crucial part of the aesthetic experience.

Gordon's use of the exhibition space is important, as well. He uses multiple screens, and every image comes in at least two versions. Bodily – physically and emotionally – the spectator works his way through a multiplicity of interconnected images. *24 H Psycho* is projected on large screens hanging from the ceiling. The rear-side of the screen presents a reversed version of the film, like a return or a remembered version of the film. Thus, every screen can be accessed from both sides: a correct and a reverse side – a real side and a dream side, so to speak.

This doubling occurs in many of the installations at the Wolfsburg Museum: both *Hysterical*, 1994, and *Between Darkness and Light (after William Blake),* 1997, are projected on screens accessible from both sides. *Black and White (Babylon)*, 1996, and *Play Dead: Real Time*, 2003, are projected onto two tilted screens using two projectors. The two projections are desynchronized according to different schemes: speed and focus may be slightly altered. The special use of the screens with all their effects of distortions, doublings and desynchronized multiplications of the image turn them into what Joanna Lowry calls "three-dimensional hallucinatory objects" (Lowry, 274). They become objects *and* time machines.

Editing in Space

The activities of the viewer produce a choreography that interacts with the multiplication of images and screens. The passage in between the extremely slow moving images follows a choreography that is spontaneous and personal, *as well as* associative and collective. The way the viewer walks in between the screens creates an additional montage dependent on the inclinations and the twists and turns of the body of the spectator. As far as editing is concerned, this is not simply a montage of discontinuity, but a new screen-body interaction which installs another rhythm aligned with the body of the spectator rather than the flow of a predetermined narrative.

The way the screen-body interaction simulates editing enhances the uncanny dimension of conflating the viewer organism with a machine. Each new view in the influential environment of the gallery creates a new emotional passage. You look away, you look forward, you move back, or continue in another direction,

and these actions are like cuts in the cinema. Literally, the viewer walks in between the images, and this motion becomes like an emotional passage into a time/space that is inaccessible in a movie theatre. Bourriaud has talked about a new "director's art," turning the contemporary exhibition/exposition into "a filmless camera, or a 'still short-movie'." He writes:

> The [installation] work does not (offer) itself as a spatial whole that can be scanned by the eye, but as a time span to be crossed, sequence by sequence, similar to a still short-movie in which the viewer has to evolve by himself (Bourriaud 2002a, p. 73).

It is as if the cinematic turn in the art gallery has foregrounded the cinematic technique of the cut *in space*. The artist Doug Aitken is even more explicit on this "technical turn." He interviewed 26 artists from Carsten Höller to Pierre Huygh and Olafur Eliasson on how they use the exhibition space to construct an "influential environment." Aitken's key question to the artists is: "Do you conceive of the exhibition space as a way of editing the viewer's experience?" (Aitken and Noel 2006, p. 23). Basically, the interviews demonstrate how "editing" and the cinematic have replaced a fatigued modernistic art discourse concerned with "objecthood" (Michael Fried) and "medium specificity" (Clement Greenberg).[14]

The turn toward editing and the cinematic, both in theory and in art practice, has precursors among architects such as Le Corbusier and Siegfried Giedion and the great theorist of cinematic montage, Sergei Eisenstein, whom they read. In a significant passage, Eisenstein talks about how the montage principle of cinema was prefigured by the way the Greeks constructed their sacred places such as Acropolis as a physical passage through an architectural landscape.

> [When talking about cinema], the word path is not used by chance. Nowadays it is the imaginary path followed by the eye and the varying perceptions of an object that depend on how it appears to the eye. Nowadays it may also be the path followed by the mind across a multiplicity of phenomena, far apart in time and space, gathered in a certain sequence into a single meaningful concept; and these diverse impressions pass in front of an immobile spectator.
>
> In the past, however, the opposite was the case: the spectator moved between [a series of] carefully disposed phenomena that he absorbed sequentially with his visual sense.[15]

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14 To paraphrase Hal Foster: the cinematic turn has threatened the disciplinary order of modern aesthetics in which visual art is held to be strictly spatial. See Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde and the End of the Century,* p. 40. To Foster, the attack on objecthood and the spatial order of modernism begins with minimalist art.

15 S. Eisenstein, *Montage and Architecture,* 1989 [1937], p. 111. To Eisenstein, montage was actually considered a trans-artistic language that investigated ways of leading a viewer through a series of juxtapositions of images (or shots) to construct a new synthetic sensation or "concept," as he sometimes called it. The montage principle is malleable. It can use a spatial configuration to create a temporal sensation, or a temporal dimension to create a spatial dimension. The point is made

Architecture and cinema meet in Eisenstein's "imaginary path" and Le Corbusier's idea of the *promenade architecture.* Indeed, Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy has been likened to "an optical instrument that turned the mobile experience of space into an editing process" (Deriu 2007, p. 38), and Beatrize Colomina writes "[his] house is no more than a series of views choreographed by the visitor, the way the filmmaker effects the montage of a film" (1991, p. 114). Giedion's classic work *Bauen in Frankreich* uses a conscious juxtaposition of photographs of views and elements of buildings to reveal "the potential of architecture as a mobile viewing platform" (Deriu 2007, p. 51). To him, "Neither space nor plastic form counts, only RELATION and INTERPENETRATION!" (Giedion in Deriu 2007, p. 44). Significantly, David Deriu points to a crucial difference between Eisenstein's "Montage and Architecture" and Giedion's book in this respect:

> [W]hile Eisenstein's walker/spectator was bound to follow a set route and recombine visual fragments into a predetermined whole, Giedion's ideal subject was free to roam through space and edit the resulting impressions according to his/her own subjective responses (Deriu 2007, p. 51).

In view of these considerations, Gordon's installational practices become very complex. Here, what is at stake is not only architecture as a "mobile viewing platform", but an architectural landscape where each object in itself constitutes a moving image projection. The landscape becomes a delirious formation. The viewer gets more or less lost in a very disorienting experience of cinematic objects. Additionally, this space does not, as Deriu contends, follow a set route, like in Eisenstein's example. There is no predetermined whole here. Each new impression, each step in the exhibition, alters the whole in a more or less arbitrary way, construing an open-ended *interactive* montage experience.

Giuliano Bruno thinks that the contemporary museum visitor traverses a haptic path:

> She who wanders through an art installation acts precisely like a film spectator absorbing and connecting visual spaces. The installation makes manifest the imaginative paths comprising the language of filmic montage and the course of the spectatorial journey. If, in the movie theatre, the filmic-architectural promenade is a kinaesthetic-process, in the art gallery one literally walks into the space of the art of memory and into architecturally produced narrative. One's body traverses sites that are places of the imagination, collected as fragments of a light space and recollected by a spectatorial motion led by emotion. Ultimately then, the form of the art installation reproduced the haptic path that makes up the very museographic genealogy of cinema (Bruno 2007, p. 28).

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very clearly in Eisenstein's fairly unknown sketch for the article "Montage and Architecture" from 1937.

Bruno's argument covers elegantly the experience at play in works by artists such as Douglas Gordon, but her strong reliance on a cinema centered discourse may be limiting when it comes to understanding works that use a cinematographic setup to address other concerns, such as the real-time experience of television and the internet.

The Real-Time Experiment

Both the German artist Tobias Rehberger and the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson rely on a cinematic-architectural promenade, but they seem to address other concerns than those of Gordon and Viola. The cinematic iconography, even the image itself in any ordinary sense, is eradicated, but their use of immersion through the use of changing light sources places them in relation to the cinematic and, perhaps even more so, in relation to the televisual and the internet.

Tobias Rehberger's piece *81 Years* (2002) looks at first like a light sculpture, a screen showing a color. Why is it called *81 Years*? This is a computer-generated "film," where the colors projected onto the screen are the result of a computer program that scans all the nuances of the color spectrum from one end to the other, 2.6 million different colors, with unprecedented slowness. It takes eighty-one years for the work to process all its computer-generated changes. A curious paradox in this experiment is the fact that the computer-generated color nuances are too fine to be perceived by the human eye, and the time span is too long, indeed, it is inhuman, even if it pretends to encompass an average Western human life of eighty-one years. As Margrit Brehm reminds us, *81 Years* couldn't be exposed on celluloid. It would weigh thousands of tons. "Its long duration alone clearly places the work in the realm of electronic media," she writes (Brehm 2002, p. 43). Each image is created in the very instant of its appearance, the result of a feat of algorithmic calculation.

Ill 3: Tobias Rehberger, 81 years*, 2002. Projector, Speakers, Computer. Photo: Marc Domage, Paris. Courtesy: neugerriemschneider, Berlin.*

The viewer is put in front of a universe created entirely by a machine, and the finest nuances are in the emissions of light perceivable only by a non-human eye. To be able to actually see the color changes, the spectator must leave the work and come back some time later. This strange and unusual appeal to a release, to an engaged non-commitment or non-looking, or simply to leaving the work, has to do with the work's experiment on the theme of "real-time" and the televisual. *81 Years* utilizes the technical possibilities of new real-time media to create a film the length of which is a function of logic, a mathematically precise calculation. Indirectly, it addresses the information order of culture and turns its most crucial characteristic, the logic of "real-time", into an absurdity, or more significantly, into an intolerable challenge. In an almost tyrannical way, the work confronts the viewer with a "real time" that is incompatible with her relational reference to an experienceable lifetime.[16] "A challenge is issued to refuse to allow the real time of one's own viewing (which is simultaneously one's lifetime) to be subordinated to the inalienable, frustrating real time of electronics," Brehm writes (2002, p. 44). Implicitly, the all-encompassing real-time, *life*time, span of this experiment puts the actual viewing time of the piece into a curious perspective. Here, the real time of the film and the real time of viewing will finally have to part. Sooner or later, the viewer will have to make a "cut" so to speak, and leave. The technicity of the work, which in this case is not simply a technical "moment", but rather a life*time*, ultimately forces the viewer to leave. When she leaves, her time will appear as a different *time*, and indeed, Brehm calls this "new" time, "a free time" (2002, p. 45).

In her book, *On the Style Site,* Ina Blom writes similarly on the proliferation of lamps and projections in the contemporary art museum as a critique of a certain real-time order she calls "televisual 'life'" (2007, p. 70). Lamps and light projections in art galleries may function as real-time machines of a different kind, with an odd and uncanny parallel to environments for living, such as one's own living room. Blom also discusses *81 Years* in relation to the televisual. She writes: "The immediate experience that there is 'nothing to see' in this work is key: it is the event that upturns all expectations about media visuality" (2007, p. 106). Rather than attracting attention to media visuality, it attracts attention to the *time* of media as empty, as potential. The experiment *takes time*, but not the way television takes time. This experiment seems rather to create an undetermined time/space allowing one to create one's own images and concepts. Rather than presenting images, this work

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16 I consciously play out the difference between the vernacular notion of a real time as the time something takes, and real-time (with a hyphen) as a media time signifying the televisual logic of a live transmission of events. Rehberger seems to intentionally confuse and converge these two times in his installation in question.

redefines the art space as a "mood lamp" addressing human perception and being (in time) in the most general way. Here, the visitors tend to sit down on the floor to "simply bask in the colored light rather than looking for visual action" (ibid). The installation transforms real-time from being the calculable time-slot of the attention economy to become an empty presence or an atmosphere for creativity where the viewer becomes a user or a producer. "The work could therefore – in principle – *generate any kind of image,*" Blom writes (ibid, pp. 106-107).

Take Your Time

This transformation of real-time is also highlighted in Olafur Eliasson's light installations. In his now famous installation at the Tate Modern in 2003, *The Weather Project,* Eliasson turns the grey and unfriendly entrance hall of the museum into the liveliest of atmospheres by installing a large lamp-driven projection of what looks like a blazing sun. A fine mist, large mirrors and a giant semi-circular form made up of hundreds of mono-frequency lamps colonize the entirety of the environment. The popularity of this work even surprised the curators at the Tate Modern. Suddenly, people just came to be in the gallery, in front of the large projection. They hung out, played, even danced or did yoga, some even seemed to sunbathe.

Several visitors have shared their experience of Eliasson's "sun" on YouTube. Some explicitly seem to interact playfully with the installation. Many visitors use their digital camera to make short YouTube videos, panning slowly in a large vertical circle to somehow convey the immersive expansiveness of the gallery space. Others seem to use the space as a suitable atmosphere for a get-together. In this connection the work may be seen as part of the international art trend the curator Nicolas Bourriaud has called "relational aesthetics," a new art form that takes "being-together as a central form" (2002a, p. 15). Eliasson turns the temporality of light into a medium which gathers people together through its temporalized atmosphere. The "audience" is somehow transformed with the time of the work. The audience is no longer simply a group of spectators, but rather, they have become a collectivity, "a people" or a new "minority" sharing and experiencing a "free" time. A screen + lights + mist + duration; this "expanded cinema" has transformed real-time into a new environment for creative living.

Ill 4:   The Unilever Series: Olafur Eliasson, The Weather Project, *16 October 2003 – 21 March 2004, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern. ©Tate, London 2013.*

Many of the structural filmmakers of the 1960s like Anthony McCall and Hollis Frampton tried to come up with a minimal definition of what film is. Frampton defined film as a "confined space, only a rectangle of white light" (Frampton

1983, cf. "A Lecture"). The introduction of film footage into this light was considered an obstruction. Rehberger and Eliasson take the concept of the expanded cinema toward the horizon of real-time media. The issue is no longer the essence of cinema, but the conditions of the social. How can real-time media be used to conjure forth a different real-time experience? This was also the theme in Eliasson's retrospective, *Take Your Time,* at the MoMA in New York, 2008.

The imperative in the title, *Take Your Time,* was meant to function both as a critique of the way a museum creates a distance between its objects and its audience, and as a demonstration of the fact that an art museum is no longer a temple of beautiful objects or pure forms; instead, it has become a place where conditions of perception, emotion and interactivity in a contemporary world are tested. The MoMA also accompanied its exhibition with a rich and informative website containing, among other things, many interviews with Eliasson where he explains his views on art and the exhibition. Eliasson talks about the "paradox" of the contemporary art museum. Rather than looking at the museum as a place for "collecting objects from reality [and] preserving them in a container somewhat outside of reality," Eliasson wants the museum to be "part of the world, part of the times in which we live." He continues:

> The very basic belief that is behind my work is that objecthood, or objects as such, don't have a place in the world if there is not an individual person making some use of that object … if the object becomes prescriptive of the individual, of this subject, then we don't integrate time, as time passes along … I want a title [*Take Your Time*] that actually takes the museum out of its own stigma of being timeless somehow, [and] in a way to add time to it, as a dimension which is productive of the quality of the work. So, it is not about the museum, but about the spectator … [in] this exhibition the museum gives the time back to the spectator, to be users of the museum.[17]

Eliasson doesn't talk about real-time, instead he addresses a more complex time, the way a spectator "add[s] time to ... [the work]." This time is activated through a turn toward the role of the spectator in the exhibition. In a conversation with Eliasson, Doug Aitken comments: "You [Eliasson] often set up experiential systems that encourage the viewer to move through the sensory environment in a subjective way" (2006, p. 114). Indeed, Eliasson states that "I certainly like the idea of the viewer being the exhibited subject" (ibid, p. 116). This turn is radical. He somehow turns the equation viewer-object all the way around; the viewer becomes the center-piece, a *relational* body. The museum or gallery space becomes an experiential system for other times, where the viewer edits his environment through cuts and pauses that add another time to the space. The exhibition becomes a

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17   Eliasson, Olafur (2008) "Presentation." Video clip on the MoMA website: http://www.moma.org/ [accessed 2008].

real-time laboratory where the spectator/user produces models for living and sketches for being.

Conclusion: Technogenesis

All the works discussed in this chapter transform the traditional museum from a "container" to an "experiential system". They set up an environment, an architectural space of light and colors, which invites the viewer to somehow co-edit the work through his or her (e)motions through "the system". This is not editing in any classical film sense, but an interactive montage in a dynamized space. Space is transformed into an atmosphere for potential "paths" for emerging subjects. These spaces are built around technologies that store time as modes of sensation, as changing atmospheres and images to interact with. Television and its character of "liveness" and real-time emerges most exemplarily in Rehberger's and Eliasson's] works. They use technology to foreground the technicity of time as a contested area. The capitalistic attention economy tends to turn the times of life into sellable slots within competing regimes of real-time media. Rehberger and Eliasson use technology to address our habitual notions and sensations of time, free time and aesthetic pleasure. They invite us to confront a sensation of time that is more open.[18] The viewer is uncertain with regards to the *time* of the work. Should I leave or should I stay? At the moment the spectator leaves the work, the confrontation isn't simply over, but is extended to embrace, not living duration, but life in an internet- and TV-mediated world, where mediated real-time and free time are blurred and often contested.

   Both Gordon and Viola seek other times of the image. While Gordon uses a new media culture (the VCR) to conjure forth other sensations and dimensions of a given image, Viola uses new media to conjure forth "technologies of the self" that were available in pre-modern civilizations. He grafts traces from one set of practices – such as devotional (*Andachtsbilder*) and visionary painting in the late Middle Ages – onto a film and video art practice, which is concurrently altered. Viola consciously evokes what Hans Belting calls "image traditions from before the era of art," when the image was considered a living or sacred agent literally

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18 I don't believe art will always produce the critical other of the capitalistic attention economy; the cinematic turn often implies borrowing elements from spectacular media (fascinating images, cultural iconography, dramatic editing, extreme speeds, etc.), but the cinematic turn in the gallery tends to conjure forth a more paradoxical situation which is often more difficult to translate into homogeneous, quantifiable and sellable experiences.

doing things to its spectator or owner.[19] Motif, framing and format often recall the devotional images that travelers once carried around with them that allowed them to contemplate a different time and a different place *anywhere*. A paradox arises in Viola's art. The sudden awareness of movement in the image, which we analyzed above as "the technical moment," as the moment we become aware of a certain machinic temporality, evokes at the same time a pre-machinic temporality and rhythm of life.

The (e)motions of the spectator, the way she edits her experience, each arrest, each turn, lays out paths in relation to technology and history (Viola), images seen and images remembered (Gordon) and collectivities and alternative times (Rehberger and Eliasson]). In this way, these four artists not only instantiate different forms of lived duration, but use a "slow space" to construct different possibilities and models of living in the contemporary technosphere. These works urge us to ask: how can artworks help us explore the way human beings co-evolve with modern technology? More than ever, modern technology saturates every aspect of modern living. Some aspects are fairly obvious (commercialism and the stimuli-response mechanism of the web and screen based cultural industries), but other aspects are less available for experience, reflection and awareness. How are our memories and our notions of time, self, history and living affected by this co-evolution? Artworks can ask questions in this difficult field, and the way artworks address the issue of the interdependence between life and technology is an important area of research for the emerging field of media aesthetics. In the works by Viola and Gordon, we saw how memory, notions of time and the rhythms of life are affected by motion and the "cuts" of the spectator. These aspects are dramatized even further in the cases of Rehberger and Eliasson], as they breach our habitual notions of free time and contemporary everyday life in new ways.

If editing was a technique used to *suture* and immobilize the viewer in a movie theatre, the cinematic turn in the museum has demonstrated how the viewer can take the cut back, and in a way edit the view herself.[20] We reach the

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19   Belting, Hans. 1994. *Likeness and presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*. The theme of "technologies of the self" (a term that goes back to Michel Foucault) is discussed more fully in relation to Viola's art videos in Eivind Røssaak, 2010, *The Still/Moving Image: Cinema and the Arts.*

20   We still need to investigate more fully how competing forms of editing and theater exhibitions before the contemporary cinematic turn in the art gallery have influenced and been instantiated in different ways in contemporary museums and art galleries. Important work in this direction has been done by Tom Gunning (starting in pre-cinema and early cinema) and Jennifer Wilde (on the French avant-garde and the exhibition), and Yuri Tsivian's work on Soviet montage opens up many new questions.

point where, as in Eliasson's words, the viewer becomes the subject.[21] Michael Fried's position – "The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theater" – is untenable.[22] Fried had hoped the modernist ethos could defeat what he called the theatricalization of the arts taking place through the 1960s art scene in environmental and tableau sculpture, along with performance art and "happenings," going back to kinetic and light art. What Fried feared according to Krauss was "a merging of the temporal experience of sculpture with real time, that pushes the plastic arts into the modality of theater" (Krauss 1981 [1977], pp. 203-4).

Krauss' observation is precise, but she uses the notion of a "real time" in a nonspecific way throughout her 1977 study, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Today, this is impossible. All modes of living in contemporary society are some-how caught up in the real-time speed of new media and information. The new technicity of real-time challenges both Krauss' model and the traditional pheno-menological position (Merleau-Ponty) which sought refuge in a rather idealist (non-technical) notion of personal expression and living duration (as the *real* time). New media technologies store, process and transmit the real and uncannily align themselves with the temporal matter of consciousness. Rather than seeing technology as incidental or detrimental, we now need to consider technology as an essential dimension of the human. We need to ask, like Mark B. N. Hansen and Bernard Stiegler, how does the human co-evolve with technology? Stiegler calls this evolution *technogenesis*.[23]

The art works discussed in this chapter transform the art gallery into a slow space where aspects of this technogenesis can be studied. Technology *appears* as an "invisible" force (movement, spacings, "real-time") co-determining the aes-thetic experience. The slow spaces produced by these art installations render technogenesis *visible.* The speed of technology meets the slowness of physiology and our senses. The environment makes the spectator aware of how sensations are technically mediated. The technical moments become the preeminent means

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21 Many have seen the rise of postmodernism in arts as a new birth of the viewer. But this "birth" actually goes back to site specific art and a long trajectory of art movements since the 1960s that critiqued modernist idealism, to the extent that it activated the interrelationship between ob-ject, context and viewer. "Such a reorientation of the perceptual experience of art made the viewer, in effect, the subject of the art" (Douglas Crimps, 1993)

22 M. Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood" from 1967 is quoted after Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture,* 1981 [1977], p. 203.

23 Technogenesis is the main theme in Bernard Stiegler's triology *Technics and Time* [*Technique et temps,* 1994, 1996, 2002]. Mark B.N. Hansen discusses the concept in *New Philosophy for New Media,* 2004; *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media,* 2006, and in W.J.T. Mitchell and Hansen, *Critical Terms for Media Studies,* 2010, see especially the article "Memory."

by which human beings extend their perceptual grasp over matter in the widest possible sense, as *being* in a *technical* world. This being is not simply an experience of continuity or living duration. Duration as a deeply felt continuity of being is a problematical concept in a media saturated real-time world. Today, there is no living duration outside media. The slow spaces of Viola, Gordon, Rehberger and Eliasson] are not places of comfort – they intervene, redirect and displace duration as a feeling of continuity to establish awareness through "spectator's cuts" and the epiphany of technical moments.

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"Are you talking to me?"
Spectatorship in Post-Cinema Art

Susanne Østby Sæther

Consider, Douglas Gordon's 1999 video work *through a looking glass*: two projectors are installed opposite each other in the gallery space, slightly askew, and projecting directly onto the opposing walls the so-called "mirror scene" from Martin Scorsese's 1976 film *Taxi Driver*. The first projection shows the scene in its original form, featuring Robert De Niro's famous monologue delivered to his mirror image. By turning the image left to right, the second projection reverses the scene. The two projections thus come to mirror each other. At least that is how it appears at first glance. If one spends some time in the gallery, however, one will notice that a temporal displacement is taking place; the second projection increasingly lags behind the first until the tables turn and it then takes the lead, only to repeat the cycle. As spectators, we find ourselves in a curious position: addressed directly by an antagonistic, double reflection of DeNiro's character Travis Bickle with gun in hand, yet left out of the loop, which continues to run after our departure. We are enfolded in the projected images as they pervade the space, yet invited to ponder their iconic position in film history. *Are* you talking to me? Are you talking to *me*? *What*, and *where*, is the spectatorial position in this work? This question fuels this essay.

Again and again, film or video installations that, like Gordon's, explicitly incorporate elements culled from the cinematic and televisual register have been encountered in galleries and museums over the last two decades. Increasingly labeled cinematic or post-cinematic, these works may include found footage, remakes, narrative conventions, or simply the reflexive employment of media technologies of which video projections are the pivotal example.[1] Such works bring together, activate, and reorganize a range of spectatorial experiences from different institutional and physical settings of the art and media spheres, to the extent that one can now talk of a new spectatorship,. In the last few years, a number of texts mapped out how the spectatorship that is associated with narrative cinema is complicated or even overturned by the association with (minimalist) sculpture and installation. Simply put, this scheme outlines how the visuality

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1 With existing genre films as their raw material, most of Gordon's video works fall under this rubric, as do influential works by artists such as Johan Grimonprez, Pierre Huyghe, Paul Pfeiffer, Candice Breitz, Omer Fast, Seth Price, Cory Arcangel, and Christian Marclay, to mention but a few.

associated with the image is challenged by the embodiment associated with sculpture and installation, how the spatial preconditions of the (classical) museum are confronted by the temporality and movement of film and video, and how immobile cinemagoers are now turned into mobile museum wanderers. While certainly productive for outlining the general terms of this emergent spectatorship,, the scheme falls short in two distinct ways.

First, the art/cinema framework accounts only to a limited extent for the interplay between image and embodiment and between the temporality of the moving image and the spatiality of the gallery. Seemingly regardless of the features of the imagery in question, cinema is frequently treated more or less as a constant that is predetermined either by the codes of Hollywood or by its opposition to the latter as experimental cinema, both with their respective spectatorships, "complacent" or "critical."[2] The medial specificity and variations of the imagery – such as its particular audiovisual encoding, narrativity, technological mediation, cultural history and materiality – is ignored or at best glossed over, its precise imbrication with its surrounding space then being difficult to determine. One thus easily ends up with general statements about the embodied spectator of media installations and the active spectatorship, they produce, which are based predominantly on arguments about the spatial layout of the work and the way it stages the relationship between media object and viewer.[3]

Second, the strict art/cinema framework can seem reductive with respect to the significance of this meeting within the art system, but also to its close interconnection with the present media sphere. The expanded cinema movement of the 1960s is frequently cited as the precursor for today's "post-cinematic" practice, yet equally significant for grasping its relevance is cinema's current migration to

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2   Interestingly, as it is presently articulated in much art criticism, such a dualist conception of the spectatorship construed by post-cinematic and new media installations as "complacent" (Hollywood cinema) or "critical" (avant-garde and experimental cinema) repeats in significant ways the understanding of the film spectator as either "passive" or "active" that dominated film studies of the 1970s. However, this conception is now supplemented by cognitive or more historically situated models informed by a notion found in cultural studies of an empowered audience. See for instance Judith Mayne, 1993, "Introduction" in *Cinema and Spectatorship*. A recent notable exception to this dualist conception is represented by Kate Mondloch's study of spectatorship in film and video installations from the 1960s and up to the 2000s. In its analysis of key media installations from this period, the study aims to draw out "the typically obscured relationships between bodies, sites, and the object-hood of the screen-based apparatus." Kate Mondloch, 2010, *Screens. Viewing Media Installation Art*.

3   Examples of this tendency are found for instance in Ursula Frohne, "Dissolution of the Frame: Immersion and Participation in Video Installations"; Liz Kotz, "Video Projection: The Space Between Screens" and Andrew V. Uroskie, "Siting Cinema," all in *Art and the Moving Image. A Critical Reader*, Tanya Leighton, 2008.

new media platforms and the user-based viewing positions that emerge with converged media. It seems that when cinema and the moving image enter the museum, their interconnections with other nodes in the contemporary media sphere are neglected in favor of a new alliance. We are not only hindered from grasping features of the works that are crucial for appreciating their potential as instances of art; also at stake here is a conception of how we are construed as spectators, and thus ultimately as contemporary subjectivities, through our imbrication with the present media sphere in its more and less tangible manifestations.

Perhaps the most significant reason for this delimitation is the widely accepted conception of the media of art being fundamentally other than the so-called mass or communication media, and indeed so "different" that a clear separation between them can be upheld.[4] Whereas institutionally, ideologically, and aesthetically a separation has historically been the case, since the 1960s artists' experimentation with media technologies necessitates a conception of the artistic medium that does not sever it from the rest of the mediatic system, but rather includes it as one of several notions of media and their manifestations.[5] This is not to reduce the history of art to a chapter in the history of media or to propose a single, essentialist denominator of the concept of media. Rather it is my intention to acknowledge the various notions and manifestations of the media that are operative in contemporary post-cinematic works and explore the very point at which they differ.[6] With

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4   Under the term "the post-medium condition," Rosalind Krauss has influentially argued that we have witnessed a fundamental change in conceptions of what constitutes the "medium" of art through its dislodging from the technical support instigated by artist's use of film, television and video. Yet in spite of the centrality of technological reproduction media in her argument, she makes a clear distinction between the "mediums" of art and the "media" of communication. Rosalind Krauss, 1999, "*A Voyage on the North Sea." Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition.*

5   The 1960s are often singled out as a key transitional period in the relationship between mass media and art media, in spite of a trajectory of previous art movements that actively engaged with the technologies, materials and conventions of the burgeoning mediasphere, Collage and Russian Constructivism being just two examples. Yet the art of the 1960s is unprecedented in its interaction and dialog with the mediasphere, either oppositionally or conceiving of it as a laboratory, both by actual use of professional equipment and so on, and as a channel for transmitting works. This was also the moment when live television was fully introduced and the technical possibility for new forms of temporality became a reality.

6   Interestingly, however, during the last fifteen years or so, the history of modern art has in fact been increasingly envisioned as a history of media art. One example of this was the exhibition *le Mouvement des images: Art and Cinema*, at Musée National D'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou (2006), which sought to reformulate the history of art since the last turn of the century in relationship to the development and dispersal of moving images. Another example is provided by German art historian Dieter Daniels. Based on the understanding that each new audiovisual medium raises

this perspective, this essay aims to grasp some of the complexities of the spectatorship, that post-cinematic works produce, and by extension, how they may articulate conditions of spectatorship more generally as constituted in the present media sphere.

By seeking to scrutinize in some detail how moving imagery and the spatial dimension of its extension into post-cinematic installations intersect with each other as well as the surrounding media sphere, my approach here is also implicitly aligned with recent developments in media theory that are best described as media ecological. Of particular relevance for the present argument is what Ursula Heise (2002, pp. 149-168) has called the relational focus of recent articulations of media ecology as it strives to make visible many of the less apparent and perceptible connections between what W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen have formulated as "the singular, specific 'medium' and the constellation of things known as 'the media'" (2010, p. xx) (see also Fuller 2005). Recent media ecology combines a holistic perspective that envisions media as an encompassing system and environment along with a local one that points to the specificities of particular "ecosystems" inside and outside of this larger system, in order to understand what goes on in the conjunction between them (Heise 200, p. 165). Importantly, contrary to the first wave of media ecology that was widely criticized for its technological determinism, that is, envisioning the media as a closed circuit that deeply affects its habitants but leaves no or only minimal room for human agency, its subsequent reformulations conceive of media as an "environment for living" as Mitchell and Hansen put it, and foregrounds the interdependence and local variations of the human/technology relation (2010, p. xii).

Moreover, a media ecological approach is, as the term signals, a conception of human perception and experience of technology in terms of spatial and environmental metaphors (Heise 2000, p. 165). Hence, there is a striking resonance between this macro-level approach to the human/media relation and the micro-level awareness of the spectator's spatial coordinates and bearings – his or her position – opened up by contemporary media installations. More than a simple homology between current art and theory, this joint interest should instead be seen to indicate the conception of spatiality as conditional for the interrelation between the sensing subject and the technological object (as discussed in other essays in this volume).[7] Situated at the intersection of art history on the one hand and film and media studies on the other, this essay also implicitly draws on theo

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new aesthetic questions that create new art forms and is taken up by existing art forms, he claims that "all modern art is media art." *Kunst als Sendung. Von der Telegrafie Zum Internet*.

7   See Mary Ann Doane, "Has Time Become Space?" and Eivind Røssaak, "The Moving Image in the Museum: Real-time, Technology and the Spectator's Cut" in this volume.

ries of spectatorship, from both fields. Seeking to understand the relationship between the individual and the filmic process or artwork, and fundamentally inseparable from theories of the human subject, the concept of spectatorship has, since it emerged in the early 1970s, represented an ongoing attempt to come to terms with the interface between humans and media, viewer and work, in the aesthetic field (Deidre Pribam 1999, p. 146; see also Buckland 1995).

For my purpose here it is useful to distinguish between three medial dimensions of post-cinematic work that also reflect three different dimensions of the notion of media: the imagery and what it represents (particularly its configuration of time and space); the material and technological organization of the work and its site (what might be called situated technology); and the surrounding media sphere of which the two other dimensions are constituent parts and from which the contemporary viewer is already familiarized with different forms of media spectatorship,. This approach opens up the possibility for exploring the precise interaction between these three medial dimensions in the work in question.[8] Thereby one can cut across the dualism implied in the opposition posed between the time-based, visual spectatorship of cinema and the embodied, spatial spectatorship associated with sculpture and installation. This tri-partition also corresponds roughly with Arjun Appadurai's notion of mediascape, in that it refers both to the flow of distribution and uses of media technologies and to the flow of images produced by them. As the suffix "-scape" implies, together these dimensions make up parts of a milieu or environment that is mediated as well as a mediating landscape. The spatial metaphor and the relational focus are significant here as well, and Appadurai's concept can be considered ecological in this sense. His "scape" is fluid and irregular, and changes according to our position in it – not unlike the frequently immersive environments of the post-cinematic media installations of concern (Appadurai 1996, pp. 33-35). As this correspondence suggests, the spectatorship explored in recent post-cinematic art may serve as cogent explorations of the conditions of contemporary media spectatorship, outside of the art sphere, as well.

