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# CINÉMA&CIE

INTERNATIONAL FILM STUDIES JOURNAL

**Mediatic Handology:  
Shaping Images, Interacting, Magicking**

Edited by

Ada Ackerman, Barbara Grespi and Andrea Pinotti

**MIMESIS**  
INTERNATIONAL

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## Mediatic Handology?\*

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### *Abstract*

A chirocentric model of thinking, an alternative to the notorious oculo-centric line which is widely questioned today, appeared in philosophy from the very beginning. The idea of the hand as our major instrument of thinking comes from Anaxagoras and reaches Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, who reconfigured the philosophical agenda around this organ's qualities. The theme of image making is crucial in this trend of thought, while artists from all ages and cultures have always expressed their sheer fascination for the motif of the hand as the conditioning agent of their creative activity. In the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin set up a philosophy of visual media which did not rely upon the optic qualities of the moving images, but on their haptic ones. The hand, after all, took central stage in the imaginary throughout the previous century: hands in X-rays, palms in modern chiromancy, fingers in the newly born *chirognomonie*, imprints in art, disembodied hands featuring autonomous characters in cinema. Together with these images, another idea of the thinking hand emerged, not only connected with the sense of touch or with craftsmanship, but also with expressive gestures, conveying affect, desire as well as imaginative power. Do we need a handology to survey the many lives of the hand in our culture and fully understand the *digital* turn within the so-called deep time of the media?

Jean-Luc Godard, whose films have always featured image manipulations (from Latin *manus*), opens *The Image Book* (*Le Livre d'image*, 2018) with the following affirmation: 'There are the five senses, the five parts of the worlds, the five fingers of the fairy. All together, they compose the hand, and the real condition of Man is to think with his hands'. Godard's statement has to be understood in the light of

\* Although this introductory essay is the result of a joint effort between the three authors, the lead authorship responsibility was shared between § 1 *Chirocentrism* (Andrea Pinotti), § 2 *The Artistic Hand* (Ada Ackerman) and § 3 *The Hand as Medium* (Barbara Grespi). This essay is the result of research activities developed within the frame of the project AN-ICON. *An-iconology. History, Theory, and Practices of Environmental images*. AN-ICON has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. [834033 AN-ICON]), hosted by the Department of Philosophy "Piero Martinetti" (Project "Departments of Excellence 2018-2022" awarded by the Ministry of Education, University and Research).

a long tradition, which can be labelled as chirocentric, and which assigns to the hand a core function in the human being's evolution as such and a fundamental role in the constitution of human experience: in respect not only to sensibility (which would be rather obvious), but also to our capacity of thinking. Rooted in ancient Greek philosophy, this 'chirocentric' model underscores the sense of touch in the creation of images as well as in their apprehension and reception, and as such, is influential in various media theories, especially the ones dealing with the moving image, in which the inclusion of a haptic paradigm challenges the presumed supremacy of the visual sense. As Emmanuelle André postulates: 'In films, it is the hands which reconfigure the practices of gaze and which crystallize historical, technical and ideological transformations of our ways to see'.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the 'chirocentric' model enables to shed light on the role of the hand within mediatic apparatuses and economies; that is not only to look at the hand as a medium between the human being and its environment, but also to handle the hand in its connections with various media.

### *Chirocentrism*

The notorious oculo-centrism, which would have affected our culture for centuries starting from the Greek *theoria* (a word cognate to the verb *theomai*, view, watch, observe, gaze, contemplate), appears actually besieged from the very beginning by an alternative model, that of chirocentrism.

From pre-Socratic philosophy down to contemporary theorists of enactivism and material engagement,<sup>2</sup> a seemingly uninterrupted line insists on the intimate and deep connection between manual skills, humanity, and rationality: a connection which is also confirmed by the close etymological roots of the terms 'perception' (from the Latin *per*, 'thoroughly' + *capere*, 'to grasp, take') and 'concept' (from the Latin *cum-capio*, 'to gather together'),<sup>3</sup> which refer both to a manual gesture.

The line linking hand and thought is indeed continuous, but far from being one-directional. As Aristotle shows in his *Parts of Animals* (687a), a two-way interpretation of this link is actually possible: 'It is the opinion of Anaxagoras that the possession of these hands is the cause of man being of all animals the most intelligent. But it is more rational to suppose that man has hands because of his superior intelligence'.<sup>4</sup> The Stagirite suggests inverting the cause-effect relation established by his precursor Anaxagoras, calling for a 'spiritualistic'

<sup>1</sup> Emmanuelle André, *L'Œil détourné: Mains et imaginaires tactiles au cinéma* (Paris: De l'incidence, 2020), p. 9 (our translation).

<sup>2</sup> See Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London, UK: Routledge, 2013); Maria Danae Koukouti and Lambros Malafouris, *Material Imagination: An Anthropological Perspective*, ed. by Anna Abraham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 30–46.

<sup>3</sup> The same can be said for the German *Begriff* (concept), from the verb *greifen* (to grasp).

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *The Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 2340.

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priority of the intelligence over the body. Nowadays, thanks to the achievements in anthropology and evolutionary theory, we are, on the contrary, ready to recognize the brilliant insight of the ‘materialist’ pre-Socratic: it was through a certain development of the bodily configuration in general, and of the hands in particular, that the human being could become the rational being.

Nevertheless, if we consider his treatise *On the Soul* (432a1), Aristotle’s argument seems subtler, since he abandons his preoccupations about the priority to be established between hands and intelligence, coming to a (much more interesting) ‘analogical’ interpretation of their relation: ‘It follows that the soul is analogous (*hospēr*) to the hand; for as the hand is a tool of tools, so thought is the form of forms and sense the form of sensible things’.<sup>5</sup> In proposing such a connection, Aristotle at the same time seems to implicitly criticize the identification of thinking as a kind of seeing that had characterized the gnoseology of his master Plato. On the contrary, in Aristotle’s treatise it is the hand and touching in general that becomes a sort of meta-*organon*, which explains not only how the soul operates, but also how the other senses function: taste, smell, hearing, even seeing are interpreted as a kind of tactile contact between the stimuli and the correspondent sensory medium.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 1: Emblema XVI. From Andrea Alciati, *Emblemata* (Paris: Rouille 1566), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 1501.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley H. Rosen, ‘Thought and Touch: A Note on Aristotle’s “De Anima”’, *Phronesis*, 6.2 (1961), 127–37; Christopher P. Long, *On Touch and Life in the De Anima*, in *Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Sight*, ed. by Antonio Cimino and Pavlos Kontos (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 69–94.

