Compilation and Critique: The Essay as a Literary, Cinematographic and Videographic Form

Alex Fletcher

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Abstract

This dissertation critically engages the meaning and scope of the category of the 'essay film'; a term that has gained increasing currency in recent decades in film studies and contemporary art to group a diverse array of moving-image works. Departing from recent literature on the essay film, the essay, as I argue, should be conceived less as a stable generic category, than as a dynamic form and experimental mode of writing and filmmaking, which employs and cuts across diverse literary, cinematic and televisual genres and sub-genres, and which is historically subject to critical transformation as it encounters new social, technological and cultural forms and mediums. The introduction provides a critical survey of some of the leading proponents of the essay film, and outlines a working definition of the essay as a literary and cinematographic form. Chapter 1 examines the history of the essay and criticism as a literary and philosophical form, focusing on the essayistic and critical writings of Michel de Montaigne, the early German Romantics, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno and Roland Barthes. Central to the critical and experimental nature of the essay, as the chapter underlines, is the deployment of various indirect, allegorical, and modernist rhetorical and poetic strategies and devices – such as citation, irony, fragmentation, and parataxis – which attempt to engage the reader in the text's reflective process through the constellation of enigmatic and disjunct moments and perspectives. Chapter 2 explores the emergence of various essayistic forms in the Soviet avant-garde in the 1920s, relating debates around the privileging of literary and photographic documentary montage practices in Soviet Factography to Esfir Shub's historical compilation films, Dziga Vertov's experimental newsreels, and Sergei Eisenstein's project to make a plotless film-essay based on Karl Marx's *Capital*. Chapter 3 focuses on Jean-Luc Godard's film and video essays – from *Camera Eye* (1967) to *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998) – delineating the crucial shifts in Godard's various attempts to present a critical discourse on cinema and the media through the montage of image and sound. Chapter 4 investigates the essay films, archival video essays, and essayistic video installations of Harun Farocki, attending to how his works endeavour to render the ciphered social life of images and the historical transformations in technologies and techniques of seeing and imaging available for critical interpretation. Central to my account of the essay as a literary, cinematographic, and videographic form is the question of *compilation*; namely, how (from Montaigne to Farocki) knowledge and history (whether in the form of text or image) is archived and assembled through the juxtaposition and critical *weighing* of disparate citations and images. Paramount in relation to Godard and Farocki, as I underscore, is their respective shifts to working with video technology, which afforded both filmmakers the capacity to more freely combine and analyze images from divergent media sources, as well as to devise novel forms of videographic montage based on the construction of historical correspondences between audio-visual elements. I conclude the dissertation with a consideration of the impact of digital technology on contemporary essayistic audio-visual practices, and how issues raised in the preceding chapters – around audio-visual criticism, the spatialization of montage in moving-image installation work, and documentary and archival film practices – have been affected by such technological and cultural shifts.

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Introduction

> 'Forcibly separated from the discipline of academic unfreedom, intellectual freedom itself becomes unfree and serves the socially preformed needs of its clientele. Irresponsibility, itself an aspect of all truth that does not exhaust itself in responsibility to the status quo, then justifies itself to the needs of established consciousness; bad essays are just as conformist as bad dissertations. Responsibility, however, respects not only authorities and committees, but also the object itself.'[1]

The term 'essay film' – along with related categories like the 'video essay' – has gained increasing currency in recent years as both a critical and curatorial category, as well as a formal model employed by filmmakers and artists.[2] Critically, the term has largely been deployed to group and discuss a diverse array of moving-image works, both new and old, screened and installed across cinema, experimental film, and contemporary art spaces and institutions (especially at international film festivals and art biennales), as well as on television and various online platforms and streaming services.[3] Particularly significant in the codification and canonization of the essay film as a genre or mode of filmmaking were a number of major film retrospectives, most notably *The Way of the Termite: The Essay in Cinema, 1909-2004* (2007), programmed by the filmmaker Jean-Pierre Gorin at the Austrian Film Museum, Vienna.[4] 'An energy more than a genre', as Gorin puts it in his curatorial

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[1] Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', in *Notes to Literature*, *Vol. 1*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 6.

[2] It has even found its way into journalistic discourse. As the Guardian reported in 2014 in a somewhat incredulous tone, the artist Duncan Campbell won the 2014 Turner prize with his 'essay film' *It for Others* (2013). Mark Brown, 'Turner Prize 2014: Duncan Campbell wins Britain's prestigious art award', *The Guardian*, 1/12/2014: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/01/turner-prize-2014-duncan-campbell-wins.

[3] For a schematic history of the essay film and its exhibition see Thomas Elsaesser, 'The Essay Film: Festival Favorite to Flexible Commodity Form?', in *Essays on the Essay Film*, ed. Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 240-258.

[4] This was followed by André Picard's two-part series, which drew inspiration from Gorin's programme at TIFF Cinémathèque, Toronto, in 2009-2010, and the film season at the BFI Southbank in 2013, 'Thought in Action: The Art of the Essay Film'.

statement, the fifty-seven films gathered under the retrospective's title – beginning with D.W. Griffith's silent short, *A Corner of Wheat* (1909) – is emblematic of the elasticity of the term, and its capacity to encompass widely different works from various traditions of fiction, documentary, and experimental cinema.[5] More recently, and testament to its consolidation as an established category, is the annual Essay Film Festival, organized by the Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image in London, which was begun in 2015. As with Gorin's retrospective, the Festival's programme reflects a typically 'open and inclusive' approach to the 'essay film', characterizing it as 'a hybrid form that brings together elements of documentary and experimental filmmaking into a highly personal and often politically engaged mode of expression'.[6]

While appealingly simple formulations such as the above have proved 'taxonomically useful' for theorists and curators 'to define a field of previously unassimilable objects' that range 'far and wide' throughout cinema, experimental film, television, and art history, the category has also proved to be 'perennially porous', and is often applied as a catch-all phrase to designate any audio-visual text seen to diverge from the norms and conventions of classical documentary and fiction filmmaking.[7] This diffuseness of the category, and its application to any work that exhibits analytical, experimental, or self-reflexive tendencies is, however, not new. In the late 1990s, the German filmmaker and artist Harun Farocki considered the term to have 'devolved into…vagueness'. When 'there is a lot of music on TV and you see landscapes – they've started calling that an essay film as well. A lot of stuff that's just relaxing and not unequivocally journalistic is already called "essay"', he states.[8] Commenting in an American context in the early 1990s, the film critic Phillip Lopate similarly observed the 'sudden frequency with which the term "essay-film" is being optimistically and

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[5] See Jean-Pierre Gorin, 'Proposal for a Tussle' (2007), in *Essays on the Essay Film*, p. 274. The German subtitle, *Beispiele eines Essayistischen Kinos* [*Examples of an Essayistic Cinema*] is slightly different to the English translation, and suggests a working definition of the essayistic that is more modal than generic.

[6] See the About section of the Essay Film Festival website: http://www.essayfilmfestival.com/about/.

[7] Andrew Tracy, 'The Essay Film', *Sight & Sound* (August, 2013): https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/deep-focus/essay-film.

[8] Rembert Hüser, 'Nine Minutes in the Yard: A Conversation with Harun Farocki' (1999), in *Harun Farocki: Working On the Sightlines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), p. 313

loosely invoked in cinematic circles'.[9] Writing several years earlier, the American film theorist David Bordwell also questioned the critical purchase of 'conventional labels like "film-essay"' in attempting to come to grips with the 'unusual narrational strategies' of Jean-Luc Godard's early features.[10] Such observations are important not only for pointing to the need for a more critical and historical approach to the essay film, but are a useful reminder that the category has long circulated before its more recent resurgence in Anglophone film studies departments. As film theorist Volker Pantenburg notes in his 2006 monograph on Farocki and Godard, the term has been 'a fixed concept in German-speaking film studies and criticism since the 1980s'.[11] The early 1990s saw a number of German-language publications attempting to historicize and theorize the 'essay' or 'essayistic film' (typically the result of conferences and film series), most notably *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film* (1992), edited by Christa Blümlinger and Constantin Wulff.[12] The extension of debates on the 'essay film' to French and Anglophone contexts in the late 1990s and early 2000s is marked by a host of other publications.[13] English language

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[9] Phillip Lopate, 'In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film' (1992), in *Essays on the Essay Film*, p. 133.

[10] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 313, 312.

[11] Volker Pantenburg, *Farock/Godard: Film As Theory*, trans. Michael Turnbull (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), p. 135.

[12] For an English translation of Blümlinger's introduction to *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen* see Christa Blümlinger, 'Reading Between Images', in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, ed. Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 2016), pp. 172-191. For one of the first German-language monographs devoted to the essay film, see Christina Scherer, *Ivens, Marker, Godard, Jarman: Erinnerung im Essayfilm* (Munich: Fink, 2001).

[13] These include: *L'Essai et le Cinema*, ed. Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues and Murielle Gagnebin (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2004); *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age*, ed. Ursula Biemann (Zürich: Institut für Theorie der Gestaltung und Kunst Zürich; Voldemeer, 2003), a volume of essays published in English which is significant for its focus on artist and experimental documentary video work; *Der Essay Film: Ästhetik und Aktualität*, ed. Sven Kramer and Thomas Tode (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2011), the result of an international conference on the essay film held at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg in Germany, with papers delivered in both German and English. Also notable here are a number of writings by Nora M. Alter, including: 'The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki's *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*', *New German Critique*, no. 68 (Spring – Summer, 1996), pp. 165-192; 'Translating the Essay into Film and Installation', *Journal of Visual Culture 6*, no. 1 (2007), pp. 44-57, and her monograph *Chris Marker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), as well as Michael Renov's *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis, Minn.:

publications devoted to the essay film have subsequently proceeded apace, with a number of monographs and essay collections appearing in recent years.[14]

'It's the film that thinks': The Lyrical I of the Essay Film and the Concept of Criticism

Much of the literature on the essay film is similar in terms its general method, endeavouring to construct a broad generic model of the 'essay film' so as to identify a wide variety of filmmakers whose works exhibit, despite their national and historical variations, comparable structural traits. This work of construction is typically twofold, and usually proceeds by first collating a growing (albeit fairly circumscribed) series of historical references of theorists and filmmakers in which the word essay is discussed in conjunction with the practice of filmmaking, which are then related to theorists and paragons of the philosophical or literary essay in order to produce a working definition of the term suitable for categorizing a large array filmmakers and films. The trouble with this approach, as Rick Warner notes, 'is that we tend to come away with a picture of the work under inspection that is much more programmatic and orderly than is actually the case', with the term 'essay' serving 'as a mere label that supports a game of inclusion and exclusion on the part of the critic'.[15] An early example of this is Phillip Lopate's 1992 essay 'In Search of the Centaur', which is interesting for it markedly restrictive and normative definition of the communicative and aesthetic functions that an essay and essay film is expected to perform. Like many subsequent theorists, Lopate considers Chris Marker's 16mm experimental travelogues *Letter from Siberia* (1958) and *Sans Soleil* (1983) as 'true essay-films', due to the preponderance, in both

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University of Minnesota Press, 2004), which has a number of chapters on the essay film and video essay as a form of documentary.

[14] Most notable here are Laura Rascaroli's two books, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2009) and *How the Essay Film Thinks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); *The Essay Film: Dialogue, Politics, Utopia*, ed. Elizabeth A. Papazian and Caroline Eades (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); *Essays on the Essay Film*, already cited above; and Nora M. Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

[15] Rick Warner, 'The Cinematic Essay as Adaptive Process', *Adaptions*, vol. 6, no. 1 (September, 2012), p. 2.

works, of a meditative voice-over commentary that is judged to maintain a sufficiently poetic or literary style.[16] Lopate's observations reiterate André Bazin's much-discussed review from 1958, in which he characterizes *Letter from Siberia* as presenting 'an essay…in the form of a filmed report'. Bazin likewise points to Marker's intelligent and witty voice-over commentary, which constantly shifts between relating ethnographic information about the film's subject (Siberia) and playfully interrogating both what is depicted and the normative codes of documentary filmmaking.[17]

For Lopate, however, what is essential in designating these works as 'true' or 'pure' essay films is what he considers the subjective inflection of their voice-over texts, whose epistolary form is said to possess 'an irrepressibly Montaignesque personal tone'.[18] Marker's 'auteurial signature', that is, is said to come across despite the fact that it is not the filmmaker's voice that we hear in *Letter to Siberia* (the text is narrated by Georges Rouquier) or in *Sans Soleil*, in which an unspecified female narrator (Alexandra Stewart) reads letters from a friend, Sandor Krasna; a 'lightly fictionalized stand-in' for Marker, Lopate reasons, which he compares to Charles Lamb's fictionalized persona in *Essays of Elia* (1823).[19] Ironically, Lopate opposes Marker's supposedly personal and essayistic commentaries to the work of Jean-Luc Godard, whose 'modernist aesthetic' is said to be 'inimical' to the essay's communicative function, notwithstanding the fact of Godard's increasing self-inscription (as both voice and body) in his works from the late 1960s on: 'He is too much the modernist, fracturing, dissociating, collaging, to be caught dead expressing his views straightforwardly'.[20] As this dissertation will demonstrate, Lopate's argument that the essay and essay film must be judged in terms of an author's personal or direct address to a reader or spectator, unhindered by indirect techniques such as irony, fragmentation, montage, or incomprehensibility, is highly tenuous. As I will elaborate in Chapter 1, Montaigne regarded

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[16] Lopate, 'In Search of the Centaur', p. 115. Lopate opposes these works to Marker's other documentary and historical compilation films, which are said to feature only 'essayistic' elements.

[17] André Bazin, 'Bazin on Marker' (1958), in *Essays on the Essay Film*, p. 103. As Bazin puts it, Marker creates a 'horizontal montage' between sound and image that engenders 'lateral' relations that move 'from ear to eye'.

[18] Lopate, 'In Search of the Centaur', p. 115

[19] Ibid., p. 116.

[20] Ibid., p. 120

his *Essais* not only as following in an ancient tradition of philosophizing that sought to employ an intimate and conversational style, but as spaces where disparate citations (often unworked into the fabric of his own text) come together to form ideas through apposition and accident. In contrast to Marker or Lamb, moreover, Montaigne often justifies his fragmentary style in terms of his inability to produce a polished fiction or narrative. Rather than merely expressing his thoughts through a personal or direct form of communication, then, the meaning Montaigne's texts is typically arrived at *indirectly*, via an experimental poetics of compilation and commentary that, in pursuing a particular theme in a *provisory* and *paratactic* manner, is full of gaps and contradictions which the reader is obliged to reconstruct or *essay*.

It is precisely this experimental aspect of essayistic writing and filmmaking, which Montaigne's *Essais* can be seen to anticipate, and which is reconfigured and reinvented by subsequent writers and filmmakers (such as Godard), that will be the primary focus of this dissertation. Contra Lopate, I will attempt to underline how such fragmentary and indirect methods of presentation are essential to understanding the critical nature of the essay form, and its capacity to fashion perspectives that displace and estrange habitual ways of thinking about and representing the world – rather than simply consisting of a mode of expression that communicates to the reader or spectator 'what its author thinks'.[21] This is, as Kaja Silverman contends, the point of the female voice-commentary in *Sans Soleil*, which does not serve as simply a fictional vehicle for relaying Marker's personal thoughts and observations, but to engender a 'self-estrangement' in the *Western* spectator, whose relation to the film's depiction of various 'foreign' cultures might easily slip into 'an unproblematically ethnographic function in another context'.[22] Why Trinh T. Minh-ha's films *Reassemblage* (1983) and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), which reflect on similar ethnographic and representational questions as *Sans Soleil*, as well as issues of 'colonialism or [the] oppression of women', through 'a reshuffling of voices' (typically Minh-ha's own) and footage, do not get to count as true essay films in Lopate's estimation appears as completely arbitrary – other than the fact they are perceived to be simply *too* experimental

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[21] Ibid., p. 119.

[22] Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 186-188.

for his taste.[23] Oddly – given that it is Marker's indirect and fictional mode of address in *Sans Soleil* that Lopate considers as offering a truly 'communicative' model for the personal essay film – Lopate's other suggestions for exemplars of the essay film are connected to the fact that the filmmaker, like many literary essayists, has 'directly injected themselves into the story'.[24] Yet Lopate is often dissatisfied with the inability of such filmmakers 'to follow a train of thought, using their own personal voice and experience to guide them' – such as Orson Welle's 'so-called essay-film', *F for Fake* (1975), in which Welles 'seems more intent on mystifying and showing off his magician-Prospero persona than in opening his mind to us'.[25] Again, this is a remarkably tenuous definition of what essayistic writing and filmmaking can be; particularly given, as I will discuss in Chapter 1, the recurrent use of digression as a key strategy in essayistic writers, from Montaigne to Barthes, as well the importance of the essayistic dialogue as a form in which a writer or filmmaker can explore or *essay* an idea or problem from a number of perspectives.

Like Lopate, Laura Rascaroli's *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (2009) considers 'reflectiveness and subjectivity' as the two 'primary markers' of the essay film.[26] At the level of 'textual commitments', as Rascaroli contends, an essay film presents 'the expression of a personal, critical reflection on a problem or set of problems', which 'does not propose itself as anonymous or collective, but as originating from a single authorial voice'.[27] At the level of 'rhetorical structures, in order to convey such reflection, the filmic essay decidedly points to the enunciating subject, who literally inhabits the text',

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[23] Lopate, 'In Search of the Centaur', p. 118.

[24] These include Gorin's documentary *Poto and Cabengo* (1982), in which Gorin 'inserts his own doubts and confusions about what sort of film he is trying to make'; Pasolini's *Notes Towards an African "Orestes"* (1970), in which Pasolini reflects on the possibility of making a film version of the *Oresteia* set in Africa; Orson Welle's *Filming "Othello"* (1978), which consists of Welles sat at a moviola discussing the production of his 1951 film; and Michael Moore's documentary *Roger & Me* (1989), with its 'strongly autobiographical' first-person narration. Ibid., p. 121-124

[25] Ibid., pp. 121-124.

[26] Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower, 2009), p. 32.

[27] Ibid., pp. 32-33.

and is seen to be 'close to the real, extra-textual author'.[28] Unlike Lopate, however, Rascaroli is far more attuned to how the 'inscription' of authorial enunciation in an essay film can manifest itself both directly – in the visible or audible presence of the filmmaker – or indirectly – 'through the use of a narrator/spokesperson, or of intertitles, or of musical commentary, camera movements and the like'.[29] Rascaroli demonstrates this through a reading of Harun Farocki's self-described essay film, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989), a work that I will also discuss in Chapter 4, which, like *Sans Soleil*, is narrated by a female voice-over commentary. The voice-over, as Rascaroli observes, is *only* 'the vocal part of a thought-provoking reflection' articulated through the film's complex montage of word, image and sound. While Farocki appears at moments in the film's image-track, the 'authorship' of the work is said to be 'played [out] in the interstices between narrator and enunciator', which is 'used to involve the spectator in a dialogue with the film, which is simultaneously reflective and subjective, open and experimental'.[30]

Yet Rascaroli's choice of Farocki to exemplify her conception of a subjective mode of essayistic filmmaking is curious, particularly given the highly impersonal and affectless quality of the voice-over in *Images of the World*. As Farocki notes of his choice to use a female narrator, he 'wanted to make evident that here a not-I was speaking'; that is, he wanted to indicate how the commentary should not be construed as simply relaying his own personal thoughts, but offering a series of readings of images which approach the object in question through different discursive frames: social, political, scientific, subjective (a subjectivity that is not necessarily Farocki's).[31] Furthermore, what is significant when

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[28] Ibid., p. 33

[29] Ibid., p. 37

[30] Ibid., p. 40. Although Rascaroli considers the voice-over as 'the most simple and successful way' of producing such an authorial and dialogic address to the spectator, the strength of her textual and rhetorical approach is to show how a filmmaker can also achieve this address through different audio-visual forms of articulation. 'If this dialogue can be achieved via purely visual means', as Rascaroli notes, 'if the enunciator is able to convey an argument and enter into a dialogue with the spectator through images unaccompanied by commentary, we can call that an essay film'. Ibid., p. 37.

[31] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Making the World Superfluous: An Interview with Harun Farocki', in *Harun Farocki: Working On the Sightlines*, pp. 188, 187. As Farocki states: 'I make such playful use of the commentary, I

reflecting on Farocki's essayistic films, videos, and video installations, as I will argue, is not simply to locate their subjective ingredients, but the way that such aspects are in constant tension with a number of extremely impersonal and highly rationalized audio, visual and textual elements and techniques, which precisely aim to put in question the conventional image of the *auteur* filmmaker through various strategies of authorial ascesis. This aesthetics of impersonality, as we will see, has a history in Soviet constructivism and Factography, particularly the essayistic compilation films of Esfir Shub, as well as the writings of Benjamin (a key influence on Farocki), all of whom share a phenomenologically sober engagement with the world, typically employing ascetic montage techniques to constellate various image and text fragments. While, as Rascaroli rightly argues, reflection is articulated in *Images of the World* through the relations that occur between *all* the film's elements (and not only the commentary), this approach comes into conflict with her desire to ground the work of rhetorical enunciation (whether literary or cinematographic) in terms of a communicational model centered on the individuality of the author. The limits of this approach become quickly apparent when thinking about manifestly collective essay films, such as Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1956) – which was made in collaboration with Chris Marker, Jean Cayrol (who wrote the script), and Hanns Eisler (who composed the soundtrack) – or the Black Audio Film Collective's *Handsworth Songs* (1987), but also when reading the credits of Farocki's works, which often feature one or more assistant researcher, cinematographer, editor, etc.[32] This collective aspect of filmmaking is typically masked by what, following Adorno, we could call the 'lyrical "I"' of the essay film, which produces the

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propose this meaning and then another meaning, and then exchange them, as one does when playing cards in a game. They are never the so-called representative illustrations for these ideas. They are never that. There is always a reading of the images, sometimes a provocative reading, where the audience will wonder, "surely, this can't be the right commentary to these images?" Between the images and the commentary there is a parallel, but it's a parallel that will meet in infinity'. Ibid., p. 187.

[32] As Farocki asserted in 1996 in relation to the idea of the *auteur* filmmaker: 'It's clear that authorship is nonsense if it's only about uniqueness. Everyone wants to be unique, but once you've met five other people in the nuthouse who also think they're Napolean, you'll begin to have your doubts. An author whose perception, whose interest in things, guides the portrayal is something else. It's about the aliveness of the narrating person, no matter how invented and pre-produced it is. I won't be able to give up wanting to be that kind of author'. Quoted in Pantenburg, *Farock/Godard*, p. 144.

semblance of a speaking individual subjectivity. Yet this 'grammatical I', as Adorno argues, whether appearing in lyric poetry or the essay film, and whether produced by an individual or collective, as Farocki's above comments highlight, is never identical with the empirical I of the author, who speaks only 'latently' and 'immanently' through the work, and is a 'function' of the work's material and linguistic elements, not the reverse.[33]

As with Farocki, Rascaroli's authorial model is in tension with her choice to focus on Jean-Luc Godard as her second case study. As Silverman argues, and as I detail in Chapter 3, from his earliest films Godard presents a series of 'sustained and self-conscious' attempts at 'authorial divestiture' and 'deconstruction'; an attempt that is most manifest in the Dziga Vertov Group period and his collaborations with Anne-Marie Miéville.[34] While, as mentioned above, personal forms of self-inscription and self-presentation are, like in Montaigne's *Essais*, a defining part of Godard's filmmaking practice (both early and late), such performances are more concerned with critically questioning the material, social and historical character of language and audio-visual forms of representation, than simply expressing a subjective point of view. This is especially evident in Godard's late works, the majority of which present a vast intertextual network of literary, cinematic, art historical, and musical references – a citational practice that is again comparable to Montaigne's *Essais*. Like the *Essais*, these works express a central tension between singularity and collectivity, which results from the authorial desire to express the self through 'the inherently and endlessly intertextual chain of language' of which the subject is made.[35] While communication, and critical reflection on mass communicational forms such

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[33] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 167. As Michel Foucault famously argued in 'What Is an Author?' (1969), the author – or what he dubs the 'author-function' – should be analyzed as 'a complex and variable function of discourse'. This does not mean, as Foucault contends, entirely abandoning the question of the author and the role of the subject, 'but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies'. See Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 138, 137.

[34] Kaja Silverman, 'The Author as Receiver', *October* 96 (Spring, 2001), p. 21.

[35] Claire de Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and the Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 94.

television and the print media, are, as I will discuss, an important subject in Godard's work, the kind of communication Godard is interested in is never presented in terms of a successfully mediated informational message, but as the disruption of conventional media circuits. This typically entails emphasizing what Roman Jakobson designates the 'poetic function' of language; namely, by promoting 'the palpability of signs' in order to deepen 'the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects'.[36] To paraphrase Barthes's remark of Mallarmé in the 'The Death of the Author' (1967), Godard's modernist poetics could be said to consist in the *laying bare* of the author function 'in the interests of writing', as well as writing's material support: the white page (or in Godard's case, the white screen).[37] In construing the text or work as 'a fabric of quotations' – something that Montaigne, Barthes, and Godard encourage the reader and spectator to do – writing, as Barthes argues, is shown to consist not of 'a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings'.[38] The 'site' where 'this multiplicity is collected' is not the 'author', but the 'reader': 'the unity of a text is not in its origin but in its destination…the reader'.[39] Accordingly, for Barthes, the 'space of writing is to be traversed, not pierced' – which is what that classical criticism attempted to do by assigning an author to a text, with the intent of closing down the work's meaning.[40]

This practice of reading or interpreting a literary text or work of art, as I will develop in Chapter 1, was first articulated at the very end of the eighteenth century in early German Romanticism (particularly the work of Friedrich Schlegel) through the concept of criticism; a concept that would be taken up and reworked by Georg Lukács, Benjamin, Adorno, and Barthes. In distinction from the Kantian concept of judgment, which lies in the reflective

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[36] Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 69-70.

[37] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (California: University of California Press, 1986), p. 50. As Barthes writes, 'for Mallarmé…it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is to reach, through a preliminary impersonality…that point where not "I" but only language functions, "performs"'. Ibid., p. 50.

[38] Ibid., pp. 52-53

[39] Ibid., p. 54.

[40] Ibid., p. 54.

process of the subject, Romantic criticism is not concerned with judging the work of art according to external standards or criterion, but in critically unfolding the presence of reflection that is *objectively* immanent to the work's presentational form. What is important here with respect to Rascaroli's argument is the attempt to shift her desire to reduce the reflective character of an essay or essay film to an extra-textual author, or to the author's subjective presence within the text, in order to consider the process of reflection immanent to the structure of the work itself. Rascaroli is much closer to this idea in her recent study, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (2017), which, as the title suggests, is less concerned with thinking the essay and essay film in terms of the performativity of an authorial enunciator, than the *performativity* of the text itself. 'Essay films', as Rascaroli writes, 'are performative texts that explicitly display the process of thinking; their reflexive and self-reflexive stance implies that issues of textual and contextual framing are at the center to their critical practice'.[41] This generalization of performativity to the structure of the text as a whole, allows, I think, for a much better understanding of works such as *Images of the World*, whose 'dramaturgical line', as Farocki puts it, 'is not in the commentary', but in the 'connections' and 'loops' that constitute the film's montage-structure.[42] *The film*, that is, stages a *dramaturgy* of reflection that the spectator, in following its reflective processes, is obliged to *co-enact*.[43] This Romantic idea is captured in Godard's enigmatic phrase that '[i]t's the film that thinks', and his corresponding characterization of the art of cinema as 'a form that thinks'; a maxim to which Farocki also subscribes.[44] As Farocki explains in an interview from 2014:

'In all modesty, I've tried to find means in which not only additional words shape the idea of cinematography's discourse, but somehow the shape, the montage, the form of a film contributes to it. It can sound a little bit poetic to say "having images that think" and "having

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[41] Laura Rascaroli, *How the Essay Film Thinks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 20

[42] Elsaesser, 'Making the World Superfluous', p. 187.

[43] I take this idea of reflective co-enactment from Lecture 13 of Adorno's lectures on Aesthetics. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics: 1958/59*, ed. Eberhard Ortland, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), pp. 126-127.

[44] On the phrase 'it's the film that thinks' see Chapter 1: 'Le film qui pense', in Pantenburg, *Farock/Godard*, pp. 33-72.

films that think," but it's…my ambition to find some autonomy in the cinematographic form, in which you don't just repeat things which already exist on paper and try to translate them to film…but you try to give some autonomy to the cinematic medium.'[45]

An essay presented cinematographically, then, as this dissertation will endeavour to demonstrate, is a work in which the articulation of an argument or an idea emerges through the reflective relations that occur between a work's elements and its formal structure. This rhetorical and poetic conception of the essay film, as I will show in Chapter 1, can best be understood through Adorno's theory of the essay as a literary and philosophical form. Yet it is also related to Adorno's broader theorization of the constructive and expressive character of *all* (emphatically) modern art, whose context of meaning is shown to emerge through the artwork's processual and tensional configuration of elements.[46] It is necessary then, given the self-reflective character of modern art more generally – the history of which, as Sianne Ngai notes, is marked by the rising convergence between art and theory – to better define what it is that makes a text or film an essay or essay-like.[47]

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[45] Ednei de Genaro and Herman Callou, '"Keep the horizon open": An interview with Harun Farocki' (2014), *Sense of Cinema 79* (July, 2016): http://sensesofcinema.com/2016/feature-articles/harun-farocki-interview/.

[46] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 176.

[47] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 34. As Ngai notes, art's 'identification with discourse about art', in which discourse is no longer simply a side effect, but part of the work itself 'has arguably become one of the most important problematics for the making, dissemination, and reception of art in our time' – a trend that would 'naturally become more of a scandal in the visual arts than in literature'. Ibid., p. 34-35. As Peter Osborne explains in relation to conceptual art, the discursive conditions for this transference of cultural authority in visual art were established by Clement Greenberg, in the idea of modernist art as 'a self-critical art which explores the definition of its medium' – a notion of self-criticism that was already an explicitly philosophical idea, in that is was borrowed directly from Kant's critique of reason. Peter Osborne, 'Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy', in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 89.

A Genre *Without* a Genre: Documentary Fictions and the Essayistic

These issues around cinematographic form are, as Pantenburg observes, a central aspect of *all* Farocki's and Godard's work – whether taking the form of observational documentaries or episodic fictional narratives – and not simply those audio-visual texts more readily identifiable (whether in content or form) as essays or essay-like. As Pantenburg notes, and I will explore in Chapter 2, these issues around cinematographic form first emerged as a central concern in Soviet cinema in the 1920s, rather than, as literature on the essay film often suggests, appearing in 1940s with the manifestos of Hans Richter and Alexandre Astruc (which I will discuss below). The fact that different forms of filmmaking can be viewed as theoretical and self-reflective in character leads Pantenburg to propose doing away with the category of the 'essay film' altogether, and to replace it with the more general concept of 'film as theory'.[48] This notion is intended to displace problems of genre that have plagued literature on the essay film by instead focusing on a film's visual language and montage techniques. While this shift in focus is welcome, Pantenburg's contention that early debates on the essay film in Soviet cinema were 'aimed more generally at the possibilities of cinematic thought than generic description' is only partly true.[49] As I show in Chapter 2, Dziga Vertov explicitly discussed his experimental newsreels in relation to the proliferation of essayistic literary forms that were popularized in the 1920s by Soviet Factography, such as the essayistic *ocherk* and feuilleton. This can also be seen in Sergei Eisenstein's various reflections on producing an 'film treatise' inspired by Marx's *Capital*, which would attempt to eschew the cinematic conventions of story and plot in favour of stylistically heterogeneous fragments, made up of '*fait divers*', '*historiettes*' and short 'film-essays'. This tendency in Soviet silent cinema – characterized by the film critic Béla Balázs in his 1930 *The Spirit of Film* as a 'flight' from the 'story' toward the 'montage essay' [*Montierte Essay*] – was, as I detail, discussed by Russian Formalist critics in terms of the emergence of various 'plotless' literary and cinematic genres in 1920s.[50] Such plotless

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[48] See Chapter 3, 'Deviation as Norm – Notes on the Essay Film', in Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard*, pp. 135-152.

[49] Ibid., p. 145.

[50] Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: The Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 127-128, 146.

genres were seen to reject narrative conventions, construed as the progressive and motivated development of a story, in favour of the accretion and juxtaposition of documentary details and image-fragments. This is likewise how Farocki conceives of his break in the late 1980s from working with episodic fictional narrative structures to producing essay-like documentary forms, which attempt to articulate their arguments through the associative montage of archival images and filmed footage, and are narrated in an analytic yet discontinuous manner, comparable, as I suggest, to the essayistic writings of Benjamin, Kracauer and Adorno.

Contra Pantenburg, then, and despite the looseness with which the term has previously been employed, this dissertation will attempt to show how the essay remains a productive category for thinking about filmmakers such Vertov, Eisenstein, Godard, and Farocki, whose works strive to convey a critical discourse through audio-visual forms that have been influenced by, or have an affinity with, various essayistic literary practices. If the category is to be productive, however, it is necessary to give a more complex account (both historical and theoretical) of the essay as a literary and philosophical form than previous explorations of the essay film have attempted. The essay or essayistic, beginning with Montaigne, as I argue in Chapter 1, should not be construed as a distinct genre, but a mode – *essaying* – which has occupied and reworked various literary forms, genres, and paratexts – the literary self-portrait, the scholarly article, art criticism, the philosophical fragment, the letter, the dialogue, prose and verse poetry, the novel, etc. The essay, like the novel, is thus a genre which is *without* a genre; that is, it is defined by its freedom from classical genre conventions. This self-defining freedom, which can be seen to condition all modern literature, was again first articulated by the early German Romantics, who advocated for the progressive mixing of once separate poetic, philosophical and scientific genres, as well as the rapprochement of art and criticism – it is, notably, from Schlegel and Novalis that Pantenburg develops his idea of 'film as theory'. The history of the essay, like the novel, registers what Adorno characterized as the advancing philosophical nominalism of modernity, in which the universal is no longer possible except by way of particularization and individuation.[51] Although no longer having principles of organization abstractly foisted

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[51] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 203.

upon it, artistic expression for Adorno nonetheless acquires and requires formal conventions, which are not to be construed as merely arbitrary (the result of pure play), but bearers of socio-historical practices and institutions.[52] This nominalist condition of literature, and modern art more generally, therefore, does not necessitate doing away with questions of genre, but, as Raymond Bellour notes in relation to the essay film, attending to the 'inner singularity of each' work, and its 'mixing' of discursive and representational forms, 'genres and sub-genres', rather than trying to 'abstractly' classify the essay film as a distinct and historically static genre.[53]

Exemplary of the latter is Nora Alter, who has consistently argued that the essay film constitutes a new and distinct 'genre of nonfiction filmmaking that is neither purely fiction, nor documentary, nor art film'.[54] For Alter, this new and distinct (albeit negatively defined) genre is said to emerge in the 1940s with Hans Richter's article 'The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film' (1940). A key motive for Richter's text, as Alter notes, can be located in the way in which both fiction and documentary genres in cinema had become much more 'solidified' by the 1940s, leaving little space for artistic experimentation – Richter retrospectively cites his experimental silent short, *Inflation* (1928), as an example of an experimental 'film essay'.[55] Yet like Vertov before him, Richter is arguing, as the title of his article suggests, for the necessity of artistic experimentation *within* documentary film. Like Eisenstein, Richter employs the term 'essay' to reflect on the ways in which a film can

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[52] As Adorno writes: 'Expression, the fiercest antithesis to abstract universality, requires…conventions in order to be able to speak as its concept promises'. As Adorno argues with respect to Nietzsche, the latter 'misinterpreted conventions…as agreements arbitrarily established and existing at the mercy of volition', overlooking 'the sedimented social compulsion in conventions', attributing them to 'pure play'. Ibid, pp. 207, 204.

[53] Raymond Bellour, 'The Cinema and the Essay as a Way of Thinking', in *Essays on the Essay Film*, p. 237.

[54] Nora M. Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 4.

[55] As Alter observes, just 'as genres became solidified in the feature film, so too…in the nonfiction film. On the one hand there were newsreels, science films, ethnographic films, colonial films, travel films, *Lehrfilme*, or instructional films, culture films (*Kulturfilme*) and the like, films whose purpose was primarily informative and educational. On the other, there were the art films such as the abstract experiments…of Richter, Ruttmann, and others'. Nora M. Alter, 'The Essay Film and Its German Variations', in *Generic Histories of German Cinema: Genre and Its Deviations*, ed. Jaimey Fisher (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2013), p. 55.

express arguments and ideas via experimental means not limited to story-telling tropes, giving the example of British documentary filmmakers, such as Basil Wright and John Grierson, who are said to have 'the same aim'; namely, to creatively 'visualize thoughts on screen'.[56] Why both Richter and Alter insists this signals the formal introduction of a 'new genre', rather than simply the reinstatement of previous modernist practices within documentary film remains unclear. What is more, Alter's definition of the essay film as an in-between genre requires her to construct a highly dubious opposition between a pure documentary and pure fiction film. The category of the essay film, like that of the fiction film and documentary before it, thus becomes another ideal type, which subsumes historically diverse practices under a new umbrella term according to their negative relation to these rigid categories.[57] This way of classifying the essay film, as Warner notes, not only ends up leaving 'intact the very boundary between fiction and documentary' that such films are said to destabilize, it also 'miscasts some of the early critical elaborations of the essayistic', such as Richter's article.[58] This formal and abstract use of genre categories is also why Farocki prefaces his remarks on the vagueness of the category of the essay film by stating that the 'category is just as unsuitable as "documentary film"'.[59] Yet, like Richter, Farocki considered his essayistic films and videos as working *within* a documentary tradition – just as Vertov considered his films as experimental newsreels, and the filmmaker and artist Hito Steyerl

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[56] Hans Richter, 'The Film Essay: A New Type of Documentary Film' (1940), in *Essays on the Essay Film*, p. 91.

[57] As Oksana Sarkisova points out in relation to the category of documentary, contemporary historiography 'submerges' the complex developments of different kinds of documentary practices under a single moniker, which 'accepts the existence of various forms of approximation to this ideal type, but fails to grasp the historical contingency of the concepts and the need for a historical approach to their cinematic embodiments'. Oskana Sarkisova, *Screening Soviet Nationalities: Kulturfilms from the Far North to Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), pp. 3-4. While Alter's work typically takes an historical approach, this approach is often in tension with her desire to classify the essay film as an abstract ideal type that transcends such instances.

[58] Rick Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema: Godard, Farocki and the Principle of Shot/Countershot', in *The Essay Film: Dialogue, Politics, Utopia*, ed. Elizabeth A. Papazian & Caronline Eades (London and New York: Wallflower Press; Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 29.

[59] Hüser, 'Nine Minutes in the Yard', p. 313.

described her early video work as 'essayistic documentaries' – rather than embodying some in-between genre, as Alter suggests.[60]

This raises questions about the usefulness of the term *nonfiction film*, which is often employed by Alter and other theorists to categorize the essay film. The word fiction, as Jacques Rancière points out, derives from the Latin *fingere*, which connotes not only to 'feign', but to 'form' or 'shape'. Fiction, as Rancière continues, designates simply 'using the means of art to construct a "system" of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent signs'.[61] Correspondingly, as Gilberto Perez argues, '[d]ocumentary film doesn't mean avoiding fiction, for no film can avoid fiction: it means establishing a certain relationship, a certain interplay, between the documentary and the fictional aspects of film so that the documentary aspect may come forward in some significant way'.[62] This idea is already explicit in early theorists and practitioners of the documentary film in the late 1920s and early 1930s, such as Grierson, who famously defined documentary as 'the creative treatment of actuality' – a creativity that is exemplified in his heavy use of symbolism in documentaries such as *Drifters* (1929).[63] Rather than existing as a distinct and stable

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[60] As Farocki states, 'documentary can assume many forms': 'I've made direct cinema films, films that have no commentary at all, where real events are treated so they look like a story…[and] also made films composed of a large number of elements and a lot of commentary'. Harun Farocki and Yilmaz Dziewior, 'Conversation, October 23, 2010, Kunsthaus Bregenz', in *Weiche Montagen / Soft Montages*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Cologne: Kunsthaus Bregnenz, 2011), pp. 207- 208.

[61] Jacques Rancière, 'Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory', in *Film Fables*, trans. Emilano Battista (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), p. 158. 'Documentary cinema', as Rancière notes, 'is not bound to the "real" sought after by the classical norms of…verisimilitude that exert so much force on so-called fiction cinema. This gives the documentary much greater leverage to play around with the consonance and dissonance between narrative voices, or with the series of period images with different provenances and signifying power'. Ibid., p. 161.

[62] Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 43.

[63] John Grierson, 'The First Principles of Documentary', in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsythe Hardy (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), p. 147. Derived from the French word *documentaire* – which was coined by French critics to distinguish serious travel films from travelogues – the term documentary was, reportedly, first used in English by Grierson in a pseudonymous review of Robert J. Flaherty's second ethnographic travelogue

tradition, the emergence of documentary practices in the 1920s and 1930s as John Roberts shows, was inseparable from the attendant 'textual and rhetorical demands of modernism'.[64] In the US, this was exemplified by James Agee and Walker Evan's 'photo-essay' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), where the 'meeting of documentary mode and modernism' in Evan's photographs' and Agee's text presents a 'highly self-conscious' attempt to 'seek a point of mediation between the "social" and experimental form'.[65] In the Soviet Union, the emergence of documentary modernism was embodied in Vertov's newsreel experiments of the 1920s, which, as Annette Michelson details, seized upon the analytical propensities and epistemological implications of the film camera.[66] As Michael Cramer notes, Vertov was fully aware of the status of his work as challenging existing boundaries, both rejecting 'art' as it currently exists (opposing his documentary practice to narrative fiction film, as well as the use of tropes from literary narrative to organize his documentary material), while at the same time refusing 'to identify his practice with established "informing" ones', such as the traditional newsreel.[67] Vertov's experiments with

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Moana (1926). See Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg, 'Introduction: The Documentary Attitude', in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, ed. Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), pp. 12-13.

[64] John Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 55. The 'most convincing' documentary practices, as Roberts adds, did not exist discretely as illustrations of a naively transparent and objective documentary realism, but arose '*within* the category of modernism'. Or as Balsom and Peleg put it, 'the documentary tradition has always been one of uncertainty, contamination, and contestation. Documentary didn't need artists to teach it creativity and reflexivity'. Balsom and Peleg, 'Introduction: The Documentary Attitude', p. 18.

[65] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, p. 59. On *Let Us Not Praise Famous Men* and other photo essays, see 'The Photographic Essay: Four Case Studies', in W. J. T Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 281-322.

[66] See Annette Michelson, 'From Magician to Epistemologist: Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*', in *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in The Collection of Anthology Film Archives, vol. 1*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1975), pp. 95-111.

[67] Michael Cramer, *Utopian Television: Rossellini, Watkins, and Godard Beyond Cinema*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p. 23. Vertov's conceptualization of his own practice 'as informing and useful', as Michael Cramer notes, 'had little to do with existing notions about transparency of information'. For Vertov, 'the existing models needed to be replaced by new forms of seeing and new ways of producing and arranging images, formal innovations that appealed to the creation of a specific sensorium and necessitated something like an art'. Ibid., p. 23.

form, however, do not lead to some in-between zone beyond the categories of documentary or fiction, as Alter suggests, but present the attempt to negotiate what Perez describes as 'that uncertain frontier' where documentary and fiction (or art) meet.[68]

It was in an attempt to 'avoid the confrontational cognitive disruptions of his much admired Bolshevik cinema', as Roberts notes, that Grierson helped to develop the documentary movement in Britain in the late 1920s and early 1930s, which endeavoured to tell 'stories of the "everyday" in epic, pastoral form', exchanging Vertov's concept of film 'as intersubjective class experience' for film 'as an intersubjective human experience'.[69] This 'domesticated' form of documentary modernism was exemplified by films such as Harry Watt's and Basil Wright's *Night Mail* (1936) – a whimsical ode to the postal service, penned by W.H. Auden to a score by Benjamin Britten – and Humphrey Jennings's *A Diary for Timothy* (1945) – a diaristic account of a boy born towards the end of the World War II, featuring a 'mildly sententious' narrative commentary written by E.M. Forster.[70] Such works combine expressive images and montage techniques reminiscent of Soviet cinema with a traditional literary sensibility. It is this pastoral and diaristic tradition of documentary cinema that plays a significant role in Timothy Corrigan's *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (2011).[71] Corrigan's scattered history of the essay film places this British tradition alongside various post-war European traditions – particularly the films of Rive Gauche directors such as Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Agnès Varda – as well as a number of other international filmmakers. Like Rascaroli, Corrigan's focus is on an essayistic cinema that foregrounds subjective leitmotifs, and which reflexively questions the norms of 'narrative and traditional documentary models'.[72] For Corrigan and other theorists of the essay film, it is Alexandre Astruc's manifestos 'The Birth of the New Avant-Garde: The

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[68] Perez, *The Material Ghost*, p. 49.

[69] John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography, and the Everyday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 59.

[70] See Tracy, 'The Essay Film'.

[71] Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: From Montaigne, After Marker* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Corrigan discusses a number diverse works, including Humphrey Jennings's *Listen to Britain* (1942), Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Space* (1997), and Nanni Moretti's *Dear Diary* [*Caro diario*] (1993).

[72] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

Caméra-Stylo' (1948) and 'The Future of Cinema' (1948) that lay the groundwork for this French tradition.[73] However, as with Richter, this again miscasts Astruc's scriptural metaphor of the 'camera-pen' and his reflections on the developments of a personal and authorial cinematic language, which are related to the dramaturgical possibilities of cinematic expression *within* narrative fiction film, anticipating French debates around *auteur* cinema that would be developed in the 1950s by film critics associated with the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*.[74]

Following such lines of thought, the category essay film is expanded by Corrigan to include any film that exhibits 'essayistic' tendencies, wherein the essayistic can signify anything from exhibiting self-reflexive traits, conveying a personal point of view, employing a diaristic form, or presenting a social commentary on contemporary or historical events. This is why, like Gorin, Corrigan can claim that the essayistic in film extends back to D.W. Griffith's *A Corner of Wheat* (1909), which is said to present 'a sharp social commentary on the commodity wheat trade'.[75] However, social commentary in *A Corner of Wheat* is not achieved through essayistic means, but novelistic ones; that is, by intercutting between three distinct stories about social types – the wheat farmer, the speculator, and the urban poor – in order to convey a moral argument about the everyday effects of financial speculation.[76] Griffith's mode of argument via narration was shaped not by essayists, but, as Miriam Hansen notes, Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens, 'known for strong authorial interventions and an unmistakable moral voice'.[77] It is, notably, Griffith's use of

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[73] See Alexandre Astruc, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra Stylo' (1948), in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Ginnette Vincendeau and Peter Graham (London: British Film Institute, 2009), pp. 31-37; and 'The Future of Cinema' (1948), in *Essays on the Essay Film*, pp. 93-101.

[74] This is likewise the case for Jacques Rivette's much-discussed *Cahiers du cinéma* article, 'Letter on Rosselini' (1955), which uses the term 'essay' to characterize the personal vision and rough documentary quality of Rossellini's post-war classics, particularly his romantic and travelogue-like drama *Journey to Italy* (1954). See Jacques Rivette, 'Letter on Rosselini' (1955), in *Cahiers du cinéma, vol. 1, The 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (London: Routledge and BFI, 1985), pp. 192-204.

[75] Corrigan, *The Essay Film*, p. 3.

[76] See Perez, *The Material Ghost*, p. 64.

[77] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 143.

parallel montage – exemplified most emphatically in his 1916 epic, *Intolerance*, with its interlacing of four distinct historical narratives – to produce an implicit or explicit commentary on the film's story that would be developed by Soviet filmmakers in 1920s.[78] Exemplary here are the intercutting between the massacre of the workers and the slaughter of a bull in Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925), and the battlefield and the stock exchange in Vsevolod Pudovkin's *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927). But rather than communicating ideas in an essayistic manner, the rhetorical tropes of these 'explicitly tendentious' films, as Bordwell explains, are closer to the genre of the *roman à these*, treating the plot of the film 'as both a narrative and an argument', with the narration performing the role of a 'didactic guide' through the story's staged conflicts.[79] While such rhetorical agendas motivated filmmakers like Eisenstein to break with the classical cinematic norms of space and time, consequently making overt the narrative process through the relentless presence of montage, such films nonetheless operate *within* a story-telling tradition, and were consequently characterized at the time as a type of 'cine-novel'. Indeed, it is in reference to the proliferation of essay-like interpolations in the narrative of *October* (1928), which digress from the story of the revolution to provide an essayistic commentary on various themes, which leads Eisenstein to conceive of his 'film treatise' on Marx's *Capital*, which would be made wholly out of such 'salient phrases'.

This is similarly the case for Godard's early films (1960-1967), in which critical commentary on contemporary events typically appear as digressions from or interpolated material within

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[78] Griffith's employment of parallel montage in *Intolerance* aimed to create, as the film's subtitle suggests, 'A Drama of Comparisons'. As Eisenstein summarized in his essay 'Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today' (1944), 'the dual *parallel rows* characteristic of Griffith ran in our cinema on the way to realizing themselves in the future *unity of the montage image* at first as a whole series of plays of montage comparisons, montage metaphors, montage puns'. The 'chief thing' for Soviet cinema, as Eisenstein writes, was 'an understanding of montage as not merely a means of producing [dramatic] effects, but above all as a means of *speaking*, a means of *communicating* ideas, of communicating them by way of a special film language, by way of a special form of film *speech*'. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1977), pp. 253, 245.

[79] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 235. 237. On the genre *roman à these*, see Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York; Guilford: Columbia University Press, 1983).

an episodic narrative fiction. This leads commentators such as Corrigan to describe such films as paradigms of the cinematic essay, ignoring the fact that Godard himself relates their narrative form to that of the novel. As Godard famously put it in an interview from 1962: 'I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form'.[80] The term 'essay' is employed here to indicate Godard's desire to incorporate theoretical ideas and social commentary into the film's novelistic (or picaresque) narrative structures.[81] As he writes of *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* [*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*] (1966), 'a film like this is a little as if I wanted to write a sociological essay in the form of a novel'.[82] While paradigmatic elements (whether they be documentary images, photographs, or other intertextual references) 'war with syntagmatic ones', there is, as Bordwell notes, nonetheless 'a (more or less determinable) story' in these films, which typically parody various generic conventions from classical cinema.[83] Even Godard's whispered voice-over commentary in *Deux ou trois choses*, that Corrigan and others take to be exemplary of Godard's essaysim, can, as Bordwell argues, be better understood in relation to the fictional omniscient narrator in André Gide's novel *The Counterfeiters* (1925), who addresses the reader directly, weighs in on the characters' motivations and discusses various tangential topics and events.[84] This is not to suggest that such passages (whether in Gide's novel or

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[80] Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. and trans. Tom Milne (London and New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), p. 171.

[81] A Peter Wollen observes, the use of chapters and interruptions in Godard's films is borrowed from 'the picaresque novel, which substitutes tight plot construction with a…series of incidents'. Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter Cinema: Vent d'Est', in *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982), p. 80.

[82] Godard, *Godard on Godard*, p. 242.

[83] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 313.

[84] As Deleuze observes, Godard's films from the 1960s give 'cinema the particular powers of the novel', to 'the extent that the characters, classes, and genres form the free indirect discourse of the author, as much as the author forms their free indirect vision (what they see, what they know or do not know)'. That is, 'the characters express themselves freely in the author's discourse-vision, and the author, indirectly, in that of the characters'. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone, 1989), p. 187. Bordwell, Deleuze, and Corrigan all fail to note how in *Deux ou trois choses* Godard's novelistic voice-over at times shifts into the apostrophic address of the lyric poem, and is often structured more like verse than prose. 'I have to listen, more than ever, I have to look around me at the world, my fellow

Godard's film) should not be considered essayistic – I will discuss this phenomena in relation to the idea of the essay-novel in the following chapter – but that, as Bordwell contends, Godard's films from this period 'cohere and make sense only within particular narrational modes' that correspond more with the tradition of the modern novel, as well as Brecht's epic theatre, than the literary essay.[85] The category of the essayistic constructed by Corrigan is, therefore, far too diluted to be of any critical use for considering the essay as a literary and cinematographic form, or, for that matter, the kinds of reflexivity and the interrogation of artistic conventions that play a significant role in the history of narrative and dramatic forms; a history that runs not from Montaigne to Marker, but, as Robert Stam details, from Don Quixote (via Brecht) to early-Godard.[86]

Compilation and Critique: Political Modernism and Parataxis

The crucial shift in Godard's filmmaking practice is his 16mm short *Camera Eye* (1967), which, as Bordwell notes, 'marks the emergence of truly essayistic forms' in his work.[87] In the latter, as its Vertovian title suggests, Godard applies Vertov's theory of montage as the construction of intervals between shots in order to establish rhetorical relations between dissimilar material (documentary footage, stills, photographs), which are no longer grounded in the narration of a story but the exposition of an argument. The film's paratactic structure looks forward to Godard's post-1968 work, which 'expands the principles behind

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creature, my brother', Godard intones at one point, paraphrasing Baudelaire's poem *Le Voyage* (from his 1857 volume *Les Fleurs du mal*) – a poet, as we will see, that becomes increasingly important in Godard's late work.

[85] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 313. As Bordwell continues, it is only because such films present 'some grid of narrational comprehension' – and are organized around narrative cause and effect – that they 'could engender the feeling that a passage is "essayistic" or "analytical"'. Yet 'the films' digressions (often flagrent ones) do not make them essays any more than the interpolated material in *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* turns them into something other than novels'. Ibid., p. 312.

[86] See Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1985). Corrigan's concept of the essayistic exemplifies Bellour's charge that 'the notion of the essay and that of the essay film may only either invade everything or dissolve'. Bellour, 'The Cinema and the Essay as a Way of Thinking', p. 54.

[87] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 333.

the digressions that swarmed into the earlier films', presenting 'an assemblage' of materials – documentary footage, photographs, television images, recorded sound, etc. – that are commented upon through contrapuntal audio-visual relations.[88] This shift in Godard's filmmaking practice, had, akin to Vertov's experimental newsreels, 'the overtly political aim of searching for a "grammar" for revolutionary cinema', becoming a paragon in the late 1960s and early 1970s for avant-grade filmmakers wanting to combine a critical analysis of ideological representations – from Hollywood cinema to advertising images – with formal experimentation.[89] Such practices, as D.N. Rodowick details, went under various monikers, including 'counter-cinema', 'theory films', '*films tableaux noirs*' [blackboard films], 'The New Talkies', and 'political modernism'. Filmmakers associated with such labels, as Rodowick summarizes, sought to reflexively explore 'the forms and materials specific to cinematic expression', as well to deconstruct the media's 'normative, representational codes'.[90] While not using the term essay film explicitly, then, it is interesting how this history of political modernism has been sidelined by the majority of theorists of the essay film.[91] For, as we will see in relation to Godard and Farocki, while the militant character of such practices quickly reached an impasse, the artistic problems that arose as a result – around 'the necessary engagement of film practice with theory, on the one hand, and with formal innovations characteristic of modernism, on the other' – remain a central issue in their subsequent work, as well as the history of the essay film more generally.[92]

The discourse of political modernism, as Rodowick notes, and I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 1, can be productively traced back to post-war French debates over the theory of writing or *écriture* inaugurated by Jean-Paul Satre's *Qu'est-ce que la Littérature?* [*What is*

[88] Ibid., p. 333

[89] Ibid., p. 333

[90] D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 12

[91] Interestingly, Laura Mulvey has recently attempted to retrospectively classify her film work, made in collaboration with Peter Wollen, such as *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), as essay films, rather than 'theory films', as they were referred to at the time. See Laura Mulvey, 'Riddles as Essay Film' (2016), in *Essays on the Essay Film*, pp. 314-321.

[92] Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, p. 1

Literature?] (1947), which distinguished between language, understood as having an objective communicative function, and style, understood as its subjective expression.[93] In *Le Degré zero de l'écriture* [*Writing Degree Zero*] (1953), Barthes adds to language and style, the mediating category of *écriture* (or writing) as a 'third dimension of Form'.[94] As opposed to Sartre, as well as bourgeois conceptions of style as a purely individual and non-relational category, Barthes attempted to unmask the social and historical origins of style and, in the process, restore to *écriture* a politics of form – this would be encapsulated in French debates (taking place in journals such as *Tel Quel*) concerning formalism, post-structuralism, and literary modernism. In Anglophone film theory journals, such as *Screen*, such issues were typically discussed in relation to Brecht's epic theatre, which, as Sylvia Harvey outlines, endeavoured to offer the spectator 'not the impression, reflection or illusion of reality, but a sense of those very processes of representation through which reality is mediated to us in artistic form'.[95] As Harvey notes, Brecht's critique of *dramatic* illusion was taken by many Structural/Materialist filmmakers in the 1970s to necessitate an anti-illusionist and narrowly formalist practice caught up in the permanent foregrounding of the filmic means and materials of representation.[96] In contrast to this tendency, filmmakers such as Godard and Farocki, saw the interrogation of the codes and operations of photographic, cinematic, and televisual representation as 'intimately connected with the desire to explore the operations of social reality' and how those operations are obscured or disclosed through processes of representation.[97]

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[93] Ibid., p. 13.

[94] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1984), p. 6.

[95] Sylvia Harvey, 'Who's Brecht? Memories for the Eighties', *Screen*, 23:1 (May, 1982), pp. 52-53.

[96] Sylvia Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), pp. 70-71. For an account of Structural/Materialist Film, see Peter Gidal 'Theory and Definition of Stuctural/Materialist Film', in *Structural Film Anthology*, ed. Peter Gidal (London: British Film Institute, 1976). See also Peter Wollen, '"Ontology" and "Materialism" in Film', in *Readings and Writings*, pp. 89-207. Whereas, as D.N. Rodowick summarizes, 'Gidal insists on strategies of semiotic reduction that systematically eliminate any elements of signification that do not belong to specifically cinematic materials of expression', Wollen and other contributors to the journal *Screen*, argue against 'Gidal's asceticism' and 'for the representation of politics as well as a politics of representation'. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, pp. xvii-xviii.

[97] Harvey, *May '68 and Film Culture*, p. 71.

While both Godard's and Farocki's early films operate within a Brechtian *epic* tradition – 'decorating', as Farocki puts it, political issues with a kind of story – what, following Bordwell, I will designate as their emphatically essayistic work, abandons this Brechtian endeavour to construct an episodic narrative drama, for a paratactic mode of composition based on the serial organization of film fragments.[98] In Godard's films and television series, this often takes on a quasi-mathematical format, which is typically conveyed by the work's title, such as *One Plus One* (1968). While rhetorical in intent and often employing story-like motifs and narrative elements, Godard's and Farocki's essayistic works strive to evade the hypotactic syntax of discursive logic and narrative cause and effect – wherein narrative units are *subordinated* by syntactic connectives – to pursue a paratactic mode of composition, in which the transitions between discontinuous fragments are linked *only* by the *coordinating* conjunction 'and'; a serial concatenation, as Deleuze puts it, of 'this and then that'.[99] This paratactic mode of composition, as this dissertation underlines, is essential not only to essayistic filmmakers like Vertov, Godard and Farocki – but the history of the essay form – from Montaigne and early German Romanticism, to Benjamin, Adorno and Barthes – the poetics of which typically draw on the paratactic and serialist techniques of poetry and music, rather than logical forms of discourse or plot-based narrative structures. Such paratactic techniques attempt to work against the constitutively linear mediums of writing and film and the closed temporality of narrative continuity, obliging the reader or spectator to reflect on the text or work as an open-ended or incomplete 'spatial form'; a structure that, while unfolding in time, does not develop in a single direction, but *constellates* diverse materials, moments and perspectives.[100]

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[98] Harun Farock, 'Written Trailers', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig books, 2009), p. 225. Such works are closer to Brecht's poetical documentary chronicle, *War Primer* (1955), than his plays. As Didi-Huberman argues, the poetic juxtaposition of text and image in Brecht's *War Primer* 'anticipate…certain historical works of montage' such as Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema* and Harun Farocki's *Images of the World*. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Eye of History: When Images Take Positions*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2018), p. 27.

[99] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 180.

[100] The concept of 'spatial form' was first theorized in relation to literary form by Joseph Frank in his 1945 essay, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature'. See Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), pp. 5-66. Frank's argument is that modernist literary works, such Ezra Pound's

This experience of spatialization leads film theorists such as Bordwell to label Godard's essayistic works as 'non-narrative'. Yet, like the category of nonfiction, the idea of a non-narrative essay film is questionable. For, as Jacques Aumont notes, while so-called non-narrative films avoid relying on certain story-telling traits employed by narrative fiction film (a diegetic plot and characters, for instance), such plotless films nonetheless entail a sequential pattern of 'development before necessarily inserting an ending or resolution'.[101] This is why in a discussion of his 1967 film *La Chinoise* [*The Chinese*] Godard characterizes his films as 'moving away' not from narrative, but from 'drama'. There is 'always a narrative line', he asserts, even if it is predominantly a 'narrative about ideas'.[102] Farocki likewise follows his remarks on the essay film by commenting that, for him, 'narration and argumentation are still very closely linked. I strongly hold that discourses are a form of narration. World War II hasn't quite made it into a novel by some new Tolstoy, but instead it has found its way into the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.'[103]

Such remarks manifest the attempt to identify the category of narrative not simply with the limited modal form of *diegesis*, as Bordwell does, but with what Aristotle called *muthos* [emplotment]; an *operation* which, following Paul Ricoeur's broadening of the term, can be

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Cantos and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, are spatial insofar as they disrupt narrative sequence and the normal continuities of prose with disjunctive arrangements, which creates a sense of mythic simultaneity. A common mistake made with regard to the notion of 'spatial form', as W. J. T. Mitchell notes, is to conceive of space and time as antithetical modalities, which is reflected in the tendency of critics to speak of spatial form as a static or atemporal phenomena. As Mitchell argues, 'spatial form is the perceptual basis of our notion of time': 'In literature, our sense of continuity, sequence, and linear progression is not nonspatial because it is temporal. Continuity and sequentiality are spatial images based in the schema of the unbroken line or surface; the experience of simultaneity or discontinuity is simply based in different kinds of spatial images from those involved in continuous, sequential experiences of time'. W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory', *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 6, no. 3 (Spring, 1980), p. 542.

[101] Jacques Aumont, et al., *Aesthetics of Film*, trans. Richard Neupert (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), p. 71.

[102] Gene Youngblood, 'Jean-Luc Godard: No Difference Between Life and Cinema', in *Jean Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), p. 40.

[103] Hüser, 'Nine Minutes in the Yard', p. 313.

seen to *dynamize* 'every level of narrative articulation'.[104] Taken in its most extreme

formality, the operation of narrative configuration, as Ricoeur contends, presents a

'temporal synthesis of the heterogeneous'.[105] It is this act of synthesis or 'grasping together'

heterogeneous elements that brings the operation of narrative close to metaphor (a key

figure, as we will see, in the montage methods of Vertov, Eisenstein, Godard and Farocki), as

well as Kant's concept of judgment, especially the reflective and teleological modes.[106] The

role of the reader, in Ricoeur's model, is to 'extract configuration from a succession' – a

capacity that is challenged by modernist literature, where it is the reader that 'carries the

burden of emplotment'.[107] This act of narrative configuration, as Ricoeur shows, can be seen

to underlie expressly non- or anti-narrative works, such as Fernand Braudel's historical

study, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949), which,

despite employing a highly 'analytical and disjunctive method', obliges the reader 'to unite

structures, cycles, and events by joining together heterogeneous temporalities and

contradictory chronicles'.[108] By 'separating' different 'planes' of historical analyses and

'leaving to the interferences that occur between them the task of producing an implicit

image of the whole', the series of chapters and sections – each of which, as Braduel notes,

presents 'an essay in general explanation' – indirectly generates a 'virtual quasi-plot' (made

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[104] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen Mclaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 168.

[105] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2*, trans. Kathleen Mclaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 158. As Daniel Hartley notes, while Ricoeur 'fails to account for such typically "plotless" genres as lyric poetry', his broadening of the concept of *muthos* allows us to consider the operation of narrative configuration as essential to 'the writer-configurer of any genre'. Daniel Hartley, *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 58.

[106] For Kant, as Ricoeur explains, 'the transcendental meaning of judging consists…in placing an intuitive manifold under the rule of a concept'. This 'kinship' of narration to judgment 'is greater still with the reflective judgment which Kant opposes to the determining one, in the sense that it reflects upon the work of thinking at work in the aesthetic judgment of taste and in the teleological judgment applied to organic wholes'. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p. 66.

[107] Ibid., p. 77.

[108] Ibid., p. 216. See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Vol. 1*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995).

up of multiple sub-plots), the bonds of which are to be reconstructed by the reader.[109] While the paratactic form of the essay and essay film breaks with conventional narrative modes of presentation, the critical force of its configuration of elements, as with Braudel's historiographical method, nonetheless often (albeit implicitly) relies on its negative relation to received narratives and narrative conventions.[110] Exemplary here is Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which, while presenting a series of essays made up of 'philosophical fragments' that approach the question of enlightenment from a number of different angles, often parodies the nineteenth-century genre of speculative universal history, and its attendant story-telling tropes, in order to subvert the notion of teleological progress that guide such 'grand narratives'.[111] Farocki will notably employ a similar immanent critical method in works such as *Images of the World*.

Such discontinuous or paratactic strategies, as I show, crucially intersect with what Lev Manovich describes as the competing imaginations of database and narrative forms; forms that have been shaped by the historical transformations in recording technologies and storage media: from the invention of moveable type (Montaigne), to the index card

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[109] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p. 215.

[110] As Peter Osborne notes, while developments in literary techniques 'are frequently understood as anti-narrative tendencies…they are more properly conceived as modifications of narrative form', since narrative conventions, such narrative cause-and-effect and completeness, can be 'abandoned without giving up the idea of…narrative unity'. Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 158.

[111] As Steven Helmling writes, the narrative of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 'is much more ambiguously "narrative"; it *tells* less the story [of enlightenment thought] than elaborates chosen moments, images, problems from it; it presupposes the reader's knowledge of the story's received outlines, and turns the energy thus released from narration to eliciting resonances and potencies undeveloped in more narratively invested versions. Though the narrative interest of the precedent "story" necessarily prolongs itself in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the narrative impulse is clearly subordinate to the interpretive'. This tension between narrative and anti-narrative, as Helmling observes, is also manifested in Adorno's writings on music, which often contains a 'narrative despite itself', in that Adorno 'deploys – or "constellates" – historical examples (Bach, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Wagner, Schoenberg) in which a received historical narrative is already implicit, a narrative Adorno must acknowledge, will he or nill he, and which, therefore, he had better, when he can, exploit, and critique'. Steven Helmling, *Adorno's Poetics of Critique* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 144, 162.

(Benjamin and Barthes), to the photographic and film archive (Factography), to video and digital technology (Godard and Farocki).[112] As the title of my dissertation intends to underscore, a persistent question for the essay as a literary and cinematographic form concerns the operation of *compilation*; namely, how knowledge and history (whether in the form of text or image) is archived and assembled. As Barthes argues, 'critical vision begins with the *compilator*' who, in breaking up and rearranging existing texts, engenders a 'certain distance' to what is cited, and consequently a 'new intelligibility'.[113] This is, as I show, of central importance to understanding the sceptical method of Montaigne's *Essais*, which emerges out of the compilation practices of early bookmaking culture, yet crucially locates in compilation a critical hermeneutics based on the comparative *weighing* of past statements and opinions. In the work of Benjamin, Vertov, Eisenstein, Godard and Farocki it is literary and cinematic montage – the putting into relation of text and audio-visual fragments – that performs this task of critical weighing. This is why, with regard to the essay as a cinematographic form, I focus on the work of Vertov, Eisenstein, Godard and Farocki, whose writings, films and videos presents a persistent and experimental exploration of cinematic montage as a critical tool for producing essayistic reflections. As Warner notes, 'a genuine Montaignian view of the essay form' – which, for Montaigne, designated a 'repeated process of revision *that extends across a large oeuvre over time*' – 'would attune itself not only to individual…works but to recursive and accretive forms that refigure still-evolving pursuits across an essayist's body of work'.[114] This Montaignian notion of an audio-visual essay, as Warner continues, applies less fittingly to filmmakers 'who from time to

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[112] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 218-243. This history of media and cultural form is decidedly missing from Rancière's sweeping and partial account of 'parataxis' as a cinematic and videographic form in Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which leaps from the use of paratactic description employed in novels by Flaubert and Zola to the 'subject-hopping' of pop culture and advertising. See Jacques Ranciére, 'Sentence, Image, History', in *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 33-67.

[113] Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, trans. and ed. by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 39.

[114] Warner, 'The Cinematic Essay as Adaptive Process', p. 4. As Warner continues: 'It thus makes only partial sense to compare, in terms of tradition or genre, a single 'essay film' to an individual chapter in the *Essais*, because for Montaigne, each chapter is a field within which multiple essays intersect'.

time make "essay films" in the taxonomic sense' than to 'essayists who revisit and rethink their earlier output while undertaking new experiments', such as Godard and Farocki.[115] Particularly significant in relation to Godard's and Farocki's experimental practice, as is also highlighted in my title, is their shift to working with video technology – a shift that remains undertheorized in literature on the essay film – which afforded both filmmakers the ability to more freely record, combine, and analyze images from disparate sources, as well as to devise novel forms of videographic montage based on constructing critical and historical correspondences between audio-visual elements.

As indicated above, an important focus of this dissertation is the way that essayistic practices have been shaped by and critically reflect on new media technologies and cultural forms: from the journal, feuilleton and illustrated press, to cinema, television, video and digitial technology. My dissertation accordingly proposes to consider the essay less as a stable generic category, than as a dynamic form and mode of writing and filmmaking, which employs and cuts across various literary, cinematic and televisual genres and sub-genres, and which is historically subject to critical transformation – or what Andreas Huyssen terms remediation – as it encounters new social, technological and cultural forms and mediums.[116] My method is accordingly both historical and critical, interrogating individual authors and filmmakers and their specific historical, social and media contexts, as well as providing theoretical readings of individual texts and works, with a focus on how they critically intervene in a specific political and historical situation through various (literary and cinematographic) rhetorical and poetic strategies. I take such an approach to be a rejection

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[115] Ibid., p. 4

[116] Andreas Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 8. Huyssen's takes the term 'remediation' from McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), which argued that every medium was bound to become the content of the next and newer media technology. In contrast to McLuhan, however, who construed remediation as working only in a linear direction, Huyssen gives the concept 'a more complex multidirectional sense', showing how older media, such as literature, will often adapt to newer ones, such as photography and film – a phenomena Huyssen dubs 'remediation in reverse'. As Huyssen details in relation to what he calls the modernist miniature, such moments, in which a medium reasserts its 'differential specificity', manifest the critical attempt to work 'through what the new medium does and does not do', rather than 'simply clamouring for a facelift'. Ibid., p. 8.

of the dominance of formalist accounts of the essay and essay film, which posits a purely intra-systemic interaction of stylistic traits and their evolution through time, unaffected by social history. For as Adorno writes, if the essay's critical vocation is to discover 'the new in its newness', this is not something that can be simply 'translated back into the old existing forms'.[117]

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[117] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 21.

Chapter 1. The Essay as a Philosophical and Critical Form

'[T]he presentation of philosophy is not an external matter of indifference to it but immanent to its idea.'[1]

'[N]o more anguish of "schemata", no more rhetoric of "development", no more twisted logic, no more dissertations! an idea per fragment, a fragment per idea.'[2]

This chapter provides a historical and theoretical account of the essay as a philosophical and critical form. While theorists of the essay film have previously touched on the tradition of the literary essay in order to construct their definition for approaching the former, this tradition is more often summarily described or simply quoted rather than critically read, treating the essay as an unproblematic and historically consistent genre or style of writing that can be readily applied to various filmmakers. This approach perpetuates an anachronistic assumption that is a central feature of literature on the essay itself; namely, that it is the same 'continuous "modern" sensibility' which 'motivates the essay historically'.[3] In contrast to this approach, this chapter will endeavour to underscore how the essay, as a *mode* of writing, is historically subject to critical transformation as it encounters new social, technological, and cultural forms and mediums; a history that, despite the loosely chronological ordering of the sections, is 'not linear or uniform, but varied by national and cultural context'.[4] Section 1 examines the two founders of the essay form, Montaigne and Francis Bacon, for whom the essay does not designate an established genre, but a mode – essaying – which entails a skeptical form of philosophizing that critically reworks the Renaissance practice of compilation. I further distinguish Montaigne's reflective and provisory poetics of citation and literary self-portrait from Bacon's analytical aphorisms, from which, as I briefly sketch, derive various kinds of essayistic writing that are no longer shaped by the book, but the periodical. Section 2 turns to the period of early German

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[1] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York and London: Continuum, 2007), p. 18.

[2] Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 147.

[3] R. Lane Kauffman, 'The Skewed Path: Essaying as Unmethodical Method', in *Essays on the Essay: Redefining the Essay*, ed. Alexander J. Butrym (Athens: University of Georgie Press, 1989), p. 222.

[4] Ibid., p. 225.

Romanticism to delineate how the essay becomes part of a broader Romantic project in the progressive mixing of poetry and criticism, and how this combinatory mode of philosophizing is staged through various fragmentary and dialogic forms of writing, which utilize indirect modes (such as irony), and how these forms attempt to figure the infinite as a medium of absolute reflection. Section 3 reflects on Walter Benjamin's development of the Romantic concept of criticism in his theory of allegory as a historical form, and how this is reworked in his practice of literary montage (and its shaping by the mediums of the feuilleton, photography and film), and the concepts of constellation and dialectical image. Section 4 considers Adorno's attempts to critically further the Benjaminian figures of constellation and dialectic at a standstill through his immanent method of criticism, expounding on his theory of interpretation and his distillation of a paratactic mode of writing influenced by modern poetry and music, as well as his reflections on the encyclopedia as possible model for an anti-systematic form of philosophizing. Section 5 focuses on Roland Barthes's endeavour in his essay writing and criticism to re-allocate the roles of writer and critic, in which criticism is figured as the task of dismantling and dispersing the text within a field of infinite difference. I conclude by considering the manifestation of this idea in Barthes's use of various aleatory and fragmentary techniques, as well as how this is applied to his late theory of photography.

1.1. Between Mode and Genre: Montaigne's *Essais* and Bacon's *Essayes*

The essay, argues Claire de Obaldia, 'always appears as a particularly problematic form of writing'. Indeed, there is a consensus among theorists of the essay that the genre's 'uncircumventable indeterminary' constitutes its very 'essence'.[5] The etymological root of the word testifies to such accounts. The French *essai* or *essayer* means to attempt, to experiment, to try out, connoting the idea of imperfection and an inherent open-endedness. According to Jean Starobinski, the word dates to the twelfth century, and stems from the Latin *exagium*, meaning 'a scale', while 'to try' derives from *exagiare*, which signifies 'to weigh'. In proximity to these terms we find *examen*, 'a long narrow strip on the beam of the

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[5] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 1.

scale', from which follows the idea of essaying or assaying as an operation consisting of measurement or examination.[6] In his *Essais* Montaigne accordingly symbolizes his practice of essaying through the metaphor of a scale, poised in the balance, and on which is inscribed the words 'What do I know?' [*Que sçay-je*].[7] The title of Montaigne's expanding book, however, which consists of three editions published in 1580, 1588, and (posthumously) 1595, does not designate an established genre – the individual pieces of which the volume is made are referred to as 'chapters' – but a *mode* of thinking and writing.[8] This is likewise the case for Francis Bacon, who borrowed Montaigne's title for his first edition of *Essayes*, published in 1597, six years before John Florio's 1603 English translation.[9] For both Montaigne and Bacon the word essay designates a verb, *to essay*, which entails a sceptical, experimental, and inductive form of philosophizing that was at variance with the systematic and deductive procedures of Medieval Scholasticism. Both are manifestly Renaissance thinkers, subverting the medieval authority of the Church by pitting it against the new horizons of knowledge and experience opened up by the discovery of new lands (particularly the Americas) and their inhabitants, as well the rediscovery of classical antiquity through recent publications and translations of Greek and Roman literature. Like Montaigne, Bacon emphasized this classical antecedent: 'The word is late, but the thing is ancient; for Seneca's epistles to Lucilus, if you mark them well, are but essays, that is dispersed meditations, though conveyed in the form of epistles'.[10]

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[6] Jean Starobinski, 'Can One Define the Essay?' (1983), in *Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to Our Time*, eds. Carl H. Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), pp. 110-111. It is in resorting to the same weight metaphor, as Starobinski points out, that Galileo titled his pioneering work on scientific method, '*Il Saggiatore*' [*The Assayer*] (1623), which, akin to Montaigne and Bacon, breaks with the scientific methodology of scholastic philosophy.

[7] Michel de Montaigne, 'An Apology for Raymond Seybond', *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1991), II, 12, p. 591.

[8] From the second edition on, the *Essais* consists of three books, which were subject to revision and addition up until Montaigne's death in 1592.

[9] The full title of the first edition was *Essayes: Religious Meditations. Places of Perswasion and Disswasion. Seene and Allowed*.

[10] Graham Good, *The Observing Self: Rediscovering the Essay* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 43. Seneca's *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* consist of a correspondence with Lucilius that is essentially fictitious, and which

For both Montaigne and Bacon, epistolary works like Seneca's *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, along with other classical forms of philosophy (Montaigne's penchant for irony and contradiction is particularly indebted to Plato's dialogues and the Pyrrhonic tradition of ancient scepticism), are seen to provide ideal literary models for their pursuit of a more popular form of philosophizing congruent with the rise of bourgeois individualism and the corresponding scientific shift from universals to particulars. In their writings, Montaigne and Bacon question the authority of *doxa* by critically testing received opinions against their own individual experience – both held roles as statesman, and typically (especially Bacon) write from this standpoint – or by critically weighing statements, in the form of *sententiae* (moral sayings, aphorisms, maxims) and classical exempla found in the pages of Renaissance compendia, such as Erasmus's *Adages* (1500) and *Apothegamta* (1533).[11] This practice of essaying, as Michael Beaujour details, derives from the pedagogical use of commonplaces by Humanist scholars such as Erasmus, where 'cultural and ethical generality is accompanied by the marginal meditation in which the compiler asserts….his status as an individual judge'.[12] In 'On Experience', the final chapter of book three of the *Essais*, Montaigne wryly comments on the situation that this tradition of compilation and commentary establishes, as well as the critical hermeneutics to which it gives rise, and which his book seeks to expound: 'It is more of a business to interpret the interpretations

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blends personal experience with moral advice, including mini-treatises alongside more plausibly epistolary compositions.

[11] Montaigne's form of modern scepticism (a critique of unconditional certainty) and retreat into interiority was, as Horkheimer notes, tied to his specific historical period (which saw the 'wars of religion' and rise of absolute monarchy in France), as well as the social stratum to which he belonged (the elevated bourgeoisie): Montaigne was diplomat and the mayor of Bourdeaux who had the means to create a pleasurable private life. Max Horkheimer, 'Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 265-311.

[12] Michel Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, trans. Yara Milos (New York; London: New York University Press, 1991), p. 178. As Barthes observes, the Middle Ages had established around the book four distinct functions: 'the *scriptor* (who copied without adding anything), the *compilator* (who never added anything of his own), the *commentator* (who made a personal contribution to the copied text only to render it intelligible) and finally the *auctor* (who gave his own ideas, always justifying his views with reference to other authorities)'. Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, pp. 38-39.

than to interpret the texts, and there are more books on books than on any other subject: all we do is gloss each other'.[13] Alluding to this statement Michel Foucault notes how for perhaps 'the first time…we find revealed the absolutely open dimension of a language no longer able to halt itself', generating a 'proliferation of…exegesis' that is caught between 'the primal Text and the infinity of Interpretation'.[14]

Montaigne's 'purely bookish book', as Beaujour points out, is emblematic of the new typographic age in which it was written. From the end of the sixteenth century the writer became accustomed to leafing through printed matter (Montaigne had within arm's reach his own private reference library), rendering obsolete previous oral and scribal cultures of education that were based on practices of rote learning and mnemonics – an obsolescence that is frequently alluded to in Montaigne's pointing up of his own amnesia.[15] This rejection of rote knowledge is offset by the 'intratextual memory' of the *Essais*, hence Montaigne's 'obstinate revision of a single book rather than the production of multiple opuscules', as was ordinary practice at the time. The writing of the *Essais*, that is, 'engenders its own memory by foregrounding, in the course of successive editions, its corrections…and additions', bringing together a *paratextual* practice of 'writing on' and 'through' prior texts (including his own).[16] The *Essais* accordingly present 'the trace of thinking in the presence of texts by others and in its presence onto those texts that were inscribed by a former self in the book that is the *analogon* of the writer's own body'.[17] As Montaigne writes, 'I have not

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[13] Montaigne, 'On Experience', III, 13, p. 1212.

[14] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 45. As Montaigne questions, 'do we ever find an end to our need to interpret?'. Montaigne, 'On Experience', III, 13, p. 1210.

[15] Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, pp. 112-113. See Montaigne, 'On Schoolmasters' Learning', I, 25, pp. 150-162.

[16] Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, p. 106. This textual practice is materially figured in Montaigne's annotations and commentary written in ink in the margins, flyleaves and blank spaces of his books (his own and others), which later become the content of essays. Although common in Renaissance culture, it is the self-reflexivity of this practice, and the making visible of notation, revision and modification that is unique to Montaigne. See Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 145.

[17] Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, p. 115.

made my book any more than it has made me'.[18] Montaigne's essaying of the intertext thus quickly becomes a self-essaying, understood as both the essaying of his own book and, since the book is 'of one substance with its author', as an essaying of the self.[19] As Erich Auerbach observes, the *Essais* 'play' with the space between the 'I' of Montaigne 'the author' and Montaigne 'the theme'. Yet they are 'neither autobiography nor diary', following 'no artfully contrived plan' nor 'chronological order'.[20] Rather, they aim to *paint* what Montaigne repeatedly refers to as a 'self-portrait': a collation and patching together of elements under thematic headings.[21] As Obaldia argues, this literary practice of self-portraiture gives rise to an 'unresolvable tension between singularity and collectivity', in that the 'self-gloss' which stages the 'self-presence' of Montaigne's enunciation 'simultaneously affirms the unbridgeable rift which separates the idealized subject from the multiple postures of enunciation (personae) of which the subject is made, along the inherently and endlessly intertextual chain of language' – I will return to this idea of the literary self-portrait and intertextuality in Chapter 3 in relation to Godard's late work.[22]

As Montaigne states: 'We are entirely made up of bits and pieces, woven together so diversely and so shapelessly that each one of them pulls its own way at every moment'.[23] For Montaigne, the individuality of experience, which is constituted by continual change, leads the 'the knowing subject' to reflect on its 'dislocation' and 'discontinuity'.[24] As he postulates in 'On Experience':

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[18] Montaigne, 'On Giving the Lie', II, 18, p. 755.

[19] Ibid., p. 755.

[20] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 294

[21] Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, p. 2.

[22] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 94.

[23] Montaigne, 'On the Inconstancy of Our Actions', II, 1, p. 380.

[24] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 32. Beaujour locates a similar disclosure of the author's discontinuous self in Book X of Augustine's *Confessions*, where Augustine 'contrasts the confession of what he has perpetrated to the disclosure of "what I am at the very time that I am writing these *Confessions*."' Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, p. 3.