Gordon's *through a looking glass* is a particularly instructive work to discuss in terms of media art spectatorship for a number of reasons. Reconfiguring an iconic scene from narrative cinema, the work explicitly signals its close entanglement with the surrounding media sphere. Moreover, from the outset, the di-

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8   To reflect these different medial dimensions throughout the text, I distinguish between "media" and "mediums" in the following: I use the term "media" to refer to the overall system of interconnected technologies and institutions, what Hansen and Mitchell refers to as "the system of 'things'", and "mediums" to designate the plural form of what Hansen and Mitchell calls "the singular, specific medium" (2010, p. xx).

rect audience address of the scene also effectively frustrates any easy dualism of spectatorship as either identificatory, frequently associated with cinema, or as activated, as increasingly associated with installation. Significantly, during the ten years after it was made, the work's particular staging of spectatorship has proven itself to be even more pertinent because it cuts through the core of ongoing discussions of the relationship between image and embodiment, time and space, and complacency and criticality in contemporary spectatorship,, and does so in ways both formally simple and conceptually complex. In accordance with the three-part model suggested above, I first discuss the imagery of the work in some detail, concentrating on the spectatorial position embedded in Scorsese's scene as it is prescribed through cinematic representation of time and space. I then consider the implications of Gordon's subsequent spatial and temporal reconfiguration for the spectatorship already embedded in Scorsese's scene, and the function video performs as the technological tool for this operation. In conclusion, I discuss how *through a looking glass* articulates a fundamental condition of contemporary media spectatorship, which ultimately hinges on the deeply ambivalent feeling of control and lack thereof as it may be experienced from our living in the present mediasphere.

Scorsese's mirror scene: No secure place to stand

Let us now consider the film clip chosen by Gordon for his *through a looking glass*: How does Scorsese's mirror scene address its audience, before Gordon intervenes? Through what stylistic and formal means is this address orchestrated? Truly an iconic scene in popular memory, what first strikes most spectators when encountering Gordon's work is the overwhelming sense of recognition, an immediate déjà-vu. Indeed, the scene offers one of the most-cited lines in American film history: "Are you talking to me?"[9] Generally recognized as De Niro's breakthrough as an actor, *Taxi Driver* is steeped in anecdotes about his improvisational skills and his acting against a mirror. Further adding to the film's mythology is its curious fate as inspiration for the copycat crime of John Hinkley III, who in order to impress actress Jodie Foster (who played a child prostitute in *Taxi Driver*) five years after its release, conducted an assassination attempt on U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

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9   Illustratingly, this line was rated number ten on the American Film Institute's list of the most influential film lines (*AFI's 100 Years...100 Movie Quotes*, 2005). In interviews, Gordon has himself recalled how he heard the line in the school yard far in advance of seeing Scorsese's film.

Scorsese's film also holds a central position in the discipline of film history and its canon. It is habitually held up as exemplary for its breaks with narrative continuity and preoccupation with the social alienation, failed masculinity, and disintegration of the self that characterized much of post-classical and New Hollywood cinema of the 1970s.[10] Embedded in the cinematic material employed by Gordon is thereby already a quite specific configuration of spectatorship,, the preconditions of which are productive to assess in order to outline its precise investments in the spectatorial position solicited by *through a looking glass*. After all, it is no coincidence that in his cinema-based works, Gordon frequently chooses films that depict psychopathological or altered states in which the relationship between self and world, subject and object, is rendered precarious, and that aim to instill a similar experience in the viewer.

In Gordon's excerpt of *Taxi Driver,* the film's status as a hallmark of post-classical filmmaking is evident in that classical, narrative continuity is broken in a series of minor, yet fundamental ways. Three factors are particularly crucial. Firstly, the very brief close-up shot of the gun being drawn is followed by a medium close-up shot of Travis in which the movement not only continues but also overlaps. Taken from the same camera position but with different framing (from medium close-up of his torso holding the gun to medium close-up of his shoulders and head), this shot arrangement results in a jump cut by which a part of the action is briefly repeated: we see Travis draw the gun and point it at us in a rapid yet strangely staccato movement, which is further accentuated by the reverberation of his "uh?" on the soundtrack. While obviously not a truly disruptive or elliptical jump cut, this moderate version of it is nevertheless significant in terms of spectatorship as it works to fragment our point of view in relation to the action and cinematic space. Furthermore, the slight overlap and repetition of action between the two shots emphasizes the quickness with which Travis draws the gun; it is as if he attempts to draw faster than the camera can follow, as implied by his challenging statement, "I am faster than you." An intense, aggressive mood accompanied by a sense of unpredictability is thus established by this relatively subtle jump cut. Editing here serves both to draw attention to the scene's formal organization and to convey the psychological state of the protagonist.

Secondly, the changed camera position between the two first shots of Travis represents an inventive manipulation of the 180˚ rule and its maintenance of spatial

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10   See for instance Contemporary American Cinema, Linda Ruth Williams and Michael Hammond, 2006, eds; Geoff King, 2002, New Hollywood Cinema. An Introduction; Richard Martin, 1997, Mean Streets and Raging Bulls. The Legacy of Film Noir in Contemporary American Cinema.

order and continuity.[11] In Scorsese's setup, this imaginary axis would run through the mirror on the one hand and De Niro/Travis Bickle on the other. Accordingly, focusing frontally on Travis, the second shot in the scene implies that the camera is positioned more or less directly on this axis. Here Scorsese uses the 180˚ rule as the point of departure for a cunning post-classical play with the continuity system of classical Hollywood cinema. As the camera angle changes from a medium profile shot of Travis via the momentarily frontal shot of the gun, into the confrontational head-on shot of the protagonist, our sense of spatial continuity and screen direction is disturbed: Where in the space is Travis actually positioned? And how are we positioned in relation to him? Moreover, as the camera balances on the demarcating line, so does the character Travis Bickle. This scene is indeed the narrative turning point in the film, leading up to his psychological disintegration and subsequent realization of his homicidal fantasies (Taubin 2000, p. 58; Williams 2006, p. 159). Combined with the jump cut, the camera seems to circle around the protagonist, unsuccessfully attempting to pin him down. In effect, the spectator "is not offered a single stable relationship with the character, or a clear point of judgment," as Geoffrey King has observed (2002, p. 34).

Thirdly, the presence of the mirror in the scene becomes a relay for the scene's perhaps most intriguing departure from the continuity system, more specifically from that of a classical dialog scene. Scorsese's scene follows a classical shot/reverse-shot setup in most respects, but with one crucial difference. Due to the presence of the mirror, Travis Bickle fills the positions of both characters. One consequence is the immediate confusion resulting from the fact that Travis now occupies two different spatial positions. Our orientation in diegetic space is frustrated. Yet this doubling is somehow motivated by the mirror's presence. Even more disruptive is that the looks exchanged (through eyeline matching and over-the-shoulder shots) in a classical setup are here passed between Travis and his reflected Other. We share Travis's point of view when he looks into the mirror as well as the point of view of his mirror image looking back, and are eventually confused as to which is one or the other. Travis's identity is quite literally split, distributed across an increasingly hostile and aggressive exchange of looks and threats between the character and his reflection, making the confusion between the two absolute. Travis, in effect, faces and seems to address the spectator directly with his provocation: "Are you talking to me?" Likewise, when Travis draws the gun as if attempting to move faster than the camera can follow, the specta-

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11 For readers not well versed in the vocabulary of film production, this principle states that the camera should stay throughout a scene on one side of an imaginary line that demarcates the action, often referred to as the *axis of action* or the *180˚ line*, in order to produce a clear sense of screen direction for the spectator.

tor herself is threatened, looking straight into the barrel of the gun. Combined with the other continuity breaks, this peculiar exchange of point of view between Travis and his mirror image elicits the effect of the spectator being simultaneously put in the position of both the aggressor and the threatened. The viewer is, as Richard Martin observes of *Taxi Driver*, "encouraged to identify with the neuroses, obsessions and paranoia of Scorsese's protagonist" (1997, p. 87). Scorsese's mirror-facilitated play with the standard shot/reverse-shot sequence not only lets Travis Bickle's emotional and psychological disintegration quite literally be acted out between Travis and his mirrored double; this disintegration is reflected onto the spectator, who is invited to share the schizophrenic point of view of both Travis and his mirror image and to negotiate the impossibility of identifying with both.[12]

Ill 1: Douglas Gordon. Through a Looking Glass*, 1999. Two screen video installation, dimensions variable. Installation view Gagosian Gallery, Soho, New York, 1999. From Taxi Driver, 1976, USA. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. © Studio lost but found / Douglas Gordon / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Stuart Tyson. Image courtesy Gagosian Gallery.*

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12   The crucial stylistic and thematic function of the mirror in this scene also results in the scene easily lending itself to Lacanian-informed film analysis, in which the analogy between Lacan's psychological mirror-stage and the film experience is central.

It is no coincidence that the turning point of Scorsese's film is a shot/reverse-shot. Allowing the spectator to occupy the points of view of both characters grants the shot/reverse-shot an essential role in the continuity system. Through it, the spectator is seen to be stitched (or with a more psychoanalytically loaded term, *sutured*) into the narrative through her sharing of a character's point of view, thus claiming ownership of the visual field of the previous shot. The centrality of the shot/reverse-shot in classical Hollywood cinema is reflected in the amount of film-theoretical debate concerned precisely with its effects on the spectator, particularly in psychoanalytical film theory. When the character Travis Bickle fills the position of both subject and object in the primordial scene of the shot/reverse-shot, the drama of psychoanalytical film theory is thereby fully acted out. Travis fills the position that in Lacanian film theory is reserved for the spectator, who in classical narration becomes both subject and object of the look in order to create a ("false") sense of wholeness.[13] Significantly, my evocation of psychoanalytical film theory here must be understood as a direct implication of the stylistic and thematic features of the mirror scene. As it happens, the genre of film noir and its post-classical manifestation of the neo-noir were deeply informed by psychoanalytical theory, and the mirror scene must be seen as a reflection of this influence. Moreover, when isolated and reworked in Gordon's work, this peculiar version of a shot/reverse-shot acts as what Mieke Bal has called a theoretical object; that is, an object that in itself "theorizes" cultural history; in this case, that of film history and its theoretical positions (1999, p. 5).

Embedded in the cinematic material of Gordon's work is thus already an ambiguous and precarious spectatorial position, which signals a relationship between viewer and image that can only be described as double. We are made aware of cuts and camera positions, that is, the film's "suture". Whereas this process in the case of classical narration would "unsuture" the spectator from the smooth identification that "cinematic suture" normally implies, in the mirror scene's post-classical editing this awareness rather serves to demonstrate the deteriorating demarcation between self and Other, subject and object as it is lived by Travis. Crudely put, one might say that the very post-classical means that according to suture theory would draw us *out* of the fictional universe do in fact serve to draw us *in*, since the spatially articulated confusion between Self and surrounding is a central theme in the film. Yet these stylistic means work very specifically by redistributing the diegetic work between the character Travis, who now acts out the spectator's role in the drama of suture, and the spectator, who is

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13 In that it is seen to effectively center the subject and produce a sense of all-seeing mastery of the visual field, the shot/reverse-shot has become a particularly important object of critique in terms of the discursive construction of subjectivity in Lacanian film theory.

called upon to share Travis's paranoia by subjectively experiencing the very same alienation and disorientation in relation to the diegetic space as that which Travis experiences in his psychological relationship to his surroundings but does not identify with his increasingly disintegrating self. Are we inside or outside? Where is our position? Are you talking to me? Indeed, Scorsese's mirror scene – spatially or psychologically – offers us "no secure place to stand" (Monk 2003, p. 149).

Significantly then, and contrary to the denigration of the spectator of mainstream cinema as predominantly passive and uncritical that is often assumed in writings on media installations and post-cinema (even though long since challenged in film and media theory by approaches as varied as cultural studies and cognitive film theory), a closer analysis of what actually *takes place* in sound and image in Gordon's work alerts us to the complexity and ambiguity of the spatial and psychological position "cinema" here allots for its spectator. Confused more than complacent, alert rather than inactive, invited to muse on the blurry line between fictional space and its outside and attend to both in tandem (the very line that fully disappeared for copycat felon John Hinckley), the spectator of the mirror scene bridges any easy dualism. Thereby, the relationship between spectator and filmic process signaled by Scorsese's mirror scene significantly foregrounds key characteristics of the "new" spectatorship, as it is outlined in recent work on post-cinema and media installation art.

Becoming installation: Entering the firing line

Consider now another dimension of the work, which in the introduction I called the material and technological organization of the work and its site. What happens to the cinematic spectatorial position of Scorsese's mirror scene when Gordon reconfigures it into a post-cinematic art installation through the technological tool of video? Gordon subjects the scene to a set of formal operations that encourage the ambiguity of its spectatorial position even further. The formally simple material and technological reconfigurations Gordon subjects the mirror scene to nonetheless establish an intricate medial situation. As described at the beginning of this essay, in *through a looking glass,* the scene is projected directly onto two opposing walls of a gallery space in particularly designated fields.[14] The projections are installed so as to not directly face each other, but are instead positioned

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14 At least if installed in accordance with the installation instructions. When showed at the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo in 2009, the work was projected on two screens and not directly on the walls.

slightly askew, as is often the case in Gordon's audiovisual works. While the first projection shows the excerpt of the mirror scene in its original form, the second projection shows the scene reversed, flipped left to right. Both image tracks are looped. Starting out in full synchronization, a temporal adjustment effectively controls the evolving dynamic between the two images. In the second projection, Gordon has inserted a progressively increasing number of video frames in the interval between the beginning and end of the scene.[15] Starting with one frame, the number of frames inserted is consistently doubled, to 2, then 4, 8, 16, 32 and so on, until it reaches 512, when it reverses according to the same principle – and then starts all over again.[16] Hence, while the scene itself lasts only a little more than a minute (71 seconds, to be precise) it is repeated here in a cycle that lasts approximately an hour.

Three simple formal and conceptual operations can be identified in the work: *doubling, reversibility*, and *reflection*.[17] *Doubling* takes place both through the duplication of Scorsese's mirror scene onto two opposing projections and in the successive, numerical doubling of the number of inserted video frames that causes the temporal displacement. Hence a spatial as well as a temporal doubling take place, in addition of course to the theme of doubles and psychological dissociation already present in the scene. Thus, the spatial relationship between the two images is defined – and continuously redefined through the successive temporal doubling. *Reversibility* operates by the fact that the work is a loop in which, through these doublings, both projections alternate in taking the lead. *Reflection* operates in that the second image is reversed from its original appearance in Scorsese's film, so that it appears as a reflection of the first image in Gordon's installation. More than mere formal operations however, these technological interventions are conceptually structured by the theme and style of the mirror scene itself, in which doubling, reversibility and reflection indeed are key concerns. When working in conjunction, they thereby engage with the precarious spectatorial position of the mirror scene in a manner that efficiently complicates the opposition frequently assumed between cinematic spectatorship and installation.[18]

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15 The video image is fundamentally electronic and is thus produced by a continuous signal rather than comprised by distinct entities, as is celluloid based film which is made up of separate photograms or frames. It is therefore debatable whether it is meaningful to talk of video frames.

16 Information provided in an e-mail from Gagosian Gallery in New York. In his book on Douglas Gordon's works based on Hollywood films, Jonathan Monk also discusses the specific numerical formula of the artist's operations (2003, p. 134).

17 In his discussion of *through a looking glass,* Monk (2003, p. 141) identifies these three operations, but does not specify their exact nature. The following explications are therefore my own.

18 Certainly, theories of cinematic spectatorship and installation art are far more complex and varied than what is referred to here, assuming a range of different positions with respect to the

One obvious outcome of these operations is that the mirror scene is transformed from a two-dimensional image contained by a film screen or a video monitor into a three-dimensional installation that engages the space between the two adjacent images. Generally considered "the type of art into which the viewer physically enters" and which insists on being regarded "as a singular totality," according to Claire Bishop, the key characteristic of installation art is that it "addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in space" (Bishop 2005, p. 6).[19] In *through a looking glass*, this address is literal even in a double sense. The spectator of Gordon's work is invited to physically enter the space that simultaneously separates and connects the two mirror projections of Travis Bickle. Therefore, the cinematic image field is extended to also include the physical space of the gallery. By entering this extended space of the cinematic image field, the viewer is required to relate to the two adjacent images that demarcate it and find her spatial position between them. The relationship between on-screen space and the space outside the screen becomes subject to scrutiny. Whereas *through a looking glass* addresses the viewer as a "literal presence" in this capacity alone, this address is raised to another level when we also consider the specific dynamic of sounds and images that plays out between the two projections, that is, when we also look at what takes place *on* the screen.[20]

In Scorsese's original version, the mirror scene is already identified as a sequence of shot/reverse-shots of Travis from the point of view of his reflected dialog partner. It is as if one half of the standard dialog setup is missing. With Gordon's doublings and spatial reconfiguration, however, what is missing from Scorsese's original scene, that is, Travis' reflection, is in a sense restored (Monk 2003, p. 132). Yet Gordon's restoration by no means causes the insecure spectatorship, produced by Scorsese's editing style to be any less so – quite the contrary. As Annika Wik has pointed out, in extensive parts of *through a looking glass,* the relationship between the two projections forms a dynamic exchange of point of view and shot/reverse-angle shots (2001, p. 105). Whereas it is only

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degree of identification and "decentering" at stake in the two different genres. Yet, in the growing body of texts on post-cinema or media installations that fuse these two forms, this dualism continues to be reproduced.

19 Bishop's main argument in this book is that installation art should be studied in terms of the viewing experiences and the different models of the subject it produces, rather than its themes or materials. Thereby Bishop foregrounds the significance of spectatorship as integral to installation art.

20 As argued in the introduction to this essay, if we are to develop a nuanced conception of the spectatorship in post-cinematic art, it is not sufficient to settle with a consideration predominantly of how the spatial, material and technological configuration of a work choreographs the movement and positioning of the spectator. Instead, we have to consider in detail the specific ways in which these elements are organized in relation to what takes place in sound and image.

implied in Scorsese's original scene, a classical conversation setup in effect fully plays out across the space between the two images in Gordon's version. While the first Travis starts the series of aggressive gestures and verbal provocations, the second Travis responds either by mimicking or with an equally provocative gesture and answer, depending on where in the cycle we come in. The sound augments the effect of a dialog as it evolves from being that of a synchronized monolog, via a slight echo to a full-fledged dialog, in which Travis and his reflection alternate in taking the lead.[21]

Ill 2: Douglas Gordon. Through a Looking Glass*, 1999. Two screen video installation, dimensions variable. Installation view Gagosian Gallery, Soho, New York, 1999. From Taxi Driver, 1976, USA. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. © Studio lost but found / Douglas Gordon / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Stuart Tyson. Image courtesy Gagosian Gallery.*

However, for the restoration of the shot/reverse-shot sequence described above to fully take place, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is asked to quite literally "fill in the gap" between the two images, thereby being put in the middle of

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21 Interestingly, in his excerpt, Gordon has omitted the panning shot in *Taxi Driver* that introduces and positions the mirror in diegetic space, which in one sense makes the spatial confusion and aggressive mood of the scene even more profound. Yet, since a reversed version of the mirror image is now in place on the opposite wall, the mirror is in fact no longer needed.

Travis' firing line. Through bodily action such as the turning of the head and the positioning in space, the spectator performs the work otherwise done by conventional continuity editing, that is, the suturing together of the images into a continuous diegesis. This act of "stitching" together the narrative is now displaced from the temporal succession of shots taking place inside the image frame to the spectator who is asked to complete the dialog across the space between the images. While the presence of the spectator is in one sense already acknowledged in Scorsese's original mirror scene through the reflexive, stylistic devices such as jump cuts and spatial disorientation, with Gordon's reconfigurations, here she is also asked to participate as an *embodied* presence in the work. While in one sense it is integral to the very genre of installation art due to its spatial extension, embodiment is here not construed simply by the material configuration or temporal and spatial layout of the work. Rather it is carefully orchestrated through the interaction of these elements with the style and particular succession of the sounds and images of the cinematic material.

Implicated in the exchange between Travis and his Other, yet grappling to find the spatial coordinates for this implication to take place, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is asked to distribute her attention equally between the absorbing images and the surrounding space that simultaneously separates and unites them. As already implied, Gordon's setup can be construed as a meeting of two theoretical accounts of spectatorship, seemingly at odds, each produced by different mediums (technological and artistic) and each opened up by the formal and conceptual qualities of Gordon's work itself. One deals with the specificity of the cinematic material with respect to narrative, (disembodied) vision, and the image. Spectatorship is here assessed in terms of the viewer's visual mastery over the image and identification as construed through narrative "suture."[22] The other foregrounds the "activated" space, presence, and embodiment invited by sculpture and installation. Critically reassessing Michael Fried's rejection of the "theatricality" of minimalism (or as he prefers, "literalist" art), due to its shifting of the viewer's experience from the intrinsic qualities of an art object to the "object in a situation," spectatorship is here construed as a result of the relationship between the material object, its surrounding space, and the viewer's position in it (Fried 1998, pp. 52-55).

In ways both illuminating and problematic, Joanna Lowry addresses the consequences of this conflict between (disembodied) vision and embodiment in Gordon's video works in general (1999). In their merging of cinematic spectatorship with that of installation and video art, we witness an "abdication of a posi-

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22 That is, through conventions for temporal and spatial continuity in vocabulary less psychoanalytically charged.

tion of visual mastery over the image," she claims. Instead of the identificatory models of spectatorship, associated with film theory (apparatus and gaze theory most notably) and classical cinema, video installations establish the spectator as "a kind of performer in the space of the object" based on the notion of "a failure in the optical system at the moment of bodily encounter," the author asserts (Lowry 1999, p. 276). More specifically, she states that the disruption of cinematic identificatory spectatorship, that occurs in video installations is ensured in that the "embodied spectator is forced into literally acting out their engagement with the image," resulting in a heightened attention towards the space beyond the image frame ("beyond the edge of the screen") and towards the technological apparatus (ibid, p. 279).

Lowry's account fittingly describes salient features of Gordon's reconfiguration of Scorsese's scene, most notably the splitting of attention between image and its contextual space. Yet it misses a crucial aspect that underplays the position that the imagery allots to its spectator through its particularly cinematic configuration of time and space. In *through a looking glass*, the spectatorial position is certainly not one defined predominantly by "visual mastery." On the contrary, in the films Gordon chooses to rework into video installations, which range from B-movies and noir films to medical films, fictional as well as factual, vision is not to be trusted, and altered consciousness, strong pathological bodily reactions, and psychic disorder take center stage. *Taxi Driver*, from which Gordon takes his material for *through a looking glass*, is invested specifically in a negotiation of the terms of spectatorship of narrative cinema related to the Lacanian film theory on which Lowry founds her argument. Indeed, in both film and art theory as well as in moving image-based art practice of the 1970s, including that of post-classical cinema, forms of "decentered/decentering" spectatorships, alternative to the identificatory models favored by Hollywood were explored.[23] That the mirror scene epitomizes this historical shift from within the institution of cinema is indeed one of the reasons why Gordon's *through a looking glass* makes such a salient object for analysis of contemporary media spectatorship. Because it treats cinematic spectatorship as a somewhat stable entity, Lowry's analysis is symptomatic of much writing on contemporary post-cinema. In this it demonstrates precisely why it is productive to consider the particular configuration of time and space in the imagery and the resulting position allotted to the spectator. Even though competing with the experience of embodied presence that

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23 In her book on installation art, Claire Bishop suggests that "decentering" is one of two central ideas that underpin the history of installation art's relationship to the viewer ("activation" being the other idea). See Claire Bishop, 2005, *Installation Art. A Critical History*, particularly pp. 11-14 and pp. 82-102.

the installation setup undoubtedly entails, the ways in which the specific imagery of the mirror scene is inscribed in a wider context of moving image history is a crucial aspect of the work.

A problem with Lowry's argument, then, is that it accounts for how and where the image takes place, but not for what takes place in the image or for the specific relationship between what is "inside" and "outside" of it. As previously pointed out, embedded in Scorsese's mirror scene and furthered by Gordon's formal interventions, a disruption of classical continuity and thus of the psychoanalytically-charged spectatorial position of classical cinema is already present, in which the viewer is envisioned as "sutured" into the narrative through devices such as the shot/reverse-shot. Thus, of concern in *through a looking glass* is not, as Lowry states, an abdication of the visual mastery over the image in favor of embodied awareness of what goes on "beyond the edge of the screen"; instead, it is a spatial extension and embodiment of the already deficient visual mastery suggested in the mirror scene. This extension results from the specific dynamic *between* the image and the space "beyond the edge of the screen."[24] Through this merging of on-screen and off-screen space, the spectator is asked to distribute her attention between image and its surrounding space and yet also to reconcile the two, thus joining forces in directing the attention towards the spectator herself.

In *through a looking glass*, then, a spectatorial position emerges that is even more insecure than in Scorsese's original scene, one that is conditioned both by the style and editing already present in the mirror and by the "hybrid" medial situation through which it is reconfigured by Gordon. Already deeply intrinsic to the genre of film noir, the spatial disorientation and confusion that is further radicalized by Scorsese's post-classical editing style and Gordon's reconfiguration expand to include the gallery space and the embodied spectator in it. As one is enfolded between the doubled Travis, the confusion between subject and object, self and Other, projected (self) image and physical presence around which the mirror scene pivots spills over to also include the relationship between the spectator and the work. The space of the fiction and the space in which the spectator is positioned fold into each other, and this is emphasized by the spectator's position quite literally in Travis Bickle's firing line. Obviously, the work's character as an installation thereby works to strengthen rather than destabilize the already precarious spectatorial position present in the cinematic material. However, if we broaden the scope from the highly directed spectatorships, of cinema

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24 The three models she discusses are Michael Fried's discussion of minimalist sculpture and its embodied spectator, Rosalind Krauss's notion of video as a narcissistic medium, and Lacanian psychoanalytical models of cinematic spectatorship (Lowry 1999, p. 279).

and the art gallery to include the everyday viewing experiences of "new" media technologies that the spectator brings into the work, another perspective emerges from which the fundamentally insecure spectatorial position of *through a looking glass* might be seen to be balanced or at least disturbed.

The space of fiction, the time of the spectator

Just as the cinematic material of Gordon's installation entails a spectatorial position that can only be fully acknowledged when considered in relation to the specific conventions of narrative cinema, the medium of video also affects the spectatorship in the work in distinct ways. In addition to the work's spatial doubling and temporal dynamic, which depends on the successive doubling of the number of video frames executed by the artist, of particular relevance here is the spectator's own everyday experiences with consumer video technology and its capacity to intervene in the temporal flow of narrative cinema.[25]

Anne Friedberg and Laura Mulvey have both critically revised aspects of what Linda Williams has called the "gaze theories" that are also addressed by Lowry. A turning point for Friedberg and Mulvey is how video's capacity for time shifting has wide-ranging implications for the experience of narrative cinema (Friedberg 1995). Importantly, the consequences of this time-shifting capacity are considered in terms of increased interactivity and as a displacement of control from the filmic object to the spectator. An implication of this increased control over the cinematic object, which is emphasized by both Mulvey and Friedberg, is that it breaks the spell of classical diegesis. Both see the concepts of repetition and return as particularly crucial for this process, presenting them together almost as a paradigmatic figure for the theorized video spectatorship, (ibid. p. 8; Friedberg 1995, p. 61 and pp. 74-76). Mulvey notes, for instance, that the DVD chapters, the possibility of instantly skipping or returning to a certain segment, the many temporal modes available on the DVD player, and the extra-diegetic material often included with DVD releases all contribute to the fragmentation and reordering of linear narrative (ibid. pp. 27). Video spectatorship thus allows for control of the temporal dimension of cinema in an unprecedented manner. However, this notion of an empowered spectator in control of the film stands in stark contrast to the almost disempowered and insecure spectatorial

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25 In keeping with the underlying ecological perspective announced in the introduction, the relations between film and video are examined here with respect to how the introduction of a new medium affects the existing media and their functions.

position – the lack of a secure place to stand – foregrounded in Scorsese's mirror scene and advanced by Gordon's reconfiguration of it.

It is productive to conceive of this situation as a meeting between cinema space and video time. Throughout the preceding discussion of *through a looking glass*, space and the spectator's position in it was a key concern – whether it is the diegetic space of *Taxi Driver* or the physical space of the gallery. Yet, as previously noted, Gordon's temporal doubling of a number of video frames is crucial for the spatial dynamic between the two projections to fully unfold. To establish this dynamic relationship, the two individual image tracks are constantly repeated (as we remember, the cycle starts all over again approximately every hour). Thus, within the one-hour cycle of Gordon's work, each individual projection is marked precisely by the "repetition and return" that Mulvey (2006, p. 8) and Friedberg (1995, p. 76) find so crucial for the new, interactive spectatorship, instigated by video.[26] In addition, because the work is looped in a structure integral to the work, the one-hour cycle in itself is also continuously repeated. The work thus reiterates the series of repetitions that are present in the sampled scene itself, as Travis Bickle asks his mirror image over and over again, "Are you talkin' to me?" On several levels, a repetitive yet dynamic structure marks the temporal relationship between the two image tracks of *through a looking glass*. Mulvey finds that these repetitions and delays contribute to the fragmentation "from linear narrative into favorite moments or scenes," by which the spectator "is able to hold on to, to possess, the previously elusive image," resulting in what she calls a possessive spectator (ibid. p. 161). In this sense, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is invited to scrutinize De Niro's gestures, movements, actions, and appearance in far more detail than would have been possible if the film had proceeded in a regular forward flow.

If we follow Mulvey, this process simultaneously both exaggerates and disempowers the iconic status of the star and shifts the power relation between film and spectator. Through the detailed scrutiny of the star's gestures and performance, the time of the film's registration (indexical time), displaces or at least comes to coexist with the narrative time of the fiction, allowing the star's extra-diegetic persona to shine through the screen. Thus, "disbelief is no longer suspended, 'reality' takes over the scene" and the star's "extra-diegetic presence intrudes from outside the scene and off-screen" (ibid. p. 173). In *through a looking glass,* we consider the actor's strikingly young face, listen to the exact phrasing of the familiar question, try to remember when we first watched the film (if we

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26 Friedberg describes the home video viewer as one who "is always able to repeat, replay, and return," while Mulvey states for instance that "[r]eturn and repetition necessarily involve interrupting the flow of film, delaying its progress, and, in the process, discovering the cinema's complex relation to time."

ever did), thereby emphasizing De Niro's star persona and the mirror scene's status as fetish object. However, as Mulvey has it, filtered through the medium of video, single scenes are not simply elevated but simultaneously potentially "subordinated to manipulation and possession," that is, they become objects of the spectator's fascinated control. This struggle between the experience of control and that of fascinated immersion plays out in *through a looking glass* in a very particular way.

The experience of manipulation and control must here be understood predominantly as part of the experiential repertoire of contemporary media spectatorship that Gordon's work activates. Indeed, the spectator of *through a looking glass* is not herself in control or possession of the temporal flow of Scorsese's mirror scene as she would be if she were watching Scorsese's film on DVD in her own living room; the true control of the film object is obviously reserved for the artist. Nonetheless, Gordon's use of video technology is here so closely associated with – and even originates from – the regular viewer's everyday experiences of consumer technology media spectatorship, that it is illuminating to consider the work in this regard; of concern in the present essay is precisely how the medium of video serves to remediate the spectatorship embedded in Scorsese's mirror scene, both through its manifestation as art video installation and in its capacity as everyday consumer technology. As Amy Taubin has pointed out, the fascination for the mirror scene as fetish object can be seen, at least in part, as "a response to the fetishism inherent in the scene itself" (2000, p. 56).[27] The spectator's video-instigated temporal control over both the scene and the star in a sense thus repeats the very drama of the mirror scene, where Travis, by challenging his reflection in the mirror, "disavows its status as an image, endowing it with autonomous powers" and "turns his reflection into an opponent in order to prove to himself that he's the better man" (Taubin 2000, pp. 56-58). One can say, somewhat speculatively, that this fetishistic control of the image, which is inherent in the mirror scene itself, is taken to a new level through the video-enabled repetitions of Gordon's work.