This passage of *On the Soul* identifying the hand as a sort of meta-tool has laid the foundations of a solid tradition: ‘*organo de gl’organi*’ (organ of the organs),<sup>8</sup> as Giordano Bruno would have put it in his *Cabala of Pegasus* (1585). In Aristotle’s and Bruno’s wake, in his *Encyclopaedia* (1817, 1827<sup>2</sup>, 1830<sup>3</sup>) Hegel defines the hand as ‘*absolutes Werkzeug*’ (the absolute instrument).<sup>9</sup>

However, such absolute character implies an internal duplicity, that of counter-laterality. According to Kant, the human capacity to find the proper orientation in the world (including reasoning and conceptualizing) ultimately rests on a distinction rooted in the body and in its organic structure, and precisely in being ‘able to feel a difference within my own subject, namely that between my right and left hands’.<sup>10</sup> This crucial difference informs the most various aspects of human existence (think of the religious<sup>11</sup> and political symbolism related to the polarity left/right), and also of the extra-human world (if we think of Louis Pasteur’s discovery of stereochemical properties of the molecules, what later would have been called ‘chirality’ — from the Greek *kheir*, hand).<sup>12</sup> A famous fan of Pasteur, Isaac Asimov, went as far as to imagine a ‘new world’ in which laevorotatory and dextrorotatory are inverted while maintaining the same composition.<sup>13</sup>

In contemporary philosophy, Heidegger transforms the hand into a fundamental ontological category: in § 15 of his *Being and Time* he defines the class of instruments (*Zeug*) precisely with reference to their manipulability and to the dynamic gesture needed to perform the correspondent action: ‘The hammering itself uncovers the specific “manipulability” [*Handlichkeit*] of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses — in which it manifests itself in its own right — we call “readiness-to-hand” [*Zuhandenheit*].’<sup>14</sup> Later on, in his 1951–52 Freiburg course *What is called Thinking?*, he goes as far as to suggest that ‘thinking, too, is just something like building a cabinet. At any rate, it is a craft, a “handicraft” [*Hand-Werk*]. “Craft” literally means the strength and skill in our hands’.<sup>15</sup> In his essay *Heidegger’s Hands*, Derrida has effectively exposed the political and ideological implications of this approach.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See the concise reconstruction offered by Maurizio Ferraris, *Estetica razionale* (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 1997), pp. 288–95 (§ “Lo strumento assoluto”).

<sup>8</sup> Giordano Bruno, *The Cabala of Pegasus* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Georg W.Fr. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), vol. 3/3, p. 23 (§ 411).

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, ‘What is Orientation in Thinking?’ (1786), in Kant: *Political Writings* ed. by Hans S. Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 237–49 (p. 238).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Hertz, ‘The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity’ (1909), in *Death and the Right Hand* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 89–113.

<sup>12</sup> Louis Pasteur, ‘On the Asymmetry of Naturally Occurring Organic Compounds’ (1860), in *The Foundations of Stereochemistry: Memoirs by Pasteur*, ed. by George Mann Richardson, Jacobus van’t Hoff, Joseph Achille Le Bel and Johannes Wislicenus (New York: American Book Co., 1901), pp. 1–33.

<sup>13</sup> Isaac Asimov, *The Left Hand of the Electron* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1927) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. II (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 27–62.

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In his turn, Merleau-Ponty moves from the major premise that ‘consciousness is in the first place not a matter of “I think that” but of “I can”’ (‘My body is wherever there is something to be done’). In this performative context, hands set once again the model for actability in general: ‘I can therefore take my place, through the medium of my body as the potential source of a certain number of familiar actions, in my environment conceived as a set of *manipulanda* and without, moreover, envisaging my body or my surrounding as objects’.<sup>17</sup>

It is therefore no surprise that in recent research on the neural circuits implied in movements and intentions of prehension (particularly the so-called ‘canonical neurons’ situated in the pre-motor areas and activated in reference to objects that show a potential graspability), neuroscientists like Vittorio Gallese have found a remarkable convergence between the results of their experiments and the conceptualizations offered by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.<sup>18</sup>

Hands and touching have received significant attention from philosophers also in the post-phenomenological phase, especially in the context of French theory, which has been engaged in what Martin Jay calls the ‘denigration of vision’ and of the oculo-centric paradigm:<sup>19</sup> to mention only a couple of names, we should not forget here Derrida and Nancy.<sup>20</sup>

It would be nevertheless wrong to unilaterally stress the fundamental importance of the hand by isolating this organ from the whole bodily framework, and particularly from the upright position. In a fascinating essay in philosophical anthropology devoted to the human achievement (both phylogenetically and ontogenetically, for the species and for each newly born child) of the upright posture, phenomenological psychiatrist Erwin Straus has argued that anatomic determinations directly condition spiritual dispositions: the expression ‘to be upright’ can refer both to physical and to moral properties of a subject. As regards our point here, he remarks in particular that ‘in upright posture, the frontal extremities are no longer asked to support and carry the body. Relieved from former duties; they are free for new tasks’.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 159–291 and 120.

<sup>18</sup> See Vittorio Gallese, ‘Mirror Neurons and the Neural Exploitation Hypothesis: From Embodied Simulation to Social Cognition’, in *Mirror Neuron Systems*, ed. by Jaime A. Pineda (New York, NY: Humana Press, 2009), pp. 163–190; Vittorio Gallese, Michele Guerra, *The Empathic Screen: Cinema and Neuroscience* (2015) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 24–27.

<sup>19</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Touching: Jean-Luc Nancy* (2000) (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005); Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli Me Tangere: On the Raising of the Body* (2003) (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Erwin Straus, ‘The Upright Posture’ (1949), in *Phenomenological Psychology* (London: Tavistock, 1966), pp. 137–65 (p. 149).

Among these new tasks we should certainly number the practices of image production: *Homo sapiens* as *Homo Pictor*, as Hans Jonas would put it.<sup>22</sup> Since ancestral times hands have constituted both the bodily condition of possibility of pictorial representation and one of their favourite subjects. A striking example is provided by the hand stencils realized during the Upper Palaeolithic Period: the oldest (around 37,900 BCE) instances have been found in a cave of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi.<sup>23</sup> Either in the form of positive handprints (obtained by directly painting the hands — mostly in red, white, or black — and then applying the pigment to the rock surface) or in the form of negative hand stencils (by placing the hand on the rock and emphasizing its contours by spraying or spitting the pigment around it), such pictures appear to our eyes as a kind of prehistoric mirror stage (*à la Lacan*) of humanity: partial avatars of the archaic self, allowing self-recognition and at the same time self-duplication. The illumination provided by the flickering lights of the torches must have ensured a veritable cinematic dynamization of the whole: Baudry's analogy between the movie theatre and Plato's cave<sup>24</sup> should therefore be reformulated in Palaeolithic terms.

Not only is the hand the condition of possibility and one of the favourite themes of image *making*; it is also a powerful tool for image *theories*. Long before the contemporary criticism raised against the above-mentioned oculo-centric paradigm and the acknowledgment that exclusively 'visual' media do not exist,<sup>25</sup> the conceptualization around images has had recourse to touching hands to understand our relations to pictures. During the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the newly born discipline of aesthetics saw the struggle around the aesthetic legitimacy of the sense of touch.

Unlike Kant, who wanted to exclude touching, because beauty of corporeal objects should be 'a thing for the eye only',<sup>26</sup> Herder (not by accident in a treatise devoted to sculpture) called for a kind of 'sense-specific' art system, in which every artistic form is exclusively offered to a single sensory channel: music to hearing, painting to seeing, sculpture to touching. Seeing a statue would mean destroying its experience. However, Herder's apparent radical plea for actual palpation of sculptures — which nowadays is promoted by museums for the blind — ultimately results in a much more attenuated metaphorization of touch,

<sup>22</sup> Hans Jonas, 'Homo Pictor and the Differentia of Man' (1961), *Social Research*, 29.2 (1962), 201–20.

<sup>23</sup> Maxime Aubert et al., 'Pleistocene Cave Art from Sulawesi, Indonesia', *Nature*, 514 (2014), 223–27.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, 'The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches To the Impression of Reality in Cinema' (1975), in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. by Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 299–318.

<sup>25</sup> William J.T. Mitchell, 'There Are No Visual Media', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 4.2 (2005), 257–66.

<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 152 (§ 5). Nietzsche sarcastically reacted against Kant's depreciation of touch in his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 74: 'Let us pay tribute to Kant for expounding the peculiarities of the sense of touch with the naïvety of a country parson!'