Out of one subject we make a thousand and sink into Epicurus' infinitude of atoms by proliferation and subdivision. Never did two men ever judge identically about anything, and it is impossible to find two opinions which are exactly alike, not only in different men but in the same men at different times.[25]

Montaigne's *Essais* accordingly attempt to replace (or relativize) the idea of a universal Truth with individual truths, indexing knowledge to the experience (habits and customs) of a particular place and time.[26] This generates a complex spatio-temporal problematic that is expressed in both the content and form of the *Essais*. Spatially, for Montaigne, we can only look out onto the world from the perspective provided by partial views, which is conveyed through Montaigne's foregrounding of his own body, as well as his interpolation of a discontinuous array of historical and contemporary voices into the space of his texts. Temporally, such views are continually revised or countered with time, an idea that is expressed by his pointing up the provisional status of knowledge and opinions, including his own. Conjunction in the *Essais* consequently takes the form of an and/or, wherein there is always the possibility of addition or alteration to an individual chapter; an open-endedness that is made to stand out by deliberately showing where revisions occur, thus problematizing the idea of unity and closure.[27] Montaigne regards his texts – which consist of fragmentary meditations (written in colloquial French) punctuated by (predominantly Latin) citations – as spaces where disparate parts and motley ideas (often visibly undigested) come together through apposition and accident. As he somewhat hyperbolically declares, they are 'monstrosities and *grotesques* botched together from a variety of limbs having no defined shape, with an order sequence and proportion' that is 'purely fortuitous'.[28]

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[25] Montaigne, 'On Experience', III, 13, p. 1210.

[26] As Umberto Eco highlights, the sceptical questioning of universal truth in sixteenth-century France was tied to an emerging theory of language that revived the ideas of Epicurus, and was influenced by the accounts of the explorers of their times, undermining the idea of a 'perfect original language'. Since 'customs and ideas were determined by climate, upbringing and government', it was, for such holders of this Epicurean line, 'impossible to conceive of a universal tongue'. Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 89, 110.

[27] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 74

[28] Montaigne, 'On Affectionate Relationships', I, 28, p. 206. As Montaigne continues, 'my abilities cannot stretch so far as to venture to undertake a richly ornate picture, polished and fashioned according to the rules

Borrowings are interpolated into the *Essais* 'editorial structure', encouraging the reader 'to locate the exemplar in the compiler'.[29] The emphasis, however, is not on self-identity, but differentiation. The discrete citations (each embodying a particular truth or opinion) are accumulated and contrasted to reveal 'ambiguities and contradictions', rather than simply confirming one another.[30] Montaigne further compares his paratactic method to the 'gait of poetry', with its associative 'jumps and tumblings'.[31] Instead of a closed, deductive mode of reasoning, as Auerbach observes, Montaigne 'omits conjunctions and other syntactic connectives', skipping 'intermediate steps of reasoning', which are replaced 'by a kind of contact which arises spontaneously between steps not connected by a strict logic'.[32] He also 'repeats ideas which he considers important over and over in ever-new formulations, each time working out a fresh viewpoint, a fresh characteristic, a fresh image, so that the idea radiates in all directions'.[33] Treating his themes in an oblique manner (a strategy he compares to Plato's dialogues), he additionally allows his 'pen and mind' to 'go a-roaming', sometimes changing his 'subject violently and chaotically'.[34] This digressive method is not without reason, but, as Auerbach contends, is tied to Montaigne's endeavour to be directed by the subject-matter he encounters, following the 'inner rhythm' of his thoughts which, 'though constantly induced and maintained by things, is not bound to them, but freely skips from one to another'.[35] As Benjamin notes of the philosophical form of the 'esoteric essay', which would be ignored by the nineteenth century concept of system, the 'method is a

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of art'. Ibid., p. 206. Montaigne notably describes his writing practice with the verb *faire* (to make, to do), in opposition to other more familiar verbs of authorship: *ecrire* [to write] and *dire* [to say]. See Knight, *Bound to Read*, p. 139

[29] Knight, *Bound to Read*, pp. 144-145.

[30] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 68. The the 'homology between truth as embodied particularity (the concrete example) and universal truth (the moral point, the maxim)', as Obaldia notes, is put into crisis.

[31] Montaigne, 'On Vanity', III, 9, p. 1125. As he also writes, 'I scatter my prose here no differently from verse'.

[32] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 290.

[33] Ibid., p. 291. Auerbach here stresses the conversational and dialogic character of the *Essais*, which Montaigne often imagines as enacting a sort of epistolary dialogue or exchange with friends and acquaintances.

[34] Montaigne, 'On Vanity', III, 9, p. 1125.

[35] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 294.

digression' precisely because it recognizes 'the uncircumscribable essentiality of truth', which is not immune to change.[36] As will Benjamin and Barthes, the *Essais* invite digression 'as both a threat and promise'.[37] For Auerbach, Montaigne's digressive method manifests 'the excitement which sprang from the sudden and tremendous enrichment of the world picture', and the 'problem of man's self-orientation' within a world no longer with 'fixed points of support'.[38] This excitement or promise is embodied in both the sheer heterogeneity of topics that populate the *Essais* (reflecting on subjects as varied as reports of cannibalism and the poetry of Virgil), as well the book's textual economy, which suggests a potentially infinite *piling* up of supernumerary fragments.[39] This is why, as Warner argues, it makes only partial sense to compare, in terms of tradition or genre, 'a single "essay film" to an individual chapter in the *Essais*'.[40] Indeed, as I show in Chapter 3, Montaigne's expanding book and his provisory poetics of citation is more comparable to Godard's expanding video project, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, than any individual essay film.

In contrast to Montaigne's *Essais*, Bacon's *Essayes*, which also went through three editions (1597, 1612, 1625), were a relatively minor project when compared to his other scientific

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[36] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 28.

[37] Gerhard Richter, *Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 69. As Montaigne writes in reference to the fickle changes of mind that idleness brings, his mind bolts off 'like a runaway horse…it gives birth to so many chimeras and monstrosities, one after another, without order or fitness, that, so as to contemplate at my ease their oddness and their strangeness, I began to keep a record of them, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself'. Montaigne, 'On Idleness', I, 8, p. 31.

[38] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 311

[39] As Montaigne writes: 'To make room for more, I merely pile up the heads of argument: if I were to develop them as well I would increase the size of this tome several times over. And how many tacit *exempla* have I scattered over my pages which could all give rise to essays without number if anyone were to pluck them apart with a bit of intelligence'. Montaigne, 'Reflections upon Cicero', I, 40, p. 281. This logic also has an economic rationale: 'My book is ever one: except that, to avoid the purchaser's going away quite empty-handed when a new edition is brought out, I allow myself, since it is merely a piece of badly joined marquetry, to tack on some additional ornaments. This is no more than a little extra thrown in, which does not damn the original version but does lend some particular value to each subsequent one'. Montaigne, 'On Vanity', III, 9, p. 1091.

[40] Warner, 'The Cinematic Essay as Adaptive Process', p. 4.

works. They represent the civil and moral dimension of his writings, performing the role of *counsels* for men's 'business and bosoms.'[41] Whereas Montaigne's focus is on 'self-reflection', Bacon centres on 'self-improvement'.[42] 'Usefulness', as Graham Good notes, is a keynote of the *Essayes*, where Bacon's deployment of citations and rhetorical tropes is primarily concerned with their pedagogical effect. Knowledge is accordingly accumulated and essayed with the goal of practically bettering the individual and society.[43] Whereas Montaigne stresses the 'disunity and digressiveness from the stated topic', Bacon imposes a more logical structure on thought and experience.[44] Rhetorically, they are far more conservative than Montaigne's *Essais*, combining a concise aphoristic style of writing with classical devices such as 'definition' and 'division' of a topic, as well as 'providing convenient summaries for the reader', all of which Montaigne deliberately neglects.[45] The intrinsic reflexivity and productivity of Montaigne's poetics is reined in by Bacon's terse and analytical form, sharpening Montaigne's penchant for diversity and difference into points of contradiction and contention – a form of argumentation that has a legalistic tone (highlighting Bacon's practical interest in jurisprudence). In his scientific works, Bacon views his aphoristic style as an expression of his experimental empiricism, intending to represent our fragmentary knowledge and prompt further investigation by means of an inductive

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[41] The third edition is titled *The Essayes Or Counsels, Civill and Morall*. Although moral considerations enter into the *Essayes*, they are not, as Good notes, 'the organizing centre of Bacon's inquiry'. Rather, his 'more morally neutral approach' is closer to Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532), which Bacon was influenced by. In contrast to *The Prince*, however, which presents a systematic political treatise, Bacon's *Essayes*, like Montaigne's, present a collation of diverse topics. Good, *The Observing Self*, p. 46.

[42] Good, *The Observing Self*, p. 48.

[43] Ibid., p. 52. As Good notes, Bacon's advice in 'Of Dispatch' about conducting brief and effective meetings applies to his essay writing as well. See Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 134-135.

[44] Bacon's aim, as Good puts it, is not 'to provide the reader with an experience of *uncertainty*, but to tabulate the results (positive and negative, certain and less certain) of his own experience, observation, and analysis'. Good, *The Observing Self*, p. 51. In the opening essay, 'Of Truth', Bacon critiques the 'discoursing wits' of modern skepticism, who take a delight in the 'giddiness' of uncertainty yet refuse to labour toward more certain forms of knowledge. See Bacon, *The Essays*, pp. 61-63.

[45] Good, *The Observing Self*, p. 45.

method.[46] For Bacon, our knowledge of nature is acquired in 'broken' fragments, which he seeks to *fix* by *advancing* through stages of certainty – a scientific method which consists in screening out the passions and prejudices of the knowing subject.[47] A similar logic can be found in Bacon's *Essayes*, which endeavour to present an impartial study of topics, typically absenting his own self from the text, as well as cutting out those aspects of rhetoric concerned with instinct and feeling, which he finds more troublesome – a 'calmness and coolness of tone' which reflects Bacon's particular social basis in the British ruling-class.[48] This troublesome aspect of rhetoric becomes a pressing problem for British empiricism in the seventeenth century. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), for instance, John Locke expounds a rational form of philosophizing based on natural clarity and a straightforward mode of exposition, which he contrasts with the various *abuses* done to language by willfully obscure and mixed modes of writing, attempting to shelter language from such 'tropological disfiguration'.[49] The word 'essay' in Locke's title, therefore, no longer announces the experimental poetics of Montaigne, nor Bacon's aphoristic and analytical essaying of diverse topics, but a book where philosophical ideas and reflections concerning a single subject (human understanding) are presented using a rational and 'abstract universal style' of argumentation that will become a hallmark of the academic essay in seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain.[50]

With the ascendency of periodical literature and the printing press, and the attendant emergence of an anonymous reading public, however, from the end of the seventeenth

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[46] See Oscar Kenshur, *Open Form and the Shape of Ideas: Literary Structures as Representations of Philosophical Concepts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1986), p. 45.

[47] Aphorisms, as Bacon writes in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), represent 'a knowledge broken', inviting the reader 'to enquire farther'; whereas deductive forms of philosophy that claim to portray the 'total, secure men as if they were at furthest'. Ibid., p. 40

[48] See Hartley, *The Politics of Style*, p. 81.

[49] See Paul de Man, 'The Epistemology of Metaphor', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 13, 22. Locke's 'soothing' conclusion is expressed in the title of Book III of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: 'Of the Remedies of the Foregoing Imperfections and Abuses [of language]'.

[50] See Hartley, *The Politics of Style*, p. 81

century on the formal possibilities that an essay could take multiplied.[51] Exemplary here is Alexander Pope's philosophical poem, 'An Essay on Man' (1733-1734), published as a series of anonymous 'epistles', and Oscar Wilde's 'The Critic as Artist' (1891), a fictional dialogue on art criticism that first appeared in the literary magazine, *The Nineteenth Century*. While the essay here merges with the attempt to make philosophy and criticism poetic or literary (an idea I will return to below), beginning in the seventeenth century the word 'essayist', as Starobinski notes, also begins to be used in English, as it is in Virginia Woolf, to distinguish the writer from the philosopher or critic, with the essay providing a convivial space where one can read for their 'own pleasure', rather than be imparted 'knowledge or correct opinions'.[52] This was typified by Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, which present a loosely fictionalized series of sketches (first appearing in 1820 in *The London Magazine*) about the minutia of everyday life, linking the essay to the miscellaneous category of *belles-lettres*. It is this 'essayistic culture', and its expression of 'a vast literature of personal opinion', as Good notes, that T.S. Eliot's famous proclamations of tradition and impersonality can be located, and which reasserts 'many of the medieval values in opposition to which the essay arose in the first place'.[53] Though the English essayist Walter Pater designated the essay as 'the strictly appropriate form of our modern philosophical literature', it was, as R. Lane Kauffman

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[51] For a good account of this ascendency in relation to essayistic writing see John A. McCarthy, *Crossing Boundaries: A Theory and History of Essay Writing in German, 1680-1815* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), pp. 94-129. McCarthy principally draws on Harbermas's famous account of the transformation of the public sphere through rise of periodical literature and the institution of the press. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Catory of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

[52] Virginia Woolf, 'The Common Reader', *The Common Reader: First Series* (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 11. The latter essay serves as a 'Preface' to Woolf's 1925 edition of *The Common Reader*; a collection of essays written over the preceding twenty years, mostly for *The Times Literary Supplement*.

[53] Good, *The Observing Self*, p. 135. See T.S. Eliot's famous 1919 essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1971), pp. 37-44. In tracing the essay through different national and historical contexts we see similar moments when the subjectivism of essayistic writing, or what Karl Kraus (writing in fin de siècle Vienna) pejoratively labels *essayism* or *feuilletonism*, is attacked.

contends, 'central Europeans schooled in the German tradition of philosophical aesthetics who did most to justify this designation'.[54]

1.2. A 'feeling for fragments': The Fragment, Criticism and Irony in Early German Romanticism

The term 'essay', as John A. McCarthy notes, did not gain wide acceptance in Germany until the second half of the nineteenth century. Essayistic writing instead appeared under categories such as *Abhandlung* [a scholarly article or treatise], *Briefe* [letters], *Gespräch* [discourse], *Versuche* [attempts], *Gedanken und Meinungen* [ideas and opinions], *Kritik* [criticism], and *Fragmente* [fragments].[55] Friedrich Schlegel is considered one of the first and most important theorists of the essay and essayistic writing in Germany, championing the form as an '*intellektuelles Gedicht* [intellectual poem]' that could partake simultaneously in both poetry and science. For Schlegel, moreover, the essay is construed as having the capacity to 'to combat intellectual arthritis' by promoting 'a mutual galvanism of the author and reader' through 'a systematic alteration between rest and motion', generating a reflective movement that vacillates between individual phenomena and abstract ideas.[56] Exemplary in this regard for Schlegel, as he outlines in 'Fragment of a Characterization of the German Classical Writers' (1797), were the writings of the natural philosopher Georg Forster, who Schlegel prizes for his 'ability to stimulate active reflection', making 'simultaneous appeals to the reader's powers of reason, imagination and emotion'.[57] Another German writer who was particularly significant in developing an actively reflective form of prose writing was the philosopher, art critic and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. In his essay, 'Lessing: Wege der Kritik' [Lessing: Ways of Criticism] (1801), Schlegel praises Lessing's 'genial energy' and 'combinatory' [*Kombinatorische*] method, which is said

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[54] Kauffman, 'The Skewed Path', p. 75.

[55] McCarthy, *Crossing Boundaries*, p. 28

[56] Ibid., pp. 29, 59

[57] Ibid., p. 122.

to feature 'daring associations' and 'surprising twists'.[58] In his manifesto-like essay 'On Philosophy: To Dorothea' (1798), which takes the form of a letter to his lover and later wife Dorethea Veit, Schlegel argues for the necessity of stylistic innovation in the philosophical presentation ideas, particularly the need to develop a 'conversational style' [*Konversationsstil*] more in tune with the modern reading public.[59] Schlegel inveighs against the stylistic inadequacies of Kant's systematic philosophy, whereas Johann Gottlieb Fichte's philosophical writings are seen to evidence philosophy's capacity to popularize and dynamize itself.[60]

Crucial for Schlegel's consideration of the inseparability of thought from its mode of presentation were the changes brought about in the understanding of language towards the end of the eighteenth century, with figures like J.G. Herder, J.G. Hamann and Wilhelm von Humboldt shifting the focus of philosophy to consider its constitutive linguistic mediation.[61] It is notably in this period that modern conceptions of literature and philology emerge, bringing about, as Foucault puts it, 'the folding back of philosophy upon its own development'.[62] In the wake of Kant's *Critiques* it is early period German Romanticism

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[58] Ibid., p. 222

[59] Friedrich Schlegel, 'On Philosophy: To Dorothea', in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, ed. Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 439.

[60] On Ficthe's efforts to dynamize philosophy, see McCarthy, *Crossing Boundaries*, pp. 85-86. Schlegel's essay is also significant in its complex critical relationship to questions of gender. The letter (like the novel) is viewed as a feminine form. Schlegel accordingly construes his task as that of feminizing a masculine philosophical culture. See Lisa C. Roetzel's 'Positionality and the Male Philosopher: Friedrich Schlegel's "*Über die Philosophie. An Dorothea*"', *Monatschefte*, vol. 91, no. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 188-207.

[61] An important text in this respect was Hamann's 1784 'Metacritique of the Purism of Reason', which critiques the purity – or idealism – of Kant's transcendental philosophy by arguing that a condition of possibility of its universality depends upon the prior existence of natural languages, necessarily bound to the contingencies of their particular historical development, and therefore undermining the idea that there could be, what he terms, a 'general philosophical language'. See Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2003), p. 186.

[62] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 239. It is also around this period when the interest in translation between languages grows. This need for a scientific understanding of language, as Bowie notes, is clearly linked to the fact that theological understandings of language lose credibility. Literature, as Bowie observes, becomes the

(between 1794 and 1802) – particularly in the work of Schlegel – where this relationship between literature, philology and philosophy begins to critically play itself out.[63] In his study, *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (1795), Schlegel begins to develop a 'historico-philosophical literary theory', or 'a philosophy that was articulating itself by means of literary criticism'.[64] Although presenting (at first glance) a study of antiquity, Schlegel's study is simultaneously an account of modernity, the standpoint from which the former is viewed. The essence of antiquity, for Schlegel (as it was for Friedrich Schiller and other thinkers of the period), was its unity and cohesion, as opposed to modernity's fracturing and dismemberment. This opposition finds its parallel, for Schlegel, in the way that the beautiful poetry [*die schöne Poesie*] of antiquity, with its objectively rule-bound universality – wherein (supposedly) no gap exists between the ideal and real, the subjective and objective – gives way in modern poetry to the 'interesting' [*das Interessante*].[65] This general orientation of modern poetry toward the interesting is one of infinite striving, propelled by the individual's lack of universality, which can never be attained – as Ngai reminds us, '*inter esse* means "to be between; in the interval", or "among and in the midst of things"'.[66] While Schlegel at first views this as a negative condition, the interesting subsequently becomes part of a broader romantic agenda advocating for the creation of new hybrid styles and genres, and the making of literature [*Poesie*] critical and philosophical, while also making criticism and philosophy literary (or poetic).[67]

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realm of language which 'arises for its own sake' and which is not bound to representation. Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 21.

[63] In contrast to Kant, whose background was in science, Schlegel's philosophical development, as Millán-Zaibert notes, was 'strictly philological'. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), p. 11.

[64] See Stuart Barnett, 'Critical Introduction', in Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, trans. Stuart Barnett (New York: SUNY, 2001), pp. 12-13.

[65] The 'goal of modern poetry', as Schlegel writes, 'becomes *individuality* that is *original and interesting*'. Schlegel, *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, ibid., p. 32.

[66] Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, p. 36.

[67] If, as Peter Szondi notes, the anarchy of stylistic and generic miscegenation takes a negative form in the essay on Greek poetry, by 1797 it transformed into an unequivocally positive theory of Romanticism, which is characterized by the attempt to unite science and art, poetry, philosophy and criticism. Peter Szondi, 'Friedrich

Schlegel's exploration of new forms of philosophical and literary criticism was linked to his engagement with the journal culture in Germany (specifically the cities of Jena and Berlin) at the time.[68] It was partly as a reaction to what the Friedrich Schlegel considered the conservatism of such journals that he and his brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel, founded *The Athenaum*.[69] Published between 1798 and 1800 (six issues in all), this experimental journal served as an important vehicle for early German Romanticism and featured contributions by, among others, Novalis, Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich Schleiermacher. Comprised of essays, reviews, dialogues, letters, and poetry, the journal is most notable for its publication of 'Fragments' which, although published anonymously, have subsequently become known as Schlegel's *Athenaeum Fragments*. The Romantic fragment [*das Fragment*] is to be distinguished from the detached piece or residue, what the romantics refer to as a *Bruchstück* (literally, broken piece).[70] In the latter case, fragmentation is linked to idea of a ruin, that is, the product of a natural-historical process. As *Athenaum* fragment 24 declares: 'Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written'.[71] There is something 'properly modern', as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy observe, in the idea that 'the incomplete be published', as well as the idea, as was the case with Montaigne, 'that what is published is never complete'.[72] For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, such ideas can be traced via a circuitous route through Chamfort's *Pensées*, *Maximes et Anecdotes*, to the tradition of English and French moralists such as Shaftesbury and La Rochefoucauld, to Pascal's *Pensées*, back to

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Schlegel and Romantic Irony', in *On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 60. See *Critical* Fragment 115 and *Athenaeum* Fragment 116, in Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 15, 31.

[68] See Millan-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel*, p. 11; and Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (New York: SUNY, 2004), p. 33.

[69] Millan-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel*, p 12.

[70] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (New York: SUNY, 1988), p. 42.

[71] Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 21.

[72] Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 41.

Montaigne's *Essais*.[73] The *meta-genre* of the Romantic fragment inherits and *unifies* this 'diverse multiplicity of forms' – which the fragments themselves employ – in 'their mutual "fragmentariness" or relative incompletion'.[74] This recoding of discontinuous or short prose forms in terms of the incompletion that they enact is expressed in Schlegel's identification of the 'feeling for fragments' with the 'feeling for projects'.[75] The Romantic fragment is construed as a 'fragment-project' because of its ability to 'idealize and realize objects immediately and simultaneously' – in completing (or realizing) a fragment it is rendered incomplete and thus idealized – it *projects the idea* of further supplementation.[76]

Such fragmentary forms of writing can be correlated to what to what Gérard Genette terms the 'paratext', particularly the related category of the 'epitext' – texts found 'outside' *the* text, such as diaries, letters, interviews – but also that of the 'peritext': prefaces, epilogues, footnotes that are found further 'inside'.[77] The function of essayistic paratexts, as Obaldia observes, can be both 'preliminary' and 'post-liminary'. As a 'rehearsal' for *the* text, an essay can be both peritext (foreword or preface), or epitext (what Genette refers to as a 'foretext') – various rough drafts, outlines, notes. Likewise, the essay as post-text, can operate both 'exteriorly ' (criticism, review) or 'interiorly': essayistic notes, glosses, afterword, postscript, etc.[78] As the prefix 'para' suggests, the paratext has both a supplementary character as well as autonomous form.[79] As draft or a preface, for instance, it can be read not only as a rehearsal for *the* work, but also as *a* work in itself, just as the fragment in early German Romanticism is at once a detached piece and an autonomous

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[73] Ibid., p. 40.

[74] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 58.

[75] Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 21.

[76] Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, pp. 42-43.

[77] See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: University Press, 1997).

[78] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 20.

[79] Ibid., p. 27.

whole.[80] As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, the fragment 'designates the border of the fracture as an autonomous form as much as the…deformity of the tearing'.[81] This fragmentary tearing both completes and incompletes the work, a dialectic which plays itself out in numerous ways in thinking the essay (as well as the essay film) as paratext – I will return to some of these ideas in Chapter 3 in relation to Godard's employment of various paratexutal cinematic forms. As a draft or 'notes towards…', it is constitutively incomplete; it is a 'fragment-project'. Yet every essay in its fragmentary character (whether sketch or completed text) is, in a sense, a fragment-project, *not* as a 'program or prospectus', but as 'the *immediate* projection of what it nonetheless incompletes'.[82]

Although connected to their personal predilection for such literature, the interest in fragmentary forms of writing for early German Romanticism was, as Peter Osborne explains, as 'an artistic solution to a philosophical problem'.[83] Specifically, it is a response to Fichte's *Theory of Science* [*Wissenschaftslehre*] (1794), and its attempt to address the problem opened up by Kant's ban on knowing the Absolute. Whereas Kant grants the subject speculative thought of the absolute, but not the possibility of its 'presentation' (*Darstellung*) – it remains a regulatory idea – Fichte attempts to deduce a system through which to know the absolute by finding an absolute ground, or first principle, in the immediacy, or intuition, of the self-positing 'I'. The Romantics reject both the idea of a single principle, or an absolute foundation, with which philosophy can begin, as well as the idea that an unmediated absolute 'I' could be made into the ground of a system through the act of self-reflection – an act which leads to an *infinite regress*: the thinking of thinking of thinking. Novalis's solution, explored in his *Fichte Studies* (written between 1795 and 1796), is to represent the insolubility of the problem through a type of Fichtean Kantianism. That is, for Novalis, the absolute 'can only be known negatively, insofar as we act and find that what we

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[80] Ibid., p. 27. Or, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, 'the fragment functions simultaneously as a remainder of individuality *and* as individuality'. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 43.

[81] Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, p. 42.

[82] Ibid., pp. 42-43. The paratactical and fragmentary structure of the essay, as Obaldia observes, is accordingly not only due to its affiliation with poetry, but equally to the idea of the essay as an expression of the 'not-yet-written', the 'pre-literary', or what she terms 'literature *in potentia*'.

[83] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, p. 58.

seek cannot be attained through action', and philosophy can only ever be an '*interruption*' of this *endless* 'activity', which he terms 'philosophizing', 'Fichtesizing', and (later) 'romantisizing'.[84] The Romantic fragment, as a 'a new form of completion', as Blanchot puts it, thus 'mobilizes – renders mobile – the whole through its interruption and through interruption's various modes'.[85]

The fragment, however, does not 'exclude systematic intention', but reflects on the 'presentability' of the system through fragmentary form.[86] As Schlegel writes in *Athenaum* Fragment 53: 'It's equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.'[87] This combination takes the form of a system that can only be achieved negatively, through fragments, which are simultaneously 'systems *in nuce*.'[88] Rather than 'attempting to grasp the absolute systematically', as Benjamin puts it, Schlegel 'sought conversely to grasp the system absolutely'.[89] Systematic presentation, however, does not progress through a systematic exposition, or totalization; rather, a 'systematic perspective' can only be achieved through a combination of fragments (a fragmentary totality), in which 'each individual fragment', in its formal independence from the others, negatively '*figures* the idea of totality'.[90] Fichte's infinity of reflection is thus rendered not as an endless and empty regress – not as something linear – but as a full

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[84] Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, ed. Jane Kneller (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 168. With regard to the idea of an absolute beginning see *Athenaum* Fragment 84: 'Viewed subjectively, philosophy, like epic poetry, always begins in medias res'. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 28.

[85] Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 358.

[86] Rodolphe Gasché, 'Foreword: Ideality in Fragmentation', in Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. xi-xii.

[87] Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 24.

[88] Gasché, 'Foreword: Ideality in Fragmentation', p. xii.

[89] Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in Early German Romanticism', in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bulldock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 138.

[90] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, p. 60. The independence of 'each individual fragment from others', as Osborne explains, '*figures* the idea of totality, from which the ensemble or collection of fragments derives both its necessity – as an *externally* imposed or constructed unity of a multiplicity, the unity of a montage – and its own sense of *in*completion'. Ibid., p. 60.

infinitude of interconnection.[91] This necessary plurality of fragments, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue, finds its equivalent in the Romantic practice of philosophizing, and the idea that 'truth cannot be attained by a solitary path of demonstration' but only through 'the active exchange and confrontation of individuals-philosophers'; a mode of exchange they characterize as 'symphilosophy'.[92] This is connected to their penchant for the genre of the dialogue, conceived in *Athenaum* Fragment 77 as 'a chain or garland of fragments', but also their interest in chemistry as model for an experimental process which combines [*Verbindung*] and mixes [*Mischung*] substances.[93] Philosophy is accordingly tasked with performing 'scientific wit'; a trope that that is key for Schlegel not only because of its capacity to engender 'social feeling', but its corrosive force.[94]

As Benjamin delineates in his doctoral dissertation of 1919, the concept of criticism in early German Romanticism transfers the 'primal cell' of Fichte's 'I' – construed as a self-determining and autopoietic subject – to the structure of the work of art as a form of infinite reflection.[95] In its self-limiting form of presentation, the individual artwork functions as a medium or 'center of reflection' for the 'idea' or 'infinitude' of art.[96] The project of Romantic criticism depends on dissolving 'the positively formal moments of the work' (as 'the germ cells of reflection') 'into universally formal moments', relating the *individual* work to the *idea* of art (as a medium of absolute reflection).[97] As noted in the Introduction, in distinction from the Kantian concept of judgment, which lies in the reflective process of the

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[91] See Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in Early German Romanticism', p. 168.

[92] See *Athenaum* Fragment 112 and 125 in Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 31, 34.

[93] As we read in *Athenaeum* Fragment 77: 'A dialogue is a chain or garland of fragments. An exchange of letters is a dialogue on a larger scale, and memoirs constitute a system of fragments'. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 27. On Schlegel's use of chemical metaphors see Michael Chaouli, *The Laboratory of Poetry: Chemistry and Poetics in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel* (Baltimore, Md.: J. Hopkins University press, 2002).

[94] See *Athenaum* Fragment 121, and *Critical* Fragments 9 and 34, in Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 33, 2, 4.

[95] Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', pp. 134-135.

[96] Ibid., p. 156.

[97] Ibid., p. 156. As Benjamin writes: 'In this medium all the presentational forms hang constantly together, interpenetrate one another, and merge into the unity of the absolute art form, which is identical to the idea of art'. Ibid., p. 165.

subject, reflection, for the Romantic critic, 'lies enclosed in the presentational form of the work', which the critic unfolds immanently.[98] It is in this respect that Romantic criticism is not concerned with judgment, but the 'completion' and 'consummation' of the work, which relies not on 'standard[s]' or 'criterion', but the presence of a reflection that can be critically unfolded.[99] There are, therefore, as Benjamin asserts, no 'value judgment[s]' concerning a work, other than the fact that is can be criticized (its 'criticizability') – taken up 'in the medium of criticism.'[100]

This critical practice of dissolving and decomposing (Benjamin emphasizes the 'chemical' valence of this act) an individual work's formal moments of reflection into the idea of art finds an 'affinity' with the Romantic theory of irony.[101] For Schlegel, irony, or what he terms 'transcendental buffoonery', works to arouse 'a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative', as well as registering 'the impossibility of...complete communication'.[102] This conception of irony is demonstrated in Schlegel's parting essay to readers of the *Athenaeum*, 'Über die Unverständlichkeit' [On Incomprehensibility] (1800), which was written as a rejoinder to the 'complaints of incomprehensibility' which had been directed at the journal.[103] Ironically purporting to present a clarification to readers, the essay instead amplifies the strategy of incomprehensibility, arguing for the necessity of the latter in linguistically representing the 'infinite world', because of the chaotic nature of our experience of the world is itself 'constructed by the understanding out of incomprehensibility'. The essay performs this need through the various strategies of digression, irony, and convoluted sentences, resisting the 'demand' that 'the whole world'

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[98] Ibid., p. 165.

[99] Ibid., p 160.

[100] Ibid., p. 160-161.

[101] Ibid., p. 163-4.

[102] See *Critical* Fragment 108, in Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 13. This is why, as *Critical* Fragment 42 notes: 'Philosophy is the real homeland of irony'. Ibid., p. 5. The Romantic theory and practice of irony was, as McCarthy notes, influenced by Goethe, for whom irony designates 'a bifocal view of the world resultant from the simultaneous awareness of subject and object', and 'the view that the context of the observing subject is in a state of flux'. McCarthy, *Crossing Boundaries*, p. 270.

[103] Friedrich Schlegel, 'On Incomprehensibility', in *Theory as Practice*, p. 121

become 'entirely understandable' to the reader through determinate propositions.[104] Such 'elusive' movements and moments are, as Cathy Comstock notes, necessary for Schlegel for two important and paradoxical reasons: first, they resist 'the disintegrating influence of rational investigation, thereby preserving the mystery essential to art and…to life itself'; second, in inducing a reflective gap between the real and the ideal, indirect forms such as irony 'makes the experience of the absolute accessible' by engaging the reader in an infinite process of self-reflective 'mirroring'.[105]

As with 'transcendental buffoonery', 'transcendental poetry', or the 'Poetry of poetry', becomes another mode through which the reflexive nature of the absolute is expressed. Just as 'transcendental philosophy that doesn't represent the producer along with the product and contain at the same time within the system of transcendental thoughts a description of transcendental thinking' is 'uncritical', as Schlegel argues, 'poetry should describe itself, and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry'.[106] Among the various forms of presentation that this idea of transcendental poetry can take, it is increasingly, for Schlegel, the hybrid and liberally inclusive genre of the novel (conceived as 'a romantic book') that is privileged. This privilege is due to the capacity of the novel to 'reflect upon itself at will', and the manner in which it 'can mirror back every given level of consciousness from a higher standpoint'.[107] As Schlegel writes of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1796), 'it turns out to be one of those books which carries its own judgement within it. Indeed, not only does it judge itself; it also describes itself'.[108] The 'exemplary modernity of the novel', as David Cunningham explains, is further due to the fact that it is 'a genre that is,

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[104] Schlegel, 'On Incomprehensibility', p. 126.

[105] Cathy Comstock, '"Transcendental Buffoonery": Irony as Process in Schlegel's "Über die Unverständlichkeit"', *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 26, No. 3 (Fall, 1987), pp. 445-446.

[106] See *Athenaum* Fragment 238 in Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 50-51.

[107] Benjamin, 'The Concept of Art Criticism', p. 172.

[108] Schlegel, 'Letter About the Novel' (1799), in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 275. As Ngai notes, the 'novel's investment in the tension between life and theory is perhaps best epitomized by its major innovation, free indirect discourse, and its oscillation between first- and third-person perspectives'. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, p. 7.

in some way, paradoxically *without* genre'.[109] As Schlegel writes in 'Letter about the Novel', anticipating Lukács and Bakhtin's studies of the novel form over a century later, 'I can scarcely visualize a novel but as a mixture of storytelling, song and other forms'.[110] The modern character of the novel, as Cunningham notes, 'means that it is not covered by those rules that delimit the "classical" genres of epic, lyric, tragedy and comedy, and so has, by definition, a self-defining freedom from such conventions'.[111] In losing their '*a priori* origin or "home"', as Lukács writes in *The Theory of the Novel*, 'genres now cut across one another, with a complexity that cannot be disentangled'.[112] Like the essay, then, the 'rise of the novel', as Adorno argues, registers an '[a]dvancing philosophical nominalism [that] liquated the universals long before the genres'.[113]

The capacity of the novel to incorporate theoretical and other discursive material (typically through dialogue or first- and third- person narration) has lead critics to propose the idea of an essayistic novel or 'essay-novel'.[114] Exemplary here are Thomas Mann's highly discursive and dialogue-driven novels of ideas, such as *The Magic Mountain* (1924), or *Doctor Faustus* (1947) – the latter famously incorporates Adorno's theoretical writings on modern music into its narrative. This idea of the essayistic novel has often been discussed in relation to Robert Musil's unfinished novel *The Man Without Qualities* (1940), in which reflection, or what Musil terms 'essayism', presents itself to the narrator in a chapter titled 'The Earth

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[109] David Cunningham, 'Genre Without Genre: Romanticism, the Novel and the New', *Radical Philosophy* 196 (March/April 2016), p. 17. See Schlegel *Critical* Fragment 60: 'All the classical poetical genres have now become ridiculous in their rigid purity'. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 8.

[110] Schlegel, 'Letter on the Novel', p. 293. Schlegel's own novel, *Lucinde* (1799), as Benjamin says, 'cultivates the multiplicity of forms (whose unification is his task)'. Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', p. 174.

[111] Cunningham, 'Genre Without Genre', pp. 17.

[112] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 40-41

[113] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 201, 203.

[114] This question of the essay form in or as a novel form, is explored in Thomas Harrison, *Essayism: Conrad, Musil and Pirandello* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992). See also Stefano Ercolino, *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

too, but Ulrich in particular, Pays Homage to the Utopian Idea of Essayism'.[115] It is, notably, Corrigan's employment of Musil's novelistic reflections on essayism that leads him to consider the essay film through a hazy and generalized concept of the essayistic. Yet, leaving aside the question of the usefulness of the category of the 'essay-novel' – given that essayistic digressions, such as in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759), were always an essential part of the modern novel – this idea of essayism fails to distinguish between essayistic and novelistic forms of theoretical presentation, becoming simply a synonym for the presence of reflection within any literary or filmic text.[116] As outlined in the Introduction, this dissertation's focus is on *essayistic forms* of writing and filmmaking, and the way in which reflection is rhetorically and poetically enacted in such forms. The significance of early German Romanticism for this dissertation is thus not only its articulation of the increasing self-reflexivity and hybridity of poetry or literature as a whole, but their theory and practice of essayistic (fragmentary and paratextual) forms of writing, particularly criticism.

This Romantic tradition of criticism and essayistic writing can be observed in numerous subsequent works of theory, such as Lukács' *Soul and Form* [*Die Seele und die Formen*] (1910); a collection of essays that exhibit the influence of early German Romanticism not only in their content (it includes an essay on Novalis), but also their form: Lukács employs a fragmentary and aphoristic style and a number of essayistic forms such as the letter and the dialogue.[117] As Lukács outlines in the opening essay, 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper', his book pursues the possibility of what he terms 'criticism as a

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[115] Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (London: Picador, 1995), pp. 267-277. As Obaldia notes, in *The Man Without Qualities* the 'confrontation between essay and fiction immediately gives way to a generalized essayism' in the way that the novel we are reading is 'the product of a narrative crisis which forbids the story even to begin'. Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 213.

[116] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 242.

[117] Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form: Essays*, trans Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974). The book was published in Lukács's native Hungarian in 1910, and in German, a year later, with two additional essays. For an account of Lukács's early 'essay period' see György Markus, 'The Soul and Life: The Young Lukács and the Problem of Culture', *Telos*, no. 32 (1977), pp. 95-115.

form of art'; 'a truth', he admits, 'that was already known to the German Romantics'.[118] In post-war France, this Romantic tradition of literary criticism will, as I will discuss in Section 5, be taken up by Roland Barthes.[119] It can also be discovered in the sociological and political writings of Henri Lefebvre, particularly texts such as *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes* (1962). Resembling Lukács's *Soul and Form*, *Introduction to Modernity* employs a medley of essayistic forms: memoir, letter, and dialogue. The final prelude reflects on the idea of a 'new romanticism', particularly the capacity of 'romantic' literary strategies to counter what he sees as the 'destruction of language' by information driven forms of communication, instead privileging the use of 'obscurities' to achieve 'dialectical profundity'.[120] Chief among such strategies, and the subject of the opening prelude, is that of irony. Ironic discourse, as Lefebvre writes (citing Montaigne as one of its practitioners), 'refutes all false claims to authenticity' – that is, any claim made 'to being above and outside "structures" and "social contexts"' – but does not say where authenticity is to be found.[121] Rather, it situates discourse in an objective and 'historical dialectic' based on the reflective gap between theory and practice, which 'allows reflective – and thus subjective – thinking a certain relative independence'.[122] Lefebvre's maieutic of irony, as John Roberts notes, occurs precisely when 'theory fails to cohere with practice'; that is, 'when theory exposes practice and practice exposes theory' – an idea, as we will see, that is essential to Eisenstein's theory and practice of montage.[123] Lefebvre's revolutionary romanticism can be seen to find its artistic enactment in the work (particularly the journals) of the Situationist

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[118] Lukács, *Soul and Form*, pp. 2, 1.

[119] It can also be seen the work of in the work of Blanchot. See in particular Blanchot's 1969 book, *The Infinite Conversation*, which I reference above.

[120] Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959 – May 1961*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 265-283. The subtitle, *Preludes*, as Lefebvre notes in the introduction is meant to indicate that the themes broached in the book 'will be tackled only in a fragmented way'. They 'will not form a finished totality', but will 'interweave and correspond, echoing and rebounding from one to another'. It also points to Lefebvre's desire that book has 'musical qualities'; that is 'be understood in the mind's ear' and not simply 'be read as a theoretical and discursive statement'. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[121] Ibid., p. 44.

[122] Ibid., pp. 47, 46, 44.

[123] John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), pp. 105-106.

International (S.I.), as well the essayistic writings and films of Guy Debord.[124] It is, however, the writings of Walter Benjamin, to which I now turn, where the theory and practice of Romantic criticism finds some of its most innovative developments.

1.3. Allegorical Constellations: The Critical and Feuilleton Writings of Walter Benjamin

In the early 1920s, Benjamin developed the philosophically based art criticism of early German Romanticism and its theory of the work of art as a medium of absolute reflection in a number of decisive ways.[125] In his essay, 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*' (1921-1922), Benjamin applies the Romantic theory to Goethe's 1808 novel, rendering the work of criticism 'explicitly historical'.[126] The essay distinguishes between two critical activities: 'commentary', which seeks the material content of a work of art, and 'critique', which seeks

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[124] Debord's essayistic style is most famously manifested in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which is comprised of a series of numbered, aphoristic paragraphs, which are often referred to as 'theses', yet are closer to fragments in the Romantic sense. Debord made a 'cinematic adaption' of his theoretical study in 1973, the spoken commentary of which is composed entirely of fragments from the book. Central to the practice of Debord and the S.I. was the textual and audiovisual practice *détournement*, as is exemplified by the large number of uncited paraphrases of Hegel, Marx, and Lukács in *The Society of the Spectacle*, and his use of advertising images and clips from television and commerical cinema in his films. For Debord and the S.I., the repurposing of texts is chiefly about history and power; it restores fluidity and conflict to concepts that have become reified or neutralized, rejecting the notion of systems as timeless and static. In his melancholic memoir *Panegyric* (1989), Debord notably compares his citational practice to that of Montaigne: 'Montaigne had his quotations; I have mine'. Debord, *Panegyric, Volumes 1 and 2*, trans. James Brook and John McHale (London: Verso, 2004), p. 60.

[125] See the short essay 'Theory of Criticism' (written in 1919-1920), in Benjamin, *SW,1*, pp.217-219. Benjamin also importantly carries over and transforms the Romantic notion of criticizability into his analysis of translation as a form, with the idea of 'translatability', which he outlines in 'The Task of the Translator' (written in 1921, and published in 1923 as a theoretical introduction to Benjamin's translation of the 'Tableaux parisiens' section of Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*). In translations, Benjamin contends, 'the life of the originals attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding', which he terms the work's 'afterlife'. See Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in Benjamin, *SW,1*, p. 255.

[126] Osborne, 'Philosophizing Beyond Philosophy', *Radical Philosophy* 88 (March/April, 1998), p. 33.

the 'truth content'.[127] The work of commentary consists of the philological work that elucidates the presentational and historical elements of a work, and is a necessary preliminary activity for critique.[128] Truth, for Benjamin, is what 'stands out…against the ground of those realities', which are historical, and should therefore be considered as a 'moving truth'.[129] This moving character of philosophical truth is expounded in relation to an artwork's historical 'afterlife', which the critic attempts to retrospectively reconstruct. Benjamin elaborates on this historico-philosophical method in his 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (written 1924-25) in relation to the categories of knowledge and truth.[130] Whereas knowledge consists in *intentionally* grasping objects through concepts, truth is said to present 'an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas [*Idee*]'.[131] For Benjamin, ideas are neither 'regulative concepts of the understanding in the Kantian sense nor unified essences in the Platonic sense', but are 'restructurations of certain elements of the world'.[132] As Benjamin writes: 'Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars.'[133] This critical work of reconfiguration leads Benjamin to reinterpret the category of 'origin' [*Ursprung*] not as the 'genesis' [*Entstehung*] by which the work came into being, but that which 'emerges' and is 'revealed' in the totality of a work's history.[134] Benjamin further explores this configurative and restorative process in the second section of

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[127] Benjamin, 'Goethe's Elective Affinities', in *SW,1*, p. 297.

[128] Recalling the Romantic penchant for chemical metaphors, Benjamin employs the analogy of a 'burning funeral pyre' in order to distinguish the way that the commentator and critic stand before the work like a chemist and alchemist, respectively. Whereas the former separates out the material elements, reducing them to 'wood and ash', the latter inquiries into the 'living flame' of truth, which emanates from the work. Ibid., p. 298.

[129] Ibid., p. 298.

[130] *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*] was Benjamin's rejected *Habilitation* thesis, which was submitted in 1925 and subsequently published in 1928.

[131] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 36.

[132] Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 231.

[133] Ibid., p. 34.

[134] Ibid., p. 45-6. This ideational work of retrospective reconfiguration is figured as 'the salvation of phenomena'. Ibid, p. 35. It is in this sense that the minor phenomenon of the baroque *Trauerspiel* is retrospectively redeemed through the historical discernment of its 'idea'.

the book, 'Allegory and Trauerspiel', in relation to the concept of allegory. Just as in the allegorical constructions of the baroque *Trauerspiel*, where ruins stand out clearly as 'formal elements', criticism constructs 'philosophical truth' out of the 'historical content' of 'artistic forms' that it (aided by historical distance) lays bare.[135] Allegory, for Benjamin, is thus not simply related to the historically specific baroque artistic forms that his book details, but expresses 'the modern allegorical way of looking at things' that the book itself enacts, pulling fragments from their original life contexts and placing them in new historical constellations – an operation, as we will see, that has a close affinity with the modern literary practice of montage.[136]

Benjamin's modern concept of allegory draws on Lukács's account in *The Theory of the Novel* of the disintegration of epic totality, wherein 'the objective world breaks down…into a world of ruins'.[137] For Benjamin, allegory passes a 'destructive…verdict' on the 'profane world', whereby, akin to the levelling force of capitalist modernity, '[a]ny person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else'. However, Benjamin sees in this allegorical process of meaning – wherein things point to something else – the power to raise 'profane things…onto a higher plane'.[138] Whereas the symbol manifests the idea in an 'unbroken whole', the baroque-modern allegorical mode instead 'immerses itself into the depths which separate visual being from meaning'. Allegorical meaning, Benjamin notes, can, at most, 'be an indirect one'.[139] It is because of this indirectness of meaning that Benjamin reads the techniques of the fragment and irony in early German Romanticism as 'variants of the allegorical', which lead, he observes, 'into the realm of emblematics'. Allegory as a form, recalling the Romantic method of combining fragments, groups

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[135] Ibid., p. 182.

[136] Ibid., p. 162. On the transformation of Benjamin's notion of allegory into a modern or avant-garde theory of montage see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 68-73.

[137] Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 53.

[138] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 175

[139] Ibid., pp. 186, 188.

'emblems' around a 'figural centre'.[140] As in Schlegel's 'On Incomprehensibility', Benjamin

enacts this idea through the 'semantic opacity' of his prose, which resist directly defining

ideas through conceptual elaboration, thus mirroring the separation of the allegorical

emblem from direct signification.[141] He additionally constructs a *discontinuity* in the

alignments of emblematic passages in the structure of book which, as with stars in a

constellation, figures the idea through their distant relationality, which require to be

reconstructed and interpreted by the reader. I will return to these ideas on allegory in

relation to Godard's construction of allegorical images, as well as the idea of the image as

emblem in relation to Farocki's discontinuous montage techniques, in Chapter 3 and

Chapter 4, respectively.

The failure to find an academic home for *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* in 1925 marks

the beginning of Benjamin's redoubled effort to pursue a career as a cultural critic.[142] The

historical moment of this turn towards cultural criticism, as Howard Eiland and Michael

Jennings note, was one of 'a veritable explosion of the mass media in the Weimer

Republic'.[143] Benjamin quickly became an important contributor to the most influential

journals and newspapers of the period, such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, whose feuilleton

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[140] Ibid., p. 188. In the seventeenth century, as Andreas Huyssen's notes, the baroque emblem 'was a multimedial mode of representing and interpreting a world out of joint', typically distributed in book form all over Europe as a pedagogic tool. As a 'literary-visual form', the emblem has a tripartite structure – the *insciptio* (title), the *pictura* (the image as picture), and the *subscriptio* (the interpretation of or commentary on the image). Benjamin's notion of the emblem as ruin, as Huyssen's observes, suggests 'a tension or conflict rather than harmony between' the allegorical emblem's 'constitutive elements'. Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, p. 140-141.

[141] See Osborne, 'Philosophizing Beyond Philosophy', p. 34.

[142] As Benjamin stated later in 1930, his desire was to be considered 'the premiere critic of German literature', which required no less than to 'recreate criticism as a genre'. See Michael W. Jennings, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 5. Benjamin's interest in the publishing side of criticism was exhibited in an earlier unsuccessful attempt in 1922 to start a journal entitled *Angelus Novus*, which he intended to model on the philosophical art criticism of *The Athenaum*. In the summer of 1930 Benjamin attempted, together with Brecht, to start a second journal project entitled *Krisis and Kritik*, which was again unsuccessful.

[143] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 235.

pages were edited by the writer and critic Siegfried Kracauer.[144] The feuilleton section was introduced into French newspapers and journals in the mid-nineteenth century and consisted of cultural criticism and serial publications of longer literary texts, but also other miscellaneous material, including gossip, fashion commentary, and a variety of short forms: aphorisms, epigrams, and quick takes or glosses on cultural objects and issues.[145] A key influence on Benjamin's feuilleton writings was the work of Baudelaire, who had previously published his poetry and art criticism in the feuilleton.[146] Particularly notable were Baudelaire's feuilleton experiments in writing *petit poèmes en prose*.[147] In these texts, Baudelaire poeticizes the proliferating genre of journalistic urban prose writing, offering 'philosophical reflections and narrative or dialogic fragments' that are punctuated with splenetic 'mood swings and contrarian states of mind'.[148] Baudelaire's 'critical mimesis of urban phenomena', as Huyssen's argues, has its analogy in the feuilleton writings of Benjamin and Kracauer, who were key in creating 'a multilayered critical theory' of metropolitan modernity, which was inflected by the spread of mass cultural forms, such as the illustrated press, as well as the mediums of photography and film.[149]

In the course of the 1920s, Benjamin, Kracauer, and a number of other prominent German and Austrian writers, shaped their writing practice to the pages of the feuilleton, experimenting with diverse aphoristic and discontinuous prose forms.[150] This short lived

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[144] Kracauer had been an editor of the *feuilleton* section of the left leaning *Frankfurter Zeitung* since 1924. As a writer he produced almost 2000 articles for the paper between 1921 and 1933. For two collections of his feuilleton essays and articles see Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimer Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995); and *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, trans. Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1998).

[145] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 258.

[146] For a collection of Baudelaire's art and literary criticism see Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

[147] These prose poems, like Baudelaire's previous poetry (such as the poems in *Le Fleurs du mal*) were first published in the feuilleton section and subsequently published (posthumously) in *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869).

[148] Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, pp. 27, 118.

[149] Ibid., p. 34.

[150] For a theoretical and historical account of this history (which includes, Baudelaire, Rilke, Kafka, Musil, Adorno and others) see Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*.

feuilleton tradition, as Jacob Bard-Rosenberg observes, 'occupies the ground of the crossroads between…two crises': the crisis of 'bourgeois culture', particularly that of the novel, and the 'economic crisis', which came to a head in 1929, and which Benjamin writes about in 'Imperial Panorama' (a paratactic and acerbic account of the economic crisis and its effect on critical thought).[151] These 'modernist miniatures', as Huyssen dubs them, mix theoretical reflection with ekphrastic snapshots of urban life, cutting across distinctions between literature, philosophy, journalism and criticism.[152] An important touchstone for Benjamin and Kracauer here, as Gerhard Richter notes, were the philosophical and sociological writings of Georg Simmel, who brought a 'phenomenological and theoretical rigor' to his 'micrological' analysis of everyday life, 'reading the surface phenomenon of modernity as ciphers of deeper cultural and political processes'.[153] As I argue in Chapter 4, Farocki's essay films and video essays can best be understood in terms of Kracauer's (Simmel inspired) sociological and philosophical project, which he pursued in his Weimar essays, to interpret 'the inconspicuous surface-level expressions' of modernity as complex historical ciphers – an interpretative approach that is also key to the work of Benjamin,

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[151] Jacob Bard-Rosenberg, 'History in Darkness: Seven Fragments on Siegfried Kracauer's *The Salaried Masses*', in *Anguish Language: Writing and Crisis*, ed. John Cunningham, et al. (Berlin: Archive Books, 2015), p. 177. Benjamin wrote 'Imperial Panorama: A Tour Through the German Inflation' in the early 1920s and later included it in his book, *One-Way Street* (1928). Corresponding to the late nineteenth-century Berlin optical attraction from which 'Imperial Panorama' takes its title, Benjamin's paratactic text is comprised of fourteen numbered paragraphs which serve as ethnographic-like windows onto the economic situation in Germany. In particular, Benjamin explores how narrow-minded private interest, wherein 'everyone is committed to the optical illusions' of their 'isolated standpoint', leads to a situation in which 'mass instincts have become confused and estranged from life', nullifying 'the genuinely human application of intellect' and 'forethought, even in dire peril'. Benjamin, *One Way-Street*, in *SW,1*, p. 451

[152] Exemplary here is Benjamin's feuilleton article 'Naples', written in 1925 and published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Benjamin, *SW1*, pp. 414-421. In the latter, as Eiland and Jennings note, there is 'no discursive through-argumentation', but rather 'observations and reflections…presented in paragraph-length clusters of thought'. These 'central ideas recur at intervals through the essay so that the reader is challenged to repudiate constructs based on linear narrative in favour of *constellations* of literary figures and ideas'. Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, pp. 211-212.

[153] Richter, *Thought-Images*, p. 7. Also significant, it should be noted, were the aphoristic prose of Nietzsche and (to a lesser extent) Kierkegaard, which merged philosophical and metaphoric language.

Adorno and Ernst Bloch.[154] Photography and film play a key part in both Kracauer and Benjamin's reflections on modernity. For Kracauer, as he writes in his famous 1927 essay 'Photography', the 'warehousing' of history in the 'photographic archive' is said to afford 'consciousness' not only with the capacity to reflect on a reality that, under conditions of industrial capitalism, 'has slipped away from it', but, in introducing an image of time and change into the world, to 'establish the *provisional status of* all given configurations'.[155] This is 'realized', he notes, 'whenever film combines parts and segments to create strange constructs'.[156] For Kracauer, the 'scrambling' of archival fragments through montage crucially counters what he (like Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno) construe as photography's reification of social reality and history into 'a nature alienated from meaning' – I will return to Kracauer's essay and the question of photography in the following chapters.[157]

Kracauer's method of interpreting the seemingly transparent and alienated nature of the phenomenological world as a ciphered text also has its roots in Marx's reflections on the fetish character of the commodity. As Marx outlines in volume one of *Capital* (1867), in capitalist societies social relations are concealed by their appearance as objective relations between things, consequently assuming, as he puts it, the form of a 'social hieroglyph'.[158] As with Marx's critique of political economy, the critical writings of Benjamin, Kracauer and Adorno undertake the task of reading social reality '*as if it were*' a hieroglyphic text; that is, like a photograph, an object that needs to be 'carefully deciphered and confronted' with its

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[154] Siegfried Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament' (1927), in *The Mass Ornament*, p. 75.

[155] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography', in *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 61-62. This is what Kracauer famously dubbed the 'go-for-broke game of history'. Ibid., p. 61.

[156] Kracauer, 'Photography', pp. 62-63. As Hansen notes, Kracauer applies this montage method to the logic of his own essay, which shifts among registers of 'ethnographic observation, micrological analysis, critique of ideology, and philosophy of history' in an attempt to grasp 'the historical moment in both its devastating and liberating possibilities'. Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 6.

[157] Kracauer, 'Photography', p. 62.

[158] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1* (Handsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 167. On notion of the hieroglyphic see Miriam Hansen, 'Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer', *New German Critique*, no. 56 (Spring/Summer, 1992), pp. 43-73.

'potential withdrawal from transparent meaning'.[159] In Benjamin's feuilleton pieces, composed between the years of 1923-1926, and published in his montage book *One-Way Street* (1928), this reading of the world as hieroglyphic text is combined with his theory of the allegorical emblem.[160] Consisting of sixty short prose pieces, the book combines widely different genres and styles, including fragmentary vignettes on the experience of modern city life, aphorisms, anecdotes, political analysis, dream protocols, teaching aids, and several series of theses on various topics.[161] A principal focus of these texts, as Huyssen's underlines, is the literal, not metaphorical, textuality or legibility of the city street.[162] As Benjamin writes: 'Script – having found, in the book, a refuge in which it can lead an autonomous existence – is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos'; a 'hard schooling' that forces language to rise from the 'horizontal plane' of the 'printed book' to the 'dictatorial perpendicular' of the newspaper, the cinema, and the shop window.[163] This heteronomous chaos is internalized by the fragmentary form of the newspaper itself, which, instead of giving rise to the progressive mixing of literary genres proposed by early German Romanticism, presents a scene of 'literary confusion'.[164]

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[159] Richter, *Thought-Images*, p. 18.

[160] Huyssen's accordingly distinguishes between the photographic and emblematic in Kracauer's and Benjamin's respective critical methods. See Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, p. 146. Yet as Esther Leslie shows, Benjamin, like Kracauer, also thought 'photographically', conceiving of memory as developing like a photographic image, as well as cultivating 'a photographic style of writing' that worked to produce a 'rapid succession of images'. See Esther Leslie, 'Introduction: Walter Benjamin and the Birth of Photography', in Walter Benjamin, *On Photography*, ed. and trans. Esther Leslie (London: Reaktion Books), pp. 32-35.

[161] The book's first section, 'Filing Station', reads as a reflection on its own method: 'Significant literary effectiveness can come into being only in a strict alternation between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that fit its influence in active communities better than does the pretentious, universal gesture of the book - in leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards. Only this prompt language shows itself actively equal to the moment'. Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, p. 444. Conversely, see the ironic 'Teaching Aid' on 'Principles of the Weighty Tome, or How to Write Fat Books'. Ibid., p. 457

[162] Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, p. 143.

[163] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, p. 456.

[164] As Benjamin later writes in his 1934 article, 'The Newspaper': 'In our writing, opposites that in happier ages fertilized one another have become insoluble antinomies. Thus, science and *belle lettres*, criticism and literary production, culture and politics, fall apart in disorder and lose all connection with one another. The scene of

Benjamin's critical relation to the newspaper was indebted to the Austrian writer and journalist Karl Kraus, whose satirical writings (primarily published in the journal *Die Fackel*) excoriated and ridiculed the press.[165] Kraus's 'basic polemical procedure', as Benjamin outlines in his 1931 essay on the author, was one of mimetic [*mimisch*] impersonantion and critical citation, unmasking the 'empty' phrases of hack journalism by wrenching its expressions into 'his own sphere', and forcing language to confront or judge itself.[166] The confused character of the newspaper – which manifests the heteronomous chaos of modern metropolitan experience more generally – is seen by Benjamin to bring about not only a crisis in the literary form of the novel – which attempts to incorporate the paratactic form and montage techniques of the newspaper and film – but criticism.[167] As Benjamin notes in *One-Way Street*:

'Fools lament the decay of criticism. For its day is long past. Criticism is a matter of correct distancing. It was at home in a world where perspectives and prospects counted and where it was still possible to adopt a standpoint. Now things press too urgently on human society'.[168]

In such a situation, as Richter explains, criticism [*Kritik*] becomes a matter of ascertaining 'the right distance' [*des rechten Abstands*] to the modern phenomena that encroach upon the critical capacities of human perception and cognition.[169] As with Baudelaire and Kraus, this distancing is typically achieved by critically miming the alienated character of such

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this literary confusion is the newspaper'. Walter Benjamin, 'The Newspaper', in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 741.

[165] Benjamin discusses Kraus's 'battle with the press' in the fragment 'Monument to a Warrior', as well as a number of other texts from the late 1920s and early 1930s. See Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, p. 469. On Kraus's media criticism, as well as Kraus's influence on Benjamin see Paul Reitter, *The Anti-Journalist: Karl Kraus and Jewish Self-Fashioning in Fin-de-Siécle* Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[166] Walter Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus', in *SW 2:2*, pp. 453-454.

[167] See Walter Benjamin, 'The Crisis of the Novel', in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1999), pp. 299-304.

[168] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, p. 476

[169] Richter, *Thought-Images*, pp. 55-56

phenomena in a sober fashion, as well as by punctuating this ascetic approach with sardonic and caustic turns of phrase. 'For the most part', as Adorno notes of *One-Way Street*, 'reflection is artificially excluded…not because Benjamin the philosopher despised reason but because it was only through this kind of asceticism that he hoped to be able to restore thought itself at a time when the world was preparing to expel thought from human beings'; presenting the 'absurd' as though it were 'self-evident', in order to disempower what is self-evident'.[170] As Adorno contends, *One-Way Street* 'is not, as one might at first think, a book of aphorisms but rather a collection of *Denkbilder*' [Thought-Images] – 'scribbled picture-puzzles, parabolic evocations of something that cannot be said in words' – which attempt to 'shock through their enigmatic form and thereby get thought moving, because thought in its traditional conceptual form seems rigid, conventional, and outmoded'.[171] This enigmatic logic can be seen not only in relation to the imagistic and fragmentary form of each *Denkbild*, but at the level of the organization of the book as a whole, which, recalling Benjamin's reflections on allegory, organizes its emblematic fragments around a figural centre. This updating of allegory in terms of the principle of shock that is induced through the montage of enigmatic fragments is further manifested in the way that the figures of baroque allegory, the ruin and relic, are replaced with that of the construction site and the waste products of modernity.[172]

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[170] Adorno, 'Benjamin's *Einbahnstrasse*', in *Notes to Literature, Vol. 2*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 323.

[171] Ibid., p. 323. Adorno traces the use of word *Denkbild* back to the poet Stefan George who used the term to describe the poems of Mallarmé. In Benjamin, however, as Adorno argues, the meaning 'has shifted' to incorporate a series of other references, most notably, for Adorno, the analogies of the book's method to dreams (their fragmentary nature, which requires reconstructing) and gambling (the speculative character involved in placing fragments next to one another). As Adorno writes with reference to gambling: 'thought renounces all semblance of the security of intellectual organization, renounces deduction, induction, and conclusion, and delivers itself over to luck and the risk of betting on experience and striking something essential'. Ibid., p. 324. Benjamin used the term *Denkbilder* when he published another collection of urban prose pieces. See Walter Benjamin, 'Thought Figures' (1933), in *SW,2:2*, pp. 723-727.

[172] As Benjamin writes in 'Construction Site': 'Children are particularly fond of haunting any site where things are being visibly worked on' and 'are irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring, or carpentry'. The child is a privileged figure for Benjamin, because of their relation to 'play', which in *One-Way Street* is important for thinking about the way it, like the figure of the child, brings

The allegorical montage method of *One-Way Street*, and its focus on the marginal and ephemeral, is radicalized by Benjamin in his *The Arcades Project* [*Das Passgenwerk*]. Began in 1927 as a newspaper article on the nineteenth century Paris arcades, the project subsequently gave birth to various drafts, essays and book projects.[173] Yet the '*Arcades* complex', which was without a definitive title, also exists in the form of several hundred citations, notes and reflections of varying length, which Benjamin revised and grouped in alphabetized 'convolutes' according to a host of topics.[174] While Benjamin often considered this complex 'as at best a "torso", a monumental fragment or ruin', or as 'notebook' which he 'intended to mine for more extended discursive applications', his continuous revision of this material also indicates that it was not just a 'stage of research', but the development of determinate literary form.[175] Indeed, the *Arcades complex* can be seen to critically develop the tradition of compilation, collating and compiling citations (which quickly come to out number the commentaries) in order to mobilize a 'philosophic play of distances, transitions, and intersections'.[176] As Benjamin states in Convolute N:

> Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show. I shall purloin no valuables, appropriate no ingenious formulations. But the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them.[177]

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together 'materials of widely different kinds in new, intuitive relationships', but also the way that children 'produce their own small world of things within the greater one'. Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, pp. 449-450. As Richter notes, the 'meticulous searching for the strange or insignificant is an eminently political gesture, not because it enacts any preconceived program of what deserves to be collected and studied and what does not, but because it refuses to accept the condition of insignificance as something natural, exposing it instead as a cultural and political construction that relies on problematic unspoken assumptions'. Richter, *Thought-Images*, p. 47.

[173] See Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, 'Translators' Foreword' to Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University press, 1999), pp. ix-xiv.

[174] Ibid., p. x.

[175] Ibid., pp. x-xi.

[176] Ibid., p. xi.

[177] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1a, 8, p. 460.

Benjamin defines his undertaking in the *Arcades* as carrying 'the principle of montage into history'; that is, 'to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components' in order to 'grasp the construction of history as such' – a principle, as I will show, that is also key to understanding the historical compilation films of Godard and Farocki.[178] In approaching history through literary montage – whereby citations are juxtaposed without commentary or (explicit) interpretative mediation – Benjamin intended to make possible a new concreteness – or what he terms a 'heightened graphicness' – in reading and writing history, while attempting 'to preserve the intervals of reflection' by inducing a distance between the book's 'most essential parts'.[179] Central to Benjamin's montage method is the essentially 'destructive or critical momentum' of 'blasting' historical objects and citations out of the 'historical continuity' in which they were 'first constitute[d]' – and which 'historical narration' conventionally endeavours to 'reinsert' them.[180] To extract an object out the continuum of historical succession for Benjamin is to bring to light its 'monodological structure', into which 'all the forces and interests of history enter on a reduced scale', and which are captured in the object's 'fore-history' and 'after-history'.[181]

Benjamin's historiographical montage method in the *Arcades* is neither calculated nor arbitrary, but 'experimental', attempting to uncover the historical character of the present by putting it in constellation with 'a series of specific pasts'.[182] Benjamin distinguishes his critical and historical method with respect to Louis Aragon's experimental novel, *Le Paysan de Paris* [*Paris Peasant*] (1926), which was a significant influence on the *Arcades*, especially in its initial Surrealist-inspired phase.[183] Whereas Aragon's novelistic exploration of modern

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[178] Ibid., N2,6, p. 461.

[179] Ibid., N2,6, p. 461; N1, 3, p. 456.

[180] Ibid., N10a,1, p. 475;

[181] Ibid., N10,3, p. 475.

[182] Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 150.

[183] Benjamin's critique of Aragon's novel as presenting simply a 'regressive romantic dream', rather than 'a socially critical project', as Huyssen's notes, is unfair; after all, Aragon 'sought out a modern mythology not in in the glittering commercialized new arcades of the Champs Elysées or in the new technologies but in marginal

Paris is said to 'persist in the realm of dream' and 'mythology', Benjamin instead endeavours to dissolve the 'dream visions' and 'mythic forces' of the nineteenth century, manifested in a range of phantasmagorical commodity forms, into 'the space of history'.[184] This 'dialectical method of doing history', as Benjamin writes, 'presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as waking world', bringing the collective dream of the nineteenth century to light in the present of its interpretation, not by leaving the dream world behind but through an immersion in its 'dreamtime' [*Zeit-traum*]; that is, by 'pass[ing] through and carry[ing] out *what has been* in remembering the dream'.[185] This Proust-like remembering of the past takes place in what Benjamin in his 1929 essay 'On the Image of Proust' terms an 'intertwined time'; a peculiarly stratified space and time in which 'far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment'.[186]

The *Arcades* accordingly works to *excavate* a stratified mode of historical perception wherein 'remembered events or habitations show through the present time and place'; an 'uncanny thickening and layering of phenomena' that, as Howard Eiland points out, is associated with (among other things) the cinematic device of superimposition.[187] The montage structure of the *Arcades*, as Eiland and Michael Jennings note, can correspondingly be compared to the cinematic sub-genre of the 'city symphony', as exemplified by Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927) and Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), whose rhythmic montages attempt to construct a 'multiangled disclosure' of the city in motion.[188] Indeed, in *Man with a Movie Camera*, Vertov – who, as I discuss in Chapter 2, based his theory of montage on the figure of the interval, and used superimposition to

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urban spaces destined for destruction and rife with political protest'. Benjamin's gripe with the novel, as Huyssen's suggests, has more to do with what Benjamin characterized as Aragon's 'vague philosophemes', which are largely limited to the introduction and conclusion. Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, pp. 190-191.

[184] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1,9, p. 458; K1,4, p. 389

[185] Ibid., K1,3 and K1, 4, p. 389.

[186] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Image of Proust', in *SW,2:1*, p. 244.

[187] Howard Eiland, 'Superimposition in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*', *Telos* 138 (Spring, 2007), p. 122. Benjamin associates the principles of superimposition [*superposition*] and interpenetration [*Durchdringung*] with film in the 'First Sketches' section of *The Arcades Project*, pp. 854, 858.

[188] Eiland and Jennings, *Walter Benjamin*, p. 276

create historical interconnections – constantly plays with metaphors of dreaming and awakening to convey ideas of historical or revolutionary consciousness. Like Vertov, Benjamin's attempt to engender a stratified mode of perception has a '[p]edagogic side', which is captured in a quotation from the poet Rudolf Borschard: 'To educate the image-making medium within us, raising it to a stereoscopic and dimensional seeing into the depths of historical shadows'.[189] This stereoscopic mode of perception is expounded in the *Arcades* through the central category of the 'dialectical image', whereby the historical object of interpretation is brought to an imagistic 'standstill' [*Stillstand*] in order to reflect on the dialectical relation between the what-has-been and the now. The cessation of history in the dialectical image, as Benjamin stipulates, is experienced as *bildlich* [figural or imagistic], yet it is not atemporal; rather, it designates a suspended temporality in which the dynamics of historical forces are momentarily arrested in 'a constellation saturated with tensions'.[190] I will return to Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image in the following chapters. I turn now to Adorno's practice and elaboration of the essay as a philosophical form, which – for all Adorno's misgivings about the 'mythologizing' and 'undialectical' character of Benjamin's montage method – attempts to critically further the Benjaminian figures of constellation and 'dialectics at a standstill' in novel ways. [191]

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[189] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1,8, p. 458.

[190] Ibid., N31,1, p. 463, N10a,3, p. 475. As Osborne notes, Benjamin's dialectical image consists in 'a paradoxically *temporalized atemporality*, since it gains meaning (and supposedly *force*) form its negation of temporal continuity, phenomenologically figured as interruption, flash, explosion'. Peter Osborne, 'The Image is the Subject: Once More on the Temporalities of Image and Act', in *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), p. 206.

[191] Adorno's critique of *The Arcades Project* is essentially twofold: first, in response to the 'Expose' of the *Arcades* Benjamin delivered to the Institute for Social Research in 1935, he criticizes the mythologizing tendency of Benjamin's approach, which like Benjamin's critique of Aragon, is said to regress to the level of the dream images his dialectical and historical method is meant to dissolve. Second, and in connection to the former, Adorno objects to Benjamin's 'ascetic refusal of interpretation', and the project's consequent lack of 'mediation', with his dialectical images remaining at 'the crossroads of magic and positivism'. See Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Henri Lonitz (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 104-115, 282-283. As Osborne notes, 'Adorno is surely right, insofar as what he means is that they lack the kind of immanent conceptual mediation expounded by Hegel as the structure of dialectical logic. He is wrong, however, to suggest that they lack mediation altogether; wrong to

1.4. The Essay Form in Theodor W. Adorno

The central concepts and method of Adorno's early philosophical writings of the 1930s, particularly those outlined in his lectures 'The Actuality of Philosophy' (1931) and 'The Idea of Natural History' (1932), as well as his habilitation thesis turned book *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (published in 1933), develop out of his reception of early Lukács and Benjamin. In 'The Idea of Natural History', Adorno takes from Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* the concept of 'second nature', understood as the reification of history into nature (or the way history appears as natural, i.e. ahistorical), which Adorno, following Benjamin, terms the problem of 'natural-history' (*Naturgeschicte*), yet critiques Lukács's proposed solution to this problem, which is based on a 'metaphysical' notion of totality.[192] Adorno instead turns to Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book, which he reads as redefining the problem of natural-history as one of philosophical interpretation, replacing the 'infinite distance' of Lukács's metaphysics, with the 'infinite closeness' of Benjamin's allegorical method, which expresses the transience of nature as a 'historical relationship' through the playing out of 'particularity'.[193] For Lukács, as Adorno contends, the 'petrified object' remains 'simply puzzling', whereas, for Benjamin, it is 'a cipher to be read'.[194] In his earlier lecture, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', Adorno adopts (although he is not credited) Benjamin's notion of philosophical criticism as a philosophical response to what he perceives as the crisis of philosophy under Neo-Kantianism, which gives up philosophy's

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reduce the concept of mediation to a narrowly Hegelian form….For mediation in Benjamin has more the character of a *switch between circuits*…than the production of a shared conceptual space'. Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, pp. 150-151.

[192] Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History', *Telos* 60 (June, 1984), p. 118. As J.M. Bernstein contends, *The Theory of the Novel* 'figures (in the mode of a ghostly absence) the need for a collective narrative to replace and displace the narratives of interiority provided by the novel', which Lukács subsequently finds in the Russian revolution and its 'narrative production of a collective subject and its world'. J.M. Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel: Lukács, Marxism and the Dialectics of Form* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), p. 262. It is this collective dimension that will, for Lukács, later find itself dissolved in modernism and naturalism, hence Lukács's privileging of the nineteenth century form of the realist and historical novel, because of its ability to represent the socio-political forces of history in an objective-epic way.

[193] Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History', p. 119.

[194] Ibid., pp. 119, 121.

relation to the real to become philosophical methodologies of the sciences.[195] Rather than

construing philosophy as 'simply a higher level of generality', Adorno, following Benjamin,

attempts to open up a new vocation for philosophy as the interpretation of riddles. In

contrast to scientific positivism, which treats its findings as 'indestructible and static',

philosophy as interpretation 'perceives the first findings…as a sign that needs unriddling',

transforming 'ciphers into a text', which is 'incomplete, contradictory and fragmentary'. The

function of riddle-solving, as Adorno explains, is not to 'persist behind the riddle' in order to

get to what 'already lies behind the question', but 'to bring its elements, which it receives

from the sciences, into changing constellations', or 'changing trial combinations, until they

fall into a figure which can be read as an answer, while at the same time the question

disappears'.[196]

As in Benjamin, Adorno's conception of philosophy entails *constructing* and *configuring*

'small and unintentional elements' of reality into 'historical images' [*geschctliche Bilder*],

which do not 'lie organically ready in history' but 'must be produced'.[197] Adorno refers to

these historical images as 'models', which, recalling the experimental concept of philosophy

practiced by Bacon and Leibniz, are constructed to examine reality by means of *testing*.[198]

As Fredric Jameson points out, the concept of 'model' for Adorno, which he will develop in

later writings, has 'a specifically *musical* provenance, and was appropriated by Schoenberg

from a loose and common-sense acceptation as "exercises" (one of his books is called

Models for Beginners)'.[199] For Adorno, the experimental idea of the 'model' provides an

alternative philosophical method to the 'idealist demand' that philosophy be based on 'an

absolute beginning', and the 'Cartesian demand' which attempts to raise thinking to

'axioms'. Instead of dogmatic methodologism, the 'productivity of thinking' is able to prove

itself only in 'historical concreteness', which transforms the idea of philosophy as '*prima*

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[195] Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', *Telos* 31 (March, 1977), p. 120.

[196] Ibid., p. 127. Put differently, the 'task of philosophy is not to search for concealed and manifest intentions of reality, but to interpret unintentional reality, in that, by the power of constructing figures, or images (*Bilder*), out of the isolated elements of reality, it negates (*aufhebt*) questions'. Ibid., p. 127.

[197] Ibid., pp. 128. 131.

[198] Ibid., p. 131.

[199] Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 61.

philosophia into essayism'.[200] As Adorno insists, he is 'gladly' willing to 'put up with the reproach of essayism'; a consequence of the essay's migration in 'the post-Kantian century' from philosophy to the 'insignificant form' of 'aesthetic essays' in which the 'concretion of interpretation' took 'refuge'.[201] Despite the suspicion of dilettantism and belletrism directed at the essay form, which Adorno considers as *partially* justified, the importance of the essay, and art criticism in particular, is its undermining of the privileging of method that dominates the fields of philosophy and science.[202]

As Max Paddison contends, Adorno 'was already grappling with the problem of how society as a totality can be understood to be "mediated" in aesthetic artefacts', in his essays on music from the early 1920s onwards.[203] The musical problems discussed in these early essays – typically 'brief reviews or technical analyses' which interweave 'critical commentary and philosophical interpretation' – provided, to some extent, 'the material sources' of Adorno's 'philosophical approach'.[204] A main issue that is raised in these articles is a notion of second nature, construed in musical terms as 'the split between the expressive needs of composers and the reified character of the handed-down traditional forms and genres'.[205] Influenced by Schoenberg (who used the term 'second nature' to describe the historical constitution of musical materials), Adorno attempts to explore the way that history and social relations are sedimented in the materials and forms of music.[206]

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[200] Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy', p. 132.

[201] Ibid., p. 132-133. Adorno notably prefaces his lecture on natural history by saying that 'I am not going to give a lecture in the usual sense of communicating results or presenting a systematic statement. Rather, what I have to say will remain on the level of an essay'. Adorno, 'The Idea of Natural History', p. 111.

[202] See Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), p. 138. For an excellent account of the essay form in Adorno see Antonia Birnbaum, 'The Obscure Object of Transdisciplinarity: Adorno on the Essay Form', *Radical Philosophy* 198 (July/August, 2016), pp. 15-24.

[203] Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 22.

[204] Ibid., p. 23.

[205] Ibid., p. 23.

[206] Ibid., p. 65. As Paddison notes, Adorno was particularly influenced here by Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre* (1911) which used the term 'material' [*Material*] to designate something pre-formed, rather than something natural, i.e. 'raw material' (*Stoff*). In *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg privileges 'dissonance', or atonality, over 'consonance' as a means to undermine the seeming naturalness of the latter. Schoenberg, moreover, used the

This immanent analysis of musical works becomes the general model for Adorno's subsequent critical writings on sociology, philosophy and culture, which strive to develop 'a critique of society by producing a critique of its intellectual and artistic products'.[207] These critical writings continue to take the form of essays, which are often first published as articles or reviews in journals, or given as talks or radio broadcasts, with the titles of the books in which they are later collated typically stressing the fragmentary nature of Adorno's approach, such as *Prismen* [*Prisms*] (1955) or *Noten zur Literatur* [*Notes to Literature*] (published in three volumes: 1958, 1961 and 1965).[208] This fragmentary approach seeks to counter the claim to truth made by totalizing systems, whether in art, philosophy, or political economy, while nonetheless producing, as he writes in 'Why Still Philosophy', a theory 'that can think the totality in its untruth'.[209] As Adorno proclaims in *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life* (written between 1944 and 1947 and published in 1951), in one the books many ironic inversions: 'The whole is the false'.[210] His most lyrical work, *Minima Moralia* consists of a collection of condensed aphoristic reflections on Adorno's personal experience of exile in America, and on various subjects – art, philosophy, psychoanalysis – taking the 'the narrowest private sphere', 'the individual in emigration', as its 'starting-point', in order to 'furnish models' to reflect on broader social issues.[211] To know 'the truth about life in its immediacy', as he writes in the preface, is to 'scrutinize its estranged form' in 'the objective powers' that mediate and 'determine individual

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term 'second nature' to describe the historical constitution of musical material, which, in a Hegelian manner, 'has a dynamic of its own'; the 'result not so much of natural forces but rather cultural and historical forces', which produce the 'immanent demands to which the composer must respond'. Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[207] Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London: Verso, 2014), p. 13.

[208] Other examples include *Dissonanzen* [*Dissonances*] (1956), *Moments musicaux* [*Musical Moments*] (1964), *Interventions: Nine Critical Models* (1963) and *Catchwords: Critical Models II* (1969).

[209] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Why Still Philosophy', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 14.

[210] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections From Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 50. Adorno is here inverting Hegel's statement, made in the Preface to the *Phenomenlogy of Spirit*, that the 'True is the whole'. For a list of the book's key inversions see Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, pp. 22-23.

[211] Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 17.

existence'.[212] Adorno employs the form of aphoristic fragments, therefore, not in order to deny the 'system's claim to totality', but to bring into focus, through an insistence on individual experience, the 'fraud' of its claim.[213] To do so, Adorno employs a number of indirect strategies, such as ironic inversion and exaggeration, in order to fashion perspectives 'that displace and estrange the world', revealing its untruth and distorted character through distortion.[214] Instead of 'qualifying' thoughts, Adorno adopts a dialectical method that 'advances by way of extremes, driving thoughts with the utmost consequentiality to the point where they turn back on themselves'.[215] In 'Cultural Criticism and Society', Adorno refers to this dialectical method as 'immanent criticism', a strategy that, akin to Lefebvre's maieutic of irony, seeks to critically grasp 'intellectual and artistic phenomena' – without attempting to occupy a fixed or dogmatic standpoint outside the object in question – by pitting the ideals that they profess against their practical reality.[216]

Exemplary of this immanent and fragmentary approach is Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1947). As the subtitle suggests, rather than presenting a systematic treatise on the idea of enlightenment, the book, which is comprised of five 'essays' (two of which are referred to as an 'excursus') and concludes with a chapter titled 'Notes and Sketches', approaches its object through a series of fragmentary perspectives and frameworks: myth, enlightenment thought, the culture industry, and anti-Semitism.[217] As noted in the Introduction, the book often mimics 'the nineteenth-century genre of speculative universal history', except that this time, as Simon Jarvis writes, 'the

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[212] Ibid., p. 15.

[213] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[214] Ibid., p. 247. As he writes of Nietzsche, Karl Kraus, Kafka and 'even Proust', they all 'prejudice and falsify the image of the world in order to shake off falsehood and prejudice'. Ibid., p. 73.

[215] Ibid., p. 86.

[216] Theodow W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981), p. 32.

[217] In the book's first appearance, mimeographed for circulation among the Institute exiles in America (1944), its title was *Philosophical Fragments* [*Philosophische Fragmente*], and the first chapter was called 'The Dialectic of Enlightenment', which was changed in the published version to 'The Concept of Enlightenment'. See Helmling, *Adorno's Poetics of Critique*, p. 74.

story runs not from barbarism to civilization but in the other direction'.[218] While containing narrative passages, the book, however, is not composed according to a conventionally narrative mode, instead constructing itself around various dialectical pairs or constellations, most notably the dialectic of myth and enlightenment. As Adorno and Horkheimer write, summarizing the two theses of the first essay: 'Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology'.[219] The chapter bears out these two theses, showing how just as myth is itself already a kind of rationality – a way of ordering, classifying and controlling the world – in attempting to subjugate all existence to the machinery of instrumental reason, enlightenment regresses into mythology, reducing reason to a positivistic and rationalistic logic that apprehends the world in abstract categories. Moreover, as Adorno and Horkheimer continually emphasize, instrumental reason is constitutively entangled with forms of social domination and the domination of nature – I will return to these ideas in my reading of Farocki's *Images of the World* in the Chapter 4, which draws on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[220] Such arguments, as Steven Helmling details, are enacted through a critical 'mimesis' of the generic conventions enlightenment thought, with its grand narratives of enlightened and teleological progress, in order to perform the failure of this tradition; a failure that is literally figured as a dialectic (of reason and history) at a 'standstill'.[221]

It is this immanent or dialectical method that Adorno views as central to the 'critical form'

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[218] Jarvis, *Adorno*, p. 20

[219] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. xviii.

[220] Jarvis, *Adorno*, pp. 22, 24.

[221] Helmling, *Adorno's Poetics of Critique*, p. 155. As Helmling argues, the book can be read as staging a tension between Horkheimer's more conventionally narrative mode of critique and Adorno's non- or anti-narrative method, so that, in what seems at first glance appears to obey 'the generic imperatives and conventions' of traditional enlightenment narratives, 'proves on closer inspection to subvert them utterly, using their own "logics" against them, to subvert not only "the grand narrative" they are conventionally mobilized to tell, but narrativity itself'. Ibid., p. 155.

of the essay, which he expounds at length in 'The Essay as Form' [*Der Essay als Form*].[222]
Written between 1954 and 1958, Adorno considered 'The Essay as Form', which introduces
the first volume of *Notes to Literature* (1958), to be one of his most important statements of
his critical 'programme', providing a condensed summary of many issues raised by Adorno
since the early 1930s.[223] Its programmatic character, however, does not consist of a
'definitional procedure', which would define the form of the essay in separation from its
presentational form, and unravel it into discrete, definable moments; rather, like
Montaigne, Schlegel, and Benjamin before him, it attempts to recreate the process of 'open
intellectual experience' that is essential to the essay as a *critical* form, as opposed to the
uncritical or non-reflexive commercial or academic essay.[224] Adorno again distinguishes the
essay from 'the traditional concept of method', exemplified by Descartes' *Discourse on
Method*, as well as scientific positivism more generally, which attempt to separate method
from the object under consideration, and to *deduce* it systematically through axiomatic
principles.[225] While the essay is 'necessarily related to theory', it does not 'deduce itself
rigorously from theory', which is, Adorno argues, the 'chief flaw' of Lukács's later
criticism.[226] For the object of the essay 'is the new in its newness', which is 'not as

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[222] As Adorno writes: 'The essay is what it was from the beginning, the critical form par excellence; as
immanent critique of intellectual constructions, as a confrontation of what they are with their concept, it is
critique of ideology'. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 18.