There is another crucial reason why the temporal repetition of the mirror scene alters the (already interrupted) spectatorship embedded in the scene to a different degree than does its reconfiguration into a spatial installation. While the diegetic space of the mirror scene through Gordon's reconfigurations conflates with the physical space of the gallery, the diegetic time of the scene is displaced by, or at least alternates with, its indexical time. While the former is an operation

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27 Taubin here relies on a definition of fetishism presented by Mulvey (1996): "Fetishism, broadly speaking, involves the attribution of self-sufficiency and autonomous powers to a manifestly man-derived object."

of synthesis or union between diegetic and extra-diegetic space, the latter is an operation of splitting between diegetic and extra-diegetic time. It is precisely this curious combination of (cinematic) spatial expansion and (video instigated) temporal splitting that ultimately defines the spectatorship, of Gordon's work, as it simultaneously serves to enhance the threatened and insecure spectatorial position embedded in the mirror scene and to evoke the spectatorial experience of some control over this fetishized object of film history.

Thus, Gordon's work employs the video medium as a tool to expand, examine, and revisit elements already inherent in its cinematic origin, Scorsese's iconic mirror scene. When seen through the filter of consumer video spectatorship, then, Gordon's use of video moderates the immersive experience of the insecure spectatorial position enhanced by Gordon's spatial expansion of Scorsese's scene into an installation. Video's capacity for temporal reconfiguration and disruption of the narrative flow is central here. While the true control of the film's flow is of course reserved for the artist, the new power of the spectator over the film is nonetheless evoked as a crucial backdrop for the accidental spectator's experience of Gordon's work. From this perspective, the work reflects on the intricate and complex relationship between the hands-on-engagement with and struggle for control over media material and technologies that is part of contemporary everyday life on the one hand, and the experience of being uncontrollably surrounded and addressed by a mediascape to which there is no clearly demarcated "outside" on the other.

Concluding remarks: Well, I'm the only one here …

The three different dimensions of media that organize this essay each condition the spectatorial position of *through a looking glass* in specific ways, which in turn have consequences for conceptions of the human/media relation more generally. First, considering the medial dimension of the imagery alone, we saw that Scorsese's original mirror scene puts the spectator in a highly insecure relation to the protagonist and the action on the screen. Our perspective jumps between disparate views of Travis, and does not allow us a clearly defined position in diegetic space. Scorsese's breaks with classical continuity editing and the overall post-classical style of *Taxi Driver* effectively frustrate any such possibility, resulting in a confused experience of the relationship between self and surroundings for Travis as well as the spectator (the separation between the life-world of the spectator and the narrative world of cinema is difficult to maintain). In its merging of subjective and objective perspective and by destabilizing the relationship between the life-world of the spectator and the fictional world of the

film, the mirror scene epitomizes the emergence of a historically "new" model for cinematic spectatorship in narrative cinema.[28]

Second, looking at the medial dimension of what I called situated technology (i.e. technology as employed in a specific situation), both the formal operations carried out by Gordon and his use of video add another layer of complexity to the spectatorial position. Expanding the scene to a dual-screen video installation, Gordon takes as his starting point the very terms of the cinematic spectatorship, embedded in the mirror scene. Due to the oppositely projected images, the spectator is required to bodily engage with the work by turning her head and shifting her view between the two versions of Travis. Whereas cinematic spectatorship has predominantly been theorized as a product of vision and as confined to (mastery and ownership of) the visual field, Gordon's doubling of the scene extends the precarious spectatorial position installed in the mirror scene (in which mastery of the visual field is frustrated) to also contain the spatial field by including the embodied position of the spectator in the physical gallery space. The confused demarcation between self and surroundings, between the life-world of the spectator and the fictional world of the film that was introduced in Scorsese's film is advanced yet another turn in Gordon's work, where any potential experience of "mastery" of both the visual and the spatial field is challenged. Yet, the spectatorial possibility for some sense of control is opened up by the conception of video (and various other media platforms with it) as a "new" and empowering medium that allows the media user to virtually handle, hold and intervene in the heavily codified image flow of narrative cinema. Or differently put: one can let one's own time and space dictate that of the media, rather than the other way around. Whereas indeed no such possibility exists for the viewer of Gordon's work, the specific use of situated media technology here nonetheless implies this liberatory sense of empowerment and control over media material and processes as one (indeed often unrealized) potential of contemporary media spectatorship.

Third, the last medial dimension of my tripartite approach is the notion of mediasphere, of which the two other medial dimensions of imagery and situated technology are constitutive parts. More concretely, the mediasphere is conjured up in two ways: as the general background of moving image culture and history from which the specific cinematic scene from Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* is isolated and reflects back upon; and through Gordon's spatial extension of the scene into a three-dimensional installation, which addresses the presence of the mobile spectator and enfolds her into the continuously shifting exchange of threats be-

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28   *Taxi Driver*'s postclassical style has been described for instance as amounting to a "realignment of the relationship between the audience and film." Robert Philip Kolker, 1988, *A Cinema of Loneliness, Penn, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman*.

tween the two versions of Travis. From this perspective, *through a looking glass* stages a media ecological system on a micro level. It foregrounds the relation between cinema, digital video and installation, each medium in turn comprising a distinct system of its own; it evokes the experience of an extended and limitless field that integrates the visual and spatial; and it puts the spectator in a precarious position right at its center, struggling for a sense of "mastery" over the surrounding field and striving to find her bearings in it.

At stake in my approach here is ultimately the question of how our interactions with other "virtual" and ever-changing times and spaces – fictional or not – are integrated into the flow of our everyday practice and experience. From this perspective, my analysis of the spectatorial position in *through a looking glass* opens up to a more general discussion of how the present mediasphere addresses and constructs its subjects at the very intersection between image and space, visuality and embodiment in arenas far removed from the white cube or black box, as well. One example is provided by recent studies of the role of moving image screens in shopping malls, which indicate that cinematic ideals of spectatorship, are thematically and structurally encoded in the space of the shopping malls (Bolin 2004). In her study of Internet spectatorship, Michele White critically interrogates various forms of visual and textual representations of, in her words, an "active and empowered Internet 'user,' who is in control over the interface, situated within the screen and moves actively within the Internet 'space'" (2006, p. 1). White argues in contrast that Internet spectatorship is shaped just at the intersection between looking on (rather than "using") and the embodied positions and identities of spectators, and that passivity as well as regulation and structuring of the subject is as decisive for Internet spectatorship as are the liberatory notions of an active "user." Lisa Parks, discussing the question of digital mobility in relation to the interface of the World Wide Web, considers how different web applications and websites *place* the user in multiple senses (2004). She analyzes software that enables visualization of users' electronic, virtual movement in concrete, spatial terms – for instance by specifying the number of hops taken between IP addresses, and the full IP addresses, node names, city locations, time zones and network ownership through which data "moves" when a user navigates from one point to another. This form of visualization counters the effacing of the infrastructure through which data moves in most web interfaces, and grounds the notion of "free" and nomadic web navigation in material geography. Thereby these visualization applications further a form of technological literacy, she argues (2004).

These brief examples focus particularly on the intersection of the spatial and visual. Being local variations of the human/technology relation that differ greatly from Gordon's work in significant ways, it is nonetheless instructive to see these

brief examples as being part of a continuum of contemporary media spectatorship, that also includes post-cinema art. Hence, as suggested by these examples, whereas contemporary media spectatorship to some extent embraces the ideology of control and individualized power, as in any complex system, this ideology is constantly challenged through the "forces of flux, transience and unmanageability" that make up the mediasphere.[29] Are you talking to *me*? Indeed, Travis Bickle's near-paranoid conception of his surroundings can stand as an apposite summation of the deeply ambivalent spectatorship of post-cinema art and contemporary media more generally.

In a wider perspective, the increased reflection in current post-cinema art on processes and events that take place in the media should be seen as a working through, as well as a contribution to, mediatization, the process by which, in Roger Silverstone's words, "The media are seen to be increasingly central as defining the terms in which the global citizen goes about his or her everyday life as well as increasingly central to the political culture within which that everyday life is in turn conducted" (Silverstone 2005, p. 190). In this process, "the media are becoming a second order paramount reality" that does not replace but runs through the "experiential world, dialectically engaged with it, eternally intertwined." (Silverstone 2002, p. 763). By distinguishing between three different dimensions of the media as well as their manifestations in recent media installations or post-cinema art – imagery, technology, and media sphere – we may grasp some of the complexity in which this intertwining of the media and the experiential world is worked through and addressed in contemporary art production.

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29 Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy make this point to describe the dialectic relationship between order and disorder integral to the experience of what they call MediaSpace. "Introduction" in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Couldry and McCarthy, 2004, p. 3.

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Doing Media Aesthetics:
The Case of Alice Miceli's *88 from 14.000*

Liv Hausken

Alice Miceli's video installation *88 from 14.000* (2004) is a 56-minute loop-projected digital video, presenting 88 black-and-white portrait photographs of victims from the Cambodian Tuol Sleng death camp known as S-21. The 88 portraits are projected on a screen of falling sand. This projection was recorded on video and then re-projected onto a screen hanging from the ceiling, while a rather loud track of ambient sound was edited in synch with each change of photographic projection. The portraits are shown one by one, at irregular intervals of time. Confronted with this art work, the first thing that struck me had nothing to do with art as such, or video. It didn't even concern the way a selection of prisoner portraits from Pol Pot's death camp has been de-contextualized and re-contextualized in the Western art world. Rather, my first reaction had to do with the screen of falling sand displaying the 88 photographs. This screen of falling sand seemed to demonstrate, in a powerful and disturbing way, the materiality of the photographs. Rather than neglect this subjective experience and the impact that such experiences normally have on perception, not only in everyday life but also in research, I will take it for what it is. Without generalizing it as an experience, I will use it as a preliminary tool, a first step towards a qualified research question. This subjective stance leads me to ask the following questions: What do we know about the mediation of photographs that is normally taken for granted, unthematized, in our contemporary culture in general and in the theoretical fields of media and photography in particular? What can Miceli's video installation help us to see and conceptualize in a more qualified manner? These are my initial questions as I sketch an investigation of the video installation *88 from 14.000* in terms of what it has to say about mediating photographs. The subject at hand is also to try out the idea of using the case study as a media aesthetic strategy. Throughout the text, I will demonstrate a media aesthetic perspective that foregrounds the case study as a research strategy, based on the belief that the best way to develop and discuss concepts and conceptions are through theoretically reflected analyses of specific phenomena. The aim of this chapter is therefore threefold: first to sketch an analysis of *88 from 14.000*; second, through this analysis of Miceli's video installation*,* to contribute to the theoretical reflection on photography and mediation; and third, to further develop, both theoretically and methodologically, the emerging field of media aesthetics.

Certain aspects of contemporary phenomenology inspire the research strategy I will employ here, most important of which is the phenomenological mode of *description*.[1] Also relevant is what is often termed the *variational method*, to which I will return during the analysis. As in contemporary phenomenology, a certain initial weighting occurs that has been characterized as radically empirical, in the sense that what is first dealt with is what is taken to be the experience. As Don Ihde pointed out in 1977 in his influential introductory book on phenomenological methodology, *Experimental Phenomenology*, "such a radical empirical beginning, while not lacking a definitional dimension, stands in contrast to other initial choices of theory […]" (Ihde [1977] 1979, pp. 30-31). Whereas, for example, "an axiomatic-constructive theory begins with a series of definitions and formal relations prior to investigation," phenomenology, in contrast, "begins with a kind of empirical observation directed at the whole field of possible experiential phenomena […] Thus, its first methodological moves seek to circumvent certain kinds of predefinitions" (ibid, p. 31). The challenge is to pay attention to what seems to be taken for granted in a certain perception, that is, the sense of what is given. This does not imply that all givenness disappears, but rather, that the significance of the given is transformed.

So far, the media aesthetic reserach strategy that I am unfolding here goes hand in hand with contemporary phenomenology. However, in contrast to phenomenology, the purpose here is not to elicit structures or invariant constituents of a particular phenomenon, but rather to confront the culturally ignored or unthematized aspects of a particular phenomenon with theoretical conceptions in the aesthetic field. During the analysis of a particular object of experience, as, for example, with Miceli's *88 from 14.000*, this ongoing confrontation implies a certain amount of theoretical choice. The ideal for me would be to make these choices as explicit as possible during the process of reflection, both to be able to extract the theoretical conclusions that can be drawn, and to make it possible for the reader to retrace my route, question my choices and thereafter contest (or agree with) my conclusions.[2]

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1 The phenomenological perspective employed here is particularly inspired by the philosophies of Paul Ricoeur and Don Ihde. Among the basic insights from Ricoeur are his concepts of understanding and self-understanding as symbolically mediated (see for instance Ricoeur 1984 and 1995). Ideas from Ihde will be presented throughout the text.

2 Different parts of this chapter have been presented as papers at the *Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference* in Chicago, March 2007 (later published as an exhibition essay "The Materiality of Mediation – the Immateriality of Photography" during the exhibition of Miceli's work at Gallery Meulensteen, New York, U.S.A. from January 13 through February 19, 2011); at the *5th Annual Meeting of the Nordic Network for the History and Aesthetics of Photography* in Paris, September 2007; at the *Thinking Media Aesthetics* conference in Oslo, October 2007; and finally at the international seminar *Ghostly Media* in Oslo, February 2008, in relation to the art exhibition *Ghost in the Machine*, February 8 – March 16, 2008.

Initial reflections: what is well known

Information: Alice Miceli's work *88 from 14.000* was first presented in 2004 in São Paulo, where it was nominated for the 4th Sergio Motta Art and Technology Award in 2004. In 2005, the work was shown at several major occasions such as the *New York Independent Film and Video Festival* and the *Basics – transmediale.05* exhibition (HKW, Berlin, Germany) where it was also nominated for an award.[3] The work has been shown at art festivals in Europe and in South America, as well as in collective art exhibitions such as the intuitively suitably titled *On Disappearance. Loss of World; Escaping the World,*[4] in Dortmund, Germany (2005), here illustrated by a photograph of a view of the installation.[5]

Ill 1: Alice Miceli, BR: 88 from 14.000*, 2004, On Disappearance. Loss of World; Escaping the World, HMKV at PHONIX Halle, 2005. © Thomas Wucherpfennig.*

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3   An initial version was presented in Rio in 2004 in a large group show, but the finished version premiered in São Paulo at the end of 2004 (personal conversation with the artist by email, February 5 2009).

4   *Vom Verschwinden. Weltverluste und Weltfluchten.*

5   Thanks to Arild Fetveit for drawing my attention to this art work.

A brief explanatory text about the origin of these photographs is presented in the video. A similarly brief text is also included in the festival program and is presented on the gallery walls next to this video installation, giving information about the production of the artwork and the circumstances under which these photographic images were produced. The explanatory text about the art work says that "Falling sand is used as a projection screen for portraits (b & w photographs) of executed Cambodian prisoners and the duration of the sand falling represents the time between the imprisonment and the execution of each prisoner, respectively."[6] The portraits are said to be of prisoners in a Cambodian death camp during the regime of the Khmer Rouge., from April 1975 to February 1979. The information given here is not very rich, but it may work as a reminder for those who know, or at least have heard of, this particular historical event.

Recognition: The Khmer Rouge. genocide is familiar to many in the West. It has been exceptionally well documented, both in written files and in photographic images (see Chandler 1999).[7] The stories about the Khmer Rouge. genocide in Cambodia are known from the news and from feature and documentary films, like Roland Joffé's feature film *The Killing Fields* (1984) and Rithy Panh's documentary film *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2002). The sites commonly called the Killing Fields are today a top tourist attraction in the country. The international tribunal investigating the crimes committed by Pol Pot and other Khmer Rouge leaders, as well as the trials currently being conducted in Cambodia (2009) and on several earlier occasions, serve as reminders of this widely recognized genocide in recent history.[8]

Even the photographic *portraits* are known in the West. One hundred of the images form a separate collection that has been circulating throughout Europe and the Americas by way of a range of different channels.[9] Some of the portraits

6   See http://www.transmediale.de/05/page/detail/detail.0.projects.203.2.html. See also *Hartware MedienKunstVerein*, http://www.hmkv.de/dyn/e_archive_artist/detail.php?nr=612&rubric=53 [last checked November 6, 2009]

7   Many commentators have underlined this. Chandler discusses it in several places in the book, for instance, on pp. 6-7 and p. 49.

8   The current trial started March 30, 2009. For full coverage of the earlier trials, see *Phnom Penh Post*, April 13-29, 2000 (see Ly 2003 p. 67n2). For tribunal news, see also information on the Khmer Rouge Genocide Tribunal at the Yale University ran Cambodian Genocide Program at http://ww.yale.edu/cgp/news.html [last checked, November 3. 2009].

9   In 1993, two US photographers, Chris Riley and Douglas Niven, secured permission from the Cambodian government and formed a small nonprofit organization called the Photo Archive Group to raise money to clean, catalog, and make contact prints of the existing negatives, close to 6,000 in all. In exchange for their work, Riley and Niven were given the rights to one hundred images and permission to print six sets of these images to exhibit outside Cambodia, and to produce a book to recover some of the costs of the preservation project. The book, called *The*

have been presented in documentary films like Rithy Panh's *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2002)[10] mentioned above, while a few of the portraits are known as photographic prints from exhibitions in art galleries in Europe and the United States, such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1997).[11]

Reflection: As with the video installation, the presentation of these photographic silver prints in programs and on gallery walls includes a brief explanation about the circumstances for their production. These images were produced as prisoner portraits – standardized portraits of criminal inmates normally used for disciplinary effect and legitimized by the need in modern societies for identification and future surveillance of convicted criminals.[12] Yet, the purpose of prisoner portraits in a death camp is not quite obvious: In an article on the MoMA exhibition of the photographic prints, Lindsay French claims that the S-21 prisoners were photographed upon intake "In a demonstration of administrative thoroughness uncharacteristic of the Khmer Rouge". (French 2002, p. 131). In his book *Voices from S-21*, David Chandler also suggests other possible explanations, among them the terrorized desire of the prison staff to prove that their work had been carried out with extreme care (Chandler 1999, pp. 49-51 and 106-109. See also French 2002, p. 152n2). From the perspective of the Khmer Rouge, the existence of these prisoner portraits might also be connected to the upper-level party's intention to create documentation for a history of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, CPK, which was in fact never written (see Chandler 1999, p. 50).

Killing Fields (1996), contains 78 of the hundred images. The collection is often referred to as the "Facing Death" exhibition (see French 2002 p. 134) and was published in its entirety as a single topic issue of *Photographers International* in 1995.

10 This is briefly discussed in Guerin and Hallas 2007 p. 20n51.

11 *Photographs from S-21 1975-79*, MoMA NY, May 15 – October 7, 1997, http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/archives_exhibition_history_list#1990 [last checked November 5, 2009]. The Ansel Adams Center for Photography in San Francisco, the Photographic Resource Center in Boston, the Museum of Design in Zurich, Museet for Fotokunst in Odense (Denmark), the Australian Center for Photography in Sydney, and the Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie in Arles, among others, have exhibited some or all of the hundred images of the Riley and Niven collection (see, for instance, French 2002, pp. 133-134).

12 The picture format of these prisoner portraits are less standardized than was common at the time in other places in the world, but there is no doubt that they belong to the genre of the police portrait.

Ill. 2: One of the 22 photos from the exhibition Photographs from S-21: 1975-1979 *at MoMa,*
NY May 15–Sept 30, 1997. Ein, Nhem (b. 1959): Untitled (prisoner #3 of the Khmer Rouge.;
young boy), 1975-79. Printed by Photo Archive Group, 1994. New York, Museum of Modern
Art (MoMA). Gelatin silver print, 10 5/16 x 10 3/8' (26.2 x 26.3 cm). Arthur M. Bullowa Fund
and Geraldine Murphy Fund. Acc. n.: 678.19e95.© 2013. Digital image, The Museum of
Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

This variety of explanations for the very existence of these portraits also reflects
the complexity in how we must expect them to have been perceived at the time
of their production. From an official Khmer Rouge. perspective, these prisoner
portraits have presumably been regarded as an ordinary function of incarceration.

166

The prison staff at S-21, however, most likely experienced a tension between the criminal body and the innocent victim in these prisoner portraits, given that they, as Chandler and others have documented, were constantly at risk of being accused of political betrayal, imprisoned on the same terms as the inmates, and tortured and killed by their former colleagues.[13] After the fall of the Khmer Rouge, it seems possible to perceive this tension as transformed into a less tense, but doubly layered portrait of victims: Since it was now *im*possible to look at these images as portraits of suspected criminals, the survivors[14] and the public are somehow forced to look at them not only as victims of a crime, but of a crime that criminalized the victims.

Exhibiting these portraits also transforms the way they may be perceived. Some of the portraits have been exhibited in art galleries, such as the MoMA in 1997, which was one of the first exhibitions to introduce the Tuol Sleng prints to the art world. But this photographic material had already been exhibited at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, where it can still be seen, located in the very same rooms where prisoners were tortured.[15] The Cambodian Genocide Project (run by Yale University to help Cambodians identify missing relatives) has also loaded these images on the Web.[16] They are, in other words, on display in several places. However, I will suggest that *exhibiting* this material in a museum or gallery, be it inside or outside of the art scene, has an emotional and cognitive impact upon the portraits that the database of the Cambodian Genocide Project does not have, or has only to a certain degree: Exhibiting these prisoner portraits seems to unsettle the well-known duality between the honorific and the repressive in the portrait genre (see, for instance, Sekula 1986, p. 6). The head-on pose of the police portrait normally signals cultural subordination, in contrast to the cultivated asymmetries of the aristocratic posture one might find in a commissioned portrait. The exhibitions of photographs from this prisoner portrait archive transform the repressive portraits of the criminal into a twisted version of the honorific portrait of the bourgeois subject: the honorific victim.

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13 Records with confessions from 79 former workers (interrogators, document workers, guards) were found in the S-21 archive. These also include entry and execution records (see Chandler 1999, p. 11). If negatives also exist of the prisoner portraits at the Tuol Sleng Museum, their portraits may be included in Miceli's video installation.

14 There are only seven known survivors among the prisoners in this camp, but among survivors, I would also include prison staff because of the constant threat they were facing (see above).

15 Vietnam invaded Cambodia in 1979 and converted the Tuol Sleng into a museum documenting the Khmer Rouge genocide.

16 See the CGP Tuol Sleng Image Database (CTS) at Yale University. http://www.yale.edu/cgp/ [last checked, February 6. 2009].

It is *these* images that are incorporated in Miceli's video installation.

With such strong and overwhelming material as the Tuol Sleng prisoner portraits, it may seem rather provocative to take the impression of the materiality of photographs as a point of departure for analysis. However, I will explore how the initial experience of a work may open a path into the conditions for its complexity. What are the cultural and theoretical conditions for such a first impression of the work? What is taken for granted here? And how do both concepts and conceptually unrecognized assumptions about photography and mediation influence the appearance of the Tuol Sleng material in Miceli's work?

Point of departure: unusual materiality

A screen of falling sand is rather unusual for displaying photographs. Just as we easily neglect the conventional and what we take for granted, we normally notice the unusual and the unexpected. The sand is even demonstrative in its materiality. It is normally considered to be dusty, incoherent, detached, loose, and in this case also streaming, flapping; it is everything we may associate with matter without form or with form transformed into matter. Even if the sand is video-recorded and therefore not present as such in the gallery, it calls attention to itself as an important aspect of the materiality of the mediation of these photographs, to its heaviness as it flows down and the sound as it hits the ground, to the machinic regulation of its screen-like appearance, to the impression of movement in the static images, and to the way that the sound of the sand is edited in synch with the change of images so that the individual portraits are slightly marked as such.[17]

Arguably, all remediation reinforces the awareness of the material quality of the display. As Jane Connarty underlines in her introduction to a collection of essays about the role of the archive within contemporary artists' film and video, "Across much found footage work there is also a heightened awareness of the medium and a fascination with its material qualities" (2006, p. 9). I will nevertheless suggest that remediations of photographs are often not even considered to be remediations at all, unless they involve a very basic focus on, or alterations of, their material qualities: their stillness must be contrasted with movement, their muteness with sound. Otherwise, photographs seem to have a tendency to disappear into their referents, inviting a pointing gesture on the part of the viewer towards the image as an effect of something physically existing in front of the

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17 The video was made take-by-take, portrait-by-portrait. What we hear is the ambient sound for each shot. It is actually the combination of the sounds of an old noisy slide projector running, a video camera running, and the machine of falling sand working. (Thanks to Alice Miceli for this information, email correspondence February 5, 2009).

camera at the moment of exposure. This calls for the viewer to overlook the material basis on which the image appears, the picture as a physical object. Even for the professional viewer, there are few exceptions to this tendency. These are mainly concerned with the digitization of analog, archival material (among the most notable, Edwards and Hart 2004). Truly, the new interest in print culture and imaging techniques has incorporated photographic reproduction techniques, but given the interest in print rather than photography, the photographic print is here normally compared to other printing systems rather than to other media of display, such as the computer screen.[18] Even the idea of digital image technology as implying a dematerialization of photography has been less concerned with changes in the ways photographs are displayed (be it on paper or screen) than with how the photographic information is produced and stored. This seems to imply that the conception of the materiality of the analog photograph has less to do with the paper on which it has most often been displayed than with the idea of the materiality of the photographic trace. The popular imagination of digital technology as dematerialization of information neglects not only the materiality of the encoded files, but also the materiality of the image as displayed. As Johanna Drucker has argued, "The existence of the image depends heavily on the display, the coming into matter, in the very real material sense of pixels on the screen" (Drucker 2001 p. 144. Cf also Paul 2007, p. 252). The unusual and demonstrative materiality of the sand in Miceli's work makes it difficult to ignore the materiality of the photographic images as displayed.

By attesting that a screen of falling sand can mediate photographs, this video installation seems to demonstrate that a medium does not exist *per se*, but many kinds of phenomena may execute a mediating function. More specifically, it also reminds the viewer of the material heterogeneity of photographs, that photographs can be displayed on paper and celluloid, on a slide projection screen or a computer screen, or on surfaces not previously engaged or employed as screens. Furthermore, it suggests two rather abstract conceptions of photography: photography as an idea and the virtuality of certain photographic images.

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18   See, for instance, Richard Benson's comprehensive work *The Printed Picture* (2008), which traces the changing technology of picture-making from the Renaissance to the present, focusing on the vital role of images in multiple copies. The book surveys printing techniques before the invention of photography, the photographic processes that began to appear in the early nineteenth century, the marriage of printing and photography, and the rapidly evolving digital printing systems of our time, like inkjet prints and digital chromogenic prints.

Theoretical implications: photography as an idea

Implied in the reflections above on how the screen of falling sand seems to demonstrate the materiality of photographs and the material heterogeneity of photographs, photography appears to be an *idea*, a concept or an ideal phenomenon. This may be contrasted to the often-defended theoretical position in the research field of photography that photography as such does not exist or, alternatively, that it is not worth talking about it. The work of John Tagg entertains such a position.

During the last thirty years or so, one of the most common refrains in the songs of photographic research is a line saying that there is no such thing as photography, only photographs. In his 1988 collection of essays *The Burden of Representation*, John Tagg proclaims (twice) the still today very often-quoted view that:

> Photography as such has no identity. Its status as a technology varies with the power relations that invest it. Its nature as a practice depends on the institutions and agents that define it and set it to work. Its function as a mode of cultural production is tied to definite conditions of existence, and its products are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have. Its history has no unity. It is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces. It is this field we must study, not photography as such (Tagg 1988, p. 63 and p. 118).

Tagg confirms this view both in his 1992 collection of essays *Grounds of Dispute* and in *The Disciplinary Frame* from 2009.[19] The subtitle of Tagg's 1988 collection of texts, *Essays on Photographies and Histories*, indicates that not only is there no such thing as photography, neither can there be a uniform history of photographs. The only thing that exists are photographies and histories, both in the plural. The whole question of finding photography's nature is itself considered misguided from the beginning.

Tagg is obviously right when he argues that photography is a heterogeneous phenomenon. Even in one single, though complex, instance like the video installation of Alice Miceli, photography seems to come to the fore as a heterogeneous phenomenon. In this work, a variety of photographic *practices* are indicated by the definition and redefinition of practices along the way from prisoner portraits to art material. Projected on the screen of falling sand and displayed in a video installation, these images work as art. For some viewers, these images have already attained an art function through the exhibition of photographic prints in art galleries. The prisoner portraits included in Miceli's video also serve different informational and documentary functions in the varying contexts in which they appear: their documentary functions in the Tuol Sleng museum in Cambodia are different from the functions they serve in the Cambodian Genocide Project on

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19   See 1992, p. 143, and 2009, see for instance the introduction.

the Web. These documentary functions are again different from those given by the variety of documentary settings like newspapers, magazines and books from which some of these images are well known in the West, not to mention the intended documentary function for the upper-level party's history of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. In addition to these two categories of function, the art and the documentary, we may also add the function these images served in the context in which they were produced; the disciplinary function of prisoner portraits for the inmates, the prison staff and the Pol Pot regime as a whole. We may call this the original administrative and psychological functions of these images.

Alice Miceli's use of prisoner portraits from the S-21 archive in her video installation demonstrates, as we can see, a variety of photographic practices and functions. In accordance with Tagg's argument, these photographs are also heterogeneous as far as what makes them *meaningful*. The different practices indicate different possibilities for interpretation. The same goes for different types of audiences, as may be briefly illustrated by the difference between Cambodians and non-Cambodians: the first category seeing images from their own history, some even recognizing someone they know, and the other category seeing images of cruelty and injustice somewhere else in the world – images of others. [20]

As to the heterogeneity of *technology* in Tagg's argument, the photographic images in Miceli's installation indicate a technical transformation from analog photographs in the original archive to digital video when displayed as part of Miceli's art work. The work may also seem to point towards all the other technical differences involved in the different kinds of storage and exhibition of these photographic images as they have traveled between places and situations, be it the storage of the negative, analog material in the Tuol Sleng archive, the digital storage in the Yale archive, the images professionally printed on silver emulsion on display at MoMA, or the low quality print in a newspaper. There is a huge variation of practices and functions, meanings and experiences, and techniques and technologies involved in this example. Nevertheless, I will argue that in all these cases, we are in some way or another still talking about photography.

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20 In "Exhibiting Terror," Lindsay French discusses important differences between various versions of the "Facing Death" exhibition when it comes to how they have dealt with these two categories of audiences, the Cambodians and the non-Cambodians (French 2002 pp. 146-148). The importance of understanding these differences may be illustrated by an example from Boston: The Photographic Resource Center of Boston invited groups of Cambodians to visit the exhibition. During one of these group visits, a woman discovered her husband's portrait among the photographs on the wall. She had not seen him for 20 years and did not know for sure that he was dead. Incidents like this clearly demonstrate the importance of understanding the significance of these images for a Cambodian audience (see French 2002, p. 148).

Rather than Tagg's conclusion that we should not study "photography as such," I will argue that photography should be seen as an idea embedded in history: changing technologies, practices and experiences constitute it. Photographs can neither be *reduced to* nor *deduced from* this idea. However, this does not imply that one cannot study photography as such. Rather, it indicates that the ideal phenomenon cannot be discussed in isolation from the theoretical landscape of which it is a part, as well as the way in which it appears to be relevant for actual, historically and culturally situated photographs.

Theoretical implications: virtual images

It has been argued that the mere act of re-presenting recycled visual material draws attention to its status as an image. In his book *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage Films* (1993), William C. Wees argues that,

> Whatever the filmmaker may do to them – including nothing more than reproduce them exactly as he or she has found them – recycled images call attention to themselves as images, as products of the image producing industries of film and television, and therefore as pieces of the vast and intricate mosaic of information, entertainment, and persuasion that constitute the media saturated environment of modern – or many would say postmodern – life (Wees 1993, p. 32, cf also Connarty 2006, p. 10).

As recycled images, the prisoner portraits in Miceli's video installation call attention to themselves as images. They are well known as images in the media-saturated environment of modern life, as products of the image-producing industries of televised news, press photography, documentary film, feature film, and art. Their material heterogeneity, also underlined by the recycling or remediation of the photographic images in this work, may also give the impression that photographic images may exist without – or independent of – their display. Well-known photographs seem to imply an idea of a *virtual* image – ideal, abstracted, displayable. Hence, I will argue that photographs do not exist without coming into matter *once.* Distinguishing pictures from images, photographs should be considered as pictures. They are embedded in a particular medium that enables them to be perceived by the senses. Once a photograph has been displayed, all sorts of remediation and other representations produce a sense of a pure image independent of these iterations (the different pictures). It is as if the portraits in Miceli's video installation, in newspapers and in documentaries like Rithy Panh's, at the MoMA exhibition, and in the Yale database, are different pictures (instantiations) of the same (pure) images: the S-21 images. Every single one of them seems to have this quality of virtuality. However, these (pure or virtual) images cannot be presented as such. Their virtuality depends on the knowledge of them having been displayed once (the first picture).