## Mediatic Handology?

which becomes a modality internal to seeing itself, thus surrendering to the ‘Look but don’t touch’ standard museological policy. The art lover contemplating a statue yearns to ‘transform his sight into touch, to make his seeing into a form of touching. [...] His eye becomes his hand’.<sup>27</sup>

This pivotal passage marks the birth of a perceptological model — that of the touching eye — that would have nourished the theories of visual arts in the following centuries. Another theorist of sculpture (and sculptor himself), Adolf von Hildebrand, provided such metaphor with a scientific base: drawing on Helmholtz’s studies on the accommodation of the crystalline lens, he distinguished between two modes of seeing: a vision at a distance (which offers the whole scene at a glance) and a vision in proximity (which develops progressively like in a sort of touching), respectively correlated to a distant image (*Fernbild*) and a near image (*Nahbild*).<sup>28</sup>

Hildebrand’s insights offered the perceptological basis for Bernard Berenson’s famous theory of ‘tactile values’, exposed in his study devoted to *The Florentine Painters* (1896): visual artists are truly artists only if they are able — like Giotto — to convey tactile stimuli of volume and tridimensionality through their bidimensional pictures.<sup>29</sup> Berenson’s view was critically discussed, among others, by Simmel and Merleau-Ponty.<sup>30</sup>

Other art historians employed Hildebrand’s distinction between two general modalities of seeing as a historical and stylistic property. Despite the fact that Wölfflin<sup>31</sup> and Riegl<sup>32</sup> investigated different artistic periods, both employed the couple ‘near vision/far vision’ to characterize the stylistic change: in the first term of the pair (Wölfflin’s Renaissance, Riegl’s Egypt), the eye, during the apprehension of the images, is tactily or haptically (from the Greek *hapto*: I touch) led by silhouettes and lines; in the second (Wölfflin’s Baroque, Riegl’s late Roman), it is guided in an exclusively optical way by the patches of colour and by the chiaroscuro. The idea of a connection between image production and reception on the one side and the sensory response (*aisthesis*) on the other

<sup>27</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion’s Creative Dream*, ed. by Jason Gaiger (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Adolf Hildebrand, ‘The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts’ (1893), in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. by Harry F. Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonou (Santa Monica, CA: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), pp. 227–29.

<sup>29</sup> See B. Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1896), pp. 4–7.

<sup>30</sup> See Georg Simmel, ‘On the Third Dimension in Art’ (1906), in *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, ed. by K. Peter Eitzkorn (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), pp. 86–90; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Eye and Mind’ (1960), in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 159–90 (p. 166).

<sup>31</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History* (1st ed., 1915) (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2015) (chapter 1: ‘The Linear and the Painterly’).

<sup>32</sup> Alois Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1985), pp. 19–31.

side points to a sort of iconic pragmatics: pictures that want to be explored closely as if they were offered to a palpation; and pictures that push away the beholder at the right distance.

As a pupil of Wölfflin and a passionate reader of Riegl, Walter Benjamin has famously picked up and relaunched this perceptological couple in his 1935–36 essay on art and reproduction, at the same time inverting the historical passage between the two terms. If for Wölfflin and Riegl the movement occurred from the linear/tactile towards the painterly/optical, Benjamin analysed the transformation in artistic reception as a change from bourgeois nineteenth-century concentration to modern distraction, as embodied in the film spectator. His description of the passage from aura to shock, from an optical contemplation to a tactile manipulation appears truly prophetic: in the thirties, Benjamin was already aware of the process of the progressive tactilisation of the image experience that today we fully recognize in the pervasive diffusion of touch screens: the digital age reveals its being deeply rooted in the *digitus* (Latin for finger).

Either through a direct debt towards Wölfflin and Riegl (it is for instance the case of Deleuze)<sup>33</sup> or through the mediation of Benjamin (as has happened for film theorists of the ‘haptic’ like Antonia Lant or Laura Marks),<sup>34</sup> the paradigm of touching has proved to be one the most effective tools for the conceptualization of our experience both of static and of moving images. As regards the latter, such effectiveness is eloquently underlined in this volume by Marie Martin’s contribution on films referring to sensory handicaps, Filippo Fimiani’s insights on the kinaesthetic relation between fingers and dance as represented in *Mad Men*, and Lucia Ruprecht’s exploration of Chantal Akerman’s documentary work on Pina Bausch’s choreography.

In addition to that, chirocentrism does not only affect theories about art and media. It also materializes in the very works of art themselves, through recurrent representations of hands, which have in turn grounded and fuelled the theoretical haptic concerns discussed above. Without pretending to survey exhaustively the gigantic corpus of represented hands within art history, it is necessary to single out some significant examples of this motif as it connects fine arts with cinema and contemporary mediatic practices. A continuous iconographic legacy therefore emerges, in which the hand is invested and celebrated as a crucial mediating agent between the Self and the world.

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981) (London-New York: Continuum, 2004), chapters 14, 15, and 17.

<sup>34</sup> See Antonia Lant, ‘Haptical Cinema’, *October*, 74 (1995), 45–73. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. xii and 22. See also her *Touch. Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, where the haptic is presented as a ‘feminist visual strategy’ (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 7.

## Mediatic Handology?

### *The Artistic Hand*<sup>35</sup>

According to Aristotle, the hand is the part of the body which singles out the specificity and superiority of humans over other animals, as the hand is endowed with a high plasticity allowing it to become, as we have seen before, a supra-tool:

For the most intelligent of animals is the one who would put the most organs to good use; and the hand is not to be looked on as one organ but as many; for it is, as it were, an instrument for further instruments. This instrument, therefore, — the hand — of all instruments the most variously serviceable, has been given by nature to man, the animal of all animals the most capable of acquiring the most varied arts. [...] For the hand is talon, hoof, and horn, at will. So too it is spear, and sword, and whatsoever other weapon or instrument you please; for all these can it be from its power of grasping and holding them all.<sup>36</sup>

Hands are the tool-organs which turn the human being into a *Homo Faber* able to transform matter and therefore to transcend and to ameliorate his original condition. From this transfiguring power stems the Greek myth of the Dactyls (*Daktyloi*), that is, little fabulous beings established in Phrygia and accredited with the discovery of iron and the art of working it with fire.<sup>37</sup> This myth is important as it highlights the role of hands in craftsmanship and in the evolution of civilisation, putting in question the balance between mind and hands in creative processes — an issue at stake in Francesco Clerici's documentary film, *Il gesto delle mani* (*Hand Gestures*, 2015), which relies upon cinema to pay homage to craft. As a matter of fact, if the human being is gifted with a superior intelligence, the latter would be of no use without the ability to affect and to rework his environment in a concrete fashion, thanks to his hands. Hence the inextricable connection between the hands and the mind that Paul Valéry establishes as he inverts the traditional submission of the manual sphere to the intellectual one: 'You must admit that hands are a really extraordinary appliance. [...] They're the all-purpose grippers! But what about the mind? It begins and ends in the fingertips.'<sup>38</sup> As such, the hand cannot be reduced to a mere utilitarian tool, no matter its level of refinement; it is also the organ through which the human being can indulge himself in an artistic activity and which can express one's sensitivity and one's worldview (*Weltanschauung*).

<sup>35</sup> As I was working on this part of the introduction, the Lebanese filmmaker and intellectual Lokman Slim was brutally murdered for his political involvement on 4 February 2021. I would like to dedicate him this text, since he was the author of the documentary film *Massacre* (*Massaker*, 2004), dealing with the Sabra and Shatila massacres, and which structure mainly revolves around the hands of the executioners.

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, pp. 2340–41.