[223] See Ulrich Plass, *Language and History in Adorno's Notes to Literature* (Wesleyan University: Routledge,
2013), p. 24.

[224] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 13. As Antonia Birnbaum puts it, Adorno's argument is 'that essayists
sometimes produce essays and sometimes do not. Zweig was an essayist and became a commercial writer;
Lukács was an essayist who became a party ideologue'. Birnbaum, 'The Obscure Object of Transdisciplinarity',
p. 19.

[225] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 11. The essay is interpreted as a 'protest' against the rules of the *Discourse
on Method*; namely, the division of the object into as many parts as possible; to conduct thought in a sequence
proceeding from the simplest to the more complex; and, to institute such exhaustive enumerations that
nothing is left out. Ibid., p. 14-15.

[226] Ibid., p. 18. As Adorno later writes in *Negative Dialectics*, 'in philosophy we literally seek to immerse
ourselves in things that are heterogeneous to it, without placing those things in prefabricated categories'.
Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 13.

something that can be translated back into the old existing forms'.[227] Accordingly, it 'erects no scaffolding and no structure', beginning in *media res*, and proceeding 'methodically unmethodically', appropriating concepts in a manner similar to 'someone in a foreign country who is forced to speak its language instead of piecing it together out of its elements according to the rules learned in school'. Yet the essay form for Adorno is not structure-less. While refusing to form a 'continuum of operations' that 'progress in a single direction', its discontinuous form moves in a multi-directional manner, whereby 'moments are interwoven as in a carpet'.[228]

While a carpet connotes the image of stasis, it is, as Adorno emphasizes, through the kinetic 'motion' and force of the syntactical 'transitions' between its elements – for reading, just as listening to music or watching a film, remains ineluctably temporal – that the moments of an essay 'crystallize in a configuration', or what, following Benjamin, he terms a 'constellation' as 'force field'.[229] Central in generating this kinetic tension is Adorno's paratactic syntax, in which clauses are connected (or *coordinated*) by juxtaposition, rather than by hypotactic logic. Banning the use of subordinating conjunctions such as 'therefore', 'however', 'but', etc., Adorno's paratactic syntax endeavours to evade or subvert the hierarchical structures and grammars of logic and narrative, for instance, 'cause and effect, antecedent and consequence, main event and subsidiary'.[230] It is 'as a constructed juxtaposition of elements', as Adorno writes, that the reader experiences 'the staticness of the essay', in which 'relationships of tension have been brought, as it were, to a standstill'.[231] For Adorno, this essayistic mode of construction *approaches* the paratactic and serial forms of poetry and music.[232] As he writes in his late essay on the device of parataxis in Hölderlin, the 'artificial disturbances' of the German poet's paratactic poetics works to

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[227] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', 21.

[228] Ibid., p. 13.

[229] Ibid., p. 13.

[230] Helmling, *Adorno's Poetics of Critique*, p. 113

[231] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 22

[232] As Adorno writes, 'the essay approaches the logic of music, that stringent yet aconceptual art of transition, in order, to appropriate for verbal language something it forfeited under the domination of discursive logic'. Ibid., p. 22.

transform the synthetic function of language into a 'music-like' 'serial order' whose elements are linked differently than in logical constructions.[233] As with Adorno's reflections on the essay form, what is envisioned in Hölderlin's 'paratactic revolt' against language is not the destruction of synthesis (or the unity of language) as such, but the production of a 'synthesis of a different kind': one which transmutes the violent and coercive character of language (perpetuated in logical forms of unity) so that 'multiplicity' and 'inconclusive[ness]' are reflected in it.[234]

Vital to Adorno's insistence on the paratactic poetics of the essay form 'is the paradoxical demand that the concept must approximate the non-conceptual, that language must say that which it cannot say'.[235] The essay, as Adorno writes, 'is concerned with what is blind in its objects' and 'wants to use concepts to pry open the aspect of its objects that cannot be accommodated by concepts', which he terms the 'opaque element' – the non-conceptual unity 'hidden' in the object itself.[236] This is why, as Gillian Rose notes, Adorno's essays typically proceed through 'a set of parallaxes', creating 'apparent displacements of an object due to changes of observation point'; a 'concentric' mode of composition that is intended to express the fact that the object in question cannot be fully 'captured', but only encircled.[237] The essay 'has to cause the totality to be illuminated in a partial feature…without asserting

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[233] Adorno, 'Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry', in *Notes to Literature*, *Vol. 2*, p. 131.

[234] Ibid., p. 136. As Jarvis explains, 'Holderlin's syntax could not be a completely new self-sufficient procedure, any more than twelve-tone musical composition; it must proceed through the determinate negation of tradition'. The aim of Holderlin's new syntax is thus 'not the liquidation of semantic meaning, but an intimation of the possibility of meaning which would not be the relentless subsumption of particulars by universals'. Holderlin's syntax, that is, 'points to the possibility of a non-coercive affinity between concepts and objects'. Jarvis, *Adorno*, p. 144.

[235] Plass, *Language and History in Adorno's Notes to Literature*, p. 24. As Adorno puts it in *Negative Dialectics*, 'to counter Wittgenstein by uttering the unutterable'. Adorno *Negative Dialectics*, p. 9.

[236] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 23. As he writes in *Negative Dialectics*: 'The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal'. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 10.

[237] Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, p. 17. As Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*: 'Properly written texts are like spiders' webs: tight, concentric, transparent, well-spun and firm…It proves its relation to the object as soon as other objects crystallize around it'. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 87.

the presence of totality', as Adorno writes. As with the Romantic fragment, the essay 'thinks in fragments, just as reality is fragmentary, and finds its unity in and through the breaks and not by glossing them over'.[238] This fragmentary method infiltrates not only the paratactic forms of serial transition but takes over larger structures. The essay is both composed of a series of fragments and is a fragment of a larger whole: 'It corrects what is contingent and isolated in its insights in that they multiply, confirm, and qualify themselves, whether in the further course of the essay itself or in a mosaic-like relationship to other essays'.[239] The paratactical form of the essay becomes the mode of composition for Adorno's later, more 'systematic' works: *Negative Dialectics* (1966) and *Aesthetic Theory* (the drafts of which were written between 1961 and 1969, and published posthumously in 1970). As Adorno writes of the intended presentational form of *Aesthetic Theory*, rather than following a progressive succession of steps, the 'book must…be written in equally weighted, paratactical parts'; a 'series of partial complexes' that are 'arranged around a midpoint' so that they express the idea 'through their constellation'.[240] As with the concept of model, this compositional principle is derived from music, namely musical serialism (as exemplified by Schoenberg's famous twelve-tone technique), wherein the particular order and configuration of elements, or notes, are subject to an elaborate series of variations and permutations – I will return to the subject of musical serialism in relation to Farocki's serial montage method in Chapter 4.

In *Negative Dialectics* the 'antisystematic impulse' of the essay form and the fragment comes into conflict with the 'systematic need' of philosophy; the need, that is, 'not to put up with the *membra disiecta* of knowledge'.[241] It is, however, only a philosophy conducted in 'fragment form' that would give proper place to the 'particular' and its mediated relation to the 'totality', which is 'inconceivable as such'.[242] As with early German Romanticism, as

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[238] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 16.

[239] Ibid., pp. 16-17. The metaphor of the mosaic here recalls Kracauer's argument that an image of reality could never be contained in a single report, but 'solely in the mosaic that is assembled from single observations on the basis of comprehension of their meaning'. Kracauer, *The Salaried Masses*, p. 32.

[240] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 364.

[241] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 20.

[242] Ibid., p. 28.

well as Barthes, Adorno turns to the forms of the encyclopaedia and dictionary as possible models for a non-systematic philosophy which nonetheless retains philosophy's 'systematic spirit', in that such literary forms present ensembles of thinking in models, which are nonetheless 'discontinuous, unsystematic, [and] loose', transposing 'the power of thought, once delivered from the systems, into the open realm of definition by individual moments'.[243] As Adorno writes in his 'Introduction' to *Catchwords*:

> The title *Catchwords* alludes to the encyclopaedic form that, unsystematically, discontinuously, presents what the unity of experience crystallizes into a constellation. Thus the technique of a small volume with somewhat arbitrarily chosen catchwords perhaps might make conceivable a new *Dictionnaire philosophique*.[244]

It is this turn to the dictionary and encyclopedia, as well as experimentation with other fragmentary forms of essayistic writing, which Adorno can be seen to share with the late works of Barthes, whose reflections on and practice of the essay and cultural criticism we will now consider.

1.5. Dispersing the Text: Writing and Criticism in Roland Barthes

Barthes's first publications – *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), *Michelet* (1954), and *Mythologies* (1957) – are all collections of – or, as in the case of *Michelet*, the result of – previously published essays and articles. They all, furthermore, explore the social and historical nature

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[243] Ibid., p. 24-25, 29 Adorno cites Jean Le Rond D'Alembert's *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopaedia of Diderot* (1751) and its distinction between *l'espirit de système* (the spirit of the system) and *l'esprit systématique* (systematic spirit). On Adorno's conception of an anti-systematic encyclopaedia or a new *Dictionnaire philosophique*, and its distinction from Hegel's systematic *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1807), see Stewart Martin, *Adorno and the Problem of Philosophy* (Middlesex University: Phd Dissertation, 2002), pp. 155-161. For materials from Novalis's project to create a Romantic Encyclopaedia, see Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, trans. David W. Wood (New York: SUNY Press, 2007).

[244] Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, p. 126.

of language: as literature, history writing, and the language of ideology (or myth). As I already discussed in the Introduction, *Writing Degree Zero* [*Le Degré zero de l'écriture*] is, in part, an implicit critique of Sartre's *What is Literature?* [*Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (1947), which distinguished between language, understood as an objective communicative function, and style, understood as its subjective expression.[245] Barthes adds to language and style, the mediating category of *écriture* (or writing) as a 'third dimension of Form', which 'binds the writer to his society', and is alienated in the form of the literary 'institution'.[246] In France, it was following the 1848 revolution, Barthes argues, when modes of writing begin to multiply, that the hegemony of a standardized French and bourgeois notions of a universal language become problematic, with its purported universality being recognized as belonging to a particular class. It is the awareness of literature, or writing, as a social and historical form, Barthes contends, which leads modern writers to search for a *utopian* 'zero degree of writing' – a neutral style of writing which transcends historical particularity.[247] Barthes's fascination with the nineteenth-century romantic historian Jules Michelet, by contrast, stems from the plurality of Michelet's eclectic style of history writing, and the manner in which he inscribes himself in his texts – I will return to Michelet in relation to Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in Chapter 3. His book on Michelet is presented as neither a history of the historian's thought or his life, but a series of fragmentary remarks on 'thematics' and 'obsessions' which preoccupied the historian.[248]

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[245] Parts of *Writing Degree Zero* appeared in the newspaper *Combat* in 1947, the same year Sartre's book was published. Both Sartre's first chapter and the first section of *Writing Degree Zero* have the same title: 'What is Writing?'. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *'What is Literature?' and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[246] Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1984), p. 6. In French *écriture* means both 'hand writing' and 'the art of writing', as well as generally corresponding to all senses of the verb *écrire*: style, composition, and the act and mode of writing.

[247] See Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, pp. 84-88. As Hartley notes, and Barthes himself recognized, 'what for one generation or class of people counts as a "neutral" style has a habit of transforming over time and space into a *non*-neutral style, one which cannot help but emit the connotations of its social origins and accents'. Hartley, *The Politics of Style*, p. 46.

[248] Roland Barthes, *Michelet*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 3.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes turns to the emerging consumer culture of post-war France. The book largely consists of essays written between 1954 and 1956 for the journal *Les Lettres nouvelles*, in which he had a monthly column, titled 'Small Mythologies of the Month'.[249] In these short journalistic pieces, Barthes discussed various topics, from films, to daily life, to criticism, to advertising and food products, to astrology and art. While the 'pleasure' of the book, as Kristin Ross notes, 'comes from the laconic brevity of the essays and their messy contiguity' – its 'jumble of things, people and events, Greta Garbo next to greasy french fries' – its interrogation of 'gestures, acts, objects and texts' is grounded intellectually in a Sartrian theory of the 'situation', attempting to build a '"situated" knowledge' that takes cultural phenomena as the starting point.[250] Recalling the Weimar essays of Kracauer, as well as Benjamin and Adorno's concept of natural-history, the essays in *Mythologies* pursue a semiological and ideological analysis of commodity and mass cultural forms in an attempt to de-mystify (or de-mythify) the way cultural objects come to signify as de-politicized, value-free and natural, rather than 'determined by history'.[251] Myth, as Barthes outlines in the concluding methodological essay, 'Myth Today', is '*depoliticized speech*', which 'purifies' things and renders them 'innocent', giving them 'a natural and eternal justification'.[252]

In the 1963 preface to his *Critical Essays* (1964) – a collection of essays (originally prefaces, articles and book reviews on literature and theatre) which date back to 1953 – Barthes provides several important reflections on criticism and writing that anticipate a number of themes in his later work, such as the idea of writing as 'an activity of variation and

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[249] The first essay in *Mythologies*, 'The World of Wrestling', was published in 1952 in *Espirit*.

[250] Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), p. 181. Barthes's effort in cultural semiology, as he would later observe, also has an affinity with the ethnographic approach of Michelet's historical writings, which focus on objects that are 'supposedly the most natural: face, food, clothes, complexion'. Quoted in ibid, p. 182.

[251] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2009), p. xix. Semiology is the general science of signs, founded by Saussure, and first published in his 1916 *Course in General Linguistics*. On Barthes's reading, semiology 'aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects…these constitute, if not *languages*, at least systems of signification'. See Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 9.

[252] Barthes, *Mythologies*, pp. 169-70.

combination', as well as the essay's vexed relation to the form of the novel.[253] The 'critic as writer', as Barthes contends, is someone 'who cannot produce the "he" of the novel, but who also cannot cast the "I" into pure private life, i.e., renounce writing'.[254] Yet if Barthes never ended up writing a novel – in the sense of a 'story fitted out with characters and events' – this is because, as he later noted, 'my writings are already full of the novelistic (which is the novel minus characters)'.[255] A similar tension to that between the essay and the art of the novel can further be seen in relation to scientific discourse. As he declares in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1977, 'though it is true that I long wished to inscribe my work within the field of science – literary, lexicological, sociological – I must admit that I have produced only essays, an ambiguous genre in which analysis vies with writing'.[256] While Barthes regularly adopts this Montaignian strategy of self-deprecation with regard to the analytical rigors of science and scholarship, the vying of analysis and writing that is central to his critical essays is approached in a significantly more combative manner in *Criticism and Truth* [*Critique et vérité*] (1966). Written in response to Raymond Picard's attack on the 'new criticism', which Barthes epitomized, the book provides an

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[253] Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. xviii. Writing and literature, as Barthes writes, consists of 'no more than an activity of variation and combination: there are never creators, nothing but combiners, and literature is like the ship Argo whose long history admitted of no creation, nothing but combinations; bracketed with an unchanging function, each piece was nonetheless endlessly renewed, without the whole ever ceasing to be the Argo'. Barthes will repeat this analogy in his 1977 book, *A Lover's Discourse*, which I discuss below.

[254] Ibid, p. xx. This is 'why the novel is always the critic's horizon'; for 'the critic is the man who is going to write and who, like the Proustian narrator, satisfies this expectation with a supplementary work, who creates himself and whose function is to accomplish his project of writing even while eluding it'. The 'critic is a writer', Barthes notes, 'but a writer postponed'. Ibid, pp. xx-xxi. Barthes will take this idea as the framework for his final lecture series at the Collège de France in 1979 and 1980, where he puts himself in the position of someone preparing to write a novel. The lectures consist of various trials, taxonomies, and analyses of novelistic forms and other kinds writing. See Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France (1978-1979 and 1979-1980)*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

[255] Barthes, 'The Adjective Is the "Statement" of Desire' (1973), in *Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 176.

[256] Barthes, 'Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège de France, January 7, 1977', *October* 8 (Spring, 1979), p. 3.

itemised critique of academic criticism, undermining the key norms on which it is based: objectivity (based on a value-free notion of language), good taste (based on prohibiting certain subjects), clarity (based on approving only its own 'natural' style of writing, which it considers jargon free), and a-symbolia (an inability to read symbolically, providing only literal readings of texts).[257] What the so-called 'new criticism' is reproached with, Barthes contends, 'is not so much that it is "new", but that it is fully "criticism", that it re-allocates the roles of author and commentator and in so doing attacks the linguistic order'.[258] Barthes traces this re-allocation of the 'poetic and the critical functions of writing', which he outlines in Part II of *Criticism and Truth*, via Blanchot and Proust, back to Mallarmé, where the distinctions in literature begin to break down and are replaced by the generic category of 'writing'.[259] Consequently, the critic becomes a writer, a word that designates 'a certain *awareness of discourse*', rather than a 'particular status': 'A writer is someone for whom language constitutes a problem, who is aware of the depth of language, not its instrumentality or its beauty'.[260]

This transformation of the status of criticism, which 'brings the critic closer to the writer', produces a '*general crisis of commentary*…perhaps as important as that which marked…the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance'.[261] For Barthes, that is, there is an affinity between the transitional crisis of the latter period and the period in which he is writing in the way that '[e]verything which is affected by language' – 'philosophy, social sciences, literature' – is 'called into question'. This concerns not only writing, but the

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[257] See also the essay, 'The Two Criticisms' (1963), in which Barthes distinguishes between two parallel criticisms in France at the time: academic criticism, essentially positivist and historicist literary criticism that thinks of itself free from ideology, and interpretative or ideological criticism, which approaches the literary work via a particular ideological reading: existentialist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, phenomenological, or structuralist. Barthes, *Critical Essays*, pp. 249-254. Although Barthes never joined the editorial board, he was strongly associated with the structuralist journal *Tel Quel* from around the mid-1960s onwards.

[258] Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, trans. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London and New York: Continuum, 1987), p. 3.

[259] Ibid, p. 23.

[260] Ibid., pp. 23-4.

[261] Ibid., pp. 24-5.

interpretation of works, past and present, whose 'singular' and 'canonical meaning' is transformed into 'a plural meaning'; the 'closed work' is transformed into an 'open work'.[262] To write, as Barthes notes, is 'in a certain way to split up the world (the book) and to remake it', an idea he relates the Renaissance tradition of compilation. '[C]ritical vision begins with the *compilator*', who, in quoting a text or rearranging the elements of a work, creates a 'new intelligibility', a 'certain distance'.[263] Barthes expounds on these ideas in his famous essay, discussed above in the Introduction, 'The Death of the Author' (1967), wherein he proposes to consider the text as a 'fabric of quotations'; 'a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings'.[264]

Barthes develops this theory of reading and the conception of the work as a multi-dimensional space of writing in his 1970 book, *S/Z*.[265] The book marks a significant departure from his emphatically structuralist works of the mid-1960s, which apply the structural linguistic theories of Jakobson and Émile Beveniste to various objects, such as narrative and fashion, using taxonomy and scientistic classification systems in a heavily formalist way.[266] In *S/Z*, by contrast, Barthes dissects the 'flowing' narrative of Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* (1830) by cutting it up into fragments, or 'blocks of signification'.[267] These blocks of text become the basis for fragmentary glosses and interpretations, which are inserted between each unit. This leads, as Barthes notes, to no final 'metameaning' – they are not 'regrouped' to establish a 'profound, strategic structure' – but are 'merely' reconnected at the end as an 'appendix'.[268] The reading of Balzac's text, as Barthes writes,

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[262] Ibid., p. 25.

[263] Ibid., pp. 38-39.

[264] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', pp. 52-53.

[265] *S/Z* was the result of a seminar held at *École pratique des hautes études* in February 1968 on Balzac's novella *Sarrasine* (1830). As Andy Stafford notes, the idea of the text as a multi-dimensional and contested space in 'The Death of the Author', was due, in part, to the seminars Barthes began teach around this time. See Andy Stafford, *Roland Barthes* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), p. 98.

[266] See Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 79-124; and *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990).

[267] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), p. 13.

[268] Ibid., p. 14.

accordingly 'avoids structuring the text *excessively*, avoids giving it that additional structure which would come from a dissertation and would close it'. Rather, the 'writing of the commentary' and 'systematic use of digression' that the '*decomposition*' of Balzac's text gives rise to is intended to demonstrate 'the reversibility of the structures from which the text is woven'.[269] Following this idea, Barthes proposes a distinction between what he terms the 'readerly' and 'writerly' text. The evaluation of texts, akin to the Romantic concept of criticism, is concerned with the 'writerly'; namely, whether a text generates a desire in the reader (or critic) to write and, therefore, re-write the text in question. The aim of a literary work, or of 'literature as work', as Barthes argues in the introduction, 'is to make the reader no longer a consumer' – which is what readerly texts are said to do – but 'a producer of the text'.[270] To 'rewrite the writerly text would consist only in disseminating it, in dispersing it within the field of infinite difference'.[271]

Barthes applies this method of rewriting the text so that it opens out onto 'the infinity of language' or 'meaning' in his essay from the same year, 'The Third Meaning' (1970), which reflects on a series of film stills from Eisenstein's epic historical drama, *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (1944). Rather than representing a writerly object, however, Barthes's choice to focus on the Soviet filmmaker as his object of study is precisely because Eisenstein's films are seen to be of an overtly readerly nature (whether Barthes is totally right in his judgment is questionable, as I will discuss in the following chapter). Eisenstein's art, as Barthes writes, 'is not polysemous: it chooses the meaning, imposes it, hammers it home'.[272] Underlining this disparagement of Eisenstein's rhetorically calculated cinematography is the significant fact that, for Barthes, the medium of film could *never* be writerly in the way literature can, in that, as Raymond Bellour notes, 'the text of the film' is 'unquotable', and thus 'unattainable' in *the medium of writing*.[273] As Barthes will later note of his '[r]esistance to the cinema', in film 'the signifier itself is always, by nature, continuous…whatever the rhetoric of frames

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[269] Ibid., p. 13.

[270] Ibid., p. 4.

[271] Ibid, p. 5.

[272] Barthes, 'The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills', in *Image-Music-Text*, p. 56.

[273] Raymond Bellour, 'The Unattainable Text', *Screen*, vol. 16, Issue 3:1 (October, 1975), p. 20.

and shots; without remission, a continuum of images'.[274] It is important to note that at the time when Barthes and Bellour are writing (the early 1970s), unless the critic had the means – i.e. a copy of the film and Steinbeck to view it on – it was impossible to stop a film to 're-read it and reflect on it' as one would when interpreting a sentence in a book.[275] It is of course these two operations that the genre of the compilation film (as practiced by filmmakers such as Shub, Godard and Farocki) attempt to do; namely, to critically quote, analyse and reflect on filmed images using the medium of film itself – an activity, as we will see, that was made exponentionally more feasible through the introduction of video (and later, digital) technology.[276] It is because of the infeasibility of the latter that Barthes comes to focus on the object of the film still, as well as why he privileges the medium of photography over film. For as Martin Jay notes, the still renders the film's image-track 'a fragment of a whole', disrupting the continuous 'motion of the cinematic apparatus' Barthes found so troublesome.[277] In interrupting and freezing the movement of its image-track, moreover, the still opens up the textuality of the film by allowing Barthes to locate in the stilled image a number of 'obtuse meanings' (or what he terms a 'third meaning'), that are beyond the informational and symbolic level of the film's narrative – a strategy of reading Barthes will later apply in *Camera Lucida*, which I discuss below.[278]

The books that follow *S/Z* – *Empire of Signs* (1970), *Sade, Fourier, Loyala* (1971) and *The Pleasure of the text* (1973) – all develop a similarly fragmentary approach, fragmenting their respective subjects into a discontinuous series of ideas, themes, or concepts which are then

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[274] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 54.

[275] Bellour, 'The Unattainable Text', p. 25.

[276] For an interesting comparative reading of Barthes's analytical method in *S/Z* and Ken Jacobs experimental film *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* (1969), which, akin to *S/Z*'s textual analysis, deconstructs, manipulates and re-frames a small fragment of found footage from a 1905 film, see Nicole Brenez, 'Recyling, Visual Study, Expanded Theory: Ken Jacobs, Theorist, or the Long Song of the Sons', in *Optic Antics: The Amazing Cinema of Ken Jacobs*, ed. Michele Pierson, David E. James, and Paul Arthur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 163.

[277] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 444.

[278] Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', pp. 54-55.

glossed. Yet unlike *S/Z* – which while spacing Balzac's text into units nonetheless retains the novella's narrative sequencing – these books perform 'an aleatory cutting-up' [a *découpage*] and organization of their material.[279] This aleatory organizing principle seeks to counter what Barthes terms the 'constraints' of 'syllogistic, Aristotelian development': 'My aim is to deconstruct the dissertation, to deflate the reader's anxiety, and to reinforce the critical part of writing by fracturing the very notion of the "subject" of a book'.[280] In *The Pleasure of the Text*, the fragments are organized according to letters of the alphabet, a method Barthes will deploy in both *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (1975) and *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977).[281] As he writes in the former, the 'alphabet is euphoric: no more anguish of "schemata", no more rhetoric of "development", no more twisted logic, no more dissertations! an idea per fragment, a fragment per idea'.[282] Essential to this fragmentary writing method, as Denis Hollier points out, was Barthes's use of the index card to record citations, notes and ideas, a practice which dates back to his book on Michelet. For as Hollier explains, in contradistinction with 'the sequential irreversibility' of the pages of the notebook and the book in general, an index card filing system 'is indefinitely expandable, rhizomatic (at any point of time or space, one can always insert a new card)' – an idea that was already manifest in the expanding fabric of Montaigne's *Essais*, which

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[279] Barthes, 'An Almost Obsessive Relation to Writing Instruments' (1973), in *The Grain of the Voice*, pp. 181-182.

[280] Ibid., pp. 181-182. Rather than simply renouncing constraint, however, Barthes sees the method as one of 'controlled accident'

[281] *A Lover's Discourse* consists of a book of fragments on the discourse of love in figures such as Goethe, Proust, Flaubert, Freud, Lacan, and Nietzsche. See Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

[282] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 147. In a fragment titled 'Later' (*Plus tard*), and recalling the Romantic fragment, Barthes describes these fragments as 'projects', which 'fulfil themselves, partially, indirectly, *as gestures*, through themes, fragments, articles'. Ibid., p. 173. As Barthes writes in *A Lover's Discourse*: 'No logic links the figures, determines their contiguity: the figures are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative…In linguistic terms, one might say that the figures are distributional but not integrative; they always remain on the same level'. This 'horizontal discourse', as Barthes continues, contains 'no transcendence, no deliverance, no novel (though a great deal of the fictive)'. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp. 6-7.

followed from the recent invention of moveable type.[283] Moreover, and recalling Kracauer's reflections on the photographic archive, the 'interior mobility' of an index card file allows for a 'permanent reordering' of material – I will return to some of these ideas in relation to the organizational form of the card catalogue in Soviet Factography.[284]

This fragmentation and reordering of the text and photographic archive is further explored in Barthes's monograph, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Echoing Montaigne's essayistic self-portrait, the latter presents a biography or portrait of Barthes's 'self', as opposed to an autobiography of *himself*. The book begins with a portfolio of photographs, predominantly taken at the time of Barthes's youth, which is followed by fragments (in the form of a dictionary of key names, themes, and concepts from Barthes's life and writing) that are occasionally interrupted by more visual material: snapshots, doodles, and illustrations. While the relation between the text and images is generally rendered oblique or obtuse, the preponderance of images of childhood in the first part of the book and of text in the second, as Martin Jay argues, clearly suggests a Lacanian narrative, 'to be sure incomplete, from the Imaginary to the Symbolic'.[285] The photographs from the author's youth thus form the starting point for Barthes's attempt to undo the 'image-repertoire' of his 'self'; an undoing or dismantling of the author's identity (or the book's subject) that is enacted in a number of ways. Most notable here is Barthes's playful use of what Jakobson terms 'shifters', particularly the pronouns 'I', 'he', R. B.' and 'you', which Barthes uses to refer to 'himself'.[286] As Barthes writes at the beginning of book, recalling his remarks on the novelistic in his

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[283] Denis Hollier, 'Notes (on the Index Card)', *October* 112 (Spring, 2005), p. 40. As Beaujour notes, 'even if Montaigne does not use a *card index*…he is already in the position of a modern researcher'. Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, pp. 112-113.

[284] Hollier, 'Notes (on the Index Card)', p. 40

[285] Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 447. 'As if to make the association even more explicit, the initial, uncaptioned photo prior to the title page is of a youngish woman on a beach striding in very soft focus toward the camera; in the illustration list at the end, she is identified as the "narrator's mother". In the album itself, there is an oval of the smiling mother, this time with the infant Roland in her arms. Underneath, Barthes has placed the caption "The mirror stage: "That's you""'. Ibid, pp. 447-448.

[286] Ibid., p. 447.

writing: 'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel', adding later, 'or rather by several characters'.[287]

In his final book, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), Barthes returns to the theme of photography which had been a subject of several well-known earlier essays.[288] As W. J. T. Mitchell notes, it is one of the few essays on photography 'that approaches the status of a photographic essay', in that, as in *Roland Barthes*, the photographs that *Camera Lucida* incorporates do not function simply as illustrations, but are given an independent or co-equal status to the text.[289] The book, which is made up of forty eight short sections, is structured in two parts: the first twenty four outlining Barthes's subjectivist phenomenology of photography; the second reflecting on themes of memory and mourning, which were occasioned by the death of Barthes's mother.[290] Central to the book is Barthes's distinction between two kinds of reading or experiencing photographs: the '*studium*' and the '*punctum*'. Whereas the *studium* designates the culturally coded and connoted meaning of a photograph, which is *publically* available to semiotic decoding; the *punctum*, akin to the *obtuse* meaning discussed by Barthes in his discussion of Eisenstein, is that 'wound' or 'prick' *privately* experienced by the subject when they resist the *studium* of the photograph to look away towards a decentred and pointed detail.[291] These stray, uncoded and accidental features of a photograph open the image metonymically onto a contingent realm of memory and subjectivity, wherein 'insignificant' details come into 'contact' with Barthes's

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[287] Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, p. 119.

[288] See Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', in *Image-Music-Tex*, pp. 15-31; and 'Rhetoric of the Image', in ibid., pp. 32-51.

[289] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p. 302. Exemplary here, as Mitchell notes, is the frontispiece of *Camera Lucida* – a colour polaroid by Daniel Boudinet of a veiled, intimate *boudoir* – which never receives any direct commentary in the text, and which is likely intended to connote the idea of photography as enigmatic, veiled, erotic, and funereal. Ibid., p. 302.

[290] If the first part of the book, as Martin Jay points out, stresses the pleasure of the image, the second stresses pain and mourning. Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 451. As Stafford notes, Barthes's search for his mother's essence in the photograph recalls Michelet's conception of history writing as one of resurrection – an idea to which I will return when discussing Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Stafford, *Roland Barthes*, p. 149.

[291] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 182.

'mnemic reserve'.[292] As Barthes says of the *punctum*, 'it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*'.[293] 'Over and over again', as Silverman writes, *Camera Lucida* attempts to irradiate 'otherwise insignificant – or even culturally devalued – details in photographs which Barthes studies with a keen, remembering eye'.[294] This is why, as Roberts notes, while *Camera Lucida* represents one of the most important books written on the photograph, politically it is also one of the weakest, displacing the social ontology and relationality of photography with 'a subjectivist and aestheticist détente with the world'. This is reflected in Barthes's turning away from any images (such as war photography) whose violence interrupts 'his "freedom" to judge' pensively and aesthetically – we could contrast Barthes's subjectivist account of photography here with Benjamin's political and historical notion of the 'optical unconscious', which I discuss in the following chapters.[295] Indeed, as Silverman contends, in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes is generally 'less motivated by the desire to shift the terms through which we apprehend the world than by the more conventionally aesthetic wish to assert the superiority of his own look and the uniqueness of the sensibility which informs it', with the content of the photograph serving only 'to activate his own memories', stripping photographs of all their 'historical specificity'.[296] In contrast to this aesthetized mode of interpretation, the following chapters will examine artists and filmmakers whose work entails a critical reflection on the different socio-

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[292] Ibid., p. 182.

[293] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1981), p. 55.

[294] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 183. This opposition between the *studium* and *punctum*, as Mitchell notes, is enacted in the book's 'double captioning' of photographs, which divide themselves into scholarly, bibliographic identification of photographer, subject, date, etc. and an italicized quotation registering Barthes's personal response. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, n. 18, p. 303.

[295] John Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 4-5. As Roberts continues, this 'construction of the "pensive" spectator (the spectator who is free to highlight the most insignificant detail in a photograph as a sign of spectator freedom at the expense of the photograph's manifest content) is alive and well today in Jacques Rancière's and Michael Fried's writing on photography. Both adopt a version of the pensive spectator as an explicit critique of the social ontology of photograph and of the documentary tradition, as a judgment on politics as an imposition on the spectator, and, therefore, in their respective ways *becalm* photography'. Ibid., p. 5.

[296] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 183.

historical dimensions of images (whether photography or film), presenting a continuous

essaying of what and how images represent.

Chapter 2. From Plotless Prose to Plotless Films: The Essay Form in the Soviet Avant-Garde

> 'Dramatised anecdotes have been the building blocks of the cinema. Its perennial characters
> have been inherited from the theatre and the novel...It is a particular society, not a particular
> technology, that has made the cinema like this. It could have consisted of historical analyses,
> theories, essays, memoirs.'[1]

This chapter explores the essay form in the Soviet avant-garde, focusing on the literary and photographic practices of Soviet Factography, as well as the cinematic montage essays of Esfir Shub, Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein. While Vertov's canonical silent city symphony, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), and Eisenstein's notes (1927-1928) toward his project to make a film based on Marx's *Capital* are often referenced in literature on the essay film, these references operate curiously adrift from any critical discussion of Vertov's and Eisenstein's theory and practice of montage, as well as the importance of various 'plotless' forms of writing for the Soviet avant-garde more generally. Section 1 examines how in the mid-to-late 1920s the literary and artistic movement of Soviet Factography promoted various essayistic and journalistic forms of writing, such as the essay-like *ocherk* and the feuilleton, which were inflected by the paratactic forms of the newspaper, the photo-essay, and the montage film, in order construct what John Roberts terms 'a Modernist "realism" of the multiperspectival'. Section 2 looks at how debates around Factography fed into disputes around the newsreel documentary through a discussion of Shub's historical compilation films and Vertov's experimental newsreels, which, as I show, were modelled on various literary forms (the *ocherk*, the feuilleton, the poetic survey), and grounded in a poetic and rhetorical conception of montage as the construction of differential intervals between disparate phenomena. Section 3 provides a close reading of Eisenstein's notes (penned in the late 1920s) for his project to make a so-called film-essay based on Marx's *Capital*, in which the social and economic mediations of society would be disclosed through a complex associative montage of image fragments and everyday scenes, connecting the latter to Eisenstein's theoretical reflections on intellectual montage.

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[1] Guy Debord, *Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents*, trans. and ed. by Ken Knabb (Oakland, Calif.: AK Press, 2003), pp. 145-146.

2.1. Reportage or Portrayal: The *Ocherk*, the Photo-Series, and the Montage of Facts in Soviet Factography

The word essay [*esse*] did not appear in Russia until the middle of the nineteenth century, and was not typically used as a genre designation until towards the end of the twentieth century.[2] When the first translation of Montaigne into Russian was published in 1803, *Essais* was instead translated as *Opyty* [*Experiments*]. The absence of the term from early modern Russian literature is reflected in the alternative designations that analogous short prose forms took – *etiudy* [studies], *zapiski* [notes], *rassuzhdenie* [thoughts] – as well the importance of extra-literary forms such as the letter and diary.[3] A prevalent corresponding form to the tradition of the essay in Russia is that of the *ocherk*. Commonly defined as a literary sketch, the *ocherk* dates back to the eighteenth century, with many Russian writers of narrative fiction in the nineteenth century additionally writing *ocherki*.[4] Regarded as both a property of the fields of literature and journalism, the majority of *ocherki* appeared in periodicals and newspapers rather than book form. A characteristic feature of the *ocherk*, as Deming Brown notes, is its combination of 'narrative with analysis', which has led it to be linked with the short story [*rasskaz*].[5] What distinguishes the *ocherk* and the *rasskaz*, however, is the narrative means which each employs: the emergence of the narrative in the *ocherk* 'is placed not on nuances of character or on intrigue, as it is likely to be in a work of fiction, but rather on exposition and the arrangement of documentary detail'.[6] Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, as Jeremy Hicks notes, the 'essay-like' *ocherk* and the feuilleton became key journalistic forms for their capacity to *rework* 'factual material' and

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[2] See Brian Horowitz, 'Russian Essay', in *Encyclopaedia of the Essay*, ed. Tracy Chevalier (London and Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), p. 1516.

[3] On the use of the letter form, see William Mills Todd, *The Familiar Letter as a Literary Genre in the Age of Pushkin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Exemplary of the diary form are Dostoyevsky's journalistic articles, written in the 1870s, which were often signed under the title, 'A Writer's Diary'.

[4] Deming Brown, 'The Ocherk: Suggestions Toward a Redefinition', in *American Contributions to the Sixth International Congress of Slavists II* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), p. 29.

[5] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[6] Ibid., pp. 36-38.

information in an engaging manner.[7] These two genres 'represent two major tendencies in Soviet journalism: the tendency towards sharp juxtapositions, irony and critical edge in the feuilleton, and the tendency toward description' in the *ocherk*.[8] Construed as 'part scientific inquiry' and 'part literary composition', as Devin Fore observes, the genre of the *ocherk* closely 'approximates' the Western European tradition of the essay.[9] This approximation has led *ocherk* to be translated into English as 'essay', consequently obscuring the specific history of the genre, such as its significance as a form in mid-to-late-1920s for Soviet Factography.[10]

Although many elements of Soviet Factography were already articulated by the mid-1920s in *Lef* (1923-1925), the journal for the Left Front of the Arts, it was in the latter half of the decade, with the journal's reincarnation as *Novyi lef* [*New Left*] (1927-1928) that the movement came to prominence.[11] The qualifier 'new' reflected not only a changed editorial board at the journal, but a significant theoretical shift towards various Factographic practices, most notably photography, film and a 'literature of fact' [*literatura fakta*].[12] That

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[7] Jeremy Hicks, *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 9-10. Leon Trostky famously viewed the development of a new 'journalistic style' in the USSR as a key component of the revolutionary cultural movement. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (1924), trans. Rose Strunsky (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), p. 46.

[8] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 10.

[9] Devin Fore, 'Introduction', *October* 118 (Fall 2006), p. 9. The introduction prefaces a special issue, edited by Fore, on Soviet Factography.

[10] See, for example, the translation of Viktor Shklovsky's 1929 article '*Ocherk* and Anecdote' as 'Essay and Anecdote' in Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher (Elmwood Park, Ill.: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), pp. 206-209.

[11] The Left Front of the Arts were comprised of various writers, artists and critics, associated with the avant-garde groups of Futurism, Formalism, Constructivism and Productivism. For a detailed history of *Lef*, see Halina Stephan, *Lef and the Left Front of the Arts* (Munich: Sagner, 1981).

[12] As Leah Dickerman notes, admitted alongside the three leading stalwarts of *Lef* – Osip Brik, Mayakovsky, and Nikolai Aseev – were the writer Sergei Tret'iakov (who took over Mayakovsky's editorship of *Novyi lef* for its last five issues) and Aleksandr Rodchenko, the Constructivist artist and photographer, who had designed the earlier journal, but had played a more marginal role in developing its content. The interest in photography and film was exemplified by Rodchenko's photographs, as well as film stills (from the work of Vertov and

Factography was understood to be an explicitly 'photographic mode of writing', as Leah Dickerman notes, is indicated by the neologism *fakto-grafiia*, 'which proposes an analogy between the light-writing of photography and the inscription of fact in this new type of prose production'.[13] Often referred to as 'documentary prose', this mode of writing represented a rejection of the conventions of belles lettres and the psychological and realist novel promoted by groups such as Prolekult and RAPP.[14] Factography thus 'emerged within a contemporary contest of realisms', explicitly defining itself as a countermodel to the Socialist Realist literature and painting that was appearing in mid-1920s and would later be canonized as official policy in the 1930s.[15] For Factographers, classical realist forms were considered no longer an adequate vehicle for portraying a contemporary Soviet society utterly transformed by revolution and technology. As the foremost champion of Factography, the writer, theatre director and correspondent, Sergei Tret'iakov proclaimed in a contribution to the 1929 collection *The Literature of Fact*: 'We are outgrowing the epoch of the story and the novel, and entering the era of the *ocherk*'.[16] In addition to the *ocherk*, Tret'iakov also lists the memoir, travel notes, articles, the feuilleton, reportage, investigations, and 'documentary montage', which he opposes to 'belletristic forms of novels, novellas, and short stories'.[17] This opposition, as he stipulates, is conceived as decidedly not a 'battle' to establish 'the literature of fact as an aesthetic genre (into which it will probably degenerate), but…as a method of utilitarian publicisitic work on present-day

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Eisenstein), that populated its covers and pages. Leah Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', *October* 118 (Fall, 2006), p. 133.

[13] Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', p. 134.

[14] Proletkult, a portmanteau for 'proletarian culture', was a federation of cultural societies existing between 1917-32. Established by Aleksandr Bogadanov and Anatoly Lunacharsky, it sought to promote proletarian culture across the fields of visual art, literature and drama. Initially 'Left Bolshevik' in its political orientation, by the end of the 1920s the majority of its organizations had become conservative supporters of Stalin. RAPP is an acronym for the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers.

[15] Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', pp. 135, 138.

[16] Sergei Tret'akov, 'To Be Continued', *October* 118 (Fall 2006), p. 54. The collection was edited by Nikolai Chuzhak. Its full title reads *The Literature of Fact: The first Anthology of Documents by the Workers of LEF*.

[17] Sergei Tret'iakov, 'What's New' (1928), in *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928*, ed. Anna Lawton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 270.

socialist problems'.[18] In relation to both literature and photography, Tret'iakov expounds a

functional concept of art that is concerned not with developing a singular '*Lef* style' that

would then be axiomatically applied to the particular problem at hand, but advancing a

wide range of inductive and experimental methods that would take the concrete particular

as its point of departure.[19] As he put it in a talk delivered in 1931: '[s]tyle arises out of social

practice…as the new life forces the application of literary weapons in new ways'.[20] That

documentary in the 1920s had not yet been 'codified' as a stable genre, with its attendant

stylistic tropes, as Fore points out, was not only a sign that such forms might serve this

function, but that they might in some sense be 'commensurate with the new socialist

reality'.[21]

The belief that new themes could be effectively communicated through old, worn-out forms

and genres was denounced by Tret'iakov for its 'militant passéism'.[22] Accordingly, the 'fight

for fact against fiction' was interpreted as the continuation of the Futurist struggle against

passé artistic forms.[23] Tret'iakov's interpretation of Factography and *Novyi lef* as an

advancement of Lef's Futurist logic draws significantly on the work of the Russian Formalists

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[18] Ibid., pp. 271.

[19] Sergei Tret'iakov, 'Photo-Notes' (1928), in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher Phillips, trans. John E. Bowlt (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), p. 252. As Fore contends, the 'experimental science pursued by the factographers' was clearly distinct from 'the abstract calculus of Western rationalism', instead presenting 'an inductive, epistemologically compromised science that took the absolute particular, rather than the universal, as its point of departure'. Fore, 'Introduction', p. 8.

[20] Sergei Tret'iakov, 'The Writer and the Socialist Village', in *October* 118 (Fall 2006), p. 68. The talk was delivered in German at Berlin's Society for the Friends of the New Russia on January 21, 1931, and had a significant impact its Weimar audience, most notably Walter Benjamin. Ibid., 64.

[21] Fore, 'Introduction', pp. 9, 7. This absence of any single methodology or model, as Fore observes, is indicated by the plurality of names with which documentary practices were designated: 'factography, reportage, factism, documentarity'. Ibid., p. 9.

[22] Sergei Tret'iakov, 'Happy New Year! Happy *New Lef*!', in *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, p. 265.

[23] Tret'iakov, 'What's New', p. 270. As he defined Futurism in the first issue of *Lef* (1923): Futurism 'was never a school' that settled on 'given aesthetic clichés', but the ceaseless 'revolutionary ferment that without respite impels us toward…the search for ever newer forms'. Tret'iakov, 'From Where to Where? (Futurism's Perspectives)', in *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, p. 205.

(who formed an important part of the Lef circle), in particular, their understanding, developed in the 1920s, of literary and, more generally, artistic evolution, or what Boris Eichenbaum termed 'the dialectical change of forms'.[24] Whereas the earlier Formalist method had focused on the nature of poetic language, and adopted a synchronic perspective in order to study what Roman Jakobson called 'literariness' [*literaturnost*], in its differentiation from everyday forms of language, later investigations adopted a diachronic perspective in order to analyse the historical process of literary change.[25] The Formalist understanding of the immanent properties of verbal art and the mechanisms of literary evolution were related to an early engagement with the emergence of Futurism in Russia, particularly the theoretical and poetic practice of the Cubo-Futurists.[26] In Viktor Shklovsky's 1914 pamphlet, 'Resurrecting the Word', he characterized the aim of Futurism as 'resurrecting things' by 'returning the sensation' to our experience of words that have become 'familiar'.[27] This was generalized by Shklovsky as 'a definition of "poetic" and, more generally, "artistic" perception', defined as 'perception in which form is experienced'.[28] 'The goal of art', as he writes in his 1917 essay, 'Art as Device', 'is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing', things in everyday life that have become automatized or familiarized. The 'device of art' achieves this de-automatization or de-familiarization through 'the "*ostranenie*" [making strange] of things and the complication of form'.[29]

The claim that the function of art was to renew perception through form had implications for a theory of literary evolution. As Shklovsky wrote in 1919, a 'new form arises…in order to

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[24] Boris Eichenbaum, 'The Theory of the "Formal Method"' (1925), in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion R. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 136.

[25] In their short 1928 text, 'The Problems in the Study of Language and Literature', Jakobson and Tynyanov define these two aspects of the Formalist method in terms of a synchronic (static or systematic) and diachronic (evolutionary or historical) concept of language and literature. See Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 48.

[26] On the relation between cubism and Russian Futurism see Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 110-133.

[27] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Resurrecting the Word', in *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, ed. and trans. Alexandra Berlina (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 63, 64.

[28] Ibid., p. 64.

[29] Shklovsky, 'Art as Device', in *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, p. 80.

replace an old form which has already lost its artistic quality'.[30] The automatization of form, as Yuri Tynyanov argued in his 1924 essay, 'The Literary Fact', necessitates a dialectic of 'ceaseless dynamism' and 'evolution'.[31] Tynyanov added to this account a more nuanced understanding of formal change, now construed not simply as a 'sudden complete renovation' or a mere *linear* 'replacement' of ossified canonical forms and genres by new ones, but rather a perpetual shift or 'mutation' in the *structural functions* of formal elements.[32] Evolution in literary form, moreover, is said to find 'the phenomena it needs' for renewal, outside the literary system, 'in the field of everyday *life*'.[33] Letter-writing, for instance, which once lay outside literature, was 'lifted out of everyday life where it had functioned as a document…becoming a fact of literature'.[34] Tynyanov's essay also notes the 'awakened interest' in newspapers and journals in their capacity as 'special works of literature, as constructions'.[35] If, as Ken Hirschklop notes, Lef writers in 1923 were concerned with developing an expanded Futurist poetics as a laboratory for generating new linguistic structures (a deforming of received forms of poetic and everyday speech with the potential for their practical use), by 1924 they would find ready-made an exemplar of this linguistic politics in the form of the newspaper.[36]

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[30] This citation is taken from Shklovsky's 1919 'The Connection of Devices of Plot Formation with General Devices of Style', quoted in Herbert Eagle, 'Afterword: Cubo-Futurism and Russian Formalism', in *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes*, p. 297. As Eichenbaum notes, 'Shklovky's essay marked the changeover from our study of theoretical poetics to our study of the history of literature...[and] resulted in the evolution of our concept of form. We found that we could not see the literary work in isolation, that we had to see its form against a background of other works rather than by itself'. Eichenbaum, 'The Theory of the "Formal Method"', pp. 118-119.

[31] Yuri Tynyanov, 'The Literary Fact', in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. David Duff, trans. Ann Shukman (London: Longman, 2000), p. 37.

[32] See Yuri Tynyanov, 'On Literary Evolution' (1927), in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Normal, Ill: Dalkey Archive, 2003) pp. 76-77.

[33] Tynyanov, 'The Literary Fact', p. 39.

[34] Ibid., p. 41. For an example of the employment of the letter form see Shklovsky's 1923, *Zoo, or, Letters Not About Love*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Normal, Ill.: Dalkey Archive, 2001). The book, which was written during Shklovsky's exile in Berlin, mixes fiction, autobiography, and literary theory.

[35] Tynyanov, 'The Literary Fact', p. 44.

[36] Ken Hirschkop, 'Short Cuts Through the Long Revolution: The Russian Avant-Garde and the Modernization of Language', *Textual Practice*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1990), pp. 430-431.

The interest in working with mass cultural forms such as the newspaper was part of a broader reorientation by the Soviet avant-garde in the 1920s away from a preoccupation with the *faktura* of the art work (its material elements) and toward an active engagement with the informational components of artistic practice.[37] Crucial in this shift was the 'precipitate transformation' of the Soviet Union in the 1920s into 'a modern media society', effected by the proliferation of technologies such as radio, film, photography, and the illustrated press.[38] Significant in this respect was Vertov's newsreel series *Kinopravda* [*Cine-Truth*] (1922-1925), which sought to extend the model of *Pravda*, the Bolshevik daily newspaper founded by Lenin in 1912, in terms of its 'approach to information, persuasion and communication'.[39] For constructivist artist Aleksandr Rodchenko, this reorientation entailed the abandonment of handcraft mediums (painting and sculpture) for the mechanical techniques of typography and photo-montage and, with the emphasis on Factography in the mid to late 1920s, single-frame photography.[40] The turn to photography

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[37] See Benjamin Buchloh 'From Faktura to Factography', *October* 30 (Fall 1984), pp. 82-119. Although *faktura* initially designated merely the textural and surface property of painting, sculpture, and many other arts, including verse (for Futurism, this comprised an attention to the material, i.e. the graphic and phonic elements of language independent of their signcative function), it was expanded by Constructivism to include the overall handling or working of the material constituents of a given medium, and thus a process of production in general. See Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution*, (Berkley, California; London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 12. In the 1921 'First Programme of the Working Group of Constructivists', written by Aleksei Gan, as well as his 1922 book *Constructivism*, Gan elaborated the three principles that lay at the basis of the constructivist approach as tectonics, faktura and construction. While tectonics encompasses the fusing of ideological and formal, and faktura the processing of material, construction reveals the process of structuring itself. See Aleksei Gan, *Constructivism*, trans. Christina Lodder (Editorial Tenov, Barcelona, 2014).

[38] Fore, 'Introduction', p. 6. Constructivism and Factography were also importantly connected to the pressure on artists and writers to serve the Soviet state. In the case of Constructivism, this pressure was tied to the uncertainties which followed the Civil War (1918-1921) and the partial return to a market economy with the New Economic Policy (NEP; 1921-1928). This pressure increased substantially with the launch of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928.

[39] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 8.

[40] See Buchloh, 'From Faktura to Factography', pp. 104-108. See also Margerita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924-1937* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 9-34.

and film by Lef during this period, as Roberts contends, was 'a means of keeping faith with avant-garde ideals' while at the same time 'participating within the demand for a new popular image culture'.[41] The result was a clear shift 'back to *representation*, but on terms that still held to the *non-artisanal* principles of productivism'.[42] A chief concern in Constructivist debates was the attempt to eradicate composition [*kompozitsiia*] from the formal organization of the constituent elements of a work of art, in favour of the principle of construction [*konstruktsiia*], which involved the suppression of 'artistic subjectivity' and the 'negation of hierarchy' in 'the interrelation of the work's formal elements'.[43] In Factography, the principle of construction is furthered in two principle respects: first, the suppression of the aesthetic emphasis on painterly and literary composition through the contingent forms of the photographic snapshot, and various *diaristic* and *journalistic* modes of writing; second, the negation of the isolated photograph and the dismantling of the classical realist novel by a constructive practice of montage inflected by the various forms of the photo-series, photo-text, film, and the newspaper.

In claiming an affinity with the 'non-compositional' and 'contingent', as Roberts argues, the photographic snapshot challenged both 'the hierarchy of artistic skills' and which 'artistic subjects are held to constitute legitimate aesthetic experience'.[44] In 'Against the Synthetic Portrait, for the Snapshot' (1928), Rodchenko berates the attempt by photographers to imitate heroic realist painting and its consequent symbolization of truth as 'immutable' and 'eternal'.[45] If 'the painterly portrait (the monument, the icon) was based on stasis and universal generalization', Tret'iakov correspondingly contends, then 'the snapshot is dynamic', designating 'all kinds of life shot in motion'.[46] The 'indicative and ostensive

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[41] John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography, and the Everyday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 19.

[42] Ibid., p. 19.

[43] Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, p. 12.

[44] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, pp. 77-78.

[45] Aleksandr Rodchenko, 'Against the Synthetic Portrait, for the Snapshot', in *Photography in the Modern Era*, p. 239.

[46] Sergei Tret'iakov, 'From the Photo-Series to Extended Photo-Observation', *October* 118 (Fall 2006), p. 74. The essay appeared in *Proletarskoe foto*, no. 4 (1931), alongside Max Al'pert and Arkadii Shaikhet's famous

function' of the photographic document for Factography, however, is not a fantasy of unmediated objectivity but, as Roberts argues, 'the basis of collective cultural praxis'.[47] Photography (as well as film), that is, are seen to 'not simply "reflect" the world but actively produce our understanding of it'.[48] Accordingly, Factography dismantles any positivistic and naturalistic notions of an unmediated or natural 'relationship between the photographic referent and photographic truth', which is instead reconfigured as a process of 'truth-disclosure'.[49] For Rodchenko, the 'photograph and other documents' serve to 'debunk' an aestheticist idea of painterly synthesis, as well the notion that a 'single' uncaptioned photograph could embody a privileged access to truth.[50] As he notes with respect to portraying the figure of Lenin, there exists no 'single, immutable portrait', but 'a file of photographs taken of him at work and rest, archives of his books, writing pads, notebooks, shorthand reports, films, phonograph records'.[51] As Rodchenko's archival list of materials suggests, the truth-claims of *visual* facts can only be constituted through a practice of 'critical *reconstruction*', as well as with the 'requisite discursive support'.[52]

With the improved technologies of reproduction it became increasingly possible to print together text-image combinations on the same page – a capacity that Rodchenko employed on the covers and pages of *Novyi lef*.[53] Rodchenko's interest in 'visual reportage', as

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photo-essay 'A Day in the Life of a Moscow Working-Class Family'.

[47] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, p. 35. As Roberts continues: 'the social ontology of photography is made on the basis of the social and political forces that pass through photography and not something that preexists these forces'. Ibid., p. 35.

[48] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, p. 20.

[49] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, pp. 30, 31.

[50] Rodchenko, 'Against the Synthetic Portrait, for the Snapshot', p. 241.

[51] Ibid., p. 241. Recalling Montaigne, Rodchenko states that 'a man is not just one sum total; he is many, and sometimes they are quite opposed'. Ibid., p. 241.

[52] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, p. 30.

[53] Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', p. 134. Rodchenko designed both *Lef* and *Noyvi Lef*, and served as the photo-editor (a new role in publishing) for the latter. In the early 1920s Rodchenko worked on the intertitles for Vertov's *Kino-pravda* films; a collaboration which was celebrated in Aleksei Gan's film-photography journal *Kino-fot*. See Christina Lodder, 'Promoting Constructivism: *Kino-fot* and Rodchenko's move into photography', *History of Photography*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter, 2000), pp. 292-299.

Margarita Tupitsyn details, resulted in a total commitment in the late 1920s to working for mass-media periodicals, and exploring the composite forms of the photo-series and the photo-*ocherk*.[54] As Tret'iakov argued, to move beyond the 'contingent' and 'isolated snapshot' it was necessary 'to enhance the moment either quantitatively or qualitatively' through the photo-series or photo-observation. Whereas the photo-series performs a *serial* process of accumulating and contrasting diverse photographs – for instance, 'the same phenomenon in different countries' or using 'different operations' – the extended photo-observation or photo-chronicle re-constructs the photographic moment as part 'single, integral process of development'.[55] The key cultural forms for this 'retemporalization' of the photographic document, as Roberts observes, were the photo-text and cinema, as well as the concomitant emerging interest in the archive as an organizational form.[56] Whereas the photo-text restores the photo-document 'to its literary/historical and narratological conditions of visibility', the photo-series 'provides a space of systematic relationality for the inscription of the photograph', channelling the photograph away from 'the confines of a singular, aestheticizing authorship'.[57] The serial and the discursive, as Cunningham observes, are understood not only to oppose the aestheticization of photography, but the essentially unrelational quality of photography as positivizing medium, which reifies reality by isolating and individualizing it.[58] This conception of the photograph as unrelational was inherently related to 'the challenge of the moving image' in the competing photographic

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[54] See Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, pp. 71-73.

[55] Tret'iakov, 'From the Photo-Series to Extended Photo-Observation', pp. 74, 77. As Tret'iakov writes: 'If one snapshot taken at random is a kind of infinitely thin scale [*cheshuika*] that has been peeled off the surface of reality, then serial photography or photo-montage lets us feel the true weight of one of reality's dense layers'. Ibid., p. 75.

[56] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, p. 115. On Rodchenko's archival photographic practice and the 'revolutionary archive' [*revarkhiv*] of Lef, see Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', pp. 146-147. In film, this archival practice was exemplified by Esfir Shub, whose historical compilation films I discuss in the following section.

[57] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, pp. 115, 56.

[58] David Cunningham, 'Renouncing the Single Image: Photography and the Realism of Abstraction', *Photographies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (July, 2016), p. 149.

technology of the cinema, with some photography directly mimicking the 'cut' of the cinema's multi-angled portrayal of reality.[59]

The impact of the cinema on literary form is embodied in Tret'iakov's first Factographic *ocherk*, 'Mokow-Peking'. Published in *Lef* in 1925, the *ocherk* documents, through a series of short titled sections, Tret'iakov's trip to take up a position as a foreign correspondent for *Pravda* in the Chinese capital. As Jacob Edmond observes, while the subtitle of the *ocherk* – A Travel Film' [*put'fil'ma*] – and its construction as a series of montaged details suggests the cutting techniques of the cinema, 'the spatial juxtapositions wrought by the railroad' are also connected by Tret'iakov to the genre of the newspaper, 'which presents disparate articles from disparate locations paratactically'.[60] In a 1927 essay, 'The New Leo Tolstoy' [*Novyi Lev Tostoi*], published in the first issue of *New Lef* , Treťiakov – punning on Lev and *Lef* – compares the 'epic' novels of Tolstoy to what he calls '[o]ur epic literature': namely, the newspaper, along with 'magazine journalism (the editorial, the article, the feuilleton), reportage (correspondent work, the *ocherk*, the review), and scientific and technical literature'.[61] Just as, the rise of the novel in the nineteenth century was tied to it being the 'only symbolic form' that could represent the geopolitical form of the nation-state, so, for Tret'iakov, the Soviet Union – as a federation comprising multiple national identifies and territories – required an alternative 'geopoetic' form, which was supplied by the newspaper-epic.[62] The newspaper thus proved 'poetically and politically expedient' in its 'sweeping away of conservative belletrist assumptions about literary genre', providing a dynamic vehicle for 'imagining the Soviet system'.[63] Moreover, the newspaper (along with the photo-

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[59] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, p. 104. As Roberts notes, it is the awareness of photography's 'subordination' to film that necessitates its re-theorization as a 'filmic or protofilmic language'. Ibid., p. 41.

[60] Jacob Edmond, 'Scripted Spaces: The Geopoetics of the Newspaper from Tret'iakov to Prigov', *Slavic Review* Vol 75, No. 2 (Summer 2016), pp. 311, p. 309.

[61] Sergei Tret'iakov, 'The New Leo Tolstoy', *October* 118 (Fall 2006), p. 49.

[62] Edmond, 'Scripted Spaces', p. 305. As Edmond argues, alongside 'the temporal rhythms of daily news as collective experience', the newspaper, unlike the novel (at least in its conventional nineteenth-century form), 'offers a spatial poetics—a geopoetics—built on the geographic reach and interconnectivity of its networks of production, distribution, and consumption'. Ibid., pp. 305-306.

[63] Ibid., pp. 308, 306.

series and photo-text) afforded Lef artists and writers to maintain a Constructivist emphasis on montage. No longer a creator, as Dickerman notes, 'the writer became a *monteur* of facts', with terms 'such as "aggregation," "accumulation," "collection," and "factomontage"' running through *Novyi lef*.[64]

The photographic snapshot served as an important metaphor for the fragmentary, notational and provisional strategies that Factography sought to develop in writing documentary prose: 'I will kodak [*kodachit*']', as Tret'iakov wrote of his 1925 travelogue.[65] In his introduction to *The Literature of Fact*, Nikolai Chuzhak promotes a series of 'provisional' documentary forms, which he terms a '*literature of becoming* [*literaturoi stanovleniia*]', for their capacity to detail 'quotidian' subject matter that 'major' canonical forms would deem 'uninteresting'.[66] In 'The Literature of Life-Construction' Chuzhak lists a number of literary forms he considers exemplary of this scrutiny of the everyday, including the 'documents' of Rodchenko's 1925 letters from Paris to his wife (fellow Constructivist artist Varvara Stepanova), and Shklovsky's 1923 memoirs of the civil war period, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922*.[67] These works are considered Factographic documents primarily for their mode of writing – first-person accounts told from the position of an eyewitness, without the mediation of an omniscient narrator – and were valued, as with photography, for their indexical character: the fact that they document a specific time and place via a particular perspective.[68] The significance of *A Sentimental Journey*, as Dickerman points out,

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[64] Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', p. 144.

[65] Maria Gough, 'Radical Tourism: Sergei Tret'iakov at the Communist Lighthouse', *October* 118 (Fall, 2006), p. 160. The word 'kodak' was coined in 1888 by George Eastman as a name for his invention of roll film. As Allan Sekula notes, Eastman saw the consonants of this neologism as expressing the mechanical snapping of the camera shutter. Allan Sekula, 'The Traffic in Photographs', in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), p. 101

[66] Nikolai Chuzhak, 'A Writer's Handbook', *October* 118 (Fall 2006), p. 80. Factography, for Chuzhak, must engage 'the "uninteresting," the "simple," the "quotidian"' with the aim of revealing '*the "quotidian" process* (be it the process of working, of striking, of repairing pants . . . whatever you can think of) in its inner being—*in its technics!*'. Ibid., p. 80.

[67] Quoted in Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', pp. 140-141. See Viktor Shklovsky, *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922*, trans. Richard Sheldon (Normal, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2004).

[68] Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', pp. 141-42.

is certainly not because of Shklovsky's ideological correctness, but rather the book's detailed focus – whether describing 'tinkering' with automobiles or the theory of plot – on the 'particular' over the 'synthetic'.[69] In *A Sentimental Journey*, as the title's allusion to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* suggests, Shklovsky uses the Sternian device of long digressions from the purported subject of the memoir (the civil war) as an organizing principle for incorporating various factual and theoretical material.[70] Discussing the 'documentary' genre of the *ocherk*, Shklovsky characterizes this privileging of descriptive mode over narrative exegesis as 'the adapting of literary invention…to a certain locality'.[71] Whereas the conventional plot of the realist novel 'squeezes out material' by 'colouring' it 'in the manner of fiction', the 'method of moving from fact to fact' in 'documentary prose', or what he terms 'plotless prose', becomes that of editing. The unworked material is edited in a manner akin to the genre of the feuilleton, incorporating whole 'excerpts' that retain the 'accidental affliction of the material itself'.[72]

Writing in 1932 on this 'trend' in documentary literature Lukács criticizes this 'experiment in form' for conflating the genres of journalism and 'creative literature' (i.e. the novel), as well as their respective methods of 'reportage' and 'portrayal'.[73] For Lukács, novelistic portrayal

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[69] Ibid., p. 143. As Chuzhak exclaims, Shklovsky 'talks about tinkering with automobiles, with the theory of the plot, with dirt, with firewood, with the reevaluation of Sterne, and with lice'; his 'scholarly prose' is 'more stirring than specialized lyrics!' Chuzhak, 'A Writer's Handbook', p. 90.

[70] In his 1921 commentary on Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Shklovsky famously distinguished between the plot [*syuzhet*] and the story [*fabula*]: the latter designates merely 'the description of events' that provides the 'material for plot formation'. Viktor Shklovsky, 'Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary', in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, p. 57. Shklovsky's commentary was first published as a monograph in 1921 and reprinted in *Theory of Prose* (1925 and 1929).

[71] Shklovsky, 'Essay and Anecdote', p. 208. Shklovky's article originally appeared in *The Literature of Fact* collection under the title 'Toward a Technics of Prose Beyond Plot', and was published the same year as the final chapter in the second edition of *Theory of Prose* under the title '*Ocherk* and Anecdote'.

[72] Shklovsky refers to this alternative form of integrating material as a 'form of denovelisation' [*razromanivanie*], in which the novel is 'squeezed out by the newspaper'. Ibid., pp. 208-209.

[73] Georg Lukács, 'Reportage or Portrayal?', in *Essays on Realism*, ed. Rodney Livingston and trans. David Fernbach (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), Ibid., pp. 49, 50-51. This leads, wrongly, in Lukács's view 'to the attempt to renew the novel with the means of journalism and reportage' – Lukács here gives the examples

remains the privileged form, for its ability *narrate* 'the overall process' of 'the economic and social forms' of society and its 'interconnections'.[74] What Lukács's either/or privileging of novelistic portrayal over journalistic reportage disregards, however, is the alternative narrative methods that these experiments in form sought to construct.[75] As Shklovsky observes, recalling Ricoeur's broadening of the concept of narrative from its diegetic modal form to a configurative operation, such documentary works are not 'devoid of semantic construction'; rather, the 'very fact of the existence of two facts side by side…gives birth to their correlation'.[76] This form of paratactic correlation or co-ordination, as Shklovsky notes, approaches the 'general orientation of a newspaper', in which the reader finds correlations 'not only *in* its articles but also *between* them'.[77] By synthesizing disparate fragments of information within and between its articles, that is, the 'schematized construction' of the newspaper – with its spatially discrete blocks of text that can be apprehended 'almost synchronically' – obliges the reader to, as Ricoeur would say, 'grasp together' its heterogeneous materials.[78] For Shklovsky, this form of paratactic correlation becomes a principle of literary construction at the level of the writing of plotless prose. The writer does this 'by transferring his work to a different plane'; that is, 'not by manipulating his plot' but employing a correlative method (akin to the photo-series), 'locating the point of intersection between' things in 'a certain word', or 'by relating a certain incident that has happened in the West and comparing it with a similar incident here'.[79] Rather than 'the conventional

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of Tret'iakov, Upton Sinclair and Ilya Ehrenburg as exemplifying this 'widespread' and 'international' trend. Ibid., pp. 45, 49.

[74] Ibid., p. 53.

[75] This antinomy reappears in Lukács 1936 essay 'Narrate or Describe?'. What is important for Lukács here is 'not any illusory "pure" phenomenon of narration or description', but the respective 'philosophies of composition' they represent. Wheáras narration is said to establish 'proportions' through the patterning of events, 'description' is said to present a *levelling* of events. Georg Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', in *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Arthur Kahn (London: Merlin Press, 1970), pp. 116, 127.

[76] Viktor Shklovsky, 'On the Fact That Plot Is a Constructive Principle, Not One from Daily Life' (1927), in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian (Udine: La Cineteca del Friuli – Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004), p. 268.

[77] Shklovsky, 'Essay and Anecdote', p. 209.

[78] Devin Fore, 'The Operative Word in Soviet Factography', *October* 118 (Fall 2006), p. 125.

[79] Shklovsky, 'Essay and Anecdote', p. 209.

methods of splicing story lines to form a novel', this spatialization of materials deautomatizes the naturalized chronological structures into which both narrative form and life habitually slip.[80] Consequently, instead of *merely recognizing* the narration of events as part of a temporal-causal sequence, the *laid bare* construction of plotless prose creates *a sensation of seeing*, by linking disparate material and enabling the reader to 'reassemble it once again'.[81]

Within Soviet Factography, as Roberts observes, there developed 'what might be called a "truth" of the discontinuous and disjoined', in which the 'complex interactions of human beings and social processes were seen as best reported through the discontinuous and accretive effects of montage'.[82] Lukács's framing dichotomy between reportage or portrayal, is accordingly reworked by Soviet Factography in terms of 'a Modernist "realism" of the multiperspectival'.[83] Portrayal consequently no longer consists in shaping materials according to conventional plot schemas, but, as Tret'iakov puts it, 'linking (comparing and contrasting)' elements so that they 'radiate social energy'.[84] While for Lukács, as Peter Bürger argues, the task of realism is similarly seen as 'the uncovering and artistic shaping of…the connections within social reality', this process of uncovering is subject to a necessary sublation in which the work is covered over through the 'creation of the appearance [*Schein*] of nature'. In opposition to this organic notion of the work of art, which 'seeks to make unrecognizable the fact that it has been made', the non-organic work calls attention to the fact that it has been constructed, or 'fitted' [*montierte*], with 'reality fragments', which 'breaks through the appearance [*Schein*] of totality'.[85] As Tupitsyn puts it in relation

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[80] Shklovsky, 'Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*', p. 33. This spatialization of plot recalls Shklovsky's analysis of Sterne's use of 'crosscurrent motifs', which are used to decelerate and disrupt the chronological action of the novel.

[81] Shklovsky, 'Essay and Anecdote', p. 209. The idea of laying bare or baring the device [*obnazhenie priema*] is famously developed by Shklovsky in relation to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which 'lays bare the technique of combining separate story lines to make up the novel' and 'accentuates the very structure of the novel' by 'violating the form'. See Shklovsky, 'Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*', p. 30.

[82] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, p. 31.

[83] Ibid., p. 26.

[84] Quoted in Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, p. 67.

[85] Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p. 72.

to Rodchenko's photo series and photo-*ocherki*, the attempt to shape the whole is renounced, and replaced with 'a montage of parts', which takes the form of 'an unfolding series of fragments'.[86]

Crucial in this montage of image and text fragments as an unfolding series is the attempt to reflect the historical present and the dynamics of the revolutionary process, which is construed as fundamentally open and incomplete; a process of totalization, or 'becoming' (as Chuzhak puts it), rather than totality.[87] This is why Factography privileged descriptive, paratactic, and provisional literary forms and techniques, over the closed narrative structures of the realist and historical novel. For as Lukács observes, whereas description 'contemporizes everything', narration 'recounts the past'.[88] Factography on the other hand, as Dickerman notes, proposes a literature aligned with what Émile Benveniste's termed the *discursive*, rather than the *historical* mode.[89] In contrast to the objective third-person narration of past events (presented without the intervention of the speaker), that is, Factography organizes its materials through the category of the first-person perfect, thereby creating 'a living connection between the past event and the present in which its evocation

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[86] Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph*, p. 67.

[87] A critical factor in the appeal by Factography for the proliferation of provisional and presentist documentary projects, as Fore underlines, was the impact of the 'massive industrial prometheanism' of the First Five-Year Plan – a conjunction that 'confirms a general pattern of historical consonance between industrialization campaigns and the documentary projects that intended to record and archive these transformations'. Fore, Introduction, p. 6.

[88] Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe?', p. 30. Lukács's favouring of the 'organicist aesthetics of the high bourgeois novel' as a means for portraying the totalising contradictions of capitalist social relations is, as Roberts argues, connected to his theoretical model, developed in *History and Class Consciousness* (written in 1922), of 'total reification', to which he opposed 'a utopian full class-consciousness'. This model leads Lukács to fetishize the pedagogic role of the Leninist party, which the novel comes to embody in the relation between 'the inert or latent class-consciousness of the reader and the ideal class-consciousness of the novel's hero'. Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, p. 34.

[89] Dickerman, 'The Fact and the Photograph', p. 41. For Benveniste, discourse includes 'correspondence, memoirs, plays, didactic works, in short, all the genres in which someone addresses himself to someone, proclaims himself the speaker, and organizes what he says in the category of person'. Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 209-210.

takes place'.[90] It is this endeavour to construct a paratactic and open-ended form of documentary filmmaking that would pull itself out of a closed narrative temporality of past events into the discursive space of the present that is central to the experimental newsreels of Dziga Vertov.

2.2. A 'card catalogue in the gutter': Esfir Shub's Historical Compilations and Dziga Vertov's Newsreel Film-Things

A key figure in the debates around Factography was the Lef-associated filmmaker Dziga Vertov and his group of *kinoks* [Cine-Eyes].[91] As Vertov proclaimed in his manifesto 'The Factory of Facts' [*Fabrika factov*] (published in *Pravda* in 1926), the *kinoglaz* [cine-eye] method that the *kinoks* had sought to develop over the past few years constituted a struggle against 'the factory of doves and kisses' – namely, narrative fiction film (embodied in Hollywood) – and the production of a 'FACTORY OF FACTS'; a documentary practice that consisted of '[f]ilming facts', '[s]orting facts', '[d]isseminating facts', and '[a]gitating with facts'.[92] Yet as is evident from the critical reception of his films in the latter half of the 1920s, Vertov's method came to be increasingly perceived by many of Factography's leading exponents as 'violating the factographic model'.[93] Writing on Vertov's 1926 film *Stride,*

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[90] Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, p. 210.

[91] *Kinoks* is a neologism coined by Vertov, which combines the word for cinema [*kino*] with *oko*, an archaic slavonicism for eye [*glaz*]. The main members of the *kinoks*, dubbed the 'Council of Three' [*Soviet troikh*], consisted of Vertov (typically credited as the author, or director/supervisor), Elizabeth Svilova (the editor and Vertov's wife), and Mikhail Kaufman (the cameraman and Vertov's brother). Although the *kinoks* were associated with Lef and Constructivism, publishing manifestos and articles in both *Lef* and the Constructivist magazine *Kino-Fot*, in which Aleksei Gan championed Vertov's *Kinopravda* as constructivist newsreels, the *kinoks* and Lef group, as Yuri Tsivian details, were often in conflict with each other. See Yuri Tsivian, 'Turning Objects, Toppled Pictures: Give and Take between Vertov's Films and Constructivist Art', in *October* 121 (Summer, 2007), pp. 92-110.

[92] Vertov, 'The Factory of Facts', in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 58-59. In Russia, the film studio was known as a film factory [*kinofabrika*], a metaphor that the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s often exploited.

[93] Malcolm Turvey, 'Vertov, the View from Nowhere and the Expanding Circle', *October* 148 (Spring, 2014), p.

Soviet! [*Shagai, Soviet!*], Shklovsky critiqued Vertov's artistic working over of the 'raw material' of newsreel footage, which was consequently 'deprived of its soul, its documentary quality'.[94] For Shklovsky, the 'whole meaning of newsreel lies in the date, the time, and the place. Newsreel without that is a card catalogue in a gutter'.[95] While, as detailed above, Shklovsky championed formal experimentation with plotless prose he grants newsreel no such licence.[96]

Shklovky's critique, as Mikhail Yampolsky observes, marks the beginning of a 'second period' of newsreel cinema, in which the 'long sequence' montage techniques of Esfir Shub were to dominate over the experimental constructions of Vertov.[97] 'Almost immediately' after its release Shub's 'compilation' newsreel, *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), 'became the ideal model for documentary film' and 'a standard of judgment for criticism' to be directed at filmmakers who were seen to diverge from that model.[98] Commissioned to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, Shub reedited newsreel footage (as well as Romanov home movies) from the final years of Czarist rule, in order to chronicle the events leading up to the Russian revolution (Figure 1). The material is

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[94] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Where is Dziga Vertov Striding', in *Lines of Resistance*, pp. 169-170.

[95] Ibid., p. 170. The card catalogue was a filing system for archiving photographs and film. Like the index card, the card catalogue renderes image and text into highly mobile units of information available for continuous reordering and rearrangement. A significant concern of Shklovsky's at the time was the practice of filmmaker's cutting up original footage to 'put bits of it into their films' before making duplicates, which he feared would end up turning 'our film archives into piles of broken film'. Ibid., p. 170.

[96] As Hicks points out, Shklovsky is, in part, simply reiterating the definition of the Russian term for newsreel, *khronika* [chronicle], which was 'applied to all films of record at this time', and 'implied a jumble of events given sense by chronological sequence'. Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 51.

[97] Mikhail Yampolsky, 'Reality at Second Hand', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1991), p. 162.

[98] Yampolsky, 'Reality at Second Hand', p. 161. In the 1920s Shub made two other historical 'compilation' films: *The Great Way* (1927) and *Lev Tolstoy and the Russia of Nicholas II* (1928). For an account of Shub's 'compilation' practice, see Jay Leyda *Films Beget Films: A Study of the Compilation Film* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971), pp. 22-31. See also Esther Leslie, 'Art, Documentary and the Essay Film', *Radical Philosophy* 192 (July/August, 2015), pp. 7-14.

organized by intertitles that are descriptive and devoid of metaphor, although sometimes ironic in tone. Shub's 'exemplary work', as Osip Brik argued, served to show that the 'montage of newsreel requires only the extremely careful and attentive presentation of the fact, playing it through to the end, and linking it with other pieces through an extremely subtle semantic link'.[99] For Shub, this method of compiling extended sequences enabled the viewer to attentively examine the footage on the screen; a decelerated temporality that the filmmaker Lev Kuleshov distinguished from Vertov's 'penchant for rapid montage', whereby sequences are 'too short' to be examined.[100] Whereas Shub presented material in an austere and impersonal manner – exemplifying what Rodchenko referred to as Factography's 'aesthetics of asceticism' – what predominated in Vertov, in Kuleshov's words, was a 'subjective-artistic montage'.[101] If Vertov's factory of facts was to live up to its aim of countering the 'manufacture' of 'played' (i.e. acted or staged) 'entertainment' films, as Shub contends, it would be necessary to 'remove its Futuristic sign'.[102]

At stake in the vicissitudes of these exchanges on the newsreel chronicle is the testing and interrogation of the nascent category of 'documentary', as well as the attendant tensions inherent in Factography's identification of the constitutive plasticity of film-facts. As Joshua

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[99] Osip Brik, 'Against Genre Pictures', in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 277.

[100] See Lev Kuleshov, 'The Screen Today' (1927), in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 273. As Shub phrased it, the aim of her compilation method was 'an emphasis not only to show the fact, but to enable it to be examined and, having examined it, to be kept in mind'. Quoted in Yampolsky, 'Reality at Second Hand', p. 163.

[101] Rodchenko, 'A Caution', in *Photography in the Modern Era*, p. 266; Kuleshov, 'The Screen Today', p. 273.

[102] Esfir Shub, 'The Manufacture of Facts' (1926), in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 152. Both Vertov and Shub positioned themselves against what was then called 'played' [*igrovoi*] (acted/scripted) studio film, arguing instead for the 'non-played' [*neigrovoi*] (non-acted) documentary newsreel. The association of 'played' film also with artistic *play* can be seen Shub's call for Vertov to remove his futurist sign.

Figure 1. *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*

Malitsky details, Factography considered the shaping and potential re-shaping of film images through 'entextualization', 'decontextualization' and 'recontextualization' to contain an at once discernible 'threat and possibility': a threat, that is, to their status as legible documents, and a possibility for their agitational deployment.[103] The 'manipulation' of film images, which, as Jay Leyda outlines, is central to the history of the compilation film, became a particularly pressing issue in the First World War, where newsreel footage began to be accumulated for propaganda purposes.[104] This exploitation of newsreel footage was followed in the 1920s by the emergence of more critical uses of 'found' or archival footage to construct alternative or oppositional histories; a tendency that was exemplified by the work Shub.[105] A significant influence on Shub's practice of editing archival footage, as Yuri Tsivian delineates, was her experience at the state film production body Goskino (later

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[103] Joshua Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film: Building the Soviet and Cuban Nations* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), pp. 166, 181.

[104] Leyda *Films Beget Films*, pp. 10, 17.

[105] As Jaimie Baron argues, although 'filmmakers and theorists have frequently used the term "found footage" to refer to reels of film found on the street, in the trash, or at a flea market and reserved the term "archival footage" for films found inside a bona fide archive, this dichotomy is becoming increasingly difficult to justify. Indeed, the extension of the word "archive" in common discourse to stand for all kinds of collections…calls for an expansion of the idea of the archive and the term "archival" to also include what might once have been referred to only as "found" documents'. Jaimie Baron, 'The Archive Effect: Archival Footage as an Experience of Reception', *Projections*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Winter, 2012), p. 103. As Sekula similarly argues in relation to photography, there are all sorts of archives: commercial, corporate, government, museum, historical, amateur, family, artists', private collectors', etc. Allan Sekula, 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital', in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 444.

Sovkino), where she worked as an editor in charge of titling and re-editing imported foreign films for domestic distribution, rendering these films 'suitable' for Soviet audiences.[106] Eisenstein, who in 1924 worked with Shub on re-editing Friz Lang's *Dr Mabuse* (1922), referred to the art of re-editing as both 'wise and wicked', adding that 'when it really reached the status of "art" rather than tinker hack-work – what infinitude of wit went into it!'.[107] As Shklovsky (who was also employed in re-editing department) summarizes: '[F]or the professional re-editor the man in the shot does not laugh or cry or mourn, he only opens and shuts his eyes and his mouth in a specific way. He is raw material. The meaning of a word depends on the phrase I place it in'.[108] It was in this context that the *Lef* film critic Viktor Pertsov conceived of the possibility of utilizing editing techniques to produce what he dubbed 'film-as-review', anticipating what would became a central strand in essayistic filmmaking – and contravening Bellour's idea of film as an 'unquotable' text. By 'intercutting' shots from a film, as Pertsov outlines, the 'film-as-review' would be able 'to compare different' film fragments, in a similar way to 'quotations' in literary criticism, as well as to add 'scholarly' or 'parod[ic]' 'filmic commentaries' to them. Commentary, or the expression of 'abstract ideas', for Pertsov, moreover, could be achieved indirectly through visual means: through 'the montage of similar and dissimilar material from different films', or 'by way of re-editing a film' so that its turns 'into an acerbic review of itself'.[109]

A striking feature of Vertov's films, as John MacKay observes, is the frequency with which they bring us almost immediately to…the tension between relatively autonomous "indexical

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[106] Yuri Tsivian, 'The Wise and Wicked Game: Re-Editing and Soviet Film Culture of the 1920s', *Film History*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1996), pp. 327-343.

[107] Ibid., p. 336.