In the critical fields of remediation and of found footage in art, there seems to be a tendency to think of the new work as pointing towards the original medium that was used. However, the new work does not necessarily reveal this information. Rather, the audience will experience the work as pointing towards *what they expect* to be the first medium, in this case, the medium of the first Tuol Sleng photographs made for Pol Pot's official and bureaucratic use. In the case of the photographic images recycled in Miceli's work, it is less important for the experience of the work that the photographs from the Tuol Sleng archive were produced with an analog photo camera than that they were most likely printed on paper (and archived together with the negatives), instead of being presented (and stored) on slides, screens, stones or textiles. Compared with the photographic silver prints shown at the MoMA exhibition and the photographic display available on a computer screen from the Yale University database, the unexpected screen of falling sand in Miceli's work seems to point toward what one might expect to be the original or first medium of the Tuol Sleng imagery: a low quality photographic print in the archive of a death camp a few decades ago – the unthematized photographic medium, the medium taken for granted.

Theoretical implications: from medium to mediation

The unusual and demonstrative materiality of the screen mediating the Tuol Sleng photographs in Miceli's work not only stresses the material dependency of photographs, the heterogeneity of this materiality, the ideality of photography and the virtuality of well-known photographic images. The screen of sand also seems to dominate the impression of Miceli's work. It may easily be treated as the primary characteristic of the medium of the work. However, I have already argued that this work seems to demonstrate that a medium does not exist *per se*, but some phenomena may execute a mediating function. This implies a methodological challenge: First, how should we decide what medium we are dealing with? In the case of Miceli's video installation, is it the sand or the video projection? the screen hanging from the ceiling? the gallery? the video as such, that can be projected on any screen, and therefore all sorts of screens? Should the photographs presented in the video installation also be considered a medium?

Everything may be considered a medium, but why should this be? On the one hand, the number of options seems endless. On the other hand, if we are looking primarily for conventional media, the work done by unconventional media may be overlooked. In addition to the number of candidates and the danger of overlooking interesting possibilities, the question of how to decide which medium to consider also involves questions of identity, that is, the question of historical,

cultural and technical variations. Are photographs to be considered one medium or several – from the daguerreotypes, via the positive-negative technique of Fox Talbot, and the Polaroid, to the digital photograph of the 1990s? According to Jan Baetens, "we no longer believe that photography is one single medium. Photographs change through time, and it is not possible to reduce all types of photography to one single model" (Baetens 2007, p. 54). This observation is not specific to photography. Should the so-called silent film from early film history be considered the same medium as the talkie of the 1930s, the blockbusters of the 1980s, and the computer-generated moving images of the 1990s?

I will suggest that we should not think of 'medium' as something given. To consider something to be a medium is a choice we make. Sometimes this choice seems to be over-determined by conventions, like when we are referring to socioculturally instituted media in everyday life, like 'television' and 'radio'. Historically, these media may be seen as culturally and institutionally given facts, but if we consider them to be defined as things – apparatuses, solid objects – we produce conceptual confusions when it comes to all forms of historical and cultural variations, remediation and technical convergence: Do we watch television displayed on the mobile phone? Are photographic images on a Web site a medium within a medium? These conceptual problems can be met if we change focus from medium to mediation: The medium, I will argue, should not be considered a thing or physical object as such, but an object performing a task. The methodological challenge is therefore not to decide which medium to examine, but rather to employ a suitable strategy for exploring the mediation that makes a difference. In Miceli's video installation, the screen of sand opens a path into the conditions for the complexity of this work. But how can we follow that path one step further?

Methodology: Studying mediation

How does the medium of sand make a difference in Miceli's work? To answer this question, I will suggest a comparative strategy. A real comparison of two empirical objects will not easily do the job: Comparing Miceli's work with Rebecca Belmore's video work *Fountain* (2005), for example, where a video is projected on falling water in the gallery, presents not only two very complex works to compare, but also yields different themes, modes, techniques and personal styles. This situation makes it easy to confuse various kinds of differences.[21] Since we

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21   This is a common problem in adaptation analysis pointed out by, among others, Barbara Herrnstein-Smith in her critique of Seymour Chatman's analysis of Jean Renoir's 1936 film adaptation of Guy de Maupassant's short story "Une partie de campagne" (set in the 1860's but first published in 1881), see Chatman 1980 and Herrnstein Smith 1980, pp 218-219. An important

are particularly interested in how the medium makes a difference, we need to arrange a comparison where the particular media in question will be forced to show their faces.

This suggests an *imaginative* comparison, a kind of thought experiment where one might think of an example and then substitute a different mediating material to see the effects of one on the other. In this case, the sand could be imaginatively varied (i.e. compared), for instance, with water, paper, canvas or other materials, the number depending on what it takes to see the very concrete work done by the particular medium in question. This variational method is inspired by the imaginative variations (or fantasy variations) of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, critically adjusted and further developed by – among others – Don Ihde in his *Experimental Phenomenology*, and later in what he has coined *postphenomenology* (Ihde 1993, 2009).[22] A somewhat idiosyncratic version of this variational method (as it is termed in contemporary phenomenology) can also be found in Roland Barthes' *La Chambre Claire* (1980), a phenomenologically inspired study of photography. Although Barthes does not exclusively vary the phenomenon in his own fantasy, he does describe concrete, empirical examples (mostly well-known photographs), in order to get closer to what has been termed the essence or invariants of photography as a phenomenon. This essence is the *noema*, what Barthes eventually ends up calling the "that-has-been." In other words, his study of photography here is not a comparative analysis of photographic images, nor is it a subjectivist analysis of reception. Rather, it is Barthes' version of what phenomenologists have called an analysis of intentionality, an analysis of the correlation of *what* is experienced with its *mode* of being experienced. An analysis from the point of view of media aesthetics may very well contribute to such an analysis of intentionality, but this is not its main purpose. The variational method suggested here is not so much to elicit structures or invariants of one particular phenomenon (see, for instance, Ihde 1979, p. 123), as it is to lodge a disturbing quality in what otherwise may appear to be a unified entity. By importing a series of disturbances, it is easier to see how the different variations make a difference. To illustrate this method, I will introduce only one variation – water – well aware that we will need several variations to get a qualified decision of the role of the medium of sand in Miceli's work.

Let us imagine that we exchange the screen of falling sand with a screen of falling water in Miceli's video installation. What does this new version reveal

dimension of this problem is also the tendency to think of the different kinds of differences between two works as differences between two kinds of media.

22 *Postphenomenology* is a neologism of Don Ihde, referring to a modified, hybrid phenomenology combining insights from American pragmatism, Husserlian phenomenology and philosophy of technology (see Ihde 2009, p. 23).

about the work of the sand? A comparison with water would demonstrate that both water and sand are *unusual* media for photographs and will therefore most likely be noticed by the viewer as *material* media. Further, in these examples, both water and sand fall in a downward direction. Due to their heaviness, they make a lot of noise doing so. As screens for displaying images, both these heavy and somehow unformed materials blur the differences between the photographs displayed, even if the editing of the sound in synch with the change of images works against this blurring effect. To be sure, the *projection* of photographic stills gives them a temporal dimension, a fixed duration: Someone or something regulates the time of the viewing. Both sand and water, however, magnify the impression of temporality due to the flowing motion of the mediating material. Finally, both sand and water give the impression of *movement* in the images; the photographic images flicker rather than remain durably instantiated.

Combined with the attention drawn towards the demonstrative materiality of the mediating screens of sand or water, this impression of movement in the images seems to reinvest the culturally formative figure of presence and absence connected to photographic images, the impossible combination of here and now with there and then. This tension seems to be most notable in photographic portraits. Since this is highly relevant for the experience of Miceli's video installation, allow me to explicate this culturally formative figure a bit further before I return to the impression of movement in the photographic images of this work.

Theoretical reflection: photographic ghosts

It is as if the *portrait* as such draws attention to the voyeuristic relationship of the viewer to the person portrayed. So much more so for *photographic* portraits, where knowledge of the time and place of the photographic exposure so easily encourages the illusion of geographic and historical continuity between the life of the person portrayed and the life of the viewer. As Barthes expresses it in the opening paragraphs of his *Camera Lucida*, confronted with a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother Jerome (1852) he realized that he was "looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor" (Barthes 1993 [1980], p. 3). Confronted with the prisoner portraits from Tuol Sleng, we are looking at eyes that looked at their torturers.[23]

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23 Confronted with the portraits at the MoMA exhibition in 1997, Lindsay French expresses a similar experience: 22 prints of identical size hung equidistant from each other at eye level around three sides of the small gallery, anonymous, intimate, portraits of individuals staring into the camera: "They are, in effect, facing their executioners in the lens of the camera, and we stare back at them from the place of the executioner. It is extremely unsettling" (French 2002, p. 135).

Even when the portrayed person is still alive, the photographic portrait has been associated with the presence of a ghost in Western culture. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes opens up this path after just a few pages, reflecting on what his body already knows of photography and observing that a photograph can be the object of three practices, emotions or intentions: the photographer's taking of the picture (the *Operator*), the *Spectator* viewing, and the person or thing photographed, which he calls "the *Spectrum* of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to 'spectacle' and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead" (Barthes 1993, p. 9). This figure of the ghost is part of a rather complex notion of photography being existentially interwoven with death, mourning and loss in our culture.

Photography has been characterized as *thanatography* (Dubois 1983, p. 160), as "the inventory of mortality" and *memento mori* (Sontag (1979 [1973], p. 70 and p. 15). It has been said that "[t]he photographic *take* is immediate and definitive, like death" (Metz ([1985] 1990, p. 158) and that the paradigm "*Life/Death* [...] is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print" (Barthes 1993 [1980], p. 92), that "the photographic has something to do with loss, with pastness, and with death" (Sobchack 1994, p. 93), and that "[p]erhaps the real measure of a photograph's greatness is that in its presence we experience a priceless relief from mortality, we engage in such intense thought that we have a sense of being outside ourselves, even for the eternity of the moment" (Justim 1989, p. 60), and that in "the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present, and the photographed present has been entirely eternalized. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it all the more" (Kracauer 1993 [1927], p. 433). I am far from proposing that all this can be reduced to one single figuration. Rather, I intend to briefly allude to the field of connotations concerning the experienced relations between photography and death in our culture before following one of these trajectories a few step further, the path set out by Roland Barthes.

The *knowledge* of the portrayed person being dead, be it the general acquaintance of the average human life span (we may take for granted that Napoleon's brother Jerome is dead) or more specific information about the death of the photographed person (like the death of Barthes' mother or the execution of Lewis Payne, both central characters in *Camera Lucida*), seems to stimulate the notion of what Barthes refers to as "the melancholy of Photography itself" (p. 79).[24] While standing in front of the photograph of his mother as a child – the Winter

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24 Given that Jérôme Bonaparte was born in 1784, the viewer of his photograph in Barthes' book (1980) may take for granted that he now is dead, even if we do not know that he died at the age of 75 in June, 1860.

Garden Photograph – Barthes tells himself: "she is going to die"; he shudders "over a catastrophe which has already occurred" (p. 96).[25] "Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe," he adds (p. 96). I find it never-theless reasonable to argue that not every photo will be experienced as if it were a catastrophe. This is a view I believe Barthes would support, given his criticism of the taming of the photograph by art and by mass consumption (p. 117-119) and his notion of the *punctum* in the second part of the book – an overwhelming experience of "that-has-been," a "vertigo of time defeated" (p. 97).[26] Every photo may basi-cally be experienced as a "that-has-been," as a cultural premise, unthematized, taken for granted. But once in a while, one may be overwhelmed by this cultural figure in the way Barthes has described, as it comes to appear in a specific pho-tographic image.

If this makes sense, the logic of Barthes' argument seems to imply that the knowledge of someone being killed, be it by accident or in accordance with a socially accepted legal system, like Lewis Payne, informs the photographic take with a double arrest: The photographic arrest is experienced as an anticipation of the death of the portrayed: "he is dead and he is going to die ..." (Barthes 1993 [1980], p.95). This phrase, which captures Barthes' experience of the prisoner por-trait of Lewis Payne (1895),[27] outlines the existential structure of photographic temporality as he sees it: Lewis Payne is dead by hanging, and alive in his photo-graph, soon to be dead; at the same time, Lewis Payne is arrested by the camera, symbolically killed, and as such already an image, a reminder of his future death. During Barthes' process of reflection, this existential structure of photographic temporality is extrapolated; it becomes a reminder of the mortality of the viewer: "It is because each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death that each one, however attached it seems to be to the excited world of the living, challenges each of us, one by one, outside of any generality (but not out-side of any transcendence)" (p. 97). This may sound like an echo of Susan Sontag and others noting the experience of photography as *memento mori* (Sontag 1979 [1973], p. 15), but where Sontag and others just state the reality of this culturally

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25 The last phrase is in italics in the original.

26 *Camera Lucida* is divided into two parts. In the first part, to which most commentators refer, *punctum* is an emotional experience of photographic presence put in contrast to *studium*, the at-titude of the cultural analyst vis-à-vis a photographic picture. In the second part of the book, this contrast has played out its role. Barthes nevertheless introduces a second *punctum* in this second part of the book, this time more explicitly related to the temporal logic of photography. My ar-gument is based on the conception of the second *punctum*.

27 Along with a series of pictures of Lewis Payne, this portrait was taken by the Civil War photo-grapher Alexander Gardner while Payne was held in federal custody before he was executed for his crime on July 7, 1865.

formative figure, Barthes *explicates* this experience during his phenomenologically-inspired process of reflection in *Camera Lucida*. Through this reflection, one may grasp the *logic* by which the notion of the ghostly presence in photography comes to the fore: Every photo is *potentially* haunting and some photos may overwhelm the viewer with their ghostly presence due, for instance, to knowledge of the death of the portrayed.

Following this logic, it therefore seems reasonable to suggest that the haunting quality of the photographic ghost must be even more pressing in cases of violent injustice, like homicide or genocide.[28] The prisoner portrait of Lewis Payne may be seen as representing the violence of a more or less acceptable legal system. Confronted with the Tuol Sleng prisoner portraits, we may be overwhelmed by the temporal logic of photography saying "they are dead and they will die," but one must expect that these portraits will work less as a reminder of the mortality of the viewer than a reminder of the horror of Pol Pot's unjust judges, or more generally of systems of injustice anywhere in the world today or in history.

This effect may also be supported by the *seriality* of the Tuol Sleng portraits both shown and hinted at in Miceli's work – the 88 prisoners, the 14,000 killed.[29] As a genre, the prisoner portrait strongly signals the subordination of the singular to the series. Barthes picks up a single portrait from this genre, the portrait of Lewis Payne, and points to the individuality of the person portrayed. Miceli shows us 88 portraits from the Tuol Seng series. The seriality of the presentation multiplies a singular moment of the past involved in the existential logic of the photographic temporality sketched above: there are 88 past moments in a row. The singular moments of past life seem to demonstrate the individual lives as subordinated to the regularity of the photographic practice. As art critic Michael Kimmelman noted in his review of the MoMA exhibition, knowing what we do about the violence involved in Pol Pot's production of this particular series, "they depict a quiet bureaucratic moment before the terror of execution" (see French, p. 137). Face-to-face with the portraits of victims from a death camp, the

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28 My argument here is based solely on the second punctum in Barthes' text and relates to a probable experience of the prisoner portraits presented in Miceli' work as they appear as a series of ID portraits which does not reveal the terror that produced them. Photographic representations of terror would not lend themselves to the logic explicated here.

29 The conservative estimate of victims from the Tuol Sleng camp is 14,000 (see Chandler 1999 p. 6), but less than 6,000 prisoner portraits seem to exist, and strictly speaking, only 5,000 of these appear to be standardized prisoner portraits (see Chandler 1996 p. 103, and see also the photographic database at Yale University, http://www.yale.edu/cgp/img.html). Among these, Miceli has included in her work all portraits with existing negatives and records for both entry dates and execution dates, 88 in all (email correspondence February 5, 2009).

S-21, the demonstration of the seriality of the police portrait in Miceli's work seems to foreground the disciplinary power of this photographic genre and the haunting quality of the photographic portrait as enforced by the knowledge of violent injustice.

The movement induced by a screen of falling sand seems, just like a screen of falling water, to give an impression of *liveness* in the images. In contrast to live-action cinema where the pastness of the photographic film image normally seems less pressing due to the appearance of unfolding action, the movement caused by the screens of falling sand or water is a movement in the flat surfaces of the photographs. The photographic arrest, and the stasis of this arrest, to use an expression from Barthes (p. 91), do not disappear in the movement of the image. On the contrary, the rapid movement of the falling material produces a tension between the stasis of the photographic portraits and the *aliveness* of the photographed persons at the moment of exposure. The impression of liveness in these images seems therefore to *intensify* their haunting quality.

Variational analysis: a brief sketch

So far, a screen of falling water seems not very different from the screen of falling sand in Miceli's work. Both these media of photography also seem to differ from the photographic print in the same manner. But the *material* quality of these two media seems nevertheless to differ in important ways; the same can be said of the symbolic value of their materiality.

If we imagine the sand actually falling in the gallery, just like the water can actually be felt in Belmore's *Fountain*, the dust from the sand makes a profound contrast to the clear, clean and fresh water imaginatively mediating the same photographic images. As to their symbolic value, the water-screen mediated photographs may be experienced as a symbol for the purity of the soul, or refer to stories about the innocent victim in the lake or people trapped behind waterfalls. The sand, on the other hand, informs the images with qualities of being worthless, gritty and dusty, with the allusion to the hourglass and the notion that the sand of life has almost run out.

This may imply different ghosts or different ways of haunting. I believe that the haunting quality of the figure on the water-screen has more in common with the dead twin sister in Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme 95 film *The Celebration* (*Festen*), or with the gothic tale of the lady in the white dress walking restlessly in the attic at the old rectory, than with the ghostly presence of a figure in the sand, haunting the viewer like zombified individuals buried alive without a coffin in a shallow grave. They seem to watch us *through* the non-transparent veil of

sand, as if the sand cannot hide them properly no matter how dark, dirty and dusty. The prisoners seem to look through the sand, and at the same time the sand seems to fall through them, as if they had a vague, airy, three-dimensional shape and the dusty sand were a fog that not only hides them but also makes these low density figures visible, present.

The video complicates the picture. Because of its technical properties, the video seems to make the strangeness of the sand less strange and the material quality of the sand less present. It weakens the material presence of the falling sand by transforming its presence into its visual and auditive appearances. The images projected on the screen of sand are incorporated in, and transformed by, a temporal medium conditioned by the *falling* of the sand. It is, however, the *video* that makes this temporality of the falling sand *present* for the public.

The video draws the sound and the projected images together in a temporal stream of a fixed rate, rhythm and duration. It makes the images projected on the sand present and unfolding: it is here, it is coming, and it is (as with all recordings) already in the past. It is like a machine controlling the frame, the temporality of the presentation and the presence of the portraits in the sand.

The temporality of a filmic machine like this always controls its presentation according to certain principles. In the classical Hollywood film, sound and images are edited to create the impression of a coherent narrative universe where the action can take place. In Miceli's video, it is the *seriality* of the portraits that emerges. Three editorial strategies seem to be particularly interesting in this respect: the choice of picture format, the projection on a screen of falling sand and the editing of the sound.

The portraits are presented as medium close-ups, showing the subject's head and shoulders. Compared with the portraits at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide, the prisoner portraits in the Yale database and the portraits presented in Riley and Niven's book *The Killing Fields* (1996), where some of the images show the subject from the waist up and sometimes include a hand from another prisoner or the face of a small child holding the hand of its mother, all the portraits in Miceli's video seems to have the *same format.* Whether this is due to cropping or to chance[30], the collection of portraits in Miceli's work appears in any case to be more *homogenous* than the other collections of the Tuol Sleng portraits available. They are presented as a series of identification portraits.

A portrait executed in the subject's environment, such as in the home or workplace, typically illuminates the subject's character or social condition. This can also be seen in some of the Tuol Sleng portraits where the relation between

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30   It is logically possible that all portraits with existing negatives and records for both entry dates and execution dates (88 in all) had the same format.

prisoners and the situation they are in is part of their presentation. The identification portrait, on the other hand, focuses on the physical traits of the subject's head: the eyes, ears, hair and facial expression. Their purpose is merely to be able to identify a likeness of the subject's physical features. In Miceli's video, however, these physical traits are made less distinct by the projection of the portraits on the screen of falling sand blurring some of the evident individuality of the persons portrayed. In addition to this blurring of facial distinctions, the screen of falling sand also makes other details in the image hard to identify. Due to both the choice of picture format and of the projection of images on a screen of falling sand, the room surrounding the prisoner can hardly be recognized at all. If you expect it to be there, you may assume the vague, visual presence of a prison number on the chest of the prisoner, a detail underlining the seriality not only of the images but also the prisoners as such. Altogether, the prisoners are presented as a series of similar (imprisoned) individuals in a neutralized room.

The choice of one single picture format – the ID portrait – and the projection of the portraits on a screen of falling sand seems not only to single out the *seriality* of the portraits as important. It also contributes to a homogenized appearance of both images and persons in the video. Where the photographic prints exhibited at the MoMA individuated the portraits and, by this, the suffering of the victims as well, the video seems to homogenize them so that their individuality is transformed into a general or generalized human being. The editing of the sound may, on the other hand, suggest that the seriality of the portraits is more important than their homogenization. The video was made take-by-take, portrait-by-portrait. What we hear is the ambient sound for each shot.[31] Nothing is done to conceal this. As an editorial strategy, it divides the first portrait from the next, producing a *formal* distinction between them which contributes to the seriality of the presentation of images.

This formal distinction between the images is underlined by the impression that some of the portraits are given more time than others. It does not seem to happen at fixed intervals, which would give a regular beat to the presentation. Without knowledge of the underlying principle, it is hard to know what to make of it.[32] As it turns out, the main criterion for the selection of the 88 portraits out of about 5,000 was Miceli's request for images with full records for the prisoner's entry and execution days. This information constitutes the basis on which the editing of the portraits was made. The pictures are taken at the time of their detention, and the actual time of projection is proportional to the individual's time in prison. The amount of sand corresponds to the time of the video like this: 1 day of life at

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31 Thanks to Alice Miceli for this information (email correspondence February 5, 2009).
32 Information about this editing principle is briefly presented in programs or at gallery walls.

the S21 prison = 1 kg of sand = image displayed for 4 seconds.[33] This knowledge imbues the editorial strategy with an existential dimension. But even without this information explaining the irregular frequency of images, this editorial strategy works against the homogenization of the portraits and adds an irregular pattern to the impression of seriality that otherwise dominates the photographic display in Miceli's video installation.

In other words, the video alters the importance of the sand and the appearance of the photographic portraits in several ways due both to technical properties and editorial strategies. The video installation also transforms the Tuol Sleng photographs just by virtue of the fact that it forms a work of art, a production. The work integrates the photographic material in a new unit different from the other units in which they belong: the photographic *archives* (as in the archive at the Tuol Sleng Museum in Phnom Penh or the CGP Tuol Sleng Image Database (CTS) at Yale University),[34] the photographic *collections* (like the Niven and Riley collection), and the photographic *exhibitions* (like the exhibition at the MoMA in 1997). This unit is not just another gathering of images, rather, it forms an entity of its own with a title that makes it distinct from the other units in which the portraits can be found.

The title, *88 from 14.000*, indicates that this sample of 88 is not a sample of the Tuol Sleng prisoner portraits (which is between 5,000-6,000 portraits). It is not even a sample of *images* in *any* relevant archive (for instance the 10,000 images in the Yale database), but rather, it is a sample of pictures of an estimate of *victims* from a particular death camp, the S-21. Although Miceli's work also refers to all the pictures well known from exhibitions, books, films and news reports, this specific title of the work makes it point rather explicitly toward the victims of Pol Pot as such, the victims from S-21, and presumably also toward all the Khmer Rouge's. victims, and maybe even to every political victim in the world. For a non-Cambodian audience, then, the work seems to portray in a rather dimmed but nevertheless overwhelming way, a de-contextualized, re-contextualized, and homogenized *index* pointing toward political injustice in the world of others.

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33 See Miceli 2007, https://mail.cofa.unsw.edu.au/pipermail/empyre/2007-September/msg00 105.html [last checked November 3, 2009].

34 The Cambodian Genocide Program's photographic database (CTS) contains more than 10,000 photographic images pertaining to various aspects of gross human rights violations under the Khmer Rouge regime. They have over 5,000 prisoner portraits from Tuol Sleng prepared by the Photo Archive Group (see http://www.yale.edu/cgp/img.html [last checked November 3, 2009]).

Concluding remarks: Mediating photographs

Alice Miceli's video installation *88 from 14.000* demonstrates how photographs can be transformed and remediated and yet still retain this insistence on pointing toward something physically present at the moment of exposure. Where *the sand* indicates that photographs can be *displayed* in various ways and still be photographs, *the video* indicates that photographs can be technically transformed in various ways, not only as to how they are displayed but also as to how they are *stored*, be it as analog photographs or digital video, without losing their character of being photographs. In other words, Miceli's video installation may seem to imply some *general* ideas of photography. But it also transforms these *particular* photographs in a certain way, because of its technical properties, because of its editorial strategies and by the title chosen for the work.

Alice Miceli's video installation compiles a rather standardized collection of photographic portraits from Tuol Sleng, homogenizes them, generalizes them, and makes them appear as ghostly presences of political victims from our recent history. Compared with the exhibition at the Tuol Sleng Museum on the one hand – where one might easily become overwhelmed by the traces of brutality at the place and the enormous amount of pictures of victims, as Lindsay French puts it, "room after room of photographs of the soon-to-be-killed" (French 2002, p. 132) – the portraits in Miceli's work are presented in the cool clarity of the art gallery, one portrait at a time, each one similar to the other, less distinct in their individuality, less overwhelming by their numbers. Compared with the exhibition at the MoMA on the other hand, where 22 prints of identical size were hung equidistant from each other, at eye level, around three sides of a small gallery so that the audience may feel compelled to look at each face individually, the portraits in Miceli's work are presented as subordinated to their genre, more overwhelming by their number and the amount of victims hinted at by the title, less overwhelming in their individuality. Compared with the high quality photographic silver prints at the MoMA and the tension that is easily produced between the beauty of the pictures on display and the brutality of the situation where the photographs were taken, the portraits in Miceli's video are buried in sand and displayed along with the noise of the work of production. They are not presented as emotionally overwhelming or unbearably beautiful. There is no historical dramatization – just a series of portraits, one at a time.[35] The seriality

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35 A common strategy in books and films that deal with genocide is to focus on the fate of an individual person or family. Some archival projects, however, focus on the archive as such. For instance, we find this in Uriel Orlow's work *Housed Memory* (2000-2005), a nine hour-long handheld tracking shot along all the shelves of the Wiener Library Collection. As an interviewee in *Housed Memory*, a Holocaust survivor who works as a volunteer at the library points out, "... you realise that the lack of drama is the whole drama. Make a list!" (see Orlow 2006, pp. 38-41).

of this photographic display underlines the formalization and stylization of the prisoner portrait as a genre. Knowing that the portraits were produced in a death camp, the video also seems to signal the administrative thoroughness of both the photographers and executioners. Information about the principle regulating the irregular rhythm of the display also directs attention toward the torture experienced between the moment of the photograph and the moment of death, repeated nearly endlessly, displayed 88 times in a loop and pointing toward all the others, the 14,000. The seriality, the sand, and the attention drawn toward the intervals between the photographs and the individual deaths seem to display the portraits and, at the same time, display an unportrayable situation. We know these images. We have seen them as horrible and as unbearably beautiful. Miceli's work displays them as dirty, dusty, noisy, and at the same time, she displays them at a distance, stylized, generalized, and maybe most important of all, *serialized* so that the disciplinary effect of the genre is demonstrated as an instrument of power that can be used and misused.

Concluding remarks: Doing media aesthetics

In this chapter, I have sketched an investigation of Miceli's artwork *88 from 14.000* in terms of its mediality. The guiding question for the analysis has been: what can Alice Miceli's video installation *88 from 14.000* say about mediating photographs? During this analysis, I have also outlined a way to analyze mediation. Media aesthetic analysis is concerned with the question of how the medium matters. It never takes a particular medium as its point of departure. If it did, it would not see anything else. The media aesthetic analysis suggested here starts with what seems to appears. The description calls for *distinctions* and the concrete reflection calls for imaginative *variations* of the aspects or dimensions that are of interest in the particular analysis. Since I have been particularly interested in how the *medium* makes a difference, the imaginative variations were chosen based on their capacity to make the function of the *medium* apparent in the case in question. The objective is to develop and practice an analytical sensitivity towards medial aspects that make a difference for the aesthetic expressions in question. This is not to suggest that what I am proposing is entirely new. Rather, my point here is to stress the call for a more empirically-based theoretical reflection in philosphies of media and further, to welcome the opportunity for challenging the researcher's theoretical apparatus in empirical research. Both theory and empirical analysis would benefit from taking this encounter seriously. The point is to develop a way of doing theory and analysis that can actually fulfill the ideal of an analysis that is sensitive to the nuances of media and that responds to the constant need for theoretical thinking and rethinking.

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The most important festivals and exhibits for *88 from 14.000*:

2011 Gallery Meulensteen, New York, U.S.A.
2006 General Archive / Parallel São Paulo Biennial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
2006 INTERCONNECT – Media Art from Brazil. ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany.
2006 paradoxos brasil. Itaú Cultural. São Paulo, Brazil.
2006 EXcESs. Z33 – center for contemporary arts, Hasselt, Belgium.
2005 On Disappearance. PhoenixHalle, Dortmund, Germany.
2005 21 Internationales Kurzfilmfestival. Hamburg, Germany
2005 Basics – transmediale.05 exhibition, HKW, Berlin, Germany.
2005 15 Videobrasil. Play Gallery. São Paulo, Brazil.
2005 NY Independent Film and Video Festival. New York, U.S.A.

Medium-Specific Noise

Arild Fetveit

[…] the accident reveals the substance

Aristotle

It is in the nature of the defeated to appear, in their impotence, irrelevant, eccentric, derisory

Adorno, *Bequest*, 1945

An aesthetics of medium-specific noise has pervaded contemporary culture. This is an aesthetics in which noises associated with particular media are actively employed as expressive devices, rather than being eradicated in the interest of high fidelity. In the realm of music, the post-industrial sound of the early releases by bands like Portishead and Massive Attack from the mid-1990s feature surface sound related to vinyl records, tape decks with uneven speeds or a fluttering frequency range, and a host of other medium-specific noises. Likewise, in the audiovisual realm, degraded film of several kinds – like color faded super 8, worn out film copies with scratches and errors – have been used in various settings, perhaps especially in music videos, where aural and visual noise may also be used in parallel.

Throughout history, a number of technologies have been deployed to fight and suppress the various noises that emerge within certain forms of media. There is also a rich history of artistic strategies that counteract restrictive notions of fidelity by pressing media beyond their calculated ranges of operation. This may involve over-exposure of film, sound recording beyond set levels and a number of other twists and tweaks aimed at thickening the medium. Such strategies have supported artistic visions in numerous productions and will continue to do so.

The aesthetics of medium-specific noise in question for this essay, however, represents something more radical. Rather than pressing photographic media to offer special forms of saturation and graininess, or a sound recording tape to deliver a fatter sound with elements of distortion, the aesthetic of medium-specific noise employs symptoms of wear and tear and errors or malfunctions characteristic of specific media as deliberate means of artistic expression. In the service of this aesthetic, technologies are developed to enhance and artificially produce such medium-specific noises and malfunctions. This situation calls for an exploration of what these medium-specific noises afford, and how the emergence of the aesthetics of medium-specific noise can be explained.

Although the aural and the visual realms are figured differently, there are striking parallels between how medium-specific noise operates across this divide,

which indicates that a comparative interrogation may be productive. Musicologists have brilliantly addressed medium-specific noise in the aural field. In the visual field, however, contributions are few. So far, attempts to explore the phenomenon as it operates across the aural and visual fields are missing as well. From this lack springs the aspiration of this present article.

In the following, I aim to synthesize and combine insights from musicology and various other fields in order to interrogate what the medium-specific noise yields in the visual and aural realms respectively, what operational logics inform it, and why this particular aesthetics has evolved. This interrogation also exemplifies an approach to media aesthetic research, where the operational logic of media and their interrelations is at center.

I will start this exploration by looking at how noise has been addressed within musicology, and then move on to issues of iconoclasm, before linking the discussion to various ways in which recorded traces have been dealt with in cultural theory. I will end by positioning medium-specific noise within the more general context of digitalization, before tracing back through the argument in a brief reflection of how this article conceives of media aesthetic research. But first, it is necessary to look into the question of how noise is to be defined in this context.

Two Conceptions of Noise

The concept of noise is handled in different ways and there exists no single answer to the question of what noise is. In fact, Douglas Kahn, in *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts*, claims that trying to define noise "in a unifying manner across the range of contexts will only invite noise on itself" (1999, p. 21). Yet, perhaps Kahn complicates the issue more than necessary. In the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, two major, but competing, meanings of the term can be singled out in their first entry on noise. First, we find the phrase "disturbance caused by sounds." Clearly, noise is primarily a compliment we pay to *sound*. A more general principle is also suggested in this phrase whereby something *disturbs* the perception of something else. This meaning is elaborated in the eleventh entry offered in the *OED*, where noise in "scientific and technical use" is taken to be "disturbances which are not part of a signal … which interfere with or obscure a signal." The *OED* is here implicitly referring to the meaning of noise operating in C. E. Shannon's seminal article, *A Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1948), and in later models of communication derived from Shannon's work and other contributions to the field of information theory.