<sup>37</sup> See 'Dactyli' in *A Classical Dictionary of Biography, Mythology and Geography, Based on the larger Dictionaries*, ed. by William Smith (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 205.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Valéry, 'Idée fixe ou deux Hommes à la mer' (1932), in *Idée fixe, The Complete Works of Paul Valéry*, vol. 5, trans. by Daniel Paul (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 54.

This is the argument followed by the French art historian Henri Focillon in his *Praise of Hands* (1934), in which he states that the hands and the mind are mutually constitutive of their respective power: ‘the mind rules over the hand; hand rules over mind’,<sup>39</sup> just as the mankind and its hands helped each other to access a higher stage of evolution : ‘Man has created his own hands — by which I mean he has gradually freed them from the animal world, released them from an ancient and innate servitude. But hands have also created man’.<sup>40</sup> It is all the more necessary to keep this reciprocal dynamic in mind, claims the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa, in our contemporary age in which so many practices are operated through virtual tools — be they *digital*, since those induce only an indirect mediation between the hand and the matter it transforms. In *The Thinking Hand* (2009), Pallasmaa advocates for the creative power of the hand and underscores its paramount role in evolution of human skills and conceptual faculties.<sup>41</sup> He promotes the tradition of craftsmanship as a remedy for our times against the effects of the increasing loss of the touch of the human hand in mechanically mass-produced products and networked societies. Calling for an ‘embodied thinking’ in creative practices, Pallasmaa surveys the productive modalities of the collaboration between the eye, the hand and the mind (already at stake in his previous *The Eyes of the Skin*, 1996).

It is no wonder then that, in a reflexive gesture about their practice, creators from all ages and cultures have expressed their sheer fascination and obsession for the motif of the hand as the conditioning organ of their artistic activity. Art history and thus history of visual culture could be unfolded along an exploration of the various types of representations of hands and of the functions they are invested of.

The most obvious type appears to be what could be labelled as the autonomous hand, detached from the rest of the body. Embodying the creative power of the human being, it becomes progressively a creature *per se*. As a matter of fact, many representations stage the hand as their main protagonist and as their exclusive topic. The first testimonies of a human artistic activity include prehistorical parietal handprints whose signification and function remain controversial (be they ornamental, ritual, magical, shamanistic...). They establish for the first time a coincidence between the artistic tool and the produced image, evidencing mankind’s discovery of its power to affect its environment.<sup>42</sup> These handprints function as a mark of a subject enunciating ‘I have been here’, a printed trace which can be read as a personal signature. This gesture has been repeated since then by numerous artists as an affirmation of their status as *creators* — such as, just to name a few, Wassily Kandinsky, Richard

<sup>39</sup> Henri Focillon, ‘In Praise of Hands’, in *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. by George Kubler (New York: Zone books, 1992), p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> Ivi, p. 161.

<sup>41</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Henri Breuil, Hugo Obermaier, *The Cave of Altamira at Santillana Del Mar* (1906) (Madrid: Tipografía de Archivos, 1935).

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Long or Andy Warhol (the latter playing of course on the reproducible aspect of the hand-as-stamp). Robert Filliou and Scott Hyde subverted the artist's handprint as a sign of this presumed elected condition in *Hand Show — The Key to Art?*, an exhibition presented in 1967 in the vitrines of New York's Tiffany store. Formed from an ensemble of twenty-four photolithographies labelled 'Prints of Artists' hands', the series which was published afterwards in a volume, gathered prints from the hands of various contemporary artists such as John Cage, Jasper Johns or Roy Lichtenstein. It was intended as an exploration of what distinguished artists from other people, with the conclusion that in the end, nothing in this collection of handprints would allow one to establish such a difference. Forty-one years earlier, Marcel Duchamp had also derided the tradition of the artistic handprint by including his fingerprint at the end of *Anemic Cinema* (1926). It was not only for him a means to highlight his manual involvement in the making of the film, but also a play with the associations that this index sign carried between artists and criminals. As a matter of fact, the fingerprint replaced the face in criminal investigation, at the turn of the twentieth century, and became thus the new paradigmatic identifying tool, the subject being deciphered in terms of traces, as Carlo Ginzburg has shown in his text dedicated to the 'semiotic paradigm'.<sup>43</sup>

Besides their handprints, artists have also represented hands as a topic *per se* in order to marvel at their creative power. Of that aspect Rodin's work is highly representative, as he has dedicated numerous sculptures to hands in action, and it is no wonder that he labelled one as *God's Hand or The Creation* (circa 1896), in which a demiurgic hand holds a piece of marble from which it is forming the figures of Adam and Eve. The power of the artist is thus invested with a demiurgic quality, in a traditional view of the artist pursuing God's Creation. Such an equivalence is also at the stake, for instance, in *The Constructor* (1924), a constructivist photomontage by El Lissitzky, in which the artist's self-portrait revolves around his hand handling a compass and on the center of which stands his eye. In a brilliant visual shortcut Lissitzky equates the power of the hand with that of the eye, while he celebrates the artist-builder as a new rational God. He reinvests here the theme of the demiurgic and almighty hand that he had encountered in the Mogilev synagogue, while he was studying Jewish folklore traditions, and which he had tackled in *Had Gadya* (1919). Contemporary biodesign even allows the artist to perform God-like creations: in *Regenerative Reliquary* (2016), Amy Karle uses cultivated human stem cells and 3D printing technology to give birth to a bioprinted scaffold in the shape of a human hand, which is supposed to evolve in time into bone and tissue. As the title of the piece suggests, Karle therefore fosters a new and paradoxical type of relics, a futurist one, which subverts the polarities between death and birth, between animation and inanimation (fig. 2).

<sup>43</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method', in *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce*, ed. by Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 81–118.

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Fig. 2: *Regenerative Reliquary* by Amy Karle, 2016. By courtesy of the author.

Moreover, *Regenerative Reliquary* replays, in the field of design, the associations of science, religion, magic and esotericism which characterized many approaches of the hand in the second half of the nineteenth century, as it will be described below.

In the light of the creative potentialities associated to the hand, it is not surprising that in the realm of the moving image, the hand becomes an autonomous character, separated from the body, able to lead its own journey and to perform its own actions. Fantastic literature had already explored this theme of a corporeal schizophrenia — for instance Gérard de Nerval in *The Enchanted Hand* (*La Main enchantée*, 1832) — but cinema, as an art of animation, will multiply its occurrences. From *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924), discussed in Karl's article further in this issue, to the 'Thing' in the Addams Family film saga, up to the recent animation movie *I lost my Body* (*J'ai perdu mon corps*, Jérémy Clapin, 2019) many independent hands have paved the story of film. In that respect, *The Hand* (*Ruka*, 1965) by the Czech animator Jiří Trnka is maybe the film which has exploited at its fullest the narrative and symbolic potential associated to the motif of an autonomous hand — and for this reason the film was subject to censorship in Communist Czechoslovakia: an almighty and terrifying hand of a totalitarian power dictates to a sculptor what he must create; that is, hands in its image. The hands of the creative potter appear as powerless against this all-controlling hand, which is also presented as a Puppeteer-Hand, and the artist has no other alternative than to obey or to die.