[108] Ibid., pp. 338-339

[109] Ibid., pp. 337-338. This idea of integrating diverse fragments into a new situational context, and turning a film into an acerbic review of itself, would become central to the Situationist practice of *détournement*, which was first theorized by Debord and Gil Wolman in their 1956 pre-Situationist article, 'A User's Guide to Détournement'. As Debord and Wolman outline with regard to cinematic *détournement*, this could be implemented by taking whole films and adding a critical spoken commentary or by splicing multiple sequences from different sources with other elements (musical, pictorial or spoken) to compose a new works. Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, 'A User's Guide to Détournement' (1956), in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knabb (Berkley California: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), p. 19.

traces of a real past", and "the control of pastness", the sequencing and signifying work performed upon those (photographic) traces' – a tension that his films insistently 'inflame'.[110] By contrast, Shub's films are held up as a model by the Factographic movement because of her proficiency in giving an impression of balance between 'mobility and stability' in the material she employed, integrating and securing the disparate film fragments as part of an intelligible visual text.[111] Conversely, Vertov's indeterminate use of images was felt to render illegible or undermine whatever political message his films intended to communicate; an instability that was noticeably out of step with the demand of the time for a cinema that was 'intelligible to the millions'.[112] This privileging of Shubian precision over Vertovian imprecision was emblematic of a broader change within artistic debates within the Soviet avant-garde in the second half of the 1920s in relation to the category of montage, characterized by Buchloh as shift from a 'strategy of *contingency*' to one of '*stringency*'.[113] What occurs in this period is a shift in emphasis on the principle of montage away 'from rhetorical and visual complexity to communicability'; a criterion that was fulfilled by Shub's *restrained* organization or 'regulation' of the catalogued material according to a principle of chronological and thematic selection.[114] Yet what is curious about Shub's work being consistently held up as exemplary of the Factographic method, as both Malitsky and Yampolsky note, is that her use of historical material, organized according to a chronological structure, ran counter to Factography's promotion of a presentist and paratactic literary practice. The reasons for this, as Yampolsky and Malitsky argue, are at least three-fold: 1) archival footage provided a certain distance from the material for a more

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[110] John MacKay, 'Film Energy: Process and Metanarrative in Dziga Vertov's *The Eleventh Year* (1928)', *October* 121 (Summer, 2007), p. 49. Mackay is quoting from Philip Rosen's *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 234.

[111] Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film*, p. 166.

[112] See Leonid Trauberg, 'An Experiment Intelligible to the Millions', in *The Film Factory*, pp. 250-251.

[113] Buchloh, 'From Faktura to Factography', p. 107. As Malitsky argues, while Shub's strategy of long takes exemplified this form of *stringency* in its aiding 'the viewer to locate and identify the fact' that the film intended to render 'legible', isolating it from its surrounding 'noise', contingency returns in the form of the ability for the spectator to scan the moving-image for contingent details and make thematic connections. Malitstky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film*, p. 187.

[114] Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film*, p. 165.

sober, analytical treatment that was fetishized by Factography; 2) the presentation of recent history according to a simple chronological structure catered to the demands for intelligibility while allowing for other more subtle arguments and experiments to be attempted; 3) by 1926 *topical* newsreels had fallen out of favour and played a 'decreased role in communicating the vision of the nation-state and its political leaders'.[115]

Central to Shub's historical compilation films is a tension that, as Hayden White shows, is at the heart of all narrative historiography; namely, the effort 'to wed a mode of emplotment with a mode of argument or of ideological implication'.[116] In contrast to Ricoeuer's notion of emplotment as the operation that *dynamizes* every level of narrative articulation, for White, emplotment designates the way an 'open-ended chronicle of events' is 'fashioned into a story…of a particular kind' (i.e. Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, or Satire).[117] In White's terms, in *The Fall of the Romonov Dynasty* (despite the fact that the title suggests a tragedy), Shub emplots the history of the revolution according to the romantic mode, moving from images of oppression to images triumph. We can see a similar principle at work in her 1993 script for a film about the history of female oppression, which would, begin with cinematic images representing stereotypical depictions of women as objectified and second-class citizens, and transition to images depicting the liberation of women under the Bolsheviks.[118]

In contrast to Shub, Vertov obstinately refused to be 'forced to emplot' his films according to a 'comprehensive or *archetypal* story form', continuously experimenting with alternative

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[115] Ibid., p. 159.

[116] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 29.

[117] Ibid., pp. 6-7. White distinguishes between the following five levels of conceptualization in the historical work: 1) chronicle (the series of events as recorded in chronological order); 2) story (the chronicle's shaping into a given sequence of events with a beginning, middle and an end); 3) mode of emplotment (what kind of story it is, i.e. Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, or Satire); 4) mode of argument (the explanation of what happens in the story by way of formal or explicit argumentation); 5) mode of ideological implication (what particular political ideologies the former correlate to).

[118] See Vlada Petric, 'Esther Shub: Cinema is My Life', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Fall, 1978), pp. 429-448. See also Leslie, 'Art, Documentary and the Essay Film', pp. 12-13.

rhetorical, poetic and musical models for organizing his catalogue of film fragments in ways that retains their contingent and open-ended status.[119] Vertov accordingly understands documentary as requiring 'a whole series of new models' of what he termed 'newsreel film-things [*kino-veshchei*]', rather than limiting or narrowing documentary 'to any one type' (i.e. the historical-chronicle).[120] Reflecting in 1935 on the series of film-things that the *kinoks* produced throughout the 1920s, Vertov lists the forms of the 'film-*ocherk*', 'film-feuilleton', 'film-editorial' and 'film-poem' as some of the distinct sub-genres that his experiments in 'factual film writing' generated – a laboratory process he defines as 'film begetting films'.[121] In addition to such forms, and emblematic of Vertov's theorisation of film as a type of writing, is the use of first-person modes popular among Factographic writers, such as the travelogue and diary, as well as the collective-singular mode of the manifesto (often voiced from the standpoint of the camera-machine), regularly mixing these modes within single works.[122] This mixing similarly occurs at the level of the footage, which blends material shot by the *kinoks* – itself consisting of various camera techniques and methods of filming both staged and unstaged events – with second-hand material obtained from various sources. Furthermore, Vertov employs 'identical footage in a number of different works',

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[119] White, *Metahistory*, p. 8. This can, as we will see, be witnessed in Vertov's use of poetic and rhetorical devices such as refrain and direct address, which disrupts the film's narrative progression and brings it back to a present of discourse.

[120] Vertov, 'Against Leftist Phrases' (1928), in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 279. The term *kino-veshchi* belongs to a broader discourse in the 1920s about the 'thing' [*veshch*], exemplified by the trilingual journal *Veshch'/Gegenstand/Objet*, edited by El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenberg in 1922, as well as Arvatov's 1925 treatise 'Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing'. As Fore notes, the concept of thing was theorised as a 'social medium' which 'spanned industrial products, cultural works, and natural phenomena', becoming 'a central component of artistic strategies' which sought 'to coalesce technological making into political action'. Devin Fore, 'Dziga Vertov, The First Shoemaker of Russian Cinema', *Configurations*, vol. 18, no. 3 (Fall, 2010), pp. 373-374.

[121] Vertov, 'My Latest Experiment' (1935), in *Kino-Eye*, pp. 132-133. O'brien's translation of *kino-ocherk* as film-essay is another example of the way that the specific Soviet tradition of the *ocherk*, which Vertov is clearly drawing on, tends to be obscured.

[122] On Vertov's ascription of human predicates (namely, sight and speech) to the camera in his writings and films, see Malcolm Turvey, 'Can the Camera See? Mimesis in *Man with a Movie Camera*', *October* 89 (Summer, 1999), pp. 25-50.

establishing an 'intertextual axis of associations that cuts across the composition of each individual film', manifesting his conception of filmmaking as a 'continuous…production' and 'editing process'.[123] Kino-eye, as he proclaimed, is not the 'individual films' – the 'random labels' put on the 'individual exercises' – but the continuous 'experimental work' done by the 'movement' (including the articles and public speeches).[124] Vertov's notion of film betting films and emphasis on process over product can be read in terms of the morphological trend in Russian Formalism and its construal of 'individual structures' not as 'discrete entities', but as 'constantly arising' 'configurations', conceived as 'momentary stages of an ongoing morphogenetic process of transformation'.[125] Also an influence on Vertov here is Gan's Constructivist notion of 'tectonics', understood as the industrial processing of geological materials and energy.[126]

Lev Manovich formulates this relation between the catalogue and its organization as an opposition between the 'competing imaginations' of the 'database' and 'narrative'.[127] Drawing on the semiological model of Saussure, these cultural forms are correlated with the dimensions of the paradigm and syntagm which, as Barthes notes, represent two axes for

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[123] Devin Fore, 'The Metabiotic State: Dziga Vertov's *The Eleventh Year*', *October* 145 (Summer 2013), p. 13.

[124] Dziga Vertov, 'Kino-Eye' (an excerpt from 'Kino-Glaz', a speech at a meeting of *kinoks* in January 1926), in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 259.

[125] Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 61. This trend was exemplified by Vladmir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) who, as Steiner points out, derives his concept of morphology from Goethe, who conceived of 'organic forms as processes rather than products'. Ibid., pp. 70-1, 73.

[126] Gan takes the concept of tectonics from geology, 'where it is used to define the eruptions coming from the Earth's core'. For Gan, tectonics becomes 'a synonym for the organic, for the upsurge from the inner essence', which is to be 'smelted and forged' by a 'process of structuring', i.e. construction. Gan, *Constructivism*, p. 61-2.

[127] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001), p. 233. These 'two basic…impulses' of the database and narrative, Manovich contends, have taken various forms throughout history, with either one (typically some kind of hybrid of the two) taking a privileged position in different periods, and generally informed by the prominence and socio-cultural impact of the prevailing recording technologies and storage media of the time. Whereas the medium of literature, in Manovich's gloss, runs between a series of narrative and encyclopedic forms, photography 'privileges catalogues, taxonomies and lists', and film 'privileges narrative'. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, pp. 233-234.

articulating the elements of a system (whether natural languages or other sign systems such as film): the paradigmatic, according to a logic of associative selection, 'forming groups within which various relationships can be found'; the syntagmatic, according to a 'combination' of signs that form a chain that is 'linear and irreversible'.[128] If, as Manovich notes, the medium of film 'exists right in the intersection between database and narrative', the axis that film, embodied in the institution of the cinema, gravitated towards in the first half of the twentieth century, and which was further consolidated with the coming of sound towards the end of the 1930s, was a set of syntagmatic codes, derived, in part, from the novel and the theatre, now known as classical film narrative.[129] The temporality of the film apparatus – the linear forward movement of the film strip through the projector – is, as Mary Ann Doane shows, here fused with the temporality of cinematic diegesis, establishing a 'cinematic syntax' based on 'continuity editing' which confers upon the narrative the same linear 'irreversibility' as the apparatus.[130]

In Vertov's final silent feature, *Man with a Movie Camera* [*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*] (1929), as Manovich argues, Vertov endeavours to undermine the dominance of classical film narrative by simultaneously playing with and reflecting on the cinema's status as both database and narrative.[131] The film does so by operating simultaneously on several syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels: 1) the quasi-story of what an intertitle calls 'An Excerpt from the Diary of a Cameraman', and the subsequent sorting of this footage into a

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[128] Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 58.

[129] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, p. 237. As Manovich contends, every filmmaker engages with 'the database/narrative problem', whether 'self-consciously' or not, in shooting and accumulating the material that forms a database out which a narrative is constructed. Ibid., pp. 237-238.

[130] Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 29-30.

[131] The film's title can mean 'a man', 'the man' or 'man' (humankind) with a film or movie camera or, more generally, the production and wielding of the whole 'film-apparatus' [*kinoapparat*]. For a scene by scene analysis of the film, which highlights many of Vertov's caustic references to the theatricality of narrative fiction film, see Tsivian's audio commentary track on the DVD version of *Man with a Movie Camera* (BFI, 2015).

Figure 2. *Man With a Movie Camera*

catalogue of themes that become material for the film's editor (Elizabeth Svilova) to work

with (Figure 2); 2) the composite 'city symphony' genre constructed by the editor, made up

of footage from different cities and structured according to a dawn-till-dusk time-frame; 3)

the scenes in which we see an audience in a movie theatre watching the completed film.[132]

As Noël Burch observes, the film subverts 'the logic of successive significations', thereby

'denying our usual sense of chronology', by moving backwards and forwards between these

levels, or 'taking us along an axis which is no longer syntagmatic, but paradigmatic'. Each

shot is 'overdetermined by a whole set of intertwined chains of signification' that can only

be grasped topologically – a deciphering that consequently requires at least 'several

viewings'.[133] In addition to presenting a catalogue of contemporary themes –

modernization, the working day, vestiges of bourgeois life, poverty in socialism, etc. – the

film offers, as Annette Michelson notes, 'a summa of the silent cinema's resources and

achievements': freeze-frame, acceleration, slow motion, split-screen, fades,

superimposition, and animation.[134] While Vertov's deployment of such of techniques

received the charge of aesthetic formalism by some – most famously, Eisenstein

characterized *Man with a Movie Camera* as 'formalist jackstraws and unmotivated camera

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[132] Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, pp. 243, 239-41.

[133] Noël Burch, 'Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response', *October* 11 (Winter, 1979), p. 94.

[134] Annette Michelson, 'Dr. Crase and Mr. Clair', *October* 11 (Winter, 1979), p. 52. See also, 'From Magician to Epistemologist: Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera*', in P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in The Collection of Anthology Film Archives, vol. 1* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1975), pp. 95-111.

mischief' – the aim of Vertov's 'manifesto in celluloid' is precisely the opposite; namely, to demonstrate the analytical and agitational motivation behind such formal experiments.[135] This aim was recognized by Kracauer, who contrasted Vertov's semantic montage practice – which 'extract[s] meaning from the connections between the fragments of reality' he presents, and 'elucidates them by the very way in which he represents them' – to the 'associative linkages' of Walter Ruttmann's city-symphony, *Berlin* (1927), which 'are purely formal throughout'.[136] In contrast to Ruttmann's 'surface approach', as Kracauer later observes, Vertov's 'lyric documentary' endeavours to penetrate 'every element' with revolutionary ideas.[137]

The post-revolutionary period saw a number of political figures drawn to the cinema, interested in what Lenin, in his 1922 'Directive on Cinema Affairs', termed the mediums 'educational' potential.[138] Of '*all the arts*', as Lenin famously stated (as reported by the Commissar of Education Anatoli Lunarcharsky), '*for us the most important is cinema*'; adding that '*the production of new films imbued with Communist ideas and reflecting Soviet reality should begin with the newsreel*' – a statement that was repeatedly cited by Vertov.[139] In 1918 Lunarcharsky established the newsreel section of the newly founded Moscow Cinema

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[135] Sergei Eisenstein*, Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Ledya (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1977), p. 43. I take the term 'manifesto written in celluloid' from Tsivian, 'Dziga Vertov and His Time', in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 14. As Tsivian points out, Vertov intended to publish the manifesto which *Man with a Movie Camera* begins in *Pravda* before the release of the film, but was rejected. On learning this, Vertov printed the texts opening lines on title cards and inserted them at the beginning of the film. For the full manifesto, see Vertov, '*Man with a Movie Camera*, Absolute Kinography, and Radio-Eye', in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 318-19.

[136] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Man with a Movie Camera' (1929), in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 358.

[137] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 184-185. Ruttmann, like Hans Richter, came out of the 'Absolute Film' movement, a post-war Dada group of filmmakers centered in Berlin, whose early works were non-representational, experimenting with moving geometrical shapes and forms. The films of the late 1920s, such as Ruttmann's *Berlin*, or Hans Richter's *Inflation* (1928), are semi-abstract, organizing their representational filmed images primarily through figurative and formal associations.

[138] Vladimir Lenin, 'Directive on Cinema Affairs', in *The Film Factory*, p. 56.

[139] Anatoli Lunacharsky, 'Conversation with Lenin. I. Of All the Arts' (1925), in *The Film Factory*, p. 57.

Committee, appointing the journalist Mikhail Koltsov to direct the weekly newsreel series *Kinonedelia* [Cine-Week], which Vertov was to work on.[140] From early on, as Hicks notes, Vertov 'saw formal experiment as going hand in hand with the political task of creating a new kind of newsreel', distinct, as he stipulated, not only from the news chronicles produced by the French studios of Pathé and Gaumont, but *Kinonedelia* and the yearly *GoskinoKalendar* (the state film studio calendar which he produced between 1923 and 1925).[141] This remodelling of the newsreel form entailed a shift from *reportage* (the recording and presenting of events and information) to an experimental *documentary* practice that combined 'the evidential power of newsreel' with a form of montage based on what Jakobson terms the poetic or metaphoric function of language; that is, a mode of combination grounded in constructing a 'similarity' or 'dissimilarity' between elements, rather than ordering them according to a syntagmatic sequence.[142] Yet Jakobson's limitation of the metaphorical process to a 'generalized…semiotic phenomenon' fails to account for what is pertinent about the operation of metaphor in Vertov; namely, the 'properly semantic operation' of metaphoric *sense* and its *referential* relation to reality.[143] The power

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[140] *Kinonedelia* was produced irregularly between June 1918 and December 1919, with Vertov initially working only as an administrative clerk. In summer of 1918, when Koltsov was sent to the front to film the civil war, Vertov was asked to assume the role of chief editor. Malitsky, *Post-Revolution Nonfiction Film*, p. 46.

[141] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 14. As Vertov states: 'Only the latest montage techniques are capable of delivering an enormous quantity of instantaneous visual events within the narrow constraints of a cine-newspaper'. Quoted in Ibid., p. 14. As Vertov will state the 1929 article 'From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye': 'Kino-eye uses every possible means in montage, comparing and linking all points of the universe in any temporal order, breaking, when necessary, all the laws and conventions of film construction'. Vertov, *Kino-Eye*, p. 88.

[142] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 9. Drawing on the semiological model of Saussure, Jakobson opposes the syntagmatic 'combination' and *metonymic* 'build-up' of a 'sequence…based on contiguity' to the *metaphoric* (paradigmatic) 'selection…produced on the basis of equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity'. The poetic function, as Jakobson writes, '*projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*'. Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in *Language in Literature*, p. 71. While, as Jakobson observes, what predominates in the classical film narrative (he mentions D.W. Griffith) are syntagmatically oriented metonymic processes, such as a change in camera-angle or a synecdochic close-up, in Soviet filmmakers such as Eisenstein, what stands out is a tendency toward 'metaphoric montage'. Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in *Language in Literature*, p. 111.

[143] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (London and New York: Routledge), pp. 235, 5.

of the metaphorical statement, as Ricoeur notes, lies not only in its production of a new semantic pertinence through a semantic impertinence, but its capacity to 'redescribe' reality, which gives metaphor not merely a poetic function but, as was the case for Aristotle, a rhetorical one.[144] As V. N. Voloshinov similarly argues in his 1926 critique of Formalism:

> '*The extraverbal import a metaphor* – a grouping of values – and *its linguistic covering* – a semantic shift – are merely different points of view on one and the same real phenomenon. But the second point of view is subordinate to the first: A poet uses metaphor in order to regroup values and not for the sake of linguistic exercise'.[145]

While anticipations of Vertov's experiments with metaphoric montage can be located earlier, it is with the newsreel series *Kinopravda*, established in 1922, that his montage practice comes into its own.[146] As the opening credits to Vertov's *Kinopravda* 7 (1922) warns, what was being projected were not standard newsreels, but 'Newsreel experiments' [*opyti khroniki*].[147] As the title of the series suggested, Vertov's newsreel experiments were significantly informed by the journalistic forms of the *ocherk* and the feuilleton, linking footage of different times and places in an associative and paratactic manner.[148] The influence of the paratactic form of the newspaper and the laconic forms of poetry – a mixing of journalistic content with poetic form that would continue throughout Vertov's works – is highlighted in *Kinopravda* 5 and 21.[149] In the former, the material is organised via a scene

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[144] Ibid., p. 5, 235.

[145] V. N. Voloshinov, 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art (Concerning Sociological Poetics)', in *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, trans. I. R. Titunik (London and New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 195-96.

[146] As early as *Kinopravda* 1 (June 1922), as Hicks points out, Vertov, instead of the merely 'registering…events', edits 'together shots taken at different times and places', abstracting from the footage so as to 'construct an argument' with it. Ibid., p. 7. In contrast to *Kinopravda*, Vertov's *Kinonedelia* and *GoskinoKalendar* tended to be structured chronologically.

[147] In 'On the Organization of a Film Experiment Station' (1923) Vertov proposes producing at least six types of film: *Kinopravda*, 'Flash news bulletins', 'The humorous newsreel', 'Newsreel studies', 'Screen advertising', 'Experiments'. See *Kino-Eye*, p. 22.

[148] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, pp. 9-10.

[149] As Vertov would write in 1934: 'I work in the poetic documentary film'. See Vertov, 'From Notebooks and Diaries', in *Kino-Eye*, p. 183.

Figure 3. *Leninist Kinopravda: A Film Poem of Lenin*

showing a man reading a newspaper titled *Kinopravda*, with each turn of its pages generating a short sequence reporting on contemporary, yet geographically discrete, events.[150] In the latter – made for the anniversary of Lenin's death and titled *Leninist Kinopravda: A Film Poem of Lenin* (1925) – Vertov takes a line from a *Pravda* feuilleton written by Koltsov – 'Lenin/ but he does not move' – which is quoted as an intertitle and subjected to a poetics of repetition and parallelism, juxtaposing images of the motionless Lenin with those of mourners filing past the Bolshevik leader's coffin, accompanied by the words: 'The masses/ they are moving (Figure 3).[151] As with Vertov's expressive handling of documentary material, the intertitles in *Kinopravda*, which (unlike the standard typographical titles that he employed for the *Goskinokalendar*) consist of a jagged Constructivist font, become a constituent experimental element in the film, rather than a mere explanatory accessory.[152]

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[150] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 10.

[151] Ibid., p. 13.

[152] Exemplary are those designed by Rodchenko, in particular *Kinopravda* 14. As a report in *Lef* (1923) describes them, Rodchenko 'produced three new types of cinema intertitles' – 'a garish [*broskii*] intertitle in large letters filling up the whole screen'; 'three-dimensional intertitles; and intertitles which move through space' – revamping the intertitle from 'a dead point in a film to an organic part of it'. See *Lines of Resistance*, p. 57. Intertitles for *Cine-Eye* (1924), *Forward, Soviet!* (1926) and *A Sixth Part of the World* (1926), are in an identical font and use the same rhythmic accents. In *The Eleventh Year* (1928), made in Ukraine, the Constructivist font of the early titles is clearly done by another person, and is replaced by a standard

Vertov's experiments in poetic montage and the expressive *kinoslovo* [film-word] were motivated not only by Constructivism but an interest in Cubo-Futurist poetry, particularly its attention to the graphic and phonic elements of language.[153] Just as Cubism 'dismembered' the conventions of perspectival painting in order to discover new ways or representing space and vision, so Futurist poetry sought to 'disarticulate' language, breaking with the conventional semantic and syntactic tropes of traditional verse, in order to forge novel linguistic innovations and meanings.[154] Devices such paranomasia (or punning) – techniques central to the poetry of Velimir Khlebnikov – are deployed so as to de-automatize language.[155] Khlebnikov's poetry, as Shklovsky notes, decelerates and contorts speech so as to render its construction visible.[156] Just as for Khlebnikov the word is 'a plastic and transformative entity' which is to be endlessly 'reshaped', for Vertov the film image is envisaged as mutable fragment to be fashioned and assembled using unexpected and unfamiliar means.[157] This Cubo-Futurist lesson is evidenced, as Tsivian notes, in Vertov's newsreel feature, *Kinoglaz* [Cine-Eye] (1924), in which a long shot of a Moscow street scene is interrupted by an intertitle announcing: 'The same street viewed from a different camera setup'.[158] Rather than a different or reverse perspective, however, we are instead shown the same shot turned ninety degrees, as if to enact Shklovsky's statement that in order to

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typographical font. See Nikolai Izvolov, 'Dziga Vertov and Aleksandr Rodchenko: The Visible Word', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2016), pp. 2-14.

[153] As a student Vertov wrote Futuristic sound poems and tried to create word and noise collages. See Oskana Bulgakowa, 'The Ear against the Eye: Vertov's Symphony', *Kieler Beiträge zur Filmmusikforschung* 2 (2008), p. 144. See also Anna Lawton, 'Rhythmic Montage in the Films of Dziga Vertov: A Poetic Use of the Language of Cinema', *Pacific Coast Philosophy*, vol. 13 (1978), pp. 44-50.

[154] Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 126.

[155] Eagle, 'Afterword', pp. 291-292. This scrutiny of language was extended in particular to its phonetics – the *zaum*, or trans-sense, quality of the sounds themselves – as well as the graphic aspects and page layout of the verse.

[156] Shklovksy, 'Art as Device', p. 94.

[157] Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 128.

[158] Quoted in Tsivian, 'Turning Objects, Toppled Pictures', p. 104.

'extricate a thing from the cluster of associations in which it is bound' it 'is necessary to turn over the object as one would turn a log over the fire.'[159]

In the 1923 manifesto, '*Kinoks*: A Revolution', the aim of creating a 'fresh perception of the world' is connected to the constructivist method of kino-eye [*kinoglaz*], envisioned as 'builder' that constructs reality anew in order to 'decipher' what remained previously 'unknown'.[160] The mechanical film camera gathers and explores 'the chaos of visual phenomena' which is organized by the '*kinok*-editor' into a 'montage study'.[161] '[F]ree of the limits of time and space', the *kinok*-editor puts together 'the minutes of the life-structure', no matter 'where recorded', which are 'seen *this way* for the first time' – what, in the earlier 'We: Variant of a Manifesto' (1922), and expounded in his later writings, is termed the 'theory of intervals'.[162] In 'The Birth of Kino-Eye' (1924), Vertov draws an analogy between the media-induced perception of the film camera – 'understood as "that which the eye doesn't see"' – and scientific instruments such as the telescope and the microscope that enhance and expand our visual and analytical capacities.[163] Kino-eye is construed as the 'union' of science and film, a form of what he terms 'cinema-analysis', or 'the theory of relativity on the screen'; a spatio-temporal reorganization of experience that contains 'the

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[159] See Viktor Shklovsky, 'The Structure of Fiction', in *Theory of Prose*, p. 61. This strategy of defamiliarizing everyday life by framing it through an unfamiliar perspective became a key technique in Rodchenko's photographs throughout the mid-to-late 1920s, shooting his subject matter from sharp camera angles, rather than the conventional frontal point of view. Responding to the cautions of formalism from certain members of Lef, Rodchenko, like Vertov, emphasised the need to 'experiment' not only with 'what' facts were depicted but 'how', as a precondition for re-educating the habits of 'visual thinking'. Aleksandr Rodchenko, 'A Caution', in *Experiments for the Future* p. 265; and 'Paths of Contemporary Photography', in ibid., p. 212.

[160] Dziga Vertov, 'Kinoks: A Revolution', in *Kino-Eye*, pp. 17-18.

[161] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[162] Ibid., pp. 18, 21. As Vertov puts it We: Variant of a Manifesto': '*Intervals* (the transitions from one movement to another) are the material, the elements of the art of movement, and by no means the movements themselves. It is they (the intervals) which draw the movement to a kinetic resolution'. Vertov, 'We: Variant of a Manifesto', in *Kino-Eye*, p. 8. On Vertov's theory of the interval, see Annette Michelson, 'The Wings of Hypothesis: On Montage and the Theory of the Interval', in *Montage and Modern Life, 1919-1942*, ed. Matthew Teitelbaum (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 60-81.

[163] Vertov, 'The Birth of Kino-Eye', in *Kino-Eye*, p. 41.

possibility of making the invisible visible, the unclear clear, the hidden manifest, the disguised overt, the acted nonacted'.[164] The 'attempt to show the truth on the screen', however, is conceived not as a universalist programme of bourgeois enlightenment, which considers itself free from the shackles of ideology and class perspective, but as constitutively allied to 'the battle for the communist decoding of the world'.[165] As Annette Michelson phrases it, Vertov seizes upon film's analytical propensities, developing 'its epistemological implications', 'fusing the deep gratification' of 'temporal control' with a 'cognitive project' enrolled 'in the service of an art conceived as vectorial in the revolutionary process'.[166]

The fusing of temporal control with a 'Marxist proaedeutic', as Michelson notes, is exemplified by Vertov's use of reverse motion in films such as *Kino-Eye*, which she considers a filmic analogue to the rhetorical device of the 'hysteron proteron' – a reversal of the conventional ordering of language.[167] *Kino-Eye* takes as its subject the Communist youth group the Young Pioneers and is, in part, an argument for the benefits of cooperative sector over the private, which it seeks to demonstrate through the kino-eye method. Reverse motion occurs in two sequences, both taking as their starting point the market – what Marx termed the 'noisy sphere' of circulation, 'where everything takes place on the surface and in

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[164] Ibid., p. 41. Widespread among the Soviet avant-garde in the 1920s were popularized versions of Albert Einstein's Theory of General Relativity. This was combined with an interest in non-Euclidian geometry and the mystical hyperspace philosophy of P. D. Ouspensky (popular among Russian Cubo-Futurists), which various artists developed in different ways, breaking with three-dimensional logics and positivist notions of space-time so as to figure what was termed 'the fourth dimension'. See Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (London, England; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 372-434. For Simon Cook, however, Vertov's notion of relativity derives not from Einstein, but certain scientific critiques of the limitations of human vision as theorised by earlier nineteenth-century physiologists. See Simon Cook, '"Our Eyes, Spinning Like Propellers": Wheel of Life, Curve of Velocities, and Dziga Vertov's "Theory of the Interval"', *October* 121 (Summer, 2007), pp. 79-91.

[165] Vertov, 'The Birth of Kino-Eye', pp. 41-42. The truth, 'laid bare by the camera' and projected on the screen, as Vertov insists, is a mediated one – a 'film-truth' [*kinopravda*].

[166] Michelson, 'Dr. Crase and Mr. Clair', p. 52.

[167] Ibid., p. 52.

full view of everyone'.[168] As with Marx, the Young Pioneers, with the aid of kino-eye, attempt to 'penetrate more deeply into the seen world' by tracing two commodities backwards in order to render visible their process of production.[169] In the first sequence, as the intertitle states, 'Kino-Eye moves time backwards' from a piece of meat in the co-op store, to the slaughterhouse in which the bull from which it came returns to life, to the railroad that it was transported along, returning it to the countryside where it was farmed – the point where forward motion is resumed. In the second sequence, beginning with the handwritten intertitle, 'From the Young Pioneer's diary: 'If the clock could go backwards, then the bread would return to the bakery…', we see, as the following intertitle states 'Kino Eye continue…the Pioneer's thought', by showing a clock's hands turning anti-clockwise and the baking process in reverse, following the sacks of flour back to the mill, and the transport of the grain on a train carriage back to the rye field where a mother of a Komosol is labouring. Such sequences, as Philip Rosen notes, embody a persistent tendency in Vertov's films to disclose how an 'immediate action of everyday life' (here buying food) fits within 'the social whole or totality'; a progression from immediacy to its mediation that is also at play in Vertov's continual foregrounding of the apparatus and the process of production behind the immediacy of the projected moving-image.[170]

The *kinoks* objective to aid 'the proletariat as a whole in their effort to understand the phenomena of life around them' by grasping visual phenomena as determined by abstract 'historical processes' and 'society's economic structure', resonates here Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923).[171] Whereas, as Lukács argues, the world-view of bourgeois empiricism construes capitalist society as 'a diversity of mutually independent objects and forces', the class consciousness of the proletariat attempts to advance 'beyond the divisive

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[168] Marx, *Capital*, p. 279.

[169] Dziga Vertov, 'An Introductory Speech before a Showing of the First Part of *Kino-Eye*', in *Lines of Resistance*, p. 102.

[170] Philip Rosen, 'Now and Then: Conceptual Problems in Historicizing Documentary Imaging', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring, 2007), p. 32.

[171] Vertov, 'The Essence of Kino-Eye' (1925), in *Kino-Eye*, pp. 49-50.

symptoms of the economic process to the unity of the total social system underlying it'.[172] For Vertov, kino-eye attempts to redress the fragmentary experience of workers scattered across the USSR and the globe by establishing what he terms a '*film*' or 'visual bond', providing an 'opportunity' for workers 'to see and hear' one another in 'an organized form'.[173] As Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle write, Vertov's 'physiological pedagogy' and 'proletarian humanism is predicated on a technical anti-humanism', in which the workers are educated by the 'inhuman kino-eye' to 'see the totality that they themselves form'.[174] Kino-eye's 'conquest of space' and 'time' – its 'visual linkage' of workers 'throughout the…world' and 'phenomenon separated in time' – is further explored in *A Sixth Part of the World* [*Shestaia chast' mira*] (1926) and *The Eleventh Year* [*Odinnadtsatyi*] (1928).[175]

A Sixth Part of the World reworks the already established genres of the 'cine-race' [*kinoprobeg*], travelogue and ethnographic documentary, constructing a cinematographic atlas which travels, as the opening intertitle states, from 'border to border': beginning with 'the land of capital' and its colonies, and moving to an extended journey across the Soviet Union's borderlands.[176] The disparate material is organized according to a phraseology and structure derived from Walt Whitman's poem 'Salut Au Monde!' (1856), especially its repetition of the intertitle 'I see', and direct address ('You'), that recurs throughout the film

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[172] Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 74.

[173] See Dziga Vertov, 'To the Kinoks of the South' (1925) and 'Kinopravda and Radiopravda (1925) in *Kino-Eye*, pp. 50, 52, 56. As Fore notes, the concept of 'bond' appears both as a noun, *sviaz'*, and as a verb, *sviazat'* [to link]. Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 3.

[174] Alberto Toscano and Jeff Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), pp. 89, 85.

[175] Vertov, 'From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye', pp. 87-88.

[176] Vertov named the assemblage of travelogue-style fragments portraying disparate places into a single entity 'cine-races'. In *The Sixth Part of the World*, as Hicks points out, Vertov not only develops on the cine-races/travelogues of *Kinopravda* (18 and 19), but is consciously engaging with an already marked tradition of ethnographic documentary film, incorporating footage from Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 49. See also Oskana Sarkisova, 'Across One Sixth of the World: Dziga Vertov, Travel Cinema, and Soviet Patriotism', *October* 121 (Summer, 2007), pp. 19-40.

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Figure 4. *A Sixth Part of the World*

and precede the diverse images.[177] While in the beginning section of the film this address takes the form of generic categories and types of the people and machines that are, we are told, 'in the service of capital', in the longer middle section, the film catalogues in detail the various labour practices of 'minority cultures' in the Soviet Union (Figure 4), 'connecting the work performed in these distant, seemingly marginal locales to the factory sites of the industrial proletariat', as well as the spectator 'sitting in the audience', who are all addressed as 'the masters of the Soviet Land'.[178] As with the apostrophic address of the lyric poem, Vertov's film pulls itself out of a closed narrative temporality of a past event into the space of what Jonathan Culler terms 'the iterative and iterable performance of an event' taking place 'in the lyric present, in the special "now", of lyric articulation'.[179] Vertov

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[177] See Ben Singer, 'Connoisseurs of Chaos: Whitman, Vertov and the "Poetic Survey"', in *Literature Film Quartely*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1987), pp. 247-58. As Singer points out, Whitman had a formative influence on Vertov's Futurist milieu, in particular Mayakovsy.

[178] Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 4. As Sarkisova observes, *A Sixth Part of the World* represents the 'indigenization [*korenizatsiia*] policy in the mid-1920s, which aimed at "fixing the wrongs" of the Russian Empire and gaining the loyalty of its nationalities'. Sarkisova, *Screening Soviet Nationalities*, p. 5.

[179] Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 226. As Culler contends, the 'wager of poetic apostrophe is that the lyric can displace a time of narrative, of past events reported, and place us in the continuing present of apostrophic address, the "now" in which, for readers, a poetic event can repeatedly occur. Fiction is about what happened next; lyric is about what happens now'. Ibid., p. 226.

employs Whitman's use of free verse and the form of the 'poetic survey' – 'inventories' of 'brief, snapshot-like images in rapid succession' – in order to evoke a vision of an 'egalitarian' Soviet federalism, a 'utopian space' composed of 'a mosaic of cultures' all contributing to the 'united socialist economy', 'irrespective of language, ethnicity, or social habitus'.[180] In part, the film functions as an advertisement for the State Trade Organization (Gostorg) who commissioned it, depicting its role in the extensive networks of the Soviet and world economy, and arguing that trade with the latter 'for machines that produce other machines' (as a repeated intertitle states) is necessary to advance Soviet production. While the intertitles draw on Stalin's 1925 Central Committee report, the image track and montage structure often seem to turn Stalin's words 'on their head'.[181] Whereas Stalin expounds a two world thesis and an argument for building socialism in one country, Vertov depicts the mixed economy of the Soviet Union as an international 'hub' (as one intertitle puts it), 'whose very existence depends on exchange with the remaining five sixths of the world'.[182] Moreover, Vertov's Whitmanesque emphasis on pluralization and collective mastery – what Deleuze describes as 'the interaction at a distance, within the USSR, between the most varied peoples, herds of animals, industries, cultures, exchanges of all kinds in the process of conquering time' – stands in tension with Stalin's call to accelerate the 'non-contemporaneous' development of the USSR and its industrial modernisation by subordinating the former to what Fore terms 'the violence of monologistion'; a unilinear plan for maximising production based on external targets.[183] From the standpoint of this

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[180] Singer, 'Connoisseurs of Chaos', pp. 253, 249-50; Sarkisova, 'Across One Sixth of the World', pp. 28, 29; Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 4. As Hicks notes, we find the same 'ethnological inventories' in Whitman's poem, which uses simple repetitions such as 'I hear…', 'I see…', 'Where…' or 'And' to introduce lists of images with no further grammatical structure. Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 47.

[181] Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 20. The film cites Stalin's Central Committee report at the Fourteenth Congress of the Communist Part, December 1925. See also Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 46.

[182] Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 20.

[183] Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 82; Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 19. Stalin's monological tendency, as Fore notes, was 'consecrated in the Socialist Realist tenet of *ideinost*' or 'ideological univocity'. On the concept of 'non-contemporaneity' [*ungleichzeitigkeit*] see Ernst Bloch, 'Non-contemporaneity and Obligation to Its Dialectics' (1932), in *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Oxford: Polity, 1991), pp. 97-116. Montage is a key form for Bloch in portraying the coexistence of various social strata in German

evolutionist narrative, *A Sixth Part of the World* 'pays passing tribute' to people that 'are ultimately to be civilised and Sovietised' by the socialist society their labour helps to develop.[184] Yet, it also could be argued, by 'not closing the gap' between these two visions (coeval and allochronic), Vertov leaves the former to criticize the latter.[185]

This tension between an official agitational message that is complicated by its presentational form reappears, as both MacKay and Fore point out, in Vertov's following film, *The Eleventh Year*.[186] Hired by the All-Ukrainian Photo-Film Directorate to make an anniversary film about the Ukraine, and made on the cusp of the Five-Year-Plan, Vertov takes industrialization as the film's principal theme, focusing on the construction of the hydroelectric station on the Dnieper River.[187] Beginning in 'poker-faced travelogue style', the opening section gives 'a brief intertitle-laden tour' of the river, which culminates in a shot of the ossified bones of a '2,000-year-old Scythian' discovered at the site of industrial

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society in the early 1930s. Correspondingly, Vertov's 'insistent pluralization of time', as Fore notes, 'addresses the complex temporality' of Russia when the Bolsheviks seized power which, as Lenin famously observed, contained no fewer than five distinct modes of production 'operating simultaneously', 'ranging from the Asiatic and primitive communist to the feudal and advanced capitalist'. Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 13.

[184] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 49. In Johannes Fabian's terms, coevalness is replaced by allochronism. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). This act of 'salvaging' in *A Sixth Part of the World* fits into a broader history of ethnographic filmmakers who employed film as a means for collecting and preserving 'disappearing' cultural traces, with its attendant colonial ethnographic gaze. Sarkisova, *Screening Soviet Nationalities*, pp. 13-14.

[185] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT, 2002), p. 65. Buck-Morss is here making a general remark about the structure of the avant-garde artwork, which holds up utopian promises to reality and vice versa. While it is true, then, as Toscano and Kinkle note, that *A Sixth Part of the World* embodies a series of 'contradictions' – 'the exaltation of labour and its subsumption to the plan; humanism (anti-colonialism, mastery over collective fate, Vertov's characteristic attention to faces, expressions and moments of happiness) and anti-humanism (the subordination of the former to the...accumulation of fixed capital)' – it is possible to read the film as consciously staging these contradictions. Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 92.

[186] *The Eleventh Year* is the first of Vertov's three Ukranian productions, the other two being *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and his first sound film, *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass* (1931).

[187] Mackay, 'Film Energy', p. 43.

enterprise.[188] At this point the film shifts to a predominately intertitle-less visual reflection on the harnessing and mobilization of energy (natural and human) by industrial processes, and 'the conversions it undergoes' in the 'advance', as one of the few intertitles states, 'towards socialism'.[189] Vertov's 'energeticist' model, as Mackay writes, envisions 'phenomena' as 'manifestations of a single, continually mobile energy' which, although not 'directly representable', 'leaves traces of its effects'.[190] This is figured visually in the film through the use of prolonged superimposition and split-screen effects in which images of flowing water, the inertia of rock formations, and the movements of workers and machines overlap and dissolve into one another creating what Christian Metz, drawing on Freud, terms image 'condensations'.[191] In 1923 Vertov referred to the technique of superimposition as the 'dramatization of human thought'; a visual analogue to the associative projection of an identity between disparate objects – a technique that Jakobson also notably identified for its 'metaphoric' qualities.[192] In contrast to the conventional use of superimposition in the cinema, which, as Metz notes, is typically employed to signify (through a fleeting dissolve) the '*transition*' or 'progression' in the narration of a story, the images in *The Eleventh Year*, as Fore writes, 'hover in a logically impossible state of simultaneity that more closely resembles the paratactic structure of the dream than the linear concatenations of causal

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[188] Ibid., p. 67. As Mackay notes, the tour of the Dnieper is clearly ironic, filming rocks selected for their allusions to 'ossified cinematic romance and historical drama' with names such as 'Catherine's Armchair', the 'Bogatyr' (a Russian folk hero) and the 'Crag of Love'.

[189] Ibid., p. 41-42.

[190] Ibid., p. 49. This notion of energy, which recalls Gan's tectonic model, as MacKay shows, has its roots in thermodynamic theories offered by nineteenth century figures such as Hermann von Helmholtz, that were influential during the early twentieth century. Ibid., p. 49.

[191] Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982), n. 17, p. 83. While the split-screen effects of workers symbolize coordination and collectivity, the use of superimposition suggest an analogy between archeological and geological notions of layers of soil and rock-strata containing multiple nonsynchronous times and histories. On this Blochian motif of portraying history as strata, see Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities*, trans. Peter D. Thomas and Sara R. Farris (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 7.

[192] Quoted in Mackay, 'Film Energy', n. 98, p. 72; Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of Language', p. 111.

Figure 5. *The Eleventh Year*

thought'.[193] While the film forges a bond between workers inhabiting different moments in a given labour sequence – peasant, miner, factory and construction worker – Vertov's vertical montage, which layers 'incommensurate elements upon one another' – hydro-electric dam, peasant houses, a bust of Lenin – 'without attributing anteriority to any one of them', intimates a transitive bond, or, as one intertitle states, which is followed by an image superimposing worker's hammering down a railway line over the ancient Scythian, an 'Echo' between the historically distant phenomena (Figure 5).[194] This palimpsestic mode of image overlay and excavation of submerged temporal strata here resonates with the stratified mode of historical perception in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, outlined in Chapter 1. The 'open and unfinished temporality' of *The Eleventh Year*, with its reanimation of 'cultural vestiges', as Fore argues, works against a narrative of historical and technological 'progress' based on a 'rhetoric of rupture and supersession', suggesting that the transition 'towards socialism' may not always be as 'consistently linear' or 'remainderless' as some 'might want to assume'.[195] As with Vertov's filmmaking practice more broadly, the film advances an image of time more aligned with Lenin's recursive notion history proceeding in spirals, not a

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[193] Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, pp. 276, 126; Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', p. 11.

[194] Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', pp. 21, 16, 9.

[195] Ibid., p. 9, 13. This theme of reanimating cultural vestiges reappears in *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934), a 'celluoid mausoleum trip' of archival footage of Lenin (some of which already used in the *Kinopravda* 21), combined with folk 'song-documents'. See Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, pp. 93-94.

straight line, together with Trotsky's idea of 'combined and uneven development' – the basis of his political strategy of 'permanent revolution'.[196]

Under the Stalinist project of modernization, the multiperspectival, disruptive, and anti-historicist function of montage (epitomized by Vertov's newsreels) would be subject to a rapid process of dissolution and subsumed by an organicist notion of history as an 'unfolding, unilinear process, of which the Soviet system was seen as the vanguard'.[197] If, as Deleuze writes, Vertov's films are about 'the (communist) transitions from an order which is being undone to an order which is being constructed', this revolutionary process – its temporalities, rhythms, and speeds – is portrayed as more messy and discordant than both the party and cinematic apparatus in the late 1920s granted.[198] With the increasing emphasis on 'planning and control within the economy and society as a whole' in the Soviet Union, Vertov's films were perceived as 'anarchic' and 'irrational'.[199] While Vertov extols the achievements of Soviet modernization, he is less interested in 'ornamentalising and aestheticizing' this transformative process, than – as the contrapuntal and asynchronous mechanical pounding of the soundtrack of *Enthusiasm* (1931) indicates – presenting what Susan Buck-Morss terms its '*lived* temporality of interruption' and 'estrangement', as well as revealing its underlying structures and dynamics.[200] What is significant in Vertov's newsreel

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[196] Fore, 'The Metabiotic State', pp. 21, 23. The spiral is not to be confused with the idea of history as cyclical, which can be seen in the criticisms, by the Soviet avant-garde, of Griffith's *Intolerance*. See Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, p. 80. As Boris Groys notes of Trotsky's notion of permanent revolution, it 'moves together with history and does not set itself any ultimate goals', which he contrasts with Stalin's attempt 'to halt…history…by placing it under complete technological control; to conquer time and enter into eternity'. Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp, 94, 72.

[197] Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, p. 31.

[198] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 39.

[199] Mackay, 'Film Energy', p. 64.

[200] See Owen Hatherly, *The Chaplin Machine: Slapstick, Fordism and the Communist Avant-Garde* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), p. 148. As Buck-Morss argues, '[i]n acquiescing to the vanguard's cosmological conception of revolutionary time, the avant-garde abandoned the *lived* temporality of interruption, estrangement, arrest' and 'became instead the servant of a political vanguard that had a monopoly over time's meaning, a cosmological understanding of history that legitimated the use of violence against all opposing visions of social

film-things, furthermore, is their augmentation of what Benjamin terms a 'scope for play', or a 'field of action' [*Spielraum*], within documentary cinema; 'an open-ended, dynamic temporality' that is 'not yet fully determined', and in which 'things oscillate among different meanings, functions, and possible directions'.[201] As Perez writes of the structure of Alexander Dovzhenko's film poems (which is also applicable to Vertov), his experimental newsreels proceed 'not from the whole to the parts but from the parts to the whole'; a movement that 'is not the unfolding of a design but the putting together of one'. Synthesis is achieved here 'not so much through a ruling rhythm of the whole as through the parallels, the numerous correspondences, drawn by the parallel montage between the individual parts'.[202]

This is why, as noted in the Introduction, Grierson and other British documentary filmmakers expressed an 'anxiety' and 'hostility' toward Vertov's 'alternative vision of documentary', attempting to domesticate its formal and cognitive disruptions through the telling of humanist stories of the everyday in epic, pastoral form.[203] More influential on the British documentary movement in this regard was Viktor Turin's silent documentary, *Turksib* (1929), which narrates the construction of the Turkestan-Siberian railroad as an episodic,

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transformation'. In contrast to this cosmological view, Vertov's films portray life in terms of 'a plurality of layers of time' and 'hybrid rhythms' that 'cannot be played out on the diminished space of a linear continuum'. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, pp. 62, 60, 66. On *Enthusiasm*'s Futurist-inspired symphonic sound-track see Bulgakowa, 'The Ear against the Eye: Vertov's Symphony', pp. 142-157.

[201] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version', in *SW 3*, n. 10, p. 124; Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 192. Although Benjamin only references Vertov's *Three Songs of Lenin* (1934) in the third version of the 'The Work of Art' essay (1939) – which he was hoping to get published in Moscow – Vertov, as Hansen contends, provides an important, if somewhat implicit, 'cinematic intertext' for the essay. As with his use of Tret'iakov in 'The Author as Producer' (discussed in the following Chapter), Benjamin's general recourse to Soviet montage film (he references Pudovkin) assumes a 'tactical belatedness', putting itself 'squarely against the official communist dogmas of…socialist realism'. Although it is difficult to ascertain what films of Vertov Benjamin saw (he remarks on seeing *A Sixth Part of the World* in 'On the Present Situation of Russian Film'), as Hansen points out, it is more than likely that he read Kracauer's enthusiastic review of *Man with a Movie Camera*, which I quote above. Ibid., pp. 87, n. 43, p. 309.

[202] Perez, *The Material Ghost*, p. 186.

[203] Hicks, *Dziga Vertov*, p. 124.

linear story, creating a dramatic central theme in man's struggle over nature.[204] In *The Spirit of Film* (1930), Béla Balázs refers to Turin's documentary as chief exemplar of what he terms the 'montage essay' [*Montierte Essay*]; a tendency in Soviet silent cinema to employ montage to '*give shape* to and *provoke* thoughts'.[205] As with Factography's championing of Shub, Balázs commends Turin's 'visual essay' for its clear development of ideas and controlled use of symbolic association. This Soviet tendency of the montage essay, however, as Balázs adds, contains the 'danger' that it degenerates into communicating ideas through a rigid system of 'hieroglyphic picture-writing'.[206] Balázs's target here is of course Eisenstein's theory and practice of 'intellectual montage', and his desire to produce a cinematic treatise on Marx's *Capital*.[207] Yet is Balázs's caricature of Eisenstein's project as turning film 'into a clumsy imitation of "archaic" forms' of ideographic writing correct?[208]

2.3. Intellectual Attractions: Sergei Eisenstein's *Capital* Project

Eisenstein first uses the term 'essay' in his diaristic notes outlining his plan to produce a film treatise based on Marx's *Capital* that would depart from the narrative conventions of cinematic plot.[209] Penned between October 1927 and April 1928, the notes are initiated while Eisenstein is in the process of editing *October*, continue after its completion in 1928, and seem to be interrupted by his return to work on *The General Line* (1929), a film project begun in 1926 but intercepted by the former commission to make a film for the Revolution's tenth anniversary.[210] References to the *Capital* project and the notion of a plotless essay

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[204] One of its script writers was Shklovsky and the English intertitles were prepared by Grierson. *Turksib* was released on DVD by the BFI as part of *The Soviet Influence: From Turksib to Night Mail* (2011).

[205] Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: The Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 127-128.

[206] Jacques Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, trans. by Lee Hildreth, Constance Penley, and Andrew Ross (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 128.

[207] Balázs cites a 1930 lecture given by Eisenstein at the Sorbonne in Paris, which I reference below.

[208] Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, p. 150.

[209] Sergei Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', *October* 2 (Summer, 1976), pp. 3-26.

[210] See Annette Michelson, 'Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*', *October* 2 (Summer, 1976), p. 27.

film resurface in his writings and articles from 1928-1929, now treated as coextensive with his theorisation of 'intellectual cinema' and 'intellectual montage', as well as two lectures given in 1930 in Paris and Hollywood.[211] Although his writings and book projects from the 1930s and 1940s continue to theorise in detail questions of cinematic montage, which is often developed in relation to other artistic forms and mediums, with the increased attack on 'Formalism' and the prominence of Socialist Realism, these issues are reoriented back (or, as Eisenstein writes, 'forward') to issues of plot and dramaturgy in the attempt to create a 'new classicism' more aligned with official policy.[212] This involved a shift in Eisenstein's theory of montage from the constructivist emphasis on dissonance, discontinuity, and heterogeneity, most pointedly theorised in his early manifestos and essays on theatre and film (1923-1925), to a striving for dialectical synthesis, harmony, and organic unity in his later (post-1932) work.[213]

As I discussed in the introduction, Eisenstein's films from the 1920s were part of a broader tendency within narrative fiction Soviet cinema which sought to employ 'narrational principles' and 'poetic procedures for rhetorical ends'.[214] This 'rhetorical aim' motivated

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[211] See Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Principles of the New Russian Cinema', in *Selected Works, Vol. 1, 1922-1934*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (London: British Film Institute, 1988), p. 200; and 'The Dynamic Square', in ibid., p. 218.

[212] See Sergei Eisenstein, 'Film Form: New Problems' (1935), in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1977), p. 147. 'Intellectual cinema' in this talk is replaced by a theory of 'inner monologue'. While the former sought to develop a form that would 'substitute for the story', the 'theory of inner monologue warmed to some extent the ascetic abstraction of the flow of concepts, by transposing the problem into the more story-ish line of portraying the hero's emotions'. Ibid., p. 129. In an article from 1934, Eisenstein seeks to distinguish montage as strictly synonymous with the so-called 'left deviation in Formalism', arguing that it is 'powerful compositional means of realizing plot'. Eisenstein argues for the importance of understanding the formal achievements of experiments of montage techniques and film language developed in 1920s Soviet silent cinema in order to be able to 'advance in a progressive cinematic movement not "back" to plot but "forward to plot"'. See Sergei Eisenstein, 'Eh! On the Purity of Film Language' (1934), in *SW 1*, pp. 287, 294.

[213] See David Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 163-198; and Mikhail Yampolsky, 'Theory as Quotation', *October* 88 (Spring, 1999), pp. 51-68.

[214] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 235, 237.

filmmakers to break with 'classical norms of space and time' making overt the narrative process through the 'relentless presence of montage', keeping 'the spectator from construing any action as simply an unmediated piece of the *fabula* world'.[215] Like Vertov, filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Pudovkin used metaphoric montage to create contrasts and comparisons between disparate phenomena, intercutting between shots so as to produce an explicit commentary. In these films, as Bordwell notes, the very idea of a 'consistent story event' often 'falls into question' and 'the action becomes "quasi-diegetic", hovering between the story world and a realm of abstract, emblematic significance'.[216] In his essay, 'Toward a Theory of Cine-Genres', published in the 1927 Formalist anthology, *The Poetics of Cinema*, Adrian Piotrovsky identifies such films as part of an emerging yet 'undefined' trend in Soviet cinema toward the genre of the 'plotless' film.[217] 'The creators of these "plotless" genres', as Piotrovsky writes – he lists Eisenstein's *Strike* and *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and Vertov's *A Sixth Part of the World* – 'reject narrative understood as the progressive motivated development of the individual's destiny' and 'base their work on exclusively cinematic means of expression, on new and unexpected juxtapositions of images, employing non-diegetic, intrinsically cinematic devices, such as associative montage'.[218] Writing in the same collection, Shklovsky, akin to Jakobson, renders the 'displacement of everyday situations' in the film's diegesis by poetic and formal devices in terms of poetry and prose, commenting on the hybrid character of Pudovkin's *The Mother* (1926), which 'starts out as prose…and ends up as purely formal poetry'.[219] For Tynyanov, the 'evolution' of cinematic 'devices' and 'semantic laws' calls for 'the liberation of these

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[215] Ibid., pp. 237, 239.

[216] Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, p. 47.

[217] Adrian Piotrovsky, 'Toward a Theory of Cine-Genres', in *Russian Formalist Film Theory*, ed. Herbert Eagle (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1981), p. 144. Piotrovsky traces this undefined genre back to the lyrical films of French directors such as Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein, in which 'the film's expressiveness is deliberately concentrated in widely scattered "atmosphere" segments… which function to build lyrical images…moving completely away from the narrative'. For Piotrovsky, it was particularly with 'the introduction of close-ups that lyricism started to supplant with increasing success the dramatic and narrative moments', creating what he calls 'pensive images'. Ibid, pp. 146, 144.

[218] Ibid., p. 146.

[219] Viktor Shklovsky, 'Poetry and Prose in Cinema', in *The Film Factory*, p. 177.

laws from the necessity of naturalistic "motivation"'.[220] Only 'timidity inhibits the emergence' of cinematic genres alternative to the 'compromise' of the 'cine-novel', such as 'the cinematic narrative poem' and 'the cine-lyric'.[221]

While a common feature of Soviet cinema was to rhetorically combine images taken from the diegetic world, presenting shots 'initially designed to denote *fabula* information' for 'connotative purposes', what particularly intrigued Eisenstein is what Metz terms the 'nondiegetic insert'; the cutting to 'an object which is external to the action of the film'.[222] As Bordwell notes, Eisenstein's 'typical cues for nondiegetic inserts are shots of objects framed in close-up and filmed against black backgrounds'. Such inserts 'serve as a kind of abstract commentary on the action, making the viewer aware of an intervening narration that can interrupt the action and point up thematic or pictorial associations'.[223] Eisenstein's narration also 'relativizes the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic imagery', treating images that are 'located in the story world' with 'a freedom that "emancipates" the action from time and space'.[224] A celebrated instance of this is the insert of the three immobile marble lion statues in *Potemkin* (one sleeping, one waking, and one rising) which, when cut together, appear to leap up in response to the thunder of the ship's guns firing in protest against the bloodbath on the Odessa Steps.[225]

It is in reference to the proliferation of nondiegetic inserts in *October* that Eisenstein first uses the (French) word '*essais*'.[226] In a note from 1927 that attempts to retrospectively

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[220] Yuri Tynyanov, 'On the Foundations of Cinema', in *Russian Formalist Film Theory*, p. 89.

[221] Ibid., p. 100.

[222] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 249; Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 125.

[223] Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, p. 44.

[224] Ibid., p. 44.

[225] See Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Dramaturgy of Film Form', in *SW 1*, pp. 172-73. Although appearing to be located as proximate to the Odessa steps, the lion statues belong to the geographically distant Vorontosov Palace in the Crimea.

[226] Eisenstein's writing often shifts between four languages (Russian, German, English and French), sometimes within a single sentence, and creates hybrid words. Eisenstein here uses the French *essais* (not the English, essay, as the translation does). Later, as noted below, he combines the Russian word for cinema with the

explicate the 'dialectical development' of his three previous films – *Strike*, *Battleship Potemkin*, and *October* – Eisenstein refers to the latter as presenting 'a new form of cinema', reading the film as consisting of 'a collection of essays [*essais*] on a series of themes'.[227] The key sequence that Eisenstein returns to throughout his writings of the late 1920s, and I will discuss below, is the so-called 'sequence of "the gods"', which digresses from the story of the revolution into a cinematic 'treatise on deity'.[228] While the 'serial film structure' of *Strike* is conceived as 'educational' in its portrayal of the 'processes' of class struggle, and *Potemkin* is considered to engender 'pathos' in the movement from the 'representation of…life to abstract and generalized imagery', the 'series of theses' that appear as 'salient phrases', or essay-like interpolations, within the narrative of *October*, are construed as providing a possible basis for producing a wholly 'discursive film' or 'film treatise' inspired by Marx's critique of political economy.[229] It 'will not be a story that unfolds' in this film, provisionally titled '*Marx's Capital*', but, as Eisenstein states in the lecture given at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1930, an 'essay'.[230] As he puts it in his 1929 essay 'The Dramaturgy of Film Form': 'Plot is only one of the means without which we still do not know how to communicate something to the audience'.[231] This instead would be a 'purely intellectual film which, freed from traditional limitations, will achieve direct forms for thoughts, systems and concepts'.[232]

This essay, or collection of essays, as Michelson notes, is not envisioned as a 'cinematic rendering' of the Marx's book, but a 'filmic implementation of the structure and techniques of its analytic method' – this is the point in Eisenstein's ironic statement that the work will be made from a 'libretto' by Marx.[233] As Eisenstein explains, the 'content' of the film, 'its

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French in the term *kino-essais*. I am indebted here to Elena Vogman for checking Eisenstein's original notes in the Eisenstein Archive, RGALI, in Moscow.

[227] Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', pp. 3-4.

[228] Ibid., p. 4.

[229] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[230] Eisenstein, 'The Principles of the New Russian Cinema', p. 200.

[231] Eisenstein, 'The Dramaturgy of Film Form', p. 180.

[232] Ibid, p. 180.

[233] Michelson, 'Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital*', p. 38.

aim', is 'to teach the worker to think dialectically', to 'show the method of dialectics'.[234] The chief aspect of this method, for Eisenstein, corresponds to what he terms the 'de-anecdotalization principle', which he sees already at work in *October* in its movement 'from given cases to ideas'.[235] In the *Capital* film, this will entail disclosing the economic and social mediations that determine an everyday scene or a trivial object: from bread and grain shortages to 'the mechanics of speculation'; 'from a button to the theme of overproduction'.[236] If the '"ancient" cinema was shooting one event from many points of view', the 'new one assembles one point of view from many events.'[237] Aspects of this multiperspectival model can be seen in Eisenstein's writings on 'intellectual montage' in the late 1920s (which I will return to below). As Oksana Bulgakowa points out, although published as separate articles, Eisenstein construed this 'bundle' of essays in terms of a rotating spherical book: 'a spatial form that would make it possible to step from each contribution directly into another and to make apparent their interconnection'.[238] These essays were not to be 'regarded successively' according to a linear logic but as a set of 'synchronic' theoretical perspectives 'arranged around a general, determining point of view', which 'enables transitions and guarantees multiple perspectives'.[239] Just as within his essays Eisenstein takes a 'scientific discipline' and renders it into an incomplete 'montage

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[234] Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 23. 'There are endlessly possible themes for filming in CAPITAL ('price', 'income', 'rent') – for us, the theme is Marx's method.' Ibid., p. 23.

[235] Ibid., pp. 5, 8. *October*, as Eisenstein writes, 'led to a complete departure from the factual and anecdotal'. Ibid., p. 3.

[236] Ibid., p. 7, 15.

[237] Ibid., p. 18. Eisenstein's reflections here resonate with what Benjamin Buchloh observes as the variety of new models for writing and imaging history, which emerged around the mid-1920s, which was exemplified by the *Annales* school. In the latter, the 'telling of history as a sequence of events acted out by individual agents is displaced by a focus on the simultaneity of separate but contingent social frameworks and an infinity of participating agents, and the process of history is reconceived as a structural system of perpetually changing interactions and permutations between economic and ecological givens, class formations and their ideologies, and the resulting types of social and cultural interactions specific to each particular moment'. Benjamin Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive', *October* 88 (Spring, 1999), p. 129.

[238] Quoted in Oskana Bulgakowa, 'From Stage to Brain: Montage as a New Principle of Scientific Narrative', *Sign Systems Studies* 41 (2003), pp. 210-211

[239] Ibid, pp. 210, 212.

fragment', which is then integrated into a new 'construction' or context, establishing interconnections with other fragments, so too with whole essays.[240]

In his 1929 essay 'Perspectives' [*Perspektivy*], playing with the etymology of the Russian word for image [*obraz*], Eisenstein characterizes this Marxist method of 'disclosure' [*obnaruzhenie*] as the attempt to construct an image [*obraz*] from a 'socially active standpoint', that '"discloses", i.e. establishes a social link' between the phenomena depicted.[241] Expressed in different ways and with attention to different dimensions throughout his writings, for Eisenstein, the cinematic 'image' is typically distinguished from what is represented or depicted [*izobrazhenie*] in the individual shot, and is instead used to designate the 'product' of a process in which a new quality (intellectual, emotional) emerges through the relations that are established by the montage of shots or (audio-visual) elements.[242] The 'essence of cinema', as he puts it in an earlier article, is 'not in the shots

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[240] Eisenstein, 'My Art in Life' (1927). Quoted in Yampolsky, 'Theory as Quotation', p. 53. As Bulgakowa observes, Eisenstein writes 'mainly in the form of fragments', composing his texts in the form of 'notes, diary entries, analyses and quotations from scholarly literature and illustrated journals, pulp fiction, belletristic literature, and political commentaries'. This process of fragmentation 'even permeates the syntax, for parts of sentences are missing or marked with dots, brackets and dashes, which convey intonation and gestures'. Bulgakowa, 'From Stage to Brain', pp. 214-15.

[241] Sergei Eisenstein, 'Perspectives', in *SW 1*, p. 154. This method of disclosure corresponds with Marx's comments on Hegelian method in the 1857 Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which he describes as the 'rising', in thought, 'from the abstract to the concrete'. In contrast with empiricist or positivist understandings of the term, the 'concrete', for Hegel and Marx, 'is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse'. Marx, like Hegel, is opposed to the level of knowledge offered by immediate, and conceptually abstract, sense-data. The more determinate or synthetic a category, the more concrete it is. See Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 101.

[242] See Sergei Eisenstein, 'Beyond the Shot', in *SW 1*, p. 139. Eisenstein makes this distinction between image [*obraz*] and depiction [*izobrazhenie*] most clearly in 'Montage 1938'. See Sergei Eisenstein, 'Montage 1938' (1938), *Selected Works, vol. 2: Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (London: British Film Institute, 1991), p. 299. Eisenstein's definition of the image here corresponds with literary romanticism and modernism – exemplified most forcefully by Pound's notion of Imagism – in which the image is defined not as 'a pictorial likeness or impression', but as 'a dynamic pattern of the intellectual and emotional energy bodied forth by a poem'. See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 25. Pound, akin to Eisenstein, developed an

but in the relationship between the shots', just as 'in history we look not at individuals but at the relationship between individuals, classes, etc.' Whereas the shot, through a process of selection, 'cuts' [*obrez*] the profilmic event by framing it from various camera angles, '[t]he conditions of cinema' are said to 'create an "image" [*obraz*] from the juxtaposition of these 'cuts' [*obrez*]'.[243] In 'Perspectives', the cinematic metaphor of the cut is extended to describe the 'individually static' bourgeois 'standpoint' that views the depicted phenomena in 'isolation' [*otmezhivanie*], as if "cut" [*obrez*]' out from its social 'surroundings'.[244] This leads Eisenstein to a discussion of content and form. The 'content' [*soderzhanie*] of a work, he contends, is inseparable from 'the act of containing it' [*sderzhivanie*] – its formal or 'organizational principle'. Eisenstein uses the organizational form of the newspaper to demonstrate this point. The 'content' of the newspaper, he writes, is not simply its 'factual *contents*' [*soderzhanie*], but 'the principle by which the *contents*…are organised and processed, with the aim of processing the reader from a class-based standpoint'.[245] It is in this sense that the 'content' of the *Capital* film is said to be its dialectical method. That is, rather than simply substitute one content for another, and '"tell the story" of surplus-value rather than any other story"', as Aumont puts it, it is the dialectical organization and processing of the film's content, and 'the relation of the spectator to this content', that is at issue. Eisenstein's pedagogic method thus attempts to relay not so much 'the revelation of a truth', than 'a series of interactions between the various filmic elements' that would stimulate the spectator 'to take on the work' of processing the film's intellectual associations in a dialectical manner; of rendering the anecdotal material or 'phenomenal units admitted' to the spectator's 'rational faculty' into 'conceptual' or 'intellectual units'.[246]

'ideogrammic method' in which concrete instances of expression were juxtaposed to produce abstract images. I will return to a similar conception of the image in the following chapter in relation to late Godard.

[243] Sergei Eisenstein, 'Béla Forgets the Scissors' (1926), in *SW 1*, pp. 79-80.

[244] Eisenstein, 'Perspectives', p. 154.

[245] Ibid., p. 154.

[246] Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, pp. 163, 162. For Eisenstein, as Aumont notes, the 'film is the trace or inscription of a specific labour of production…carried out by the director…and this inscription of a *process* must generate in the spectator, more or less mimetically…a new labour of meaning production'. Ibid, p. 194.

Much of the *Capital* notes are taken up by Eisenstein casting about for possible solutions to the formal problems that the work poses. The problem of 'volume of material', is to be 'solved by an incredible succinctness and by treating each part entirely in its own way': one part could be acted, another 'all from newsreels'.[247] Eschewing a single plot, the film will be constructed out of '*fait divers*' [news in brief], '*historiettes*' [short historical vignettes] and 'collections of short film-essays' [*kino-essais*] whose form, he notes, 'is fully appropriate for replacement of "whole" works'.[248] The structure of a *fait divers*, a popular feuilleton form made up of compressed news reports of unusual incidents that are connected to unexpected causes is instructive for understanding Eisenstein's de-anecdotalization method. *Fait divers*, as Barthes notes, are constituted out of the junction between '[a]leatory causality' and 'organised coincidence'. It tells us 'that man is always linked to something else, that nature is full of echoes, relations movements'; implying a certain idea of 'Fate' or an 'alien force' at once 'indecipherable and intelligent'.[249] In the notes Eisenstein endeavours to find ways to represent certain subjects not merely through direct, symbolic representation, but indirectly, through fragmentary details. 'Stock exchange to be rendered not as "a Stock Exchange"…but as thousands of "tiny details". Like a genre painting'.[250] Taking a 'banal development of a perfectly unrelated event', these 'montage fragments' would serve as a point of departure for 'forming of associations' or 'intellectual attractions', providing an 'impulse towards abstraction and generalization (mechanical spring-boards for patterns of dialectical attitudes towards events)'.[251] One such associative sequence springs from a shot of a housewife seasoning soup with pepper: 'Pepper. Cayenne. Devil's Island. Dreyfus. French chauvinism. *Figaro* in Krupp's hands. War. Ships sunk in the port.'[252] Eisenstein finds another model for the structure of the film and the 'de-anecdotalization principle' in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, particularly its construction out of chapters written in various styles and its effective combination of the 'extreme concreteness' of banal everyday

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[247] Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 18.

[248] Ibid., p. 9.

[249] Barthes, 'Structure of the *Fait-Divers*' (1962), in *Critical Essays*, pp. 194, 191, 193. Eisenstein cites Henri Barbusse's 1928 collection of *Faits divers*.

[250] Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 7.

[251] Ibid., pp. 15, 12, 16.

[252] Ibid., p. 17.

life with 'metaphysical' 'offshoot[s]' of 'maximum abstractness'.[253] The chapter known as 'Ithaca', written in 'the manner of a scholastic catechism', is especially intriguing for Eisenstein, in its digression from a question about how to bring a teakettle to the boiling point into answers that are 'cosmic and philosophical'.[254]

Eisenstein's vision of *Marx's Capital* as constructed out of stylistically diverse 'intellectual attractions' can be seen, as the phrase suggests, to continue, albeit with a different inflection, his earlier constructivist writings on theatre and film, which he theorised in terms of a 'montage of attractions'. An attraction, as Eisenstein explains in his 1923 manifesto on theatre is '*any aggressive moment…calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator*' and intended to direct the audience to '*perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown*'.[255] In 'The Montage of Film Attractions' (1924) this constructive principle is said to 'free' the events of the film 'from narrowly plot-related plans', in order to create 'associations' through the juxtaposition of the film's separate elements.[256] In *Strike*, as Eisenstein notes in 'The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form' (1925), the 'form of the plot [*syuzhet*]' is not based on 'dramaturgical laws' but on 'the exposition of the content', which is 'investigated' as if factory process.[257] Here, the inspiration of the film's construction derives from 'manufacturing newsreels' and his 'forerunner' *Kinopravda*. Yet whereas 'the *external form* of the construction' is said to bare 'a certain similarity' to Vertov, Eisenstein contrasts his *consciously calculated* plan to 'subjugate' the audience to

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[253] Ibid., pp. 7, 15. In his essay, 'Laocoön' (1937), Eisenstein stresses his continued interest in the 'range of literary forms and genres' that *Ulysses* contains: 'One is written in the form of a catechism', 'another on the model of newspaper reports with screaming headlines', a 'third in dramatic form'. 'All this is, as it were, a miniature encyclopedia of all the forms and genres of literary composition, which arise from the complex of chapters that go to make up the image of "Literature"'. Eisenstein, 'Laocoön', *SW 2*, pp. 195-6.

[254] Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', pp. 7, 15.

[255] Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Montage of Attractions', in *SW 1*, p. 34. 'Theatre's basic material', as Eisenstein writes, 'derives from the audience: the moulding of the audience in a desired direction (or mood) is the task of every utilitarian theatre (agitation, advertising, health education, etc.)'. Ibid., p. 34.

[256] Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Montage of Film Attractions', in *SW 1*, p. 41. This text anticipates the notes in its speculation that 'the future' of cinema 'undoubtedly lies with the plot-less actor-less form of exposition'. Ibid., p. 48.

[257] Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Problem of the Materialist Approach to Form', in *SW 1*, p. 59.

controlled ideological associations with Vertov's impressionistic 'pointillist painting'.[258] In these early texts, as Aumont notes, Eisenstein's desire is to 'subordinate lyricism and the spectator's pleasure to ideology, to the "moulding" of the spectator'.[259] This leads to Eisenstein's various attempts to break down analytically each image-fragment into mathematically determinable 'stimuli', to produce 'meanings stripped of all ambiguity'.[260] Yet this dream of producing univocal meanings quickly comes into conflict with Eisenstein's treatment of the filmic image as 'plurality of coded levels'.[261]

Likely encouraged by the semiotic focus of the 1927 *Poetics of Cinema* collection, Eisenstein's essays from 1928-29 sought to develop a semiotic understanding film, treating the shot as a depictive sign which, like 'other visual systems of representation rely on convention'.[262] While the notes and writings of the late 1920s do not abandon the concept of attractions, there is an important development in these texts, shifting their focus away from the agitational and emotional dimensions of cinematic montage to an analysis of its semiotic and intellectual dimensions. This shift in focus was clearly spurred by his experience of making *October*, which manifests a keen awareness of 'the practical semiotics of power', a phenomena that was particulary manifest in the post-revolutionary culture.[263] As Voloshinov puts it in his 1929 *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, it is particularly at times of 'social crises or revolutionary changes' that the '*inner dialectic quality of the sign*' – its 'social *multiaccentuality*' – is rendered fully apparent and 'becomes an arena of the class struggle'.[264] In *October*, Eisenstein explores 'different conceptions of the sign', identifying those conceptions with 'particular historical forces'; a connection that is made evident from the film's opening scene which depicts the tearing down, piece by piece, of a statue of Alexander III, decked with imperial regalia – the camera focusing first on his crown,

[258] Ibid., pp. 62-63, 64.

[259] Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, p. 58

[260] Ibid., pp. 33, 159.

[261] Ibid., p. 158.

[262] Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, pp. 125-126.

[263] Ibid., pp. 135, 93.

[264] V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 23.

Figure 6. *October*

then on the scepter and orb held in his hands.[265] As Anne Nesbet details, historical sites in

October, such as the Hermitage and Winter Palace – turned state museum following the

revolution – are raided for their significative objects, which are employed to generate

satirical commentaries on the film's diegesis, often turning them against their original

purpose.[266] To borrow Shklovsky's phrase, *October* 'incites insurrection among things',

wresting objects from the 'semantic cluster' in which they are 'embedded' and reassigning

them to a new cluster.[267] Eisenstein, as Wollen writes, is 'concerned with "image-building"

as a kind of picto-graphy, in which images are liberated from their role as elements of

representation and given a semantic function within a genuine iconic code, something like

the baroque code of emblems'.[268] Exemplary here are the two sequences that intercut

Kerensky, the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government, with a plaster figure of

Napoleon (fostering a resemblance through their respective postures in order to ridicule the

formers imperial ambition) and a bejewelled, toy mechanical peacock (Figure 6) –

'pictorializing a figure of speech: Kerensky is as vain as a peacock'.[269] As Bordwell and others

show, Eisenstein takes 'fairly dead and clichéd metaphors and enlivens them through

contextual associations', visual puns and other 'filmic figures' that 'go beyond one-for-one

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[265] Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, p. 93. As Bordwell points out, this sequence creatively reworks

newsreel material from Esfir Shub's *The Fall of the Romonov Dynasty* and *The Great Way* (both 1927), which

features images of the actual statue, which was hauled down in Moscow, not St. Petersburg. Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[266] Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctures: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 88.

[267] Shklovsky, 'The Structure of Fiction', p. 62.

[268] Wollen, 'Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*', p. 84.

[269] Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, p. 45.

comparisons and acquire the penumbra of connotation[s]'.[270] In *October*, as Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier points out, the Winter Palace only first appears through such metaphoric fragments, glimpsed via its objects framed in close-up, some of which only become localizable towards the end of the film when the Palace is stormed, which is also when the first long-shot of the Palace occurs.[271] Consequently, the objects are 'metaphors of the Palace before being metonymies of it', and this order of representation, in which the historical site of the palace is only arrived at through its construction out of depictive sign-objects, serves to show that 'reality' is always 'a product of a history', and, in turn, that history is 'the product of a discourse'.[272]

In his theoretical reflections on 'intellectual cinema' from late 1920s Eisenstein construes his the task as combining 'the "language of logic" and the "language of images"'.[273] The key problem explored in these writings is how to create, through the 'figurativeness' of montage, the 'cinematic *materialization of ideas*'.[274] In these essays montage is understood through various models: 1) as Japanese hieroglyphics, wherein ideograms, which taken separately correspond to a representable object, are juxtaposed to produce an abstract thought or concept; 2) in terms of dialectics, understood as the dynamic and evolving conflict and contradictory unity between independent shots; 3) as a system of changing rhythms, overtones and dominants, based on music (Debussy and Scriabin) and verse theory

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[270] Ibid., p. 45. As Eichenbaum states: 'The film metaphor is a kind of visual realization of a verbal metaphor. Naturally, only current verbal metaphors can serve as a basis for film metaphor; the viewer quickly understands them precisely because they are well-known and therefore easily decodable as metaphors'. Boris Eichenbaum, 'Problems of Cinema Stylistics', in *Russian Formalist Film Theory*, p. 79.

[271] Marie-Claire Ropare-Wuilleumier, 'The Function of Metaphor in Eisenstein's *October*', *Film Criticism*, vol. 2, no. 2/3 (Winter/Spring, 1978), pp. 14-15. This metonymic grounding does not affect them all, with objects such as the peacock and the Napoleon statue, remaining indefinitely suspended.

[272] Ibid., p. 15. *October*, as Ropare-Wuilleumier puts it, does not simply 'recount the Revolution' and 'represent' its events, but 'analyses its meaning'. Ibid., p. 16.

[273] Eisenstein, 'Perspectives', p. 156.

[274] Sergei Eisenstein, 'The GTK Teaching and Research Workshop' (1928), in *SW 1*, p. 129. Figurative because not denoted *in* the shot, but emerging from the juxtaposition of shots.

Figure 7. *October*

(Tynyanov).[275] It is the 'sequence of the gods', a key model for Eisenstein's proposed essay film, where the development of what he terms '*montage thinking*' is pushed the furthest.[276] The sequence begins with General Kornilov's counter-revolutionary attack which, as an intertitle states, went under the rallying cry, 'in the name of God and Fatherland'. Isolating the word 'God', repeated in large letters in the subsequent intertitle the following series of shots juxtapose diverse cultural figurations of the universalizing concept; transitioning from cupolas of a church, to a bust of a baroque Christ, a Hindu god, a Buddha, Japanese mask, and other idols and fetishes, which are followed by shots of military medals (Figure 7).[277] This morphology of figurations of the divine, as Ropars-Wuilleumier notes, proceeds in two contradictory movements, in which the different representations, taken into the same whole, both build and deconstruct the unity of the abstract concept.[278] As Eisenstein writes, 'a conflict arises between the concept "God" and its symbolisation', with the 'idea and image' growing 'further apart with each subsequent image'. The 'preconception' God is

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[275] See Eisenstein, 'Beyond the Shot', 'The Dramaturgy of Film Form', and 'The Fourth Dimension in Cinema' (1929), in *SW 1*, pp. 181-194.

[276] Sergei Eisenstein, 'An Unexpected Juncture' (1928), in *SW 1*, p. 122.

[277] Ropare-Wuilleumier, 'The Function of Metaphor in Eisenstein's *October*', p. 16. See pages 18-24 for a textual and visual shot by shot break down of the sequence.

[278] Ibid., p. 25.

subject to 'its *gradual tendentious discrediting by degrees* through pure illustration', turning the 'conventional *descriptive* form of the film' into 'a kind of reasoning'.[279]

Eisenstein's reflections on 'intellectual montage', and particularly its actualization in *October*'s sequence of the gods, as Nesbet argues, provide a 'striking gloss' on the interrelationship of image [*Bild*] and concept [*Begriff*] in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, a philosophical *Bildungsroman* concerning Spirit's path towards Absolute Knowledge, 'consciousness…must again and again seek a new "image" as a means of access to the "concept" at hand and then learn to emancipate itself from the limitations of what Hegel labels "mere picture-thinking"'.[280] In notes from 1928 referencing this sequence Eisenstein refers to this form of reasoning in terms of an 'ironic dialectic', which he dialectically opposes to the 'Hegelian (idealistic) dialectic'.[281] The dialectic of 'ideal' and 'irony', by contrast, mirrors for Eisenstein, following Lenin, the dialectical relationship between 'theory' and 'practice', in which 'theory "strains" towards materialization (towards its putting into practice)' and 'practice in turn tends "towards its theoretical" basis'.[282] The ironic dialectic is exemplified, for Eisenstein, in a sequence in *October* portraying Kerensky's rise to power, which takes on a '[c]omic effect' achieved by intercutting intertitles '*denoting ever higher rank*' with shots of Kerensky repeatedly ascending the same flight of the Winter Palace. Here, Eisenstein creates a 'counterpoint between verbally expressed, conventional idea and a pictorial representation of an individual who is unequal to that idea', highlighting an 'incongruity' between them and consequently producing 'a purely *intellectual* resolution

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[279] Eisenstein, 'The Dramaturgy of Film Form', p. 180.

[280] Ibid., p. 82. As Donald Phillip Verene puts it, the '*Bild* is the basis of the pathway of the process of consciousness'; images are the means which consciousness 'brings forth its starting points and restarting points' in the course of its becoming. Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 3-4. 'This Becoming', as Hegel famously writes in the final paragraph of the book, 'presents a slow-moving succession of Spirts, a gallery of images [*Galerie von Bildern*]' whose goal is the 'revelation' of '*the absolute Concept* [*Begriff*]'. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 492.

[281] Quoted in Nesbet, *Savage Junctures*, p. 92

[282] Quoted in Ibid., p. 92.

at the expense of this individual'.[283] The irony is thus not in the shots of Kerensky's ascension, but, recalling Lefebvre's Romantic definition of irony, in the juxtaposition of the ideal intertitles and the image of the actual individual (the gap between the ideal and its materialization).[284]

Eisenstein's pictorial visualisation of metaphoric figures in *October* figures the already quasi-visual or sensible aspect of verbal metaphor making that Ricoeur terms 'seeing as' – an idea to which I will return in the following chapter. 'Half thought, half experience, "seeing as"', Ricoeur explains, 'is the intuitive relationship that holds sense and image together'. To establish a metaphoric resemblance between two objects is both an 'experience' and an 'act' which joins 'verbal meaning with imagistic fullness'.[285] Yet in his various attempts to combine the language of logic and the language of images, as Nesbet observes, Eisenstein simultaneously undoes any ideal of 'getting images to communicate particular concepts in a consciously controllable manner'.[286] As the two sequences described above reveal, both concept and image in Eisenstein's 'intellectual montage' become 'fundamentally slippery' and 'no longer held in any kind of tight correspondence'.[287] *October*'s witty 'betrayals' of objects and their 'original roles and intensions' instead demonstrate that their 'flexibility…cannot be trusted to remain loyal to any one message or any single owner': any

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[283] Eisentein, 'The Dramaturgy of Film Form', p. 179.

[284] In the notes for the *Capital* film, Eisenstein favourably quotes a review of *October* which compares its use of irony with German Romanticism. See Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 10.

[285] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 252. For Ricoeur, 'seeing as' plays the role of the Kantian 'schema that unites the *empty* concept and the *blind* impression; thanks to its character as half thought and half experience, it joins the light of sense with the fullness of the image'. Ibid., p. 253. As Osborne explains, in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 'image' is the 'mediating term between aesthetic and logic, in which intuitions achieve a *non-conceptual synthesis* and (in both editions) in which *concepts are rendered sensible* through the action of a transcendental schematism and hence become capable of organizing sensible intuitions into cognitive experience'. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 'image is that *non-conceptual but more-than-sensible* form in which aesthetic ideas become actual. Aesthetic ideas are those that can be actualized in images'. See Peter Osborne, 'The Distributed Image', in *The Postconceptual Condition*, pp. 138-139.