John Johnston locates paradoxical complexities in the fact that noise in Shannon's theory "appears to be both what impedes the transmission of information and

what is not yet coded as information" (2010, p. 201). However, it would seem that a conception of noise as disturbance, as "what impedes the transmission of information," by necessity generates complexities, simply by rendering noise *relative* to our interest. If noise on a telephone line may be considered as impeding the transmission of the voice of our interlocutor, it may also provide useful information about errors in the telephone system. What we have may even be two conversations interfering with each other, where each may be construed as noise from the point of view of the other.

In contrast to conceiving noise as "what impedes the transmission of information," the second part of the *OED's* first entry offers a quite different conception of noise, as "music characterized by use of dissonance or inharmonious noise, esp. loud distorted guitar, amplifier noise, feedback, etc."[1] While the first part of the entry sets up a relation between two elements, one signal disturbing the perception of another, the second part focuses on the single issue of inharmonious sound and dissonance often associated with forms of distortion. Thus, inside the first *OED* entry, oddly enough, we find two rather divergent characterizations of the term *noise*. These two are, I believe, the most relevant conceptions of noise for the current exploration. The musicological research on noise also seems to address these two divergent meanings, with a main emphasis on dissonance rather than on disturbance.

Musicology's Take on Noise

In the textbook definition offered by the information theorist Abraham Moles, "noise is a signal the sender does not want to transmit" (1966, p. 78). Of this conception, we can safely say that noise has been with us as long as anyone has attempted to construe a signal: from the singer having throat problems, to the guitar player seeking to suppress strings not meant to sound, to the artist perfecting molds for death masks or automatically recording the visual and aural world after the emergence of the mechanical inscription devices of the photographic camera, and the phonograph in the 19th century.

From the inevitable concern with noise, as the unwanted other of any positive signal as articulated in Mole's trans-historically relevant phrase, noise comes to the center of attention in cultural life when the Futurists turn the tables and argue

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1   "Noise-rock" is a prominent genre in this part of the *OED* definition of noise, "characterized by the use of dissonance or inharmonious noise, esp. loud distorted guitar, amplifier noise, feedback, etc. It can also be related back to the "noise music … originating among members of the Futurist movement, utilizing non-musical or dissonant sounds (often made on customized instruments) and rejecting traditional notions of harmony and structure" (*OED*).

that noise is worthy of exploration in its own right. In a 1913 letter, later known as "The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto," Luigi Russolo notes how, in a world of machines, noise reigns "over the sensibility of men" (Russolo 2004, p. 10). He goes on to observe that, after having sought purity and sweetness, "musical art seeks out combinations more dissonant, stranger, and harsher for the ear. Thus, it comes ever closer to the *noise-sound*" (ibid., p. 11). Russolo calls on artists to break out of the limited circle of sounds previously used and *"conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds"* (ibid.).[2] In Russolo's vision, noise is conceived not as disturbance, but as inharmonious, yet artistically interesting, sound. This perception, as I have noted, is later to become the dominant in musicological work on noise, a body of research that does not quite cut to the core of the aesthetics of medium-specific noise, but still holds some relevance to it.

John Cage makes an interesting connection between the two main conceptions of noise in the following observation:

> Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments (Cage 2004, pp. 25-6).

Cage's conception of noise comes across here, in the first instance, as Russolo's *inharmonious sound*, except perhaps the static between stations, which may also be conceived as *interference* hindering the perception of particular radio signals. Cage's observation explains a growing interest in noise by inscribing it into a general urge to expand the palette of expressive means open to the artist. Thus, it is in tune with Russolo's call to *conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds*. This interest grounds the reversal whereby noises are recoded from something unwanted and rejected, to become useful "musical instruments" in their own right. Thus, Cage's conception resonates well with contemporary interests in noise as a means to artistic expression.

In work on noise as inharmonious sound, there have also been attempts to localize noise in musical instruments that we do not necessarily think of as noisy, as in the following observation by Henry Cowell:

> Noise-making instruments are used with telling effect in our greatest symphonies, and were it not for the punctuation of cymbal and bass drum, the climaxes of our operas would be like jelly fish …. But most shocking of all is the discovery that there is a noise element in all our musical instruments. Consider the sound of a violin. Part of the vibrations producing the sound are periodic, as can be shown by a harmonic analyzer. But others are not – they do not

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2 Russolo's call to "*conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds*" finds its parallel in calls to include all kinds of materials in the visual arts, articulated, among others, by Kurt Schwitters and the Dada movement, though this occurs at a later stage than Russolo's manifesto.

constantly re-form the same pattern, and consequently must be considered noise (Cowell 2004, p. 23).

The intensification achieved by adding what Cowell conceives to be inharmonious sounds is interesting. But the discovery of "noise" in a number of places the human ear would not find it unless aided by a harmonic analyzer risks stretching the concept beyond the phenomenologically relevant. Mary Russo and Daniel Warner offer a more productive take on the idea that noise is inscribed in all sound and music and therefore also in every instrument. They note that

> noise plays a primary role in the perception of virtually every musical sound. Noise components at the beginning of musical instrument tones…referred to as attack transients, very often provide the primary conceptual clues for aural identification. Without these noise components it is virtually impossible for a listener to differentiate between, for instance, a clarinet and piano tune sounding at the same frequency, because their pitched or steady-state portions (comprising most of all instrumental tone's duration) happen to be timbrally similar (Russo and Warner 2004, p. 49).

Thus, the noises known as attack transients are crucial for distinguishing instruments. But again, they are hardly noisy when instruments are handled properly, except in the rather technical sense of embodying inharmonious sound, best assessed by a harmonic analyzer. Seen from the informational point of view, moreover, where we can take noise to be a signal the sender does not want to transmit, attack transients hardly represent noise. On the contrary, they are vital parts of the music and integral to the signals musicians want to transmit, affording orchestras as well as performers crucial elements of timbre. Among the rich varieties of expressive options offered by varieties of timbre are forms of intensification as well, such as a violinist's ferocious attacks on the strings with the bow, where the friction of the bow against the strings adds an intensity that is key to virtuoso violin performances. In such cases, the attack transients bring the identifying and the intensifying capabilities together in an articulation of the *violinness* of the violin, where the grainy earthiness of its building materials and its construction as a prosthetic extension of the human come together. The attack transients do not merely identify the instruments. They also provide a key arena for articulating the individuality of the piece played, as well as that of the particular performer, through sound qualities, dynamism, timbre, attack energy and so on.

Medium-Specific Noise in the Aural Realm

Returning to the issue of medium-specific noise, what does it mean to say that a noise is medium-specific, and what do such noises afford? The musician and artist Brian Eno may have been the first to describe the effects of medium-specific noise as it is presently used. In the 1999 article, "The Revenge of the

Intuitive," Eno articulates a fascination with older media, technologies and instruments, and the specific noises they can produce. He writes:

> Since so much of our experience is mediated in some way or another, we have deep sensitivities to the signatures of different media. Artists play with these sensitivities, digesting the new and shifting the old. In the end, the characteristic forms of a tool's or a medium's distortion, of its weakness and limitations, become sources of emotional meaning and intimacy (Eno 1999, p. 1)

By noting how the "characteristic forms of a tool's or a medium's distortion, of its weakness and limitations, become sources of emotional meaning," Eno initiates a groundbreaking insight about medium-specific noise. He reminds us that there is such a thing as a medium's "characteristic forms …[of] distortion," and that these forms can be used as means of expression. By observing this, Eno also implicitly comes to evoke the simple but important question: what are the means by which we can represent one medium within another? The compelling answer to this question is that medium-specific noise offers a crucial means to represent one medium inside another: it *is* the means by which we can represent the mediality of the vinyl record and the super 8, respectively, within a CD and a 35mm movie.[3] Once these evocative powers of medium-specific noise are established, we must go on to ask: what does medium-specific noise afford, and how does it operate in various circumstances? In two groundbreaking articles, musicologists Joseph Auner and Steven Link have started to address these questions in the realm of music. As is made clear by their contributions, medium-specific noise provides a highly plastic tool for sculpting space in the aural realm. It also provides tools for articulating complex emotional worlds.

The first example Auner points to is Pink Floyd's eloquent transition between "Have a Cigar," with its attack on the commercial music business, and the song "Wish You Were Here" from the album of the same name. He writes:

> As if to enact the threat of commercialization, the raucous hard rock jam that concludes "Have a Cigar" sounds as if it is sucked out of the speakers into a lo-fidelity AM radio broadcast. The radio is evoked first through the cramped, tinny sound quality and static, and then confirmed as the radio is retuned through several channels…before settling down on a station broadcasting a mellow guitar accompaniment. As the radio continues to play, we become directly aware of the person in the room who has been tuning the radio, as he clears his throat, sniffs, and then starts to play along on an acoustic guitar (Auner 2000, p. 3).

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3   The German artist Gerhard Richter developed a new style of realist paintings in the 1960s by painting motifs from photographs. By imitating medium-specific noise associated with photography, particularly out of focus and motion blur, he was able to emulate the mediality of photography in his paintings. Richter's work utilizes the medial principles commented on by Eno, but in spite of Richter's success, these principles were not widely adopted and explored by others until they came to define parts of the music scene in the 1990s.

The example takes us back to 1975, when Pink Floyd released their album. Auner describes well how an imaginary space is created where someone seems to be listening inside the recording. The contrast between high and low fidelity helps build the space, and the radio's static further specifies its physicality. The flickering across channels and the noise of interference while the radio is tuned evokes the image of someone in the room tuning it, and that someone is confirmed to be a male when he is heard clearing his throat. Now, from these sounds, the imaginary space is construed and specified.[4] However, this example merely contains one distinctly medium-specific noise which, in addition to helping build the space, also calls forth the medium of the radio. Now what more do medium-specific noises specifically afford, and how can such noises be orchestrated?

Auner moves to the 1990s in order to explore this further, when the current aesthetics of medium-specific noise started to emerge with the trip-hop coming out of Bristol bands like Massive Attack, Portishead and Tricky. He notes the powerful emotional charge Portishead can produce, and attributes this "to the way the band foregrounds recording media and musical technologies to engage tradition and to manipulate memory and time." A key feature for these bands was the prominent use of surface noise from vinyl records, the implicit negation of the presumptive digital perfection of the CD, a format that could render a previously unheard silence. Commenting on the track entitled "Undenied" from Portishead's second album, the use of silence is a key element for Auner:

> In "Undenied," the opposition of the sound of a very scratchy record and digital silence become an integral part of the composition. After a short introduction … a noisy rhythm track suddenly begins, marked by a bright cymbal rhythm embedded in a haze of vinyl noise. These background scratches and pops continue…providing a tense, highly-charged backdrop that underscores the obsessive nature of the sexual attachment described in the lyrics. But at two key moments, this veil of noise abruptly drops out; first just before the voice enters and then at the restrained climax of the song …. The effect is very different than in Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here," where the flawed sound of the radio was contrasted with the purity and presence of the guitar sound and the careful construction of the sound space of the room. Here when the scratchy noises and cymbal hiss drop out we are confronted with

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4   We can learn more on the construction of space by aural means from various sorts of radio drama, as well as from sound work in filmmaking. In order to understand how this works, it might be useful to explore what the effect would be if one were to take away certain elements. Basically, we could take away the medium-specific noises of the radio (static and tuning) and still sustain the space (generated from the contrast between the high fidelity of the clearing of the throat and the acoustic guitar, and the low fidelity of the other music), but we would lose the specificity of the radio, and thereby its symbolic implications relating to commercialism. The sound would merely be seen as coming from a generic music player with a limited frequency range. The elimination of the clearing of the throat would render the character in the room less physical and, for example, preclude the identification of a male. In short, the various elements add different aspects to the sculpting of the imagined space.

a desperate emptiness. Through the lyrics, the vinyl noise becomes the embodiment of the obsession; the thought of absence results in the moment of absolute emptiness represented by the digital silence, now made horrible and empty (Auner 2000, p. 5).

A silence rendered horrible and empty is here set up against the material physicality of a bright cymbal rhythm embedded in a haze of vinyl noise, representing loving obsession, but also a love about to be lost. The example demonstrates how noise may help construe complex textures with rich symbolic meanings that are not merely reduced to positive and negative comments regarding the digital and the analog, or the CD and the vinyl format respectively.[5] The use of the medium-specific noise here does not explicitly construe a space in which someone listens, as in the example from Pink Floyd. Such a prospective spatiality is here swallowed up in a palimpsest where audible traces of the material physicality of the vinyl are revealed through its imperfections, and where the potential spatiality only adds to the dense medial texture as an unspecified layer.[6]

Medium-specific noise may easily invoke nostalgia. Analog media, like turntables and vinyl records, are often associated with notions of warmth, authenticity and wholeness. The situation that they have now been largely replaced by digital formats sets up a nostalgic relation to elements of the past now lost to us. Stan Link points to how a construction of imaginary spaces, comprising a subject listening to old media technologies, may support such a sense of nostalgia. The nostalgia may be evoked by our identification with someone listening inside such a space. But if we take the position of an outside observer, "who hears a scene of audition but does not enter," as Link puts it, the listeners may "experience their own absence from that scene … the sense that the actual listener cannot be there. The nostalgic aspect of this situation is obvious, and no doubt accounts again for the appeal of retro noises …." (Link, 2001, p. 38).[7] In an analysis that seems as

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5   Simplistic notions of the difference between the analog and the digital, circulating though popular culture, need to be interrogated and corrected. Tellef Kvifte offers a productive rethinking of this divide in the article, "Digital Sampling and Analogue Aesthetics" (2007).

6   But the physicality of this medium is not the mere physicality of the actual recording material used. In contemporary music as well as in the Portishead productions of the 1990s, recording is usually digital and involves digital samples. In contrast to this, sounds of old media technologies like vinyl records are imported. But they are imported as deliberately construed samples, ironically embedded within and presented in the digital mediality they implicitly negate.

7   Link notes that this structure is also found on a more general level in the medial structure that recording sets up: "I believe these were, however, the effects of genuine transduction noise as well. Noise was a palpable sign of the listener's remove from the recording along with its remove from the scene of documentation. Serving as an opacity between scenes, noise articulated our possible conceptual locations along with those from which we were absent. Again, though an artifact of the apparatus, noise becomes a powerful mechanism of establishing and reconfiguring subjectivity" (ibid. p. 38).

relevant to the use of aural as well as visual medium-specific noise, Link further proposes to anchor an effect of authenticity in the relations to the listener in these imaginary spaces.

> It is in these ways – presence, identification, absence, location – that even the noisiest recordings may be perceived as "authentic." By creating conditions whereby such categories become both possible and necessary, noise enables us to dwell in and about such recordings. This has quite a significant impact on the effect of listening. In a very palpable sense, the "real" emerges from where one is present or located, regardless of its qualities or correspondence to some other circumstances whether "real" or imagined (Link 2001, p. 38).

This palpable sense of the real, of presence and location, is also intimately connected with the fascination with the medium itself and its materiality, and the noises that testify to its embodied dimensions. Thus, we can observe a connection between the interest in medium-specific noise and more general urges for embodiment in the face of sensations and conceptions of disembodiment and immateriality. These come together with a stronger interest in notions of physical location, materiality and opacity, as opposed to tendencies toward dislocation, disembodiment, immateriality and transparency, both in the realms of aural and visual media. Noise plays a vital role in articulating such interests. As Link notes,

> in drawing our attention to the technology itself, its machines and media, noise becomes a metaphor attaching a kind of tactility to sound. Radio static becomes the feel of a tuning knob. The crackle of dust becomes the vinyl itself. The hum of tubes evokes their warm temperature. A stylus dropping carries the weight of a tone arm (2001, p. 38).

Noise then helps to counteract a notion of dematerialization produced in various ways as storage media have become less tangible (see Fetveit 2007). It also comes to set up an adversarial relation to the presumably improved digital technologies of CDs and other formats of digital storage. Thus, noise is not merely a means for artists' expression. It is also mired in a more substantial battle between the new and the old, progress and tradition, playing itself out in various fields, hovering above a mediascape struggling to digest current changes, both in the aural and the visual realm.

Noise in the Visual Realm

Following the advent of the aesthetics of medium-specific noise in the 1990s, various forms of noise and retrograde aesthetics have also pervaded the visual culture for more than a decade. Examples are rife in the cover work for various musical artists, for example, on albums from the Scottish electronica duo Boards of Canada, like *Music Has the Right to Children* (1998), *In a Beautiful Place Out in the Country* (2000), *Twoism* (2002) and *The Campfire Headspace* (2005). The

covers of these albums have discolored and torn photographs evoking the 1970s. A noisy and retrograde aesthetics also defines the cover art for Madonna's greatest hits album *Celebration* (2009), where Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe portrait has formed the basis for a Madonna image where raster dots, wear and tear as well as imperfect splices between paper bits help illude an aged and worn billboard image.

In the realm of photography, the German artist Stephanie Schneider also presents seemingly washed-out and discolored images where details might be smudged out to the point where they are hardly legible. She uses expired Polaroid film in which the deprecation of the chemicals produces odd and partly unpredictable effects. Her photographs are often taken in desert areas such as those found in California's Death Valley, and they look at times as if they were stills from a road movie.[8] She has also narrativized her images in short films based on a series of Polaroid still images. Each image may be shown from a fraction of a second to several seconds and, as such, they never aspire toward creating the illusion of movement. The films utilize music rather than dialog on their sound tracks, evoking moods of intimacy and authentic living, as exemplified in *Strange Love* (2004). A number of other photographers also actively take advantage of medium-specific noise in various ways, among them U.S. photographer Sally Mann, who I will come back to.

Within the realm of film, both Peter Delpeut's *Lyrical Nitrate* (1991) and Bill Morrison's *Decasia: The State of Decay* (2002) display radically deteriorated film material, but in these cases the deteriorated materials are displayed in their own right, rather than used to invoke one specific medium inside another. In these films, often a third or more of the face of the image is so destroyed that there is hardly any image left. They remind us of how film material has a historicity of its own, and how time and poor storage conditions may completely deteriorate this material. As Mary Ann Doane notes,

> The historicity of a medium is traced in the physical condition of its objects. This is why a film like Bill Morrison's *Decasia* (2002) is so moving in its melancholic record of the slow death of the films once thought to immortalize their subjects, in its chronicling of the deterioration and disintegration of film stock and its subjection to the external forces of water and fire (2007 p. 144).

If nostalgia relates to past life, and outmoded or decayed media forms are evoked in the album covers by Boards of Canada and in Schneider's imagery, nostalgia and melancholy take center stage in *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia*. The mourning for the medium in a state of decay, staged as a meditative spectacle to be enjoyed for its aesthetic beauty, charged with a host of photographic *puncta* from a past

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8   Her book, *Stranger Than Paradise*, offers a collection of her photographs (2006).

in the process of being lost, is on offer in a film where visual motifs are largely subjugated to the formal and material qualities of this decay. If *Decasia* mourns the loss of chemical film in a meditative fashion, there are also films with a cheerful take on the shift to digital technology.

Ill 1: Screenshots from Planet Terror*, Robert Rodriguez, 2007.*

Robert Rodriguez has mired his *Planet Terror* (2007) with deteriorated imagery[9]. The film is a light-hearted comic book-style horror movie about a zombie attack on the planet. Its imagery is, to varying degrees, degraded. In the extra material on the DVD, Rodriguez explains what he calls "the aging effect" by saying that it "is really just a series of layers of real film print damage, artifacts, dust-passes, scratches." (Rodriguez 2007). He emphasizes the importance of keeping it

> looking random so it doesn't feel like you're watching the same effect over and over …. I would also use the aging for dramatic effect. Whenever a scary sequence is coming up or an action sequence, you notice that the film gets more deteriorated. And then, once the threat disappears, so miraculously do a lot of the scratches (ibid.).

Thus, the film gets deteriorated and wobbly at dramatic high points, as when doctor Block (Josh Brolin), sees the badly damaged Tammy (the pop singer Stacy Ferguson) come into the hospital. Block later discovers that Tammy is the secret lesbian lover of his wife. Aural noise accompanies the visual deterioration in the hospital scene when the corpse of Tammy, who Block refers to as a "no-brainer … scooped clean out of her skull," is put on display to his associates. Similar combinations of narrative intensity and noisy crescendos take place throughout the movie, especially in violent and sexually charged scenes.

In one example, we also get to see attacking zombies eating humans. Rodriguez comments interestingly on the effect of introducing deterioration in this case:

> In one instance, the MPAA wanted us to cut down a scene where someone's brain was being eaten, because it was getting munched on for a little too long. I cut it down and added a lot of aging, and it actually made it feel a lot more violent…. Clean, it looks fine, but once you add the skipping and the jumping and deterioration of an old print, it feels twice as fast, twice as violent. It just roughs it up a lot (ibid.).

The most deteriorated element is a love scene, in which the film loses all its colors but red, distorts and gets sprinkled with deteriorated bits and missing flecks of film. It ends with the sound of flicker as the movie halts to a full stop and then burns from the heat of the projector. If Ingmar Bergman let his film strip burn *Persona* (1966), as if to hint at how the film was pressing up against something the medium could barely represent, Rodriquez lets his film strip burn with an effect as different as the films are different. The playful implications of the celluloid burning in Rodriguez's film is perhaps, first of all, that his leading lady is too hot for the film material.

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9   The film was part of a double feature of "Grindhouse movies" together with Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (2007).

Ill 2: Planet Terror*, Robert Rodriguez, 2007.*

A. O. Scott, the *New York Times* reviewer, commented on both of the "Grindhouse" films, Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* and Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (2007):

> Each of the features is missing a reel – the management apologizes for the inconvenience – and of course it's the reel with the sex in it, which the projectionist probably stole for his own amusement. The prints are full of scratches, bad splices and busted sprocket holes, and the images are not always in focus.
>
> It's all a pretty good joke, especially since most of these glitches, artifacts of an earlier technological era, have been produced digitally.[10]

Planet Terror, according to the film scholar Caetlin Benson-Allott, was "shot with a Panavision HD video camera, meaning that their imperfections are digital composites, image imperfections lifted from celluloid transfers and added to the necessarily pristine HD file" (2008 p. 20). The artifice produced by Rodriguez evokes a particular mode of nostalgia. The celluloid copy of a Grindhouse movie theater, worn to pieces by innumerable screenings, perhaps even robbed of the juicy sex scenes as hinted at by the *New York Times* reviewer, is evoked again in a digital age, largely by medium-specific noises and malfunctions transferred from real celluloid materials.[11]

A completely different tone is set in the autobiographical documentary by the Norwegian filmmaker Margreth Olin, *My Body* (2002). In a highly personal and intimate tone, Olin reveals the difficult relation she has to her own body. From the age of five, she became increasingly aware of its abnormalities in the eyes of various female observers. Her belly that was sticking out, her toes that would "ruin any shoes," the position of her teeth that, according to the dentist's assistant, could hardly bite off a sausage. In the film, Olin shares this difficult coming of age story, generously crediting men with a series of loving remarks that eventually help her to come to terms with her body. She questions the ways in which

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10   Technically, this process creates glitches that are produced in an analog medium, which then are transferred to a digital film. Thus, they combine both analog and digital techniques http://movies.nytimes.com/2007/04/06/movies/06grin.html (accessed 4.4.2013).

11   The ironic tribute to, and longing for, the past invites a new and particular form of cinephilia, according to the German media researcher Dominik Schrey (2010).

women, in particular, can be highly critical toward each other, and emphasizes the importance of a pounding heart over a picture-perfect body. In a number of cases when medium-specific noise is used in movies, it is especially prevalent in the opening of films, as seen for example in David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995), where a long and beautifully orchestrated credit sequence puts on display what seems like multiple materials collected from a crime scene, in footage that is full of scratches and glitches, to produce a compelling and rough forensic aesthetic.

My Body also starts with scratched footage and what appears like dust on a vinyl record on the sound track, during an old style pre-movie count down from 8 to 3.

Ill 3:   Screenshots from My Body*, 2002, Margreth Olin*

Then, the volume of dusty sound track is lowered and we hear the voice of Olin say: "Now you should lean back, lower your shoulders and breathe deeply. Nobody is judging you now. Slowly, in…and out."[12] In between her utterances, a male voice sounding possibly like some kind of relaxation guru, is echoing Olin's voice by saying: "take a deep breath – you must not be so self-protective – make lower your shoulders, it's not so dangerous to relax."[13] While this is spoken, the deteriorated film, in black and white, full of scratches, missing flecks of emulsion, visible dust, and flickering lights, has provided the visuals. Thus, the opening of this film strives to set a particular tone. It is explicitly therapeutic toward its audience, in its attempt to establish its mood. What mood is this, and how does the aesthetics of noise contribute to establishing it?

We are told to relax, to lean back, and to lower shoulders and breathe deeply, and we are assured that nobody is judging us now. Olin aims to set up an intimate connection to her audience in which generous acceptance is the key issue. The aesthetics of the film is not one of pristine beauty-shots, smooth and elegant framing and editing. It is not an aesthetic akin to the glossy fashion magazines like *Elle*, in which female beauty is negotiated. It is more reasonable to see the

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12   My translation from Norwegian.

13   This is spoken in English with a strong accent that may suggest a person coming from India.

film's aesthetic as a negation of such glossy imagery of the female body.[14] Thus, it is an aesthetic of imperfection, of vulnerability, inaugurated by displaying a film body marked by life. Within the movie, we also find a lively, unpretentious and charming use of imagery. Transitions may seem clumsy, the camera seems at times searching, zooming, the images are partly out of focus, and discolored, partly so grainy and so low in resolution that they cover up as much as display the body of Olin. This aesthetics of imperfection is that of the amateur: "One who loves or is fond *of*; one who has a taste for anything," in the words of the *OED*.

In this film, told by a pounding heart, the carnal predicament of its frail medium comes to parallel the frailty of the person portrayed, or perhaps more importantly, the respectful care the filmmaker wants to see granted to other female bodies, other humans, other hearts. In the film, Olin tells the story of how her deep uncertainty about her own body and her various inferiority complexes defined her coming of age, but she also shares how these insecurities were eventually overcome with the help of loving men. The decayed aesthetics of the film helps Olin articulate a particular tone of intimacy and fragility, and helps convey the respect that bodies deserve.

Noise in the Aural and the Visual Realms

In view of these examples, what is there to be said about the similarities between the noise in the aural and visual realm? We noted how aural noise can be used to construct space. Does visual noise have comparable powers? Film history offers a number of examples where we see someone seeing a film, and where the low-grade image emphasizes that it is indeed a film within a film. But to a considerable extent, the information added tends to be redundant as we already perceive and judge the space from what we see. In the classic opening of *Citizen Kane*, for example, when the newsreel ends, its poorer quality as we cut to the screening space is superfluous for our understanding that we are seeing someone seeing a film. But even though it is not crucial for building the space, it still may add realism and credibility to the spatial setup we are perceiving. However, the power to build space is, as we have seen, hardly the most important feature of medium-specific noise, as a number of other sounds can also achieve this. The main achievement of medium-specific noise is, therefore, simply its capability to call forth specific

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14   Olin got considerable attention in the Norwegian press when launching the film. One reason for this involved *Elle* magazine, which had asked for a feature interview. As a condition for granting the interview, Olin required that her body should be displayed on the cover of the magazine. *Elle* declined, which spurned a debate and also made the case for the importance of the topic of the film.

media, media that can be summoned by other means only with difficulty. Forms of nostalgia are also constructed though the evocation of these media, forms which seem to operate in a parallel manner in the aural and the visual realm.

As Cowell pointed out, noise in the sense of inharmonious sound, from cymbals, bass drums and the like, is a crucial means of intensifying an expression in order to produce climaxes in music. Medium-specific noise may also operate to intensify an expression. Thus, Auner points to the way in which the bright cymbal rhythm embedded in a haze of vinyl noise intensifies the sense of obsession articulated in the Portishead song, and as Rodriguez notes how a violent scene could be roughed up to seem twice as violent with the medium-specific noise of the worn film strip added. Now, intensification by means of noise in the form of something that impedes the transmission of information may also occur and may in fact be part of the explanation of the intensifying effect noted by Rodriguez. Link is onto this medial operation when he reminds us that: "As a barrier to the signal, noise engenders interference with transmission as well as embodying an effort to receive" (2001, p. 37). Our effort to receive in the face of interference may render our connection with what we try to perceive vulnerable and precarious, and the faint information we get from the material, as well as the mediating material itself, may become more precious, as it is a scarce resource. Under these conditions, our perception may be intensified, as it is in the cases Rodriguez discussed above.

The Digital Remediation of Medialities

The efficiency with which a medium can be evoked, or remediated, by means of its specific forms of noise, adds crucial medial resources to digital media. Filters imitating the specific forms of noise associated with various media come to provide a powerful resource for bringing forth a considerable back catalog of medial qualities. The strategy of remediating by means of medium-specific noise operates as a working principle that can articulate a number of media, not only media that are becoming obsolete. In a situation where human creativity excels in the arena of software, and software becomes a major tool for cultural production, it is no surprise that a host of software applications now exist that assist in these remediation efforts by means of medium-specific noise, and in more general efforts to create forms of retro looks and sounds.

At the same time, of course, more solutions than ever aim at the contrary effects of noise reduction to improve the quality of photographic images by removing noise and grain and so on. Thus, along with the digital remediations on offer, there are plenty of other opportunities to support degrading as well as upgrading,

to enhance as well as to erase noise, in this era when new media in many ways seem pitted against older media forms.

Iconoclasm as Rivalry Between Media

Rivalry and competition between media may be viewed as involving particular kinds of iconoclasm. These are perspectives that may help add to an explanation as to why the aesthetics of medium-specific noise has become so prevalent. A stimulating take on such rivalry and competition between media may be found in Boris Groys' provocative analysis of how film has been related to other media, involving observations that bear on the current divide between the new and the old, as well as on the issue of medium-specific noise.

Groys claims that "throughout its entire history as a medium, film has waged a more or less open struggle against other media such as painting, sculpture, architecture, and even theater and opera" (Groys 2008, p. 282). Thus, he locates what he calls cinematic iconoclasm "in terms of the conflict between different media." More generally, he links iconoclasm to notions of progress, where it appears to clear "our path of all that has become redundant, powerless, and void of inner meaning, to make way for whatever the future might bring." He goes on to suggest that "the avant-garde is nothing other than a staged martyrdom of the image that replaced the Christian image of martyrdom" (ibid.). After all, he adds, "the avant-garde abuses the body of the traditional image with all manner of torture utterly reminiscent of the torture inflicted on the body of Christ in the iconography of medieval Christianity." Groys continues to note that

> this possibility of strategically deploying iconoclasm as an artistic device came about because the artistic avant-garde, for its part, shifted its focus from the message to the medium. The destruction of old images embodying a particular message is not meant to generate new images embodying a new message, but rather to highlight the materiality of the medium concealed behind any "spiritual" message (2008, p. 77).

The evidence that Groys draws on in terms of smashed statues, slashed paintings and crushed buildings is convincing for making his point about filmic iconoclasm and media rivalry. However, Groys also finds that, in recent years, an iconoclasm is also directed against the medium of film itself. New technologies like video, the computer and the DVD format, make it possible to arrest a film's flow, and thus, the medium is laid bare. Its movement is proven to be a mere illusion.

Though Groys' analysis is suggestive, it becomes less convincing when he locates iconoclasm in the increased manipulation of time, and illustrates his point by

referring to *The Matrix*.[15] It is easier to see how audiovisual motion is amplified and refined through the new flexibility afforded by digital techniques than how it is abated and crushed. But this does not mean that the film is not subjected to iconoclasm. What it means is that we should look elsewhere than to the amplification of motion control to find it. The ubiquitous uses of medium-specific noise, in cinema as well as the audiovisual media, would be a useful place to look. We have already seen how Rodriguez thrashes his celluloid in *Planet Terror*, how Stephanie Schneider implicitly batters her Polaroid film material by aging it beyond expiration dates, how Margreth Olin presses Super 8 to degrade its looks, and how, in their album art, Boards of Canada uses faded photographs pushed to look decades older than they are, and Madonna uses scruffy and worn medial materials to intensify the look of the *Celebrity*-cover through a palimpsest of media evoking conflicting time signatures. As mentioned, such strategies have also become prevalent in music videos, where forms of noisy iconoclasm have been prevalent since the turn of the millennium.

Let us consider Green Day's video for "Boulevard of Broken Dreams" (2004). The music video is ordinary in its mix of footage from the band playing and the members of the band walking through a presumably interesting landscape, in this case an arid landscape with cacti and various other tokens of the desert. But the level of distortion and noise the footage is inflicted with makes it a powerful example of the lengths to which directors have taken this trend in music videos.[16] In the "Making of" movie accounting for its production, which is featured as extra material on the CD, the director Samuel David Bayer claims that he intends to "hand-burn the negative with cigarettes and spill coffee on it." We then see him burn the film-strip and scratch it with a razor blade. The procedure clearly offers a tangible sense of physical materiality, much like the physicality of the film Rodriguez has used to obtain his effects, though the styles of distortion differ. The violent aggressivity these film materials are subjected to can bring to mind violent acts of iconoclasm.