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Another main function dedicated to hands by artists is linked to their communication potentialities: 'Hands are almost living beings. [...] endowed with vigorous free spirit, with a physiognomy. Eyeless and voiceless faces that nonetheless see and speak'.<sup>44</sup> This statement by Focillon could perfectly describe the artistic goal pursued by Christophe Loizillon in his film *The Hands* (*Les Mains*, 1996) in which he shoots the hands of five of his friends while they are telling him their life stories. The hands look and behave as if they were the characters themselves, as if the voices that we hear were emanating from them, due to their extreme expressivity. As a matter of fact, gestures function as a paramount tool for expressing emotions and actions and thus translating them into a visible code, as Giovanni Bonifacio details in his treatise *The Art of Signs* [*L'Arte de' Cenni*, 1616], which surveys 'mute eloquence, that is a talkative silence'. In that respect, Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (circa 1512), in which God transmits life to Adam through their index fingers stands as one of the brightest examples of the extreme and powerful narrative concision allowed by the motif of the hands — it is no wonder that as an artist fascinated with hands, Philip Guston would play on associations with Michelangelo's scene in *The Line* (1978). Moreover, in *On Painting* [*De Pictura*, 1435], Alberti describes one of the painters' tasks as 'to express the states of mind with the movements of the limbs'.<sup>45</sup> Hands can convey emotions no less, if no more, than faces, as it is well demonstrated by, just to mention one example, Egon Schiele's convulsed hands. In *Hand Movie* (1966), Yvonne Rainer even removes everything of her body but her hand which she films: recovering from a surgery in a hospital bed and deprived of her usual capacity of movement as a dancer, she focuses on the only remaining parts of her body which are still able to move, that is her fingers. Despite the minimalism and the apparent simplicity of the situation, Rainer's film accounts for her marvelled discovery of the unexpectedly expressive potential of her fingers.

The rhetorical power of hands and of gestures appears to be one valuable expressive resource for artists concerned with political issues, from the solemn raised hands of the Horatii in *The Oath of the Horatii* by Jacques-Louis David (1784) to the desperate hands of the captives to be shot in the *Third of May* by Francisco Goya (1814), up to the workers' hands acclaiming the socialist achievements in Gustav Klutssis' photomontage *Let's fulfil the Plan of Great works* (1931). Cinema will of course unfold this rhetoric in its turn, as crystallised, just to bring one example, in Sergei Eisenstein's raised hands of the striking workers (one of them with a mutilated finger) as they are being repressed at the end of the *Strike* (*Stáčka*, 1924). The *pathos* of the scene is enhanced by the framing of the stretched hands through close-ups, which not only highlight their gestures of distress but also sever them from their respective bodies through pure cinematic means, duplicating the mutilation operated on screen by the Cossacks. The

<sup>44</sup> Focillon, p. 157.

<sup>45</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *Book Two: The Picture*, in *Leon Battista Alberti: On Painting*, ed. by Rocco Sinisgalli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 64.

strong expressivity of hands for the creation of a political cinema could only be acknowledged by the filmmaker, who famously called for a ‘cine-fist’.

In addition to that, variations of hand positions and gestures convey expressivity and animation to a representation according to the principle of *varietas*, as, for instance, *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci (1495–1498) particularly exemplifies or as all the work by Rembrandt could illustrate. Painters do not only use hands in order to express relations and actions between the painted characters, but also between them and the viewer, through the figure of the *admonitor*. As Alberti writes about the latter, ‘it seems opportune that in the *historia* there is someone who informs the spectator of the things that unfold; or invites with the hand to show’.<sup>46</sup>

Cinema, as an heir of this pictorial culture, will in turn pursue and develop all these various uses of the hand, multiplying the occurrences of this motif.<sup>47</sup> The attractiveness of filmic images of hands — hands that touch, gesticulate, operate — has led many filmmakers to nurture an obsession with hands, from Robert Bresson to Denis Villeneuve. In some cases, filmmakers would cast their actors, in addition to their interpretation skills, as much for their faces as for their hands, such as Tarkovsky who chose Oleg Yankovsky for the role of Gorchakov in *Nostalghia* (1983), mainly because of the final scene in which he holds a candle and for which eloquent hands were needed.

In turn, the filmic potential of hands has been widely acknowledged by the early film theorists, especially those influenced by modern physiognomics. Béla Balázs, for instance, considers the expression of hands in film as powerful as that of faces, and even more revealing, since their movements are less self-controlled.<sup>48</sup> Balázs absorbed ideas that circulated since the mid-nineteenth century, a period during which the *chirognomonie* by Casimir D’Arpentigny benefitted from an increasing popularity, with its very detailed classification of morphologies, measures and textures of fingers and palm.<sup>49</sup> From this period dates also the attributionist approach coined by the art historian Giovanni Morelli in order to identify the authors of Italian Renaissance paintings on the basis of elements such as ears, nails or hands (fig. 3). Morelli assumed that in those secondary details, the artist would free himself from influences and that their shape would therefore reveal his personal touch much more than any other element of the composition. Morelli established a methodology akin to a detective’s by collecting hundreds of these ‘traces’ left by artists, which he ranged in comparative tables. As in chirognomonie, the morphology, the

<sup>46</sup> Alberti, p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> See the collection of hands in film established by Raphaël Nieuwjaer: *Notes pour une histoire du cinéma. Annexe 2: Etudes de mains*, <[http://debordements.fr/pdf/Etudes\\_de\\_mains.pdf](http://debordements.fr/pdf/Etudes_de_mains.pdf)> [accessed 9 January 2021].

<sup>48</sup> Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, ed. by Erica Carter (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Casimir S. d’Arpentigny, *La chirognomonie: L’art de reconnaître les tendances de l’intelligence d’après les formes de la main* (Paris: Charles Le Clere Editeur, 1843).

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size and the proportions of a represented hand could betray the peculiarities of a subject, here the style and the temper of an artist, literally, his 'hand' at work. The connection between chiromnomy and filmmaking is even more directly established by the case of Sergei Eisenstein, who was very familiar from his youth with the ideas of D'Arpentigny and who also expressed his sheer interest for the even more esoteric 'science' of chiromancy (a mixture of medicine, mesmerism, exotericism): he had his hand read by the famous clairvoyant Cheiro and took his prophecy very seriously.<sup>50</sup> The merge of medical knowledge with esoteric considerations which is at stake in chiromnomy and chiromancy is characteristic of nineteenth century discourses revolving around the hand, which favor eclectic approaches. Such is the psychology of the hand by Nicolae Vaschide, discussed further in Plaitano's essay.

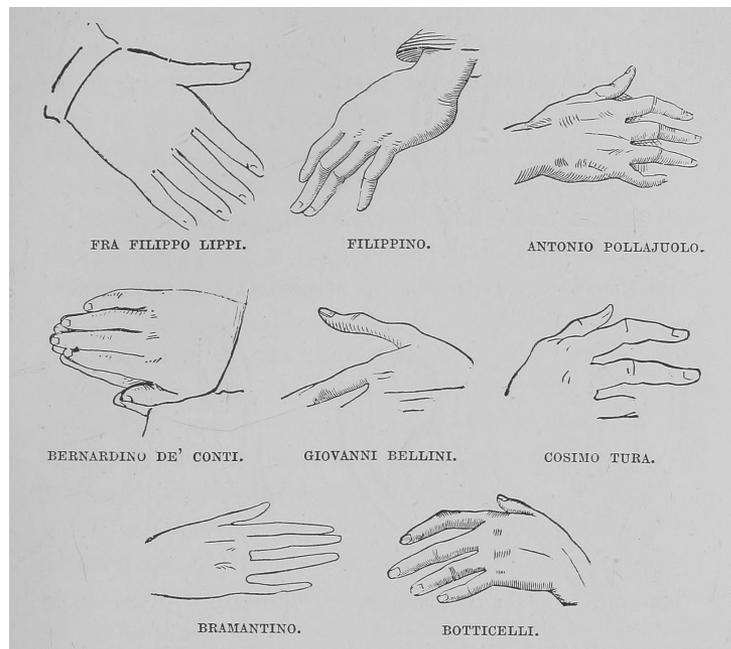


Fig. 3: Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of Their Works* (London: John Murray, 1892), ill. p. 77.