[286] Nesbet, *Savage Junctures*, p. 93

[287] Ibid, p. 93.

image holds 'more meaning than any single concept' can 'control'.[288] Eisenstein comments on this tension in his essay 1938 essay on montage. 'The strength of montage', as Eisenstein writes, 'lies in the fact' that the 'spectator is forced to follow the same creative path that the author followed when creating the image' and 'experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and formation of the image in the same way that the author experienced it'. As Eisenstein adds, the 'strength of montage lies also in the fact that the spectator is drawn into a creative act of a kind in which his individual nature is not only not enslaved to the individuality of the author but is deployed to the full by a fusion of the author's purpose' and the 'creative act' of 'interpretation' on the part of the spectator. Every spectator 'creates an image' from 'his past experience; from the depths of his imagination; from the web of his mental associations'.[289]

Here we run right up against the difficulties of Eisenstein's theory of 'intellectual montage'; namely, how 'to engage the spectator's imagination in the direction of one or the other association', when the process of watching a film 'always involves an *expansive* development from a representation, and not the *limitation* of this representation to a single meaning'.[290] While Eisenstein's theory of montage generally attempts to construct controlled associations 'rooted in the solidity of a signified', he is also keenly aware 'that a montage of several fragments, let alone one single fragment, is never univocal'.[291] This is why Balázs's critique of Eisenstein's attempts to figure or express abstract ideas through a form of ideographic writing are only partly correct. Rather than 'posit an *equivalence* between language…and film', as Aumont notes, Eisenstein is more often concerned with 'a much looser analogy between certain semantic operations in film…and certain "figures" of thought'. When discussing metaphor or synecdoche, for instance, 'it is never in the context of copying…figures of rhetoric for the cinema, but more in the sense of models' for the cinematographic 'production of meaning'. A central problem here for Eisenstein, as his writings demonstrate, is the desire to simply reproduce '"worn" metaphors' in the form of

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[288] Ibid., pp. 88, 93.

[289] Eisenstein, 'Montage 1938', pp. 309-310.

[290] Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, pp. 167-168.

[291] Ibid., p. 168.

images, 'but to catch the metaphor in its emergent state'.[292] As with Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Eisenstein's montage practice thus endeavours to 'express itself as process, in permanent *status nascendi*', working against the presentation of filmic figures of thought 'as something congealed'.[293] This is why the notes to the *Capital* project 'do not reveal a *method*…or even succeed in isolating fixed *rules*' to establish an intellectual cinema.[294]

While Vertov's and Eisenstein's experimental theory and practice of montage, and their respective attempts to create a reflexive and political form of cinematographic discourse through the rhetorical and poetic juxtaposition of text and image fragments would come into stark conflict with the canonization of Socialist Realism in the 1930s, as well as the technological innovations in synchornized sound film from the late 1920s onwards, this experimental and essayistic legacy of Soviet silent cinema would be taken up and developed in diverse ways by a number of filmmakers in Europe toward the end of the 1960s.[295] One

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[292] Ibid., p. 158. As Eisenstein notes in 'Beyond the Shot', the reduction of montage to a 'stock combination of images' 'carves out' only 'a dry definition of the concept', whereas, the 'same method, expanded into a wealth of…semantic combinations', generates 'a profusion of *figurative* effect'. Eisenstein, 'Beyond the Shot', p. 140.

[293] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Skoteinos, or How to Read Hegel', in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Webet Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 121. Adorno notably makes 'an anachronistic comparison' between Hegel's style of writing and film: 'Hegel's publications', as Adorno notes, 'are more like films of thought than texts. The untutored eye can never capture the details of a film the way it can those of a still image, and so it is with Hegel's writings'. Ibid., p. 121.

[294] Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, p. 159-160. As Eisenstein comments: 'It is interesting that these things can have no existence outside the meaning…An abstract formal experiment is inconceivable here. As in montage in general'. Eisenstein, 'Notes for a Film of *Capital*', p. 9.

[295] As Seth Feldman notes, Vertov was largely forgotten by the time of his death in 1954, and was only reintroduced to Soviet film culture in the 1960s when many of his writings were re-published. Excerpts of Vertov's writings quickly began to appear in the early 1960s in French, German and English. Seth Feldman, 'Vertov After Manovich', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring, 2007), p. 42. In France in the early 1960s, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin dubbed their ethnographic documentary methods, which sought to obviate rehearsal and staging, '*cinéma-vérité*', after George Sadoul's translation of *kinopravda*. Although the term *cinéma-vérite* was a 'homage' to Vertov, and his goal of catching life unawares, Rouch and Morin notably spurn the rhetorical and analytical importance of experimental montage in Vertov's project, which, like André Bazin, they consider as leading to 'formalist distortion'. In doing so, as Tom McDonough contends, they

such filmmaker was Jean-Luc Godard.

renaturalise Vertov's constructivist kino-eye, and treat film's 'indexical relation to reality' as a sort of '"natural language"', which montage inevitably deforms. See Tom McDonough, 'Calling from the Inside: Filmic Topologies of the Everyday', *Grey Room* 26 (Winter, 2007), p. 12.

Chapter 3. Essaying Cinema and the Media in the Work of Jean-Luc Godard

From the early 1960s on Godard has referred to his activity as a filmmaker as practicing criticism by other means. 'Instead of writing criticism', he states in a 1962 interview – responding to a question about his transition from writing film criticism for the journal *Cahiers du cinéma* to becoming a leading film *auteur* of the French New Wave – 'I make a film' wherein 'the critical dimension is subsumed'.[1] Whether captured in the settings of the modern urban environment and the contemporary consumer culture that his characters navigate, or staged through acted dialogue and commentary (typically through voice-over, intertitles or the direct address of characters), 'critical analysis' and 'critical commentaries on events' appear throughout Godard's early films.[2] Yet, as I already noted in the Introduction, criticism in these works, akin to Eisenstein's narrative features, typically appears in the form of essayistic interpolations within a novelistic or Brechtian narrative. While the influence of Brecht on Godard's work from the early 1960s – particularly its mixture of discursive reflection and an episodic narrative form – has often been highlighted, less recognized in the critical literature is the importance of early of German Romanticism for Godard. As Godard has noted in a number of interviews, in his youth he was 'very influenced by German Romanticism', more so than French literature: 'It was Novalis or the young Goethe that made me know Sartre'.[3] Godard's work of the late 1960s, as Richard I. Suchenski argues, can best be understood as presenting a 'Marxism read through the lens of

[1] 'Interview with Jean-Luc Godard' (1962), in Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. and trans. Tom Milne (London and New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), p. 171.

[2] 'Let's Talk about *Pierrot*' (1965), in Godard, *Godard on Godard*, p. 230. As Godard notes in this interview, indicating to his desire to produce something akin to early German Romanticism's blending of criticism and art: 'Only literary criticism exists in its own right, because its object blends with its subject'. Ibid., p. 229.

[3] Quoted in Richard I. Suchenski, *Projections of Memory: Romanticism, Modernism, and the Aesthetics of Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 156-157. As Godard comments in a 2001 interview with Alexander Kluge about his film *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* (1991), his youth was marked by a discovery of the German Romantics, which the film is, in part, a recognition of: 'I even read books that people don't read anymore – Novalis, Jean Paul...all of them'. This influence is comically pointed to in his 1967 film, *La Chinoise*, where we see a portrait of Novalis pierced by an arrow of the student radical played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, as well as the final section of the film which invokes the French titles of Goethe's two *Wilhelm Meister* novels, ironically linking Léaud's character to the Goethe's Romantic *Bildungsroman*. Ibid., pp. 156, 154

early Romanticism'; an influence that can be seen in Godard's exploration of fragmentary and essayistic forms in subsequent works, such as the poetic monologue, the critical dialogue and the letter form.[4]

This chapter begins with two early examples from the late 1960s in which Godard employs the Romantic forms of the poetic monologue and critical dialogue, *Camera Eye* and *Le gai savoir*, which, in different ways, attempt to defamiliarize the naturalized unity of sound and image in media representations. In Godard's early Dziga Vertov Group work, which I discuss in Section 2, the image becomes merely a false representation of the ideology of the visible, which must be negated by correct sounds; an idea that is displaced in the later works, such as the essayistic paratext *Letter to Jane*, which attempts to explore the photographic image as a codified form of expression. The exploration of images as overdetermined by a pre-existent discourse is the central starting point for Godard's subsequent collaboration with Anne-Marie Miéville in the mid-to-late 1970s through their production company Sonimage, whose films I write about in Section 4. In particular, I focus on how Godard and Miéville use post-production techniques afforded by video editing technology as a tool for not only connecting images and sounds, but producing essayistic reflections on their linkage process. Section 5 discusses Godard's so-called video-scenarios from the late 1970s and early 1980s, which serve as paratexts – rough drafts and research notes – to his cinematic feature films. In these paratexts, the films become a site of reflection that is to be critically unfolded through the video scenarios that surround them. Section 6 explores how Godard's work of the 1980s and 1990s can be understood as developing a 'late-style', producing polyphonic and abstruse compositions marked by a peculiar amalgam of subjectivity and melancholic anachronism. I further examine Godard's hypertextual citational practice, and his highly textured soundtracks, which operate in a state of semiautonomy to the image – a discontinuity that I read in relation to what Benjamin characterizes as the desolate dispersal of allegorical emblems in baroque drama. Section 7 considers Godard's video project, *Histoire(s) du cinema*, and its experimental combination of self-portrayal and citation, and its creation of a stratified mode of historical perception, which I relate to various textual

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[4] Ibid., p. 155.

models, including Montaigne's *Essais*, Andre Malraux's iconographic art historical studies, and Benjamin's *Arcades Project*.

3.1. *Camera Eye* and Radio Ear

As noted in the Introduction, 'the emergence of truly essayistic forms' in Godard's work occurs with his 16mm eleven minute short, *Camera Eye*, made as a contribution to the collective film, *Loin du Viêt-Nam* [*Far from Vietnam*] (1967), which was organized by Chris Marker as a vehicle for filmmakers 'to affirm, by making a film, their solidarity with the people of Vietnam in their resistance against aggression' (as is announced at the beginning of the film).[5] Godard's contribution appears around halfway through the two-hour film, and is introduced by the intertitle CAMERA EYE, which is followed by an image of a clapper board, on which is written 'Vietnam Godard'. We then cut to Godard operating a large 35mm camera on a rooftop in Paris, who is filmed from various angles while he reads what seem to be a collage of discrete newspaper clippings detailing the Vietnam war. 'If I had been a cameraman for the news', Godard concludes, 'that is what I would have filmed'. 'But I live in Paris', he adds, 'and I was not in Vietnam'. The latter avowal registers a distinct change in Godard's voice in terms of both its sound and its delivery: now a lower-quality recording and no longer synchronized with the image-track his voice is suddenly marked by vocal tics, hesitant pauses and self-corrections.[6] Over the image-track – which is now comprised of various documentary scenes depicting the effects of the war on the everyday life of Vietnamese people, footage of a factory strike in France, photographs, posters and an occasional clip from *La Chinoise*, which are intercut with Godard still sat at the camera (Figure 8) – Godard recounts his previous attempt to go to North Vietnam to make a film, which was, he notes, 'rightly' rejected by the Vietnamese delegation who were suspicious of

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[5] *Loin du Viêt-Nam* is comprised of a range of predominantly documentary sequences, filmed in North Vietnam, France and the US, which were produced by various international filmmakers who, although listed in the credits, are not assigned to any particular section.

[6] We hear, to borrow Barthes's term, the 'grain' of Godard's voice. For Barthes (his focus is on music and vocals), the grain of the voice is 'the materiality of the body speaking' which opens the *significance* between language and voice. Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p. 182.

Figure 8. *Camera Eye*

his well-meaning, yet 'vague', intensions. This refusal, Godard relates, forced him to reflect on his own position as a filmmaker based in Paris, arguing that the best thing he can do for Vietnam, rather than 'invade' it and attempt to portray a situation he has no experience of is, on the contrary, 'to let Vietnam invade us and make us realize the place it occupies in our daily lives'.[7]

Godard goes on to consider Vietnam as a 'symbol of resistance' within a broader system of oppression, connecting widely distant (both geographically and in kind) cases of oppression and forms of struggle: from revolutionary movements taking place in South America, to the 1967 strike at the Rhodiacéta textile plant in Besançon, France, to his own personal struggles against the 'economic and aesthetic imperialism' of the American film industry (symbolized by the giant American Mitchell camera Godard is operating). By putting into relation various instances of oppression, Godard does not seek to render equivalent these widely divergent scenes of violence and exploitation but, as with Vertov's kino-eye, to link, through 'solidarity' these disparate phenomena. In uniting these disparate experiences Godard further endeavours to reflect on the multiple separations that are revealed through this linkage process, in particular the socio-economic and cultural 'fractures' that exist between himself (a bourgeois filmmaker based in Paris) and the French working class (who are uninterested in his films and who he feels almost as 'far' from as Vietnam). Echoing Brecht's theory of the apparatus – which would be developed by Benjamin in 'The Author as Producer' (1934) – Godard nonetheless aligns his struggle within the cinema with the workers struggle at Rhodiacéta, in one sequence cutting from a photograph of a worker's

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[7] Beginning with Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965), the topic of the Vietnam war appears in all of Godard's films of the 1960s.

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Figure 9. *Camera Eye*

hands to a shot of his own hands turning the wheels of the film camera (Figure 9), thereby

generating an adequation between their respective positioning within the relations of

production.[8] In an analogous manner to the depicted worker, Godard is separated from his

means of production, an apparatus dominated economically, technologically and

aesthetically by American cinema of which he is deprived effective control over.[9] Godard

will rehearse this argument about the dominance of American cinema over national

cinemas throughout his career, connecting it to wider forms of economic and imperial

aggression.

Camera Eye anticipates a number of themes and formal strategies that will underpin much

of Godard's subsequent essayistic film and television work, most notably: 1) a Brechtian

interrogation of the cinematic and, more broadly, media apparatus, united with a self-

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[8] Drawing on Brecht and Tret'iakov, Benjamin in 'The Author as Producer' argues that the writer should be in

'solidarity with the proletariat' not only with respect to to their 'attitudes' toward the latter, but to their own

status as a 'producer'. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *SW 2:2*, p. 772. As Maria Gough notes,

Benjamin uses the word 'producer' [*Produzent*] here chiefly to identify 'a particular class position, or

positioning, within capitalist relations of production, rather than to refer to any particular category of labour

as such'. Maria Gough, 'Paris, Capital of the Soviet Avant-Garde', *October* 101 (Summer, 2002), p. 69.

[9] Godard's argument here can be correlated with Brecht's argument in 'The *Threepenny* Lawsuit' (1931), that

the 'migration of the means of production away from the producers signals the proletarianization of the

producers'. As Brecht continues: 'Like the manual labourer, the intellectual worker has only his naked labour

power to offer, yet he is his labour power and nothing more than that. And, just like the manual labourer, he

needs these means of production more and more to exploit his labour power (because production is becoming

ever more "technical")'. Bertolt Brecht, 'The *Threepenny* Lawsuit', in *Brecht on Film and Radio*, trans. and ed.

Marc Silberman (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2000), p. 162.

interrogation and self-representation of his position within it; 2) an application of Vertov's theory of montage as the construction of intervals between shots in order to establish metaphoric (poetic and rhetorical) relations between dissimilar phenomena, no longer grounded in the narration of a story but the exposition of an argument or the (paratactic) circling of an idea or problem.[10] In addition to Brecht and Vertov's conspicuous influence on *Camera Eye*, Godard's enactment of a self-critical form of filmmaking can also be also be compared with Novalis's 'Monologue' (1798).[11] Written, as with Godard's voice-over commentary, in a tone that is at once conversational and confessional, Novalis's short aphoristic text attempts to both reflect on and present a Romantic conception of literature. What is most striking in *Monologue*, as Andrew Bowie notes, is Novalis's 'dismissal' of a 'representational model of language', instead describing literature as the setting up of a 'strange game of relations' between words in which things are reflected.[12] Linguistic representation, for Novalis, lies not in identifying 'things', but in the ways language can establish 'new *relations* between things', 'which constitute what a thing is understood to be' – a relational interplay between linguistic elements which he notably compares to mathematics and music.[13] I will return to how similar notions of mathematical and musical relationality appear in Godard's later film and video work in the sections that follow. I turn now instead to his television film, *Le gai savoir* (1968), where Godard attempts to connect contemporaneous theoretical debates around language and epistemology to reflect on the relation between sound and image in media representations.

Following the completion of his final commercial feature of the 1960s, *Week-end* [*Weekend*] (1967), Godard was commissioned by the French state TV network ORTF to produce a televisual film adaption of Rousseau's novelistic treatise on education, *Émile, or On*

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[10] It also prefigures what will be the chief subject of Sonimage's first work, *Ici et Ailleurs* [*Here and Elsewhere*] (1974), which I discuss below; namely, a critique of 'Western intellectuals' projecting their 'revolutionary zeal…onto distant political struggles' at the expense of reflecting on 'the reality of their immediate environment and daily lives'. See Michael Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 46.

[11] See Novalis, 'Monologue', in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, pp. 214-215.

[12] Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, p. 66.

[13] Ibid., p. 66.

Figure 10. *Le gai savoir*

Education (1762). Entitled *Le gai savoir* [*The Joy of Knowledge*], the film was shot just months before the events of May-June 1968 and edited shortly afterward. While the film's aim to, as one the characters states, 'turn against the enemy the weapon with which he most fundamentally attacks us: language', can, as Colin MacCabe underlines, best be understood in terms of the concerted attempt at the time, exemplified in journals such as *Tel Quel*, to combine post-structuralist theory, literary modernism, and Maoism, *Le gai savoir* can also be seen to be informed by the Situationist practice of *détournement*.[14] This can be observed not only in the film's attention to the ideological multiaccentuality of audio-visual signs, but its incorporation of various still images – including cartoons, the covers of contemporaneous theoretical books, political posters, drawings, and advertising photographs – that have been written upon in pen (Figure 10). Some of these materials had featured previously in the collaboratively (and anonymously) produced *Ciné-tracts* [*Film-Tracts*]. Made during the events of May-June 1968 to be shown during meetings and assemblies, the *Ciné-tracts* are comprised of a series of quickly fabricated 16mm silent-shorts, consisting largely of still black and white photographs of the uprising, intertitles, and other assorted images, some of which bear the signature of Godard's distinctive handwriting. These 'collage film essays', and their incorporation into *Le gai savoir*, as Michael Witt notes, offer a particularly striking display of 'the centrality of the still image' in the development of Godard's 'essayistic style', which would be developed in his subsequent

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[14] Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at 70* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 206-207.

Figure 11. *Le gai savoir*

films, obliging him to achieve 'graphic and signicative complexity through very modest means'.[15]

The minimalist narrative structure of *Le gai savoir* takes the form of series of acted dialogues between Émile Rousseau (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and Patricia Lumumba (Juliet Berto), which take place in the deserted and darkened nonplace of a television studio (Figure 11). The scenes of dialogue are punctuated by brief sequences made up of contemporary documentary footage of the streets of Paris and the various image stills already mentioned, as well as snatches of recorded sound (including recordings of the student occupation of the Sorbonne). Bombarded by these image-sound fragments, which simulate the fragmented experience of the cultural forms of television and radio, Émile and Patricia embark on a three-year curriculum: to 'collect' and 'critique' (to 'decompose' and 'recompose') images and sounds in order to advance some alternative 'models' for constructing them differently. The method of this analytical undertaking – to 'dissolve' and analyse the audiovisual components of film and television – is characterized, as Patricia stipulates, not as a 'starting from zero', but as an attempt to 'return to zero'.[16] This desire to return to zero, however,

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[15] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 55.

[16] The idea of a return to zero evokes the 1789 French Revolution, where the National Convention instituted (in 1792) a new calendar beginning from 'year zero'. This phrase appears towards the end of *La Chinoise* where, in an urban wasteland that a character strolls through, we see a man paint in red the words 'theatre year zero'. The phrase also alludes to Roberto Rossellini's post-war drama, *Germany, Year Zero* (1948), which Godard reprises in the title of his film, *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* (1993). It further recalls Isidore Isou's Letterist manifesto, 'Aesthetics of Cinema' [*Esthétique du cinéma*] (1952), in which Isou argues that, with the

which recalls Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, is quickly contravened by Patricia's proposal to, when they get there, look around for 'traces'.

As *Le gai savoir* will suggest, the idea of 'traces' belies any ideal of discovering a pure state of images and sounds existing outside the linguistic, social and cultural fabric in which they are both formed and encountered. Accordingly, Émile and Patricia turn their attention to disclosing the signifying practices by which the mass-media distributes images and sounds and anchors their meanings through the relations that are established between them, attempting to undo or defamiliarize our habitual ways seeing and listening; breaking apart such naturalized image-sound relations and re-linking them in unconventional ways. The film performs an audio-visual exercise in what Barthes named 'semioclasm': the creative destruction of signs.[17] A key strategy here, as Farocki notes, is Godard's use of 'transsensory catachresis'.[18] An important instance of this is the question 'who is speaking' in 'every image', which is originally posed by Patricia and is returned to throughout the film. In his 1964 essay, 'Rhetoric of the Image', Barthes observed how photography constituted a 'decisive mutation' in 'informational economies' in that the analogical dimension of the medium, which gives the impression of pure denotation, or what he terms 'a message without a code', is utilized by advertising to naturalise and render innocent its 'semantic artifice of connotation' or 'symbolic message'.[19] To ask who is speaking in an image is an essentially Nietzschean question – the title of the film is borrowed from the French

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integration of synchronized sound, the cinematic medium exhausted its amplic resources and must now move into a 'chiseling' or reductive phase [*phase ciseland*] through the practice of 'discrepant' montage techniques, especially the non-synchronization of sound and image. For an account of Isou and the Letterist avant-garde, see Kaira M. Cabañas, *Off-Screen Cinema: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Avant-Garde* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[17] Roland Barthes, 'Preface to the 1970 edition' of *Mythologies*, pp. xvii-xviii. As Barthes notes in the 1970 Preface, the events of May 1968 made 'brutally evident' the renewed need for 'more sophisticated' forms of 'ideological criticism'.

[18] Harun Farocki and Kaja Silverman, *Speaking About Godard* (New York; London: New York University Press, 1998), p. 120.

[19] Roland Barthes, 'The Rhetoric of the Image', in *Image-Music-Text*, p. 45.

translation of Nietzsche's *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882).[20] For Nietzsche, as Foucault

comments in *The Order of Things* (1966) – passages from which are cited by Émile – it is not

a matter of understanding concepts or words in themselves, but of apprehending 'who was

being designated, or rather *who was speaking*' in a text.[21] In *Le gai savoir* Godard directly

writes on photographs and advertising images or adds to them what Émile and Patricia term

'missing sounds' in order to help us to 'hear' their symbolic message. As in Barthes, it is not

an individual subject revealed to be speaking, but a dominant world-view or ideology, which

gains its power through the naturalized unity of images and language.[22]

The splitting apart of images and sounds is allied in *Le gai savoir* to the task of 'undoing our

received ways of knowing', which is similarly driven by the ill-fated goal of reaching a zero

degree 'site of epistemological stability'.[23] Drawing on the likes of Derrida's *Of

Grammatology* [*De la Grammatologie*] (1967) – the cover of which appears in the film with

the word *savoir* written over it in red – the film will, as Silverman observes, ultimately call

into question the notion 'a transcendental subject who thinks from a position outside of

language' – a position that is exemplified in the film by the figures of Rousseau and

Descartes.[24] This is played out linguistically, as Silverman points out, in Émile and Patricia's

initial use of term *savoir*, to designate knowledge of the objective or impersonal sort, which,

over the course of the film is gradually displaced by the term *connaissance*, the latter

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[20] *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* is conventionally translated into English as *The Gay Science*. The term
Wissenschaft, unlike the English 'science', does not connote natural or biological sciences, but any organized
study or body of knowledge, including history, philology, criticism. Akin to Nietzsche, Godard seems to have
chosen the title to signify a certain spirit of understanding and criticism free from dogmatism and doctrine;
albeit pursuing notion of pleasurable learning closer in its politics to the that of Brecht than Nietzsche.

[21] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 333. For a gloss on Godard's use of Foucault's *The Order of Things* see
Farocki and Silverman, *Speaking About Godard*, p. 120.

[22] While Wollen, somewhat exaggeratedly, suggests that Godard in *Le gai savoir* 'investigates the whole
process of signification' out of which cultural artefacts convey a naturalised world-view, it would be more
accurate to say that the film, in contrast to Barthes's more systematic textual analyses, playfully points to such
issues. See Peter Wollen, 'The Two Avant-Gardes' (1975), in *Readings and Writings*, pp. 99-100

[23] Farocki and Silverman, *Speaking About Godard*, pp. 114, 135.

[24] Ibid., pp. 119-120.

signifying knowledge of the subjective or personal kind, based on familiarity.[25] The idea of a transcendental perspective, untroubled by 'biographical localization' is epitomized in the film by Godard's *disembodied* voice-over, which, as if an interference in the radio airways, is whispered over the sound of electronic noise.[26] To the extent that it 'cannot be yoked to a body', the voice-over in film, as Mary Ann Doane writes, is endowed with an 'authority' that appears to be 'beyond criticism', in the way that it 'censors' the questions '"Who is speaking?", "Where?", "In what time?", and "For whom?"'.[27] In the history of classical documentary film, as well as television news, the (predominantly male) voice-over represents a 'guarantee of knowledge' which, due to its appearing to be free from 'the spatiotemporal limitations of the body', becomes the 'privileged' and 'unquestioned' mode of 'interpreting the image' and 'producing its truth'.[28] This dominance of the voice-over in relation to the image is especially exacerbated in the work of the Dziga Vertov Group.

3.2. Sound and Image in the Dziga Vertov Group

The appellation *Groupe Dziga Vertov* first appeared in an article on their first film, *British Sounds (aka See You at Mao)* (1969), which Godard made in collaboration with the young Maoist student Jean-Henri Roger.[29] It was used to sign Godard and Roger's following film, *Pravda* (1969), and three subsequent works Godard made in collaboration with Jean-Pierre Gorin (a student of Louis Althusser and editor of the journal *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*),

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[25] Ibid., p. 117.

[26] Ibid., p. 121. As with the news flashes from Radio Peking that the students tune into in *La Chinoise*, the '"pure word" of radio', as Michael Cramer notes, figures here as 'a transmitter of truthful messages'. Michael Cramer, *Utopian Television: Rossellini, Watkins, and Godard Beyond Cinema*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), p. 135.

[27] Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York; Guilford: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 341.

[28] Even when the voice is 'explicitly linked with a body', as with a television news anchor, the body, as Doane notes, 'is situated in the nonspace of the studio'. Sound in television, more so than film, as Doane argues, 'carries the burden of "information" while the impoverished image simply fills the screen'. Ibid., p. 341.

[29] The name first appeared in September 1969 in a short article on *British Sounds* printed in the journal *Cinéthique*. See Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 129.

the majority of which were commissioned for and then rejected by various European television networks.[30] Working collaboratively and signing his films collectively represented an attempt by Godard 'to distance himself from the high-culture trappings' of the *auteur* cinema that he was associated with.[31] The adoption of Vertov's name, moreover, signalled an allegiance to a political cinema which, unlike Eisenstein's penchant for stylized recreations of the past, was rooted in the present and the everyday, as well as an adherence to Vertov's experimental montage techniques and his 'deep-rooted mistrust of any semblance of literary narrative'.[32] This attempt to couple political content with formal experimentation is captured in one of the groups often-cited slogans: 'The problem is not to make *political* films but to make films *politically*'.[33] While the agit-prop style and didactic tone that prevails throughout the Dziga Vertov Group's work has caused commentators to conflate the different films, or to treat one work as representative of the whole, there is an important development that occurs in relation to status of the image, the consequences of which are significant for understanding Godard's later Sonimage period.

In the first two films the image is associated with falsity or what D.N. Rodowick terms 'the ideology of the visible'. Employed by Jean-Luc Comolli in a number of articles written for *Cahiers du cinéma*, this phrase is taken by Rodowick to characterise the way in which a number of filmmakers and film theorists in the late 1960s and 1970s drew on Althusser's theory of ideology and philosophical critique of empiricism (equated with vision) in order criticize the ideological status of the film image, and to which they opposed Althusser's 'scientific' notion of 'theoretical practice' (equated with a phonological conception of

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[30] See Cramer, *Utopian Television*, pp. 125-145.

[31] Ibid., p. 128. The Dziga Vertov Group can be seen to be following the example of the film collective the Medvedkin Group [*Groupe Medvedkin*] (1967-1971), named after the Soviet filmmaker Alexander Medvedkin, which emerged out of a collaboration between Chris Marker and workers at the Rodiaceta factory in France. See Trevor Stark, '"Cinema in the Hands of the People": Chris Marker, the Medvedkin Group, and the Potential of Militant Film', *October* 139 (Winter, 2012), pp. 117-150.

[32] Witt, 'Montage, My Beautiful Care, or Histories of the Cinematograph', in *The Cinema Alone: Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard 1985-2000*, ed. Michael Temple and James S. Williams (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), pp. 36-37.

[33] Quoted in Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), p. 19.

language).[34] A variant on this model is clearly evidenced in *British Sounds* and *Pravda*, which although claiming to work on the principle of a dialectical 'struggle' between images and sounds, present, as Cramer observes, simply a negation of the image by the spoken commentary: 'the falsity of the image and its status as a vehicle for the "ideology of the visible" are countered through the truth of the word'.[35] Whereas *Le gai savoir* 'opened up a gap between image and sound in order to question the very possibility of some ahistorical truth inhabiting language or science', *British Sounds* and *Pravda*, as Douglas Morrey writes, re-inscribes 'sound and image with the metaphysical values of true and false'.[36] The following work by the Dziga Vertov group, *Vent d'est* [*Wind From the East*] (1969), made in collaboration with Gorin, marks a significant shift in the treatment of the image.[37] The idea that images can be 'subject to political and epistemological judgment in any idealist, essentialist fashion' – treated as 'unequivocally true or false' – or 'conflated with their referents' is displaced by an experimental investigation of the film image as 'a codified form of expression', which can itself 'comment on the codes through which it communicates' by

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[34] Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, p. 70.

[35] Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 132. As a voice proclaims over a scene of student activists making posters in *British Sounds*: 'the screen is no more than a blackboard, the wall of a school offering concrete analysis of a concrete situation'. This expressly Leninist pedagogical model, in which the vanguard party or militant filmmaker acts to translate peoples experience represented by the film into a form of rational knowledge and, at the same time, to teach them about their own experience, is typified by *Pravda*. See Stark, '"Cinema in the Hands of the People"', p. 144.

[36] Douglas Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 93. Yet, as Morrey points out, the film also recognises such failures. Vladimir at one point interrupts Rosa to point out that they have acted 'dogmatically'. The film's dogmatism, moreover, is extremely parodic. For instance, when Rosa hesitates for a moment in her commentary, 'Vladimir berates her for it, instructing her not to leave too long between analyses to allow the revisionist images to take hold'. There is, however, as Morrey observes, still 'a certain mastery, a righteousness located in the voiceover'. Ibid., pp. 94-95

[37] Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 135. This shift coincides with the fact that the object of critique in *Vent d'est* is no longer the transparent and informational images of broadcast television and documentary film (as it is in *British Sounds* and *Pravda*), but that of Hollywood cinema. The attempt to make a 'leftist-spaghetti western', as Cramer notes, obligated Godard and Gorin to abandon what they termed 'the "fetched" images' of the previous two films and instead to construct images that both parody and critically interrogate the dominant forms of cinematic representation.

setting up 'a conflict between codes'.[38] This is summed up in the film's famous declaration: 'It's not a just image, it's just an image'. While *Vent d'est* eventuates a return to employing more conventional narrative forms in Godard and Gorin's subsequent films – in particular, the allegorical narrative of *Lotte in Italia* [*Struggles in Italy*] (1970) and the Brechtian drama *Tout va bien* [*All's Well*] (1972) – this semiotic interrogation of the image is most forcefully pursued in their final collaboration, *Letter to Jane: An Investigation about a Still* (1972).

Letter to Jane was made to accompany the relatively big budget cinematic feature, *Tout va bien*.[39] Presented as an audio-visual paratext to this 'main attraction', the fifty-minute 16mm film seeks to expound upon what the filmmakers take to be the central problem posed by *Tout va bien*: 'what part should intellectuals play in revolutionary struggle?' A *détournement* of the cinematic convention of promoting a film through supplementary forms – such as the trailer, the interview or the behind-the-scenes account – *Letter to Jane* does not provide the audience with a direct answer to this question or an explanation of the authorial intentions behind *Tout va bien*, but takes the viewer on what the filmmakers refer to as a 'detour'.[40] This detour consists primarily in the analysis of a single image, a well-known photograph of Jane Fonda in Vietnam from a 1972 issue of the French magazine *L'Express* (Figure 12). Addressed as a letter to Fonda, which Godard and Gorin read in their French-accented English, what is at stake in the film is not the individual 'Jane', but the *function* that the famous actress and activist performed in being invited by the North

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[38] Ibid., p. 135-136. It is this idea of structuring films around contradictory codes that Wollen elaborates in his 1972 'Conclusion' to *Signs and Meanings in the Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), pp. 107-118; and his famous 1972 essay, 'Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d'Est*', in *Readings and Writings*, pp. 79-91.

[39] *Tout va bien* figures as an allegory for the disappointments of the years following the events of 1968, as well as the perceived failure of the Dziga Vertov Group (the film is signed not by the latter but by Godard and Gorin), presenting a fable about a bourgeois couple – a filmmaker (Yves Montand) and a journalist (Jane Fonda) – whose attempt to ally themselves with French factory workers ends in disillusionment. *Letter to Jane* seems to have been produced with a US audience in mind, presumably to be shown after the screenings of *Tout va bien* which was set to tour the US. Written in English, a French translation of the script was published in *Tel Quel* later the same year.

[40] See Soyoung Yoon, *'Havoc Matter': Détournement in the Films of Debord, Rouch, Godard* (Stanford University, Phd Dissertation, 2010), pp. 166-167.

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for copyright
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Figure 12. *Letter to Jane*

Vietnamese to represent their revolutionary struggle.[41] What they endeavour to show is how the issues that are elaborated in the film's sound-track are *visually* distilled in the *mise-en-scène* of the photograph.

The photograph in question portrays Fonda in three-quarter profile, her face, turned to someone out of frame, expressing sympathy or concern.[42] While the caption underneath the photograph describes Fonda as 'interrogating' the North Vietnamese habitants about American bombing raids, the image and text, as Doane observes, precludes 'the possibility of a reverse shot'; the possibility of seeing and hearing the Other speak.[43] As Godard explains in a 1972 filmed interview on *Tout va bien*, however, what is significant here is not simply the question of letting the Other speak – whether the Other be the workers portrayed in *Tout va bien* or the North Vietnamese in *Letter to Jane* – but the way in which the media inscribes the Other in a predetermined role (or reverse shot): that of the helpless

[41] Yoon, *'Havoc Matter'*, p. 167. The dynamic of two men haranguing Fonda, even if, as Godard and Gorin stipulate, it is the photograph and not the actress that is the object of their critique, can at times be, as many commentators have noted, astonishingly condescending and misogynist.

[42] Fonda's expression is linked by Godard and Gorin to a long history of method acting in the American cinema which, as Doane notes, conveys 'an expression of vague liberal concern'; an expression, as Godard and Gorin argue, that 'says nothing more than how much it knows'. See Mary Ann Doane, 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14:3 (2003), p. 106.

[43] Ibid., p. 106

victim unable to articulate a coherent analysis about their situation.[44] *Letter to Jane* reveals how this position is formally figured in the *L'Express* photograph. It does so, as Soyoung Yoon notes, by offering us another way of 'consuming or rather *not* consuming this too-well-known image'; that is, by disregarding what Benjamin describes as the 'directives given by captions to those looking at images in illustrated magazines'.[45] Through the extended act of looking and looking again at an image intended to be surveyed by a cursory glance, *Letter to Jane* gives what Benjamin calls 'free play to the politically educated eye', scanning the photograph for the 'illumination of detail' or its 'optical unconscious'.[46] Through a series of 'fragmentations, framings and re-framings', the film brings forth the anonymous and out-of-focus face of a North Vietnamese man. Located in the centre-lower-half of the image the film exposes how this face of the Other, 'blurred into the background as if it was a part of the landscape', becomes a mere backdrop for the in-focus American actress.[47] Here, the illumination of photographic details, such as framing and aperture, are shown to manifest (whether conscious or unconscious) not merely 'technical' or aesthetic concerns, but 'social' ones: the idea, as Godard and Gorin put it, that a Western individual is 'sharp and clear' and the North Vietnamese 'blurry and unclear'.[48]

The *légende* or caption accompanying the *L'Express* photograph, as Godard and Gorin argue, not only misconstrues what we see, but 'blocks off' our capacity to perceive the technical

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[44] For a discussion of this interview see Hito Steyerl, 'Can Witnesses Speak? On the Philosophy of the Interview', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies* (2008): http://eipcp.net/transversal/0408/steyerl/en. The interview, along with *Letter to Jane*, can be found on the Criterion DVD of *Tout va bien*. Criterion interestingly describe *Letter to Jane* as a 'postscript' to *Tout va bien*. The former is thus transformed from a cinematic supplement to DVD extra.

[45] Yoon, *'Havoc Matter'*, p. 169. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', in *SW 3*, p. 108.

[46] Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography' (1931), in *SW 2:2*, pp. 519, 510-512.

[47] Yoon, *'Havoc Matter'*, p. 169.

[48] As Godard notes in an interview from 1972: 'For us as moviemakers', questions of 'form' are 'not merely something technical', but 'something social'. See Robert Phillip Kolker, 'Angle and Reality: Godard and Gorin in America', in *Jean Luc-Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press Mississippi, 1998), p. 65.

and social relations that are 'visible in the image'.[49] Regarding *Letter to Jane*, Godard in a 1972 interview relates that '[w]e feel very strongly that people today have completely lost the power of seeing. We only read, we don't see the image anymore'.[50] Godard's remarks here recall Benjamin's comments in his 1931 'Little History of Photography' where, paraphrasing Laszlo Maholy-Nagy, he states: '"The illiteracy of the future…will be ignorance not of reading or writing, but of photography"'. For Benjamin, visual illiteracy is accelerated by the increasing fleetingness in which we encounter photographic images, 'whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder' and which necessitates textual 'inscription'. 'Won't inscription become the most important part of the photograph?', he asks.[51] If the use of textual and verbal inscription in *Le gai savoir* and the films of the Dziga Vertov Group are largely employed to undermine the naturalism and transparency of the photographic and filmed image, *Letter to Jane* anticipates what will be a key concern in Godard's Sonimage period: namely, the way in which images in the media are over-determined by a pre-existent discourse that 'denigrates their potential to carry meaning visually'.[52] Notably, this will begin with an auto-critique of the dominance of sound in the Dziga Vertov period.[53] This shift, however, does not represent an absolute rejection of sound which, as Doane notes, can end up promoting the illusion 'that the film is not a constructed discourse', but the attempt to 'construct *another* politics' of the relation between sound and image.[54] The key problem for Godard, as Witt writes, becomes how to make 'meaning…emanate…from the combination of images and sounds rather than from an explanatory or interpretative text written about or imposed on them'.[55]

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[49] Witt, *On Communication: The Work of Anne-Marie Miéville and Jean-Luc Godard as 'Sonimage' from 1973 to 1979* (Phd Dissertation, University of Bath, 1998), p. 114

[50] Kolker, 'Angle and Reality', p. 63.

[51] Benjamin 'Little History of Photography', p. 527.

[52] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 113.

[53] This self-critique of the dominance of sound is, as Yoon observes, already indicated in the soundtrack of *Letter to Jane*, which often interrupts Godard and Gorin's voice-over text with 'sporadic fragments of Vietnamese songs that overwhelm their overwhelming commentary'. Yoon, *'Havoc Matter'*, p. 179.

[54] Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema', p. 344.

[55] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 2.

3.3. Videographic Thinking in Sonimage

Following the dissolution of the Dziga Vertov Group and the dissipation of *gauchiste* activity in the early 1970s, Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville in the winter of 1973-1974 established the production company Sonimage, a 'studio-laboratory' based in Grenoble (1973-1974) and then in Rolle in Switzerland in 1977.[56] As Witt details, the main objectives of Sonimage were: 1) to decentralize their audiovisual practice, which entailed moving away from Paris, owning their means of production (video equipment and editing studio), and working 'collaboratively with small production teams on projects relating to concerns arising from their daily experience'; 2) to investigate the contemporary field of mass communications, in particular the cultural forms of television and news media; 3) to explore 'the technical and aesthetic potential' of the medium of video as a tool for conducting essayistic experiments and conceiving of new forms of montage.[57] Intellectually, the Sonimage project is marked by a suspicion towards the dogmatic 'deployment of political theory', especially 'the Marxist-Leninist theory that had underpinned the work of the Dziga Vertov Group'.[58] The latter, as an all-embracing political paradigm, is supplanted by a multiplicity of discourses, most notably those of information theory, feminism, and psychoanalysis, displacing what Felix Guattari termed a 'Manicheist…simplification of the class struggle' with an attention to 'a micro-politics of desire'.[59]

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[56] Witt, 'On and Under Communication', in *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Tom Conley and T. Jefferson Kline (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2014), p. 318.

[57] Ibid., p. 318.

[58] Witt, 'On and Under Communication', pp. 321, 320; Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 145.

[59] Felix Guattari, 'Towards a Micro-Politics of Desire', in *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 85-86. As Godard utters in the commentary *Ici et ailleurs*: 'Too simple and too easy to divide the world in two'. 'The primacy of political theory', as Witt writes, 'is rejected in favour of a micro-politics which identifies the process of change not in clearly visible processes such as social revolution, but in the barely perceptible shifts contained within the superficial habits of everyday life'. Witt, *On Communication*, p. 123.

This revision in theoretical focus is accompanied by what MacCabe calls 'a new and hesitant faith in the image'.[60] This is nonetheless balanced by a 'scepticism' toward the possibility of the *single* image to signify 'in some self-evident and transparent way' without being put into a critical constellation with a text, a sound or other images.[61] While the relation between sound and image remains discrepant in the Sonimage work, it is far less conflictual when compared with the harsh and strident sound-tracks that dominated the works of the Dziga Vertov Group. In contrast to the self-assured and often aggressive tone that characterized the latter, the voice in Godard and Miéville's 'lacunary essayistic practice', as Witt terms it, takes on a far softer and tentative inflection, as well as giving way to moments of silence. [62] The predominance of the male monologue, and the interpretive closure it establishes, is further dislocated by the open form of the typically male-female debate or dialogue, which becomes a defining structural aspect of the Sonimage project.[63] This auto-critique of the Dziga Vertov Group is articulated in Godard and Miéville's first film, *Ici et ailleurs* [*Here and Elsewhere*] (1974).

Ici et ailleurs takes as its point of departure Godard and Gorin's unfinished film project *Jusqu'à la victoire* [*To Victory*]. Shot in 1970 at the invitation of the revolutionary Palestinian group, Al Fatah, in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, *Jusqu'à la victoire* aimed to document the Palestinian revolution in its efforts to regain land occupied by Israel in the wake of the 1967 war. The film, as Godard recounts in the opening moments of *Ici et ailleurs* over the 16mm rushes from the latter, was to be organized according to a 'Marxist-Leninist' and quasi-mathematical formula in which 'the will of the people', plus 'armed struggle', plus 'political work' leads inexorably 'to victory'. Just months after returning to France, however, the filmmakers exported revolutionary model and political optimism was overtaken by historical events when in September 1970 the Jordanian army's offensive against the Palestinians in Amman resulted in the deaths of thousands of combatants and civilians (subsequently known as Black September), including many of those filmed by Godard and Gorin. This

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[60] MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait*, p. 242.

[61] Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 152.

[62] Witt, 'On and Under Communication', p. 324.

[63] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 24.

Figure 13. *Ici et ailleurs*

fundamentally altered the status of the footage from depicting 'imminent revolution' to being an 'archival record' of an ill-conceived and tragic moment.[64]

Working through the abandoned material Godard and Miéville attempt to understand how both the political rationale that had governed the filming and editing of the images, and the political interpretation that was imposed on them via its soundtrack, had failed to grasp the reality of the situation depicted.[65] This failure is connected by Godard to what he considers the essential error of the Dziga Vertov Group: 'We took images and put the sound too loud', he explains. As he notes over an image of a hand turning up the volume on a stereo playing *L'Internationale*, this led to drowning out 'the voice it wanted to produce from the image' – a superimposition of an abstract (western) model or formula that is also illustrated by Godard's hand trying to add up on a calculator the canonical dates of leftist history (Figure 13).[66] The act of taking the time to translate the Palestinian voices in the rushes is accorded particular importance in *Ici et ailleurs*, which is foregrounded by the slight delay of Miéville's

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[64] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 40. As Godard intones over a photographic close-up of a face of a victim of the Amman massacre, on which is superimposed a flashing electronic text that reads 'Amman September 1970', 'that became this'.

[65] Witt, 'On and Under Communication', pp. 320-21.

[66] This drowning of the voice in the image is exemplified in a scene shot near Jordan in June 1970 in which a small group of Palestinian Fedayeen discuss the specifics of the dangers they face in liberating a river from Israeli machine guns. Instead of translating their conversation, Godard and Gorin had appended a ready-made slogan to the image about the relation between theory and practice, obscuring the fact that the group were in fact discussing 'their own death'.

spoken French.[67] This pedagogy of attention, signified by the flashing electronic intertitle, 'On thinking about that again', is further demonstrated by Miéville's brief semiotic observations on Godard and Gorin's footage. These include Miéville commenting on the theatre-like setting of a young girl reciting a poem by Mahmoud Darwish, the bored look on an illiterate woman's face who is asked to repeat a text that is read to her, and the absent presence of the male directors in a scene in which another woman is directed before the camera.[68]

The 'inability to see or hear' the images of the Palestinian revolution is linked by Miéville to the failure to understand the 'here' of contemporary France, and to see, as she puts it, how our perception of 'elsewhere' is always conditioned by 'our here'. As *Ici et ailleurs* suggests, analysis should begin not only with an inquiry into our everyday social relations – which is explored in the film by a series of acted vignettes of a French family (a man, woman and children) in the domestic setting of their home (Figure 14) – but with an investigation into the dominant forms through which images of elsewhere are mediated and encountered. As the recurring motif of family members gathered around their television set highlights, the prevailing form through which this encounter takes place is taken to be no longer that of the collective, darkened space of the cinema but, what Jameson dubs, the 'home appliance' of television.[69]

Television is representative of a wider transformation in the production, circulation and consumption of images that Godard and Miéville set out to explore. A constant theme in the Sonimage work, which overlaps with that of Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), is the portrayal of contemporary capitalist society as saturated by a 'flood of images' (as an intertitle in *Ici et ailleurs* reads), which is seen to result in a dulling of critical and perceptual faculties. This line of argument resonates with what Benjamin Buchloh terms the

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[67] Ibid., p. 321.

[68] There is a danger here, as Constance Penley notes, in the assignment of 'a censoring and denunciatory role' to Miéville's voice, in that it tends to make feminism an 'authoritative truth that stands as a corrective to the sexism of men', rather than 'a political theory and set of strategies'. Constance Penley, 'Les Enfants de la Patrie', *Camera Obscura* 3:4 (1982), p. 51.

[69] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 37.

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Figure 14. *Ici et ailleurs*

'media pessimism' of Kracauer's famous 1927 essay on photography.[70] In the latter, Kracauer construes the 'flood' or 'blizzard' of photographic imagery in Weimer Germany as carrying out an 'assault' on memory and cognition, or what he calls the 'awareness of crucial traits'.[71] This assault is epitomised by the cultural form of the illustrated magazine, which represents for Kracauer one of the 'most powerful weapons in the strike against understanding'. Understanding is prevented, above all, as Hansen notes, by 'the contiguous arrangement of images – "without any gaps" – thereby systematically occluding reflection on things in their relationality [*Zuzammenhang*] and history', as well as domesticating 'otherness, disjunctions, and contradictions' through the advancement of 'a social imaginary of complete coverage'.[72] The 'surface coherence' of the illustrated magazine, moreover, institutes 'a regime of knowledge production that makes for a structural "indifference" toward the meanings and history of the things depicted', glossing over the 'randomness of the arrangement and, with it, the arbitrariness of the social conditions it assumes and perpetuates'.[73]

Ici et ailleurs correspondingly portrays the economy through which images circulate – an 'image-space' described by Peter Osborne as the 'distinctively transnational and

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[70] Buchloh, 'Gehard Richter's *Atlas*', p. 131

[71] Kracauer, 'Photography', p. 58.

[72] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 30.

[73] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

translinguistic cultural-economic form' of '*photo-capitalism*' – as one of structural indifference and the domestication of contradiction.[74] This is exemplified in a sequence juxtaposing series of photographic images, including scenes of war, pornography, and advertising, each cut accompanied by the noise of a camera shutter.[75] Underlying this indifference is the economic form of capitalist exchange, discussed by Godard in an aphoristic voice-over commentary that occupies the central part of *Ici et ailleurs*. In the latter Godard illustrates the 'function' of 'capital' with an image of a hand chalking on a blackboard an ever-growing series of zeros which, he explains, 'represent dozens, hundreds, thousands of yous and mes'. Godard outlines how individuals and their desires are subject to the abstract and equalizing force of the capitalist economy, a circuit they can only enter 'to the extent that their difference is denied in favour of a value which renders them comparable to all other elements within the system of exchange'.[76]

It is this structural indifference to content and relationality, characteristic of capitalist exchange and the illustrated press, that Godard and Miéville construe as the defining feature of television. Television is typically portrayed as a homogenising grid or schema, which effects a levelling of individual images. This levelling of images is expressed in *Ici et ailleurs* by various shots depicting multiple television screens arranged in grid-like formations simultaneously displaying disparate subject matter, such as a football match and a French news report on the Middle East. Godard and Miéville's critical portrayal of television, as Witt suggests, can be usefully read in relation with Raymond Williams's contemporaneous study, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974), particularly his identification of the defining characteristic of broadcast television as that of a 'planned flow'; an abstract grid into which a sequence of miscellaneous items are 'programmed'.[77]

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[74] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, p. 118.

[75] This indifference toward the content of imagery is seen to evidence a broader social and cultural condition, described by Buchloh as one of 'anomie', which is epitomised in *Ici et ailleurs* by the recurring appearance of Gérard de Villiers pornographic/adventure novel, *Massacre à Amman*. Buchloh, 'Gehard Richter's *Atlas*', p. 133.

[76] Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard*, p. 111.

[77] Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 86. This abstraction from content is as Williams notes part of the historical emergence of radio and television

Although comprised of several alternative channels that are organized into a schedule of discrete units, that are themselves punctuated with adverts or trailers for forthcoming attractions, the 'experience' of watching television, as Williams observes, consists in the switching on of an 'always accessible' flow 'without definite intervals'.[78] It is not only, as Williams notes, that many particular items 'are affected by those preceding and those following them', but that 'the television experience has in some important way unified them' in the form of a 'single dimension'.[79]

This experience of television as a unified flow of images clearly informs Godard and Miéville's conception of the image in *Ici et ailleurs*. In the latter, as Cramer notes, the image 'never stands in isolation or as a fixed surface to be gazed upon, as in the Dziga Vertov Group films, but is always part of both a circuit and an image-environment and takes on meaning only within the context of a totality, a linking of "here and there"'.[80] 'Any daily image', as Godard intones, is 'part of a vague and complicated system', or what he terms a chain [*chaîne*] of images. The chain in which an image is placed, as Williams observes of television programming, affects how we perceive it – '*where* an image is', as Cramer puts it, is as important as '*what* it is'.[81] Godard illustrates this point in *Ici et ailleurs* by inserting and lighting up various slides depicting disparate subject matter which he arranges and rearranges in different formations (first in a row of three and then in a grid of three by three) (Figure 15). Evoking Williams's delineation of television as an interval-less flow Godard laments that we are being 'replaced little by little by uninterrupted chains of images, slaves to each other and each one in its place, like each of us in our place in the chain of events over which we have lost all power'. By way of a series of puns, Godard further applies the figure of the chain to other discrete processes: from film as a chain of individual stills (which is illustrated by actors filing past the camera, each holding a still photograph representing the intended mathematical sequence of *Jusqu'à la victoire*), to a

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which, unlike 'all previous communications technologies…were *systems primarily devised for transmission and reception as abstract processes, with little or no definition of preceding content*'. Ibid., p. 18.

[78] Ibid., p. 94-96.

[79] Ibid., p. 96.

[80] Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 150.

[81] Ibid., p. 150.

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Figure 15. *Ici et ailleurs*

DNA chain, workers on an assembly line [*á la chaîne*], and history as a 'chaining together' of events. Godard's metaphorical use of the chain can be compared with Deleuze and Guattari's elaboration of desire in *Anti-Oedipus* [*L'Anti-Oedipe*] (1972) in terms of a coding and chaining of flows.[82] As is suggested by Godard's string of puns, images are coded by the relational chains in which they are placed or programmed; a serializing and standardizing regime seen as analogous to that of the assembly line.[83] Just as Benjamin finds the logical counterpart to the associations of advertising photography in constructivist montage, Godard and Miéville make use of experimental montage techniques as means for disrupting and 'unmasking' (Benjamin's term) the conventional image chains established by the media; countering the homogenising effects of the latter through the production of what Deleuze terms 'interstices'.[84]

The 'mode of construction' developed in *Ici et ailleurs*, as Deleuze observes, is based on the rendering visible of interstices, which he designates 'the method of BETWEEN'.[85] The figure

[82] See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oediups: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), pp. 36-41. Deleuze and Guattari take the notion of the code and chain from Lacan's notion of the 'signifying chain'.

[83] Recalling both Kracauer's and Benjamin's earlier use of the paradigm of mass mechanical factory labour to characterise film and the cinema in the 1920s and 1930s, television is repeatedly correlated in Godard and Miéville's work with capitalism's organisation of spatio-temporal experience according to conventional and repetitive forms and structures.

[84] Benjamin 'Little History of Photography', p. 526

[85] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 179-180.

of the interstitial between proliferates in *Ici et ailleurs* – between here and elsewhere, between images and the disparate phenomena they depict, and between the voices and sounds that accompany them – creating what Deleuze, citing Blanchot, terms a 'vertigo of spacing'.[86] This disjunctive spacing of the film's heterogeneous elements is based, as Deleuze notes, on 'the method of AND'. The *coordinating conjunction* 'and' is embodied in *Ici et ailleurs* by the image of a three-dimensional '*ET*' that repeatedly punctuates the film and points to what is its guiding paratactic logic. Instead of *subordinating* its elements to a syntagmatic chain, based on what Deleuze terms cinema's 'law' of '[f]alse continuity', or what Doane defines as the 'cinematic syntax' of 'continuity editing', *Ici et ailleurs* takes the form of a paratactic syntax; a serial concatenation of 'this and then that', as Deleuze puts it, which the film repeatedly foregrounds and reflects on.[87] This paratactic mode of transition is particularly manifest in Godard's discussion of the image in *Ici et ailleurs* which, while resembling something like a brief excursive lecture, is often closer to the paratactic form of a poem than the hypotactic syntax of discursive prose; particularly in his use of elliptical observations and condensed expressions, as well as his metaphoric use of language and images.[88] In *Ici et ailleurs*, as Deleuze writes, it is no longer 'a matter of following a chain of images…but of getting out of the chain' and the 'association[s]' that such chains conventionally establish.[89] In interpreting this fissuring of continuity only in terms of cinematic form, however, Deleuze fails to consider the significance of broadcast and print media in Godard and Miéville's work of the 1970s, instead relating it back to Godard's novelistic and episodic constructions of the 1960s.[90] While the paratactic mode of

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[86] Ibid., p. 180.

[87] Ibid., p. 180; Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, pp. 29-30. Serialization is central to Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (1969), which is itself composed as a serial text, with each supposedly individual 'chapter' given the title 'series', which are themselves presented as a series of thirty-four divisions. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

[88] This is also the case with much of Miéville's voice-over commentary and the flashing electronic intertitles in the film which, rather than serving to subordinate the image-track to an explanatory text or to create smooth transitions between the film's elements, interrupt the film's syntagmatic movement and complicate its image-track with aphoristic statements or formulae that are often repeated (whole or in fragments).

[89] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 180.

[90] Ibid., p. 179.

connection could be said to resemble previous works, such as *Deux ou trois*'s delineation of 'a complex' of 'people and things' (which were inspired by the forms of the novel and the newspaper), the logic of accretion employed in *Ici et ailleurs* – its accreting of audio-visual fragments – is clearly informed by the dominance of television as a cultural form, which the film both mimics and critiques.

If 'television enacts a process of homogenisation by "levelling" disparate imagery within a repetitive programming grid', the post-production techniques of video provide Godard and Miéville with tools to 'enact an analogous reverse process', displacing and transposing disparate imagery from their conventional media circuits into new relational contexts.[91] Video, as Witt explains, functions for Godard and Miéville as 'a quasi-scientific tool for the processing of found images and sounds' and 'conducting comparative visual research', allowing them 'to combine and dissect material from disparate sources' in a 'fluid, quasi-musical' manner, 'that is more difficult and time-consuming to achieve in 35mm'.[92] 'Above all', as Godard observed in 1975, video allowed him to 'think in images, not in text'.[93] The medium of video, that is, is employed 'not just as a tool for processing and connecting images and sounds, but also as a means for reflecting on the linkage process and of presenting the process and effects of the comparison visually'.[94] An important technique in the development of this form of 'visual thinking' is that of videographic superimposition, which Godard and Miéville employ to construct various forms of 'composite images through montage *within* the frame'.[95] Montage here, is no longer simply one of succession, or what Eisenstein termed the creation of '*inter-shot*' relations, but the '*intra-shot*' juxtaposition of multiple images.[96] This is exemplified in *Ici et ailleurs* by a sequence in which video transition wipes pull the frame of a single image (typically still photographs) horizontally or diagonally across the screen, revealing the co-presence of two discrete yet overlapping

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[91] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 63.

[92] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 52, 54.

[93] Quoted in ibid., p. 52.

[94] Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[95] Ibid., p. 52. As Witt notes, they provide the blueprint for the wide variety of forms of vision-mixed imagery used throughout *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Ibid., p. 53.

[96] See Eisenstein, 'Montage 1937', in *Selected Works, Vol. 2*, p. 56.

Figure 16. *Numéro deux*

images within the frame. What is at stake here, as Deleuze notes, is not an 'operation of association', but of 'differentiation': 'Given one image, another image has to be chosen which will induce an interstice *between* the two', and which 'allows resemblances to be graded'.[97]

The employment of video to create interstitial image relations is further explored in Godard and Miéville's two subsequent films, *Numéro deux* [*Numer Two*] (1975) and *Comment ça va?* [*How's it going?*] (1976). The episodic narrative fiction of *Numéro deux* is composed of discrete fragments in which the different members of a working-class family are presented and observed in the domestic environment of their apartment (somewhere outside 'the city' in France). Shot on video, and then reshot in 35mm film while the images played on video monitors, two monitors can often be seen playing simultaneously within a single frame (typically framed by a disproportionately large void of empty black space, or interspace). The idea of doubling the image Farocki infers, must have come from working with video editing technology, which 'is usually done while sitting in front of two monitors', so that the editor 'becomes accustomed to thinking of two images at the same time, rather than sequentially'.[98] This is pointed to in the film by the repeated shots of Godard in his editing studio surrounded by monitors (Figure 16). Corresponding with Deleuze's account of *Ici et ailleurs*, Farocki characterises the use of doubling in *Numéro deux* as one of 'soft-

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[97] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 179-180.

[98] Farocki and Silverman, *Speaking About Godard*, p. 142.

montage' (a concept to which I will return in the following chapter), since 'what is at issue is a general relatedness, rather than a strict opposition or equation'.[99]

Comment ça va? is more recognisably essayistic in its form. The latter is structured around an acted dialogue between Odette (played by Miéville) and an unnamed journalist who is making a video documentary about the Communist newspaper at which he works. The couple set out to study the manner in which information is processed and relayed by the left-wing press, the revelations of which are related by the journalist to his son via a series of letters (read as a voice-over commentary). In a key sequence they examine a photograph taken during the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974-1975, over which is superimposed a visually similar photograph of a 1972 strike at the Joint Français factory in France, previously published in the journalist's newspaper.[100] Recalling Vertov's use of filmic lap-dissolves in *The Eleventh Year*, Godard and Miéville use videographic dissolves to fade between the two photographs, at one point shifting the half-dissolved and overlaid images in order in order map their graphic resemblance (Figure 17). The interplay of resemblance created through this superimposition not only obliges the journalist to examine the two photographs visually (instead of simply reading them through their accompanying caption), but to reflect on the identity and difference between the two historical situations (the interstice between Portugal and France). 'I began to see why she insisted on putting these two images together', he recounts; 'simply to think'. The 'interaction of two images', as Deleuze notes, 'engenders or traces a frontier which belongs to neither one nor the other', inducing a relational tension that opens up a reflective space for thought.[101]

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[99] Ibid., p. 142. This method of soft-montage reflects the film's theoretical drive to undo the binary oppositions that populate the film – such as political/pornographic, factory/landscape, man/woman – in favour of a more complicated account of relation and difference.

[100] This 'scene of pedagogy', as Cramer points out, is a dramatization of an actual presentation Godard had previously given to the editors of the left-wing newspaper, *Libération*, on the image-text relationship in an article on Portugal. Cramer, *Utopian Television* p. 153. The concerns reflected in *Comment ça va?* and other Sonimage works, as Witt details, are a direct extension of Godard's involvement with the leftist press in the early 1970s. See Witt, 'On and Under Communication', pp. 335-337.

[101] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 181

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Figure 17. *Comment ça va?*

This *rapprochement* of disparate imagery through videographic superimposition and other spatial montage techniques so as to map the differential relations between discrete phenomena, can be seen, in similar vein to Vertov and Eisenstein, to perform a visualisation of the process of metaphor; a process that is essential to understanding not only Godard and Miéville's experiments with interstitial montage, but their theory of communication on which it is grounded. Recalling Vertov and Eisenstein's use of metaphoric montage, Godard and Miéville's interest in metaphor is not merely aesthetic but political. Metaphor is deployed, that is, not merely as a means for formally generating semiotic and semantic impertinences, but in order to, as Voloshinov noted of the '*extraverbal import*' of metaphor, 'regroup [social and cultural] values'.[102] In contrast with Vertov and Eisenstein, however, Godard and Miéville's focus on metaphor is less on its power to achieve a desired rhetorical end, than as an analytical and pedagogical 'frame' for 'scrutinising, and drawing the viewer's attention to, the operation enacted by metaphor'.[103] The significance of metaphor in their work, as Witt observes, is essentially twofold: to point up 'the dead structuring metaphors' which permeate language and society; and to 'exploit the process of metaphorical *rapprochement*' to disturb and displace established linguistic and audio-visual codes and conventions.[104]

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[102] Voloshinov, 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art', pp. 195-196.

[103] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 174.

[104] Ibid., pp. 175, 182.

As was indicated by the figure of the chain in *Ici et ailleurs*, verbal and visual metaphors and puns – which constitute, as Umberto Eco points out, a particular type of metaphor – proliferate throughout Godard and Miéville's work.[105] Godard remarks upon his interest in the operation of punning in the opening monologue of *Numéro deux* (a sort of essayistic preface to the film's diegetic narrative), which he delivers standing in his editing studio. A pun, he comments, is a 'word that slides on a thing' and 'shows short-circuits' and 'interference'. In a pun, that is, you project a 'forced contiguity' between two or more words or contexts, exploiting either the homophony of different words, or the multiple meanings of a single term in transposing it into different contexts, while at time perceiving the semantic space that separates the words or the contexts.[106] An 'unusual' metaphor, as Eco writes, 'overturns and restructures the semantic system by introducing circuits not previously in existence….which, rather than depend upon the existence of already culturalized courses, take advantage of some of these courses in order to institute new ones'.[107] To explicate a metaphor, as Ricouer notes, 'is to enumerate all the appropriate senses in which the vehicle is "seen as" the tenor'.[108] Ricouer describes this 'cumulative' and 'quasi-visual' aspect of verbal metaphors as creating a 'stereoscopic vision' (a notion clearly conducive to reading the doubling of monitors in *Numéro deux*), in that we perceive the vehicle through the lens of the tenor while retaining our previous conception of the vehicle.[109] The importance of metaphor, for Godard and Miéville, is its capacity to generate 'exchange and displacement', which they construe as essential to all genuine forms of communication.[110] 'Communication', as Godard states, 'is what moves'; it is what displaces things from their conventional, or 'phatic', circuits through the creation of interstitial

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[105] Umberto Eco, 'Semantics of Metaphor', in *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington; London: Indiana University press, 1979), p. 72

[106] Ibid., p. 72.

[107] Ibid., p. 86.

[108] Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 251.

[109] Ibid., p. 136. Godard and Miéville's interest in metaphor as a strategy for instantiating new ways of seeing (and hearing), and its connection to their theory of communication, is especially evident in their television series, *Six fois deux: Sur et sous la communication* [*Six Times Two: On and Under Communication*] (1976), a discussion of which I had to omit due to lack of space.

[110] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 186.

relations.[111] Metaphor emerges not just in poetic discourse, as Eco notes, but each time language invents 'combinatory possibilities or semantic couplings' not yet 'saturated' by the 'codification' of culture.[112]

A striking characteristic of Godard and Miéville's use of metaphor, as Witt notes, is 'the disturbance of traditional figure-narrative relations'.[113] Metaphor is not employed to offer 'additional layers of meaning' to a narrative text but is what '*generates*' the text and gives a unity to what would otherwise be 'mere assemblages of loosely connected fragments of everyday life'.[114] Even when there is a more-or-less discernible story, such as in *Numéro deux*, attention is directed onto the 'action and process' of the metaphors sketched out in Godard's prefatory monologue, which acts to postulate 'narrative routes' across the acted scenes, setting off 'a spiral of metaphor/metonomy oscillations'.[115] As is anticipated by *Numéro deux*, metaphor is used by Godard as a way to 'chart a tentative route back towards' creating a new form of 'narrative fiction' in his return to cinema at the end of the 1970s, employing video as a sort of 'preparatory sketch-book' for creating essayistic visual

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[111] Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 147. Witt takes the term 'phatic' communication from linguistics to characterise all forms of communication circuits which serve to 'reproduce endless unworked repetitious clichés'. Witt, *On Communication*, p. 103. In Jakobson, the 'phatic function' of language designates 'ritualised' speech acts whose purpose is not to communicate any informational content, but to establish and maintain the communication channel. In Jakobson's terms, as noted in the Introduction, Godard and Miéville are interested in disrupting television's phatic use of language through the 'poetic function' of language, which promotes 'the palpability of signs' and 'deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects'. Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', pp. 69-70.

[112] Eco, 'Semantics of Metaphor', p. 69, 87. The reflective movement generated by metaphor, as Ricoeur contends, is premised on a 'tension' between not only the terms of a metaphorical statement, but the statement's 'relationship…to reality'. In the case of banal or dead metaphors, 'the tension between the terms of the statement' and 'with the body of our knowledge disappears' (or, in Godard's terms, movement is stopped). Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, pp. 292, 253.

[113] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 192

[114] Ibid., p. 193

[115] Ibid., pp. 192-193. In *Numéro deux*, and other films, what 'appears at first a metaphorical relation (through which correlations are explored) is revealed as a metonymic one, based on a demonstrable contiguity, fuelled by a causal (usually socio-economic/political) link'. Ibid., p. 183.

'scenarios' that trace metaphoric 'correlations' and possible narrative routes through the film's image-fragments.[116]

3.4. Essaying Cinema in Godard's Video-Scenarios

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Godard produced a number of 'video-scenarios' that serve as paratexts (or parafilms) – 'rough drafts, sketches, or research notes' – to his cinematic feature films. These include: *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie): Quelques remarques sur la réalisation et la production du film* [*Scenario for Sauve qui peut (la vie): A Few Remarks on the Making and Production of the Film*] (1979) and *Scénario du film Passion* [*Scenario of the Film Passion*] (1982).[117] In these video-scenarios, as Philippe Dubois notes, the essayistic becomes a semi-autonomous form that operates in *parallel* with individual film projects, presenting (akin to *Letter to Jane*) audio-visual reflections 'on questions that the film was putting, had put, or would put into play'.[118] These audio-visual scenarios embody Godard's desire to resist the logocentric imposition and 'confines of a *written* script' in the production of cinematic works in favour of the attempt to use video, as Godard puts it in *Scénario du film Passion*, as a means to '*voir un scénario*' [see a scenario].[119] Such video-scenarios can be understood as an extension of Godard's practice from the mid-1970s onwards of creating image-text collages (made using a photocopier) for future film projects, as well as his attempt at an alternative form of image/film criticism in the special 300th double edition of *Cahiers du Cinéma* (guest edited by Godard), in which he approached the 'blank page' not as

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[116] Ibid., p. 193.

[117] Philippe Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates: Notes on Jean-Luc Godard's Work in Video and Television', in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Raymond Bellour (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), p. 178.

[118] Ibid., pp. 178, 177.

[119] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 157. As Godard notes in his Montreal lectures: 'People should write scripts on video…seeing a shot would help you decide how or now not to shoot it. But you have to see this rather than writing it. Today, I think all films are monstrosities because they were written beforehand. Even on screen, filmmakers find it noble to write: "*Written and directed*"'. Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, ed. and trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose Books, 2014), p. 41.

a space to be filled by text (with the occasional illustration), 'but as a *screen*' to create poetic/critical image-image and image-text relations.[120]

This conflict between script/text and image is staged in the opening of *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)* in a shot depicting photocopied portraits of the actors from the film in conception, *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* [*Every Man For Himself, aka Slow Motion*] (1979), emerging from a typewriter, while Godard's semi-improvised voice-over contrasts the horizontality of Western writing with the verticality of the image. Whereas the former, for Godard, as he rehearses here and elsewhere, signifies closure and probability, the latter represents openness and possibility.[121] Bringing together various still images (photographs and paintings) and video clips, Godard explains how these image 'embryos' form the basis for him to begin to 'organize' the film's elements into a scenario or story.[122] Traces of Vertov are again visible here not only in Godard's rejection of the hegemony of the written script in the production of a film and his fascination with morphological notions of art as form of embryology, but the use of video techniques such as slow motion, dissolves and

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[120] Witt, *On Communication*, n. 17, p. 244; Witt, 'Archaeology of "Histoire(s) du Cinéma"', in Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema*, p. xliii. The 300th issue of *Cahiers* is split into two parts. The first sixty pages are comprised of a series of letters written to various individuals working in cinema about various topics – film criticism, image and text, montage – that are interspersed with photocopied images, as well as fragments from an interview with Godard. This is followed by a sixty-page section about a commission by the Mozambique government to assist in the establishment of the country's first television station, which features a confessional diary/photo-essay of Godard and Miéville's time there, as well as critical reflections on the project. On the issue see Daniel Fairfax, 'Birth (of the Image) of a Nation: Jean-Luc Godard in Mozambique', *Film and Media Studies*, 3 (2010), pp. 62-64.

[121] This conflict between text and image is often approached by Godard through the Christological notion of the Law as written and images as idolatry. For a similar account of the conflict between text and image see Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), pp. 8-13.

[122] As Godard discusses in his Montreal lectures: 'cinema can be used…to see the creation of forms, their embryology. Embryology is something extremely mysterious…How are forms born? [H]ow are societies formed? And people are formed and informed and deformed: once a form is set, how does it change?'. Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema*, p. 271.

superimposition as a tool for '*visual* research'.[123] First systematically employed by Godard

and Miéville in their second television series *France tour détour deux enfants* [*France Tour

Detour Two Children*] (1979), Godard's interest in slow- and stop-start-motion, as he

explains in *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, is for its capacity to *slow down* and

decompose everyday human gestures and movements: 'to see if there is something to see

about which something can be said'.[124] As Godard explains, in 'changing the rhythm' and

analysing 'movements as simple as buying a loaf of bread, for example, you notice that

there are entire worlds contained within' such gestures.[125] This enchantment with slow

motion is connected to Godard's renewed interest (from the late 1970s onwards) in early

silent cinema: 'cinema as it was invented', as he puts it, and which 'deals in human gestures

and actions…in their reproduction'.[126]

In his video-scenarios Godard uses dissolves and superimposition to 'show' the viewer his

'way of seeing' a scenario form. In *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)* Godard demonstrates

how dissolves allow you to plunge from one image into another and to 'see if there is

something that will open or is close' in the concatenation of images. Unlike his exploration

of slow- and stop-start motion techniques, however, which is incorporated into the

cinematic narrative of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, his experiments with dissolves and

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[123] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 158. As Witt notes, this is likely in part inspired by the concept of 'visual

analysis' advanced by Robert Linhart in *Lénine, les paysans, Taylor* (1976), which discusses Vertov's films.

Godard notably adopts the pseudonym 'Robert Linard' in *France tour*, where Linhart's idea of visual analysis

can be seen in Godard and Miéville's use of video slow motion techniques to observe the everyday gestures

and activities of two children. Witt, 'On and Under Communication', p. 334.

[124] Quoted in Penley, 'Les Enfants de la Patrie', p. 36. As Witt notes, Godard's use of such technique recalls not

only Vertov's cinematic decomposition of labouring bodies and the proto-cinematographic and quasi-scientific

work of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard J. Muybridge, but the 'deepening of apperception' and

'unconscious optics' that Benjamin saw such cinematic devices to engender. Witt, 'Montage, My Beautiful

Care', pp. 41-42.

[125] Quoted in Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 179. As Godard says over slowed down images of

a waitress in a café and an amateur football match: 'At times in sports we love to see slow motion shots. It's

because we see the work and the emotion in the work. We have the time to see'.

[126] Gideon Bachmann, 'The Carrots Are Cooked: A Conversation with Jean-Luc Godard' (1983), in *Jean Luc

Godard: Interviews*, p. 138.

superimposition are not transposed to the films but are instead shown to underlie his thinking about the linking of images and the movements of the film's narrative.[127] Godard reflects at length on videographic superimposition in *Scénario du film Passion* (a technique that he puts it into practice in virtually all his subsequent video work). In contrast with *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, this longer video-scenario – made after the cinema release of *Passion* (1982) and shown on television – takes place in Godard's video editing studio, and can be seen to parody Orson Welles's *Filming Othello* (1978), which consists of Welles's, sat at a moviola, discussing the production of his 1951 film.[128] That the 'scenario' can come after the film is finished, as Dubois notes, exemplifies how what counts for Godard 'is not to *have made* a film, not preparing one, in the classical sense, with its usual separate and progressive stages; it's rather being always in the process of making one' – of being 'always in the "scenario"' – a perpetual process of construction and de-construction.[129] As with the concept of art criticism in early German Romanticism, the films become a site, or medium, of infinite reflection that is to be critically unfolded through the scenarios that surround them.

In the opening moments of *Scénario du film Passion* we see the silhouette of Godard, shot from behind, in front of a video screen. Godard goes on to show how he employs this 'vast, white surface', which he likens to Mallarmé's notion of the 'white page' [*la page blanche*] (a reference to which I will return in the following section), to see or receive [*re-cei-voir*, as Godard intonates] 'vague ideas' and 'traces' from which to compose the film's scenario; a process that is described in a quasi-theological manner as 'seeing the invisible become visible'. Akin to Vertov, the technique of superimposition becomes a way to dramatize Godard's thought process, acting as a visual analogue to the associative projection of 'possible' narrative connections between disparate themes and gestures; in particular, the connection between gestures of 'love and work'.[130] In a key sequence, Godard fades in and

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[127] Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 179.

[128] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 108.

[129] Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 178.

[130] As Jameson writes of *Scénario du film Passion*, the video functions as an 'experimental laboratory' to 'examine the various things that having a story or narrative might mean', in which video serves as 'an instrument or a geiger counter for detecting narratability and narrativity, narrativization and anecdotality out

Figure 18. *Scénario du film Passion*

out of documentary footage (research material, we are told) of a woman in a textile factory, which he intercuts with Tintoretto's painting *Bacchus, Venus and Ariadne* (1576) and a still of one of the protagonists of the film (played by Isabel Huppert) sat at a factory work bench. Standing in front of these images, Godard traces with his hands the formal correlation of gesture and motion in the clip, the painting and the photograph (Figure 18).[131] From the early 1980s on, painting becomes a key model for Godard's cinematic and videographic construction of *images* which, in contrast to mere *pictures*, are always defined as 'the result of the combination, tension, and dynamic interplay among a number of component elements' – a definition that recalls Eisenstein's distinction between *obraz* [image] and *izobrazhenie* [depiction] .[132] Eisenstein, as Witt notes, 'quietly re-entered' Godard's theory and practice of image-making at the end of the 1970s, and by the late 1980s had come to occupy a prime position in his schema, especially with regard to *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.[133] Godard's primary interest in Eisenstein was as a theorist who sought 'to chart and redefine what "montage" might mean' by retrospectively examining the history of art (painting,

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of the various pre-fabricated materials of late capitalist life and society'. Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; London: BFI Publishing, 1992), p. 164.

[131] Witt, *On Communication*, p. 181.

[132] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 180.

[133] Witt, 'Montage, My Beautiful Care', p. 27. It is notable that two key works on Eisenstein – Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuillemier and Pierre Sorlin's *Octobre* (1976) and Jacques Aumont's *Montage Eisenstein* (1979) – came out in the late 1970s with the 'Ça/cinéma' book series published by Èditions Albatros, which would publish Godard's *Introduction to a True History of Cinema*. See Witt, 'Archaeology of "Histoire(s) du Cinéma"', p. xli.

music, theatre, the novel, poetry, architecture) from the standpoint of cinematic montage.[134] In *Scénario du film Passion*, superimposition is employed in a painterly manner to layer 'two or more visual sources within the same frame' to create imagistic relations between a number of elements that form the basis for the film's story.[135]

Godard's work of the early 1980s is characterized by an engagement not only with the (Western) canon of classical painting and religious themes (*Je vous salue, Marie* [1985]), but with (predominantly classical) music (*Prénom Carmen* [1983]). As Albertine Fox details, the significance of Godard's engagement with music in his post-1979 films and videos can be witnessed not only in the increased incorporation into his films of snippets of music with 'more buoyancy, acuity and fluidity', but the ways in which his organization of both audio *and* visual materials takes on an 'explicitly musicalized…form'.[136] As an opening credit title in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* indicates, the film – marked by its 18 instances of speed variation – was not directed, but 'composed', by Godard.[137] As with his use of visual superimposition, in the video-scenarios – which, as Witt notes, can be also be construed as *études* [studies], in both the intellectual and musical sense – Godard experiments with the different ways in which the sound-track engenders *mental* or *emotional images* through its relation with the image-track.[138] In the concluding moments of *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, for instance, Godard fades in and out between a televised sequence showing a full orchestra

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[134] Witt, 'Montage, My Beautiful Care', pp. 37-38.

[135] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 180. While superimposition does not make it into *Passion*, it clearly underpins the entire logic of the film's narrative, which centers around a film director's recreation of a number of classical paintings as *tableaux vivants*, whose distillation of various themes (oppression, passion, etc.) serve as allegorical condensations for the everyday relations that occur between the film's characters, and with which such scenes are interwoven.

[136] Albertine Fox, *Godard and Sound: Acoustic Innovation in the Late Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp. 28-29.

[137] This is again anticipated by the series *France Tour*, which is conceived as twelve 'movements', rather than 'programmes'.

[138] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 51. This idea is exemplified in *Petites notes à propos du film Je vous salue, Marie* [*Little Notes About the Film Je vous salue, Marie*] (1983), in a scene in which Godard discusses with the leading actress in the film her performance of the same action to two different pieces of music by Bach, which give the actions completely different resonances.

playing Schumann's *Piano Concerto in A minor* (Op. 54) and shots of a field, the music literally flooding 'the "field" of vision [*le champ visual*]'; and in *Scénario du film Passion* Godard creates an analogy between the process of writing and the idea of 'installing music *inside* the image', treating the white screen like a 'visual score'.[139]

Godard further explores the construction of images through the creation of tensions between visual and audio materials in his essayistic video short, *Lettre à Freddy Buache: À propos d'un court-métrage sur la ville de Lausanne* [*Letter to Freddy Buache: About a short film on the town of Lausanne*] (1981). Originally commissioned to make a film about the Swiss town of Lausanne on the occasion of the town's five-hundredth anniversary, Godard responds to this brief in the form of video letter addressed to his eponymous friend Freddy Buache (a film critic and director of the Swiss Film Archive). The video begins with Godard's disembodied voice-over addressing 'Cher Freddy' in a conversational tone, confiding what he predicts will be his perceived failure to make a film 'on' Lausanne. Instead, as Godard explains, he used the opportunity as a point of departure to produce a work 'about' the possibility to evoke a particular place through images, as well as to reflect on what he perceives as the imminent demise of cinema. As Godard intones: 'You and I are too old, and cinema will die soon, very young, without giving everything it could. We must quickly get to the bottom of things. It's an emergency'. As is indicated by the concluding intertitle, which dedicates the short to the 'memory' [*en souvenir*] of Robert Flaherty and Ernst Lubitsch, the idea of cinema presented by *Lettre à Freddy Buache* is premised on Godard's long-held conception of filmmaking as arising from both an ethnographic impulse to document or 'impress' [*imprimer*] reality in the form images, and the desire to shape or 'express' [*exprimer*] images through fiction.[140]

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[139] Fox, *Godard and Sound*, pp. 32, 56.

[140] As Godard elaborates in his 1978 Montreal lectures in a discussion of Flaherty and documentary: 'I would say that impression is the document, but when this document expresses itself or when we need to look at it, at that point we are expressing ourselves. And that's fiction, but fiction is just as real as documentary, it's another moment of reality'. Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema*, p. 157.

Figure 19. *Lettre à Freddy Buache*

Recalling Vertov's city symphony, *Man with a Movie Camera*, this tension between what Godard calls 'the time of documentary' and 'the time of fiction' is played out in *Lettre à Freddy Buache* through the film's shifting between Godard (in his editing room) playing with audio equipment, and scenic tracking shots of Lausanne, in which the camera restlessly wanders in search of just 'three shots' (or impressions) that could adequately express the city's landscape (its light and colours), as well as footage of the city's inhabitants, which Godard manipulates through slow- and stop-start motion techniques (Figure 19). Accompanying these images is the sound of Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* (1928), whose ostinato commences when we see Godard's hand place a cassette into a tape deck – although later we also see Godard operating a record player that also appears to coincide with the film's soundtrack. Ravel's famous work, as Fox points out, serves Godard as a means not only to dramatize the various images, 'but also as a generator of musical thought that comes to fuel the filmmaker's musings on the time of documentary and the time of fiction'; in particular, through Godard's undermining of the musical composition's famous climax by stopping and then playing again it's central passage, and by subverting the soundtrack's creation of a musical illusion by fostering an ambivalence about its possible source.[141]

Although less overtly political that his previous films, Godard's post-1979 work returns repeatedly to the idea of cinema, and art more generally, as a form of *resistance* to the cultural and economic imperialism of television and market capitalism.[142] Emblematic here is Godard's video-short, *Changer d'image*, or, *Lettre à la bien-aimée* [*To Change of Image*, or, *Letter to a Beloved*) (1982) which, like *Lettre à Freddy Buache*, presents a confessional

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[141] Fox, *Godard and Sound*, p. 85.

[142] Godard is here close to Adorno, who in *Aesthetic Theory*, argues that '[a]rt keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance', without which 'it becomes a commodity'. See Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 226.

essay that questions the possibility of fulfilling a television commission – this time for the occasion of the one-year anniversary of Francois Mitterrand's election in 1981. Coming to office on the promise of socialist change, the Mitterrand's presidency was instead characterized by the quick embrace of consensus-oriented politics and the implementation neoliberal economic policies. Rather than explicitly address Mitterand's presidency and the subject of political change, in *Changer d'image* Godard reflects on the possibility of making what he refers to as 'an image of change' when cinema and television are 'occupied' by capital and the state; a situation that is literally acted out through a scene in which Godard, tied to a chair, is being beaten by a male interrogator. During this scene we hear a third-person male voice-over recount Godard's failed project, undertaken in the late 1970s, to work with the socialist government of the newly independent Mozambique in their establishment of the country's first television station – a symbol of the failure of Third Worldism and the utopian image of socialist projects across the globe more generally, as well as the idea that television might serve as a communicational tool in such struggles in particular. [143] The male narrator repeatedly refers to Godard as hopeless 'imbecile', a character role that Godard will perform in later video works and films, such as *Prénom Carmen*, *Soigne ta droite* [*Keep Your Right Up*] (1987), *King Lear* (1987), and *Les enfants jouent à la Russie* [*The Kids Play Russian*] (1993). The artist-filmmaker, Godard suggests in such works, is an outdated geriatric, a holy fool or Idiot Prince for still quixotically believing in change and in the possibility of creating images that foster or document change.[144] In his post-1979 works Godard becomes, to borrow Edward Said's phrase, 'a figure of lateness itself'; an idea that his so-called 'late' work can be seen to develop both discursively and formally.