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15 It might be argued that the famous instances of manipulated time in *The Matrix* do not represent an abatement of movement, but rather the opposite, its amplification, by means of highly refined motion control. This refined motion control takes place on the diegetic level where Neo must learn to command his powers (in Zen-inspired scenes where mind trumps matter), and on a technical level through the ground-breaking visual effects of the movie. This, by the way, is only one of a series of ways in which the spatiotemporal flexibility of moving images in general has been augmented with digital effects to allow for the emergence of a new aesthetic of post-production that excels in the use of mutable temporality (see Fetveit 2011).

16 The video won six awards at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2005, most notably Video of the Year. It was also awarded Best Direction, Best Editing, and Best Cinematography, as well as Best Group Video and Best Rock Video.

Groys describes the iconoclastic strategies of the avant-garde of the 1920s, as "a staged martyrdom of the image." His observations on the 1920s avant-garde iconoclastic practices are surprisingly well-fitted to practices characteristic of the current aesthetics of noise, most certainly those to which Bayer subjected the above-mentioned film strip.

> In its treatment by the avant-garde, the image is – in both symbolic and literal terms – sawed apart, cut up, smashed into fragments, pierced, spiked, drawn through dirt, and exposed to ridicule [...]. This is by no means driven by some sadistic urge to cruelly maltreat the bodies of innocent images. Nor is all this wreckage and destruction intended to clear the way for the emergence of new images and the introduction of new values. Far from it, for it is the images of wreckage and destruction themselves that serve as the icons of new values. In the eyes of the avant-garde the iconoclastic gesture represents an artistic device, deployed less as a means of destroying old icons than as a way to generate new images – or, indeed, new icons (Groys 2008, p. 77).

At the end of this observation, Groys, without claiming to do so, comes close to articulating an aesthetic of noise which sits in a complex way between an iconoclastic gesture and a retooling of what was formerly unwanted noise. It becomes a means of expression in its own right, as an iconoclastic act that aims to produce new icons. And here it gets complicated, because diagnosing the punishment meted out on the film material merely as expressing iconoclasm is hardly satisfactory, no matter how violently the martyrdom of the image is staged. What we see in present audiovisual culture is not merely destruction of the image and ways of displaying the weaknesses of various media. It is also, as we have seen, a caring for and a nostalgia for media materialities that are about to become obsolete. The unsettled score here – between appreciation and depreciation, between nostalgia and scorn – may be related to what Zygmunt Bauman diagnoses as a fundamental ambivalence in what he calls "liquid modernity" (2000). This is a situation in which we come to celebrate technological progress by displaying the inadequacies of past media, while at the same time evoking the life and warmth of older media in a nostalgic gesture of longing.

Such a structural situation – mired with ambivalent tensions, where destruction and love go together – provides us with a sketch for a medial ecology defined by our fundamental ambivalence toward the efficiency of computers for handling cultural data on the one side, and a longing for lost materialities like vinyl and film emulsion on the other. This provides a backdrop for assessing the current ubiquity of the aesthetics of medium-specific noise. In particular, we may see more clearly why it has risen to prominence, and therefore perhaps the factors that may lead to its decline. But before getting to that, how can we further explain the urge for material embodiment and for the materiality of the medium?

Embodied Animism

The critical theorist Greg Hainge's reading of the foregrounding of noise is much in tune with that of Auner and Link, when he points out how these noises can evoke "a more embodied, physical, past era different from our own" (Hainge, 2005, p. 6). He comments on the sense of nostalgia produced by "Mom's typewriter," a font emulating the print of an old pre-electric typewriter, a noisier version of the more common "Typist."[17] Its inadequacies, he says, become proof of the overwork to which this machine has been subject, like Mom. Certainly, they are both past their retirement age, but they are somehow more endearing in their slight incompetence, as they cannot fail to make us nostalgically recall what they once were (Hainge 2005, p. 5). In Hainge's phrasing, the distinction between the human Mom and the machine typewriter disappears, which is a main point in his analysis. The machine comes to elicit similar notions of getting old and worn and eventually passing away, and before that happens, both Mom and machine become "endearing." Hainge's reading adeptly brings out the animism in play, where old media and old machines come to be perceived as subjected to similar processes of aging and decay as humans, and they therefore also enlist similar endearing emotions.

Now, Hainge notes how "the promise of 'Mom's typewriter' (for all nostalgia implies a promise, a promise of a return to a longed-for past) is a lie since it emulates as noisy (or opaque) a font that was never ever intended to be silent and transparent" (2005, p. 6). Clearly, the nostalgia articulated by these noises does not return us to a longed-for past, but sets up a *relation* to this past (as shown in Link's analysis). This relation is premised on the evocation of the older medium, and this evocation is made possible by means of its characteristic noise. Thus, we are not returned to the medium in its prime working modus, where it would be perceived as reasonably transparent and therefore not so clearly articulated as a material medium subject to decay, error and noise.[18] Rather, it returns us to a situation in which the medium is worn, noisy, opaque, endearing and possibly even dying, setting up an ambiguous relation between now and then. The putting on display of the weaknesses of the older medium, by focusing on its noise, can

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17 The font was made in 1997 by Christoph Mueller who typed the alphabet on his mom's old typewriter, scanned it and then made the font.

18 Both Auner and Link point out how we are trained to listen past the noise of whatever medium is in current use. As Link says: "Listeners learned to 'hear through' noise. The dust and nicks on vinyl recordings, amplifier hum, or speed inaccuracies of tape mechanisms produced types of noise that were basically as predictable as potholes on a familiar road. We knew where and when these things occurred and simply drove around them, so to speak. We could ignore noise and, as we say, ignorance is bliss" (p. 36).

be taken to imply the sovereign quality of the new digital alternative as well as an affirmation of progress. Contrary to this, the endearing weaknesses can be read as placing the older medium on the right side of a divide constituted by a set of dichotomies sorting good from bad. The noisy media then may very well come to be seen as alive as opposed to dead, warm as opposed to cold, human as opposed to machinic, real as opposed to virtual, material as opposed to immaterial.[19]

Objects, as they age, become marked with their history. This, according to Walter Benjamin, comes to endow them with a special "aura." He also notes that an aura can be evoked by an experience of something that seems close, yet distant at the same time, like the star in the night sky that is remote while its light is yet with us. More precisely, he speaks of "a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance [...] of a distance, however near it may be" (Benjamin cited in Hansen 2008, p. 336) .The presence-effect of mechanical recordings is precisely that which places us within the reach of, brings us close to, people or objects recorded. Yet, these media based on *automated inscription* – to use Friedrich Kittler's term, which is more narrow and also more fitted to electronic media than Benjamin's term *mechanical reproduction* – also place us at a remove from the objects and events they represent. Thus, a structural similarity can be noted between the operational logic of media based upon automated inscription and the aura-producing constellation Benjamin describes. Noise may intensify this pull between distance and nearness. It may expand a sense of distance, by making characters, like the ones in *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia* seem more faded and remote. Yet, this sense of partial loss of and disturbance to the connection may also intensify our perception and our relation to what may otherwise be lost, and paradoxically bring it nearer to us. In this way, as we have seen, noise can charge recordings with a curious energy, an energy that the clean recording would lack.

Noise, by disturbing the transition of sound and imagery from the source to the delivery medium can make that transition precarious, staging it as only able to take place against long odds. What comes to us, then, must be cherished, as it just barely made it to us and was almost lost. This set-up, where a recording is charged with a special energy by means of intervening noise, can be generalized beyond the medium-specific sense of noise discussed here, to an even more general disturbance that interferes with or obscures a signal.[20] The negation of the

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19 How this is balanced in actual examples, whether they are tilted clearly in favor of the presumably analog, or they articulate a more ambivalent position, may vary.

20 This is an issue that deserves to be explored in its own right. I started such an exploration by presenting a paper on *The Precarious Aesthetic of the Documentary* in a seminar at University of Copenhagen in November 2007. The work is now being continued in the research project *The Power of the Precarious Aesthetic*, which is supported by The Danish Council for Independent Research for 2013-2015.

medium's ordinary power to inform us about what is happening can then be compensated by a denser connection offered by the metonymic power of the relic. In a sense, we move, as from metaphor to metonymy, from likeness to closeness, from the iconic to the indexical. The energy with which the medium is charged is also auratic – both on the model of the paradoxical distance and nearness, and on the model of how objects are marked by the history to which they have been subjected. Thus, noise may work to actualize the media in question as material objects in their own right, subject to histories, marked by a physical life, ultimately subject to decay and death. This is a major contribution of the timely films *Lyrical Nitrate* and *Decasia*, which seems to display limited interest in the faith of its human subjects, and focus instead on the death of their own medial material.

Sally Mann combines an interest in the death and decay of human subjects, as well as that of the medium itself, in her series of photographs collected in *What Remains* (2003). Mann's engagement with death combines mortality as a motive with a Culloden wet plate technique that produces an uneven image that itself seems subject to the similar processes of decay and dying that affect humans. Thereby, the mortality of the medium comes to echo the mortality of the represented, but it also endows the representation of death with a contemplative spirituality. The carnal medial effect offered by the very hands-on techniques required by the wet plates helps to carry the images away from a merely informational, "forensic" status to one that invites reflection on our predicament as humans, our mortality.[21]

In these images, we get the stripping bare of the medium itself, perhaps more than the subjects presented. The medium, being examined in its decay, where its inadequacies and problems are laid bare, inadequacies that testify to the particular shortcomings through which it can be recognized and evoked, is revealed as to its weaknesses and possible mortality. In fact, the medium comes across as as mortal as the humans represented in it. And just as the decaying and dying human body elicits care, so does the decaying and dying medial body. This allows human sentiments to come to bear on the medium, it humanizes the medial body on the basis of the silent assumption that what can die is alive. But how does this material and embodied medium come forth, how does it speak?

Barthes has talked about the grain of the voice, about the ways in which the body comes to obstruct the air flowing out of the lungs and, by means of this hindrance, how the flesh of the body inscribes itself into the voice by providing a

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21 In spite of the noisy technology that thickens the medium and ensures its embodied quality, a number of Mann's images in this series remain somewhat clinical because of the limited concern for the subjects represented, except for her beloved dog whose remains may have initiated the project.

graininess that testifies to its carnal physicality. This bodily resistance to the air slipping out inscribes itself in the voice as *grain*, which again thickens the physical connection between the body of the singer and the body that listens. The obstructions inscribing themselves in the signal as grain are much like the obstructions we have observed inscribing themselves with noise. They are immensely revealing, similar to the way that medium-specific noise reveals the medium, or attack transients help identify the instrument being played. Now, what Barthes sought in the grain of the voice was the intimacy of a connection between the singing body and the listening body – a connection between two humans. When talking about the *grain of the medium*, however, the relation is no longer between the experiencing human body and the represented human body, but between the experiencing body and the medium itself, which has now become endowed with a body subject to decay. It has, in a sense, become mortal and therefore, by implication, alive. Furthermore, the grain that helps thicken and bring into being that medial body ensures for the beholder and listener a physical connection to the represented. This connection ensures the invocation of a form of presence that is physically based, that rests in contiguity more fundamentally than in similarity. But if analog media can be noisy, and can be alive, can digital media be alive as well?

Digital Noise: GLITCH

Noise from analog media is often presented in a setting where the idea of a more perfect digital medium is evoked. This, however, is a digital perfection that at the same time may be associated with something cold, non-human and machine-like. The genre of Glitch music effectively counters the ideas of perfection, of coldness and immortality that tend to be associated with the digital, in spite of the rapid aging of computers and software caused by upgrades. It demonstrates in a tangible way that digital technology can fail, too. In Glitch music, the particular distortions and inadequacies of the computer, CD and CD-player are put on display in the stuttering, skittering, skating sounds of glitches as the technology fails to correctly read and translate files into analog and thus perceivable sounds. Thus, premature conclusions about the immateriality of the digital, and the unique materiality of analog media are called into question by this genre.[22] Glitch mimics the strategy of mortality adopted by analog media to communicate the fact that digital media are subject to decay as well, which, by implication, also comes to endow them

22   See Fetveit (2007) for a critical discussion of notions of immateriality.

with a sense of life, and invites notions of animism to come into play in relation to these media as well.

The strength of the interest in Glitch beyond the avant-garde – leading it to become incorporated in the music of Madonna as well as in music videos by Lady Gaga and many more – must be seen as fueled by more substantial cultural negotiations concerning our media as they migrate to digital platforms.[23] Thus, if the prevalence of medium-specific noise at present can be linked to negotiations concerning the shift to digital media technologies, we may expect the interest in such an aesthetic to diminish as digital media become more settled, and nostalgia for analog media eventually fades into the background.[24] However, the new options for re-circulating older media in digital media have provided important expressive options that are likely to continue being used. They broaden the expressive palette of these media substantially. Moreover, the interest in, and exploration of, noise has also disclosed a rich array of artistic possibilities that may transform and continue to develop in their own right, in various ways, rather than merely fade with the further adoption and normalization of digital technologies. At any rate, noise as a means of intensifying human expression is likely to stay with us in various shapes and forms. The precarious aesthetic, based in various forms of obstructed perceptions urging us to intensify our efforts to sense vital signals that are barely perceivable, will also stay with us in different ways, as it is a fundamental operational logic associated with the automatic recording of sounds and images. Therefore, the aesthetics of our media can be expected to remain noisy in various ways, even after the current interest in noise becomes less urgent.

Media Aesthetics

The exploration of noise, above, takes place in a situation where the concept of medium has gained considerable traction across the humanities, although our insights into how 'the medium is the message,' to say it with McLuhan, or into what difference the medium makes, and how it may operate in a number of settings, still needs to be improved. Yet, the common interest in exchanges across disciplines like film and media studies, art history, visual culture, aesthetic philosophy, and others is considerable. In such a context, media aesthetics may be a

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23 For an analysis of glitch in Madonna's "Don't Tell Me," see Anne Danielsen and Arnt Maasø, "Mediating Music: Materiality and Silence in Madonna's 'Don't Tell Me'," *Popular Music* (2009).

24 An analysis of such processes, involving de-solidifying and solidifying of media, can be found in my article "The Concept of Medium in the Digital Era" (Fetveit 2012).

useful term around which to organize productive exchanges.[25] It may also be a label to describe research into aesthetic uses of medial matters.

The current essay has pursued an interest, not only in the aesthetic sensations and experiences strategic uses of medium-specific noise can produce, but also in principles that are guiding the ways in which this noise operates. This has involved an interrogation of what noise is in its various definitions, its history in the realm of art and music, as well as how the intensified uses of medium-specific noise can be related to media change.

Thus, the exploration above is driven by an interest in how matter – in particular noisy matter that mediates – works to generate experience and emotional engagement. My vantage point has been an interest in the aesthetic experience produced by the sensuous offerings from the medial matters in question. The choice of examples has not been informed by an attempt to prove the importance of medial differences in cases where the medium aspires to invisibility, as media tend to do, but rather to interrogate examples where the medium clearly demands attention, and is actively operating as an arena for creative artistic interventions. The examples also work comparatively to elucidate how what may appear to be similar techniques may elicit widely different results on the level of meaning and emotional engagement, for example, by the different uses of torn and noisy film materials by Olin and Rodriguez, producing even more different effects.

A conception of media aesthetics as a research program that invites close attention to the medium, to the materials and technologies deployed, and how they operate together to elicit sensations and engagement, could be deemed rather formalist and lacking in political significance. Thus, it is also crucial to look into how human subjects are inscribed into and co-constituted by media in a number of ways. It becomes important to ask what life-worlds are co-produced at the receiving end of alternate medial expressions. I have shown how the political productivity of Olin to grant freedom, to suspend and even to erase judgment towards female bodies, in particular, is partly articulated by the noisy imperfection of her medium, while the noisy aesthetic of Rodriguez is more likely to produce a playful jack-ass attitude. Thus, drawing attention toward the biopolitical aspects of noisy media – being both able to elicit fragility, fallibility and a number of other attitudes and sensations – is vital for bringing media aesthetic analysis to bear on life, also in its more political dimensions. Formal aesthetic choices are often fundamentally invested with preferences for life forms and values making up the social fabric of the human endeavor. For this reason, digital perfection is easily translated into something foreign to human life, a point which may be part

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25   An example of this can be found at University of Copenhagen where *Seminar in Media Aesthetics* provides a fertile arena for exchanges accross disciplines.

of the inspiration for an aesthetics that shows the digital to be fallible too, even subject to mortal decay.

Times of medial transition, most certainly the slow burning revolution in media that the migration to a digital platform entails, are bound to make the medium appear more clearly to us. A business-as-usual situation tends to make the medium retreat to a less prominent position – as a kind of reassuring massage that stabilizes our sense of connection to the world, and inscribes us with less friction into appropriate subject positions in various life-worlds. In times of transition, it is more evident how the medium is the message, and how those producing media have, in a sense, worked on that message to various effects. However, in times of greater medial stability, when media slide into the background and stop being noticed as much, it will still remain important to investigate these ways in which the medium operates, the differences it makes, the massage it may offer, and the subject positioning and life forms it invites.

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Shifting Aesthetics of Image-Sound Relations in the Interaction between Art, Technology, and Perception

Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann

1. Perception and technology: the two sides of Media Aesthetics

An important part of the evolution of human perception concerns the differentiation and (re-)synthesis of hearing and seeing over the course of natural evolution and their subsequent cultural conditioning. This aspect is represented by multimodal integration as an element of the perceptual capacity of the individual. Several anthropological theories dating from the early twentieth century are based on the assumption that the senses had a single common precursor from which the individual sense faculties developed over the course of evolution. Also, it is allegedly possible to demonstrate that certain "primeval synesthesias" existed over the course of human development and history.[1] Today, neurologists are exploring the hypothesis that during early neonatal development the sensory regions in the brain advance from synesthetic processing to neurologically differentiated, single-sense processing.[2] One could argue that this development of the differentiation and (re-)synthesis of hearing and seeing is mirrored in the history of culture and technology of image and sound, which will be the main focus of this text.[3]

Today, the technical and cultural interlacing between visual and acoustic information is so deep and diverse that it is difficult to imagine how separate the cultures and artifacts of image and sound were before the advent of audiovisual media. This separation comprised both the cultural evaluation of music and fine art as well as the physical-material rendering of visual or acoustic artifacts. Music

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1 On primeval synesthesia, see Albert Wellek, 1927, "Die Farbe-Ton-Forschung und ihr erster Kongress," *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 9, pp. 576–584.

2 See Daphne Maurer, 1997, "Neonatal Synaesthesia. Implications for the processing of speech and faces," in Simon Baron-Cohen and John E. Harrison (eds) *Synaesthesia. Classic and Contemporary Readings,* p. 224.

3 For the relation of perception and technology see also: Daniels, Dieter and Naumann, Sandra, 2010, "Introduction" in Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann (eds) *SEE THIS SOUND Audiovisuology. Compendium: An Interdisciplinary Survey of Audiovisual Culture*, pp. 5–16.

has been considered to be an intellectual art related to mathematics since antiquity. Until the Middle Ages, however, painting and sculpture were understood primarily as crafts. If at all, one could only occasionally establish a relationship between the fleeting sounds of music and lasting works of art that one would today refer to as "performative." It was not until the nineteenth century that media technology enabled the time stream of sounds to become storable and that images started to move, so that today we perceive their synthesis almost as a matter of course. Thus from the outset, the question arises in all media based forms of art as to the relation between image and sound, namely in terms of both technology as well as aesthetics. However, the interfacing of image and sound made possible by media technology not only corresponds with a logic of machines but with the fundamental need for synesthesia embedded in human culture. Its expression ranges from the torch dance accompanying the sound of drums in a prehistoric cave, organ music and the light falling through the window of a Gothic church, to the spectacular courtly celebrations of the Baroque period and visual performances in a techno club, in which ecstatic and spiritual experiences often play a role.

Over the past 150 years or so, this deep-seated desire for a synthesis of image and sound has gradually become reality. Then, as now, artists and inventors, tinkerers and entertainers have worked on achieving this. In the process, aesthetic and technical innovations meet each other at the interface between image and sound, where artistic experiment, obsessive bricolage, and genuine technical inventions emerge in an alternation between enthusiasm and desperation, between success and failure. Only very few of the results are finally – often very much later – injected into the mainstream of marketing by the mass media. The ambitious artistic aims as well as the immense technical problems that were wrestled with in the "heroic" period of combining image and sound have today been replaced by digital commodities. There is therefore little awareness of the long series of historic predecessors to what can be called today's commonplace audiovisuality. They range from designs for a *Gesamtkunstwerk* towards the end of the nineteenth century and the abstract films of the 1920s to the video-audio synthesizers and psychedelic events of the 1960s. Tracing this development, one can examine the close relationship between the innovation of technical processes and new forms of artistic expression and content.

Electronic media – initially analog in the 1960s and then increasingly digital since the 1990s – mark a decisive turning point in this development. Their emergence brought about a fundamentally new relation between images and sounds, both in terms of their production as well as their reception: while human perception had previously been their only point of convergence, for the first time in history, sound and light were directly combined and able to be presented as an

analog wave or as digital bytes in the same medium, or could be interconverted or generated out of the same code. This liquefaction of audio and video meant that processes that could previously only be produced by means of laborious mechanical techniques working directly with the media carriers now occurred virtually "by themselves" as effects in real time.

The term media art, also coined in the 1990s, stands for a spectrum that includes all of the electronic and digital art forms in image, sound, interaction, immersion, and communication. Today, however, the associated theory of a convergence of all art forms in the digital is already in need of revision. Exclusively media-technical criteria are no longer sufficient for specifying an independent art form or genre that can be clearly delineated from classic genres. It is therefore perhaps time to refer back to the basic phenomena of human perception and to formulate the question concerning media aesthetics not solely from the generative, but rather from the human-receptive side. Electronic and digital media nevertheless mark a radical break in the cultural and technical change of perception. This becomes evident with an eye on a development lasting about 150 years using image-sound relations as an example. This also enables the reformulation of the question regarding media art in order to lead it out of the often self-referential immanence of being a special field and to position it as a hybrid field of culture, media technology and economy.[4]

2. Aesthetic of separation and re-combination: the mechanical recording of sound and moving images

In the second half of the nineteenth century, basic physical and physiological research (Ernst F. F. Chladni, Thomas Young, Hermann von Helmholtz) was applied in the form of media apparatus. The "epistemic thing" built in the scientific laboratory was transformed into media-technical applications suitable for a commercial commodity, which gave rise to an audiovisual mass media culture. An important step in the coupling of images and sounds was the development of recording technology. As early as 1857, Leon Scott had constructed a device – the "phonoautograph," – that recorded sound as a wavy line on paper but which was not yet capable of playing back. Thomas Alva Edison was the first person to succeed, in 1877, in creating a device that played back: the "phonograph," in which the waves of a microphone membrane were cut into a cylinder coated with

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4   Cf.: Daniels, Dieter, 2011, "Hybrids of Art, Science, Technology, Perception, Entertainment and Business in Sound and Vision" in Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann (eds) *SEE THIS SOUND. Audiovisuology II – Essays. Histories, and Theories of Audiovisual Media and Art*.

tin foil and made audible again through a funnel-like horn. Initially, each phonograph cylinder was a unicum; the mass production of sound storage media did not begin until 1887 with the device developed by Emile Berliner: the "gramophone," whose disks, which were produced using a template, were infinitely reproducible, thus marking the beginning of today's music industry.[5]

That same year, Edison outlined a device that – with the use of a phonograph cylinder – could record sounds in synchronization with short sequences of moving images. It had already been possible since the 1830s to utilize the stroboscopic effect to fuse static individual images into fluid movement by means of machines such as the "phenakistiscope" (1832) or the "zoetrope" (1834). These kinds of precinematographic devices emerged at about the same time the first practical photographic process – the daguerreotype – was publicly presented in 1839 and enthusiastically received worldwide. Between 1870 and 1890, Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne Jules Marey succeeded in recording motion in their phase photographs by combining dozens of cameras. However, the decisive steps toward the successful recording and playback of moving images were not taken until the 1880s with the invention of roll film, the roll film camera, and celluloid, as well as the construction of early projection devices such as Charles-Émile Reynaud's "praxinoscope" (1877). Thomas Alva Edison's "kinetoscope" (1890-92), which was nothing more than a "phonograph" fitted with chronophotographic images, confirms the parallels between sound and image technology. This development was completed by the Lumière and the Skladanowsky brothers, who in 1894 arranged the first public showings of films in the "Cinématographe" in Paris and the "Bioscope" in Berlin, respectively.

In short, since the advent of telephone, phonograph, and film at the end of the nineteenth century, and since radio, sound film, television, audiotape, and video in the twentieth century, audiovisual culture has undergone historically unparalleled expansion and reformation. All these media have redrawn the borders of the visual and the auditory and reconfigured their relations. In the beginning, in the nineteenth century, media first separated images and sound, then in the twentieth century united them again.

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5   In 1923, László Moholy-Nagy suggested using the phonographic method not only to reproduce existing music, but to generate synthetic disc sounds by manually or mechanically working the wax template (1923, pp. 103–105).
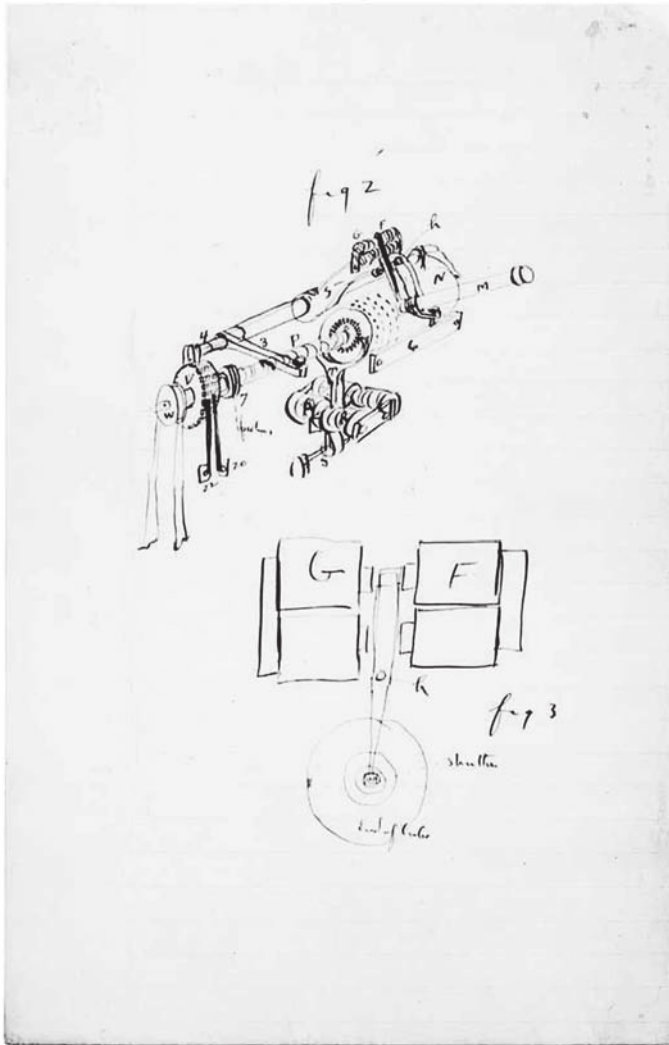
Ill 1: Thomas Alva Edison's first sketch for the "kinetoscope" (c. 1888) "to develop an instrument, which does for the eye what the Phonograph does for the ear." (Thomas Edison papers, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey).

The parallel emergence of storage media for images and sounds is more a story of separation than of synthesis. However, the ideas for such exclusively acoustic or optical devices are closely interlinked from the very beginning. A good example

is the history of transmission media for images and sounds. On the one hand, Alexander Graham Bell's invention of the telephone in 1876 supplied the direct inspiration for Edison's "phonograph" and led, on the other hand, to plans for the electric transmission of images by means of the photoelectric sensitivity of selenium, which had been established in 1872. Thus the fundamental concepts for a television medium designed to transmit signals via wire were formulated as early as 1878; however, due to the state of technology at the time, it was not yet possible. The history of ideas for the transmission medium television and the storage medium film operates in the gap that emerged between image and sound attributable to photography, the telephone, and the phonograph: if static images and time based sounds can be stored – and if sounds can be transmitted electrically – why shouldn't it be possible to transmit and store moving pictures? These kinds of conclusions by analogy between acoustic and optical media have characterized the development of radio and television as well as the sound film and the audio-video synthesizer, which will be enlarged on later. The parallel histories of the individual audiovisual media have therefore wrongly reduced image and sound to separate strands; instead, they can only be regarded in terms of their complex interaction, which already contains the potential for their later synthesis.

3. Aesthetic of analogy: concepts for linking visual and auditory arts

While sound and image still remained separate in terms of their media technology, an increasing theoretical and aesthetic interlinking of music and visual arts takes place in the course of the nineteenth century. Richard Wagner, for example, incorporated the demands made by Romantic authors such as E.T.A. Hoffmann and Friedrich Schlegel for the synthesis of the arts when, in 1849, he conceived his *Gesamtkunstwerk* in his essay "The Art-Work of the Future": "The great United Art-work, which must gather up each branch of art to use it as a mean, and in some sense to undo it for the common aim of all, for the unconditioned, absolute portrayal of perfected human nature – this great United Art-work he cannot picture as depending on the arbitrary purpose of some human unit, but can only conceive it as the instinctive and associate product of the Manhood of the Future" (Wagner 1895, p. 88).[6] Beginning in 1904, Alexander N. Scriabin created a utopian work that tied in with these ideas: *Mysterium*, a "polyphonical-

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6 Online at http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wagartfut.htm [accessed April 14, 2008].

ly linked texture" consisting of words, sounds, colors, smells, movements, and the senses of taste and touch (Kienscherf 1996, p. 141).

Interaction between painting and music, however, flourished in particular around the turn of the twentieth century. Thus the treatment and organization of musical material was exemplary for the painterly pursuit of abstraction, harmonious composition, and the depiction of the lapse of time. This becomes apparent in titles of paintings that were inspired by music, such as Wassily Kandinsky's *Improvisations* (after 1908), František Kupka's *Nocturne* (1910/11), or Paul Klee's *Fugue in Red* (1912). Conversely, musicians oriented themselves toward visual manifestations with their concept of the *Audition colorée.* In his symphonic poem *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* (1908-10), Scriabin integrated a "light voice" (Luce), which was meant to flood the auditorium in different colors in exact timing with the alternating tones. Josef Matthias Hauer not only made a significant contribution to the liberation of music from tonality and the establishment of twelve-tone music, he was also intensely concerned with the relationship between colors and tones. Based on Goethe's theory of colors, he correlated a light-color wheel with an "acoustic color wheel" and assigned color values to intervals and tonal values.

The light organs that were becoming more and more popular with the availability of electric light after the second half of the nineteenth century were also based on the drawing of these kinds of analogies. As with Alexander Wallace Rimington's "color organ" (1893), most of the instruments played the colors by means of piano-like keys. In the early twentieth century these concrete, often arbitrary attributions were finally overcome in favor of a replication of musical structures. Among the first proponents of the open light compositions were Mary Hallock-Greenwalt who, between 1911 and 1931, constructed different versions of her "Sarabet," and Thomas Wilfred, who introduced the "Clavilux" in 1922, calling the new art composed of light, form, color, and motion "Lumia." In Germany, similar approaches to fusing means of musical and painterly expression were being pursued: Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack and his fellow students at the Bauhaus Kurt Schwerdtfeger and Joseph Hartwig produced "reflecting light compositions" (1922), and Alexander László developed a "Sonchromatoscope" (1925).

Parallel to the technical-industrial development of media in the nineteenth century outlined above, devices for producing audiovisual effects from aesthetic-artistic motifs were also being built. Some of the inventors of these hybrids between a work of art and a media device saw them going into mass production. However, all of them remained bound to the person who created them and disappeared along with their inventors from the world of art and technology, so that today there are only few surviving functioning examples of such devices. This

reflects the importance of standardization and compatibility for the proliferation and conservation of audiovisual media, which can be exemplified by 35mm film, the most long-lived global media format.[7]

4. Aesthetic of synchronization: the coupling of time based images and sound on film

As early as the first two decades of the twentieth century, artists who wanted to expand their previous means of expression by creating "visual music" turned toward film, an art form that was still struggling for acknowledgement. The trained painter and musician Walter Ruttmann described his vision of "painting in time" transposed in filmic terms as follows: "An art for the eye that distinguishes itself from painting in that it is time based (like music) and the artistic emphasis does not (as in an image) consist of the reduction of a (real or formal) process to a single moment, but precisely of the temporal development of formal aspects. Because this art develops temporally, one of its most important elements is the temporal rhythm of visual events. It will therefore produce an entirely new type of artist, up until now only latently existent, positioned somewhere halfway between painting and music."[8]

With this in mind, in addition to Walter Ruttmann, in the 1920s and 1930s, Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, and Oskar Fischinger produced a series of abstract films in which they attempted to transfer rules of musical composition to film. The oldest surviving abstract film, Walter Ruttmann's *Lichtspiel Opus I* (Light-Play Opus I, 1921) was accompanied by a string quartet composition written specifically for the film by Max Butting. In addition, in order to be able to produce the fluid forms he envisioned for his "painting in time," Ruttmann constructed a special trick table, with the aid of which he manually spliced together the individual frames over the course of months to produce the film.