### *The Hand as Medium*

When the physiognomic perspective declined, the hand in film became, as a synecdoche, the image of the human being, without being solely bound to the

<sup>50</sup> See Ada Ackerman, 'Les préoccupations ésotériques de Sergueï Mikhaïlovitch Eisenstein', *Revue russe*, 29.1 (2007), 125–45.

psychological features of a specific figure on the screen or representing itself an autonomous character. The fascination exerted by the *motif* of the hand on filmmakers, especially in silent cinema, can be partly explained by the universal dimension of many manual gestures, forming a semiotic system which can be easily understood by a worldwide audience. This ‘anthropological’ hand does not disappear with the emergence of sound film; it survives, though with a different accent, in the work of some modern directors like Robert Bresson, who indulges in a variety of the subtlest material manipulations and in the creation of technical tools. The hands of Bresson’s almost prehistorical creatures already ‘contain’ those prostheses which are about to be externalized, on which Leroi-Gourhan’s theory of the technical gesture is based: the pleasure of watching them derives from seeing through, or beyond, the organ. In the same wake, hand gestures operating with media technology foster archaeological reflections on the relationship between the body and optical devices. In fact, all optical devices have always been manual: they have always relied upon a specific articulation of the eyes and the hands (from the telescope to the cinematograph);<sup>51</sup> their visual output cannot, therefore, be accounted for solely through the paradigm of visibility. This is also true in the case of cinema: in addition to the abstract processes of touching with the eyes and seeing with the hands, which we addressed in the first section, it is important to consider also the nature of the moving image as a visual phenomenon displayed through a whole set of operations and movements, therefore challenging the conception of an ‘ocular hand’ (that is a hand totally subjugated to the eye), inherited from the Renaissance.<sup>52</sup> The twentieth century stands as the era of the concrete manual editing of the filmstrip through gestures of touching, pasting and sensing the ‘skin’ of the film between the fingers (film or ‘pellicle’, from the Latin *pellicula* that refers to a small piece of skin); the relevance of this creative practice probably explains why so many directors claimed that cinema is the art of hands not less than of eyes. For instance, this includes Jean-Luc Godard, who believed that handling images in the editing process was more important than the act of framing,<sup>53</sup> or Dziga Vertov, who insisted upon reflexive images showing his (and his wife’s) hands at work. Perhaps Harun Farocki is the filmmaker who has grasped and explored to its fullest extent the pivotal role of hands in filmmaking, in the history of film, as well as, more broadly, in the history of culture. This is particularly exemplified in his seminal work *The Expression of Hands* (*Der Ausdruck der Hände*, 1997), in which Farocki claims that ‘hands circulate like images’, but it is also clearly conceptualized in his idea of montage as ‘gestural thinking’. This way of thinking with the hands, that is, to touch the

<sup>51</sup> André, pp. 227–45.

<sup>52</sup> On the concept of ‘main oculaire’, see André, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Godard stated that, in extreme choice, he would prefer to work being blind than having his hands cut off. ‘I would be more obstructed by not being able to use my hands when making a film than by not being able to use my eyes’. Quoted in Volker Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard: Film as Theory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), p. 217.

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film in order to understand the image, has not changed in digital culture: the viewer's hands persist as crucial tools which dialogue with machines, especially in the processes of data visualization. As concrete operators of visibility, fingers build and support the gaze; when they touch a screen instead of an analogue image, their power to enable us to see remains unaltered. In the following pages, Löffler's and Puchta's essays question respectively how hands 'manipulate' analogue and digital images.

In reality, the idea of the hands as capable of disclosing a series of liminal dimensions of perception, becoming thus a device for visualization that competes with the eyes, links the different case studies gathered in this volume. Given all we have said in the previous paragraphs, the concept of the hand as a tool that has its own eye, that is, a capacity similar to sight, is nothing new. Indeed, its origin could even be seen as condensed in a late Renaissance image included in the 1543 reprint of the book *Emblemata* (1522), by the Italian academic lawyer Andrea Alciato, the father of this genre of image-text literature. In it, a disembodied horizontal hand floats in the sky in a woodcut landscape and stares at the viewer with its single, Egyptian-style eye placed in its palm (fig. 1). Despite its threatening aspect, this emblem represents only a translation into visual form of the Roman proverb attested in Plautus 'oculatae nostrae sunt manus: credunt quod vident' (Our hands have eyes: they believe what they see).<sup>54</sup> Modern culture reinterpreted the pragmatic value of the *oculatae manus* not only with a specific reflection on tactility, but also discovering the role of gestures as vectors of visibility. Thanks to the crucial focus on the operational hand in its interactions with vision technologies, from pre-cinema onwards, we already know how much the ultimate visual medium is only minimally optical.<sup>55</sup> But expressive gestuality adds paramount points to this thesis as well, and within this field, the hand takes on a specific role. Wilhelm Wundt has identified the gestures produced by the face's mimetic muscles (reflecting the qualities of affect) from those produced by pantomimic muscles of the limbs and especially hands, through which affect is elaborated and transformed into an idea.<sup>56</sup> Modern visual culture captures and displays these liminal gestures at the crossroads between affect and thinking, giving birth to a broad and eclectic imaginary of the hand as medium.

In a segment of nineteenth-century visual culture in which imaginary and theory converged as well as popular culture and science, the hand was invested with three modalities of mediation: between ephemerality and trace (*transcription*), between reality and virtuality (*imagination*) and between different bodies (*transmission*). These properties emerged at their fullest in the years of cinema's birth, derived from its performed gestures and the palm's skin qualities.

<sup>54</sup> See John Manning, *The Emblem* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), p. 322, who attributes this image to Pierre Vase, illustrator of Andrea Alciato's book of emblems.

<sup>55</sup> We agree on this at least from Strauven's crucial contribution: Wanda Strauven, *The Observer's Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch*, in *Media Archaeology*, pp. 148–63.

<sup>56</sup> Wilhelm Wundt, *Outlines of Psychology*, Nalanda Digital Library, 2003, p. 349.

Concerning transcription, the link between gestures and the palmar surface became very precise at the intersections of rhetoric, music and cinema: here the gesture is increasingly conceived as writing and the palm as a place in which this graphic translation is deposited. This connection appears first in ancient rhetoric, due to the perceived coincidence between a mimetic origin of numbers and that of alphabetic letters, which the orators learnt in order to write with their hand whole discourses in the air; in ancient times people ‘used gestural figures like the Egyptian hieroglyphics’,<sup>57</sup> as the polymath Vincenzo Requeno reports at the end of the eighteenth century. A few years later, Gilbert Austin explores the same phenomenon, though he postulates that gesture doesn’t rely upon an alphabetical base, whether abstract or figurative, rather it functions like music:<sup>58</sup> the chain of human gestures is similar to a chain of musical notes, and the model becomes the conductor, who mimics music progression as his hands modulate it. Austin’s modern treatise evokes ancient music transcription systems which involved the hand, and not only the hand in motion, but also the palm as an archiving site. The notes’ ancestors — so-called neumes, which were the first method for sound transcription — looked like mere graphic traces: straight, curved, ascending or descending, composite or straightforward lines, akin to grammatical accents. Their origin remains uncertain but, according to many experts, it is connected to the gestural phenomenon: they probably derived from the instinctive translations into stylized graphic patterns of the movements of the choir direction performed by the conductor and transcribed by the copyists. Moreover, in the process of transformation of neumes into notes, around the year 1000, hands come into play also on another level: the first staff used to position notes according to the octave scale is indeed constituted by the skin folds of the palm and fingers. The so-called Guidonian Hand — a four-line embodied staff that medieval monks used to learn music — is a device, as even the experts call it,<sup>59</sup> in which the palm works as a *surface for the inscription* of feelings, tones, gestures, intervals: all dimensions which need to be extracted, transformed into a sensorial material that the eye can see and the ear can hear.