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[143] See Fairfax, 'Birth (of the Image) of a Nation', pp. 55-67.

[144] *Changer d'image* ends with Godard comically relating an anecdote from his childhood about his grandfather who, when driving Godard and his siblings around, would never leave first gear. The children would cry from the backseat, 'change, grandfather, change'. The anecdote is clearly intended to pose the question whether he has become the grandfather resisting change, or is he still the child in the back crying for change.

3.5. Self-Portraiture, Phrases, and Allegorical Images in 'late-style' Godard

While the category 'late' has largely been applied to Godard as form of periodization to designate his return to cinema in 1979, Godard's work of the 1980s and 1990s can be more critically understood as developing what Said terms a 'late-style'. Said takes the phrase 'late-style' from Adorno's essay fragment '*Spätstil Beethovens*' [Late-style in Beethoven] (1937), where he deploys the term to capture how Beethoven's late compositions, rather than attain a sense of 'harmony and resolution', are constituted by 'intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction', as well as 'a peculiar amalgam of subjectivity and convention'.[145] Late-style is construed by Adorno as providing a 'prototypical modern aesthetic form…by virtue of its distance from and rejection of bourgeois society', insisting on an 'increasing sense of apartness, exile and anachronism, which late style expresses and, more importantly, uses to formally sustain itself'.[146] Godard portrays himself in his late work as 'a figure of lateness itself' (as Said characterizes both Beethoven and Adorno); that is, as 'an untimely…commentator on the present' whose alienation from society is expressed not only through the obstinate abstruseness of his films and videos, populated as they are by enigmatic (personal and historical) allusions and recollections, but in his geographic apartness from the metropolitan 'centres', making much of his work close to his home in the small Swiss village of Rolle.[147] Exemplary here is Godard and Miéville's video essay *Soft and Hard: Soft Talk on a Hard Subject Between Two Friends* (1985), whose intimate tone is notably underscored by the repeated fading in and out of a melancholic phrase from Beethoven's late *String Quartet in A minor* (Op. 132). Produced for the British television

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[145] Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), pp. 7, 12. 'Spätstil Beethovens' was included in the 1964 collection of musical essays, *Moments musicaux*. For an English translation, see Adorno, *Essays On Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 564-568.

[146] Ibid., pp. 14, 17. Said continues: 'Were this reminder to be simply a repeated *no*…late style and philosophy would be totally uninteresting and repetitive. There must be a *constructive* element above all, which animates the procedure. What Adorno finds so admirable about Schoenberg is his severity as well as his invention of a technique that provides music with an alternative to tonal harmony and to classical inflection, colour, rhythm'. Ibid., p. 18.

[147] Ibid., p. 14.

company Channel 4, *Soft and Hard* takes the form of a 'home movie', featuring scenes of Godard and Miéville going about their domestic and daily routines (often in a self-parodic manner), which are punctuated by stills and photographs from cinema history. The video begins with an elegiac voice-over commentary read by both Godard and Miéville, speaking in French over the English title, with the delay of Miéville's voice and the sound of Beethoven's *String Quartet* creating a polyphonic chorus:

> 'We were still looking for the right path to our language. It was still the period of daily massacres in Beirut…It was the moment that private television took over…It was perhaps the time of the penultimate sessions of analysis and the last showings of cinema. In fact, we weren't really looking for the right path of our language, for we were speaking less and more quietly. There was no shortage of subjects of conversation. Or rather, there were. What wasn't lacking was objects. Piles of objects with their names…But the subject, true or false, had disappeared.'

A later sequence depicts the couple roaming around Lake Geneva and its environs, reading in turn from a French translation of Hermann Broch's 1945 novel *The Death of Virgil* (although the text is never identified).[148] A meditation on aging, memory, and art's 'desperate attempt' to, as Godard recites, 'create the imperishable with perishable means', Broch's novel is a recurring reference in Godard's late work, which can be understood as developing a kind of romantic modernism close to Broch's (in spirit, if not in form).[149] This sequence serves to preface a lengthy dialogue between Godard and Miéville, which takes up the second half of *Soft and Hard* and circles around their contrasting attitudes to artistic production, the history of cinema, and television. In a reprise of their opening statement on the disappearance of the subject [*sujet*], their conversation eventually turns to what they see as the essential difference between cinema and television (an idea that Godard will

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[148] See James S. Williams, *Encounters with Godard: Ethics, Aesthetics, Politics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2016), p. 209.

[149] On the multiple appearances of *The Death of Virgil* see Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 66. 'To call Godard a Romantic modernist', as Suchenski writes, 'is not to disregard history and politics, but rather to highlight the means by which he engages with them'; namely, by endeavouring to work through past artistic forms and traditions as a means to reflect on the present. Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 167.

repeatedly rehearse in his later works). Whereas in the cinema, Godard reasons, the subject 'was projected and magnified' so that it 'could get lost', the small screen of television 'no longer projects anything'; rather, 'we receive it and are *subjected* to it'. What is distinct about the cinema, for Godard, in contrast with the experience of watching television, is its capacity to afford spectators the opportunity 'to project, lose, and rediscover themselves through films in a way that nurtured the development of a sense of individual and collective identity' – a connection that is underlined by Godard's pointing out the shared roots of the words 'projection' and 'project'.[150] In an inversion of 1970s 'apparatus theory', Godard views the distance created by projection as affording spectators the possibility of an imaginative engagement with the cinematic image, something he considers lost under television's logocentric influence.[151]

Godard's expressed melancholy over what he sees as the '*coming to pass* of…cinematic history', which surfaces again and again in his works from the mid-1980s on, should not, as Christopher Pavsek contends, be understood merely as an 'experience…of irretrievable loss, but as shot through with a utopian energy'.[152] As Godard comments in an interview from

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[150] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 64. Godard's remarks here could be compared with Schlegel's conception of Romantic poetry as a form of infinite becoming, which Schlegel similarly designates with the term 'project' (as well as the metaphor of embryology). 'A project', as he writes in Athenaeum Fragment 22, 'is the subjective embryo of a developing object'. Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 20-21. This idea is expressed in the final moments of *Soft and Hard*, when the camera zooms towards a television screen showing various adverts before settling on the famous opening tracking-shot of Godard's 1963 film, *Le mépris*, which depicts a camera dolly pulled along a track and then turning its lens toward the audience. On the film's appearance, the camera pans to a white wall where the same sequence is projected, which Miéville and Godard use to create a silhouette representing the expanding beam of a projector by each placing an outstretched arm in front of left part of the projected image. 'Where has all that gone? The project of growing and enlarging into subjects', Godard questions. To which Miéville replies (in English): 'It is hard to say'.

[151] Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 149. As the character William Shakespeare the Fifth explains in Godard's *King Lear*, the film is produced 'in a time now where movies and more generally art have been lost and must somehow be reinvented', which the character Professor Pluggy, played by Godard, attempts to demonstrate by creating small models that simulate the effect of cinematic projection. Ibid., p. 149.

[152] Christopher Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film: Cinema and its Futures in Godard, Kluge, and Tahimik* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 25.

1983: 'It is true that for the cinema I have a sentiment of dusk, but isn't that the time when the most beautiful walks are taken…[F]or me, dusk is a notion of hope rather than despair'. The cinema, he continues, like both himself and history, 'is a passing thing, something ephemeral'.[153] Godard returns to these themes of passing in his 35mm film, *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* [*JLG/JLG: December Self-Portrait*] (1995); a film that is, in part, about Godard's own passing, and which, as in Beethoven's late-style, is often refracted through irony.[154] In one scene, we see Godard playing tennis and vainly flailing at a passing shot, turning to the camera to say: 'I am as happy to be passed as not to be passed'. Before this scene, however, we see written across the pages of a notebook a phrase, taken from William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun* (1950), that serves as one of the guiding maxims of Godard's late works: 'The past is never dead, it's not even past'.[155]

Commissioned by Gaumont to make an 'autobiography' as part of its films for the upcoming centenary of cinema at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, *JLG/JLG* instead presents Godard's attempt to compose a filmic self-portrait. As Godard notes in an interview, referring to Gaumont's decision to replace the slash in the title with the word 'by', the slash separating the two sets of initials is not a synonym for 'by', which would signify 'a study…of myself by myself and a sort of biography'.[156] As with Montaigne's literary self-portrait, *JLG/JLG* replaces the continuous narrative development typical of autobiography with a collation or patching together of various elements. In the opening moments we hear the sound of an off-screen telephone before seeing the title of the film written in cursive on the page of a notebook, the ruled lines of which recall those of a school exercise book. The following shot shows a digitally altered photographic portrait of a young Godard on a mantelpiece, towards which the camera tracks, with Godard's shadow projected onto the surrounding wall – evoking, as Silverman notes, 'those self-portraits in which the painter

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[153] Bachmann, 'The Carrots Are Cooked', p. 138. As Said correspondingly writes: 'Late style is *in*, but oddly *apart* from the present. Only certain artists and thinkers care enough about their métier to believe that it too ages and must face death with failing senses and memory'. Said, *On Late Style*, p. 24.

[154] As Said says about Adorno and Beethoven: 'late style does not admit the definitive cadences of death; instead, death appears in a refracted mode, as irony'. Said, *On Late Style*, p. 24.

[155] This phrase appears in other works, such *Histoire(s) du cinema*.

[156] Gavin Smith, 'Jean-Luc Godard' (1996), in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, p. 183.

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Figure 20. *JLG/JLG*

appears not only within the frame of the canvas, but also as the one who paints it' – and

over which we hear Godard's breathless voice-over listing various tasks to prepare the

shooting a film.[157] Godard punctuates this shot with the names written in his notebook from

the autumnal months of the French Revolutionary calendar (Figure 20). Running backwards,

the months signify renewal or starting again, a key theme explored in *JLG/JLG* which is

especially present in the multiple images of uninhabited landscapes. The shots of Lake

Geneva and its environs which, at first sight, appear to simply represent *nature*, do not, as

Pavsek points out, 'appear without some human presence or trace thereof' – disintegrating

wave barriers, vehicle tracks on a snowy landscape, or Godard himself (Figure 21) – and can

be read, following Benjamin and Adorno's idea of 'natural history', as an attempt to convey

historical phenomena as part of nature, and consequently transient, as well as nature as

historical and shaped by social relations.[158]

Underlying *JLG/JLG*, as with much of Godard's late works (most notably, *Histoire(s) du*

cinéma), is a 'dialectic…of death and resurrection, in which death is the precondition for the

life that precedes it as well as the resurrection to come'.[159] The opening moments are

particularly saturated by tones of (visual, vocal and musical) mourning and requiem. In one

scene, we see Godard writing the text for his 1993 'audiovisual pamphlet' *Je vou salue,*

Sarajevo, made to protest the inaction of the European Parliament in the face of escalating

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[157] Silverman, 'The Author as Receiver', p. 18

[158] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, p. 44.

[159] Ibid., p. 26.

Figure 21. *JLG/JLG*

humanitarian crisis in the Balkans.[160] In this enraged, yet aphoristic, statement Godard

contrasts the 'rule' of 'culture' with the 'exception of art' and 'the art of living', arguing that

the rule of the former is to always desire the 'death' of the latter.[161] *JLG/JLG*, however, is

less about actual death (whether natural or the result of war), than the metaphorical death

that Godard considers constitutive of art. 'Art is that which has been reborn from that which

is burned', as he says, quoting André Malraux (another recurring reference in Godard's late

works).[162] In particular, as Silverman contends, the mortal event with which *JLG/JLG* is

primarily concerned is the death of Godard as a biographical *auteur* or 'legend'.[163] In the

closing moments of the film, this authorial death is expressed through the Brochian theme

of 'self-sacrifice'.[164] This takes a more secular inflection in the last sentence of the film,

spoken by Godard over black leader, which paraphrases the closing lines to Sartre's 1964

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[160] The televisual short was broadcast in 1994 as part of an evening of programs devoted to the war in Bosnia. See Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 103.

[161] The text reads: 'For there's a rule and an exception. Culture is the rule, and art is the exception. Everybody speaks the rule: cigarette, computer, T-shirt, TV, tourism, war. Nobody speaks the exception. It isn't spoken, it's written: Flaubert, Dostoyevsky. It's composed: Gershwin, Mozart. It's painted: Cézanne, Vermeer. It's filmed: Antonioni, Vigo. Or it's lived, and then it's the art of the living: Srebrenica, Mostar, Sarajevo. The rule is to want the death of the exception. So the rule for Cultural Europe is to organize the death of the art of living, which still flourishes'. Quoted in Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 103.

[162] This quote is taken from Malraux's *The Voice of Silence*, and appears in other works by Godard, such as *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.

[163] Silverman, 'The Author as Receiver', p. 20

[164] In *The Death of Virgil* the Roman poet wants to destroy the *Aeneid* as a sacrifice through which redemption (the merging of individual soul in a unified world-soul) may be achieved. See Barnard Levin's introduction to the English translation: Herman Broch, *The Death of Virgil*, trans. Jean Starr Untermeyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. x-xi.

literary self-portrait, *Les Mots* [*Words*]: 'I will deserve the name I gave myself. A man, nothing but a man, no better than any other, but no other better than him'.[165] Sartre's statement, as Warner points out, itself performs a critical revision of a line from Rousseau's *Confessions*, where, in contrast to Sartre's rewrite, Rousseau asserts his singularity and originality over others.[166] As with Sartre, Godard's (uncited) reworking of the final sentence of *Les Mots* serves to express a central tension that is expressed in *JLG/JLG* – which is critical to the genre of the literary self-portrait more generally – between singularity and collectivity, which results from the authorial desire to express the self through 'the inherently and endlessly intertextual chain of language' of which the subject is made.[167] As Godard notes earlier in the film, whenever we 'express ourselves' through language 'we say more than we want to':

> 'We think we express the individual but we speak the universal. "I am cold". It is I who says I am cold, but it is not I who is heard. I disappear between these two moments of speech. All that remains of me is the man who is cold, and this man belongs to everyone'.[168]

The death that *JLG/JLG* intends to both scrutinize and enact, therefore, is primarily the demise of the traditional conception of the artist as an individual personage, best understood, as Silverman argues, 'as an ongoing process than as a realizable event'.[169] This ongoing process of authorial divestiture or negation is connected in *JLG/JLG* to a series of

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[165] Sartre's sentence reads: 'If I put away Salvation among the stage properties as impossible, what is left? A whole man, made of all men, worth all of them, and any one of them worth him'. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Words*, trans. Irene Clephane (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 158.

[166] Rick Warner, 'The Cinematic Essay as Adaptive Process', p. 11.

[167] Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, p. 94. This desire, as Silverman notes, is signified by the slash of the film's title, which serves to 'evacuate' Godard 'from the position of the enunciator'. Silverman, 'The Author as Receiver', p. 17.

[168] Godard here echoes Hegel's argument regarding 'sense-certainty' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As Hegel writes there, 'we ourselves directly refute what we *mean* to say' by attempting to express in language our 'sensuous being'. For while we 'do not *envisage* the universal', it is as 'a universal…that we *utter* what the sensuous [content] is'. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 60.

[169] Silverman, 'The Author as Receiver', pp. 22, 34.

references to Mallarmé, whose 'entire poetics', as Barthes wrote, 'consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing', as well as with writing's material support: the white page.[170] In *JLG/JLG* Mallarmé's white page (represented not only by the lined pages of Godard's exercise book but the multiple images of snowy landscapes) ceases to be merely a metaphor for the formal support of Godard's filmic writing, and becomes a metaphor for Godard himself – 'White paper is the true mirror of man', as an written intertitle reads. For Godard, as Silverman argues, the artist is 'not properly a creator', but a 'receiver'; a *screen* (recalling *Scénario du film Passion*) 'where words and visual forms inscribe or install themselves'.[171]

Silverman's notion of the author as receiver is most conspicuous in the citational practice developed by Godard in his late works, the majority of which present a vast intertextual (as well as *intra*textual) network of literary (as well as cinematic, art historical, and musical) references.[172] This literary hypertextuality is represented in *JLG/JLG* by the numerous shots of Godard's book-lined shelves from which he and other actors read.[173] The late works, as Pavsek notes, perform a 'dispersal into citability', wherein Godard or his actor's statements are often indistinguishable from the numerous citations of which the works are composed.[174] While Godard's early films are replete with literary citations, the intertextuality of his late works is marked by an 'increasing seriousness' towards the (largely European) literary, art historical, and philosophical traditions with which he engages.[175] This

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[170] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 50.

[171] Silverman, 'The Author as Receiver', pp. 23-24

[172] References point to not only their origins, but also to their repetition across many films and videos. As with Godard's repeated use of both literary and pictorial citations, the repetition of sound and musical phrases occurs not only within individual works, but across Godard's late corpus, creating, as Suchenski observes, the impression of a sustained 'musical dialogue' between films. Particularly conspicuous, for instance, are the repeated sounds of a telephone or the crow, as well as the recurrence of specific phrases from Beethoven's late *String Quartets*. Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, pp. 152-153.

[173] See Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 207.

[174] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, p. 28. In *Nouvelle Vague* (1990), as Williams notes, almost the entire script appears to be derived from literary and philosophical texts, with the credits lacking any mention of Godard as author of the film. Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 207.

[175] Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, pp. 209-210.

is manifest not only in the slow and deliberate way Godard and his actors read from such texts, but in the series of short books Godard produced between 1996 and 2001 to accompany various films and videos, such *JLG/JLG*, all of which carry the subtitle *Phrases*.[176] These slender volumes, which include no accompanying images, offer an exclusively text-based experience of the films, transcribing and condensing their spoken commentary and dialogue, as well as intertitles.[177] The presentational form of these books, however, is closer to the free verse of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, than a conventional film script, with no punctuation and multiple line-breaks, as well as no designation of who is speaking what lines or the sources of quotations.[178] As is apparent in these books, Godard's strategy towards intellectual history – as with Debord's practice of *détournement* – is less one of 'simple homage' than 'critical transformation'; a continual process of reworking, re-contextualisation and *paraphrase*, as well as translation.[179] As Stuart Kendall notes, the figures of translation and non-translation in Godard's films and texts – which is, as Kendall points out, again reminiscent of Pounds's use of untranslated foreign phrases in the *Cantos* – typically serve a double function: on the one hand, it reflects 'the collapse of communication'; on the other, 'the plurality of the languages and the problem of translation emerge as a theme' that is to be explored.[180] The latter is especially present in Godard's film *Allemagne année 90 neuf zéro* [*Germany Year 90 Nine Zero*] (1991), which 'revels in a

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[176] The *Phrases* publications were each originally released as individual books by the French publisher P.O.L. between 1996 and 2001: *For Ever Mozart* and *JLG/JLG* in 1996; *Germany Nine Zero*, *The Kids Play Russian*, and *2 x 50 Years of French Cinema* in 1998; and *In Praise of Love* in 2001. For the collected English translation see Jean-Luc Godard, *Phrases: Six Films*, trans. Stuart Kendall (New York: Contra Munda Press, 2016).

[177] As Godard describes the *Phrases* volumes, they are less 'books', than 'recollections of films, without the photos or the uninteresting details', offering 'a little prolongation'. Accordingly, they 'aren't literature or cinema', but '[t]races of a film, close to certain texts by Duras'. Quoted in Stuart Kendall, 'Traces of Cinema: Introduction', in Godard, *Phrases*, p. vi.

[178] A central feature of Godard's intertextual method, as Williams notes, is that those literary works with which he engages most are identified more by the names of their authors than by their titles, providing summary lists at the end or beginning of the *Phrases* volumes, with no attempt made to distinguish the textual origin of the works in question. Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 211.

[179] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

[180] Kendall, 'Traces of Cinema: Introduction', p. xxxvii.

polyglot, pan-European artistic and historical past imaginary', particularly that of German romanticism.[181]

The subtitle *Phrases*, moreover, is also clearly intended to invoke music theory, where the term designates a unit of musical syntax, usually forming part of a larger whole, or 'a rhythmic pattern or melodic contour', typically created through repetition.[182] From the early 1980s, as Fox details, Godard's films and videos encourage the spectator 'to differentiate the sound from the visuals and to hear the "horizontal" sonic relationships, as well as to explore the "vertical" sound-image combinations'.[183] As Godard states in an interview from 1985, 'I try to work not only with an idea of vertical sound, where there are many tracks distinct from one another, but horizontally, where there are many, many sounds but still it's as though every sound is becoming one general speech, whether it's music, dialogue or natural sound'.[184] Essential for Godard in the *composing* of his films and videos is the creation of rhythmic patterns, polyphonic melodies, and dialogic resonances and counterpoints, which can be seen not only in relation to his use of repetition of musical and sound phrases, but his approach to language (hence his poetic use of line-breaks in the *Phrases* volumes to evoke the soundtrack's sense rhythm) and the cadenced editing of the image-track.[185]

While the highly textured soundtracks of Godard's late works operate in a state of 'semiautonomy' with relation to their image-track, his films and videos nonetheless work at

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[181] Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 56. Exemplary here is a scene near the beginning of the film in which two characters translate passages, in German and French from Hegel's work. For a detailed reading of this scene see Daniel Fairfax, 'Godard the Hegelian', in *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard*, pp. 403-407.

[182] Fox, *Godard and Sound*, p. 146. This definition, as Fox notes, shares common ground Pierre Schaeffer's concept of a 'sound phrase'.

[183] Ibid., pp. 144-145. This shift in listening and viewing practices is emphasised by Godard releasing (with ECM Records) digitally remixed soundtracks of his 1990 film *Nouvelle vague* (released in 1997) and *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as CDs. On Godard as a 'sound artist', see also Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 198-201.

[184] Katherine Diekmann, 'Godard in His Fifth Period' (1985), in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, p. 171.

[185] This is expressed in a scene in *JLG/JLG* in which Godard hires a blind assistant editor to cut his film *Hélas pour moi* (1993), and who has to rely on her ear, memory, and sense touch and timing to execute her task. See Fox, *Godard and Sound*, p. 147

the same time to create acoustic, verbal and visual relations between their elements –
through both vertical and horizontal forms of montage – that will engender the creation of
images.[186] That the image for Godard is considered 'a purely aesthetic and cognitive
creation, nowhere immediately apparent in the material, pro-filmic world' is illustrated in
JLG/JLG through scene in which Godard invites his blind assistant editor to imagine a cube
with a point at its centre, and to then draw lines from the point to each corner.[187] Asking the
editor where she envisions the six equal pyramids that the division of the cube creates, the
editor responds 'In my head; like you'.[188] The image receives a number of definitions in
Godard's late works, yet its constant abstract form (as noted above) is always presented as
the tensely articulated relation or association that is created through the juxtaposition of
disparate elements. A key reference for Godard since the early 1980s is Pierre Reverdy's
short poem '*L'image*' [The Image] (published in 1918 in the Dadaist and Surrealist journal
Nord-Sud), which Godard quotes in various forms in multiple works, such as *JLG/JLG*, where
he cites this condensed version:

> The image is a pure creation of the spirit.
> It cannot be born of a comparison, but of the rapprochement of two more or less separate
> realities.
> The more distant and just the ties between realities, the stronger the image will be.
> Two realities with no relationship between them cannot be usefully brought together.
> No image is created.
> An image is not strong because it is brutal or fantastic, but because the association of the ideas
> is distant and just.[189]

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[186] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, p. 44

[187] Ibid., pp. 39-40.

[188] As Pavsek explains, the lesson here 'does not concern the cube…Instead, it is a lesson about vision and
about seeing the invisible, precisely the type of conceptual or imaginary object that Godard is…trying to *show*'.
Ibid., p. 40.

[189] Quoted in Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, p. 39. For longer English translation of Reverdy's poem, which Godard
reads in *King Lear*, see Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 180-181.

For Godard, as for Reverdy, the creation of *poetic* images is not to be narrowly equated (as the example of the cube in *JLG/JLG* might suggest) with an act of mental calculation, but is conceived as an intuitive and speculative operation that works to bring together distant *realities* from which an image *might* be formed.[190] André Breton famously cites the opening lines of Reverdy's poem in the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in an attempt to define the *surrealist* image.[191] For both Reverdy and Breton, *poetic* images are not to be valued 'for the implied symbolic plenitude of their analogies' but the 'effective *denial* of any immediate *unification* [or reconciliation] of their disparate elements'.[192] Yet whereas Reverdy's concept of the image tends toward a state of equilibrium – or what he poses as a question of *justesse* [justness or rightness] – between the distant realities it sets in tension, Breton's emphasis is instead emphatically directed toward the jarring violence – or what he later terms 'convulsive beauty' – that is produced from the image's 'immanently constructive dissociation'.[193] While Reverdy's more irenic model appears to be the more appropriate for considering the dissociative montage techniques employed by Godard in late films such as *JLG/JLG*, Breton's account of the image as a convulsive and involuntary spasm can nonetheless be seen to provide a felicitous characterization of the 'pulsing flash shots' that begin to populate Godard's late video works, such as *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Godard notably first employs such rapid flash shots in his video *Puissance de la parole* [*The Power of Words*] (1988). Named after Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allan Poe's 1845 short story, the creation of a 'video-vibration' (as Dubois describes it) serves to materialize the theory of vibrations set out by one of Poe's characters, in which every word and gesture is said to give

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[190] It is this persistent contact with *reality*, as Michael Bishop argues, that importantly distinguishes Reverdy's poetics from Mallarmé's aestheticism. See Michael Bishop, 'Image, Justesse, and Love: Breton, Reverdy, and Bonnefoy', *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, vol. 42, no. 3 (1988), pp. 189-190. See also Michael Bishop, 'Pierre Reverdy's Conception of the Image', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (January, 1976), pp. 25-36.

[191] André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), pp. 20-21.

[192] David Cunningham, 'Photography and the Literary Conditions of Surrealism', in *Photography and Literature in the Twentieth Century*, eds. David Cunningham, Andrew Fisher and Sas Mays (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2005), p. 78

[193] Ibid., pp71. 78. While he draws favourably on Reverdy's poem on the image, Breton famously takes issue with what he takes to be Reverdy's overly conscious or intentional conception of creating images.

rise to an infinite vibration that would echo throughout the whole universe.[194] As Witt
suggests, Baudelaire's proto-surrealist notion of poetic expression as the creation of
correspondences between a 'forest of symbols', which 'blend[s] from afar' the 'resounding
echoes' of 'perfumes, colours, and sounds', provides another suggestive model for Godard's
later image-making practice.[195]

Images (in Reverdy's strong sense of the term) do not, of course, *always* arise in Godard's
films.[196] The film's materials, as Pavsek underlines, 'can hover next each other in
comparative solitude, free from the overbearing influence of its neighbours', with no *just*
association between a 'sound-image and picture' being formed. The vertical montage of
different sounds, moreover, can simply devolve into 'noise' – 'a veritable metaphor for the
omnipresence of competing discourses' and 'the cacophony of media culture'.[197] In all these
instances, however, Godard's montage of sound and image is essentially allegorical – in the
sense given to the term by Benjamin in his writings on baroque drama and Baudelaire –
engendering a discontinuity between 'image and meaning, which disrupts the false
appearance of "unity" located in the symbol'.[198] It could be argued, furthermore, that the
detached hovering of sound and image fragments in films such as *JLG/JLG*, rather than enact
something akin to the 'fundamentally *affirmative*, and thus avant-garde, form' of
juxtaposition in Breton's surrealist image, instead evoke a sense of what Benjamin described
as the 'desolate, sorrowful dispersal' of allegorical emblems in baroque drama.[199]

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[194] Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 182

[195] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 186. See Charles Baudelaire, 'Correspondances', in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. Anthony Mortimer (Surrey: Alma Classics, 2016), pp. 16-17.

[196] Pavsek gives the example of the artificial and off-screen sound of a squawking crow that punctuates the shots of landscapes in *JLG/JLG*, and creates an image by revoking the latter's natural appearance. Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, p. 44.

[197] Ibid., p. 44

[198] Cunningham, 'Photography and the Literary Conditions of Surrealism', p. 80.

[199] Ibid., p. 80; Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 186. It is, Benjamin says of baroque drama, as something 'incomplete and imperfect that objects stare out from the allegorical structure'; a remark that could equally characterize the literary, musical, and cinematic phrases that populate Godard's late films. Ibid., p. 186.

For Benjamin, Baudelaire's poetry presents a modern form of allegory, pulling reality fragments from their life contexts and joining them in new, unexpected ways, thus dispelling the illusion of 'myth' (although often drawing on mythic figures) and 'organic wholeness' that causes a given order to appear 'endurable'.[200] Yet whereas for baroque allegory, as Benjamin notes, the key figure is the 'corpse', in Baudelaire's 'late allegory' (as well as Surrealism) it is the 'souvenir' [*Andenken*].[201] Like the allegorist, the collector of souvenirs wrenches objects from their familiar contexts, which are transformed into relics of an 'experience that has died out'.[202] In Baudelaire, '*correspondences* are, objectively, the endlessly varied resonances between one souvenir and the others'.[203] They are, as he puts its elsewhere, 'the data of recollection – not historical data, but data of pre-history'.[204] Baudelaire's allegorical intention, that is, is to secure moments of elusive plenitude that transcend time and space; a metaphysical, 'quasi-Platonic' liberation from the present that is expressed in his poems through the figure of recollection, wherein the modern streets of Paris are experienced as 'a complex of signs pointing to things now disappeared'.[205] It is, notably, as Godard says to Serge Daney in episode 2A of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* – in an interview segment that follows a lengthy sequence that features a reading (by a young Julie Delpy) of Baudelaire's poem '*Le Voyage*' (the concluding poem to the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*) – only as a 'souvenir' that it was feasible to tell the 'projectable history' of

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[200] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, J57,3, p. 331.

[201] Benjamin, 'Central Park' (1939), in Benjamin *Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 190.

[202] Ibid., p. 173.

[203] Ibid., p. 190.

[204] Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1940), in *SW 4*, pp. 333-334.

[205] Nicholls, *Modernisms*, p. 21. See in particular the poem 'Le Cygne' [The Swan] – which is part of the section 'Tableaux parisiens' that was added to the 1861 edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* – wherein the 'changing' suburbs of Paris 'turn allegorical', arousing in Baudelaire a series of memories and images. Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, pp. 173-177. As Benjamin highlights in his reading of *Les Fleurs du mal*, the splentic energies of Baudelaire's verse, with their portrayal of the shock experience [*Chockerlebnis*] of modern life sit in tension with their operative ideal to fix in language 'days of recollection [*Eingedenken*], not marked by any immediate experience [*Erlebnis*]'. Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', p. 333

cinema.[206] As he relates in the interview and on a number of different occasions, his grand scheme *to tell the history of cinema with the medium of cinema* – that is, made with and projected on 35mm film – was 'unrealisable'.[207] Instead, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* presents only a souvenir or 'trace' of this utopian project.[208]

3.6. A 'form that thinks': *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

Although Godard's desire to produce a history of cinema can be traced as far back as 1969 to an abandoned book project sketched by himself and Gorin, Godard's first significant attempt to explore cinema history through *cinematic* means were the series of screenings and talks he gave in Montreal in 1978, the transcription of which was subsequently published as *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* [*Introduction to a True History of Cinema*] (1980).[209] The format of the screenings were inspired by the experimental film programming practices of Henri Langlois, with whom Godard had originally intended to collaborate to make his cinema history project. At the Cinémathéque Française in Paris Langlois pioneered an comparative form of film curation, showing widely different films from cinema history one after the other to establish identities and differences between discrete works.[210] Akin to Langlois's curatorial strategy, Godard's method in the Montreal

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[206] Serge Daney, 'Godard Makes (Hi)stories Godard Makes', in Bellour (ed.), *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, p. 159. Godard uses the French '*souvenir*', which is translated as 'memento'.

[207] As Godard says: 'My goal, then, alas…is like that little poem by Brecht: "I examine my project carefully: it's unrealizable". Because it can only be done on TV, which reduces…Whereas in cinema…[i]t's the only history that projects'. Ibid., p. 159.

[208] As Godard relates in the 1978 Montreal lectures: 'In the end, the history of cinema you make will be a trace, like a regret that it isn't even possible to make the history of cinema. But you'll see traces of that history'. Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema*, p. 135.

[209] Witt, 'Archaeology of "Histoire(s) du Cinéma"', p. xix.

[210] In 1972, Langlois also created the Musée du Cinéma, bringing together various souvenirs from cinema history. See Witt, 'Archaeology of "Histoire(s) du Cinéma"', pp. xxiv-xxvi. Another important model for Godard's project was Langlois's work as a compilation filmmaker, such as his attempt in 1974 to create a twelve-hour non-stop montage of clips from two hundred films devoted to 'Paris through the cinema from Louis Lumière to Jean-Luc Godard'. Ibid., p. xxvi

screenings takes the form of 'historical montage', wherein individual reels of three to five films (beginning with the silent era) were shown in the morning, followed in the afternoon by a screening of a film by Godard in its entirety, and then an improvised talk/group discussion where Godard would attempt to unravel the guiding themes ('women', 'revolution', 'war', etc.) that connected the different films.[211] The screenings and talks were construed as a sort of Baudelarian 'Voyage', as Godard titles the individual chapters of the published transcription; a series of personal journeys through history via past works and half-remembered films that he had either seen or written about as a critic, which occasion various recollections, anecdotes and reflections – a kind of public 'psychoanalysis of myself and of where I am in cinema', as Godard says.[212] Godard's initial hope in Montreal 'had been to conduct practical visual experiments with the students by juxtaposing film clips or still images on two screens simultaneously', in order to allow the viewer 'trace connections at the moment of projection'.[213] Following the experience of Montreal, Godard became convinced that the only way for a 'true' history of cinema – one, that is, composed of sounds and images rather than text – could come into being was through the marriage of video and film archives.[214] The situation was fundamentally transformed by the rapid proliferation of domestic video technology, which saw the commercial release of many films on videotape and afforded anyone in possession of a VCR the possibility to record material off-air.[215] Yet the relative ease and cost of employing video technology, as Godard laments in episode 2A, entailed a two-fold compromise, requiring him to work with 'poor quality, miniature copies of the original films', with the final result destined for 'domestic consumption via the small screen, whether through television broadcast or on video'.[216]

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[211] Godard describes his method in terms of 'historical montage' in Part One of the Sixth Voyage of *A True History of Cinema*, pp. 295, 297.

[212] Godard, *A True History of Cinema*, p. 8.

[213] Witt, 'Archaeology of "Histoire(s) du Cinéma"', pp. xxxvi, xxxix

[214] Ibid., p. xxxix

[215] Ibid., p. xl. The televised origin of some of this material is occasionally visible in the form of the logos of the channels from which it had been recorded.

[216] Ibid., pp. xl-xli. Godard would, as Witt notes, end up 'integrating the diminished, murky quality of the film image, mediated through electronic reproduction and repeated copying, into its discourse on technological change'. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 22.

A germane literary model for considering Godard's video project, as has been suggested, are Montaigne's *Essais*, particularly because of their respective 'bric-a-brac dynamic' and experimental admixture of 'citation and self-portrayal'.[217] As with Montaigne's *Essais*, Godard is omnipresent in *Histoire(s)* as both 'body and voice': we see and hear him recite from various texts and provide his own narrative commentary (the distinction between the two is often blurred), as well as take part in the dialogue with Daney mentioned above.[218] Godard could also be said to approximate Montaigne in his working method, constructing over the years an audio-visual archive in Rolle reminiscent of Montaigne's library (or *arrière-boutique* [back room], as he referred to it); a process which consisted of 'stockpiling' and cataloguing film stills, photographs, video cassettes, material taped from television and footage of actors reading from various texts for future use.[219] In contrast to video works such *Scénario du film Passion*, there are surprisingly no shots of Godard at work in his editing studio in *Histoire(s)*.[220] The significant moments of bodily self-inscription that are interspersed across the episodes instead take place in his library/study, where we generally see Godard seated behind an electronic typewriter, writing short evocative phrases (typically the titles of films and books) or pulling books from his shelf in order to cite specific passages (Figure 22). A further point of comparison between the *Essais* and *Histoire(s)* is their fundamentally open-ended character. Godard worked on *Histoire(s)* for more than a decade, presenting initial drafts of the four chapters (each of which is divided into two parts) from the series between 1988 and 1998, the content and form of which were subject

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[217] Michael Temple and James S. Williams, 'Introduction to the Mysteries of Cinema, 1985-2000', in *The Cinema Alone*, p. 27; Warner, 'The Cinematic Essay as Adaptive Process', p. 12.

[218] Warner, 'The Cinematic Essay as Adaptive Process', p. 13

[219] MacCabe compares Godard's move to Roll and setting up of his video studio with Montaigne's *arrière-boutique*, yet it is really only with his beginning to work on *Histoire(s)* that Godard's audio-visual project comes to approximate Montaigne's. See MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait*, p. 241. In an interview from 1983 Godard refers to collecting video cassettes as 'a form of stockpiling provisions…for the future'. Bachmann, 'The Carrots Are Cooked', p. 138. As Godard notes of the filmed readings (recorded in 1988): 'While making the first two chapters I had taped various things without knowing what to do with them: Alain Curry reading Élie Faure, Sabine Azéma reciting a text from Broch's *La Mort de Virgile*, Julie Delpy as a schoolgirl reading Baudelaire's *Le Voyage*'. See Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of the Century*, trans. John Howe (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 9.

[220] In Chapter 3A we see Godard in his darkened studio smoking a cigar, but not working.

Figure 22. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

to revision up until the release of the video box set by Gaumont in 1998.[221] Although these modifications are less visible than the *Essais*, where the intratextual memory of Montaigne's book and the changes between its various editions is made to stand out, we can see something like Montaigne's provisory poetics in Godard's constant tendency throughout the series to double back and return to various arguments, images, film clips and phrases presented earlier on. A more specific instance of revision can additionally be seen in Chapter 3A, where Godard corrects a number of erroneous statements as the word 'ERREUR' flashes up on the screen.[222]

The constitutively open character of the *Histoire(s)* project is further emphasised by the number of other artefacts and off-shoots to which it has given rise.[223] As Godard notes in his long interview with Youssef Ishaghpour for *Trafic* in 1998 – again recalling Montaigne's conception of his *Essais* in terms of an infinite piling up of chapters comprised of supernumerary textual fragments – he did not consider the series in anyway complete,

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[221] Godard continued to edit the project even after its completion, making minor adjustments of various kinds before its release on DVD in 2007. See Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 3-4.

[222] See Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 124.

[223] These include: a four-volume set of art books published by Gallimard in 1998 which, unlike the *Phrases* volumes, is made up of both texts and images derived from the series; a box set of five CDS of the soundtrack accompanied by multilingual books released by ECM Records in 1999; a 35mm compilation, titled *Moments choisis des Histoire(s) du cinéma* (2001), of 'selected moments' from the series commissioned by Gaumont for theatrical distribution; and the exhibition Godard staged at the Pompidou Center in 2006, titled *Voyage(s) en utopie: JLG, 1946-2006, À la recherche d'un théoréme perdu*. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 5-6.

stating that it could have had 'hundreds' of other chapters 'and even more appendices, like the footnotes that are often more interesting to read than the actual text'.[224] Indeed, video works such as *Les enfants jouent à la Russie* (1993), as Witt suggests, effectively function as additional episodes to the series.[225] Accordingly, and akin to Montaigne's *Essais*, *Histoire(s)* constitutes a tension between a potentially infinite work whose *excessive* economy is curtailed by the necessarily finite and fragmentary instances (or traces) of its presentation. As with the concept of the 'fragment-project' in early German Romanticism, the completion (or realization) of a chapter in or appendix to *Histoire(s)* simultaneously *projects* the *idea* of further supplementation, rendering the project essentially incomplete or, in televisual terms, 'to be continued'.[226] The 'pre-programmed impossibility' of Godard's task is expressed in the title and opening moments of Chapter 1A, *Toutes les histoires* [*All the (hi)stories*] (a reference to Malraux), in which Godard promises to tell and show 'all the [hi]stories' of cinema that 'have been', 'might have been' and 'will be'.[227] This desire to tell the history cinema in its totality evokes not only Malraux (who I will return to below) but the *Annales* school historian Fernand Braudel (another key figure for Godard), whose work is cited in various episodes and a recording of his voice incorporated into episode 3B.[228] Braudel famously approached history writing in terms of an interdisciplinary 'total history' [*histoire totale*], which he conceived as 'the total of all possible histories – an assemblage of professions and points of view, from yesterday, today, and tomorrow'.[229] Godard's

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[224] Godard and Ishaghpour, *Cinema*, p. 5.

[225] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 38. We could also add here subsequent video works, such as *The Old Place: Small Notes Regarding the Arts at Fall of 20th Century* (1998, co-directed with Miéville).

[226] Temple and James S. Williams, 'Introduction to the Mysteries of Cinema, 1985-2000', p. 30.

[227] The title is a reference to the first part of Malraux's *The Voices of Silence*, 'The Imaginary Museum', which I discuss below. As Malraux writes of his art historical study: 'the assemblage of so many masterpieces – from which, nevertheless, so many are missing – conjures up in the mind's eye *all* the world's masterpieces. How indeed could this mutilated possible fail to evoke the whole gamut of the possible?'. See André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Paladin, 1974), p. 15.

[228] In 3B, Godard samples excerpts from the soundtrack of Braudel's last public lecture in October 1985, a month before his death, which is taken from a television program devoted to Braudel. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 84.

[229] Fernand Braudel, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p. 34. See also Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 83.

Braudelian emphasis on plurality and polyphony is notably conveyed by the plural *Histoire(s)* of the series title, as well his method of interweaving different documents (visual, audio, textual) from different times and places.[230]

Yet in contrast with the *Annalistes* attempt to separate narrativity from the historical discourse – whereby narrative is construed as the principal impediment to the creation of a scientific historiography – Godard is more interested in those historians and philosophers, such as Hegel, who have in different ways attempted to bridge the gap between history and the art of storytelling and literature.[231] This is manifest in Godard's incessant play on the polysemic *histoire*, a word in French that can mean both 'history' and 'story', as well as 'fabrication'.[232] The two central figures for Godard in this respect are the poet and essayist Charles Péguy and the nineteenth century historian and founding figure of modern French historiography Jules Michelet. Godard includes a number of passages from Péguy's work on history *Clio: Dialogue de l'histoire et de l'áme païenne* [*Clio: Dialogue of History and the Pagan Soul*] (published posthumously in excerpts in 1917 and 1918, and in its entirety in 1932) in Chapter 4B, where we also glimpse parts of the book's cover. In *Clio*, Péguy opposes the positivist historiographical methods of the Sorbonne historians, instead

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[230] The influence of Braudel, moreover, can also be seen in the title of Chapter 2A, *Une histoire seule* [*A solitary (hi)story*], which embodies Godard's attempt in the series to portray 'History' (with a capital H) as 'alone' or 'distanced from man' – an approach he compares not only to the *Annales* school method of examining history in terms of large-scale structures and impersonal forces, but to Hegel's conception of history as a process that exceeds individual actors. As Godard says in an interview from 1998, 'I am rather Hegelian. I think that history is alone and that the cinema is one of its best representatives'. Quoted in Fairfax, 'Godard the Hegelian', p. 408.

[231] As Godard says to Ishagpour: 'From what little I know of Hegel, what I like about his work is that for me he's a novelist of philosophy, there's a lot of romantic in him'. Godard and Ishagpour, *Cinema*, p. 27. For a critique of the attempt by the Annales school to separate history and narrativity see Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). On Hegel's theory of history writing as an art form, see White, *Metahistory*, pp. 81-131.

[232] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 2, 78. As Godard says to Ishaghpour: 'It was to play on the different meanings, the way *histoires* can mean tall stories or hassles. It was to point out that it's both History with a big H and *histoires* with a small one, French has these different usages for the word but other languages don't'. Godard and Ishagpour, *Cinema*, p. 59.

advocating for an 'engaged, memory-based, intuitive, [and] poetic' form of history writing that was exemplified for Péguy by Jules Michelet and Victor Hugo – another important figure in *Histoire(s)*.[233] Drawing on Henri Bergson's philosophy of time, Péguy distinguishes between what he terms history as 'inscription' (the horizontal plotting of time as a series of external events) and memory as 'recollection' (a vertical and qualititative experience of temporality in which past events are recalled and brought to life from their inside) – an idea that Benjamin would develop some years later.[234] The key figure for Péguy in this regard was Michelet, who saw his work as a historian of the French revolution in terms of a Christological notion of *resurrection*, taking it upon himself 'to "remember" the...ideals of the Revolution' by restoring to life the recently forgotten 'voices of the dead', as well as 'their silences'.[235] What both Péguy and Godard value in Michelet is his emphatically partisan approach to the study of history, wearing – in contrast to the 'judicious' pretensions of historians such as Leopold von Ranke – his principles of 'nation, the people, and the Revolution' on his sleeve, and consequently collapsing the distance between History and its narrator.[236] Above all, Godard 'cherishes Michelet for his lyricism and powers as a prose stylist', especially admiring his use of 'poetic imagery, [and] the "incredibly visual" quality of his writing'; demonstrating, as Godard says to Ishaghpour, 'that history could be a work of art'.[237]

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[233] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 77. In the opening moments of 3A Godard reads Victor Hugo's 'Pour le Serbie' [For Serbia] (1876), an article condemning the outbreak of violent conflict in the Balkans and the failure of European governments to adequately respond, which is connected to 'the cyclical returns of history and the barbarism of modern warfare' and the more specific historical resonance with 'the 1990s Yugoslav wars that were ongoing at the time *Histoire(s)* was in production'. See Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 167

[234] See François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 128. For an English translation of *Clio*, see Charles Péguy, *Temporal and Eternal*, trans. Alexander Dru (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), pp. 85-165.

[235] See White, *Metahistory*, pp. 156, 159.

[236] Ibid., p. 158. This collapse is expressed, as Rancière observes, in Michelet's constant dismantling of any stable opposition between the tenses of historical narration and the present of discourse (declarations, commentaries, or maxims). See Rancière, *The Names of History*, pp. 48-49.

[237] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 82; Godard and Ishagpour, *Cinema*, p. 28. Correspondingly, it is the idea that criticism should combine 'a genuine sense of critical agenda and a personal, literary style' that

Godard works the themes of recollection and resurrection into the audio-visual fabric of *Histoire(s)* in a number of ways. As I have already highlighted above in relation to Baudelaire, recollection performs a central role in Godard's idiosyncratic cinematic voyage, which can be seen not only in relation to his attempt to reflect on his place as a filmmaker within the history of cinema – such as in Chapter 3B, *Une vague nouvelle* [*A New Wave*], where Godard offers a personal account of the French New Wave – but the ways that, as a *spectator*, films (or, more precisely, particular images from films) have inscribed themselves in his memory.[238] The choice of many of the films that appear in *Histoire(s)*, therefore, as the Eurocentric nature of the canon suggests, should not be read as presenting an impartial or objective history of cinema, but one made up of Godard's own 'personal filmic memory stains' – as he indicates at one point with the intertitle '*Histoire(s) du cinémoi*' [cine-me].[239] This imbrication of cinematic images with Godard's own memory is conveyed throughout *Histoire(s)* via the simple but effective superimposition of film imagery over his face, and is particularly manifest in the opening moments of Chapter 1A where we see Godard type the titles of films into his electric 'memory' typewriter, the delayed and jarring staccato clacking of which gives rise to a flashing series of stills, photographs and film clips. In other moments, Godard turns his eyes upward and stabilizes his glasses before a stream of images issue forth, as if they were his own screen memories materializing (Figure 23). This work of involuntary recollection is connected in Chapter 2B, *Fatale beauté* [*Fatal Beauty*], to Proust's novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*], through Godard superimposing the words *LE TEMPS PERDU* [TIME LOST] and then *LE TEMPS RETROUVÉ*

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distinguishes the predominantly French cast writers, art historians, and films critics that appear throughout *Histoire(s)*: Diderot, Baudelaire, Élie Faure, Malraux, André Bazin, François Truffaut, and Daney. See Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 39. The interview, with Daney in 2A, in which Godard relates his views on criticism, is notably prefaced by a quotation from Oscar Wilde's essay/dialogue 'The Critic as Artist' (1891). The interview with Daney was initially recorded as a primer for *Histoire(s)*, but worked into the fabric of 2A following Daney's death in 1992, adding to the episodes 'elegiac quality', which is underscored by the ghostly reverb effect Godard applied to the extracts of the filmed conversation. Ibid., pp. 39, 41.

[238] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 17. As Godard argues in Chapter 4A about the films of Alfred Hitchcock (to whom the episode is devoted), what we 'remember' of Hitchcock's films are visual *images* or sounds – a glass of milk, a windmill, a musical score, etc. – rather than the plot-lines to which such images and sounds belonged.

[239] Ibid., p. 18.

Figure 23. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

[*TIME REGAINED*] over an image of a reel of 35mm film moving through the rollers of an editing table.[240]

The image of a 35mm strip of film unwinding on an editing table – which is often slowed down to create a deformed sound (connoting, as Dubois writes, the struggle to bring to life 'tired old machinery') – recurs throughout *Histoire(s)* and represents Godard's various reflections on the cinematic image in terms of resurrection.[241] Every film, as Godard argues, constitutes an 'attempt at resurrection', in the sense that the camera's recording of past events are then resurrected via the projected image.[242] Godard's argument here can be traced back to André Bazin's influential essay, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (1945), in which Bazin famously characterized photography and film as an embalming or mummification of time.[243] Following from Bazin's realist emphasis on the indexical nature of

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[240] Shortly after this sequence Godard adopts the role of Proust's narrator Marcel, calling out for his lover Albertine who, like the 'mystery' of the cinema, is said to be 'lost'. For a comparison between the poetics of Proust's novel and *Histoire(s)* see Miriam Heywood, 'True Images: Metaphor, Metonomy and Montage in Marcel Proust's *À la recherché du temps perdu* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*', *Paragraph 33*, no. 1 (2010), pp. 37-51.

[241] Dubois, 'Video Thinks What Cinema Creates', p. 182. This image first appears in *Puissance de la parole*.

[242] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 25.

[243] André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 14-15, Also significant for Godard, as Witt notes, is the proto-realist film theory of the 1920s, notably the concepts of *photogénie* and mobile embalming developed by Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein, respectively. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 25.

the cinematic image, Godard views all films – 'irrespective of their nominal status as newsreels, documentaries, or fictional dramas' – as carrying 'an extremely high documentary charge', haphazardly documenting the present in which they were produced, whether in terms of contemporary attitudes, fashions, architecture, modes of story-telling, or formal devices.[244] As such – and recalling Langlois's Musée du Cinéma – the history of cinema is said to present a 'museum of the real' (3B); an audio-visual archive which authorizes the spectator to, like the figure of Orpheus, 'look back' on the past 'without causing Eurydice's death' (2A).[245] As in Bazin's writings on film, the capacity of the cinema to reproduce filmed reality is often expressed in *Histoire(s)* in quasi-religious terms: 'Even scratched to death', as Godard states in 1A, 'a simple thirty-five millimeter rectangle saves the honor of all reality'.[246] For Godard, as for Bazin, there is something deeply theological about the iconic-indexical nature of the cinematic image, which, as Osborne explains in relation to the ontology of the photographic image, replaces the 'theological structure' of the image as a symbolic 'carrier of the divine' with a 'secular paradigm for the participation of meaning in the real'.[247] This is, in part, the point of Godard's repeated linking of the cinema to Christian themes and iconography in *Histoire(s)*, construing the quasi-religious worship of the cinema as a continuation of the Christian iconophilic tradition.[248]

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[244] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 23, 22. The cinema presents both the 'actuality of history' [*Actuality de l'historie*] and the 'history of news' [*Histoire de l'actualite*], as Godard's chiastic formula phrases it in 1A. Or as Godard says elsewhere: 'I think the cinema is an image of the world. If you know how to look, you learn many things. It is a projection of the world at a given time'. Jean-Luc Godard, *The Future(s) of Film: Three Interviews 2000/01*, trans. John O'Toole (Bern: Gachnang and Springer, 2002), p. 29.

[245] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 23-24. The Orphic myth, as Witt details, which is evoked a number of time in *Histoire(s)*, serves as an allegory for Godard's historical enterprise, and is most notably visible in Godard's use of clips from Jean Cocteau's modern update on the myth in his film *Orphée* (1949). Ibid., p. 72.

[246] See, for example, Bazin's essay 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema', where the cinematic image is discussed in terms of a 'faith' in and 'respect' for the reality that it depicts. André Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema', in *What is Cinema?*, p. 24.

[247] Peter Osborne, 'Sign and Image', in *Philosophy in Cultural Theory*, pp. 34-35.

[248] See Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 115, 132-134. The cinematic image and its powers of resurrection are, however (as Godard's allusion to the Orphic myth suggests), also figured through various non-Christian themes, including a number of clips from horror films. Ibid., p. 134

A key influence on both Bazin's and Godard's thinking on cinema was Malraux's essay '*Esquisse d'une psychologie du cinéma*' [Sketch for a Psychology of Cinema] (1940), in which Malraux situates the emergence of film within the broader history of the Christian tradition of 'dramatic representation', as well as characterizing the cinema 'industry' as presenting a combination of 'journalism' and 'Myth'.[249] More crucial for *Histoire(s)*, however, is Malraux's art historical publications, in particular the three volume work *Pscyhologie de l'art* [*The Psychology of Art*] (1947-1950).[250] As Godard acknowledged, the first volume of *The Psychology of Art*, *Le musée imaginaire* [*The Imaginary Museum*] – the tile of which Godard is also likely alluding to in referring to the cinema as a 'museum of the real' – 'showed' him 'the way'.[251] One of the major theses of *The Psychology of Art*, that is central to *Histoire(s)*, is the transhistorical capacity of art, through its powers of metamorphosis, to triumph over death and human destiny by transfiguring and thus redeeming reality.[252] Godard borrows the title of the third volume, *La monnaie de l'absolu* [translated into English as *The Twilight of the Absolute*], for chapter 3A, which explores (in a Malrucian manner) the relations between European painting, cinema and history (specifically war) during the nineteenth and twentieth century.[253] As with his interest in the French art historian Élie Faure, what Godard takes from Malraux is the latter's 'poetic approach to the…fabrication of…history', as well

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[249] See André Malraux, 'Sketch for a Psychology of the Moving Pictures', in *Reflections on Art: A Source Book of Writings by Artists, Critics, and Philosophers*, ed. Susanne K. Langer (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), pp. 317-318, 326. Godard recycles a number of statements from Malraux's sketch, such as the statement in 1A: 'myth begins with Fantômas [a popular fictional character popularized through Louis Feuillade's 1913-1914 silent film serial], but ends with Christ'. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 88-90.

[250] Malraux's study was published initially in three volumes: *Psychologie de l'art,* vol 1, *Le musée imaginaire* (1947); vol. 2, *La création artistique* (1948); and vol. 3, *La monnaie de l'absolu* (1949). It was republished in revised and less expensive single volume under the generic title *Les voix du silence* in 1951 by Gallimard*,* which also included the additional section *Les métamorphoses d'Apollon.*

[251] Quoted in Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 87.

[252] See Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, p. 46.

[253] For a detailed reading of this episode see Chapter 2 of Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, pp. 53-81.

his focus on artistic form.[254] Even more significant for Godard are Malraux's experiments in creating an iconographic form of art history. Developing the genre of the art historical album, *The Psychology of Art* assembles photographic reproductions of artworks to (akin to the recent developments in museological practices) create *dialogic rapprochements* between widely different works from disparate historical contexts, as well as devising innovative image-image and image-text relations.[255] Like *Histoire(s)*, Malraux's presentation of photographic reproductions deploy a number of 'dramatic effects', often juxtaposing full-length shots of artworks with extreme close-ups; a strategy likely inspired by Malraux's interest in cinematic montage.[256]

Just as Malraux employs the technology that, as Benjamin argued, was one of the key factors in the loss of the artwork's aura (photography) to conduct his exploration of the historical metamorphosis of artistic forms, so Godard in *Histoire(s)* employs one of the very technologies said to have destroyed the aura of the cinema (video) to reflect on the cinema's various histories, as well as to resuscitate what, for Godard, is construed as its unrealized potential for montage.[257] In episode 3B Godard cites the title of his 1956 article, '*Montage, mon beau souci*' [Montage, My Beautiful Care], in which he confronted the anti-

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[254] Michael Temple, 'Big Rhythm and the Power of Metamorphosis: Some Models and Precursors for *Histoire(s) du cinéma*', in *The Cinema Alone*, p. 91.

[255] On the self-reflective character of Malraux's attempts to think with images and not only text see Temple, 'Big Rhythm and the Power of Metamorphosis', p. 91.

[256] See Walter Grasskamp, *The Book on the Floor: André Malraux and the Imaginary Museum*, trans. Fiona Elliott (Los Angeles, California: The Getty Research Institute, 2016), p. 79. Malraux discusses the art of cinema towards the end of 'Part One: The Museum Without Walls'. As Malraux writes: 'The cinema acquired the status of an art only when the director thanks to this use of different planes, was emancipated from the limitations of the theatre. Henceforth it could choose the significant shots and co-ordinate them, thus remedying the silence of selectivity'. Malraux considers the isolation of fragments and details of works through photography, which brings about a 'metamorphosis' of the work, in terms of an increasing 'intellectualization of art', affording the viewer to 'detect' the persistence and modulation of 'hitherto unobserved' artistic forms and styles. Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, p. 124 Malraux's focus on the historical persistence and modulation of artistic forms and styles can be compared to Aby Warburg's *Bilderatlas* project, which I discuss in the following chapter.

[257] Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 57.

editing directive issued by Bazin's article 'Montage interdit' [Montage prohibited] –

published in the same issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* as Godard's text, and referenced by

Godard in episode 4B.[258] Godard's early thinking on montage can be traced back to

Malraux's 'Sketch for a Psychology of Cinema', in which he defined the 'art' of cinematic

montage as 'the expression of significant relations between human beings, or between

minds and things'.[259] As Godard repeatedly rehearses in his Montreal lectures, recalling

Malraux's definition, early silent cinema 'fostered…a different way of seeing' that 'gradually

came to be called montage': 'something that filmed not things, but the connection between

things'. Montage, moreover, allowed spectators to see 'a relationship with what they saw,

because what they saw itself created a relationship in the form of telling stories and made

this relationship truly seen'.[260] In *Histoire(s)* Godard links what he considers the 'intrinsic

pedagogical function' of cinema back to the invention of the cinematograph, and 'the

process of visual education it set in motion'.[261] This conception of the cinematograph as an

instrument that brought about new forms of perception is symbolized in *Histoire(s)* by the

numerous images of people looking through various devices, such as the opening images of

1A, which show James Stewart in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), his eyes shifting behind

his telephoto lens, and Mischa Auer looking through a magnifying glass in Welles's *Mr.*

Arkadin (1955) (Figure 24). Accordingly, as Witt suggests, *Histoire(s)* is less a history of

cinema, than a '*histoire(s) du cinématographe*' (as a shift in intertitles indicates in 1A); that

is, the story of what the scientific and philosophical impetus of early intellectual cinema

became in the age of the talkies.[262] Godard correspondingly follows Jean Cocteau's and

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[258] See Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 27. Already in 'Montage, My Beautiful Care', Godard

imbues cinematic montage with a quasi-mystical power that transcends any localized sense of film editing,

arguing, in a Malrucian manner, that it 'can restore to actuality that ephemeral grace neglected by both snob

and film-lover, or can transform chance into destiny'. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Montage My Fine Care', in *Godard on*

Godard, p. 39.

[259] Malraux, 'Sketch for a Psychology of the Moving Pictures', p. 326.

[260] Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema*, 217-218. As Godard puts it: 'Montage allowed one to see

things and no longer to say them, that's what was new. You could see that the boss was robbing the workers,

it wasn't sufficient to say it'. Ibid., p. 218.

[261] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 114.

[262] Ibid., p. 112.

Figure 24. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

Robert Bresson's in using the term 'cinematograph' to designate 'a type of thoughtful cinema that lies beyond, and resists, the homogenous forms and homogenizing influence of the Hollywood-derived mainstream', and which is represented in *Histoire(s)* by a handful of individuals, such as Cocteau and Bresson.[263]

As James Williams and Michael Temple note, many of Godard's ideas about cinema history – 'the betrayal of cinema's popular mission and scientific vocation' and the curtailment of silent cinema's experiments with montage by Hollywood-spectacle, with its technical innovations of script, sound, colour and television – are 'quite standard fare'.[264] What is less standard, is the way Godard 'gives some of these common motifs a powerful idiosyncratic twist'.[265] Central here is Godard's emplotment of the rise and fall of the cinema(tograph) according to a Micheletian romantic narrative, whereby the revolutionary events and heroic ideals of early silent cinema, as with the French Revolution for Michelet, are 'set within a

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[263] Ibid., p. 113. The importance of Bresson for Godard can be seen in the number citations from *Notes sur le cinématograph* [*Notes on the Cinematograph*] (1975) that appear throughout *Histoire(s)*, such as Bresson's maxim on cinematographic construction: 'To bring things that have as yet never been brought together and did not seem predisposed to be so'. Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematograph*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: New York Review of Books, 1986), p. 29. In *Notes on the Cinematograph*, Bresson reflects (through a series of aphoristic dictums, written in the style of Chateaubriand and penned over many years) on his attempt to develop an ascetic and elliptical form of cinematographic composition that would enable, rather than disable, the spectator's imagination.

[264] Temple and Williams, 'Introduction to the Mysteries of Cinema, 1985-2000', p. 18.

[265] Ibid., 18.

larger Tragic awareness' of their 'subsequent dissipation', and which is expressed (as with Michelet) through an increasingly 'melancholic' and 'elegiac' tone.[266] This tragic narrative is initially outlined in 1A, where Godard presents a condensed, epigrammatic history of the corruption of cinema's documentary function by the 'dream factories' of Hollywood and the Soviet Union which, it is argued, lead to the cinema's failure to testify to the events of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust. The latter provides the background for Godard's reflections on the cinematic image in terms of resurrection, projection and fatal beauty, which he develops in 1B, 2A, and 2B respectively. 3A and 3B focus on the national cinema movements of post-war Italian Neo-realism and the French New Wave, which are portrayed as the final flickers of resistance to the occupation of the cinema by a uniform (and Americanized) film industry.[267] 4A turns to the work of Alfred Hitchock as an exception to the rule, characterizing the director as one of the greatest creators artistic forms in the twentieth century (because of the director's power to create striking images); and 4B presents 'a combination of somber, intimate self-portrait and meditative stocktaking in relation the series as a whole'.[268] While the episodes in *Histoire(s)* present what Godard refers to as 'localized case studies' that can be watched separately, and although the episodes 'bleed into and at times repeat one another', breaking with any strict sense of chronology, the 'long-form structure' of *Histoire(s)*, as indicated above, can nonetheless be read as constituting what Ricouer (in relation to the work of Braudel) terms a 'quasi-plot'.[269] As with Braudel's *The Mediterranean*, the quasi-plot that Godard threads through *Histoire(s)* is often 'deeply buried and difficult to reconstruct'.[270] The viewer is warned of this difficulty at the outset of 1A by the very first lines that appear on the screen, 'hoc opus, hic labor est' [That is the task, the hard thing]; a citation from Virigil's *The Aeneid* that refers to the challenges that face Aeneas in his effort to retrace his steps from his journey to the under-

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[266] See White, *Metahistory*, pp. 153, 152.

[267] The principal case of resistance in Italian neorealism for Godard is Rossellini's World War II drama *Rome, Open City* (1945); a film 'shot in adverse conditions beyond the limits of the studio system' which is seen as realizing 'cinema's full potential, unique among the visual arts, to operate at a popular and national scale, literally projecting an entire people's new, future self-identity'. Williams, *Encounters with* Godard, p. 69.

[268] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 4-5.

[269] Ibid., p. 4-5; Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 151.

[270] Ricouer, *Time and Narrative, vol. 1*, p. 230.

world.[271] Yet as the unreferenced and unexplained Latin citation from *The Aeneid* suggest, the difficulty for the viewer in reconstructing the various plot-lines and arguments Godard interweaves through series lies less in the eschewal of recognizable narrative tropes and the emplotment of history in terms of individual characters and events (as is the case with Braudel), than in the oblique and elliptical form of Godard's audio-visual text.

With its 'dense weave of implied associations that steadily accumulate gravity even as they resist fixed, unitary meaning', *Histoire(s)*, as Suchenski argues, is often closer to Pound's *Cantos* than the writings of Braudel, Péguy, Michelet, or Malraux.[272] Godard suggests such a connection between his audiovisual history and Pound's modernist epic-poem by including a recording of Pound reciting a section from the first of his *Cantos* around a minute before the end of the final episode (4B). The extract, in which Pound recounts the story of Elpenor from Homer's *Odyssey* – the forgotten friend of Odysseus who died 'unburied' and 'unwept', and whose ghost begs to be remembered – is not elucidated upon, yet is clearly deployed by Godard for its resonance with his own elegiac lament for the cinema, as well as the ways in which 'ghosts of the past endure into the present'. The latter is emblematic of the primary mode of quotation employed in *Histoire(s)*, which intermixes 'images, sounds, and texts stripped from their original contexts' so that they resonate with surrounding elements and take on new meanings; a process that is comparable to Pound's poetic 'stitching together of different ideas and periods'.[273] Both the *Cantos* and *Histoire(s)*, as Suchenksi observes, consist of an 'accretion of fragments grouped into fluid arrangements...that echo back and forth across the body of the work', regularly 'looping back' to central figures and motifs 'to remind the reader' of their work's 'spiralling arc'.[274] Both works also having a number of relatively clear 'discursive passages' that 'provide points

[271] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 72

[272] Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 145

[273] Ibid., p. 145.

[274] Ibid., pp. 147, 196. Both have a dirge-like quality, creating a funereal song of mourning and a *memento mori* for their lost objects, through a repetitive movement that leads it into a form of music in which the sense of individual words seems to give way to the overall rhythm.

around which the whirlwind of associations can momentarily coalesce'.[275] The echo-like

character of *Histoire(s)* is epitomized by Godard's voice-over commentary, which is

sometimes subject to a heavy reverb effect, generally uttering short epigrammatic phrases

that are linked via repetition, chiasmus and associative word-play. The rhetorical and poetic

movement of Godard's voice-over, as well the (often simultaneous) barrage of intertitles,

typically reflects the series constant movement between the history of cinema and the

history of the twentieth century with which it is imbricated: 'History of cinema/ actuality of

history/ history of actualities/ histories of cinema/ with an s/ with an SS', as Godard intones

in 1A.

Godard's endeavour to 'invoke complex histories through small details' (whether in the

form of visual, textual, or musical fragments) that are brought together 'not according to

diachronic patterns but through provocative collisions', as has been pointed out, has strong

echoes with the historical constructivism and micrological thrust of Benjamin's writings (in

particular, the *Arcades Project*), as well as Benjamin's theorization of the manifold

immanence of the past in the present and the crucial role of the present in interpreting the

past.[276] In his conversation with Ishagpour Godard claims to be unaware of the *Arcades

Project*, yet references Benjamin's idea of constructing historical 'constellations…between

the present and the past' as a key idea for understanding his own montage method.[277]

Although there is no direct reference to Benjamin in *Histoire(s)*, Godard cites fragments

from Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History' (1940) in other works from the period.[278] 'On

the Concept of History' – a series of numbered (eighteen) 'theses' (or fragments) – is

suggestive as a model for reading *Histoire(s)* not only because of the way in which Benjamin

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[275] Ibid., pp. 147, 146. *Histoire(s)* further resembles the *Cantos* in that both projects took the form of
'continually expanding works-in-progress publicly released in provisional forms before reaching their final,
never entirely stable, states'. This instability is manifest in the ways in which moments of the past in both
Pound and Godard 'are recalled and held up against the chaotic uncertainty of the present', consequently
conveying a 'History that is always in motion'. Ibid., pp. 147, 146.

[276] Ibid., p. 167

[277] Godard and Ishagpour, *Cinema*, pp. 21, 7.

[278] References appear in *Les enfants jouent à la Russie*, *Hélas pour moi*, and *The Old Place*. See Witt, *Jean-Luc
Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 79.

encrypts his theoretical propositions in the form of parabolic figures, stories and images, but its bringing together of political, historical and theological motifs. Particularly relevant here are Benjamin's quasi-messianic reflections on redemption, which corresponds with Godard's recurrent use in *Histoire(s)* and elsewhere of the 'quasi-Pauline' phrase, 'the image will come at the time of the resurrection'.[279] Redemption – that is, the completion of history as a whole wherein the past becomes 'citable in all its moments' – becomes in Benjamin (and later, Adorno) a 'standpoint from which to think the possibility of a new kind of historical experience'.[280] As such, as Osborne explains, theology in Benjamin 'stands for the moment of totalizing transcendence of the given which is intrinsic to the concept of history itself'. Yet 'redemption' as 'the reception of the fullness of the past' remains practically *unrealizable*, as it 'does not come until Judgment day: the end of time'.[281] It is this impossibility of receiving or realizing *the Image* in its fullness that the is suggested by Godard's quasi-Pauline phrase. It is also how we can read the repeated motif of hands

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[279] On the origins of the phrase see Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 25. A key instance of Godard's deployment of the phrase occurs in 1B in a sequence that incorporates the dramatic concluding scene from King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946), in which fatally wounded lovers crawl toward each other with outstretched arms (Figure 25). While Witt reads the phrase and the iconography of hands reaching out to each other (a recurring motif in Godard's late work) as simply an allegory for Benjamin's definition of materialist historiography as the construction of constellations between a specific past and present, Godard is clearly gesturing toward something more complex in this sequence, which can be better understood in terms of Benjamin's quasi-messianic notion of redemption.

[280] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *SW* 4, p. 392; Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 141. As Adorno puts it in the final aphorism of *Minima Moralia*: 'The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption…Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its object – this alone is the task of thought'. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 247. As Williams contends, *Histoire(s)* seems to move in this particular direction indicated by Adorno. Like Godard, Adorno 'viewed the Holocaust as an end point of human civilization and as a result had a sense of permanent catastrophe', and both moreover can be seen to generate works that constantly undermine 'any idealizing synthesis', while never abandoning 'the concept of totality' – which is why it is fitting that Godard won the Adorno prize in 1995. Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 80.

[281] Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 149.

Figure 25. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

reaching towards each other (Figure 25) in Godard's work, as well as his use of
superimposition and montage more generally; namely, as a *utopian* image of reconciliation
or unification which, in the 'hermetic enclosure' of the image's 'internal relations', carries
within it 'the *perspective* of redemption'.[282]

Connected to this impossible unity is Godard's persistent tendency in *Histoire(s)* to present
only fragments and details of paintings, photographs, film clips and textual excerpts, that
are constantly interrupted by other elements, and which gesture 'towards a narrative unity
and whole located forever off-screen and thus forever deferred'.[283] As Williams argues,
Europe becomes a privileged subject in Godard's late work precisely as a metaphor for an
'impossible unity', reflecting on the latter as a site of an 'ongoing crisis of fragmentation and
decontextualization'; a crisis intensified, for Godard, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, by
the global spread of the capitalist system, in which 'the different processes of history and
memory, as well as art and culture, risk being flattened if not canceled out'.[284] History,
montage, fragmentation, and questions of language and translation thus come to figure as
an artistic means of 'resistance' against cultural uniformity and the attempt to impose a
'fixed "European" unity, especially a vision of Europe that includes no proper account of the
painful and complex experience of the Second World War'.[285] Yet this 'shattering of national

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[282] Ibid., p. 145

[283] Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 60. This is captured in Godard's citation in *Histoire(s)* of Beethoven's
axiom: 'The perfect union of several voices prevents, all in all, the progress of one towards another'. Ibid., p.
74.

[284] Ibid., p. 74.

[285] Ibid., p. 60.

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 26. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

integrities (spatial, linguistic, temporal)', as Pavsek notes, and as Godard's late works attest, also holds a utopian 'moment in which history and its artifacts can possibly be liberated'.[286]

It is because of the historical impossibility of redemption in Benjamin that, as Osborne points out, it is an angel – famously represented by Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) – a being that exists in between time and eternity and who is 'powerless to intervene', and 'not the Messiah, who watches over Benjamin's later work'.[287] Although not directly referenced, Klee's *Angelus Novus*, as Monica Dall'Asta contends, can be seen to 'haunt', by metonymic association, chapter 1B through the recurring image (taken from Ingmar Bergman's *Prison* [1949]) of a man and women with a small toy film projector – an association that is reinforced by Godard's superimposition (towards the end of the episode) of the word '*l'ange*' [angel] over the couple (Figure 26).[288] Like Klee's angel, the couple in the image face toward the viewer and gaze fixedly at their off-screen projection, which is often intercut with various images of war and destruction to create the impression that their glance is addressed to such events; events that appear to the couple, as Benjamin writes of Klee's

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[286] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, p. 47.

[287] Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 149.

[288] Monica Dall'Asta, 'The (Im)possible History', in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), p. 352. As Dall'Asta notes, Godard originally included an image of Klee's drawing *Forgetful Angel* (1939) in the initial version of 1B. Godard also reinforces the association by intercutting the image of the couple with a Byzantine painting of an angel.

angel, as 'one single catastrophe'.[289] The standpoint of Klee's angel, however, is not that of

Benjamin's materialist critic or historian, but that of an '"inverted" progress': the

'homogenous empty time of historicism' which 'mirrors the indifference to all historical

specificity characteristic of a purely Messianic view'.[290] Benjamin's materialist historian, by

contrast, is always *immanent* to history and consequently 'located inside a specific historical

present'.[291] To articulate 'the past historically', as Benjamin contends – corresponding with

Godard's portrayal of history as a form of remembrance – 'does not mean recognizing it

"the way it really was"', but 'appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of

danger' – or what he terms the 'now of recognizability' [*Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit*].[292]

Benjamin's proposed historiographical method here is, as with Godard's Reverdian notion of

the image, neither simply calculated nor arbitrary, but 'experimental', attempting to

uncover the historical character of the present by putting it in constellation with 'a series of

specific pasts'.[293] In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin describes this operation as a

'[t]elescoping of the past through the present' – an image Dall'Asta correlates with the

recurring image in *Histoire(s)* of James Stewart behind his telephoto lens.[294] As with

Benjamin's citational montage method, Godard's blasting of audio-visual fragments from

their original historical context and placing them in new historical constellations attempts to

bring a 'heightened graphicness' to the reading and writing history, presenting the spectator

with extracted fragments in which 'the forces and interests of history enter on a reduced a

scale'.[295]

We can see something akin to Benjamin's historical montage method in the compendium of

audiovisual constellations that Godard constructs in *Histoire(s)*, the most discussed of which

occurs in 1A, wherein Godard brings together footage of the liberated Dachau

concentration camp, shot by American filmmaker George Stevens in 1945, and images from

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[289] Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', p. 392

[290] Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 149.

[291] Ibid., p. 149.

[292] Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', p. 392.

[293] Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 150.

[294] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N7a, 3, pp. 471; Dall'Asta, 'The (Im)possible History', p. 355.

[295] Ibid., N2,6, p. 461; N10,3, p. 475; See also Thesis XVII of 'On the Concept of History', p. 369.

Figure 27. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

the Hollywood drama *A Place in the Sun*, directed by Stevens in 1951. As Godard comments over the image-track, which fades between colour footage of corpses and a sentimental scene (filmed in black and white) depicting Elizabeth Taylor cradling Montgomery Clift by a lake so that the couple momentarily appear in front of a background dead bodies: 'if George Stevens hadn't used the first 16mm colour film in Auschwitz and Ravensbruck, Elizabeth Taylor would never have found a place in the sun'.[296] This jarring montage is followed by a further superimposition of a rotated section of Giotto's painting *Noli me tangere* (1305-1306), framed so that the hands of Mary Magdalene (reaching out to touch Jesus in the original composition) are pointed down over an image of Taylor slowly rising, so that it appears as if she ascends toward the former (Figure 27).[297] '1939, 1944', as Godard states over this image, 'martyrdom and resurrection of the documentary'. Many critics, as Suchenksi notes, miss the complex set of references at work in this sequence. Godard cites Giotto's portrayal of an enigmatic passage from the New Testament not for its 'neospiritualism', as Rancière reads it, but its allusion to 'the power of sight to register that which is about to vanish' – in the depicted passage the recently arisen Christ tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him since he is about to depart the earth. In juxtaposing *Noli me tangere* with Elizabeth Taylor, Godard is not attempting to endow the latter with a 'sacred value', but to comment, through iconographic means, on his attempt to make momentarily

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[296] As Witt points out, the footage filmed by Stevens is of Dachau, not Aushwitz or Ravensbrück – a fact that points to Godard's sometimes careless tendency toward historical detail. Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 132.

[297] Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, pp. 169-170

visible (through his preceding superimposition) how Stevens's experience of recording the death camps appears to 'come through', or is *resurrected*, '*indirectly*' in *A Place in the Sun*: through both its tragic narrative – the picturesque lake around which the film centres is importantly a scene of death – and the unexplained sense of despair and catastrophe that, despite the film's saccharin title and its portrayal of the American Dream, haunts its characters.[298] This sequence is related to Godard's broader argument in *Histoire(s)* about the 'failure' of cinema to show the Holocaust, which, as Godard's montage suggests, is not simply a question of recording its horrors, but the unwillingness of filmmakers to develop cinematic forms 'that would make clear what happened and what was lost between 1939 and 1945'.[299]

As in Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image, Godard's videographic superimpositions work to *excavate* a stereoscopic mode of historical perception, wherein remembered events *literally* show through the present. The cessation of history in Godard's superimpositions are experienced as *bildlich* [figural or imagistic], presenting a suspended temporality in which the dynamics of historical forces are momentarily arrested in 'a constellation saturated with tensions'.[300] '[E]very dialectically presented historical circumstance', as Benjamin importantly notes, in which the historical object is turned into a 'force field' – a field of tensions represented by the object's fore- and after-history – becomes such a field only insofar as 'the present instant interpenetrates it', and thus the polarization of 'historical evidence' occurs 'always anew, never in the same way'.[301] This Benjaminian

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[298] Ibid., p. 170. As Godard explains to Gavin Smith: 'This is historical montage. This is critical work: explaining why the smile of Elizabeth Taylor is such a smile...Because of the Holocaust. And because George Stevens had shot the Holocaust, kept it hidden away for many years in his cellar, but when he was shooting *A Place in the Sun* there was a kind of both smile and disaster. Even if it's not an extraordinary film, it's very intense, and you can't explain it. Smith, 'Jean-Luc Godard', pp. 190-191.

[299] Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 169. It is also important to note that Steven's footage from 1945 was buried and resurrected only later by his son, George Stevens, Jr. in *D-Day to Berlin* (1994). On the question of representing the Shoah through montage in Godard's *Histoire(s)* see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 120-150.

[300] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N31,1, p. 463, N10a,3, p. 475.

[301] Ibid., N7a, 1, p. 470.

theory of historical interpretation is reflected in *Histoire(s)* via Godard's recurrent foregrounding of the 'toi' [you] in the word *histoire*, which, as Witt suggests, intimates the way in which the history constructed by Godard is one produced at the juncture between Godard's presentation of his own memories and thoughts and 'the mind of the individual viewer-listener' – 'Let every eye negotiate for itself', as an intertitle instructs in the opening moments of 1A.[302]

Central to both the *Arcades* and *Histoire(s)* is Michelet's statement that '[e]ach epoch dreams the one to follow'.[303] In the *Arcades Project*, as discussed in Chapter 1, Benjamin attempts to expound the 'primal history' [*Urgeschichte*] of the nineteenth century through the historical 'residues' of its 'dream visions'.[304] In eliciting the complicity of past and future, history is shown by Benjamin, to dream not only backward, but forward, as is exemplified by the anticipation of new glass and iron architectural structures in the arcades, or the medium of cinema in the painted and illuminated tableaux of the panoramas.[305] In response to Daney's suggestion in 2A that the cinema was a twentieth-century affair, Godard correspondingly counters that in his view it was essentially a nineteenth-century one, which was 'resolved' in the twentieth. This view is connected not only to the technological history of the cinematograph, which arose out of various nineteenth-century scientific projects (3B), but to the way that the 'dream' of cinema (projection, moving pictures, imaginary travel) was anticipated in the pre-cinematic writings of authors such as Baudelaire (2A).[306] This idea of dreaming forwards can also be seen in Godard's argument in 1A that a number of films from the 1920s and 1930s – such as Jean Renoir's *La régle du jeu* [*The Rules of the Game*] (1939) – 'foresaw the disintegration of Europe into war'.[307] Like Benjamin, moreover, Godard's method of doing history consists not in leaving this dream world behind, but

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[302] Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 18. The latter is a citation from Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*.

[303] Quoted in Benjamin's 'Exposé of 1935', in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 4.

[304] Ibid., K1,4, p. 389

[305] Eiland, 'Superimposition in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*', p. 133.

[306] See Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p. 115.

[307] Ibid., p. 124. As Witt points out, Godard's argument here resonates with Kracauer's identification in *From Calgari to Hitler* of the premonitions of fascism in the German cinema of the 1920s.

through a remembering of and awakening from its 'dream visions'.[308] If the dream of the nineteenth century that Benjamin enters largely focuses on the phantasmagorical forms of commodification – a 'dream-filled sleep' that came over Europe and reactivated 'mythic forces' – Godard's passage, as Silverman notes, concerns more the dreams of 'sovereignty' that extends from the nineteenth century into the twentieth, and is embodied in historical figures from Hitler to domineering Hollywood film producers like Iriving Thalberg.[309]

Following Benjamin, then, *Histoire(s)* can be understood as an attempt to awaken from the mythic forces and dream images of the twentieth century, through an *immersive* 'dissolution' of its cinematic expressions 'into the space of history'.[310] The montage and transformation of pre-existing material (further manipulated through various videographic effects) is thus seen by Godard to 'deepen', rather than 'threaten the integrity of an artwork' (whether a film, a painting or a text) and its 'connection with history'.[311] As such, Benjamin's historical materialism provides a similar yet crucially different model to the essentially 'conservative…motivation' of Pound's *Cantos*, whose juxtaposition of past and present fragments is predominantly intended 'to produce a symbolic image of the "eternal" rhythms of mythic extratemporality'.[312] It also provides an important corrective to the aesthetic focus of Malraux's imaginary museum, which, as Hannah Feldman argues, tends 'to decontextualize the art object from the constraints of any spatio-temporal specificity and liberate it instead as pure form' – an aestheticism that can also be seen to be at work in *Histoire(s)*.[313] Indeed, it is this aesthetic and formal side of *Histoire(s)* that Rancière

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[308] As Godard states in the final moments of 4B, in a reference to a story by Jorge Luis Borges: 'If a man travelled across paradise in a dream, and received a flower as proof of his passage, and on awakening he found that flower in his hands…What is to be said? I was that man'. As Suchenski notes, while an onscreen intertitle credits the story to Borges, Borges himself took the story from Samuel Taylor Coleridge who, in turn took it from Jean Paul. See Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 199.

[309] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, K1a,8, p. 391; Silverman, 'The Dream of the Nineteenth Century', *Camera Obscura* 51, vol. 17, no. 3 (2002), p. 12, p. 7.

[310] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1,9, p. 458

[311] Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 171.