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7   The development of the first film devices was also motivated by artistic as well as commercial interests. However, in contrast to color-organ and sound-light devices, its history is "aufgehoben" ("canceled out" and "preserved") – in the ambiguous, Hegelian sense – in the medium of film.

8   Walter Ruttmann, untitled, undated [presumably ca. 1919/20], from the Walter Ruttmann estate, cited in Hein and Herzogenrath 1977, p. 64 [under the title "Malerei mit Zeit"].

Ill 2: Invitation from the Ruttmann Film GmbH to the premiere of Lichtspiel Opus I, which took place in 1921 in Frankfurt am Main. The film was subsequently shown, among other venues, at the legendary Der absolute Film event in 1925 in Berlin, which Kurt Weill also attended. © Eva Riehl.

Thus for many artists, film technology meant that they did not have to construct their own audiovisual devices; however, it was modified to meet their needs in that there continued to be a close relationship between technological and artistic development. One of the greatest problems was producing the synchronicity of sounds and images, which is why, very early on, the pioneers of film worked on systems to mechanically couple projectors with phonograph cylinders or gramophones. Oskar Messter even developed a special sheet-music reel with which the film score could be conducted to accurately coincide with the images being projected, as well as a process for coordinating the piano rolls of player pianos with the films. However, putting silent films to sound was not restricted to background music, but attained a certain proximity to the radio play by means of narrators, people producing sound effects, cinema organs, or recorded sounds. This art form, which emerged in the 1920s for radio, in turn took on numerous filmic techniques such as cross fading, brightening, fading in and out, dimming,

or the sound editing of detail and general long shots. Kurt Weill's theory of a non-narrative, acoustic and abstract "absolute radio art," which he formulated in 1925 with direct reference to the "absolute film" for the purpose of "thinking out for once the all-too frequently used and abused comparison of film with radio," exemplifies this interaction between the aesthetics of the silent film and "blind" radio (Weill 1990, p. 192). Walter Ruttmann made the radiopiece *Weekend* five years later, the first example of this new form of art which Weill imagined. It was shot on Tri-Ergon sound film for the Deutscher Rundfunk and referred to by Ruttmann himself as a "film without images," using the wonderfully paradoxical and so appropriate term "photographic radio art" (Goergen 1994, p. 25). With the Tri-Ergon optical sound process, which was introduced to the public for the first time in 1922, sound was recorded onto the edge of the strip of film as an optical track and retransformed by means of a photocell. "It is said that an overall metamorphosis requires an eleven-fold transformation," wrote Siegfried Kracauer. "Today, the esoteric of technology already surpasses the Eleusinian mysteries."[9]

Because sounds and images could now for the first time be stored on one and the same carrier and hence exactly synchronized, the combination of the two phenomena, which had previously consisted primarily in structural analogies or formal similarities, achieved a completely new quality. As a supplement to the realistic film image, optical sound was now used for the, as it were, naturalistic playback of language, noises, and music, although early sound-film theories advocated the contrapuntal use on an acoustic level. In their "Statement on the Sound-Film," Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov write: "THE FIRST EXPERIMENTAL WORK WITH SOUND MUST BE DIRECTED ALONG THE LINE OF ITS DISTINCT NON-SYNCHRONIZATION WITH THE VISUAL IMAGES. And only such an attack will give the necessary palpability which will later lead to the creation of an ORCHESTRAL COUNTERPOINT of visual and aural images."[10] Many of the projects to this effect failed, however, so that the theoretical demands made by Soviet directors could only be experimented with in a few films, such as Dziga Vertov's *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass* (1930). In general, sound-film practice tends more toward so-called Mickey Mousing, in which visual events and movements are translated 1:1 on the sound level.

Optical sound made more than just the synchronization of sounds and images possible. Around 1930, Rudolf Pfenninger and Oskar Fischinger studied the graphic formations of the audio track, and started applying them to the film by hand. Their optically generated synthetic sound is regarded as the precursor of

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9   Kracauer in 1928 in a review of the first sound films (1992, p. 299).
10   Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov, 1949, pp. 257-259, here p. 258 (emphasis in the original).

synthetic electronic sound in the same way the hand-made abstract film is viewed as the forerunner of the mechanically generated computer film (Cf. Weibel 1987, p. 103).

5. Aesthetic of transformation: analog electronic modulation of sound and video

As early as the 1910s, the "optophone" and the theories on "optophonetics" anticipated the electrical generation and combination of sounds and images. Originally conceived as an aid to the blind, which was intended to make optical signals audible by implementing the photosensibility of selenium, the "optophone" became the source of more far-reaching visions. Walter Brinkmann, for example, propagated the pure technical transformation of light into sound as a well-founded possibility for the creation of a consistent relation between both phenomena: "Practical possibilities of the positive solution of the problem [of color-sound research] would, for example, be given if we succeeded in removing light and sound from their media – ether and air – or furthermore, in identifying electric waves as media for both of them together" (Brinkmann cited in Moholy-Nagy 1927, p. 20ff). Raoul Hausmann, who himself designed an "optophone," not only assigned the device the potential of "representing the equivalent of any optical appearance in sound," but of expanding and altering human sense perception (Hausmann (1982 [1922]), p. 51).[11]

After the 1930s, however, scientists and artists such as Leon Theremin and Mary Ellen Bute began experimenting with the transformation of acoustic signals into optical signals with the aid of an oscilloscope. Along with Hy Hirsh and Norman McLaren, Bute was also one of the first to employ this method of generating images, during which electronic waves are represented graphically, in film during the 1950s. Nam June Paik was one of the artists to continue working with the oscilloscope over the course of the following decade. He was simultaneously interested in television technology and conducted, for example, distortions of the TV image where sound input was transformed in movement and color of electronic patterns on the screen (*Participation TV* 1963).

It was not possible to implement Brinkmann's ideas until the 1960s – with the emergence of electronic image media and image processing devices. These comprised a fundamental paradigm change with respect to the relations between images and sound as it was now possible not only to alternately transform analog image signals into sound signals and vice versa, but to produce one and the same

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11   Cf. Borck, Cornelius in: Dieter Daniels, 2008, *Artists as Inventors*.

electromagnetic wave as a sound as well as an image. Peter Weibel therefore refers to these new kinds of relations as "isomorphism" (Cf. Bódy and Weibel 1987, p. 102).

During these years, an international scene of artists-engineers created an "Eigenwelt der Apparate-Welt" (a self-contained world of the world of devices) that far outreached any of the industrially produced technology at the time (cf. Dunn 1992). Aesthetically motivated inventions again emerged as hybrids between works of art and media devices, which – like the color organs of the nineteenth and the sound-light devices of the early twentieth century – are in jeopardy of disappearing if they are no longer attended to by their creators.

Steina and Woody Vasulka's work is exemplary of the artistic examination of video/audio technology. They had become interested in it at the end of the 1960s, as it was a new medium in which "time/energy [acted] as an organizing principle of sound and image," and in which sounds and images could be generated, interconverted, and interact only through voltage and frequency (Vasulka and Vasulka, cited in Bódy and Weibel 1987, p. 102). *Violin Power* (1970-78) shows Steina Vasulka playing the violin, whose sounds at the same time distort the image. In *Soundsize* (1974), the size of the image as well as the frequency of the sounds is controlled by the voltage of a sound synthesizer; and in *Noisefields* (1974), the energy content of the image modulates the sound. Starting in about the mid-1970s, the couple also worked with a Rutt/Etra Scan Processor, one of the numerous devices for processing video images that had been developed beginning in the late 1960s and which made it possible to manipulate images by means of, among other things, mixing, color transformation, or keying.

During this period, the first video synthesizers, modeled on the audio synthesizer, were developed, enabling the production of visual material without a camera. Stephen Beck's Direct Video Synthesizer (1970) produced images by defining their basic parameters – form, contour, color, texture, and movement. Because video synthesizers were capable of producing images in real time, Stephen Beck not only used his device for videotape compositions but for live performances, such as *Illuminated Music* (1972-73). Due to their ability to generate images and sounds autonomously, synthesizers are regarded as the successors of the analog computer, whose applications were considerably advanced, especially by artists such as John Whitney. Beginning in the late 1930s, the trained musician and his brother James, who had studied painting, produced abstract films that visually transposed the permutative principles of twelve-tone music. They used this method of serial composition in their first sound films, the *Five Abstract Film Exercises* (1943/44). Furthermore, in order to achieve the equal status of sound and image, they used a device constructed by John that produced synthetic optical sound according to a process similar to the one used to produce animated im-

ages. From 1960 onward, John Whitney concerned himself with motion graphics, and in 1960 produced his first computer film, *Catalog,* which shows a range of analog effects, using an analog computer he had designed himself. He received the first artist-in-residence grant awarded in 1966 by IBM, within the framework of which he was able to investigate the aesthetic possibilities of computer graphics on new, digital, high-performance computers at about the same time as Stan Vanderbeek and Lilian Schwartz in collaboration with Ken Knowlton did at the Bell Laboratories. Still interested in exploring the relationships between musical and visual composition, it was during this same period that Whitney developed his ideas on "digital harmony," which he published in 1980 in a book of the same name and expanded on in films in the 1980s. He composed works such as *Spirals* (1988) or the *Moondrum* series (1989-95) with the use of a special composition program that allowed him to create a "musical design intertwined with color design tone-for-tone, played against action-for-action."[12] John Whitney's development is not only exemplary for the metamorphosis of the relations between sound and image in the twentieth century, in which he was significantly involved in terms of both technology and aesthetics, but also for a new kind of composition in which ideas are simultaneously formulated musically as well as visually and which is occurring again today in the context of digital real time live visuals.

6. Aesthetic of convergence: digital merging of audio and video in real time

In the 1990s, electronic and digital media became a part of everyday culture for the reception and production of audiovisual "content." This did not, however, mark the end of the interaction between artistic and technological development that has been described here; rather, it obtained a previously unimagined dynamism and complexity. A striking example is VJing, which emerged in the mid-1990s in the club context, which not only "abused" commercial technology, but initiated the modification and creation of hardware and software.

In analogy to mixing records by DJs, in the early days of VJing, VJs initially assembled image sequences live out of found footage and material they had filmed or animated themselves, with the aid of analog electronic devices such as video mixers and videotapes to create a new, continuous flow of images in correspondence to the sound of the DJ. As digitalization progressed, the analog

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12   John Whitney, *The John Whitney Biography Page*, Available online at http://www.siggraph.org/artdesign/profile/whitney/digiharmon.html [accessed July 25, 2007].

electronic video processing, synthesizing, and editing devices were transferred to software applications. Thus VJ software integrated former analog techniques, such as scratching, multilayering, keying, color correction, or changing speed and the direction of playback. Two of the pioneers in this field were the British artists Coldcut and Hexstatic who, in the mid-1990s, developed what was to be among the first VJ software, VJamm, for live performance of their audiovisual works. Hence when VJs mix and assemble the material, which stems from a wide variety of different sources, its editing and transmutation play a pivotal role, a method that is still being successfully practiced by, among others, Addictive TV and TV Sheriff.

Besides the application of similar or identical processes to sound and image, which was to some extent already possible with analog electronic media, generative software and the real time transformation of image/sound data count as some of the genuinely new possibilities in the digital age. Because all information is based in code, it can be represented in any form, any process can be initiated or controlled, and the principles it is based on can be arbitrarily varied. Golan Levin speaks of software as an "inexhaustible, infinitely variable, time-based, audiovisual ›substance‹."[13]

As a matter of fact, numerous artists not only fall back on existing applications, they also program software according to their own ideas and use these not only to produce clips and effects, but to create self-contained visual worlds. In a series of performances, Carsten Nicolai, aka Alva Noton, for example, used software written by Karl Kliem that analyzed the sound signal of his Minimalist sound and translated it into equally reduced abstract image elements in real time, so that these became a "live" graphic representation of the music.

Semiconductor, for instance, go a step further than the purely automated transformation of sounds into images. Inspired by the challenge to improvise the entire act of visualization in real time, Ruth Jarman and Joseph Gerhardt developed their own software, Sonic Inc., with which they produced forms, environments, and textures in their live performances, orienting themselves toward digital strategies of representation. Hence the actual artistic input in the creation of an audiovisual product is in the algorithms according to which it is generated and in the interactions with the software that are carried out during the performance.

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13   Levin, Golan (2000) "Painterly Interfaces for Audiovisual Performance". M.S. Thesis. Abstract available at: http://www.flong.com/texts/publications/thesis/.
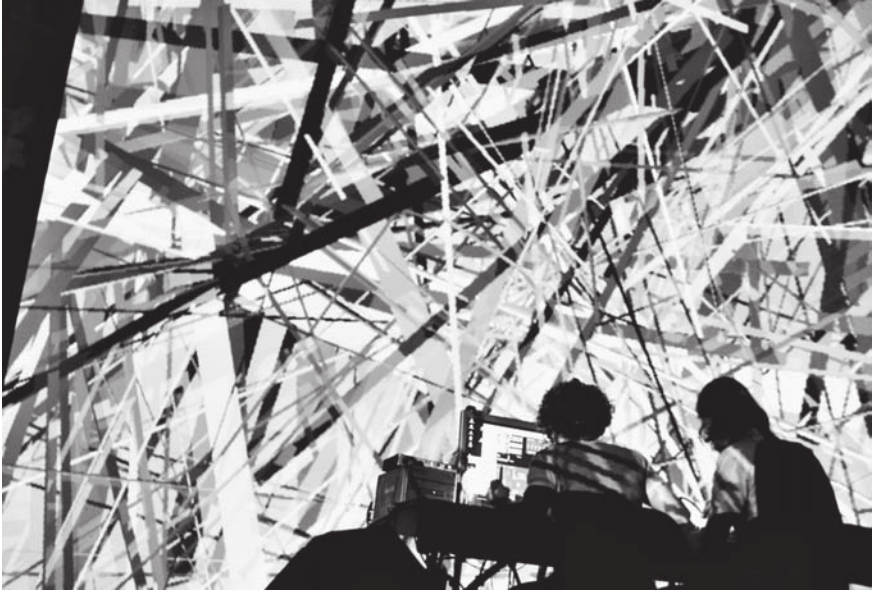
Ill 3:   Live performance by Semiconductor using Sonic Inc. at the Mutek Festival 2007 in Montreal. © Semiconductor, photo credit: Caroline Hayeur.

In view of the relevance placed on live performance and real time generation, as well as the progressive shift away from the entertainment and club context toward an artistic environment, the term "live cinema" is increasingly being used for VJing (cf. Jaeger 2005, and Makela 2006). As far back as 2004, Jan Rohlf summed up these developments as follows:

> The new possibilities presented by digital technologies … are currently reactivating concepts of audiovisual music in much the same way they were formulated by the Constructivist avant-garde in the first third of the last century. As universal production and performance instruments, high-performance laptops together with the corresponding software are opening up new possibilities for the real time processing of sounds and images. Thus within the context of electronic music, the acoustic and visual live performance becomes the center of interest. The coupling of visual and acoustic events as the expression of a direct physical equivalence relationship as well as a performer's interaction with generative software applications, in which development principles that have been implemented in the code automatically generate sounds and/or images, is replacing the collaging and manipulation of existing sequences as techniques of DJing and VJing. Accordingly, the protagonists of this art form can no longer be distinctly classified as musicians or visual artists. As "video artists," they embody – not without recourse to historical models – hybrid identities made up of musician, designer, performer, scientist, and programmer (Rohlf 2004, pp. 121ff).

231

This description is not only reminiscent of Ruttmann's idea of an intermedia artist, which applies, for example, to Ryoichi Kurokawa; it also refers to technological innovations that unite the production and editing of sounds and images in a single device. This is exemplified by the audio and video mixer DVJ-X1 developed by Pioneer in collaboration with Hexstatic and brought out in 2004, a device that allows the same method of real time manipulation for sounds and images, such as scratching and looping. In addition, this mixer shows how a commercial commodity can emerge from artistic experiments.

Despite the unlimited transformation potential, the primacy of the auditory level can be detected in most sound-image relations. Exceptions to this are *Island Playback* (2005) by Katarina Matiasek and Robin Rimbaud, aka Scanner, in which they transform the coastline of an island in the Mediterranean into a sound curve and play it back, and *Robotic Guitar Drone* (2004) by Bull and Wounded Horse, in which a guitar is controlled by means of the MIDI messages communicated by digital images. In addition, attempts are being made to suspend any kind of hierarchization and to generate sounds and images from one and the same source. An example of one such approach is FarmersManual's work *Graceful Degradation* (2001/02), in which real TCP and Ethernet data taken from a local computer network and the Internet are transformed into sounds and video images. Information such as communication time, file volume, or source and destination address are translated into parameters such as rhythm, frequency, color, form, and configuration and presented via speakers and a video projection in a two-dimensional image and sound layer.

Besides these efforts to synchronize sound and the image, there are also aspirations to extend their relationships to include spatial, physical, and interactive aspects. The trio Sensors_Sonics_Sights (Cécile Babiole, Atau Tanaka, and Laurent Dailleau) and the duo 4 Hands (Jean-Marc Duchenne and Bertrand Merlier) are working on the integration of the body by creating audiovisual worlds which are triggered by gestures and movements. The Belgian group lab[au] (Manuel Abendroth, Jerome Decock, Alexandre Plennevaux, and Els Vermang) is interested in architectural concepts. In collaboration with other artists, in their Liquid Space project, they have been experimenting since 2003 with the creation of spatial audiovisuals within a 360-degree multiscreen setting. The *Panoscope 360°,* a large semisphere that is equipped with a single-channel fisheye projection and a surround-sound system and was developed by Canadian Luc Courchesne, affords a special spatial experience: with the aid of a joystick, one navigates in real time through a virtual three-dimensional world that has been created by a program, such as, e.g., *Where are you?* (2005). The installation *Messa di Voce* (2003) by Golan Levin and Zachary Lieberman also requires recipient participation: noises that are input via a microphone generate their graphic equi-

valents on a screen, which in turn respond to the player's movements. This pursuit of the creation of interactive, immersive, sensory, audiovisual spaces is without doubt one of the ultimate goals of the convergence of the arts and media. The so called "digital multimedia *Gesamtkunstwerk"* stands for the merging of the contradictory: the Wagnerian cult of the genius meets the do-it-yourself bricolage of the amateur.

Today, the inescapability of the combination of sounds and images in a multimedia lifestyle becomes even more evident in the applications of media players, where "gadgets" for the visualization of music have already been integrated into the standard software. There is no longer a sound not accompanied by an image – if there is no video signal, as a kind of stopgap, visuals are generated automatically. The pitch, duration, timbre, volume, and frequency spectrum are analyzed and translated into a visual representation that is varied through random parameters. The basis for this development was the invention of the mp3 data format in the mid-1990s and the simultaneous emergence of audio players such as Winamp, Audion, and Soundjam. Whereas the first visualization software, Cthugha, which was designed by Kevin "Zaph" Burfitt in 1994, is still referred to as an "oscilloscope on Acid," other early programs featured an aesthetic proximity to demos. Some of these plug-ins have a greater similarity with live visuals. Lennart Denninger describes his plug-in BeatHarness, which can be used both for generating visuals on the desktop of your PC as well as for live performances, as a "free automated VJ." The ability of integrating video sequences and live images are further parallels to what used to be VJing. Software development kits (SDKs) enable users to modify or create new plug-ins, making them not only consumers, but producers or so called "prosumers" as well.

Smartphone technology opens up completely new perspectives regarding this blurring of the lines between consumption and production, or rather between performer and audience in the context of live performances. One example is the iPhone app "Synk" (2010), conceptualized by Richie Hawtin aka Plastikman, which allows users to log in to the artist's Wi-Fi network and to influence the organization of certain samples, to observe the real time programming of selected elements live on the mobile phone screen or to follow the show from the stage perspective. This creates not only interaction between artist and listener/viewer but also an "augmented experience" in which immediate and mediated perception overlap.

Parallel to this use of advanced technology, recent years have seen a renaissance of analog technology, such as film projectors, video devices, tube television sets or overhead projectors. In the context of performances, these tools are used in combination with digital devices – or without – to generate live sounds and images. An example for this approach is the performance work "Inside the Black

Box" (2010/2011) by Sati and Yroyto. For their shows they use objects made of raw materials like paper, cardboard, motors, and lights which are manipulated in real time, filmed and projected on the screen, while the sound is picked up by contact microphones and further processed with digital means. This coupling of digital and analogue tools offers the artists not only direct and immediate access to the medium as well as the unlimited processing options of the digital, but also make the processes underlying the performances transparent to the public.

Summary and outlook

Starting from the initially separate recording of sound and images and their later synchronization with the aid of sound-film, progressing to their direct transformation by means of analog electronic media and finally their real time generation in digital code, acoustic and visual phenomena gradually converged and merged to an "audiovisual substance". This was accompanied by a shift in the relationship of seeing and hearing: for most of human history their connection was made exclusively in a subjective, sensory way, and became a technical-physical link about 150 years ago. Since the production of images and sounds is based on algorithms, it can be set in a real time feedback loop with seeing and hearing. This digital "audiovisual substance" is seemingly a direct correspondence to the senses of the performer using it. It can be designed individually and in a variety of ways. Meaning that the creative process entailed in generating audiovisual artifacts shifts from a physical instrument or apparatus to the manipulation or programming of software. But this dematerialization means that it becomes increasingly difficult for the recipient (e.g., the audience of such a live performance) to evaluate the respective artistic contribution and to distinguish it from the mere use of pre-programmed software applications. The current joke is that the guy behind the laptop in the club might as well be reading his e-mail while the public is raving to his sound or his visuals.

At the same time, the increasing affordability of hardware and software as well as the availability of source material and programs online, provide the opportunity to experiment on one's own, and thus encourage greater understanding of audiovisual artistic works. It is therefore becoming less and less possible to separate the production and reception of audiovisual aesthetics from one another. Also there is a trend away from the standard laptop performance setting by making the digital interfaces physical and the live performance palpable to the public.

Another trend is the way back to (neo-)analog technology, which makes the production process transparent for the public and at the same time enhances the choreography of the performer.

To conclude, with the apparently almost unlimited potential of digital technologies some of the aesthetic dreams from the nineteenth and early twentieth century seem to be coming true. Many of the ideas at the time could only be realized by means of arduous handwork or ingenious apparatus – others simply failed due to the limitations of technology. Today we have reached the "post-heroic" age of audiovisuality, so to speak.

But it may have been precisely the unfulfilled visions, which for decades impelled artists and researchers to adapt the insufficient means to their concepts, alter the function of existing technologies and refine them, or invent new devices and methods – and this process continues to this day when audiovisual artists modify or create tools to correspond to their needs, either by making the digital physical or by going back to analog.

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A Compass in a Moving World
(on genres and genealogies of film theory)[1]

D. N. Rodowick

> All that we reckoned settled shakes and rattles; and literatures, cities, climates, religions, leave their foundations and dance before our eyes
>
> <div align="right">Ralph Waldo Emerson</div>

1. A compass in a moving world

> Ein philosophisches Problem hat die Form: "Ich kenne mich nicht aus."
>
> <div align="right">Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §123</div>

In the final pages of *The Virtual Life of Film*, I recounted my puzzlement at being asked if the study of film would remain relevant in an era dominated by electronic and digital images. No doubt cinephiles of a certain generation regard the disappearance of the photographic image with intense nostalgia, perhaps even mourning. Indeed the millennial form of cinephilia has become historical in a way that swings between mourning and melancholia. A desire in pursuit of a lost object: Has not the experience of film always been such, that is, the longing to recover the past in the present and to overcome lost time? The difference now is that the phenomenological force of photography has been almost completely replaced by new series of computational automatisms and experiences. From the perspective of melancholia, film is historical in an archaeological sense: an object lost to history that cannot be recovered; an experience that can be imagined or reconstructed perhaps but never again felt anew. Consequently, one seeks in digital images an experience that cannot be fully replaced, like widowers who have not yet learned to admire a worthy and seductive lover.

The melancholic cinephile will never let go of his desire for a lost object. (And he may even have forgotten or lost any sense of this experience as perceived or lived.) But mourning can be overcome and new loves reborn. That moving images have a virtual life means that new ways to love them can always be found – they will continue to be meaningful and to give meaning to our present experience. Explaining and evaluating this virtual life requires concepts, or rather, an ongoing process of conceptualization, of refashioning or inventing

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1 This essay is adapted from my book *An Elegy for Theory*, forthcoming from Harvard University Press in fall 2013.

ways of understanding commensurate with the image's virtual life. The desire to explain this experience by inventing or developing concepts adequate to thinking with or through it – call this, for the moment, theory – is inescapably caught up in, indeed engendered by, our confrontations with the ontological perplexities that screened images raise regarding our locatedness in time and in space, both in relation to the world and to each other through the medium of moving images.

But am I not caught in paradox here? In a project devoted to exploring the prospects for studying moving image culture in the twenty-first century, why extol a love that can always be rekindled in the moving image while writing an elegy for theory?

In some respects, theory is more present than ever to our thoughts about moving images. One consequence of the rapid displacement of photographic by digital processes has been to fuel a new and welcome fascination with the history of film theory, as if desiring to recover or to re-experience the intense aesthetic pleasure and ontological curiosity of the artists and writers who lived and witnessed the first thirty years of film's virtual life. These philosophical pioneers puzzled over the new qualities of space and time enfolding spectators and defining their modernity, while challenging tenaciously held concepts of aesthetic experience inherited from the nineteenth century. (Writing in 1939, Walter Benjamin expressed this attitude in observing that the question was not whether photography or film could be art, but whether instead they had transformed the entire character of art (Benjamin 2002, p. 258).) In short, faced with a new medium, they felt compelled to define and explain it, even as its forms shifted before their eyes. Classical film theory has renewed significance for film studies today because the computational arts and communication, which often take on a photographic or cinematographic appearance, confront us with an analogous shock and compel us to reassess our experience of modernity through moving images. Like Vachel Lindsay, Hugo Münsterberg, or Ricciotto Canudo, not to mention Jean Epstein, Sergei Eisenstein, Siegfried Kracauer, or Walter Benjamin, we strive mentally for concepts to give logical form to the unruly thoughts inspired by images that disorient us in time, and which are no longer content to occupy space in ways familiar to us.

An elegy for film fuels the virtual life of theory; one turns on the other like two strands of a Moebius strip. The displacement of the photographic by the digital inspires new forms and conditions of ontological puzzlement concerning our experience of modernity through moving images. And these images now move, and occupy space and time, in ways that are as novel to us as to spectators in the first nickelodeons. Twenty years hence, will readers completely attuned to a computational ontology puzzle over how we could have felt such wonder and anxiety? Classical film theory was a lively period of conceptual innovation and

experimentation. Contemporary cinema studies seeks inspiration there, perhaps because the shock of modernity is as intense for us now as it was for those thinkers who first confronted the powers of photography and cinema. The desire to explain this experience, indeed the unending task of mastering it through concepts that could settle this moving world and help us find peace within it, was given a name very early in the twentieth century: "theory." Already in 1924, in his wonderful and prescient book *Der sichtbare Mensch*, Béla Balázs called for theory as a conceptual compass in the stormy seas of aesthetic creativity and experience. What film studies has forgotten in the intervening decades is the *strangeness* of this word, as well as the variable range and complexity of the questions and conceptual activities that have surrounded it over time like clouds reflecting light and shadow in ever-changing shapes. The word "theory" has weight, gravity, and solidity in the humanities today. But, as Wittgenstein might have put it, like every overly familiar word on closer examination it begins to dissolve into "a 'corona' of lightly indicated uses. Just as if each figure in a painting were surrounded by delicate shadowy drawings of scenes, as it were in another dimension, and in them we saw the figures in different contexts" (Wittgenstein 2001, p. 155).

The idea of theory in art or film has a long and complex history, and this history invariably and recurrently coincides with and departs from the history of philosophy. Indeed the range of activities covered by concepts of theory comprises a genealogy much longer and more complex than the virtual life of film. As a form of explanation, theory is ever more important to our comprehension of contemporary moving image culture, which is ever more powerfully a digital culture. Yet in film studies, as in the humanities in general, attitudes toward theory remain vexed. The decades since the 1970s have witnessed many critiques of theory, mostly unkind. These attempts to dislodge, displace, overturn, or otherwise ignore it have taken many forms – against theory, post-theory, after theory – as if to contain or reduce the wild fecundity of its conceptual activity or to condemn it to exile. In most cases, these critics have a no clearer view of what theory is than the thinkers who are supposed to practice it. The lack of clarity in our picture of theory haunts the humanities, and this is equally as true for its defenders as its assailants.

The impulse that drives my project goes deeper than debates for and against theory, for there is a hole at the center of this discussion (what once might have been called a structuring absence) that is not so easily filled in or accounted for. My first thoughts on this problem date back to my inaugural lecture at King's College London in 2002, when it occurred to me that the two fundamental problems confronting the revitalization of film studies in the twenty-first century were, first, how to assess the displacement of the photographic by the electronic and

digital, and second, how to renew the place of theory in this debate.[2] In the days following my lecture, a colleague and good friend, Simon Gaunt, an accomplished scholar of medieval French and no stranger to contemporary theory, asked a question which, despite its simple and straightforward form, continues to haunt and derail me: "What is film theory?" He might well have asked, what is literary theory or art theory? But being a good philosophical friend, Gaunt was provoking me, I continue to think, to confront a deeper and more fundamental problem. Despite thirty years of teaching and writing about the history of theory, I could not give a simple answer to his enquiry, for the question "What is theory?" is as variable and complex as the desire to explain "What is cinema?"

Gaunt's question, and my incapacity to respond to it, utterly defamiliarized a mode of existence I had happily occupied for several decades – that of a self-described film theorist. My confidence was shaken, and the word "theory" became unfamiliar to me, melting into its corona of lightly indicated uses. Indeed, to paraphrase Christian Metz, I discovered that I have loved theory, I no longer love it, I love it still.

What is theory that it should arouse such emotion and debate both within the humanities, and between the humanities and the sciences? For those of us in the arts and humanities who characterize our work as theoretical, by what conceptual means do we recognize and identify the how, why, and what of our doing? What does it mean to belong to a community of thinkers in the arts and humanities who characterize their work as theoretical, and how does this make us different from (or similar to) a historian, a critic, or even a philosopher? Do we have now (have we ever had?) a clear and perspicuous view of theoretical activities, practices, and concepts? Would anyone who knows what "theory" is, please raise your hand?

2. Many lines of descent

When the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the uses and disadvantages of history for life*

In the contemporary context, the concept of theory is like a coin too long in circulation. Passed from hand to hand its surface is flat and unburnished, its value illegible. If our conceptual picture of theory is clouded, perhaps this is because

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2   Published as "Dr. Strange Media, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Film Theory" in Grieveson and Wasson, 2008. An expanded version of this essay comprises Part I of *The Virtual Life of Film*, 2007, pp. 1-24.

we have forgotten that it is a *moving* picture. Theory, as we live and challenge it today, and as it challenges us, has a history. It is not *a* language-game but many, comprising various overlapping yet often contradictory and contested forms of life. Little wonder that now as in the 1920s it has seemed more a battleground – a test of competing conceptual wills with feints, sallies, and parries – than the rational unfolding of a communal research program. From a scientific point of view, it may seem odd to suggest that theory has a history, or further, to say that our picture of theory is cloudy or unfocussed because we have forgotten its history or become blinded to it. However, a genealogical reflection on theory in general, and in the philosophy of art and of film studies in particular, may help to restore some conceptual precision to its range of connotations and semantic values. Theory may again become a satisfying word if, as Emerson would recommend, it can be reclaimed from its counterfeit currency.

Genealogy is not history. One must take seriously that Nietzsche's critique of history, of its uses and disadvantages, was one of his untimely meditations. A genealogical approach offers an historical perspective that breaks open the linear conception of time as progress or progression, revealing many variable and discontinuous lines of descent. We may set out on straight and well-paved highways, but there will also be cul-de-sacs, detours long and short, secret passages, steep turns, and sudden and surprising vistas. Theory has no stable or invariable sense in the present, nor can its meanings for us now be anchored in a unique origin in the near or distant past. If the currency of theory is to be revalued conceptually for the present, we need a history that attends critically to the competing sites and contexts of its provenance in the past, and which can evaluate the forces that shape its diverse and often contradictory conditions of emergence and its distributions as genres of discourse. To sketch out a genealogy of theory is to return to it a historical sense of its discontinuities as a concept and as an activity – not retracing a line, completing a circle, or constructing a frame, but rather, to follow theory's complex web of derivations and to evaluate the concept in the space of its proper dissemination.