The cinema enters this imaginary of manual transcription of gestures above all on a theoretical level. In the twenties, a consistent notion emerges in the theories of Vachel Lindsay, Marcel Jousse and Sergei Eisenstein: film is conceived as the hieroglyphic writing of gestures while the palm is featured as the screen onto which the body figures are inscribed. In 1915, Lindsay wrote that cinematic images are not to be literally construed, but should be ‘read’ as variants of around twenty

<sup>57</sup> Vincenzo Requeno, *Scoperta della chironomia, ossia, Dell'arte di gestire con le mani* (Parma: Fratelli Gozzi, 1797), which was based on the treatises by the English monk The Venerable Bede, c. 700 AD.

<sup>58</sup> Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia, or a Treatise on Rethorical Delivery* (London: W. Bulmer & Co, 1806).

<sup>59</sup> Stefano Mengozzi, *The Renaissance Reform of Medieval Music Theory: Guido of Arezzo between Myth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 62.

## Mediatic Handology?

hieroglyphics corresponding to the Roman letters;<sup>60</sup> between 1929 and 1932 Eisenstein acknowledged the same leap from a figurative to an abstract level, from an iconic to a symbolic one, both in the transition from the single frame to the edited sequence (that does not sum up but multiplies the meaning of each image) and in hand lines, which he envisioned as ‘the hieroglyphics of the expressive movements made by the hand’, and as a material transcription of one’s character.<sup>61</sup> A few years later, Marcel Jousse considered film frames as a graph of gestures, an updated version of the mimograms that the Amerindians carved on bark in sequences.<sup>62</sup>

The hand’s capacity of translating ephemera into trace, similarly to cinema, is complementary to its second mediatic features, that is its crucial role in supporting imagination. The chiromantic tradition has fuelled the link between the hand and the imagination over the ages, but in modern culture, trace and mental images are interconnected through more rigorous parameters that are very similar to those employed in the theory of memory.<sup>63</sup>

In his fundamental media-archaeological study devoted to Freud as media theorist, Thomas Elsaesser associates the Freudian model of memory, the mystic writing pad, to digital media, both based on a play between material-latent traces and an iconic-phantasmatic phenomenon.<sup>64</sup> What can be added to this is how the imaginary of the hand provided an entirely corporeal version of the same mediatic functionality: the palm archives cipher experiences which can be accessed through particular techniques; not only sound experiences, as we have seen, but also one’s entire life in the case of chiromancy, according to which the palm stands as a paradoxical place that archives the future. The imaginary of palmistry was significantly enriched in the years of cinema’s birth: methods for visualizing the palm’s signs through ink proliferated, sharing many features with the devices that collected fingerprints. The hands of many celebrities started to circulate under that form, from politicians to movie stars. At the end of the nineteenth-century, the hand reached a total and an unprecedented visibility. On one side, its depth was revealed thanks to X-rays, fostering an image in which the inside and the outside were blurred (as in the famous image of Roentgen’s wife’s wedding ring worn on a phalange). On the other side, the palm in black created by the popular clairvoyant Cheiro was printed in several books about new palmistry. Some decades later, the two images were blended in an Italian doctor’s odd experiment that tried to X-ray palm lines (fig. 4).

<sup>60</sup> Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1915), p. 153.

<sup>61</sup> Sergei M. Eisenstein, ‘The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram’, in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. by Jay Leida (New York: Hartcourt, 1949). For Eisenstein’s idea of the palm as stenography of gestures, see Ackerman, p. 128.

<sup>62</sup> Marcel Jousse, *L’analyse cinématographique du mimisme* (École d’Anthropologie, 1932), in *Transcription des cours de Marcel Jousse*, 2 CD-ROM (Paris: Association Marcel Jousse, 2002).

<sup>63</sup> See for instance the theory of the wax imprints in George Muchery, *Traité complet de chiromancie déductive et expérimentale* (1931) (Paris: Edition du Chariot, 1958).

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, ‘Freud and the Technical Media: The Enduring Magic of the Wunderblock’, in *Media Archaeology. Approaches, Applications and Implications*, ed. by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 95–115.

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Fig. 4: X-ray of a hand's back with metal wires placed along the lines of the palm. From Ludovico Armani, *Chiromanzia e astrologia viste da un medico* (Milano: Fratelli Bocca, 1952)

The black ink used to ‘print’ palms in modern chiromancy is also the material that turns the palm into a real cinematic screen, as was somehow prefigured in the novel *Moonstone*, by Wilkie Collins (1868). Here, some Indian Brahmins in pursuit of a diamond use a stray to predict the future, and when they need to make forecasts, they pour black ink into the palm of their gifted boy: he freezes, staring at that liquid, inside which the events that are about to happen start to appear.<sup>65</sup> His pose is revealing: the boy is folded into himself, looking into a reflecting surface in which his own image should appear. Thus, this glossy liquid recalls something midway between the mirror and the photographic plate, black also being the colour of the pellicle: the dark and opaque mixture casted on one side of the transparent glass in mirrors, or the silver emulsion used to sensitize paper in analogue photography. In fact, the same *motif* resurfaces in early cinema precisely in the form of a screening of imminent events into a palmar mirror. In *Grandmother's Fables* (*Le fiabe della nonna*, Cines, 1908), a bridesmaid is able to see what is going to happen to her beloved knight by looking into her magic black

<sup>65</sup> I am grateful to Carlotta Santini and Alberto Frigo for drawing my attention to this piece by Collins: ‘The Indian took a bottle from his bosom, and poured out of it some black stuff, like ink, into the palm of the boy’s hand. The Indian — first touching the boy’s head, and making signs over it in the air — then said, “Look”. The boy became quite stiff, and stood like a statue, looking into the ink in the hollow of his hand’. From Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1944), p. 16. Unfortunately, the 1934 filmic adaptation of this novel does not include this passage.

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mirror, already a handheld device that permits to travel through space and time, reflecting the interbreeding of their multiple scales. Only some year later, the mirror was removed and these mediatic properties were directly transferred to the palm's skin: in Gance's *The Wheel* (*La roue*, 1923), chiromancy is represented exactly as a projection of a movie fragment on the protagonist's palm. Sisif's hand in close up is not framed as a subjective shot, it appears rather like a visual concept: it becomes our screen, a sort of corporeal frame of the images we are watching and certainly the deepest figurative convergence between the hand and the cinema. Perhaps we may fully understand the density of that image in the light of a frame taken from *Barbaric Land* (*Pays Barbare*, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricchi Lucchi, 2013), in which the directors scrutinize newly discovered photographic documents of the Italian fascist colonialism in Ethiopia. They often hold those shocking images in their open palms, and in one of these cases, we can almost touch the lines of the palm being prolonged by the scratches of the photographic print (fig. 5): we see the undug past of a country superimposed with the traces of the future, in a sort of implicit warning, albeit one contained in the sober gesture of offering a 'black' mirror in which we Westerners are asked to reflect ourselves.



Fig. 5: *Pays Barbare* (Yervant Gianikian, Angela Ricchi Lucchi, 2013). By courtesy of the authors.