[312] Cunningham, 'Photography and the Literary Conditions of Surrealism', p. 77

[313] Hannah Feldman, *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 21.

privileges in his various essays on the work, opposing what he favorably characterizes as Godard's 'neo-symbolist' play of words and images to what he construes as its vestiges of a critical or dialectical montage method.[314]

While there is a danger, as Suchenksi argues, of 'making Godard's montages cohere to easily as texts', and to reduce *Histoire(s)* to little more than 'guessing-game' of cinematic and other historical references, it is similarly one-sided to reduce, as Rancière does, the complexity of *Histoire(s)* historical constellations to an aesthetic play of analogy and metaphor, evacuating it of its critical and historical discourse.[315] Even at its most direct, the pretensions of Godard's critical montage practice is never as transparent or immediate as Rancière would have it. Rather than function, as Ranciére claims of *all* critical art practices, under the rubric of political immediacy (didactically impating knowledge to the spectator), Godard's montage practice presents the spectator with a 'nominative' and 'archival' process that works to name and document a set of issues or connections which might be taken up as a subject for criticism and dialogue.[316] From the late 1970s Godard often draws on the metaphor of the court room to characterize this dialogic model of cinematic pedagogy. As he says in in *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)*:

> 'What I'm trying to show you is how I see things, so that you can judge whether I am able to see…I want to show you the relationships between images and then you would be as in a court of law where you are both the defendant and the prosecutor…And you can say: "No, he's wrong. There's nothing to see."'

The critical capacity of cinematic montage for Godard does not, therefore, consist, as Rancière suggests, in simply revealing a secret or hidden world behind given appearances, but in constructing relations between images (or pieces of evidence) for judicial review and

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[314] See in particular Jacques Rancière, 'Sentence, Image, History', in *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2007), pp. 33-67.

[315] Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 178; Temple and Williams, 'Introduction to the Mysteries of Cinema, 1985-2000', p. 24.

[316] For a critique of Rancière's critique of critical art practices along these lines, see John Roberts, 'Philosophy, Culture, Image: Rancière's "Constructivism"', *Philosophy of Photography*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2010), p. 77.

essayistic weighing.[317] 'Justice comes from comparison. And from then weighing it in the scales', as Godard states (returning us to the original meaning of the word essaying): 'The very idea of montage is the scales of justice'.[318] The audio-visual relationships that Godard creates in *Histoire(s)*, despite their playful poetic character are, as I have shown above, clearly meant to reflect and connect up with the series constant movement between cinema and history, image and discourse. Like Benjamin's *Arcades*, then, the sense of 'ambiguity' that *Histoire(s)* engenders, should be not be understood as merely an aesthetic play of forms, but an imagistic presentation of dialectical relations that attempts 'to preserve the intervals of reflection' and 'the distances lying between the most essential parts' of the work.[319] Both the *Arcades* and *Histoire(s)* refer to this imagistic experience as a form of 'mystery'. This state of mystery, for Benjamin, as a citation from the *Arcades* reads, 'comes from remaining always in the equivocal, with double and triple perspectives, or inklings of perspective (images within images) – forms that take shape and come into being according to the state of mind of the spectator'.[320]

For Godard, the mystery of the cinema lies in its capacity to present to the spectator what he terms 'a form that thinks' [*une forme qui pense*]; that is, the creation of enigmatic relations between images and sounds that preserves an interpretative space for the spectator – 'bad cinema', by contrast, presents a reification thought or what he terms a 'thought that forms'.[321] Drawing on Malraux's *The Psychology of Art* and George Bataille's 1955 study of Édouard Manet, Godard in 3A traces the cinema's capacity for facilitating

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[317] On Godard's recourse to the metaphor of the court room for thinking of the way the art of cinema makes available to the spectator events and social conflicts for criticism and discussion, see Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, pp. 126-127.

[318] Quoted in Witt, *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian*, p, 127.

[319] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1,3, p. 456. As Benjamin famously put it in the 'Exposé of 1935': 'Ambiguity is the manifest imaging of dialectic'. Ibid., p. 10.

[320] Ibid., M6a,1, p. 429. The latter is a quote from the French symbolist painter Odilon Redon. Benjamin refers to this constant doubling of perspectives, which is said to be the characteristic experience of Flaneur, as the 'colportage phenomenon of space'. Godard also draws on the figure of the colporteur (an itinerant peddler of printed matter and former mode of cultural transmission) in 4B, where he recounts (as an allegory for the cinema) Charles F. Ramuz's story of a colporteur who is chased out of town.

[321] Quoted in Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 71.

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Figure 28. *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

creative thought back to Manet, whose non-naturalistic painterly representations of

enigmatic figures are seen by Godard not only as the beginning of modern art but the art of

cinema.[322] This idea is literalized in *Histoire(s)* through the numerous close-ups of faces that

are excised from their original contexts and narrative motivation (whether paintings,

photographs, or films), and which typically present, as with Manet's portraits, a figure

caught in the moment of thought.[323] In the final moments of 3A, Godard presents this idea

in the form of a chiastic inversion, superimposing the captions 'une pensée/ quie forme' [a

thought/ that forms] over a black-and-white portrait of Pier Pasolini, followed by 'une

forme/ qui pense' [a form/ that thinks] over a detail of a face taken from Piero della

Francesca's sequence of frescoes, *The Legend of the True Cross* (1447-1466) (Figure 28).[324]

Through this simple juxtaposition Godard creates a dialogue between the two images,

connecting two moments in Italian art history – the early Renaissance and the resurrection

of this Christian painterly tradition in Pasolini's films – that also provokes a number of

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[322] Ibid., p. 63. Like Malraux, Godard sees Manet as prefiguring the art of cinema not only because his career

coincided with the beginnings of photography, but because of his rendering of modern life and individuals in a

non-naturalistic, painterly style, in which the subject of the painting was not simply the figures represented,

but Manet's use paint on the canvas. Once painting entered the realm of abstraction and lost figurative

contact with the historical real, in both Malraux's and Godard's account, the representational or documentary

burden of art found its proper medium in the cinema. See Malraux, *The Voice of Silence*, pp. 99-128.

[323] Suchenski, *Projections of Memory*, p. 160.

[324] Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 71.

further associations.[325] Yet the relation created between the two images does not operate simply at the level of their historical connections, but at the level of iconographic form; cutting together the tortured expression of Pasolini's downturned face, whose eyes are hidden by sunglasses, with the serene gaze of the figure in Piero della Francesca's painting.[326]

It is through the relentless flux of Godard's videographic montage and the work's inherent struggle between sense and sensibility that *Histoire(s)* constitutes a form that thinks. As Temple and Williams contend, 'a proper approach to *Histoire(s)* would need to be sensitive both to questions of comprehension, i.e. that which can be logically or discursively paraphrased, and to questions of rhythm, i.e. those formal or structural features that require a very different type of attention and sensitivity altogether'.[327] *Histoire(s)*, as Williams points out, is therefore not simply a work *about* remembering historical instances of cinematic and political resistance, but an attempt to engage the spectator, at the level of form, in a process of 'internal self-resistance'.[328] As Pavsek says of Godard's late works more generally, the 'elements of these films…have a certain autonomy or hard kernel that resists comprehension', or what he terms (paraphrasing Adorno) 'the imperialism of the concept'.[329] In this way, Godard's films and videos become, at the level of form, 'an allegory…of a possible utopia at the level of the social'; a utopia that is premised not on the

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[325] As Williams notes, *The Legend of the True Cross* is likely employed not only because it represents a Christian image dealing with the theme of death and resurrection, but because of the historical context of the fresco's production, which was 'commissioned as part of an attempt to renew the Catholic Church by bringing together different parts and engineering a *rapprochement* with the Eastern Church'. Ibid., p. 70. Likewise, Pasolini represents here an individual artist who attempted to resist the state's imposition of cultural and societal norms – i.e. a thought that forms – while at the same time bringing together disparate traditions, such as Christianity and communism in novel ways.

[326] Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, pp. 78-79.

[327] Temple and Williams, 'Introduction to the Mysteries of Cinema, 1985-2000', p. 20. As Godard says in response to *Histoire(s) du cinéma* being 'essentially and above all a work of art': 'It's cinema, in other words not like literature which is more closely bound to meaning, in film there's rhythm, it's more like music, that's how I came to use black for rhythm'. Godard and Ishaghpour, *Cinema*, p. 24.

[328] Williams, *Encounters with Godard*, p. 80

[329] Pavsek, *The Utopia of Film*, p. 48.

achievement of narrative unity or closure, but a critically open-ended project of association, translation, remembrance and renewal.[330] While repeatedly claiming that the cinema dead, Godard thus nonetheless attempts to breathe new life into the medium, revitalizing the cinematic potential of montage to create new connections and critical relations between sounds and images that attempt to trigger new forms of thought. As we will see in the following chapter, Farocki too will engage with the memory of the cinema and the principle of cinematic montage as a means to reflect on how images both document and repress historical reality, attempting to fashion (like Godard) audio-visual forms that think.

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[330] Ibid., p. 49.

Chapter 5: Dialectic of Enlightenment: The Essay Form in Harun Farocki

While Godard has long used the term 'essay' to refer to his filmmaking practice, as already noted in the Introduction, by the late 1990s Harun Farocki considered the term, which he had previously employed to characterize at least two of his former works, to have 'devolved into…vagueness'. Yet, as he added, for him 'narration and argumentation are still very closely linked. I strongly hold that discourses are a form of narration. World War II hasn't quite made it into a novel by some new Tolstoy, but instead it has found its way into the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'.[1] While Farocki's comment on the form of the novel could be questioned – a counter-example that could be given, for instance, is that of Peter Weiss's three-volume historical novel, *The Aesthetics of Resistance* (1975-1981), which Farocki produced a television documentary on following the publication of the first volume – his remarks on the close connection between narration and argumentation, and how different types of discourse are themselves a form of narration, are nonetheless crucial for elaborating a sharper definition of how the essay form could be said to figure in his practice.[2] Central to Farocki's artistic practice, as I discuss below, are the writings of Benjamin and Adorno, with which his works share not only similar themes – in particular, the increasing rationalization of social life portrayed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – but a sustained deliberation on how the presentational form of an argument or critical discourse is not merely one of aesthetic embellishment, but inextricable from its content. A key point that Farocki wants to make in challenging the category of the 'essay film' in the above interview – he is responding to a question about the adequacy of the term as a genre designation for categorizing his own work – is, as I already mentioned in the Introduction, the fact that these issues around cinematographic form are a central aspect of all his work, and not simply those more readily identifiable as essayistic. Yet, despite Farocki's remarks, the essayistic and essay form, as I will show, does designate a central strand in Farocki's

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[1] Rembert Hüser, 'Nine Minutes in the Yard: A Conversation with Harun Farocki' (1999), in *Harun Farocki: Working On the Sightlines*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), p. 313.

[2] Farocki's documentary on Weiss, *On Display: Peter Weiss* (1979), was made for the German public-broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), and consists of a fourty-four minute discussion with Weiss about *The Aesthetics of Resistance* in his studio in Stockholm.

practice, which can be distinguished from his exploration of other forms of filmmaking, such as his early experiments with narrative fiction, as well as his development (beginning in the early 1980s) of an observational documentary form in the tradition of Direct Cinema.[3] From the mid-1980s onwards Farocki's practice takes a decidedly documentary turn, subsequently committing himself to working only with various documentary and essayistic forms – the latter, for Farocki, as already noted, is considered a form of documentary.[4] This adherence to working within a documentary or Factographic tradition (whose resonance with Farocki's practice I explore below) is what seems to be at stake in Farocki's implicit allusion in the quote above to Tret'iakov's 'The New Tolstoy'.

The following sections proceed in a loosely chronological manner and focus on Farocki's exploration and employment of different image mediums: photography, film and video. In the first section, I give a brief account of Farocki's early narrative based work, and his early interest in the connection between industry and war (a crucial theme that will recur in subsequent works). Taking what Farocki himself considers as his break with this story based approach, I examine two examples where Farocki develops an alternative form of building an argument (and a critique of images) through the constellation of disparate images, relating his dissociative montage of images to Soviet Factography, as well as Kracauer and Adorno's writings on photography and film. Section 2 continues these reflections through a reading of Farocki's two canonical essay films, *As You See* and *Images of the World*, whose complex meditation on the imbrication of images in the industrialization and rationalization of society I explore primarily through the frame of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In Section 3, I look at Farocki's turn to working with video and a form of

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[3] Beginning with *Ein Bild* [*An Image*] (1983), Farocki produced a number of observational documentaries in the tradition of Direct Cinema, presenting various contemporary production processes and training situations without the aid of a spoken or textual commentary. On these works see Volker Pantenburg, '"Now that's Brecht at last!": Harun Farocki's Observational Films', in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, ed. Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Berlin; Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2016), pp. 142-162.

[4] Although, as Farocki notes, 'since 1986 I've made no story films at all', he has however worked on other directors films, such as Christian Petzold. Harun Farocki and Yilmaz Dziewior, 'Conversation, October 23, 2010, Kunsthaus Bregenz', in *Weiche Montagen / Soft Montages*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Cologne: Kunsthaus Bregnenz, 2011), pp. 207-208.

compilation filmmaking, delineating his semantically oriented method of sorting and reading archival images, as well as how themes of automation and deskilling (a key subject in Farocki's practice) are reflected in Farocki's own artistic labour and work with ready-made images. Section 4 concludes with an analysis of three of Farocki's essayistic video installations, all of which are made from surveillance and technical images used for non-expressive purposes, and the way they employ a spatialized form of 'soft-montage' to engage the spectator in the works reflective operations.

5.1. Narration and Argumentation: *Industry and Photography*

Farocki's work from the late 1960s to the early 1980s can be read as constituting a series of experiments with different modes of narration and argumentation. A member of the so-called 'Godard-cult' at the German Film and Television Academy [*Deutsche Film und Fernsehakademie*] in West Berlin, which in May 1968 was occupied and renamed the Dziga Vertov Academy, Farocki's early films consists of a number of 16mm black-and-white shorts.[5] These agit-prop works are informed by a mixture of Situationist irony, Maoist-inspired political discourse and semiotic critique, engaging a number of contemporary issues and events; most notably, advertising images, the German press, the student movement and the Vietnam war.[6] In his most discussed work from this period, *Nicht löschbares Feuer* [*Inextinguishable Fire*] (1969), Farocki follows Godard's call 'to let Vietnam invade us and make us realize the place it occupies in our daily lives'.[7] Akin to Godard's *Camera Eye*,

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[5] As with Godard, the Vietnam war and the events of May 1968 strongly shaped Harun Farocki's early films. See Volker Pantenburg, *Farock/Godard: Film As Theory*, trans. Michael Turnbull (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), p. 17.

[6] For information about these works, as well as all of Farocki's subsequent work, see the Harun Farocki website: http://www.harunfarocki.de/films.html.

[7] The journal *Filmkritik*, which Farocki became editor of the mid-1970s, printed the spoken text from *Camera Eye* in full in 1967. As a character in Farocki's 1982 film, *Before Your Eyes – Vietnam*, puts it, recalling *Camera Eye*, what is necessary is to 'replace the images from Vietnam with images from here, express Vietnam here'. See Quinn Slobodian, 'Corpse Polemics: The Third World and the Politics of Gore in 1960s West Germany', in

Figure 29. *Inextinguishable Fire*

Inextinguishable Fire opens with a scene in which Farocki reads a testimony from a victim of the US napalm bombing of Vietnam. Sat in suit and tie at a desk in front of a white backdrop, as if to parody the conventional role of a television announcer, Farocki asks how it would be possible to 'give an idea' of the effects of napalm without the viewer closing their eyes; first, to the images, then to the memory of those images, then to the facts and the context that they represent.[8] The camera slowly zooms in on the desk at which Farocki is sat while he then proceeds to stub a cigarette out on his arm (Figure 29), an off-screen voice-over informing us that a cigarette burns at around 400 °C, whereas napalm burns at 3,000°C. The rest of the film takes the form of a series of acted dialogues, which supposedly take place at the Dow chemical plant in Michigan. These Brechtian scenes, spoken in an emphatically deadpan manner, attempt to show how the division of labour in the production of napalm is organised in such a way that the producers are unaware of what they are in fact producing.

Inextinguishable Fire anticipates a number of themes that Farocki will develop in his subsequent works: 1) a critique of the form and rhetoric of television and other media images and an attempt to construct an alternative form of image pedagogy (particularly significant here is his use of comparison as a model for reflection); 2) the problem of

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Between the Avant-Garde and the Everyday: Subversive Politics in Europe from 1957 to the Present, ed. Timothy Brown and Lorena Anton (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011, p. 70.

[8] See Diedrich Diederichsen, 'Napalm Death', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun (London: Koenig books, 2009), pp. 52-53.

representing the effects of impersonal structures and forces on the human body, as well as the interconnection between civic production and military warfare; 3) how images can provoke both 'an intelligence and ethics of seeing'.[9] In the 1970s and 1980s Farocki's exploration of such themes took various forms: from film and literary criticism, particularly his essays written for the journal *Filmkritik* (which he edited from 1974 to 1984), to his critical television programmes (made for the television series *Telekritik*), as well as three cinematic features.[10] Farocki construed the way his research could be put to different uses in his television and film work in terms of a *Verbund* [integrated or compound] system, whereby (as with the steel industry on which the analogy is based) waste products flow back into the process of production.[11] An example of this is the television documentary *Industrie und Fotografie* [*Industry and Photography*] (1979), which was made from photographs and footage Farocki collected and filmed for his cinematic feature *Zwischen Zwei Kriegen* [*Between Two Wars*] (1978).[12] In a written draft for the television film *Erzählen* [*About Narration*; or, more literally, *To Narrate*] (1975), made in collaboration with Ingemo Engström, Farocki employs the term 'essay' to name this endeavour to combine his research with his artistic practice and everyday experience: 'Essay, a term from written literature: unity of science and art; unity of social and individual knowledge'.[13] *About Narration* follows Farocki and Engström across West Berlin as they struggle with the question of how to organise their respective research and give it a narrative form. Farocki, drawing on the work of Alfred Sohn-Rethel, is studying how German heavy industry was a key factor in Hitler's rise to power; a subject that he will rework into the historical narrative of *Between Two*

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[9] See D. N. Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 78.

[10] On the journal, see Harun Farocki, 'Filmkritik' (2003), in *Harun Farocki: Another Kind of Empathy*, ed. Antje Ehmann and Carles Guerra (Barcelona: The Antoni Tàpies Foundation, 2016), pp. 66-69.

[11] See Thomas Elsaesser, 'Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist', in Elsaesser (ed.) *Harun Farocki: Working On the Sightlines*, p. 16

[12] See Thomas Elssaesser, 'Political Filmmaking after Brecht: Harun Farocki, for Example', in Elsaesser (ed.) *Harun Farocki: Working On the Sightlines*, p. 143.

[13] This quotation is taken from a handout distributed at a screening of *About Narration* at the Goethe-Institut, London, on Monday 27, March 2017, curated by Volker Pantenburg as part of the 2017 Essay Film Festival, organised by Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image.

Wars.[14] *About Narration* is comprised of a series of minimally dramatized dialogues which, in addition to discussions around Farocki and Engström's projects, includes the elaboration of a structural theory of narrative (visually elucidated in the film with props and diagrams) as well as several scenes where different individuals tell stories. In one scene, Engström reads from Benjamin's 'The Storyteller' [*Der Erzähler*], recounting his portrayal of the decline of oral narrative traditions and his connection of this decline to the disappearance of artisanal forms of labour, such as weaving (a recurring subject in Farocki's work to which I will return). While Farocki will employ a similar episodic and dialogue-driven narrative form as *About Narration* in his cinematic features, *Between Two Wars* and in *Etwas wird sichtbar* [*Before Your Eyes – Vietnam*; the German title translates as *Something is Becoming Visible*] (1982), by the mid-1980s he will abandon this Brechtian (or Weissian) endeavour to, as he writes, 'decorat[e]…political issue[s] with a kind of story', in favour of developing various documentary and essayistic forms.[15]

Although there are evident cross-overs between Farocki's documentaries and his essay films – the latter often contain clips from, or in the style of, the former – there are nonetheless a number of notable differences between these two forms. While the most conspicuous difference between the two is the absence of a voice-over or textual commentary in Farocki's observational documentaries, equally significant is their materials and mode of assembly. Whereas the former develop in a linear, story-like form, observing or chronicling a contemporary event or work process as it unfolds, the latter are comprised of a large array

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[14] As Elsaesser notes, the specific text by Alfred Sohn-Rethel Farocki is drawing on is 'Ökonomie and Klassenstrucktur des deutschen Faschismus', *Kursbuch 21*, October 1970. See Elsaesser, 'Harun Farocki: Filmmaker, Artist, Media Theorist', pp. 27-28, n. 8, p. 38.

[15] Harun Farock, 'Written Trailers', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, p. 225. Both *Between Two Wars* and *Before Your Eyes* are structured around scenes of dialogue between actors recited in an undramatic style reminiscent of the films of Straub and Huillet: the former consists of a historical dramatization (set between 1917 and 1933) of his research on German heavy industry; the latter involves a working through of the memory and images of the Vietnam war and the German student movement. Elsaesser compares Farocki's use of a fictional support for setting up a dialogical situation, which echoes through the film, with the films of Marguerite Duras, yet both could also be compared with Weiss's *The Aesthetics of Resistance*. Both Weiss's novel and Farocki's films feature lengthy conversations and debates about not only political and economic issues, but images (in Weiss, largely painting and sculpture, in Farocki, photography).

of photographs and film footage taken from different times and places, which are assembled and commented upon in a paratactic manner. As Farocki notes of his self-described 'essay film', *Wie man sieht* [*As You See*] (1986), 'I found a way in which I could make texts become an issue' without the 'unnecessary detour' of 'plot and characters'.[16] In contrast with the fictional narratives of his cinematic features, works like *As You See* articulate their arguments through the montage of various archival images and filmed footage, which are narrated by a voice-over commentary (or, in later installation works, by intertitles) that proceeds in an analytic yet discontinuous manner akin to that of an essay. Like Benjamin's *Denkbilder*, to which Farocki in an interview from 2004 compares his method of avoiding 'a linear, deductive argument' in favour of 'quite short, poem-like concepts', his essay films, moreover, are typically comprised of fragmentary observations and reflections that are constelled around a central idea or theme.[17] It is, accordingly, the more 'marginal' television productions of the 1970s, as well as Farocki's written essays for *Filmkritik* – both of which critically examine images in an ambulatory and paratactic style – that give an indication of the essayistic forms he will develop in the late 1980s.[18]

An important instance here is *Industry and Photography*. In the latter, a male voice-over narrates a disjointed history of the industrialization of coal mining by way of an analysis of photographs accumulated from disparate sources, such as amateur photo-albums and the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher (Figure 30). Around mid-way through the film shifts into a series of reflections on the difficulty of representing modern industrial processes and factory labour, which is illustrated by filmed footage (first employed in *Between Two Wars*) depicting the slow pan of a factory wall and the mechanized process of a coking plant in Oberhausen. If the portrayal of the plant as a 'gigantic organism, at once beyond vision and of somnambulist precision' echoes, as Thomas Elsaesser observes, Brecht's dictum about a

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[16] Ibid., p. 225.

[17] Harun Farocki and Tim Griffing, 'Viewfinder: Interview with Harun Farocki', *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 3 (November, 2004), p. 163.

[18] A paradigmatic example of Farocki's paratactic and ambulatory essay writing is 'Dog from the Freeway' (1982), which discusses the reporting of the Vietnam war through a series brief numbered sections. See Harun Farocki, 'Dog from the Freeway', in *Imprint/Writings*, eds. Susanne Gaenscheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen, trans. Laurent Faasch-Ibrhaim (New York: Lukas & Sternburg, 2001), pp. 112-171.

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Figure 30. *Industry and Photography*

photograph of a factory disclosing little about the complex social relations of such institutions, *Industry and Photography* nonetheless seeks to counter what Brecht construed as photography's reification of reality into unrelated and isolated moments through a method comparable to the Factographic techniques of the photo-series and extended photo-observation.[19] Evoking Rodchenko's 'Against the Synthetic Portrait, for the Snapshot', the film begins with a critique of the aestheticizing character of the photographic 'still life', which 'stands for itself', turning instead to the 'poorer' and non-professional snapshot, which is studied and assembled so as to trace the historical development of mining and its mechanization. This historical development primarily unfolds through the serial accretion of photographic details and bits of historical information, which are linked via comparison and juxtaposition rather than an overarching narrative commentary.[20] A systematic perspective, for Farocki, as *Industry and Photography* indicates, can only be figured through the constellation of partial and incomplete fragments; a (Romantic) idea that is also an

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[19] Elsaesser, 'Political Filmmaker After Brecht', pp. 143-144. As Brecht famously wrote: 'The situation has become so complicated because the simple "reproduction of reality" says less than ever about that reality. A photography of the Krupp works or the AEG reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations'. Most citations of Brecht's statement stop here, omitting his constructivist solution: 'So there is indeed "something to construct", something "artificial", "invented". Hence, there is in fact a need for art. But the old concept of art, derived from experience, is obsolete. For those who show only the experiential aspects of reality do not reproduce reality itself. It is simply no longer experienced as a totality'. Brecht, 'The *Threepenny* Lawsuit', pp. 164-165.

[20] At multiple moments the voice-over gives way to long sequences of photographs depicting industrial mining sites and factories, which are cut together with the industrial-sounding rhythmic drone of Tony Conrad and Faust's album, *Oustide the Dream Syndicate* (1973).

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important aspect of his written and televisual criticism. This is conveyed in his television programme on Basil Wright's documentary *The Song of Ceylon* (1934), *Über Song of Ceylon* [*About Song of Ceylon*] (1975): 'Instead of a fleeting glimpse of the whole', Farocki declares at the outset of the show, 'it is preferable to show a few particular things in detail…When you show a few particulars in detail, an idea of the whole might emerge'.[21] Farocki can be seen to work with an analogous principle in his essay films, all of which seek to provide, through the illumination of details, a glimpse of the totality that they at once contain and dissimulate. Like Benjamin's montage method in the *Arcades*, his work endeavours to 'to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest most precisely cut components…to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event'.[22]

Farocki's essay films, video essays and essayistic video installations repeatedly return to various moments in, what Hal Foster terms, 'the long Industrial Revolution', juxtaposing archival images with filmed footage in an effort to grasp not only the signal (and ongoing) transformations in capitalist production, work, war, and daily life, but in technologies and techniques of 'seeing and imaging'.[23] If, as indicated above, Farocki's cataloguing and compilation of disparate documents can be correlated with the photographic and cinematic practices of Soviet Factography and Benjamin's proposal to carry over the montage principle into history, his detailed decoding of images as indices of historical change can also be compared with Kracauer's sociological and philosophical project to interpret the 'the inconspicuous surface-level expressions' of modernity as complex historical ciphers.[24] As with Kracauer, the mediums of photography and film for Farocki's contain 'both a forensic dimension and a mnemonic imperative'.[25] The 'warehousing' of history in the photo and film archive affords Farocki not only with the capacity to reflect on a reality that, under

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[21] Quoted in Volker Pantenburg, 'Telekritik: Über Song of Ceylon', *Necsus* (December, 2017): https://necsus-ejms.org/telekritik-uber-song-of-ceylon/. The latter features Farocki's programme and an introductory text by Pantenburg, which also discusses other works made by Farocki for the *Telekritik* series.

[22] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N2,5, p. 461.

[23] Hal Foster, 'Vision Quest: The Cinema of Harun Farocki', *Artforum International* 43, no. 3 (November, 2004), pp. 157-158.

[24] Kracauer, 'The Mass Ornament', p. 75.

[25] Foster, 'Vision Quest', p. 157.

conditions of industrial capitalism, 'has slipped away from it', but, in introducing an image of time and change into the world, to 'establish the *provisional status of* all given configurations', countering photography's reification of social reality into 'a nature alienated from meaning' through the constellation and seriation of image fragments.[26]

Writing some forty years later in support of the New German Cinema, Adorno restates what he sees as the continued importance of montage to disrupt the naturalism inherent to photography and film, and its tendency to 'reinforce…the phenomenal surface of society'.[27] 'The obvious answer today, as forty years ago', he affirms, 'is that of montage which does not interfere with things but rather arranges them in a constellation akin to that of writing [*Schrift*]'.[28] Adorno, however, is not interested in the idea of film becoming 'abstract', something that its 'representational' character does not permit, but that montage be used to work against the inherent positivity of photography.[29] As he writes in *Aesthetic Theory*, 'montage goes beyond photography immanently without infiltrating it with a facile sorcery, but also without sanctioning as a norm its status as a thing: It is photography's self-correction'.[30] Adorno's reference to writing, moreover, is not to be equated with linguistic communication, from which, as he argues, art 'must strive to free itself'; rather, writing, or what he sometimes terms '*écriture*', refers to the way in which 'the content [*Inhalt*]' of a work becomes 'eloquent' through its 'formal structure'.[31] 'All artworks are writing, not just

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[26] Kracauer, 'Photography', pp. 61-63. See also Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*, p. 70. As Thomas Y. Levin notes, for Kracauer, photography 'stages nature as the negativity of history', and, as such, 'the hegemony of photography speaks the truth of the alienation of *Ratio* even as it reveals a previously invisible residuum of nature which holds open the possibility of a new, emancipated relationship between reason and nature'. See Levin's introduction to Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimer Essays*, p. 22.

[27] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Transparencies on Film' (1966), in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 182. Adorno's essay is in part a critical response to Kracauer's later 'realist' film theory, developed in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960).

[28] Ibid., p. 182.

[29] Ibid., p. 182.

[30] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 154.

[31] Ibid, pp. 168, 230.

those that are obviously such; they are hieroglyphs for which the code has been lost'.[32] To arrange images in a constellation akin to that of writing, therefore, is to 'transform images into signs' which, like hieroglyphs, require critical interpretation – as opposed to what Adorno and Horkheimer see as the 'hieroglyphic script' of mass cultural images, which demand only that their ciphered messages be grasped and not contemplated.[33]

As D.N. Rodowick suggests, Kracauer and Adorno's reflections on an 'emancipated' cinema that would, through the discontinuous assembly of images and sounds into 'novel constellations', render the 'ciphered social life of things' available for critical interpretation, provide a fitting theoretical model for understanding Farocki's practice.[34] A paradigmatic instance here is Farocki's television film, *Stilleben* [*Still Life*] (1997), which employs a set of formal strategies that he repeats in different ways in many of his other works; in particular, the critical juxtaposition of not only different types of images, but different historical moments.[35] *Still Life* is comprised of discrete sequences concerning classical still-life painting from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which are intercut with extended documentary scenes depicting the process of production behind contemporary advertising images (Figure 31) – the final results of which we do not see. While the passages devoted to still life painting feature an interpretive voice-over text, the documentary sequences, filmed in various commercial photography studios, are (in a manner corresponding with Farocki's observational documentaries) presented without any commentary.[36] In the former, the commentary scrutinizes the still lifes not only for the historical information they provide – such as their evidencing of the emergent commodity culture and consumption habits of the

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[32] Ibid., p. 124.

[33] Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*, p. 96; Adorno and Horkheimer, 'The Schema of Mass Culture', in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, p. 93.

[34] Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*, 96-97. As Rodowick contends, if 'Alexander Kluge was always Miriam Hansen's ideal for the critical and utopian aspirations of cinema', a 'deep engagement with the variety of Farocki's work retroactively gives force and clarity to the style of emancipated cinema that Adorno was trying to imagine'.

[35] *Still Life* was commissioned for *documenta X* in Kassel in 1997 and represents Farocki's transition from traditional context of film and television to contemporary art. See Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard*, p. 103.

[36] In the German version the voice-over is male, while in the English it is female and is read by Kaja Silverman.

Figure 31. *Still Life*

time – but as formally indexing the rise in modern natural science and the expansion of

commodity relations, especially in the way that they suppress 'symbolic and allegorical

modes of expression' in favour of material description and visual surface.[37] Yet, as the voice-

over states:

> 'It is difficult for the art of depiction to avoid allegorical and symbolic expression – or such
>
> interpretation. Centuries later, the objects in these paintings are scrutinized as if they were
>
> ciphers of a secret writing. Like ciphers of a hidden code, a code which doesn't want to be
>
> recognized as such, and whose signs are meant to appear as non-signs. A drinking vessel qua
>
> drinking vessel.'[38]

The juxtaposition of the essayistic sequences on still life painting with the documentary

sections portraying commercial photography can be read in multiple ways. We can, for

instance, read a connection between the proto-photographic qualities of Dutch still life

painting and the painterly compositions of advertising images, or the comparable

marginalization of the still life and documentary film to the narrative genres of Renaissance

painting and commercial cinema. Another reading that is engendered through bringing

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[37] For stills and commentary from *Still Life* see Harun Farocki, *Diagrams: Images from Ten Films*, ed. Benedikt

Reichenbach (Cologne: Walter König, 2014), pp. 333-343. Svetlana Alpers, drawing on Lukács's distinction

between narrative realism and descriptive naturalism, famously characterizes seventeenth-century Dutch still

life painting as an 'art of description'. See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth*

Century (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).

[38] Farocki, *Diagrams*, pp. 334-335.

together these two historical forms of image production is the adequation between the apparent non-signs of still life painting and what John Roberts, drawing on Vilém Flusser (a key theorist for Farocki), characterizes as 'the imagined transparency of photography under the universal expansion and dominance of the commodity form', which 'lies in the fact that its naturalism is held to be "nonsymbolic"'; that is, 'to be without any discernible, embedded "textuality" or connection to external social and historical forces'. [39] This transparency is contravened by not only revealing the meticulous construction behind advertising images, but through the film's montage structure, which obliges the spectator to subject such images encountered in their everyday lives, as well as the commodity relations of which they are a part, to a mode of historical analysis akin to that exemplified by the film's deciphering of the paintings. [40]

In a text written to accompany his essay film *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* [*Images of the World and the Inscription of War*] (1988), Farocki describes his general working method as striving to engender a 'mistrust' in images, as you would 'mistrust words'; a hermeneutics of suspicion that is primarily achieved not by creating 'new, never-before-seen images', but by taking 'images at hand and work[ing] on them in such a way that they become new', or disclose a 'submerged meaning'. [41] In his video installation, *Schnittstelle* [*Interface*] (1995), in which, like Godard's video-scenarios, Farocki reflects on his filmmaking practice, he compares his 'reworking of images and sounds', wherein he 'writes into the images and then reads something out of them', to the Enigma machines employed during World War II (evoking Adorno's theorisation artworks as enigmas): 'Might this editing station be an encoder or a decoder?', he asks while sitting at his editing table. 'Is it about decoding a secret, or keeping it?' This double movement of encipherment and decipherment in Farocki's essay films, as exhibited by *Still Life*, is rhetorically enacted

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[39] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, p. 97.

[40] As Farocki writes, 'the hope is that one projects the art-historical ideas onto the advertising and notices the differences. And conversely that one can see such still lifes differently when the peculiar cultic effort put into these productions is transferred to the sacred act of art realization'. Quoted in Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard*, p. 109.

[41] Quoted in Volker Pantenburg, 'Visibilities: Harun Farocki Between Image and Text', in Farocki, *Imprint/Writings*, p. 26.

through their formal structure which, to borrow Adorno's phrase, become like 'picture puzzles' whose solution remains a 'vexation' for the viewer.[42] This vexation derives not only from the tension that is established between the commentary and the image-track, or between the consecutive editing of images, but – following Alexander Kluge and others' constructivist account of montage elaborated in their 1965 essay 'Word and Film' – by preserving 'a certain tension' between *all* the 'disparate elements of filmic expression': verbal, auditory and visual. This tension makes itself 'felt' in the 'gaps' that montage creates, 'concentrating' the film's 'subject matter in the spaces between' its 'forms of expression', which must be worked over by the spectator.[43] Crucial in Farocki's work here is what Rodowick terms his strategy of 'dissociative and recombinatory montage', something that can be seen to be operative in earlier works, yet is pushed to new levels of complexity in *As You See* and *Images of the World*.[44]

5.2. *As You See* and *Images of the World*

As You See and *Images of the World* are comprised of multiple image-fragments, including archival photographs, illustrations (typically taken from the pages of books), and documentary footage, which are narrated by a serene yet affectless female voice-over commentary.[45] Both, moreover, are structured according to a logic of repetition and variation inspired by musical serialism, ordering their elements in the form of a permuting

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[42] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 121.

[43] Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz and Wilfried Reinke, 'Word and Film', trans. Miriam Hansen, *October* 46 (Autumn, 1988), p. 87. As Farocki notes: 'Where it's interesting, montage connects two things without turning them into one. It's about a certain proportion; a balance has to be kept, a confusion or mixing of the equated elements has to be avoided and a productive association of ideas has to be attained, a witty thoughtfulness'. Harun Farocki, 'The Images Should Testify Against Themselves', in *Harun Farocki: Another Kind of Empathy*, p. 86.

[44] Kluge, et al., 'Word and Film', p. 82

[45] The soundtracks of *As You See* and *Images of the World* also contain snatches of music: in the former, we hear faint sounds of Brazilian drums and ambient electronic music; in the latter, we hear Bach's *English Suites* and Beethoven's *Razumovsky Quartets*, which are quickly faded in and out. Both have no obvious correlation to the commentary, and work to produce a defamiliarzing effect.

series, wherein disparate sequences consisting of still images and voice-over are interrupted and then recursively returned to around a repeated set of brief film clips.[46] These filmed clips, which have sound but predominantly no accompanying commentary, punctuate the forward progression of the films' various narrative threads, generating a machine-like rhythm that, as if determined by an impersonal system, often appears in tension with the text being narrated – indeed, the filmed images sometimes interrupt the voice-over in mid-sentence. This dissociative montage generates a pattern of 'delayed decoding', whereby images and themes, that at first sight seem to have no logical relation with one another, are rendered legible or acquire a possible meaning in relation to the other elements only as the film progresses.[47] It is instructive to compare Farocki's dissociative montage with what Artavazd Pelechian theorised as '*montage-at-a-distance*', whereby a shot shown at a particular point in the film 'reveals its entire semantic effect only some time later', when a 'montage connection' – not only 'between the repeated elements, but also between the material that surrounds them in each particular case' – 'has been established in the mind of the spectator'.[48] Images, as Foster observes, consequently 'take on the hermeneutic form of allegorical objects', which the viewer 'must first decipher and then use in further deciphering'.[49]

In contrast with *Industry and Photography*, which commences with an explanation of what we are about to watch – 'This is a broadcast dealing with industry and photography', we are

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[46] For an account of the influence of musical serialism on film narration, see the chapter 'Parametric Narration, in Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, pp. 274- 310. In the latter, Bordwell discusses two key historical examples of films informed by musical serialism: Alain Resnais and Robbe-Grillet's *nouveau roman* on film, *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and Jean-Daniel Pollet and Phillippe Sollers's *Tel Quel* experiment, *Méditerranée* (1963).

[47] I take the term 'delayed decoding' from Ian Watt's famous essay 'Impressionism and Symbolism in *Heart of Darkness*', *Southern Review*, vol. 13, no. 1 (January, 1977), pp. 96-113.

[48] Artavazd Pelechian, 'Montage-at-a-Distance, or: A Theory of Distance' (written in 1972, and published in 1988), trans. Julia Vassileva *LOLA 6* (December, 2015): http://www.lolajournal.com/6/distance.html. As Pelechian continues, the 'repeated montage elements' acquire 'a qualitatively different meaning' as the film progresses, opening a 'new cycle of thought' each time they appear. Farocki mentions Pelechian's theory of distance montage in Farocki, 'The Images Should Testify Against Themselves', p. 102.

[49] Foster, 'Vision Quest', p. 158.

Figure 32. *As You See*

informed – *As You See* begins in *media res*. 'Here is a plough that looks like a canon, or a cannon that looks like a plough', the voice-over states in an impassive diction over an illustration of plough. The commentary continues: 'The ploughshare exists only to give the cannon a firm base. War is founded on earning one's daily bread'. Only then do we see the title of the film, *Wie man sieht*, signalling that what is to follow concerns both the audio-visual presentation of an argument and an investigation into the act or process of looking. The opening movement between a graphic resemblance that leads to uncovering a deeper connection between two disparate objects, exemplifies both the style and subject of the film's narrative, which attempts to trace, via a series of associative, metaphoric and figurative relations, the historical interconnections between technological development, production and war. Following the title of the film we jump from an Egyptian hieroglyph for city, to the idea that cities are founded at the crossing between two roads, to the invention of the machine gun and the internal combustion engine, to the construction of the Autobahn in Nazi Germany and the colonial division of Africa into straight lines (Figure 32). While certain connections are readily, albeit tacitly, intelligible, and on occasion ironically pointed up – 'Here I establish a connection between sex and death, as did the American bomber pilots during the Second World War', the voice-over clarifies over photographs of aircraft fuselage decorated with paintings of women, which follows a sequence that contrasts Hannah Arendt's reflections on the 'unknown soldier' with the convention of giving names to photographs of women in porn magazines (an expression of the dialectic between anonymity and individuality that runs throughout the film) – other images only reveal a determinate semantic meaning sometime later.[50] The recurring film clip of a robotic

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[50] Some images, such the actors dubbing a porn movie in German, are never directly alluded to and remain opaque – despite the obvious link to pornography noted above. The theme of sex and death in *As You See*, is

hand attempting to grasp a circular disk, for instance, which on first appearance seems related to the displacement of skilled hand work by capitalist automation that is investigated in other parts of the film, is only contextualized toward the end as an example of the alternative technologies that the engineer Mike Cooley is attempting to develop, and which he discusses in a number of interview segments – a shift in meaning that registers the films broader drive to grasp technology's both destructive and liberating possibilities.[51]

In *As You See* certain image-emblems oscillate between having a metaphoric or metonymic function in the film's narrative structure. The depictions and descriptions of roads as a forking and branching of routes, for example, come to be allegorically aligned with an argument that is expressed about historiography: 'The history of technology is fond of describing the route that development has taken from a to b', as the voice-over states, 'it should describe what alternatives there were and who rejected them'. A repeated clip of a manual weaving loom (Figure 33) and the definition of weaving as the fabrication of a 'network' of 'recurring connections', also gather metaphoric significance in terms of the editing of the film's 16mm material into discontinuous constellations – the latter recalls Adorno's characterization of essay form as progressing in a multi-directional manner, like moments 'interwoven…in a carpet'.[52] Weaving can additionally be read as an allegory for history; what Esther Leslie, in reference to Benjamin's historical materialist method, describes as the 'warp' [*Textur*]' of 'the multi-threaded nature of the present', 'shot

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further related to convention of newspapers to juxtapose 'images for sex and words for death'; a topic that is discussed in Farocki's televisual interview with Vilém Flusser, *Schlagworte, Schlagbilder: Eine Gespräch mit Vilém Flusser* [*Catch Phrases, Catch Images: A Conversation with Vilém Flusser*] (1986), where they analyse the front page of the German tabloid *BILD-Zeitung*.

[51] Like in *Between Two Wars*, *As You See* exemplifies Farocki's persistent reflection on what Marx saw as the central conflict between the revolutionary expansion of the forces of production and the fabled fetters of the relations of production. Exemplary here is the contrast of the robotic hand developed for useful or beneficial purposes (such as dangerous work situations), and not simply as a labour saving technology to reduce labour costs. In contrast to this linking of 'intelligence with advanced technology', is the replacement of skilled craft labour by machine tools, elaborated in *As You See* in relation Marx's reflections on the screw cutting lathe, and the repetitive labour of the assembly line, which is illustrated by the recurring image of toy cars being assembled.

[52] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 13.

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Figure 33. *As You See*

through' with the 'weft [*Einschuß*] of the past'.[53] Yet it also figures as an important metonym for the broader history of industrialization that the film chronicles. As in Benjamin's 'The Storyteller', the handicraft of weaving is employed by Farocki to 'shade in the tendencies of an epoch' and 'to tell a story of change', by contrasting the textured experience [*Erfahrung*] that was engendered by such modes of artisanal labour with the alienation of the senses and the proliferation of *Erlebnis* [immediate and isolated experience] under conditions of mass industrial society – a condition that the film's dissociative montage could be said to mimic.[54] A central thread that is intermittently unravelled in *As You See* reveals how the mechanization of weaving was an integral precursor to the calculating machine and factory automation. From the Jacquard loom, which disassembles the patterned image and encodes it as points on a punch card, we get

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[53] Esther Leslie, 'Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1998), p. 7. Leslie cross-codes two essays by Benjamin here, reading Benjamin's essay 'Edward Fuchs, Collector and Historian' (1937), in *Selected Writings, Vol. 3, 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp 260-302, together with Benjamin's metaphor of weaving in 'The Image of Proust' (1929), p. 238.

[54] Leslie, 'Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft', p. 7. Benjamin encapsulates this displacement of the human in 'The Storyteller' through what Hansen characterizes as a cinematic 'lap dissolve'. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, p. 171. As Benjamin writes: 'A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcars now stood under the open sky in a landscape where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and, beneath those clouds, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body'. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Selected Writings, Vol. 3, 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 144.

the binary code of the modern computer (as well as the digital image); from the coupling of machine tool and calculation we get the manufacture of a helicopter rotation blade. Farocki's historiographic method here, to borrow Benjamin's distinction, is less that of the *historian*, whose 'task is to *explain*…the happenings with which he deals', than that of the *chronicler*, who concatenates 'definite events' and displays them as 'models' in 'the course of the world'.[55] This course is aphoristically characterized as the emergent 'power [of] arithmetic' [*Rechnen*], which is seen to increasingly dominate production and society, as well as to undermine what is described as the long-standing struggle between the written word and the image.[56]

Farocki continues his engagement with the imbrication of images, calculation, industry and war in *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*. The primary theme of the film explores how the apparatus of the camera, conceived as a 'constantly shifting field of social and technological relations', is implicated within the 'scopic regime' of modernity and the Enlightenment aspiration for mastery and knowledge.[57] The film begins with a series of images of a laboratory built in Hannover for the study of the movement of water, the motions of which, we are informed, is still less researched than light. We then cut to a drawing from Dürer's *Instruction in Measurement* (1552), representing a Renaissance model

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[55] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', *SW* 3, pp. 152-153.

[56] If the calculating machine emerged from weaving 'in the moment when a picture was to be woven', the voice-over states, 'nothing has pushed the image aside so forcibly as arithmetic'. These reflections are informed by Flusser's theorisation of the 'technical image', which, as Pantenburg notes, was a pivotal influence on Farocki, who reviewed Flusser's books *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983) and *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (1985). See Volker Pantenburg, 'Working Images: Harun Farocki and the Operational Image', in *Image Operations: Visual Media and Political Conflict*, eds. Jens Eder and Charlotte Klonk (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 52. For Flusser, whereas 'traditional' images represent 'observations of objects', 'technical' images present 'computations of concepts'. See Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 10.

[57] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 136. I take the term scopic regimes of modernity from Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), p. 3.

of vision in which light was assumed to proceed from the look rather than the object.[58] As the drawing appears the voice-over states: 'Enlightenment – that is a word in the history of ideas. In German, *Aufklärung*'.[59] The word *Aufklärung* accretes a number of meanings over the course of the film but, as Kaja Silverman notes, is here employed to establish 'a close analogical connection between the rationalism and humanism of the Enlightenment project, and the notion of human vision as an agent of illumination and clarification'.[60] It also implicitly invokes a book in the history of ideas, the central themes of which the film can be read as providing an extended meditation on: Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Corresponding with *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Images of the World* explores how the attempt by instrumental rationality to master nature – to bring it under control via abstract and quantifiable techniques and technologies – is dialectically entangled with social domination – the effort by humans to control and administer the life of other humans.[61] In the film we move from the wave-channel laboratory – an instance of the attempt to master the fear of nature through mimesis (by making it repeatable) – to what Adorno and Horkheimer see as the inextinguishable remainder of nature in culture, the fear of death, which is initially developed in the film by way of a story about the discovery of scale measurement based on photography. The idea of scale photography, the voice-over recounts over various photographs and illustrations, arose in 1858 when Meydenbauer, a local government building officer in Wetzlar, had a near-death experience in attempting to

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[58] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p .138.

[59] Harun Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*', *Discourse*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Spring, 1993), pp. 78-92.

[60] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 138.

[61] The wave-channel will, as Silverman points out, later be connected, under the mutual sign 'laboratory', to Auschwitz, and the commentary quotes Hannah Arendt's description of the concentration camps as '[l]aboratories, in which experiments were carried out, to see whether the fundamental claim of totalitarian systems that human beings are capable of being totally dominated is correct'. Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', p. 86. In contrast to the transhistorical scope of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which traces the prehistory of instrumental rationality back to ancient Greece, *Images of the World* provides a more conventional periodisation of the Enlightenment.

measure the dimensions of a cathedral façade by suspending himself in a basket from the roof. As a substitute for this practice, Meydenbauer developed scale photography, as well as later initiating the establishment of memorial archives, with the aim of preserving buildings destroyed during war. The story of Meydenbauer introduces an important dialectic between preservation and destruction, which is primarily explored in *Images of the World* through the use of aerial photography for reconnaissance during World War II; a use that foregrounds how the camera can be exploited not only as a technology for preservation and measurement, but for destructive purposes.[62]

'In German', the voice-over notes, '*Aufklärung* also has a military meaning: reconnaissance. Flight reconnaissance'.[63] Over photographs of military aircraft and a map designating the itinerary of an 'intelligence' mission, the commentary recounts the story behind the production of an aerial photograph of the Auschwitz concentration camp, taken in April 1944, to which the film repeatedly returns. The photograph was captured when a pilot clicked his camera while flying over the intended target of a factory for the production of *Buna* (synthetic petrol and rubber). Sent for evaluation in England, only the factory and other surrounding buildings were discovered, not the camp, which the analysts 'were not under orders to look for'.[64] It was not until 1977 that the details of the pictured camp were finally 'inscribed' on the image; the consequence of two CIA employees (working in their free time) searching and evaluating photographs from the archives. This episode manifests not only a recurring connection that is made in the film between industry and war – in one shot we see Farocki measure the proximity of the factory and the camp with his hand

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[62] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 137. As Jarvis notes, self-destructiveness, and 'collective (military-industrial) self-destructiveness' in particular, is interpreted by Adorno and Horkheimer as a 'miscarried' act of 'self-preservation', in which presevatory thought and action, in an attempt to ward off death, mimics death. Simon Jarvis, *Adorno*, p. 31.

[63] Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', p. 81. On the history of military reconnaissance photographs see Allan Sekula, 'The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War', in *Photography against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973-1983*, (Halifax, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984), pp. 33-51.

[64] Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', p. 81. Later in the film, in a Kracauer-esque aside, the voice-over refers to the fact that the photograph of the camp had been taken without anyone noticing as '[n]otes as written into a book of God'. Ibid., p. 91.

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Figure 34. *Images of the World*

(Figure 34) – but a central tension between the mechanical apparatus of the camera and human vision.[65] If aerial photography exemplifies the increasing separation of camera and eye in its (non- or extra-intentional) ability to render perceptible what the eye cannot, the initial imperceptibility of the camp reveals how human perception is always conditioned by its particular historical and institutional placement, and how this placement is subject to change.[66]

'Because bomber pilots cannot properly estimate whether they have hit their target', the commentary explains in a following sequence about the history of aerial photography, 'in World War II they began to equip bomber planes with cameras'. This is said to be an instance not only of the 'press[ing] together' of the 'preserving photograph' and the 'destroying bomb', but an early example of the way in which cameras came to be 'employed to control effectivity' in the workplace.[67] The latter is illustrated by various film clips, such as a scene depicting ergonomic research into movement of a pilot's eye and the image of a computerized camera checking the parts of a factory produced car door (Figure 35). Following this sequence, we jump to a history of metal pressing and the death of this artisanal enterprise under conditions of mass industrial production. The overproduction of commodities under capitalism is then linked to the overproduction of images by the

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[65] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 144.

[66] Ibid., p. 144.

[67] Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', pp. 82-83.

Figure 35. *Images of the World*

military, who take more 'pictures…than the eyes of the soldiers are capable of evaluating'.[68]
This in turn is related to two recent film clips documenting the development of a computer
programmes to aid soldiers in the processing of surveillance photographs and footage.

The use of photography for surveillance purposes is related to another state institution in
Images of the World: the police. '*Aufklärung*', the voice-over informs us, 'also has a meaning
in police language: to clear up the case'.[69] Near the beginning of the film we see
photographic portraits of unveiled Algerian women, taken by the conscript soldier Marc
Garanger for the issue of identity cards by the French colonial authorities in 1960 – an
instance of the film's exploration of how the apparatus of the camera is often articulated
with questions of race and gender.[70] If, in the West, the idea of unveiling is typically
associated with the Enlightenment secularisation and the freedom from self-incurred
tutelage, here it serves to evidence colonial repression and the violation of Algerian
culture.[71] As the commentary notes: 'Only those close have looked on these faces without
the veil'. This remark occasions the dissociation of human memory from the memorializing
function of the camera. Whereas the former 'brings in something of a shared past' when
looking 'into the face of an intimate', a 'photograph captures the moment' by cropping

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[68] Ibid., p. 84.

[69] Ibid., p. 88.

[70] See Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, pp. 146-148.

[71] Ibid., p. 148.

Figure 36. *Images of the World*

'away past and future'.[72] This abstractive nature inherent to the representational logic of photography, is furthered by the police's use of it, who, as the voice-over later comments, are only concerned with its iconic-indexical capacity to identify a suspected criminal, thus reducing its analysis of the human face to its biometric data.[73] In contrast to the abstract gaze of the police, the commentary reads into the faces of the unveiled Algerian women a sense 'horror'.[74] In one sequence, after seeing a shot of Farocki leafing through a book of Garanger's photographs, he redresses the image of an unveiled face by covering the subjects mouth and nose with his hand (Figure 36). In both instances, as Silverman notes, Farocki can be seen to attempt to apprehend something that the photographs cannot show and might be said 'actively to repress'; 'the corporeal and psychic "reality" of being female and Algerian in a French colony in 1960'.[75]

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[72] Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', p. 80. As Kracauer writes in 'Photography': 'Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum; memory images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance'. Kracauer, 'Photography', p. 51.

[73] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 88. As the commentary repeatedly states: 'The police does not know what it is, the picture of man'. As Sekula notes, criminal identification photographs are 'designed quite literally to facilitate the *arrest* of their referent', and reduce the human portrait to phrenological analysis and positivistic techniques of measurement. As Sekula points out, the statistician Adolphe Quetelet (whose development of social statistics form an important precursor to the science of criminology and police photography) compared his anthropometrical research to Dürer's studies of human bodily proportion (Farocki makes a similar comparison between Dürer and police photography in *Images of the World*). See Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, Vol. 39 (Winter, 1986), pp. 7, 23.

[74] Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', p. 80

[75] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, pp. 158-159. For a different reading of this section, which

In *Images of the World* the camera emerges as an apparatus for the production of 'quantified and quantifiable images', which, as Silverman contends, 'represents less a moment of rupture with earlier visual technologies' – police photography in one sequence is linked to the use of 'projective geometry' by the 'mathematical artists of the Renaissance' – than a 'moment at which their implicit disjuncture from the eye becomes manifest'.[76] Beginning in the nineteenth century, as Jonathan Crary elaborates in *Techniques of the Observer* (1990), a new set of scientific and philosophical discourses redefined the status of the observing subject by displacing the Renaissance model of vision, understood in terms of a geometrical optics and the 'incorporeal relations of the camera obscura', with a new physiological optics that interrogated the constitutive role of the body in the apprehension of the visible world.[77] The relocation of vision to the corporeally circumscribed subjectivity of the observer, on Crary's account, opened up 'two intertwined paths': the first, led towards 'various "romanticisms" and early modernisms' that affirmed 'the sovereignty and autonomy of vision'; the second, issuing from a preoccupation with the defects of human vision, led towards the proliferation of rationalizing techniques aimed at disciplining the 'activity of the eye, to regiment it, to heighten its productivity and to prevent its distraction'.[78] These techniques are construed by Crary as 'crucial preconditions' for 'the ongoing abstraction of vision' in capitalist modernity, which he sees culminating in a number of emergent automated visual technologies, many of which also appear in the filmed images that punctuate the image-track in *Images of the World*.[79]

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connects the photos of Algerian women and ideas of veiling to women terrorists in Red Army Faction in Germany in the who wore disguises in order to evade the police, see Nora M. Alter, 'The Political Im/perceptible in the Essay Film: Farocki's *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*, *New German Critique* 68 (Spring/Summer, 1996), pp. 182-184.

[76] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 143.

[77] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1990), p. 16.

[78] Ibid., pp. 150, 69, 24.

[79] Ibid., p. 3.

While the voice-over rarely directly comments on these images, they clearly serve, as in Crary's account, to exemplify the increasing dominance of abstract techniques of visualization according to which primary economic and state institutions function.[80] Such techniques, as Crary writes, relocate vision to 'a plane severed from a human observer', supplanting the active organ of the human eye with the processing of 'millions of bits of electronic mathematical data'.[81] In a short text prefacing the publication of the English script of *Images of the World*, Farocki refers to these productive techniques as embodiments of 'the industrialization of thought', whereby, to quote Adorno and Horkheimer, '[t]hought is reified as an autonomous, automatic process, aping the machine it has itself produced'.[82] In attempting to subjugate all existence to the machinery of instrumental reason, as Adorno and Horkheimer argue, the Enlightenment regresses into mythology, reducing reason to a positivistic and rationalistic logic that apprehends the world in abstract categories, and 'arrests thought at mere immediacy'. For Adorno and Horkheimer, by contrast, '[k]nowledge does not consist in [the] mere perception, classification, and calculation' of the empirical world, but, following Hegel's critique of Enlightenment positivism, in the determinate negation of immediate knowledge, whereby reason reflects on the latter 'as surface, as mediated conceptual moments which are only fulfilled by revealing their social, historical, and human meaning'.[83]

Images of the World, like *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, attempts to offer a corrective to this decay of Enlightenment reason. This corrective, as Rodowick observes, is 'less asserted than implied through the image constellations that emerge across the film's logic of repetition and variation'.[84] These constellations primarily set in tension two forms of apprehending the

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[80] Ibid., p. 2.

[81] Ibid., p. 1-2

[82] Harun Farocki, 'The Industrialization of Thought', trans Peter Wilson, *Discourse*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Spring, 1993), p. 77; Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 19.

[83] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 20. Dialectic, as Adorno and Horkheimer write in a Kracauer-esque line, 'discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth'. Ibid., p. 18.

[84] Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*, p. 82. As Farocki notes, 'one image can elucidate the other, critique it, give it some experiential validity'. Elsaesser, 'Making the World Superfluous', pp. 183-184.

world: one, based on the 'witnessing and recording of life from a human scale', such as the drawings made by concentration camp survivor, Alfred Kantor, and the verbal testimonies given by two escapees from Aushwitz; the other, based on 'the replacement of hand and eye' by automated techniques and technologies, which generate various 'inhuman perspectives'.[85] If the latter are able to capture information that the human eye cannot, their machine vision is also shown to be constitutively blind to social and historical meaning, as well as to occlude the 'pulsings and phantasms' of the human body and subjective experience.[86] '[B]lindness', however, as Rodowick points out, is 'not restricted to the state's vision and data machines'; 'every observer', as the film suggests, 'confronts the image from a perspective of limited intelligibility', whereby 'information emerges or recedes according to the external perspectives and contexts from which images are perceived and interpreted' – a process that is 'inherently incomplete, contested, and contradictory'.[87]

This tension between different forms of apprehending the world and images is reflected in the montage structure of *As You See* and *Images of the World*, whose calculated and machine-like logic appears to mimic the technologies it depicts.[88] As if to insist on this analogy, *Images of the World* seems to correlate the film's serial montage, and the mode of spectatorship that it engenders, with various depictions of machine learning and pattern

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[85] Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*, p. 82.

[86] Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 136. As Farocki notes of aerial photography, for instance, 'the individual human beings fall through the grid, and only the ornament of their group-existence registers'. Elsaesser, 'Making the World Superfluous', p. 183. As Farocki writes in a companion article to *Images of the World*: 'To conceive of a photographic image as a measuring device is to insist on the…calculability, and finally the "computability" of the image-world. Photography is first of all *analog technology*; a photographic image is an impression at a distance…Vilém Flusser has remarked that *digital technology* is already found in embryonic form in photography, because the photographic image is built up out of points and decomposes into points. The human eye synthesizes the points into an image. A machine can capture the same image, without any consciousness or experience of the form, by situating the image points in a coordinate system'. Harun Farocki, 'Reality Would have to Begin' (1988), in Farocki, *Imprint/Writings*, p. 198.

[87] Rodowick, *What Philosophy Wants from Images*, p. 84.

[88] Both *As You See* and *Images of the World* reveal an important aspect of the principle construction developed by Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*, which, in rationally subordinating materials to an 'imposed unity' reflects the instrumental rationality and 'logicality' of industrial society. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 57.

recognition, such as the already mentioned image of a computerized camera checking the parts of a car door, the words 'partly mounted' [*teil montiert*] appearing each time a part has been scanned.[89] Yet Farocki's dissociative and recombinatory montage works precisely to elicit a form of (human) observation that such technologies are seen to displace, engaging the spectator in a hermeneutic process that gestures in a very different direction to the forms of abstract vision that these machines carry out. Crucial here is Farocki's use of repetition, or 'loops' (as he often terms it), which calls for a form of mnemonic reflection akin to what Adorno termed 'structural listening', wherein the listener comprehends 'the individual moments' that constitute a musical work 'as part of a "complex of meaning", a context made up of past, present and future moments which…unfolds through time'.[90] The recurrent interruption of and returning to various narrative threads and leitmotifs in *As You See* and *Images of the World*, additionally serves to undercut an Enlightenment conception of history based on the idea of a linear and 'irresistible progress' in human reason and technological advances.[91] As Foster notes, 'the cumulative effect…is such that we can no longer hold humanist uses of seeing, measuring, and imaging apart from military-industrial-bureaucratic abuses of such techniques'.[92] Farocki's de- and re-contextualization of historical fragments, however, also aims against the closure of the possibility that history could have been, and could be, different; an idea that is further expressed in certain historical events that are narrated, such as the story of a resistance group in Auschwitz with which *Images of the World* ends, whose partial destruction of a crematorium can be discerned from the distance of on an aerial photograph.[93] It is 'precisely because the look is

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[89] The word montage, as Bordwell points out, derives from the process of 'mounting' [*montiert*] in 'machine assembly', Bordwell, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, p. 120. Bringing out the aleatory aspect of this process, Farocki in *Interface* also compares his serialist technique to 'the wheels in a slot a machine'.

[90] Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music*, p. 210

[91] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 28. Farocki additionally attempts to undercut the excessive use of 'calculation and premeditation' in the construction of the film through the musical soundtrack. In the adding the soundtrack, as Farocki notes, he followed an 'aleatory principle', whereby, 'without calculating it in advance', he 'would sometimes turn the music on and then off again'. Elsaesser, 'Making the World Superfluous', p. 186.

[92] Foster, 'Vision Quest', p. 159.

[93] Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', p. 92.

located within…temporality and the body', as Silverman argues, and the various acts of interpretation and reinterpretation that populate *Images of the World* attest, that 'it can reanimate and open to change' what the camera would both 'mortify and memorialize'.[94]

5.3. Compiling History and Representing Labour in Farocki's Archival Video Essays

While the essay films discussed above are constructed out of archival photographs and filmed images, Farocki's video essays from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s are predominately comprised of archival footage. Significant in the making of these works is Farocki's shift to working with video technology which, as with Godard, afforded him the ability to more freely record and combine filmed images from disparate sources in order to conduct what both he and Nicole Brenez refer to as visual studies or critiques.[95] While Farocki produced different types of compilation works in the early 1990s, in this section I focus on two examples of what we could call his series of archival video essays, *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* [*Workers Leaving the Factory*] (1995) and *Der Ausdruck der Hände* [*The Expression of Hands*] (1997) – this series would also include *Gefägnisbilder* [*Prison Images*] (2000), which I briefly discuss in the following section. In these works Farocki compiles archival footage from the history of cinema, as well as other 'archives' (such as surveillance images), in order to create essayistic texts that explore a recurrent theme or motif through history. If an important precursor to these works can be found in Farocki's televisual criticism and his experience of working on Hartmut Bitomsky's *Deutschlandbilder* [*Images of Germany*] (1983), which examines *Kulturfilme* made during the Nazi period, they also invite parallels with Shub's compilation films of the 1920s.[96] Shub's ascetic method of compiling

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[94] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 150.

[95] See Nicole Brenez, 'Harun Farocki and the Romantic Genesis of the Principle of Visual Critique', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. Antje Ehman and Kodwo Eshun, pp. 128-142. As Farocki puts it in his Vilém Flusser lecture from 1999, '[e]ver since video recorders have been available, filmmakers have begun to refer back to film history'. Harun Farocki and Wolfgang Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', in *Working on the Sight-Lines*, ed. Elsaesser, p. 280.

[96] Farocki briefly discusses both Bitomsky and Shub in 'The Images Should Testify Against Themselves', pp. 86-87, 92. Shub's *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* notably invites parallels with Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's

contextualised and extended sequences so that (in contrast to the rapid montage techniques of Vertov) the viewer could scrutinize the footage presented, can be compared with Farocki's approach in his archival video essays which, although still composed in a discontinuous manner, have a less mathematical rhythm than *As You See* and *Images of the World*, and proceed at a slower, more ambulatory, pace – indeed, Farocki often uses video technology to pause, slow down, and rewind various images. This ascetic quality is also apparent in Farocki's use (or non-use) of sound and music in his work following *As You See* and *Images of the World* which, in contrast to the defamiliarizing sound-tracks of the latter, derives only from the material employed, as well as Farocki's elliptical voice-over commentary.

Farocki's montage method, furthermore, can be related to a broader tendency within Soviet Factography to approach the archive (or catalogue) and the compilation of material via a principle of thematic and historical selection. As discussed in Chapter 2, a key motivation for various Factographic practices was the emergence of the photo and film archive and debates around the organizational form of the card catalogue. Farocki's video essays of the 1990s are likewise informed by the developments in digital storage media at the time; in particular, computer-controlled archival systems which, as Lev Manovich argues, led to the privileging of various database forms in contemporary art.[97] In the mid-to-late 1990s Farocki was involved with the *Bild-Schrift-Zahl* [Image-Writing-Number] research project at Berlin's Humboldt University.[98] A guiding question in his research was the possibility of 'combining

compilation film, *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992), in both its theme – documenting the fall of the Ceausescu dynasty in Romania, the latter, as Forocki says, presents 'a film about a revolution that would not establish, but abolish socialism' – and chronological structure. See Farocki, 'Written Trailers', p. 228. Although *Videograms* could be characterised as video essay, it is clearly distinct from Farocki's essayistic approach in the archival video essays I discuss, reconstructing five days from the Romanian Revolution in December 1989 chronologically out of footage filmed by both official television cameras, as well as recently available home movie video cameras.

[97] As Farocki writes in an article from 1995: 'A new archive system is thus on its way, a future library for moving images, in which one can search for and retrieve elements of pictures'. Harun Farocki, 'Workers Leaving the Factory', in *Imprint/Writings*, p. 232.

[98] Pantenburg, 'Working Images', p. 53. Among the researchers involved in the *Bild-Schrift-Zahl* project was Friedrich Kittler.

hermeneutic approaches to film history and other image archives' with new 'forms of image retrieval and pattern recognition', which resulted in the 2001 *Suchbilder* [*Image Search*] conference at Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin.[99] The conference, as Pantenburg observes, is important for revealing the limits of computerized models that are restricted to searching the purely visual information of images, consequently occluding their 'historical and social contextualization'; an approach that stands in contrast with Farocki's *semantically oriented* 'methods of searching, sorting and assembling'.[100]

An important model often cited by Farocki for his semantically oriented approach to searching and assembling of what he designates as an 'archive of filmic expressions' is the German journal *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* [*Archive for the History of Concepts*].[101] Farocki's interest in the latter, as he explains, is the way that theorists associated with the journal follow the 'transformation' in the 'meaning' of concepts through history, which they ground in socio-political concerns, yet do so in a manner that is 'not bound to any lexical or systematic principle'.[102] Another model that is central for considering Farocki's approach to

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[99] Ibid., p. 53. The subject of image retrieval is already manifest in *Images of the World* in the account of the discovery of images of Auschwitz by members of the CIA, which they find by feeding 'into the photo archive computer the coordinates of all strategically important targets' situated near the camp. Farocki, 'Commentary from *Bilder*', p. 81.

[100] Pantenburg, 'Working Images', p. 53. As Wolfgang Ernst notes: 'Humans are much better than computers at extracting semantic descriptions from pictures. Computers, however, are better than humans at measuring properties and retaining these in long-term memory.' Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 270. Or, as Pantenburg elsewhere puts it, Farocki is interested in the 'formal analogies' and 'cross-references' that escape systems of 'computer-aided tracking'. Volker Pantenburg, 'Cinema's Past in the Museum's Present: Harun Farocki's Installation Work', in *Harun Farocki: One Image Doesn't Take the Place of the Previous One*, ed. Michèle Thériault (Montréal: Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery; Concordia University), p. 52.

[101] Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 273. For a short introduction to the work done by figures associated with the *Archive for the History of Concepts*, see Jan-Werner Müller, 'On Conceptual History', in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 74-93.

[102] Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 273. 'What is essential for me', Farocki clarifies, 'is that the texts in such an archive are independent of each other and do not acquire their individual legitimacy through the system in which they are embedded'. Farocki also cites the model of the dictionary,

compiling an archive of filmic expressions is Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne-Atlas*, as well the different iconological methods that were developed by art historians associated with Warburg, such as Erwin Panofsky.[103] As is exemplified by *The Expression of Hands*, Farocki shares with Warburg's *Bilderatlas* project a keen interest in gestural expressions, or what Warburg termed *Pathosformeln* [*pathos formula*].[104] Both Farocki and Warburg, moreover, attempt to chart the historical recurrence and transformation of expressions – or what Warburg termed *Ausdruckswerte* [expressive values] – by assembling a diverse array of images – in Warburg's case, predominantly photographic reproductions of images from art history.[105] An additional model, that pursues a Warburgian approach within the field of film theory, and that is cited by Farocki on various occasions, is Michele Mancini and Giuseppe Perella's *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Corpi e luoghi* [*Pier Paolo Pasolini: Bodies and Places*] (1981).[106] The 400-page atlas organizes photograms from Pasolini's films according to themes and

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'because of the way they document the usage of a word or expression chronologically, through the decades or centuries', as well as Christian Meier's *The Greek Discovery of Politics* (1980), which 'follows the transformation in the meaning of the words "democracy" and "tyrannis", "eunomy" and "isonomy"' in Ancient Greece. Ibid., p. 273-274.

[103] Briefly put, iconology aims to explicate the historical significance of an individual artwork through the interpretation of the symbolic values attached to compositional or iconographic features. See Panofsky's programmatic essay, 'Iconography and Iconology', in Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning and the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 26-54. As Müller notes in relation to broadening conceptual history to include images, Reinhart Kosselleck, a key figure in the *Archive for the History of Concepts*, later in life worked extensively on questions of political iconology. Müller, 'On Conceptual History', pp. 88-89.

[104] Farocki also refers to his archive of filmic expressions as a 'treasure chest of images' [*Bilderschatz*], a phrase that appears in Warburg's writings.

[105] On the large panels of the *Bilderatlas* that Warburg created between 1924 and 1929 he arranged and re-arranged art reproductions, advertisements, newspaper clippings, geographical maps, and personal photographs. 'The atlas', as Philippe-Alain Michaud writes, 'was an instrument of orientation designed to follow the migration of figures in the history of representation through the different areas of knowledge and in the most prosaic strata of modern culture'. Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warbug and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone; London: MIT, 2004), p. 277.

[106] On the importance of *Corpi e luoghi* for Farocki, see Toni Hildebrandt, *Corpi e luoghi: Harun Farocki on Pasolini*, *Sense of Cinema 73* (December, 2014): http://sensesofcinema.com/2014/feature-articles/corpi-e-luoghi-harun-farocki-on-pasolini/.

visual motifs – from facial and bodily gestures to places – which, as Farocki underlines, 'relies on the successively juxtaposed images to form relations', rather than text.[107] While Farocki employs iconological analysis in his films, explicating the historical significance of individual film clips through the interpretation of the symbolic values attached to their compositional and iconographic features, essential in these works is also something like what Warburg famously terms an 'iconology of the intervals [*Zwischenräume*]', which, as Philippe-Alain Michaud contends, is based not only on the singular meaning of individual figures, 'but on the interrelationships between the figures' that is created through their complex arrangement.[108] Akin to Warburg, furthermore, the metonymic and metaphoric logic of Farocki's image constellations, in contrast to the stable and intrinsic meanings sought by iconology, 'embraces concision, ambiguity, and instability', creating a 'cognitive space for reflection' on the historical meanings that images convey, and which are shown to be constantly in motion.[109]

Despite their highly discursive character, Farocki's video essays (as with his film essays) seek to resist becoming what Benjamin termed 'information'; a form of communication that 'appear[s] "understandable in itself"' and is 'shot through with explanations'.[110] As such, their mode of narration is closer to what Benjamin saw as an essential characteristic of storytelling; namely (as he observes in a passage from the 'The Storyteller' that is also quoted by Engström in *About Narration*), 'to keep a story free from explanation as one recounts it'.[111] In such a mode, 'connections are not forced on the reader', but are left open

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[107] Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki, 'Cinema Like Never Before', in *Kino Wie Noch Nie/ Cinema Like Never Before*, ed. Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2006), p. 17.

[108] In arranging images on the black cloth of the panels of his atlas, as Michaud contends, 'Warburg was attempting to activate dynamic properties that would remain latent if considered individually'. Confronted with the tabular deconstruction of the panels, 'the viewer must re-create the trajectories of meaning…by focusing on the spacing of the photographs'. The *Mnemosyne* panels, for Michaud, thus function like 'screens on which the phenomena produced in succession by the cinema are reproduced simultaneously'. Michaud, *Aby Warbug and the Image in Motion*, pp. 253, 244-246, 260.

[109] Christopher D. Johnson, *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 113, 26.

[110] Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', *SW 3*, p. 147.

[111] Ibid., p. 148

to interpretation, achieving 'an amplitude that information lacks'.[112] A key technique in this regard is again Farocki's use of repetition and variation, wherein he returns to an image multiple times, integrating 'different ways of reading' the material that, although intersecting and overlapping, 'stand in tension' with one another.[113] Another is his continued use of delayed decoding as a narrative device, typically allowing the viewer to scan the image before providing laconic fragments of information, or allowing a more complete context to emerge only sometime later. Even at its most objectively descriptive, however, we are made aware of a 'disequivalance' between the commentary and image-track.[114] What is continuously highlighted here is the problem of *ekphrasis* – a critical aspect of Farocki's early written and television film criticism – which stages an interstice between word and image that, in being approached from different perspectives, is continually reinstated.[115] 'Between the images and the commentary', as Farocki puts it, 'there is a parallel, but it's a parallel that will meet in infinity'.[116] This disjuncture is especially manifest in moments when the commentary shifts from a largely impersonal and objective reading of an image to performing an overtly subjective, speculative or ironic interpretation about what is (or is not) depicted, or when the former is punctuated by a sudden and terse use of simile or metaphor.[117] This has the effect of both keeping the viewer from slipping into pre-

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[112] Ibid., p. 148.

[113] See Sven Kramer, 'Reiterative reading: Harun Farocki's Approach to the Footage from Westerbork Transit Camp', *New German Critique 123*, vol. 41, no. 3 (Fall, 2014), p. 42.

[114] Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*, p. 159.

[115] As Farocki notes in relation to his televisual criticism made in the 1970s, working in television 'one of the first lessons to learn is that you should by no means repeat in the commentary what is seen in the image. You still learn that today. To me, it was almost mandatory to repeat what is in the image, that's the only way to create a tension'. Quoted in Pantenburg, 'Telekritik: Über Song of Ceylon'. Description, as Olaf Möller notes, was a key aspect of the *Filmkritik* style pursued by authors such as Farocki, who instead of using 'evaluative words' for a film, tended describe 'a scene…for pages on end, each word carefully and scrupulously weighed up against its implications, its resonances, [and] its role in the logic and the poetry of the sentence and the text'. Olaf Möller, 'Passage along the Shadow-Line: Feeling One's Way Towards the *Filmkritik*-Style', in *Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 70.

[116] Elsaesser, 'Making the World Superfluous', p. 187

[117] Perhaps the most famous instance of what Kramer terms a 'subjective-empathetic' interpretation of an image – which recalls Farocki's interpretation of the photographs of Algerian women in *Images of the World* –

established patterns of reading a given image, as well as allowing for 'the difficulties of struggling with the material to shine through'.[118]

A central feature of this struggle in Farocki's archive video essays is the tension they generate between the film image as an iconic-indexical trace (a mechanical recording of a past event) and its legibility. Like in *Images of the World*, Farocki's reading of film images often attend to what he terms their 'documentary surplus'; the fact that the optical unconscious of the camera captures 'whatever is in the frame' and not just 'what was intended or highlighted'.[119] As with Godard's *Histoire(s)*, Farocki's shifting between an analysis of images from the history of documentary and narrative fiction cinema attempts to underscore how *all* film images contain a 'documentary surplus', in the way that they document both a film's technological and formal features, as well as the historical moment at which they were produced. Farocki's voice-over commentary will often address what seems to be the intended symbolic aspects of an image, only to then turn to such unintended or inconspicuous historical details. In contrast with Barthes subjective and aestheticized mode of apprehending a marginal or insignificant photographic detail (as discussed in Chapter 1), Farocki's reading and rereading archival images from different standpoints instead entails a continuous opening up of the look to the different socio-historical dimensions of images and what (and how) they represent. Even when, as noted above, the commentary in his films performs a manifestly subjective reading of an image, what is revealed in such instances, is less Farocki's own aesthetic sensibility and subjective memory, than an attempt to perform, what Ricoeur terms, an 'acculturation' to the

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is in Farocki's film *Aufschub* [*Respite*] (2007). Examining silent black-and-white film scenes shot at Westerbork, a 'transit camp' in Holland for the Nazis, Farocki in one scene frames the well-known close-up of a Sinti woman seen in the wagon with intertitle: 'The fear or premonition of death can be read in her face'. This subjective assessment is followed by a statement in the first-person singular: 'I think that is why the cameraman Rudolf Breslauer avoided any further close-ups'. Kramer, 'Reiterative reading, p. 51.

[118] Jan Verwoert, 'See What Shows – On the Practice of Harun Farocki', in *Weiche Montagen/ Soft Montages*, p. 19. As Farocki puts it: 'I always try to avoid interpretations where the film dissolves without leaving a residue. One of my strategies is to over-interpret or even misinterpret a film. My hope is that something is being saved in such an exaggeration'. Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 276.

[119] Genaro and Callou, '"Keep the horizon open".

otherness or 'externality' of the historical past (which is typically figured as a relation to the otherness of others) as it is represented in the externality of the image.[120]

In *Workers Leaving the Factory* Farocki compares and reflects on (with the aid of a voice-over commentary read by himself) images accumulated from the hundred-year history of cinema (1895-1995) that portray the elementary motif of 'workers leaving the factory'.[121] It opens with one of the first films brought to the screen, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895), an 'actuality' film by the Lumière brothers, which consists of a single, static shot (around two-minutes in length) of men and women leaving the Lumière film factory in Lyon (and the film image) by two exits to the right and left. Returning to this shot several times in the course of the work, the Lumière film serves as a kind of 'primal scene' or an *Ur-type* of which all the other images are construed as morphological transformations.[122] Following from the Lumière film, Farocki concatenates documentary footage of workers at different times and places running out of factories: Emden in 1975, Detroit in 1926, and Lyon in 1957 (Figure 37). These images, like the Lumière film, are interpreted in a Kracauer-esque manner: the 'impression…is of people hurrying away as if impressed by an invisible force'; 'as if they had already lost too much time'; 'as if they knew somewhere better to be'. As Kracauer notes in his feuilleton article, 'Travel and Dance' (1925), in industrial societies workers are forced to live 'a double existence', 'intermittently dwell[ing]' in two spatio-temporal realities, by oscillating between the different rhythms of labour and leisure time, wherein the former is temporarily escaped through the latter.[123] Following the regularization and rationalization of time, time awareness, as Doane notes, becomes 'a source of anxiety' in modernity; 'a form of constant pressure and constraint'.[124] The exits of

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[120] See Peter Osborne, 'Information, Story, Image: Akram Zaatari's Historical Constructivism', in *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), pp. 156-157.

[121] In the English version the commentary is read by Kaja Silverman.

[122] Farocki uses the term primal scene in Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 280. I take the Goethean term *Ur-type* from Propp, discussed in Chapter 2. As Farocki notes in relation to the capacity afforded by video to examine the 'typology' and 'structural similarity' that recurs across film history, '[o]ne might find this kind of analysis in Propp's research into fairy tales'. Ibid., p. 280.

[123] Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, pp. 70-71.

[124] Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 225.

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Figure 37. *Workers Leaving the Factory*

factories, as Farocki shows, are not only a liminal space in which this anxiety is momentarily manifested, but also a place where one can effectively glimpse the size of an enterprise, due to the exits 'compress[ing]' of male and female workers into a consolidated 'work force', before they disperse 'to become individual persons'. It is this aspect of their existence, as the Farocki observes, which is taken up by commercial narrative cinema, which typically takes place in that part of life where work has been left behind.[125] Most films, as he writes,

> 'begin where the identity of the protagonist as a worker ends…[and] the protagonist leaves the factory behind'… [I]n this sense, the Lumières' film is a precursor to the rest of cinema, with its inclination to tell the story of life that is left to the individual after work is over, or indeed of the life that one dreams of and wishes for beyond the realm of work'.[126]

Farocki explores this idea in *Workers Leaving the Factory* through an analysis of a scene from Fritz Lang's *Clash by Night* (1952), in which we see a woman (played by Marilyn Monroe) leaving a tinning factory in California where a man is waiting for her outside. The couple, followed by the camera, then proceed to walk away from the factory which moves into the 'background'.[127] This shot is intercut with other scenes from the history of cinema, in which we witness something similar: a couple meeting outside a place of work and being followed by an *unedited tracking shot*. As Farocki's comparative montage suggests, this

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[125] Farocki, 'Workers Leaving the Factory', p. 232.

[126] Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 277.

[127] It is important to note that Farocki, as with many of the clips he employs, does not cite the source of the film clip here.

'stylistic' device (which transcends different 'eras and national cinemas') appears to express and amplify the desire of the cinema to turn its back on work. [128] The cinematic spectacle, as Doane notes (echoing Debord), has historically served to present a 'counterdream' to 'the abstraction and rationalization of time' in capitalist modernity, and is 'given the crucial ideological role of representing an outside, of suggesting that time is still allied with the free and indeterminable', which it does by making 'the contingent legible'.[129] This central relation of the cinema to contingency is illustrated by Farocki's rewinding and slowing down of a moment in the Lumière film to point out the occurrence of a woman tugging at another woman's skirt before they separate. As with photography in *Images of the World*, this capacity of the film camera to capture contingent details, has, Farocki suggests in *Workers Leaving the Factory* (and which he will explore in later works) an alternative history: 'Where the first camera once stood', he comments, 'there are now hundreds and thousands of surveillance cameras'.[130]

Recalling his video installation *Interface*, *The Expression of Hands* consists of Farocki sat at a video editing suite in front of two monitors. In contrast to the double-channel device employed by the former (which I will return to in the following section), this single screen television film instead consists of slow tracking shots between the two monitors, on which are played various scenes representing different narrative and expressive functions of the hand in film history, which includes clips from fiction, documentary and propaganda films. Farocki's own hands also repeatedly appear, 'leafing through books, imitating gestures from films…or outlining sequences on a sheet of paper' (Figure 38).[131] In the cinema, as Farocki states, the camera typically focuses on hands 'in order to prove something', yet 'too seldom

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[128] Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', pp. 277-278.

[129] Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, p. 230. This idea of making the contingent legible, as Doane notes, was exemplified by the Lumière's actuality films, which 'presented themselves as potential catalogues of everything'.

[130] *Workers Leaving the Factory* features a brief clip taken from contemporary surveillance footage, which Farocki does not comment on.

[131] Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard*, p. 249. *Interface*, as Pantenburg notes, similarly attends to forms of 'gestic thinking', reflecting on gestures as varied as counting money and film editing.