3. On the history of film theory

> What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.
>
> Michel Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*

Perhaps our picture of theory is not so much a cloud or corona as it is a palimpsest, whose many historical layers compete for our attention in such a way that we are unable to focus on any one of them. Theory is not only a vista composed

of many layers; our view of it is also oriented by many competing frames. Obtaining a clearer picture of theory means neither choosing a different frame nor drawing a more refined sketch or taking a different perspective, but rather remaining open to the complexity of its past and present movements.

In *The Virtual Life of Film*, I argued that one powerful consequence of the rapid emergence of electronic and digital media is that we can no longer take for granted what "film" is – its ontological anchors have come ungrounded – and thus we are compelled to revisit continually the question, What is cinema? This ungroundedness is echoed in the conceptual history of contemporary film studies by what I call the metatheoretical attitude recapitulated in cinema studies' current interest both in excavating its own history and in reflexively examining what film theory is or has been. The reflexive attitude toward theory began, perhaps, with my own *Crisis of Political Modernism* (1988; rpt. 1994) and throughout the 1980s and 1990s manifested itself in a variety of conflicting approaches, principally Noël Carroll's *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* and *Mystifying Movies* (both 1988), David Bordwell's *Making Meaning* (1989), Bordwell and Carroll's *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996), Richard Allen and Murray Smith's *Film Theory and Philosophy* (1997), Francesco Casetti's *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995* (1993/1999), Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey's *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts* (2001) and so on.[3]

One thing characteristic of all these works is the isolation and detachment of "theory" as an object available for historical and theoretical examination, but in doing so, these books take three different approaches. Natural scientific models inspire one approach, both philosophical and analytic, which posit that the epistemological value of a well-constructed theory derives from a precise and generalizable conceptual framework defined in a limited range of postulates. This approach assumes there is an ideal model from which all theories derive their epistemological value. In turn, the value of film theory is measured by its historical progress toward commensurability with this ideal model. Alternatively, Francesco Casetti's approach is both historical and sociological. Agnostic with respect to debates on epistemological value, it groups together statements made by self-described practitioners of theory, describing both the internal features of those statements and their external contexts as a form of social knowledge. In *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, my own approach, inspired by Michel Foucault's) *Archaeology of Knowledge,* assumes that the conditioning of knowledge itself is historically variable. Discourse *produces* knowledge. Every theory is subtended by enunciative modalities that regulate the order and dispersion of statements by engender-

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3   I present another and more expansive version of these arguments in my essay, "An Elegy for Theory," 2007.

ing or making visible groups of objects, inventing concepts, defining positions of address, and organizing rhetorical strategies. This approach analyses how knowledge is produced in delimited and variable discursive contexts that are investigated as discontinuous, if sometimes overlapping, genres, practices, or modes of discourse.

In a first move, it might seem strange to associate theory with history. Introducing a series of lectures at the Institute for Historical Research at the University of Vienna in 1998, I astonished a group of students by asserting that film theory *has* a history, indeed multiple histories with various yet intertwining genealogical lines of descent. Here the analytic approach to theory, on one hand, and sociological and archaeological approaches on the other, part ways. The fact of having a history already distinguishes film theory, and indeed all aesthetic theories, from natural scientific enquiry, for natural and cultural phenomena do not have the same temporality. Examination of the natural world may presume a teleology where new data are accumulated and new hypotheses refined in modeling processes for which, unlike human culture, we have no prior knowledge. Aesthetic inquiry, however, must be sensitive to the variability and volatility of human culture and innovation; their epistemologies derive from (uneven) consensus and self-examination of what we already know and do in the execution of daily life, or in adhering to and departing from the cultural protocols of our institutional contexts. And there is yet another model of theory offered by Hegel in the introduction to his *Lectures on Aesthetic*, or the young Lukács in his *Theory of the Novel*, which stands somewhere between art and philosophy as the expression and refinement of concepts offered to us in aesthetic experience, but in a pre-conceptual or proto-conceptual modality. For Hegel, art is the perfection of a place where philosophy will arrive and find itself in reason through theory; for Lukács, theory is a lifeline thrown to us in the storms of modernity, where art expresses the disjunction of reason from reality as well as the utopian possibility of their reconciliation.

Here, our picture of theory becomes unfocused again, but now lacks clarity for other reasons. Many different conceptual images are superimposed one on top of the other, and each image resembles the others in ways significant enough that they appear to share the same design. But this image is chimerical and leads us astray if we are unable to recognize that even the short history of aesthetic writing on film reveals distinct and disjunct strata. Here the discontinuities between different approaches to investigating and evaluating the arts are as important as continuities.

A historical perspective on film theory is wanted here, but what kind of history? One irony in asking this question suggests that our contemporary picture of film theory is ineluctably tied to a certain image of *history*. To my knowledge, the first synoptic account of aesthetic writing on film was Guido Aristarco's *Storia*

delle teoriche del film, published in 1951.[4] Owing to the overlapping senses of the word "storia" in Italian, the title of Aristarco's pioneering book could be translated as either the "story" or "history" of film theory. But the appearance of "theory" in the title is equally significant. Our contemporary sense of what theory means may not derive precisely from Aristarco's work, but his particular usage was certainly representative of a broad shift taking place in the immediate post-war period that involved a new set of criteria for identifying theory as a concept allied to a distinct set of institutional practices.

The notion that there is a "story of film theory," a coherent and perhaps teleological historical narrative that could be retroactively superimposed on the unruly critical writing on film emerging in cinema's first fifty years, is coincident with similar shifts in the study of art and literature, especially the emergence in comparative literature of a new domain of inquiry – the survey of critical theory in a synoptic perspective whose inaugural gesture is René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949). To this general historical perspective we owe the practice of conceptualizing courses in film, art, or literary theory as occupying a single term of study, or perhaps two successive semesters. In a course on aesthetics, which might begin with Plato and conclude with Derrida, this kind of decontextualized, ahistorical, and often chronological, approach implicitly assumes that there is a continuous, linear, and more or less unified narrative that can be told about aesthetic expression and judgments of value. Or, similarly, that the concept of the aesthetic itself has a philosophical continuity reaching back to Periclean Athens or before. Hegel's philosophy of history is not too far in the background, even if its outlines are fading. That Aristarco was influenced by Lukács and encouraged him to return to writing about film, and that Lukács and Balázs were close friends throughout the teens establishes an oblique yet distinct network of filiations and family resemblances here.

Retrospectively, it is equally curious that early in the 20th century film would become associated with theory. This association is not natural or self-evident. One of the earliest occurrences of the term appears in the aforementioned *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924), where Béla Balázs argues that "Theory is, if not the helm, then at least the compass of artistic development. And only when a concept sends you in the right direction can you speak of erring. This concept – film theory – you must make for yourself" (Balázs 2001, p. 12).

The idea of theory presented here is both wonderfully contemporary yet also expressive of a very specific moment in the philosophy of art. On one hand, Balázs is suggesting that in order to develop or unfold its expressive possibilities, the new art of film needs critical reflection. Criticism guides film (away from

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4   I thank Francesco Casetti for leading me to this reference.

246

literature or theater perhaps) towards something like a heightened self-understanding, not only of its internal formal possibilities, but also its external cultural presentation of "visible humanity." In many ways, Balázs' book can be read as a founding text of visual cultural studies, one that gives pride of place to film not simply as the art most characteristic of modernity, but also as a new scriptural form through which humanity comprehends itself in a post-alphabetic culture, and where literacy now means close attention to the physiognomy of things as well as people, social as well as natural space. At the same time, "die Theorie des Films" is not something discovered "from" or "in" cinema as if there were facts there to be uncovered or brought to light. Rather it is a practice of the construction of concepts that is already curiously close to Gilles Deleuze's observation sixty years later in the conclusion to *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* that theory is made or crafted no less than artistic expression itself.

On the other hand, Balázs' text may appear contemporary to us only as the retrojection of a picture that is far too familiar, and this image may not align precisely with the one he intends. Theory seems always to have accompanied film study on its long march toward academic acceptance, which still seems hardly or only newly achieved in the twenty-first century. It is a word, concept, and practice that we have taken for granted since at least the 1950s. Just as the notion of the *auteur* appeared as one strategy for legitimating the study of film by trying, and only with some difficulty, to locate filmic expression in a singular creative voice or signature thus defining it as art, perhaps theory also emerged as a way of applying a scientific patina to the discussion of an art form that was barely considered as such in 1924.

But step back further from this picture or try to see it in a different light. What is called theory now might not be legible as such to someone of Balázs' historical place and culture. In 1924, a writer with Balázs' education and experience might well have defended film in the context and vocabulary of the philosophy of art or aesthetics. Here we need a frame or context where theory seems alien or strange to us as a usage that is not obvious or self-evident. Indeed Balázs' particular appeal to theory in 1924 was probably exceptional and the word itself surprising in this context. This was certainly not the way writing on film or art was usually characterized in the teens (Georg Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* being an exception, to which I will return). For example, in 1912 Lukács, one of Balázs' closest friends of the teens, published a short text entitled, "Gedanken zu einer Ästhetik des 'Kinos'," that is, thoughts toward a cinema aesthetics. Reviewing Balázs' book in 1926, Andor Kraszna-Krausz describes it as a contribution to "aesthetic philosophy," and the title of his review characterizes

the book as "eine Filmdramaturgie" (Balázs 1926). [5] This terminology resonates in compelling ways with other fundamental texts of the period such as Sergei Eisenstein's 1929 statement, "A Dramaturgy of Film Form." In his first preface to *Der sichtbare Mensch*, Balázs portrays his arguments as a "philosophy of the art of film" that explores questions of meaning by way of a critical account of the medium's distinctive aesthetic features. And finally, Balázs' most well-known book in English, *Theory of the Film*, a collection and synthesis of texts spanning his entire career as a writer, seems never to have born that title except in English translation. Published first in Russian in 1945 as *Iskusstvo Kino* (*The Art of Film*), in 1948 the book appeared in German as *Der Film. Werden und Wesen einer neuen Kunst* (*Film: Growth and Character of a New Art*). Yet more significantly, the Hungarian title given this work was *Filmkultúra: A film müvészetfilozófiájá* (*Film Culture: A Film Philosophy of Art*). To complicate this picture, or alternatively, to show that a new usage of a concept of theory was setting in by 1950, it is interesting to note that the first chapter of the German version of Balázs' book argues in its title for "Eine Filmästhetik ("a film aesthetic"), while the Hungarian version begins "Az elmélet dicsérete" or "In Praise of Theory."

My point here is that what we call theory today was characterized very differently throughout the long and complex history of writing on film before the end of WW II – as dramaturgy, aesthetic philosophy, and the philosophy of art, if the writers bothered to characterize their work at all. Indeed the adoption of the English title *Theory of the Film* in 1952 is already indicative of a reflex to superimpose retroactively a picture of theory on a complex range of conceptual activities that may not have characterized themselves as such. This picture clouds our image of what those activities meant and were supposed to accomplish historically.

No doubt, many of the best known writers on film in the teens and twenties did not think of themselves as theorists at all, at least in the contemporary sense. Like Balázs or Lukács, students of the great nineteenth century German tradition of aesthetics, they placed themselves, and were trying to place film, in a conceptual domain occupied by the philosophy of art. The appearance of the word theory in 1924, then, must evoke a special case, and one that is already in tension with philosophy or the philosophy of art.

At the same time, we still don't know what "theory" means in 1924 or why it should be evoked as a special case. In calling for theory as the compass guiding

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5   Reprinted in the Reclam edition of *Der sichtbare Mensch*. This rapprochement of theory to dramaturgy also suggests a slippage with one of the German senses of *Lehre*. Often translated as "theory" (Goëthe's *Farblehre* as color theory or Schlegel's *Kunstlehre* as theory of art), in an aesthetic context the term is closer to doctrine, or better, a systematic poetic guiding or clarifying expression.

the aesthetic direction of a new art form, what language-game was Balázs playing? To grapple with the genealogy of this concept does not mean erasing differences and restoring continuities, but rather making the word "theory" alien again, to make it unfamiliar by peeling back the palimpsestic layers of meaning covering it over.

4. Genres of theory

The modern is never simple; it is always, so to speak, on the top of something else; always charged with contradiction, with a reminiscence, in one word, with a history.

Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic*

To make these layers distinct again, it may be useful to picture the emergence of film aesthetics in the twentieth century from the perspective of three more or less discontinuous and open genres. It is tempting to think of the history of film aesthetics as a sequence of thirty year periods – 1915 to 1947 for classical, 1947 to 1968 for modern, and 1968 to 1996 for contemporary film theory. But this approach disregards the important overlaps, retentions and returns, irregular continuities, all the dotted lines, straight and curving that thread through these three discursive series. For reasons that should soon be apparent, I will recast this formulation as the emergence and persistence of aesthetic, structural, and cultural modes of aesthetic writing on film. These are less chronological periods than distinct though sometimes interpenetrating enunciative modalities whose internal regularities are defined by commonalities of concept formation, institutional contexts, and rhetorical strategies.

Blossoming from the soil of Hegel's organic and typological categories, the aesthetic discourse is concerned with questions of artistic value and the delimitation of aesthetic a prioris through which film's singularity as an art form could be identified and assessed as well as compared with the other arts of space and of time. The structural or semiological discourse is dominated by problems of meaning or signification in relation to the image. Beginning with the filmology movement in postwar France, it is marked by the introduction of film studies to the university in the contexts of the human sciences and is dominated by the influence of formalism and structuralism in the 1960s. Finally, the cultural discourse is defined by the psychoanalytic challenge to structuralism, the predominance of theories of the subject, and the problem of ideology.

Periodizing the aesthetic investigation of film as classical, modern, and contemporary is doubtless familiar to most students of cinema and, at first glance, may seem commonsensical. However, it is precisely the sources of this common-

sense that interest me here, for there are good reasons to challenge them. To maintain productively our disorientation with respect to theory, the discontinuities of these genres of discourse must be understood from the standpoint of their institutional contexts and rhetorical strategies but also, and more specifically, as distinct conceptual shifts in which the practice and activities of explanation and evaluation – ways of asking questions and anticipating answers, adapting and transforming terminology, rewriting precedent debates or repressing them – subtly but decisively shift meaning.

The earliest emblematic works of the aesthetic discourse are Vachel Lindsay's *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915) and Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916). Undoubtedly the richest and most complex period of writing on film, this discursive territory ranges from North America across France, Germany, and the former Soviet Union, before returning to the United States in the last works, written in English, of Siegfried Kracauer. It includes all the dominant figures of the first fifty years of thought about film: not only Lindsay and Münsterberg, but also Ricciotto Canudo, Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, the French Impressionist and Surrealist writings on film, the Soviet montage schools with Lev Kuleshov, V. I. Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov, the *Poetika Kino* and all of Sergei Eisenstein's writings through his magnificent *Non-Indifferent Nature*, Béla Balázs, Rudolf Arnheim, Erwin Panofsky, Hans Richter, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin, among other important figures. Chronologically, the genre is brought to a close by the post-war writings of André Bazin (still, probably, the most influential texts in the history of film aesthetics) and Kracauer's *Theory of Film*. It is tempting to date the end of the aesthetic discourse with Bazin's death in 1958 and the publication of Kracauer's *Theory of Film* in 1960. (Curiously, Kracauer mentions Bazin nowhere in this book despite its enormous bibliography, which nonetheless includes other important sources in French from the era of filmology.) However, this argument ignores the place of the 1971 publication of Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed*, still one of the most misunderstood books, both conceptually and historically, in writing on the cinema. But, as I already suggested in *The Virtual Life of Film*, Kracauer's *Theory of Film* and Cavell's *The World Viewed* stand together in their very different ways as the grand closing gestures of a certain way of thinking about film. And part of their richness, and why they remain compelling works today, is that they represent both the closure of a certain kind of thought and the opening up of new philosophical vistas to which we still have not properly adjusted our vision. They remain, in many ways, untimely works.

A period spanning nearly fifty years and two continents: What criteria would justify bringing so many diverse figures, and so many conceptually rich texts, together on a single territory of such geographical, linguistic, and historical diversity?

First, this territory, and the set of criteria populating it, must be considered as open and variable. In this respect, the different discursive modalities of aesthetic writing on film, individually and together, are best considered as open sets, indeed something like a genre in Stanley Cavell's logical characterization of that concept.[6] A genre, of course, must contain a definable and delimitable set of criteria according to which membership in the set can be discussed, accounted for, and debated. Membership in the set does not require that each text exhibit or conform to all the criteria, however. Rather, it suffices that all members share at least some significant number of elements in common. The salient features of a genre, and candidacy for membership of individual texts, are therefore open-ended: new conceptual features, definitions, and questions are not limitable in advance of critical evaluation. Characterizing a genre, then, does not mean identifying a set that has been closed off in the past, nor establishing a rigid typology. It requires attentiveness to both repetition and change as well as contradiction, for genres are future-oriented, seeking change and mutation.

The trick, then, is to assess and evaluate commonalities and family resemblances that persist across that repetition, which produces new members of the set until the salient elements change and recombine in such a way that a new genre emerges. The recognition of a new genre – in my example, a new discursive modality of film theorizing – equally requires contests, or tests of negation. These contests are not historically linear; the time of repetition and contestation can be lateral, moving backwards or forwards across related groups of texts or arguments. A new genre thus emerges through a process of derivation where there is no a priori standing or necessary set of features that an instance must exhibit to qualify as a member of the set. Indeed, members will emphasize or exhibit different or further features of the discursive set, and some feature or features will inevitably sit uncomfortably within the set formed by the other members.

One last feature, especially characteristic of discourses of theory and the generic transformations of aesthetic writing on film, bears mentioning here. The emergence of a new discursive modality often suppresses its discontinuities with earlier genres by retrojecting its logic, vocabulary, and conceptual structure onto earlier genres and discourses. This would be another way of characterizing ge-

6   See in particular Cavell's discussion of genre in *Pursuits of Happiness: the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, 1981, pp. 26-34, *Contesting Tears: the Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*, 1996, pp. 3-14, and "The Fact of Television" in *Cavell on Film*, William Rothman, 2005, ed., pp. 59-85.

neric contestation or tests of negation. For example, in his essay on "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," Bazin resituates the history of film style not as a break between the silent and sound periods but rather as a contest between "faith in the image" or "faith in reality." Rather than defining the technological history of cinema as a break between the silent and sound periods, one finds the ebb and flow of a constant evolution towards deep focus cinematography. Expressionism or montage are in contest here with composition in depth as a persistent stylistic option. In a founding work of the structural discourse, "Cinema: Language or Language System," Christian Metz remaps the conceptual history of the aesthetic mode with respect to the problem of language, thus transforming the unruly precedent debates on film art as a continuous debate on the question of signification or meaning. When the cultural discourse emerges after 1968, Eisenstein or Benjamin are re-read in the context of a materialist and ideological discourse that wants to recover or reconstruct a continuous history of left aesthetics in film, thus rendering the history of film theory as a Marxist theory and history. Very often, these retrojections involve conceptual remappings and replacements of the idea of theory itself.

In this respect, attention to discontinuities in the set is as important as to its continuities. This is crucial for understanding so-called classical film theory, which I will focus on for the remainder of this essay. Before 1950, with some few very notable exceptions it is rare to find writing on cinema that characterizes itself as theory or theoretical, as I have already pointed out. In the great variety of texts produced in this period, what might be recognized today as film history, criticism, or dramaturgy blends with the conceptual innovation or invention that is more characteristic of the activities and rhetorical strategies of film theory or aesthetics. This observation still leaves unresolved, of course, the question of how to characterize logically a theory of art or of an art form like film? Indeed, the idea of theory, and what constitutes a theory in the aesthetic, structural, or cultural modes, is something of a moving target.

Nevertheless, as I suggested earlier, the aesthetic discourse confronts film as a problem, above all because the new medium is perceived to sit only uncomfortably within the then current philosophical discourse of Art or the aesthetic. Indeed, in the first forty years of its existence, film is testing, even negating, the "genre" of Art itself; its very existence and evolution undermine and throw open the questions of how to settle the identity of a medium or art form, and how to value, or not, the subjective aesthetic experiences it inspires. The insistence of the questions – What is film? Or what is cinema? – thus demonstrates the difficulty of making film visible and intelligible as an object of explanation and evaluation, and therefore, the object of a theory. And at the same time, the persistence of

these ontological questions undermines confidence, as did modernism in general, in the concepts that previously assured the identity of art forms and categories of aesthetic judgment. In this manner, theory, in film or in art, first emerges as a form of explanation in confrontation with a problem, and this problem arises because of the variability or ephemerality of the objects writers are trying to frame or picture. What can be learned from the variety and contentiousness of writing on film, especially in the silent and early sound periods, is that here theory is less a form of unifying and systematizing a body of knowledge about an object than a mode of activity or of conceptual engagement, a manner of interrogating one's self and debating with others about the nature of what counts as a (new) medium and how to describe its subjective effects and cultural significance. There is also the question of responding to larger historical pressures being brought to bear on the concept of art in general, as Walter Benjamin was so well aware.

In my account, this observation neither turns the aesthetic discourse towards theory or away from it. These writings are neither pre-theoretical nor another kind of theory or an alternative to theory. Could the early experience of film have been accounted for otherwise? My concern, rather, is to indicate at least in outline how the ontological force of the new medium confronts writers struggling to comprehend the experience of modernity through their experience of film. The wild inventiveness of the aesthetic discourse was a continuing and contradictory response to the perceptual and conceptual vertigo elicited not only by the novelty of the medium, but also by the velocity with which it was continually reinventing itself and responding dynamically to larger historical and cultural forces.

At the same time, we need to be attentive to the deeper and more complex genealogical network of concepts that thread through these writings philosophically, linking them in sometimes direct and indirect lines, if not errant displacements, to wider debates in the philosophy of art. It is important, first, to recognize in the aesthetic mode the conceptual and rhetorical form of the systematic aesthetics of the 19ᵗʰ century, especially in German philosophy, that would have formed the philosophical background of most of the writers. Here definitions of the medium or genre of art are motivated by criteria that delimit and typify major artistic forms such as poetry, music, dance, painting, sculpture, and architecture, often in ways that reproduce, explicitly or implicitly, the idealist system of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetic* and its promulgation in the late nineteenth century in the works of Bernard Bosanquet and others. In most characteristic accounts, the aesthetic, or what counts as an instance or medium of Art, is thus framed by enunciative a prioris that define the horizon of all that can be said or thought within this discursive register. These are the conceptual grounds of the discourse, which include: the criterion of self-identity (that the existence of a medium of art

must be typified as a pure genre); the criterion of substantial self-similarity (that each genre of art is produced from a medium, here defined as a single substance or a closed set of qualities); and finally, the definition of unique aesthetic a priori for each medium, that is, sets of formal or stylistic options that are solely characteristic of the genre and its medium.[7]

These enunciative a prioris define the horizon wherein the aesthetic discourse curves back upon itself. Contrariwise, the openness of the genre is assured, paradoxically, by the historical persistence of a discourse on aesthetics as a conceptual vocabulary that is challenged and undermined by the very object(s) it is trying to define or construct. From Canudo through Benjamin, the more one tries to defend film as Art through the conceptual vocabulary of system aesthetics, the more film, as Benjamin so eloquently put the case, redefines the question of What is Art? What continues to fascinate about pre-War writing on film is that it poses problems without "solutions" – a discourse that raises more questions than answers. The wild proliferation of "aesthetic a prioris" throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s – *photogénie*, *cinégraphie*, close-up, montage, etc. – is best characterized as something like the generation of concepts in open-ended series of explanations or accounts that vary positively in their *failure* to come to terms with defining art, or film, in the framework of a systematic aesthetics. In fact, the success or failure of a "theory" is irrelevant here; what is at stake, and what the authors strive for, is conceptual invention and innovation commensurable with the newness, the modernity, or contemporaneity of film as a means of expression. A new genre of discourse thus emerges through the gradual erosion and contestation of historically precedent concepts. Indeed one might say that what characterizes the historic period of modernism is that "theory" emerges in the confrontation with and transformation of "aesthetics." It becomes the sign, as it were, of an opening on the discursive horizon toward a new territory.

Here we confront one last twist, and one that takes us away from film, but perhaps illuminates the form of life theory expressed in the 1920s. Georg Lukács' second major work, *The Theory of the Novel*, was composed in 1914-15 in the time of the European march towards total war. It was first published in the *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* in 1915 and printed in book form in 1920, just after the conclusion of the war. Folded into the work,

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7   See for example my *Reading the Figural*, 2001, pp. 30-44 and *The Virtual Life of Film*, pp. 31-41. Carroll also adds what I have characterized as an "injunctive argument," where the definition of media require an exclusiveness – deriving from their substantial self-similarity and aesthetic a priori – that discourages or prohibits uses contrary to those criteria. In my account, the injunctive criterion was not as widespread or consistent as Carroll seems to believe, and it is contrary to my characterization of both discursive and artistic genres as open and variable.

then, is a sense of a break in history and the suffering of a discontinuity where reason is disjoined from the world and society. And there is another turn, presented in Lukács' retrospective account of his youthful work in the 1962 Preface to the re-publication of *The Theory of the Novel*. There is very little retrojection here as the elder Lukács takes pains to criticize his younger incarnation (always referred to in the third person as a kind of pre-historical self), for offering, in his own words, "a fusion of 'left' ethics and 'right' epistemology" in the years before discovering his own scientific perspective in Marxist philosophy, whose outcome was the controversial and still compelling *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) (Lukács 1971, p. xx). The Preface is thus a history of erring paths and epistemological breaks.

My interest here is not to review Lukács' arguments concerning the history of the novel as a social and philosophical form but rather to make present and perspicuous what language game he was playing in offering a "theory of" the novel in 1914-15, especially in his pre-Marxist period, and how this might render perspicuous what theory might have meant to early aesthetic writings on film. This task is made more difficult in that neither in the book nor in the retrospective preface does Lukács offer an explicit account of the logic and value of theory as distinct from aesthetics, the philosophy of art, or of *Kunstwissenschaft*, all of which would be more common characterizations for the period. In an era when theory is still rare, how to account for its presence here as if it were a pelorus sighting a distant land where few had so far traveled?

Considering its time and place of composition and publication, one of the most striking aspects of Lukács' book is its Hegelianism. Lukács' reference to his fusion of left ethics with right epistemology provides an important signpost for the stakes of theory at this historical moment. Lukács relates that the book was written under the influence of Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber, and that the influence of Dilthey's 1905 study of *Poetry and Experience* was deeply felt, in particular. In turning to Hegel, Lukács was rejecting the neo-Kantian formalist and positivist aesthetics then dominant at the time, which for the younger Lukács contaminated even Dilthey and the "human sciences" school. And in turn, aesthetics seemed implicitly not the right way to characterize this approach, but rather, theory. Lukács is responding sympathetically, no doubt, to the critical reaction of Dilthey and other philosophers to positivism and historicism, a reaction which was strongly present in other ways in the turn of the century reception of Nietzsche. At the same time, he implies that his youthful fascination with Hegel is analogous to that of the young Marx as a pre-scientific though necessary preliminary step toward a correct (theoretical) understanding of history and its relationship to art or literature. Theory has another special role to

play here as the critical response to a felt crisis in history, a crisis where other practical and conceptual possibilities seemed blocked, or as yet unthought or unthinkable. Lukács relates that *The Theory of the Novel* was conceived in a period of deep existential as well as historical crisis, "written in a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world," and where "nothing, even at the level of the most abstract intellection, helped to mediate between my subjective attitude and objective reality" (1971, p. 12). What I want to suggest here is that theory signifies the response to this crisis, at once ethical and social, wherein one no longer feels at home in the world and where the movements of history are experienced not as progress but rather as the headlong rush into catastrophe or cataclysm.

This is where the turn to Hegel seems strange, and where philosophy seems no longer to console or to provide a searchlight guiding humanity toward reason. As Lukács relates, for Hegel history is continuous – a steady progressive march towards reason –and in moments of historical change or transformation only art becomes problematic as the signifier for one form and Idea replacing another. Art becomes problematic, or rather, confronts philosophy with problems calling for conceptual clarification, "precisely because reality has become non-problematic" (ibid. p. 17). Philosophy is the solution to art's ontological puzzles as humanity continually re-finds and refines itself in reason. For Lukács, however, the novel is expressive of a lived crisis in history, one where the world and history have gone out of joint and where art is unsure of its place. This is why the prose of life – poetry or philosophy – are "here only a symptom, among many others, of the fact that reality no longer constitutes a favourable soil for art; that is why the central problem of the novel is the fact that art has to write off the closed and total forms which stem from a rounded totality of being – that art has nothing more to do with any world of forms that is immanently complete in itself" (ibid. p. 17). The novel, it would seem, is less Stendhal's mirror held to life than an irregular or broken crystal that presents the world in fragments.

The historical realism of the novel is the historical crisis of modernity. Here the desire for totality, as represented in the perfectability of aesthetic form, or as a relation of identity between the subject and world or the subject and reason, all come to grief, and not for artistic but rather for historical and philosophical reasons: "there is no longer any spontaneous totality of being", the author of *The Theory of the Novel* says of present-day reality. A few years later Gottfried Benn put the same thought in another way: ". . . there was no reality, only, at most, its distorted image" (Lukács 1971, p. 18). In this respect, in concluding the 1962 Preface, Lukács makes explicit that the desire to create a theory of the novel was not intellectual, but rather ethical: "that the author was not looking for a new literary form but, quite explicitly, for a 'new world'" (ibid. p. 20). In or through

theory, Lukács understands that the progress of art is unfinished and falls into fragments in humanity's confrontation with the emergence of modernity and the global scale of violence of the First World War. In this respect, Lukács' appeal to theory is a reversal of Hegel. Where philosophy or metaphysics have failed in history, there is little left but to turn to theory. Like Marx and Kierkegaard writing after Hegel, the aim of theory was not to affirm existing reality as the culmination of history but to criticize existing reality as spiritually and historically incomplete and insufficient. Finding no solace in art as either the image of a perfectable world or a world guided by reason, one turns to theory.

Expressing in its forms a crisis both ontological and historical, the novel presents history in a state of traumatic change; for the young Lukács this transformation was potentially destructive and chaotic. History would present him with new compass points, however – the Russian revolution of 1917 and the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919. As a mode of art the novel is not the completion of a stage in history, but rather the anticipation of a new historical shift forged in violence. The young Lukács experienced this historical violence as a barrier – he had to find his way in theory. Retrospectively, the elder Lukács sees the problem posed by the novel as one of an anticipated revolution, which called for a response not from philosophy or metaphysics, but from theory as the complement to revolutionary practice. In turn, the history of the novel is something like the prelude to this theory. Theory turns to, or turns into, praxis in the extent to which it is capable of thinking change. In this respect, knowledge will no longer be theoretic – the static and contemplative standpoint of abstract thought and pure reason – but rather turns through theory to what is concrete, actual, and capable of transformation. Just as art was for Hegel the not-yet anticipating the completion of the system of philosophy, theory after Lukács was the always-to-come of world revolution as anticipated in the "problematical" structure of the novel itself. At the same moment, another group of writers were working through the problematic experience of modernity in relation to another form, one whose relation to art was not only uncertain, but which also threw up a challenge to the reigning concepts of aesthetics – cinema.

Hegel announced the end of art (and perhaps the beginning of modern philosophy), but the concept of free art also signaled the completion of a vast social change indicative of a new, modern relation to art. By the early nineteenth century, artworks were definitely becoming objects with a special kind of value. And from Winckelmann through Hegel, the scientific study of art recognized ever more strongly and complexly the historical nature of this value. But it would take another hundred years before the twentieth century avant-gardes would undermine and disturb, before philosophy or art theory themselves, the

concept of beauty as the axiological foundation for concepts of art. Indeed the emergence of art theory, as distinct from the philosophy of art or *Kunstwissenschaft*, is inseparable from a certain politicization of art in critical theory – whose great critical exponents included Lukács, Bloch, Benjamin, Brecht, and Adorno – that still recognized aesthetic experience as a unique perceptual domain or activity, but which placed questions of significance and value in relation to and recognition of art's penetration by the commodity form. Film and aesthetic writing on film has a special place in this account not only as the emergence of a new and perplexing expressive mode – for many writers the very expression of modernity – but also one that was in historical tension with the transformation of aesthetic by the commodity form and capitalistic exploitation of culture and aesthetic experience.

What Lukács suggests, and what we see in the first aesthetic accounts of cinema, is that the call for theory is the appeal to the new, the actual, or the contemporary – what breaks from the past to anticipate the future. At the same time, embedded within the concept of theory is a discontinuous history of conceptual usage whose genealogy is as long as it is incomplete. Each time we evoke or invoke theory in the humanities, we lift the weight of this history on our backs, or more likely, we tread lightly upon it, as if to leave undisturbed the bones of our ancestors, unaware of how many geological layers lie beneath our feet. And while a genealogy of theory seeks conceptual clarity, it cannot confuse this desideratum historically with the search for origins in either science or philosophy. Not one identity, many lines of descent.

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Index