Image removed for copyright reasons

Figure 38. *The Expression of Hands*

to read something from them'.[132] What is generally being proven, as Farocki's comparative

reading of the discrete film clips highlights, is the value, use, and skill of the human hand –

the pianist, as he observes, 'is the cinema's favourite manual labourer' – the 'power' of

which is often 'addressed through its loss' (commonly because of war). The attention given

to the hand in cinematic history is further interpreted as symptomatic of the hand's

displacement from artisanal labour, which (as Farocki explored in works such as *As You See*)

is subordinated to a process of deskilling through the technical division of labour under

capitalism. In *Interface* Farocki interestingly meditates on a kind of deskilling in his own

artistic practice, contrasting his work with video technology, whereby the film is edited by

pressing buttons, with the 'fine perception' and 'sensitivity' involved when cutting and

gluing a film (Figure 39).[133] What is interesting here, and notable of Farocki's later video

works more generally, is the way they increasingly reflect on questions of deskilling and

rationalization in both their content and form, dislocating a conventional alignment of the

auteur filmmaker with an idea of artisanal craft through various strategies of 'authorial

ascesis' that, as Benedict Seymour points out, appears to mimic the displacement and

alienation of the labourer by the various techniques and technologies that his films seek to

scrutinize.[134] This is especially conveyed through the minimization of Farocki's authorial

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[132] Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 274.

[133] Farocki shows how he *feels* the cut with his fingers as it runs through the editing desk before he *sees* it on the screen.

[134] Benedict Seymour, 'Eliminating Labour: Aesthetic Economy in Harun Farocki', *Mute*, vol. 2, no. 16 (April, 2010): http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/eliminating-labour-aesthetic-economy-harun-farocki.

Figure 39. *Interface*

presence (visual and verbal) in his works following *The Expression of Hands* and *Prison Images* – the former is the last instance where Farocki physically appears in his work, while the latter is the last time we hear his voice (the commentaries are either read by others or take the form of intertitles).

In *Interface* Farocki compares his video editing station to a scientific laboratory, recalling the Constructivism's image of the artist as engineer. As he correspondingly writes of his video installation *Zur Bauweise des Films bei Griffith* [*On the Construction of Griffith's Films*] (2006), in which Farocki contrasts two scenes from the American director's work to reveal a crucial evolution early narrative cinema: 'My intention was to create a film laboratory, to show as much as possible of the structure of a film, a film genre, or a style, with as few interventions as possible'.[135] Akin to *The Expression of Hands*, where an analysis of the grammar of expressions in film acting and cinematic form is linked in various ways to the economy of movement developed by Taylorism, in the latter installation, the introduction by Griffith of the cinematic technique of shot/countershot, which consequently divides the room into two, is likewise construed as reflecting the increase in productivity that the

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[135] Exhibition material issued at Farocki's 2009 exhibition, *Harun Farocki: Counter-Music and On Construction in Griffith's Films* at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris. Quoted in Volker Pantenburg, 'Manual: Harun Farocki's Instructional Work', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, p. 96.

Figure 40. *On the Construction of Griffith's Films*

division of labour by Taylorism brought about.[136] These issues, furthermore, are reflected in the formal economy of the installation, which analyze Griffith's cinematographic techniques by simply presenting them on two adjacent television monitors, as well as the work's minimal use of intertitles (Figure 40).

As with Shub's commitment to minimizing her authorial presence in her editing of archival material, Farocki's form of authorial divestment in his later works is connected to his choice to only work with 'readymade' images and a form of direct cinema.[137] In addition to Shub's compilation films, Farocki's work with archival images can be read as part of longer tradition of the readymade in twentieth century art history which, as John Roberts argues, importantly shifted traditional notions of artistic value, based on the expressive manipulation of painterly or sculptural materials, to concerns around 'placing, ordering and selecting'.[138] The employment of readymade materials in art, as Roberts elaborates, has the

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[136] This idea, as Farocki notes in his 1981 article 'Shot/Countershot' (which I discuss below), is taken from Hartmut Bitomsky. See Harun Farocki, 'Shot/Countershot: The Most Important Expression in Filmic Law of Value', in *Imprint/ Writings*, p. 96.

[137] As Farocki puts it: 'No actors, no images made by myself, better to quote something already existing and create a new documentary quality'. Quoted in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, p. 208. As with Shub, this minimising of authorial intervention in Farocki's work is also tied giving a sense of autonomy to the material – something that is particularly evident in works like *Respite*.

[138] John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 88.

consequence of aligning, as in Constructivism, artistic labour with other forms of non- or extra-artistic labour.[139] However, as Roberts contends, in contrast with the incremental process of the deskilling of productive labour under capitalism, through the development of various industrial techniques and technologies, artistic labour is not subject to the same diminishment of skill or value. While the introduction of technological reproducibility into art's relations of production effected a corresponding form of deskilling in terms of the displacement of the traditional applications of hand and eye in craft-based forms of artistic labour, this instead results in, what Roberts terms, a dialectic of 'skill-deskilling-reskilling', whereby '[a]rtistic skills find their application in the demonstration of conceptual' and formal 'acuity', rather than 'expressive mimeticism'.[140] What is significant here in relation to Farocki's video works, and their combination of readymade materials with an increasingly minimalist formal economy, are the issues around authorship and critique that they raise, and which are not merely tied (as with Godard) to the decentring of the author through a form of hyper-intertextuality, but grounded in a critical reflection on capitalism's division of labour.[141] This becomes especially important for considering Farocki's video installations, to which I now turn, particularly those constructed out of readymade images taken from civil, police, military, and industrial institutions and archives, and which return to many of the themes explored by Farocki in *As You See* and *Images of the World*.

5.4. The Right Distance: Soft Montage and Operative Images

In this section I focus on three examples of what can be classified as Farocki's series of essayistic video installations: *Ich glaubte Gefangene zu sehen* [*I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*] (2000), *Auge / Maschine I-III* [*Eye/Machine I-III*] (2000-2003), and *Gegen-Musik* [*Counter-Music*] (2004). While there is a tendency to dissociate his broader installation practice from his essay films and video essays, Farocki's essayistic video installations can better be undstood to continue strategies developed in the former in a spatially expanded

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[139] Ibid., p. 24

[140] Ibid., p. 3.

[141] Ibid., p. 3.

form. In these works, Farocki advances arguments and ideas through both a successive and simultaneous montage of images, as well as an essay-like commentary rendered in the form of epigrammatic intertitles.[142] Despite proceeding in a paratactic manner and working to establish the numerous paradigmatic relations through the spatial juxtaposition of image-tracks, then, these image-texts nonetheless develop in a sequential order (with a beginning and an end). Such spatial-sequential works can be differentiated from Farocki's multi-channel installations – such as *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* (2006), *Deep Play* (2007), or *Labour in a Single Shot* (2014) – where the logic of the work is primarily determined through a spatial montage of elements that are presented in what Manovich would term a database form, which a mobile spectator can freely navigate in the order that they chose. They can, moreover, be contrast with installations such as *Comparison via a Third* (2007) or the first three episodes of the four-part series *Serious Games I-IV* (2009-2010), which portray various processes or events in a spatial-sequential mode similar to his essayistic video installations, yet which are nearer to Farocki's (commentary-less) style of observational documentary.[143]

Produced (as with all Farocki's installations) for art spaces, *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*, *Eye/Machine I-III*, and *Counter-Music* were designed to be shown as double-channel projections – the two image-tracks set side-by-side – creating what Farocki terms a 'soft montage'. Farocki additionally produced single-channel versions of these works to be screened on television and in cinema spaces, dividing the screen into two equal frames, set on a diagonal from upper left to lower right with an overlap at the centre – a technique that he also employs intermittently in his single-channel video essays *Prison Images* and *War at a Distance* (2003). Double projection, as already noted, was first explored by Farocki in *Interface*, whose 'point of departure was the fact that only one image is seen when editing

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[142] In later essayistic video installations, such as *The Silver and the Cross* (2010) and *Parallel I-IV* (2012-2014), Farocki employs a voice-over commentary instead of intertitles.

[143] *Comparison via a Third* is a 16mm film installation. *Serious Games I-IV*, akin to *Still Life*, combines discrete documentary and essayistic sections. Whereas the first three episodes follow Farocki's observational documentary style, in the final episode intertitles are employed to reflect on images that appear in the previous episodes, serving as an essayistic afterword.

film, rather than two images when editing video'.[144] Farocki's use of double projection was inspired by Godard and Miéville's filming of two or more television monitors in *Numéro deux* (Farocki first employs the term soft montage, as quoted in the previous chapter, in his and Silverman's analysis of the latter) and, to a lesser extent, the employment of multiple film projectors in experimental film (or 'expanded cinema') in the 1960s and 1970s.[145] As Pantenburg suggests, Farocki's side-by-side technique can also be connected with 'a more oblique tradition in the [double] slide projections that Bruno Meyer, Herman Grimm and Heinrich Wöfflin introduced and made popular in art history classes since the 1870s, where it provided the basis for iconological and analytical learning and teaching'.[146] The multiplication of images further serves to express the accustomed condition in which (by the early 2000s) images are consumed – whether in terms of the multiple screens that populate the various institutions and work places (such as those documented in Farocki's installations), or simply the typical format of television, wherein, as Farocki notes, the spectator is always 'looking at several images' and 'creating interrelations among images and texts'.[147]

In double projection, as well as the spatialized montage of his single-channel films, as Farocki reflects, there 'is succession as well simultaneity': 'the relationship of an image to the one that follows as well as the one beside it; a relationship to the preceding as well as the concurrent one'.[148] In his essayistic video installations Farocki seeks to create an 'interplay' between these various image relations which, as Warner observes, 'involves both

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[144] Harun Farocki, 'Cross Influence/ Soft Montage', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, p. 72. The essay was first published in French as 'Influences transversals', in *Traffic*, no. 43 (2002).

[145] Ibid, p. 72.

[146] Pantenburg, 'Manual', p. 97. On the slide lecture as an analytical and pedagogical tool see Robert S. Nelson, 'The Slide Lecture, or the Work of Art "History" in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Spring, 2000), pp. 414-434.

[147] Farocki and Tim Griffing, 'Viewfinder: Interview with Harun Farocki', pp. 162-163. As Farocki states: 'That's why I use multiple screens in my work – because today there's always the image, and then the image being read in terms of what's next to it'. Farocki first employs a spatial soft montage technique in the opening part of *Videograms of a Revolution*, which juxtaposes within the same frame what is officially broadcast on television with what the camera continues to film.

[148] Farocki, 'Cross Influence/ Soft Montage', p. 70.

serial and concurrent linkages that execute a variety of doublings, refrains, reenactments, side-by-side weighings and relays of motifs'.[149] This process is defined as 'soft' [*Weiche*], because the montage relations that Farocki engineers, 'while they may be robust, have a provisional tone and texture, as though the relations are still being essayed'; preserving, 'even in its "finished"…structures and cadences, the *sense of trial* that distinguishes the detail-oriented work that a cutter undertakes at an editing station'.[150] Like Godard, Farock is attracted to the '[e]quivocality' that that is generated in the act of placing two images side-by-side, the effects of which, as puts it, is '[m]ore trial, less assertion'.[151]

Soft montage can be seen to take effect not only within individual works, but, as Warner points out, 'between and across many of his projects when they are installed together as repeating loops in gallery space, making for an intricate scene of comparison that enfolds multiple stages, contexts and varieties of his output simultaneously'.[152] This is also the case within individual installation projects, such as *Eye/Machine I-III*, that take the form of a series of short episodes made over several years, and which, once complete, can be shown together – a strategy Farocki compares to the practice of writing short 'articles' that will subsequently be published in book form as individual chapters.[153] This article-like, serial form, as Foster writes, has the consequence of stressing the provisional and 'open' character of Farocki's image-texts, in that their continuous dis- and re-assembly of material creates a sense that the work presented is 'a problem to reconsider, precisely an essay to revise, at a later moment, a different conjuncture'.[154] This is made particularly apparent, as Martin Blumenthal-Barby notes, by Farocki's 'metaleptic repetition of identical images'

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[149] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 49.

[150] Ibid, pp. 49, 48.

[151] Farocki, 'Cross Influence/ Soft Montage', p. 73. As Farocki writes: 'Imagine three double bonds jumping back and forth between the six carbon atoms of a benzene ring; I envisage the same ambiguity in the relationship of an element in an image track to the one succeeding or accompanying it'. Ibid., p. 70.

[152] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 49

[153] Farocki and Dziewior, 'Conversation', p. 211

[154] Foster, 'Vision Quest', p. 157. This reworking of identical material (both image and text) is further manifested in the relations between Farocki's installations *I thought I Was Seeing Convicts* and *Eye/Machine I-III* and their single-channel counterparts, *Prison Images* and *War at a Distance*.

throughout the three episodes of his *Eye/Machine* triology, which, akin to Vertov's employment of identical footage in a number of different works, serves to establish an intertextual axis of associations that cuts across the composition of each individual film, embedding the images in 'a *polyvalent web of meaning*'.[155]

This spatial arrangement of images through soft montage both renders explicit and expands on what was already an essential aspect of Farocki's practice of dissociative and recombinatory montage, whereby '[o]ne image doesn't take the place of the previous one, but supplements it, re-evaluates it, balances it'.[156] Indeed, the effect achieved by soft montage is, as Farocki notes, 'comparable to the shot/reverse shot in a single-strip film', a device which, as Warner observes, Farocki's installations (as with other singe-screen works) attempt to both reflect on and formally refigure.[157] This is most explicitly brought out in Farocki's double-channel installation *On Construction of Griffith's Films* (2006), which, as noted above, examines Griffith's use of the technique of shot/countershot by presenting it on two monitors placed side-by-side. Farocki's 'critical gesture' here (which recalls Eisenstein's reflections on how Soviet montage cinema developed out of Griffith's parallel montage technique), as Warner explains, 'is to characterize his own image practice as a derivation of this foundational procedure in narrative cinema': 'We are given to see in detail how the device articulates both connection and separation, [and] how it engineers a "drama of comparisons"' (the subtitle of Griffith's *Intolerance*).[158] In essence, as Warner highlights, Farocki's experimental adoption of spatial montage techniques both revises and amplifies the cinematic principle of shot/countershot as an operation of essayistic 'montage' (a

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[155] Martin Blumenthal-Barby, '"Cinematography of Devices": Harun Farocki's *Eye/Machine Trilogy*, *German Studies Review*, vol. 38, no. 2 (May, 2015), p. 343.

[156] Hüser, 'Nine Minutes in the Yard', p. 302

[157] In *Interface* Farocki reflects on an example of shot/countershot in footage found in his research for *Videograms of a Revolution*. In the clip we see amateur footage of someone filming a television screen showing Ceausescu at a live political rally. After a disturbance on the screen, the filmmaker turns his camera from the TV screen to the window contrasting, as Farocki notes, 'official image with the street image: image with counter-image'.

[158] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 50. See Eisenstein's essay, 'Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today', which I briefly discussed in the Introduction.

linking of images through ideas), rather than as a mere device for *continuity* 'editing' – its conventional role within the history of cinema.[159] This principle is a recurring subject in Farocki's film theoretical writings for *Filmkritik*, in particular 'Shot/Countershot: The Most Important Expression in Filmic Law of Value' (1981), where Farocki 'insinuates the need to extricate shot/countershot from the schemes of continuity that constrain it and to reinvent it in a way that intensifies the perceptual activity of the filmmaker and viewer alike'.[160] Whereas the common syntactical function of shot/countershot is to institute (typically in scenes of dialogue) narrative continuity, as well as to suppress difference and otherness, Farocki's soft montage attempts 'to recast shot/countershot as a principle of comparative and differential observation', which, as Farocki has repeatedly stated (drawing on Deleuze's reading of Godard), is constituted by the open grammatical form of the 'And', rather than a strict opposition or equation .[161]

Farocki's reflections on and development of the principle of shot/countershot in his installation practice is exemplary of how, despite his shift to working in art and museum spaces, Farocki retains 'a reflective investment in the history of the cinema and its forms'.[162] This is important for considering the essayistic video installations I discuss below, all of which pursue their respective critiques of instrumental and operative images through a reflexive, although sometimes subtle, relationship with film history. A notable feature of these installations that invokes film history is their commentary. In contrast with his essay films and video essays (as well as later essayistic video installations), the commentary in *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*, *Eye/Machine I-III*, and *Counter-Music* take the form of white

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[159] As Farocki argues in an early essay: 'One notices montage, and one does not notice editing. Montage is linking images through ideas, editing is…creating a flow, finding a rhythm'. Quoted in Rainer Knepperges, 'The Green of the Grass: Harun Farocki in *Filmkritik*', in *Working on the Sight-Lines*, p. 77.

[160] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 43. As Farocki puts it: 'I am trying to discuss this shot/countershot by taking shots from both sides. Put together they should produce a different image and that which is between the images should become visible'. Farocki, 'Shot/Countershot', p. 108.

[161] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 43.

[162] Ibid., pp. 49-50. As Pantenburg similarly argues, Farocki's 'installations insist on showing a cinematic intelligence that has evolved and developed throughout a century of moving images'. Pantenburg, 'Cinema's Past in the Museum's Present', p. 61.

intertitles on a black background, the terse character of which (oscillating between an informational and poetic tone) is reminiscent of the silent films of Shub and Vertov. Farocki's intertitles generally punctuate either one of the image-tracks (which unless silent footage, typically have sound) as an image continues to play on the other, serving, as he writes, 'as its commentary or its footnotes'. The laconic character of the intertitles on black screens, which interrupt the flow images, also establishes a sense of rhythm, which is accentuated through Farocki's strategy of 'anticipation and reprise'.[163]

I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts reworks material that also features in Farocki's archive video essay *Prison Images*, which, akin to *Workers Leaving the Factory*, compiles film clips from the history of cinema that deal with the theme of prisons. The first half of this hour-long television film predominantly concerns an investigation of the disciplining and regimentation of the human body represented in early-to-mid twentieth century prison films (both documentary and fiction), as well as the ways that certain individuals resist or recreate themselves under such conditions.[164] While surveillance footage (filmed in US penitentiaries) at first only serves to punctuate Farocki's analysis of films from the history of cinema – often juxtaposing the two types of images by dividing the screen into a diagonal soft montage – they quickly and progressively become, along with other technical images and instruction videos, the central focus of the film, which interrogates the recent 'industrialization of the prison' and its outfitting with various 'prison technology'.[165] It is, interestingly, this second part of *Prison Images*, with which *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* begins, almost entirely erasing the connection with the history of cinema explored in the

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[163] Farocki, 'Cross Influence/ Soft Montage', p. 72. This is particularly evident in *Eye/Machine I-III* and *Counter-Music*, where he employs the figure of the dash to break up sentences into several separate intertitles.

[164] The latter is demonstrated through Farocki's reading of sequences from Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (1956), in which the protagonist works to turn objects of his imprisonment (a spoon, wire from his bed frame) into the tools of his escape, and scenes from Jean Genet's *A Song of Love* (1950), where the prison cell becomes a site of sexual transgression.

[165] The 'controlling gaze', that the proliferation of video cameras in prisons multiplies, is, as Farocki observes, intended 'to make the prison transparent [*Aufklärung*], to rid it of mystery'. This is illustrated in a sequence that contrasts the erotic gaze of the guard portrayed in Genet's film, who watches the male inmates 'like the women in peep shows', with footage from the 'cold' subject-less eye of surveillance cameras.

former. References to film history are only directly made in the brief appearance of silent

black and white footage, as well as the title of the work, which is a quotation from Roberto

Rossellini's neorealist drama, *Europa '51* (1952) – or, more exactly, Deleuze's citation of it in

his essay 'Postscript on Control Societies' (1990).[166]

Deleuze's short essay, as Farocki underlines, provides a key theoretical source for *I Thought

I Was Seeing Convicts*, and can also be seen to inform his subsequent essayistic video

installations concerning surveillance and operative images.[167] In 'Postscript' Deleuze

outlines what he considers the progressive introduction of a new system of domination in

post-industrial societies based on forms of 'control', which he contrasts with what Foucault

theorized in terms of techniques and technologies of 'discipline'. In brief, whereas

Foucault's account of disciplinary societies details the ways in which power physically

'fashions' and 'moulds' *individuals* into what he calls 'docile bodies', control societies, as

Deleuze contends, instead seek to control or *modulate* individual behaviour by coding

individuals in the form of endlessly divisible data, made possible through new forms of

electronic surveillance technology and computer monitoring software. In control societies,

Deleuze writes, '[i]ndividuals become "*dividual*" – that is, 'coded…matter to be controlled' –

just as 'masses become samples, data, markets, or "*banks*"'.[168] Deleuze's delineation of a

control society, as well as the significance of the installation's title, is discernible from the

opening sequence of *I Thought I was Seeing Convicts*, which juxtaposes two images of

computer surveillance technology: the first, pictures customers moving through the aisles of

a supermarket; the second, shows prison inmates who have been outfitted with electronic

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[166] As Farocki notes, the quote is taken from the English translation of Deleuze's *Negotiations* (1995), where
Deleuze quotes the heroine (played by Ingrid Bergman) in Rossellini's film – although in the original Italian
version she says something different. Farocki, 'Written Trailers', p. 234. See Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on
Control Societies', in *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press,
1995), p. 177. See also Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, pp. 2, 20-21.

[167] Farocki, 'Controlling Observation', in *Imprint/Writings*, p. 318.

[168] Deleuze, 'Postscript on Control Societies', pp. 180, 182. Deleuze here echoes Adorno and Horkheimer's
account, outlined in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, of an administered society. As Deleuze writes, 'whether the
state or some private power', in control societies such entities become 'transmutable and transformable
coded configurations of a single business where the only people left are administrators'. Ibid., p. 181.

Figure 41. *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (single-channel version)

bracelets (Figure 41).[169] In both cases, individuals are represented by dots on a computer screen, whose 'identity' (as a series of intertitles states) – whether coded in terms of a customer's buying habits or the whereabouts of a prisoner – can be obtained with a simple click. As with Ingrid Bergman in *Europa 51*, who utters 'I thought I was seeing convicts' in relation to witnessing workers at a factory, thus establishing, as Deleuze observes in *Cinema 2*, a relation between the two sites, Farocki's montage similarly suggests a connection between techniques and technologies used to administrate prison control and everyday life (or consumption) – a connection also made by Deleuze in 'Postscript'.[170]

This sequence is followed by representations of the industrialization of the prison through technology such as body scanners and a control booths that resemble, as an intertitle suggests, those in factories. Later, we see training exercises for prison staff, during which the commentary explains how 'power and violence are (mostly) exercised impersonally' today, and is 'no longer commonly exercised at close quarters'. A key tool in this exercising of power from a distance is the ubiquitous electronic eyes of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras that populate contemporary prisons, and whose continuous recording of predominately banal content and poor quality images stand in contrast those of the cinema. The 'undramatic' quality of surveillance footage is brought out through Farocki's juxtaposition between contemporary images of prison visits and a dramatized portrayal of

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[169] Deleuze also discusses electronic tagging in 'Postscript'. Ibid., p. 182.

[170] *Prison Images* develops a number of connections between the prison and the factory, such as the example of a film about woman prisoner who goes to work in factory as a means of correction.

the same occurrence in an early silent film.[171] The commentary, however, goes on to read (or misread) various surveillance images of prison visits against their intended function as purely instrumental and indexical images, *as if* they were cinematic images and represented a (romantic) story.[172] As we are informed, surveillance tapes are only 'worthy of attention' and 'not erased and reused' in 'exceptional cases', such as 'death'. Farocki accordingly shows footage documenting the fatal shooting of a prisoner by an armed guard in the concrete prison yard at Corcoran State Prison in California. What is distinctive about this footage, as the commentary points out, is the way that the camera is placed above the window of the armed guard, and the '[f]ield of vision and field of fire coincide' – a pressing together, like in *Images of the World*, of preservation and destruction. The clip, which appears to have been used in either a low-budget documentary or as a piece of evidence used in a prosecution, has a voice-over (provided by members of the activist group Prison Focus) describing the event. Farocki places side-by-side the footage of the shooting with an earlier clip from the prison staff training video (Figure 42), in which the instructor insinuates to prison staff how, in the event of witnessing such incidents, the officer's decision to shoot the prisoner should always be seen to be justified. As an intertitle tells us following this spatialized shot/countershot, in every case of a prisoner being shoot, 'the use of firearms was upheld by the Shooting Review Board'. Farocki's soft montage, which provokes the spectator to cast a sceptical eye on the latter statement, exemplifies the installation's method of immanent of critique, which forces the work's audio-visual materials to interrogate each other in order to disclose a 'discrepancy' between the 'values' or 'ideals' certain institutions purport to represent and 'what they actually are' in

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[171] As Farocki notes: 'The interesting thing about the images from the surveillance camera is that they are used in a purely indexical fashion, that suspicions or hypotheses are never at issue, only facts…and often they are erased right away to save on tape'. An important influence on Farocki's engagement with surveillance images, is Michael Klier's 1983 film, *The Giant*, which constructs a narrative film with music out of surveillance videos, and 'thereby suggests a radical misreading' of the latter. See Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 282.

[172] In one sequence we see a female visitor show a newly minted coin to the male prisoner she is visitiong, symbolising, as an intertitle suggests, 'life beyond the prison walls'. In other sequences the camera focuses on various instances of what an intertitle refers to as 'Gestures of love'.

Figure 42. *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (single-channel version)

practice.[173] As Farocki notes of such moments in *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*, 'the right image makes a demand, but is also being criticized by the left one, sometimes even condemned'.[174]

This method of immanent critique is particularly acute in Farocki's *Eye / Machine* trilogy. The latter largely consists of various examples of technical images taken from civil and military institutions, and filmed by all manner of 'camera-eyes' or 'eye machines' (as they are referred to in the intertitles). These images are characterized as 'operational', because they are 'made neither to entertain nor to inform', but to ensure the efficacy of a designated 'operation'.[175] As with Barthes notion of an 'operational' language, from which Farocki's theorization of 'operational images' derives, such images are not simply representations of objects, but an instrumental part of a technical operation.[176] These non-

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[173] I take this basic understanding of immanent criticism from Horkheimer's 'Notes on Institute Activities', in which criticism is defined as 'relating social institutions and activities to the values they themselves set forth as their standards and ideas', in order to 'disclose a pervasive discrepancy between what they actually are and the values they accept'. See Max Horkheimer, 'Notes on Institute Activities', in Critical Theory and Society: A Reader, edited by Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas MacKay Kellner (New York; London: Routledge, 1989), p. 265.

[174] Hüser, 'Nine Minutes in the Yard', p. 302.

[175] Farocki, 'Phantom Images', *Public 29* (2004), p. 17.

[176] Ibid, p. 17. Barthes gives the example of a woodcutter who names the tree which he is felling. In such an

expressive images are, as series of intertitles states, 'devoid of social intent', produced neither for 'edification' or 'reflection', but merely to monitor or execute a technical process – a specificity that is brought out in the installation by contrasting this class of images with other image-types, such as those used for promotional or propaganda purposes. Many operational images, moreover, are 'not really intended for human eyes', and are only viewed by technicians to check a machine's functioning – an automated process characterized in one intertitle, which addresses images recorded by assembly robots, as a 'cinematography of devices'.[177]

Akin to Barthes's notion of an operational language, as Pantenburg notes, 'the operational image nurtures post-hermeneutic hopes of an image world free of symbolisation'.[178] Yet, as Farocki contends, '[a]lmost all technical representations which maintain that they only represent the operative principle of a process have a large share of mystification in them'.[179] This is shown to be conspicuously manifest in the recurring images Farocki shows that are taken from remote controlled missiles deployed during the 1990-1991 Gulf War, with which *Eye / Machine I* begins (Figure 43). These 'suicide cameras', as an intertitle labels them, which hurtle towards their target, were built into the projectiles warhead so that it could be steered remotely. Like the other military images that Farocki presents that are recorded from the air, they additionally serve to check whether the target has been hit. Although these operational images were originally intended strictly for military technicians, they were subsequently broadcast on television, becoming a form of propaganda for a supposedly victimless and humanitarian war, as well an advert for the so-called 'intelligent weapons' industry. As a series of intertitles observe, however, these 'images lacked plasticity' – or, we could say, a counter-shot – in that the 'human scale was missing'. No people can be seen in these images, nor is there any 'reference to everyday experience'; their cold machine eye

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instance, Barthes contends, the woodcutter '"speak[s] the tree"', and not 'about it'. The woodcutter's 'language is operational', an 'instrument' that is 'transitively linked to its object'. The tree is 'not an image' for the woodcutter, a second-order language or 'metalanguage', but the meaning of an 'action'. Barthes, 'Myth Today', in *Mythologies*, p. 146.

[177] See also Farocki, 'Phantom Images', p. 21.

[178] Pantenburg, 'Working Images', p. 52.

[179] Farocki, 'Phantom Images', p. 15.

Figure 43. *Eye / Machine I*

failing to 'grip' the viewer, and thus making the war easily forgettable.[180] As with aerial photography in *Images of the World*, what these operational images fundamentally mystify, as Farocki suggests, is the 'impure reality' of life and of war; a 'disavowal' that is the very essence of the *war at a distance* aspired to by modern warfare – *War at a Distance* is, notably, the English title of Farocki's single channel video essay that works with material from the *Eye / Machine* series.[181] Along with the other computer generated images and virtual-reality simulations that recur across *Eye / Machine I-III*, these images share, as Farocki writes, 'in the spirit of a utopia of war' that does not 'reckon with encountering people', conjuring up 'the image of a cleanly led war' and modelling the world according to an 'idealised image' produced in 'labs and factories'.[182]

Eye / Machine I-III, however, does not provide us with a contemporaneous *visual* counter-shot to such inhuman and distanced representations of war, instead decidedly taking the perspective or standpoint of the military-industrial complex, whose logic the installation seeks to both understand (by putting it into relation with a larger history of the rationalization of production) and undermine, via its immanent critical method. This

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[180] As Farocki notes: 'Today you cannot get footage from the military archives in which cars can be seen, footage that would force you to conclude that humans were indeed present at or near the target. It is obvious, then, how war tactics and war reportage coincide. The images are produced by the military and are controlled by the military and politicians'. Farocki, 'Phantom Images', p. 15.

[181] Blumenthal-Barby, '"Cinematography of Devices"', p. 336. The German version is titled *Erkennen and Verfolgen* [*Recognize and Follow*].

[182] Farocik, 'Phantom Images', p. 21.

immanent method, as Foster observes, operates according to a strategy of 'mimetic exacerbation', whereby Farocki tropes the 'administered society' he is endeavouring to expose, which is not only evident in the installations ascetic citation or re-presentation of images taken from and filmed in various military institutions, but also in the largely affectless tone of the commentary, which sometimes seems to approximate the frozen language of bureaucracy or protocol.[183]

In a key sequence appearing in all three episodes, Farocki juxtaposes a silent black-and-white image of a worker sat at a factory punch press (a 'single purpose machine') with a promotional video for a guided missile (Figure 44) – the latter shows a red missile, filmed from an airplane flying above, traveling through the air over a forested terrain, the sound of its propulsion mixed with cheap synthetic music.[184] This soft montage, as Farocki notes, creates 'a negative shot/reverse shot', wherein the worker, depicted in the left image-track (and whose repetitive labour is shown in slow motion), 'turns his back' to the rocket in the right image, which appears to fly in the opposite direction.[185] As an intertitle proclaims in *Eye / Machine II* in connection with this sequence: 'There must be a connection between production and war'. Like *Images of the World*, the *Eye / Machine* trilogy paratactically circles around this connection between the forces and relations of production and the destructive force of war, through a historical examination of various eye machines and image processing technologies.[186] A particular historical thread that is unravelled across the installation's episodes is the ways in which the invention of guidance weapons through image processing technology is entangled with emergence of flexible automation in factory production, as well as a broader economic logic. In episode two and three, for instance, we see another advertisement for a precision-guided missile system. This 'promotional film with music' (Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*) as the intertitles note, 'have no operational

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[183] Foster, 'Vision Question', pp. 161, 160. In the English version of *War at a Distance*, the female voice-commentary also has an impersonal and affectless quality.

[184] Farocki, Farocki, 'Cross Influence/ Soft Montage', p. 70

[185] Ibid., p. 70

[186] As Farocki notes: 'When I saw this double projection in the art space Kunst-Werke in Berlin, on two monitors turned slightly towards each other, I was struck by the horizontal connection of meaning, the connection between productive force and destructive force'. Ibid., p. 71.

Figure 44. *Eye / Machine II*

function', but are meant to both 'threaten' and 'entertain', as well to present an 'economic argument' about how the precision of guidance missiles means that less bombs are needed to find their target. Yet, as Farocki suggests, fewer bombs means a loss of turnover (and consequently profit), and the need for more guidance systems to be developed and sold for purposes other than military use.[187]

Throughout the series we see contemporary examples of robotic camera eyes in both civil production, everyday life, and military institutions; such as images of robots picking up work pieces, an autonomously driven vehicle, and simulations of guidance missiles flying over a landscape (Figure 45). In all these examples of pattern recognition technology, an algorithm compares the real-time recording of images with stored data, '[b]alancing', as an intertitle states, 'intention and proven reality'. 'Contours and significant details are stored and will be compared with the actual item'; a 'comparison', as Farocki writes, between 'pre-image and real-image' or 'goal image and actual image'. [188] Like with the serial montage structure of *Images of the World*, the idea of working with two image tracks in *Eye / Machine I-III*, as Farocki notes, was intended to formally reflect this operation of comparing performed by

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[187] Farocki, however, is not interested in simply equating war technology with civil technology, but posing questions about their connection. As he writes: 'A montage must hold together with an invisible force the things that would otherwise become muddled. Is war technology still the forerunner of civil technology, such as radar, ultra-shortwave, computer, stereo sound, jet planes? And if so, must there be further wars so that advances in technology continue'. Ibid., p. 74. Farocki further investigates such themes in his installation *A Way* [*Ausweg*] (2005). The title is a paraphrase of a quotation from Brecht: 'War always finds a way'.

[188] Ibid., p. 72; Farocki and Dziewior, 'Conversation', p. 210.

Figure 45. *Eye / Machine III*

image processing software.[189] Yet, while Farocki's technique of soft montage formally
mimics the image processing technologies that his installation re-presents, thereby
entangling the spectator in their operational logic, it simultaneously attempts to elicit a
critical mode of spectatorship, dependent on (human) reflection and forms of comparison
that are markedly absent from the former; creating a series of differential oppositions
between the (human) eye and machine vision.[190]

If Farocki's strategy of mimetic exacerbation, as Blumenthal-Barby writes, provokes
spectators to contemplate their complicity in the increasing proliferation of 'modern-day
eye machines', its presentational form also endeavours to 'figuratively' undercut the latter,
by engaging the viewer in an activity of '*close* reading' that runs counter to the
'distantiating' and 'abstract' logic of modern warfare, as well as the corresponding
application of this logic to all aspects of life.[191] Like *Images of the World*, moreover, the
various moments of reprise (or loops, as Farocki calls them) that recur across the three

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[189] Farocki and Dziewior, 'Conversation', p. 210.

[190] This difference, as Blumenthal-Barby notes, is embodied in the slash of the installation's title, which mimics
the machinic aesthetics of pattern recognition, using a red slash in the titles of *Eye/Machine I* and
Eye/Machine II, which is replaced by a white slash *Eye/Machine III*. Blumenthal-Barby, '"Cinematography of
Devices"', pp. 344-345.

[191] Blumenthal-Barby, '"Cinematography of Devices"', pp. 345-347. As Farocki notes of the increasing use of
statistics in sports such as football: 'Ongoing computerization seems to incline us to view soccer rather as we
view work or war. We try to systematize it' – a phenomena that is expressed in Farocki's installation *Deep Play*.
Farocki and Dziewior, 'Conversation', p. 225.

episodes of *Eye / Machine I-III* (which, when shown in art spaces, are of course themselves played on a loop), aim to call into question a teleological conception of progress based on ideas of 'technological advancement toward a fully automatized world' (and mode of warfare).[192] Accordingly, as Farocki observes, *Eye / Machine I-III* can be seen to enact a similar form of 'displacement', or *détournement*, to that executed by the US Army when they showed operational images from the Gulf War on television, displacing this catalogue of technical images into the space of art so that they might be critically contemplated.[193]

Farocki's ascetic and sober, yet sometimes sardonic, analysis of images taken from the prison system and military industrial complex, which mimes the hyper-alienated character of the phenomena he is attempting to critique, can be understood as developing a similar ascetic strategy used by Benjamin in his *Denkbilder*, attempting, as Adorno wrote of the latter, to 'restore thought' by presenting the 'absurd…as though it were self-evident'.[194] Like Benjamin, moreover, essential to Farocki's critical method is the problem of proximity and distance: that is, how best to ascertain 'the right distance' with regard to the modern phenomena his works engage? Blumenthal-Barby's contention, then, that *Eye / Machine I-III* engenders a form of *close* reading that runs counter to the distantiating logic of the images captured by various eye machines, should be not be read as one of *immersion* or *absorption*, but, following Benjamin, of gauging a critical distance to such images, in order to better read what they simultaneously show and dissimulate.[195] Farocki's practice of soft montage, as Richter writes of the dialectical image in Benjamin, 'measures distance and

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[192] Blumenthal-Barby, '"Cinematography of Devices"', p. 344.

[193] As Farocki writes, that 'the US Army command showed operational images during the Gulf War', images 'that were produced for operational reasons and not for edification or instruction', is 'an incredible displacement' akin to that of 'conceptual art'. 'I, too', he continues, 'only wish to arrive at art incidentally'. Farocki, 'Cross Influence/ Soft Montage', p. 74. As Blumenthal-Barby argues, the *Eye / Machine* trilogy endeavours 'to *de-tool* these images and turn them into something they were never meant to be, namely art'. Blumenthal-Barby, '"Cinematography of Devices"', p. 344.

[194] Adorno, 'Benjamin's *Einbahnstrasse*', p. 323.

[195] 'Immersion' is notably the name of the third episode of *Serious Games*, which observes a research centre that uses immersive technologies such as virtual reality and computer-simulations as a form of therapy for war-veterans suffering from PTSD.

proximity, angle of vision and perspective, in the traces of its own spatiotemporal positionality'.[196] Like Benjamin, moreover, Farocki's citational method works to create new grammatical constellations, tearing both past and present from their immediate historical contexts, so that each may be contemplated through a 'prism of historical time that is not its own'.[197] If this general structure of the dialectical image, in which images from different historical moments are rendered 'simultaneously perceptible and interarctulated', can be seen to be at work at various moments in *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* and *Eye / Machine I-III*, this becomes more manifest in *Counter Music*, which, as with the *Arcades Project*, is connected to the exploration of the city as a place of historical excavation and remembrance.

While *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* and *Eye / Machine I-III* invoke the history of the cinema largely only *negatively* – as something like an absent counter-shot to the 'cinematography by devices' from which these works are assembled – this history becomes an explicit component in *Counter Music*. The title of Farocki's installation has multiple meanings. The original French title, *Contre-chant* [literally, *Counter-Song*], as Warner notes, is a homophone for the word for counter-shot [*contrechamp*], highlighting Farocki's continued interest in spatially reworking this cinematic technique.[198] As Warner adds, it also translates as 'counterpoint', which serves to express the installation's orchestration of multiple independent historical threads (or melodies) that are interwoven like a musical score. Moreover, the title refers to installation's attempt to recreate the genre of the 'city symphony', as pioneered by Ruttman and Vertov. Farocki's remake, however, is assembled from a catalogue of contemporary surveillance footage and operational images used to monitor and regulate the city of Lille in France. Like Ruttman and Vertov's urban incursions, *Counter Music* is playful in tone, using clips from *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera* as a historical *counterpoint* to the contemporary catalogue of technical images it examines, often ironically pointing up the mundane and undramatic character of the latter in contrast

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[196] Richter, *Thought-Images*, p. 61

[197] Ibid., p. 64.

[198] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 52. See also Christa Blümlinger, 'Memory and Montage: On the Installation *Counter-Music*', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, p. 102

Figure 46. *Counter Music* (single-channel version)

to the dramatic dynamism of the former.[199] The prosaic and deadening regime of 'control images', as Farocki labels them, that surveil urban life in Lille, and which are emblematic of a broader 'rationalization' of the city in the early-twenty-first-century, are, as the title *Counter Music* also suggests, constitutively antithetical to being made into the kinds of visual symphonies fashioned by Ruttman and Vertov. This is brought into focus in various sequences which contrast the ways in which both Ruttman and Vertov 'dramatise means of transport' in early-twentieth-century metropolitan life, such as trains, with contemporary images from the high-speed train control centre (TGV) and the Metro (Transpole) in Lille, as well as other traffic systems, which are monitored by attendants who gaze at the multiple surveillance screens and data monitors with a bored expression (Figure 46). In the Metro control center, as an intertitle informs us, 'Images from 1,200 cameras arrive'; 'Many shot at the same time – as in Ruttmann's and Vertov's dream – to tell the story of a day in the life of city'. Yet these automatic surveillance images are 'without a cameraman/camerawoman'. They do not, as Foster writes, 'extend the human prosthetically', as in Vertov's vision of *kinoki* [camera-eye-men] going off into the world to document various occurrences and events using various innovative camera techniques, so much as they replace 'the human robotically'.[200] The 'extremely undramatic' character of surveillance images, as Farocki observes, is related to the fact that 'the most common means' of cinematic 'condensation are missing', such as 'camera movements or edits'.[201]

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[199] This difference is emphasised by including the dramatic musical soundtracks that accompany the films.

[200] Foster, 'Vision Quest', p. 160. See also Blümlinger, 'Memory and Montage', p. 104.

[201] Farocki and Ernst, 'Towards an Archive for Visual Concepts', p. 282.

Although the editing room does not appear in *Counter Music*, the installation, as Warner points out, 'implicitly entertains a relation (part oppositional and part analogical) between the control room and the editing room, as sites where a multiplicity of gathered sights and sounds are intensively studied'.[202] Yet in contrast to Vertov's notion of the *kinok*-editor who would attempt to read or decode such visual phenomena, and in turn, through montage, make them readable to a spectator, in these control rooms the act of reading images has also been largely replaced by various kinds of automatic pattern recognition software.[203] If the opening sequence of *Counter Music*, which compares images of people being monitored in a 'sleep laboratory' with scenes of people sleeping in *Man With a Movie Camera* (examples of Vertov's theory of 'life caught off-guard'), encourages us to see how the 'theme' of 'surveillance' is already present in the latter, as the installation goes on to suggest, the 'constructivist dreams' of Vertov and Ruttman 'have given way to a control society where the lives of the inhabitants are extensively regulated by a cold, purely functional vision'.[204] 'Both Vertov and Ruttman', as an intertitle contends, following a sequence showing an image of software that 'counts' the number of people moving through the space of a train station (Figure 47), 'envisaged something different': 'For them, the crowd was not a lump to be dissected…and rendered as numbers'.

What such surveillance and operational images 'rule out', as both Christa Blümlinger and Warner observe, is the principle of a counter-shot that Farocki considers so central to the history of cinema.[205] Instructive here is the distinction made by Serge Daney between what he terms the 'image' and the 'visual'.[206] The 'image', for Daney (which he closely aligns with

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[202] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 54.

[203] Farocki plays with Vertov's idea of decoding everyday phenomena by applying pattern recognition technology to various documentary images of signs on buildings, which attempt to read, often incorrectly, what they spell out. The reading of street signs also recalls Benjamin's *One-Way Street*.

[204] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', pp. 50-51.

[205] Blümlinger, 'Memory and Montage', p. 102; Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 52.

[206] See Serge Daney, 'Montage Obligatory: The War, the Gulf and the Small Screen' (1991), *Rouge* (2006): http://www.rouge.com.au/8/montage.html. Passages from the latter are quoted in Harun Farocki, 'Diary', in *Harun Farock: Soft Montages*, p. 65.

Figure 47. *Counter Music* (single-channel version)

the cinema), is 'always both more and simultaneously less than what it is in itself', in that it is both 'doomed to bear witness to a particular otherness' that resists fully yielding itself to the spectator, yet expresses, at the same time, that 'something is always lacking'; that it is always incomplete and requires something more (another image, further thought). The 'visual', by contrast, designates merely the 'optical verification' of visual information, which is seen in terms of a 'closed circuit' that 'lacks nothing' and is 'complete in itself' – a 'purely technical' operation, as Daney writes, that 'knows no reverse shot [*contrechamp*]'.[207] In this 'purely technical relay' of visual information, as Warner puts it, there is 'no off-screen, no "otherness" to be acknowledged'. Farocki's soft montage, thus 'effectively tries to reinscribe the critical power of "the image" where "the visual" prevails', putting into effect 'the notion of a countershot within and against the extensive reaches of an informatics system that has no use for such a principle'.[208]

Yet Farocki does so in *Counter Music*, primarily not by offering the spectator contemporaneous countershots to such images and the perspectives (human or non-human) from which they are viewed, but by putting them into constellation with various archival images, which are construed as representing various cinematic and historical

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[207] Farocki 'Diary', p. 65.

[208] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 52.

Figure 48. *Counter Music* (single-channel version)

memories.[209] This is comically exemplified in a sequence that shows images depicting

miniature robotic cameras moving through the Lille's sewage system (to check the welding

of pipes), which brings forth, as an intertitle phrases it, 'recollections' of the 1966 American

science-fiction film *Fantastic Voyage* – we see a clip from the latter which shows a

miniaturized medical team traveling through a human body.[210] In another sequence we see

silent black-and-white images from a textile factory in Lille (Figure 48); 'memories', as an

intertitle describes them, from the city's 'industrial past'. 'Many cities whose industry has

faded are building a new centre', we are informed; a historical development in which Lille,

and particularly the sanitized business district of 'Euralille' (where most of the images are

shot), is emblematic. Recalling *As You See*, the footage of the textile factory, which recur

throughout *Counter Music*, acquire multiple connotations, representing an early precursor

to the machine automation which the installation explores (Farocki in one instance

juxtaposes the latter with the train control room), as well as the claim by post-industrial

cities such as Lille (with the aim of attracting global business), 'to be a city of connecting

links'. They also, as with *As You See*, serve as a metaphor for Farocki's interweaving of

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[209] As Blümlinger notes, the installation can be read as a 'theatre of memory'. Blumlinger, 'Memory and
Montage', p. 103.

[210] In this case, the recollection is of a past envisioning a particular future whose utopian aspects stand in
contrast with the prosaic character of the present. In the final sequence, which shows images of the train
control room, the intertitle notes (without showing any examples) how '[w]e know rooms like these from the
movies': 'In rooms like these rocket launches are supervised – or the Third World War is started or prevented'.

images in a complex network of historical cross-references, and the spectator's role in reading the weave of history as a *textum* (both a text and textile).[211] As Blumenthal-Barby notes, just as the human perception and cognition ceases to matter in the automated operations of surveillance and pattern recognition, Farocki's practice of soft montage, 'compels it to remerge', asking the spectator to perform a *counter* reading of such images that they themselves 'seem to have left behind long ago'.[212] The spectator is further asked, as Warner writes, to perform their 'own mental montage and supply connective counter-shots where they fail to find material expression'.[213] Like Benjamin's dialectical images, Farocki's soft montages presents a 'historicity and spatiality' through which the correct distancing to critically reading phenomena and images can be found.[214] Like Benjamin, moreover, this has a pedagogic side: 'To educate the image-making medium within us, raising it to a stereoscopic and dimensional seeing into the depths of historical shadows'.[215]

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[211] As Benjamin points out, the Latin word from which the word 'text' derives, '*textum*', means something woven, a 'web'. Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust' (1929), in *SW 2,1*, p. 238.

[212] Martin Blumenthal-Barby, '*Counter-Music*: Harun Farocki's Theory of a New Image Type', *October 151* (Winter, 2015), p. 129.

[213] Warner, 'Essaying the Forms of Popular Cinema', p. 62. As Daney argues, to produce cinematic images is to assemble images in such a way that 'viewers say to themselves: "Ah, there's an image missing" and do not forget it'; rather than, as is the case with what Daney terms the 'visual', to 'fill in emptiness, to decorate', and forbid such thinking. Serge Daney, 'Before and After the Image', *Discourse*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Winter, 1999), pp. 188.

[214] Richter, *Thought-Images*, p. 64.

[215] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, N1,8, p. 458.

Conclusion: Digital Constellations

This dissertation has sought to examine the essay as a critical form of writing and filmmaking. It focused on how the literary, cinematographic, and videographic *form* of an essay plays a constitutive role in the presentation of a discourse or an argument, as well as engaging the spectator in the co-enactment of a text or a work's interpretative labour and reflective structure. Moreover, it attempted to underline the important ways that new technological and cultural forms, that are a major theme of many of the texts and works presented above, have significantly shaped or remediated the essay form, as well as how this transformation is central to the essay's critical force; that is, its capacity to reflect on and critically intervene in the historical present. Fundamental here were the various ways literary and audio-visual practices and techniques of compilation, parataxis, and montage have been employed to constellate disparate text and image fragments, as well as how such practices have been revamped under new medium conditions and in new socio-historical contexts. Especially important for the essayistic practices of Godard and Farocki, as I explored in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, were their respective turns to working with video in the 1970s and 1990s, and how this lead to the creation of new spatialized forms of montage, as well as the construction of complex rhetorical and poetic image, text, and sound relations. While the historical narrative of this dissertation ends with Godard in 1999 and Farocki in 2004, these cutting off points are not to meant to suggest that either filmmaker stopped producing essayistic works or continued to experiment with new media technologies after these years. Godard's *Adieu au langage* [*Goodbye to Language*] (2014), for instance, which presents various essayistic reflections on language and communication, employs 3D technology to create a dimensional or stereoscopic form seeing that develops on his previous video experiments.[1] Farocki's four-part video installation *Parallel I-IV* (2012-2014), explores the history of computer generated animation (CGI), and what he terms the 'new constructivism' of video games, subjecting the latter's computer generated images to the same analytical method of historical interpretation that he applied to the cinematic and

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[1] See Rick Warner, 'Godard's Stereoscopic Essay: Thinking in and with *Adieu au langage*', in *The Global Auteur: The Politics of Authorships in 21st Century Cinema*, ed. Seung-hoon Jeong and Jeremi Szaniawski (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 61-78.

operational images in his videos and video installations.[2] Both *Adieu au language* and *Parallel* are representative of the uncertainty of the digital present in which they were made. 'Maybe the computer images will assume functions previously held by film', the voice-over commentary postulates near the end of *Parallel I*. Yet rather than 'simply clamoring for a facelift', both works present attempts to critically work through what these new mediums and technologies do and do not do, testing their limits and putting them in constant tension with a thinking about and with images permeated by Godard's and Farocki's respective engagements with the history of cinema, with all its 'gaps and holes, necessary hollows and superfluous plentitude, forever missing images and always defective gazes'.[3]

The impact of digital technology on essayistic audio-visual practices has been significant, and while any sustained consideration of its effects is outside the scope of this dissertation, I want to use to this conclusion to reflect on a number of issues that were raised in the preceding chapters, and how they might have been affected by such technological and cultural shifts. As Laura Mulvey outlines in *Death 24x a Second* (2006), advances in new media technologies for watching films, from the VHS and DVD player, to the digital file viewed on a computer or laptop, has 'opened up new ways of seeing old movies', giving both 'film scholar' and 'film fan' the capacity to slow down, freeze, and repeat a particular shot or sequence for closer examination and analysis – a capability that has manifestly informed this dissertation.[4] As was the case with the introduction of VHS, digitalization has

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[2] See Erika Balsom, 'A World Beyond Control', *La Furia Umana* 23 (Spring, 2015): http://www.lafuriaumana.it/index.php/56-lfu-23/358-erika-balsom-a-world-beyond-control.

[3] Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, p. 8; Serge Daney, 'The Tracking Shot in *Kapo*' (1992), in *Postcards from the Cinema*, trans. Paul Douglas Grant (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), p. 25. Like Daney, Godard and Farocki's late works could be said to present a thinking about and with images that was acquired from their respective engagements with the history of cinema, and which persists in a 'world "without cinema"'; in a world and media environment, as Daney puts it, 'where, alterity having more or less disappeared, there are no longer good or bad ways to manipulate images'. Ibid, p. 34

[4] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 8. For Mulvey, the abilty to pause and slow down the image gives rise to a 'possessive' and 'pensive' form of spectatorship. Whereas the former designates a fetishistic absorption in the image of the human body, the

given rise to a preoccupation with cinema history, which can be witnessed in the rapid growth over the past several years in the 'digital audio-visual essay'. Employed predominantly by film academics and critics to present research or criticism in an audio-visual format, and released on online platforms such as the film and media studies journal *[in]Transition* or the 'video essay' section on the *Sight & Sound* magazine's website, the digital audio-visual essay presents a belated realization of Pertsov's proposal in the late 1920s for the 'film-as-review'.[5] The latter has been fueled by the rise in popularity of video-sharing websites, and is often indistinguishable from amateur forms of online fan culture and other sampling and remix practices.[6] Yet despite such technological advances, the 'rhetorical and presentational' modes and forms that such audio-visual criticism takes, as Christian Keathley contends, has remained 'largely unchanged'. Rather than present novel or experimental relations between image, text, and sound, that is, criticism in such works is primarily rendered in the form of an explanatory (spoken or written) commentary.[7] Instead of – as we saw with Farocki's *ekphrastic* commentaries or Godard's poetic montage of image and sound – staging an interstice between word and image that opens the image up to different socio-historical readings, such audio-visual texts tend to habitually slip into familiar patterns of interpreting and presenting images, which consequently serve to close down their meaning.[8]

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latter, recalling Barthes's reflections on photography in *Camera Lucida*, is concerned with a form of pensive meditation on the visibility of time and death in the cinematic image.

[5] For a good summary of these practices see Michael Witt, 'Taking Stock: Two Decades of Teaching the History, Theory, and Practice of Audiovisual Film Criticism', *Necsus* (Spring, 2017): https://necsus-ejms.org/taking-stock-two-decades-of-teaching-the-history-theory-and-practice-of-audiovisual-film-criticism/.

[6] It has also become a marketing strategy for film distribution companies such as The Criterion Collection, which commission 'video essays' to accompany their DVD releases.

[7] Christian Keathley, 'La Caméra-Stylo: Notes on Video Criticism and Cinephilia', in *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*, ed. Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 179.

[8] As Keathley notes, it 'is not just language that is at issue here, but the explanatory mode itself', which he contrasts with Godard's 'use of language (both spoken and written)' in *Histoire(s)*, wherein '[e]xplanation vies with poetics' in a montage of 'images and sounds, words and music', with explanation 'sometimes gaining the upper hand, [and] sometimes losing it'. Ibid., p. 181.

The 'arrival of digital video editing on "entry level" personal computers', as Victor Burgin observes in *The Remembered Film* (2004), 'exponentially expanded the range of possibilities for dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable objects offered by narrative cinema'.[9] Burgin makes these observations on the changing conditions of producing and consuming cinematic images in the context of a discussion of his gallery installation, *Listen to Britain* (2001), which incorporates a short sequence from the 1944 wartime mystery, *A Canterbury Tale*, around which Burgin weaves a number of reflections on memory and history.[10] Burgin's video installation is emblematic of the wider explosion of moving-image work within contemporary art spaces since the 1990s; a migration of film and video from the black box of the movie theatre to the white cube of the gallery and museum that was facilitated by widespread adoption of video projection. This migration, as Erika Balsom details, epitomized 'the new mutability and transportability of the moving images after digitization', and compromised 'what were once relatively rigid borders between the image-regimes of cinema and art'.[11] As we saw with Farocki's essayistic video installations, this new mutability has given rise to the proliferation of artists and filmmakers exploring installation formats that work with multiple projected image-tracks. Two recent paradigmatic instances here are John Akomfrah's forty-eight minute, three-screen installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015), and Isaac Julien's feature-length seven-screen installation *Playtime* (2013), both of which Alter sees as embodying the 'genre of the essay film'.[12] Yet

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[9] Victor Burgin, *The Remembered Film* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), p. 8.

[10] Ibid., pp. 18-22. Burgin's *Listen to Britain* is included as a DVD extra on the Criteion Collection release of *A Canterbury Tale*.

[11] Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), p. 11. For various considerations on how the dissolution of the institution of the cinema (as the primary space in which films are seen) by an array of new media configurations constitutes a new expanded field of possibilities for moving-image practices, see Gertrud Koch, Volker Pantenburg and Simon Rothöhler (eds), *Screen Dynamics: Mapping the Borders of Cinema* (Vienna: Synema: Gesselschaft für Film und Medien, 2012).

[12] Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction*, p. 286. The inspiration of Julien's *Playtime* supposedly came from Eisenstein's *Capital* project. Instead of attempting to articulate the abstract processes and impersonal relations of capitalism by working to formally transpose Marx's *method* (as Eisenstein wanted to do), however, *Playtime*, as Toscano and Kinkle note, resorts to simply '*repeating* the representational clichés through which we typify capitalism', presenting 'highly stylized "portraits" of a set of archetypal figures – the Art Dealer, the Bankrupt Artist, the Domestic Worker, the Auctioneer, the Hedge Fund Manager'. Toscano and Kinkle,

far from 'generating perplexing thematic correspondences and visual juxtapositions', as Alter claims of *Vertigo Sea*, both installations are suffused with what Toscano and Kinkle (in reference to *Playtime*) term 'an effulgent glossiness, a grit-less visual field familiar from advertising' and 'nature documentaries'.[13] Both installations, moreover, are devoid of montage in any critical sense of the term. There are no 'flashes of insight, no clashes of form and content, no unexpected connections'; rather, images are organized simply through a 'rhythmic alternation of shots', and their concatenation and juxtaposition softened by the 'continuity of ambient soundtracks'.[14] Both installations, it could be argued, are more representative of what Rancière terms 'the neo-symbolist and neo-humanist tendency of contemporary art', than the disruptive and critical montage experiments of Vertov, Eisenstein, Godard, and Farocki.[15]

A further important factor in the migration of moving-image into the art gallery and museum, as well as debates around the essay film, has been the increasing investment of art institutions in documentary practices in recent years (a phenomena often referred to as the 'documentary turn').[16] Whereas, as Balsom and Hila Peleg note, many artists' moving image practices of the 1990s 'were concerned with the image-repertoire of classical Hollywood cinema', this gradually gave way to heightened interest in the adoption of 'essayistic, ethnographic, archival, and observational strategies, that extend the traditions of documentary cinema in a new institutional context and an expanded field of aesthetic

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Cartographies of the Absolute, pp. 179-180. *Vertigo Sea* is comprised of disparate materials concerning the history of humanity's relationship to the sea, juxtaposing high definition depictions of nature, and portraits of individuals (in the style of Casper David Friedrich) standing in these sublime settings, archival images depicting phenomena such as twentieth century migration and whaling, and readings from various sea-themed literature.

[13] Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction*, p. 1; Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 178

[14] Toscano and Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, p. 182. Akomrah describes his aesthetic strategy as the attempt to create an 'affective proximity' between the various audio-visual materials his installation brings together.

[15] Rancière, 'Sentence, Image, History', p.67.

[16] Exemplary here are Catherine David's *documenta 10* (1997) and Okwui Enwezor's *documenta 11* (2002), as well as the biannual Berlin Documentary Forum (which took place at Berlin's Haus der Kulteren der Welt between 2010 and 2014).

possibilities'.[17] The field of documentary has been marked by the simultaneous 'threat and promise' of new digital technologies on image production and reproduction. Yet the threat of digitalization – namely, the ease and speed that a digital image can be manipulated and reconstructed in comparison to its photochemical correlate – should not to be conflated, as Alter does, with the 'loss of…the indexical signifier of "truth"' as such, which is what purportedly leads to various essayistic 'explorations into zones free from the notion that filmic images relay truth'.[18] As Roberts argues, digitalization does not destroy the truth-claims of the photographic index, but 'makes such claims an explicit condition of critical *reconstruction*'.[19] This condition was already central to the long history of positions (from Soviet Factography to Godard and Farocki) critiquing the idea of photography and film as transparently positivist mediums, as well as conceptions of the index formulated in strictly technological (rather than social and political) terms. If, as Hito Steyerl observes, the 'only thing we can say for sure about the documentary mode in our times, is that we always already doubt if it is true', the history of documentary (as Steyerl's writings on the subject attest) has never *not* been marked by multiple doubts and uncertainties.[20] The truth claims

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[17] Balsom and Hila Peleg, 'Introduction: The Documentary Attitude', p. 16. The increasing appearance of documentary practices within contemporary art has practical, economic determinations. 'Due to the increasing privatization of media and cuts in public funding', as Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl note, 'experimental documentary production' was 'increasingly pushed' from the cinema and television 'into the art field', with the art field consequently becoming 'a laboratory for the development of new documentary expressions'. See Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, 'Introduction: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art', in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), p. 14.

[18] Alter, *The Essay Film After Fact and Fiction*, p. 22.

[19] Roberts, *Photography and Its Violations*, p. 30.

[20] Hito Steyerl, 'Documentary Uncertainty', *Re-visiones* 1 (2001): http://re-visiones.net/anteriores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html. As Osborne suggests, the basic source of such anxieties around the loss of an indexical real that has accompanied the advent of digital photography has little to do with photography itself – 'artists (and others) have been intervening in the mechanisms of the photographic process since its inception'. Rather, 'it has to do with the nature of *the abstraction of social relations* characteristic of societies based on relations of exchange', wherein 'the most decisive sectors of the capitalist economy, associated with finance capital, are *not "real"*' – in the everyday empirical sense of being immediately perecepitble. It is this 'free-floating anxiousness about the real', and its connection with other kinds of modern uncertainties, 'that has "latched on" to digital photography as a cultural site in which to

of documentary images, as Steyerl notes elsewhere in relation to Soviet Factography, are not only 'produced', but perpetually 'unmade' (and remade) through the particular contexts in which images circulate and are interpreted.[21]

In 'The Essay As Conformism: Some Notes on Global Image Economies' (2011), Steyerl observes how the different methods of sourcing audio-visual materials for her works from the mid-to-late 2000s index the rapid transformations in the media technology that has taken place over this short period, transitioning from bootlegged VHS tapes and DVDs to torrent sharing websites such as Pirate Bay.[22] It is also over this period that the writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge integrated (through more legal avenues) digital media – DVDs and a Website – into his work with film and television. Exemplary of Kluge's employment of the DVD format is *News from Ideological Antiquity – Marx/Eisenstein/Capital* (2008), a work (consisting of three discs) that totals around nine hours in length, and which takes as its starting point Eisenstein's unrealized *Capital* project.[23] Like Kluge's television programmes, *News from Ideological Antiquity*, renounces the high production values of much contemporary moving-image work for the out of date aesthetics of early cinema and television, employing intertitles, iris masks, scrolling texts, fades, and garish graphics.[24] Kluge's DVDs and television programmes, which are typically based around interviews

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invest, because of the social importance but current epistemological uncertainty about the various documentary functions of photography'. Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, p. 128.

[21] Hito Steyerl, 'Truth Unmade: Productivism and Factography', *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies* (2009): http://eipcp.net/transversal/0910/steyerl/en.

[22] See Hito Steyerl, 'The Essay as Conformism: Some Notes on Global Image Economies', in *Essays on the Essay Film*, pp. 278-283.

[23] *News from Ideological Antiquity* is divided into three parts: I. Marx and Eisenstein in the Same House; II. All Things are Bewitched People; III. Paradoxes of Exchange Society. It is only the first part which deals with Eisenstein's *Capital* project. On *News from Ideological Antiquity* see Fredric Jameson, 'Marx and Montage', *New Left Review* 58 (July/Aug, 2009), pp. 109-117.

[24] Such strategies manifest Kluge's Benjaminian interest in the obstinacy and untapped potential of past cultural forms and media formats that are rendered instantly obsolete by the rapidity of technological innovation under capitalism, serving to work against the reality-effects instituted by the mass media (particularly cinema and television). For a good account of such strategies in Kluge's film and television work see Tara Forest, *Realism as Protest: Kluge, Schlingensief, Haneke* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015).

conducted by Kluge with intellectuals, artists, 'experts', and actors playing various personas, present a highly aleatory version of Eisenstein's constructivist montage of intellectual attractions. Presenting fragmentary and open 'construction sites', they are comprised of stylistically heterogeneous raw material gleaned from various sources (early cinema, books, the media), whose a bric-a-brac dynamic and informational overload intentionally keeps its discontinuous elements from too easily cohering.[25] Digital media has additionally provided Kluge with the means to archive and transcode his work with antecedent image mediums (analog and electronic); a 'recombintarory potential' that is exemplified by Kluge's online archive the 'Garden of Information', which gathers a segments from his television shows and re-constellates them under various thematic headings.[26] The potential of using online platforms to assemble audio-visual material in a database form has also been employed by Farocki and Antje Ehmann in their collective film project *Labour in a Single Shot* [*Eine Einstellung zur Arbeit*] (2011-2014), the online exhibition of which features an archive of multiple clips that can be sorted using various quasi-encyclopedic categories.[27]

The capacity afforded by digital technology to transcode, store and remediate older media formats has made the archive a key site of engagement for contemporary artists and

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[25] On the notion of the construction site in Kluge, which recalls Benjamin's reflections in *One-Way Street* (discussed in Chapter 1), see Eike Friedrich Wenzel 'Construction Site Film: Kluge's Idea of Realism and His Short Films', in *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*, ed. Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 173-190. While Kluge's film and television work has often been discussed in relation to the essay film, a large amount of Kluge's audio-visual texts are perhaps better considered as analytical stories and anecdotes, rather than essays. On Kluge's short stories see Andreas Huyssen, 'An Analytic Storyteller in the Course of Time', in ibid., pp. 271-281.

[26] Philipp Ekardt, 'Starry Skies and Frozen Lakes: Alexander Kluge's Digital Constellations', *October* 138 (Fall, 2011), p. 114; Cramer, *Utopian Television*, p. 230

[27] *Labour in a Single Shot* is the result of workshops conducted by Farocki and Ehmann in fifteen cities worldwide where participants were asked to make a film (lasting a maximum of two minutes in length) that addressed the topic of a labour in a single shot (i.e. with no cuts). In its online version, this archive of short films can be sorted by various themes – such as 'eye-work', 'muscle work', 'waiting', 'working at night' or 'working at height' – or by colour. These Borges-like configurative options could be read as attempting to point up the arbitrary (socio-historical) sorting of labour in capitalist societies into productive and nonproductive activity. See http://www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net/en/films/.

filmmakers.[28] Exemplary in this regard is The Arab Image Foundation, whose audio-visual material (primarily photographic) has served as material for a number artists working with the archive, including various video works by the artist (and co-founder of the foundation) Akram Zaatari. In Zaatari's work, the digitally remediated archive acquires its 'afterlife' through his *use* of archival materials to write and re-write the history of Lebanon (and the Arab World more generally); a form of historical constructivism that sets images of the past in relation with the particular 'now' of the work.[29] It is, notably, this critical relation to historical documents, which reflects on the present from which they are viewed, that is often missing from many contemporary archival film practices and archival video essays, which typically fetishize the archival material out which they are composed, transforming the latter into aesthetic objects. This is not to say that the signs of wear and other forms of damage (whether intentional or unintentional) do not give an insight into the *life* of archival images: the social and historical relations in which image-objects have circulated.[30] For while the transcoding of old media into the numerical code of the digital image has led to numerous ahistorical and aesthetic uses of archival imagery in contemporary art, abstracting images from their social functions or contexts, it also provides, as the work of Zaatari attests, the means to critically interrogate images, to bring to light the layers of historical information that an image distills, as well as to place images in new semantic constellations.[31] Yet the 'possibility of an easy and unproblematic retrieval' of archival

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[28] For a recent account of archival film and video practices see Catherine Russell, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2018).

[29] See Peter Osborne, 'Archive as Afterlife and Life of Art', in *The Postconceptual Condition*, p. 131. An important insipiration for Zaatari's film and video work, as Hannah Feldman points out, is Godard and Miéville's *Ici et ailleurs*. See Hannah Feldman and Akram Zaatari, 'Mining War: Fragments from a Convesation Already Passed', *Art Journal*, vol. 66, no. 2 (2007), p. 57.

[30] For a similar argument in relation to the life of digital images, and their degradation through circulation, see Hito Steyerl, 'In Defense of the Poor Image', in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 31-45.

[31] Exemplary of this formalist decontextualization of archival imargery in contemporary art is Christian Marclay's twenty-four-hour single-screen video installation, *The Clock* (2010), which is comprised of film and television clips that include visual references to time, which are ripped from their original narrative contexts and edited together to function as a clock. Richard Misek contrasts this formalist and self-referential use of film images with the documentary, *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), in which Thom Andersen, using a similar

images afforded by digital technology can also occlude the 'currents of power' that underlie the new media archive.[32] In Adam Curtis's various historical documentaries, whose illustrative image-tracks are made up of footage gleaned from the BBC archive, for instance, the partisan perspectives and absences that constitute his archival material is never considered. Historical narration in Curtis's pictorial histories becomes simply a matter of 'appealing to the silent authority of the archive', and of linking documents into a 'seamless account'.[33]

It is, perhaps, Steyerl's essayistic documentaries, which often focus on the ever-changing image conditions of the present, that offer the most interesting development of the essay film in recent years. Influenced by, among others, filmmakers such as Godard and Farocki, her videos and video installations typically endeavour to trace the social and historical networks of relations that become manifest when searching for an image (*Journal No. 1 – An Artist's Impression* [2007], *Lovely Andrea* [2008]), an individual (*November* [2004], *Abstract* [2012]), or a material object (*In Free Fall* [2010], *Adorno's Grey* [2012]).[34] Like her literary essays, Steyerl's moving-image work typically employs word-play and metaphoric montage, approaching various subjects through a constantly shifting set of parallaxes, ascertaining the meaning of a word, an image, or phenomena by examining its use or appearance in 'continually changing contexts'.[35] The laconic and fragmentary form of Steyerl's essays – the content of which ranges from contemporary art and post-Fordist labour practices, to technological warfare and the Internet – reflect the predominant

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mode of historical observation to Farocki's archival video essays, narrates the history of the city of Los Angeles through its representations by Hollywood fiction film. See Richard Misek, 'Trespassing Hollywood: Property, Space, and the "Appropriation Film"', *October* 153 (Summer, 2015), pp. 132-148.

[32] Sekula, 'Reading an Archive', pp. 447, 445. Sekula is here discussing the photographic archive. On the work of Adam Curtis, see Owen Hatherley, 'And then the Strangest Thing Happened: What is Adam Curtis Doing?', *N+1* magazine (March, 2017): https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/and-then-the-strangest-thing-happened/.

[33] Sekula, 'Reading an Archive', p. 447

[34] For a collection of essays on Steyerl's work, see Hito Steyerl, *Too Much World: The Films of Hito Steyerl*, ed. Nick Aikens (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).

[35] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 13.

experience of reading essays and articles online today (which is where most of Steyerl's texts are first published), presenting hypertext-like links and paratactic leaps between disparate topics and fragments of information.[36] Like her essays and lecture performances, Steyerl's videos and video installations incorporate widely disjunct kinds of material – documentary footage (shot on different devices), archival images, cinematic clips, online videos, and popular music. They also commonly foreground Steyerl's own performative presence (whether as body or voice) in the work, exhibiting a humour and playfulness that, in recent years, has bordered on what Ngai describes as the hyperactive and vertiginous aesthetic of the 'zany'.[37]

In her two-channel installation *Abstract* (2012), by contrast, Steyerl combines her penchant for metaphoric word play and performative self-inscription with a formally restrained mode of spatial montage, reminiscent of Farocki's essayistic video installations. As with Farocki, furthermore, *Abstract* draws on the principle of the shot/counter-shot to generate a series of linguistic and economic interconnections between images of a battlefield taken in south eastern Turkey, where Steyerl's friend and longtime subject of her films, Andrea Wolf, was executed in 1998 while fighting for the PKK, and images of Lockheed Martin's Berlin headquarters, the company that manufactured the ammunition cases found on the battlefield, and which were sold by the German government to the Turkish military (Figure 49).[38] The cinematic 'grammar' of the shot/countershot becomes a simple but effective means to reflect on how the 'grammar of battle' (the literal *shooting* of an individual person) – a phenomena that is typically *abstracted* from any social or historical context – is

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[36] For a recent collection of essays see Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (London and New York: Verso, 2017). In the online version of many of her essays (most of which are published by the journal e-flux), Steyerl incorporates hyperlinks, as well as other elements, such as images, gifs, and videos from youtube. For a more critical take on Steyerl's hypertext-like form of essay writing, see Hal Foster, 'Smash the Screen', *London Review of Books*, vol. 40, no. 7 (April, 2018), pp. 40-41.

[37] Steyerl's zany aesthetic is exemplified by her video installation *Factory of the Sun* (2015), which was first shown at the German Pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale.

[38] Steyerl incorporates *Abstract* into her lecture performance, *Is the Museum a Battlefield?*, first delivered at the Istanbul Biennial in September 2013.

Figure 49. *Abstract*

fundamentally entangled in a network of *abstract*, global relations.[39] The works laconic form – it is around seven and a half minutes in length, with the commentary presented as a series of epigrammatic intertitles – can be read as adapting itself to the distracted reception of contemporary gallery and museum spectatorship, as well the everyday consumption of images, which has, in recent years, been marked by the increasing ubiquity of consumer devices to take and view images on, most notably smartphones – in *Abstract* we see Steyerl pointing her iphone camera at Lockheed Martin's headquarters, while on the screen plays footage depicting the battlefield in Turkey.[40] The distracted reception of contemporary

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[39] Steyerl's montage method in *Abstract* takes us back to Eisenstein's 1929 essay, 'Perspectives', in which Eisenstein extends the cinematic metaphor of the cut to describe the individually static standpoint that views depicted phenomena in isolation (i.e. cut out, or *abstracted*) from their social and economic context, and which he contrasts with the Marxist method of disclosure, which attempts to construct an image [*obraz*] from a 'socially active standpoint', that '"discloses", i.e. establishes a social link' between the phenomena depicted. Eisenstein, 'Perspectives', in *SW 1*, p. 154.

[40] As Osborne notes of the distracted reception of viewing film and video art in gallery and museum spaces, 'the form of collectivity here is very far from that of the cinematic masses of Kracauer's picture palaces; it is a privatized, serial, small group affair. The work has only a short time to engage, and immobilize, the sampling viewer, by imposing its image and rhythm…before they move off and out to the next distraction'. Osborne,

video art and the everyday refraction of images through multiple screens is thus used by Steyerl to open such conditions up to a complex series spatio-temporal relations and to a 'reflective and transfigurative view'.[41]

In 'The Essay As Conformism', Steyerl asks whether the 'discontinuous and heterogeneous form [of the essay and essay film] is still capable of providing alternative forms of vision, knowledge, and grounds for discussion', rather than simply mirroring 'contemporary global forms of production'.[42] 'Obviously it is', she answers. Yet whether an essay or essay film can articulate its various materials into critical constellations that work to disrupt 'movements of thought' and to 'undermine the status of images and sounds as mere commodities', is, as Steyerl underlines, not (and never was) a given.[43] This is, as Adorno contends, the 'daring, anticipatory, and not fully redeemed aspect' of 'truth' that resides in 'every essayistic detail', the 'untruth' of which the essay must 'knowingly entangle itself' if it is to continue to be, as Adorno once claimed, a 'critical form par excellence'.[44]

Anywhere or Not At All, p. 189. On the way that the iphone has transformed how images are consumed, as well as its recalibration of hand, eye, and attention, see Evan Calder Williams, *Shard Cinema* (London: Repeater Books), pp. 35-57.

[41] Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, p. 189.

[42] Steyerl, 'The Essay as Conformism', pp. 278, 277.

[43] Ibid, p. 278. By engaging 'social, cultural, and political predicaments from the *inside*', and performing 'a "dialectical mimesis" that must "repeat" what it would "reliquify" or redeem', Steyerl's essays and video essays expose themselves to the constitutive danger of all immanently critical methods. The necessary *risk* of this immanent method, as Helmling notes, is that of 'reinforcing' or 'replicating' the very conditions that the critic sets out to critique. Helmling, *Adorno's Poetics of Critique*, p. 131. It is this failure that Lukács ascribes to modernism, and Foster to Steyerl's critical writings.

[44] Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', pp. 19, 18.

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---------- *Oktyabr* [*October*], 1928, 142 min, b/w, silent
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---------- *Über Song of Ceylon*, 1975, 25 min, colour
---------- *Erzählen* [*About Narration*], co-dir. Ingemo Engström, 1975, 58 min, 16mm, colour
---------- *Zwischen Zwei Kriegeni* [*Between Two Wars*], 1978, 83 min, 16mm, b/w
---------- *Industrie und Fotografie* [*Industry and Photography*], 1979, 44 min, 35mm, b/w
---------- *Zur Ansicht: Peter Weiss* [*On Display: Peter Weiss*], 1979, 44 min, 16mm, colour
---------- *Etwas wird sichtbar* [*Before Your Eyes – Vietnam*], 1982, 114 min, 35mm, b/w
---------- *Ein Bild* [*An Image*], 1983, 25 min, 16mm, colour
---------- *Wie man sieht* [*As You See*], 1986, 72 min, 16mm, colour
---------- *Schlagworte, Schlagbilder: Eine Gespräch mit Vilém Flusser*, 1986, 13 min, video, colour
---------- *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* [*Images of the World and the Inscription of War*], 1988, 75 min, 1988, 16mm, colour
---------- *Videogramme einer Revolution* [*Videograms of a Revolution*], co-dir. Andrei Ujica, 1992, 106 min, video transferred to 16mm, colour
---------- *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* [*Workers Leaving the Factory*], 1995, 36 min, video, colour
---------- *Schnittstelle* [*Interface*], 1995, 23 min, video installation (two-channel), colour
---------- *Stilleben* [*Still Life*], 1997, 56 min, 16mm, colour
---------- *Der Ausdruck der Hände* [*The Expression of Hands*], 1997, 30 min, video, colour
---------- *Gefängnisbilder* [*Prison Images*], 2000, 60 min, video, colour
---------- *Ich glaubte Gefangene zu sehen* [*I Thought I was Seeing Convicts*], 2000, 23 min, video installation (two-channel), colour
---------- *Auge/Maschine I* [*Eye/Machine I*], 2000, 23 min, video installation (two-channel), colour
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---------- *Auge/Maschine III* [*Eye/Maschine III*], 2003, 25 min, video installation (two-channel), colour
---------- *Erkennen and Verfolgen* [*War at a Distance*], 2003, 58 min, video, colour
---------- *Gegen-Musik* [*Counter Music*], 2004, 23 min, video installation (two-channel), colour
---------- *Zur Bauweise des Films bei Griffith* [*On Construction in Griffith's Films*], 2006, 9 min, video installation (two-channel), b/w, silent
---------- *Aufschub* [*Respite*], 2007, 40 min, video, b/w, silent
---------- *Vergleich über ein Drittes* [*Comparison via a Third*], 2007, 24 min, 16 mm double projection, colour
---------- *Deep Play*, 2007, 135 min, video installation (twelve-channels), colour
---------- *Serious Games III: Immersion*, 2009, 20 min, video installation (two-channels), colour
---------- *Serious Games I: Watson is Down*, 2010, 8 min, video installation (two-channels), colour
---------- *Serious Games II: Three Dead*, 2010, 8 min, video installation (two-channels), colour
---------- *Serous Games IV: A Sun Without Shadow*, 2010, 8 min, video installation (two-channels), colour

---------- *Das Silber und das Kreuz* [*The Silver and the Cross*], 2010, 17 min, video installation (two-channels), colour

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---------- *Parallel II*, 2014, 9 min, video, colour

---------- *Parallel III*, 2014, 7 min, video, colour

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---------- *La Chinoise* [*The Chinese*], 1967, 95 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *Camera Eye* (episode in *Loin du Vietnam* [*Far From Vietnam*]), 1967, 11 min, 16mm, colour

---------- *Film-tracts*, 1968, 2-4 min. each, 16mm, b/w

---------- *Le gai savoir* [*The Joy of Knowledge*], 1968, 95 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *One Plus One*, 1968, 99 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *British Sounds (aka See You at Mao)*, co-dir. Jean-Henri Roger, 1969, 52 min, 16mm, colour

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---------- *Vent d'est* [*Wind From the East*], Dziga Vertov Group, 1969, 100 min, 16mm colour

---------- *Lotte in Italia* [*Struggles in Italy*], Dziga Vertov Group, 1970, 60 min, 16mm, colour

---------- *Tout va bien* [*All's Well*], co-dir. Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972, 95 min, 35mm, colour

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---------- *Ici et ailleurs* [*Here and Elsewhere*], co-dir. Anne-Marie Miéville, 1974, 53 min, 16 mm and video, colour

---------- *Numéro deux* [*Number Two*], 1975, 88 min, 35mm and video, colour

---------- *Comment ça va* [*How Is It Going?*], co-dir. Anne-Marie Miéville, 1976, 78 min, 16mm and video, colour

---------- *Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie): Quelques remarques sur la réalisation et la production du film* [*Scenario for Sauve qui peut (la vie): A Few Remarks on the Making and Production of the Film*], 1979, 21 min, video, colour

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---------- *Lettre à Freddy Buache: À propos d'un court-métrage sur la ville de Lausanne* [*Letter to Freddy Buache: About a Short Film on the Town of Laussanne*], 1981, 11 min, video transferred to 35 mm, colour

---------- *Passion*, 1982, 87 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *Scénario du film Passion* [*Scenario of the Film Passion*], 1982, 53 min, video, colour

---------- *Changer d'image* [*To Change an Image*], 1982, 10 min, video, colour

---------- *Prénom Carmen* [*First Name: Carmen*], 1983, 83 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *Petites notes à propos du film Je vous salue, Marie* [*Little notes about the film Je vous salue, Marie*], 1983, 20 min, video, colour

---------- *Je vous salue, Marie* [*Hail Mary*], 1985, 78 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *Soft and Hard: Soft Talk on a Hard Subject Between Two Friends*, co-dir. Anne-Marie Miéville, 1985, 52 min, video, colour

---------- *King Lear*, 1987, 90 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *Puissance de la parole* [*The Power of Words*], 1988, 25 min, video, colour

---------- *Nouvelle vague* [*New Wave*], 1990, 89 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *Allemagne année 90 neuf zéro* [*Germany Year 90 Nine Zero*], 1991, 62 min, 35mm, colour

---------- *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* [*The Kids Play Russian*], 1993, 58 min, video, colour

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- 1A *Toutes les histoires* [*All the (hi)stories*], 50 min
- 1B *Une histoire seule* [*A Solitary (hi)story*], 41 min
- 2A *Seule le cinéma* [*The Cinema Alone*], 26 min
- 2B *Fatale beauté* [*Fatal Beauty*], 28 min
- 3A *La monnaie de l'absolu* [*Aftermath of the Absolute*], 26 min
- 3B *Une vague nouvelle* [*A New Wave*], 27 min
- 4A *Le contrôle de l'univers* [*The Control of the Universe*], 27 min
- 4B *Les signes parmi nous* [*The Signs Amongst Us*], 37 min

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---------- *Moments choisis des Histoire(s) du cinéma* [*Selected Moments of Histoire(s) du cinéma*], 2001, 84 min, video transferred to 35mm, colour

---------- *Adieu au langage* [*Goodbye to Language*], 2014, 70 mins, 3D video, colour

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---------- *Leninskaia Kinopravda: Kinopoema o Lenine* [*Leninist Kinopravda: A Film Poem of Lenin*, 1925, 29 min, b/w, silent

---------- *Kinoglaz na pervoi razvedke: pervaia seriia tsikla "Zhizn vrasplokh"* [*Kino-Eye on Its First Reconnaissance: First Episode of the Cycle "Life Off-Guard"*, 1924, 78 min, b/w, silent

---------- *Shagai, Sovet!* [*Stride, Soviet!*], 1926, 65min, b/w, silent

---------- *Shestaia chast mira* [*A Sixth Part of the World*], 1926, 68 min, b/w, silent

---------- *Odinnadtsatyi* [*The Eleventh Year*], 1928, 52 min, b/w, silent

---------- *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* [*Man with a Movie Camera*], 1929, 68 min, b/w, silent

---------- *Entuziazm: Simfoniya Donbassa* [*Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass*], 1931, 67 min, b/w