Finally, if in modern imaginary the palm is the surface of the hand that supports imagination, the fingers acquire the ability to convey and transmit something which is not so much concrete (through the sense of touch and through contagion) than somehow intangible. According to Desbarrolles, the author of

one of the most influent and eclectic treatises of modern chiromancy,<sup>66</sup> palm lines function as traces carved by the passage of electromagnetic fluid, that is, flowing channels of the electricity that propagates from the brain through all the body, before being conveyed outside by the fingers. Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, many representations of palms attempted to provide a visualization of the electric shocks radiating from the top of the fingers (for instance, the popular hand drawn by the illustrator Eugène Lacoste in 1890) and it is all too easy to recall how much this idea has been exploited by mass culture, up to the most popular blockbuster fantasies of the present era in which it survives. We already know that mesmerism triggered the imagination of the modern media in any way, but the literature has mainly focused on the way it has affected the human eye,<sup>67</sup> while the hand also represented an extremely important model of mediality. Desbarrolles's conception of transceiver fingers, which he also describes as lungs that breath electricity in and out, can be fully inscribed in an archaeology of the 'connection machines'<sup>68</sup> that is soon to come, and perhaps also in that of the *digital* media.

<sup>66</sup> Adolphe Desbarrolles, *Les mystères de la main révélés et expliqués* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1859).

<sup>67</sup> With the relevant exception of: Ruggero Eugeni, 'Imaginary Screens: The Hypnotic Gesture and Early Film', in *Screen Genealogies: From Optical Device to Environmental Medium*, ed. by Craig Buckley, Rüdiger Campe and Francesco Casetti (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), pp. 269–91.

<sup>68</sup> See *Book of Imaginary Media. Excavating the Dream of the Ultimate Communication Medium*, ed. by Eric Kluitenberg (Amsterdam, Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2006), pp. 157–85.

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## Technologies de l'œil, psychologie de la main: Nicolae Vaschide et la photographie médico-artistique

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*Abstract*

This contribution aims to present the research of Nicolae Vaschide — a direct pupil of Alfred Binet — by focusing on a set of problems dealing with the *mécanisme subconsciente de la pensée* and by highlighting the intrinsic bond between the psychological and the physiological nature of the individual. By the same token our research spans the raising interest of that time in image semiotics. The study of his text, *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main*, which surveys the hand through different analytical approaches (anatomy, artistic morphology, anthropology, psychopathology...) as well as the analysis of his experimental research on chiromancy unveils a dialogue between new psychological paradigms and art history. We will explore how this bond between a still-developing experimental psychology, the use of recording and representational devices of the human body and the use of photographic material foster an original '*critique scientifique des œuvres d'art*', fitted to didactic and educational aims, and contributing to the 'development of the modern seeing'.

Dans la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, alors que le positivisme connaît son apogée, pratiques scientifiques et savoirs ésotériques se mêlent et s'influencent réciproquement. L'étude de la main y occupe une place particulière : elle est analysée comme un dispositif « à lire », qui détiendrait aussi bien les caractéristiques distinctives du sujet (caractère, émotions, sentiments) que son passé et son avenir. Cette pseudo-science se nourrit des nouvelles disciplines médicales qui se développent alors selon une perspective expérimentale concevant l'étude comme une double opération, à la fois théorique et pratique. À cette époque, la recherche scientifique se présente comme une « pratique sociale matérielle » dont instruments, technologies et usages fusionnent au sein d'un même espace : le laboratoire<sup>1</sup>.

Ce lieu moderne et ses outils ont déjà fait l'objet de différents travaux, notamment dans le domaine de l'histoire et de la philosophie des sciences<sup>2</sup>, mais

<sup>1</sup> Cette définition du sociologue Raymond Williams est reprise par : William J.T. Mitchell, « There Are No Visual Media », *Journal of Visual Culture*, n° 4/2, 2005, pp. 257–266.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bruno Latour, Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life. The Construction of Scientific Facts*, Beverly

également dans ceux de la culture visuelle et de l'histoire des médias<sup>3</sup>. Ces dernières recherches, portant sur les dispositifs photographique et cinématographique, ont surtout mis en évidence les enjeux épistémologiques véhiculés par les images scientifiques, présentées par les médecins comme des représentations objectives des faits, mais en réalité manipulées, construites et « [...] just as deeply engaged with the visual, and just as resourceful and visually reflective as in any painting, even though [their] purposes may be entirely different »<sup>4</sup>. Dans le prolongement de ces conclusions, notre étude de cas, centrée sur les recherches de Nicolae Vaschide, psychologue roumain travaillant au sein des plus grands laboratoires parisiens de psycho-physiologie, entend insister non seulement sur cet emploi de l'image photographique comme instrument de connaissance, mais aussi comme moyen de création d'une archive iconographique originale — aussi bien scientifique qu'artistique, une archive produite à des fins de pédagogie et de transmission d'un savoir médical.

*La psychologie livrée par la main: entre documentation visuelle et lecture tactile*

Dans la dernière décennie du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, le milieu hospitalier de Paris — à l'instar des autres capitales européennes — s'enrichit de nombreux laboratoires d'un nouveau type, issus de l'institutionnalisation de nouvelles disciplines médicales, la physiologie et la psychologie au premier chef. Le plus important d'entre eux est le laboratoire de la Sorbonne, rattaché à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études dans la section des sciences naturelles, et qui représente un centre d'études et de rencontres pour tous les médecins intéressés par la psychologie expérimentale. Il naît comme une extension pratique des cours de psychologie expérimentale et comparée dispensés par Théodule Ribot<sup>5</sup> afin de « permettre des études sur la sensation et sur le mouvement, et sur les formes élémentaires de

Hills, Sage, 1979; Karin Knorr Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures. How the Sciences Make Knowledge*, Cambridge MA/London, Harvard University Press, 1999; Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *An Epistemology of the Concrete. Twentieth-Century Histories of Life*, London/Durham, Duke University Press, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1990; Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body. Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*, Minneapolis/London, University of Minnesota Press, 1995; Silvio Alovio, *L'occhio sensibile. Cinema e scienze della mente nell'Italia del primo Novecento*, Torino, Kaplan, 2013; Vera Dünkel, Horst Bredekamp et Birgit Schneider, *The Technical Image. A History of Styles in Scientific Imagery*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015; Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship. Art, Science and Early Cinema in Germany*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015; Mireille Berton, *Le Corps nerveux des spectateurs. Cinéma et sciences du psychisme de 1900*, Lausanne, L'Âge d'Homme, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> James Elkins, « Art History and Images That Are Not Art », *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 77, n° 4, December 1995, p. 559.

<sup>5</sup> Théodule Ribot (1839–1916) est considéré comme le fondateur de la psychologie scientifique française et comme le vulgarisateur en France de la psychologie expérimentale de Wilhelm Wundt. Sur le rapport entre son laboratoire et le laboratoire de Wundt voir Jacqueline Carroy, Henning

la vie psychique »<sup>6</sup>. Le laboratoire de la Sorbonne est dirigé à partir de 1895 par Alfred Binet, un ancien élève de l'École de la Salpêtrière<sup>7</sup>.

Parmi ses collaborateurs figure un médecin roumain, Nicolae Vaschide qui, après une période consacrée à fournir une base anatomique et physiologique aux recherches de son maître, quitte cette institution ensemble avec Édouard Toulouse pour travailler dans le laboratoire de psychologie expérimentale de l'asile de Villejuif. Au sein d'une atmosphère stimulante, animée par des personnalités comme Claude Varpas, Raymond Meunier ou Henry Piéron, Vaschide développe ses recherches de 1900 jusqu'à sa mort en 1907, en étudiant la main et en travaillant sur la sensibilité tactile.

La singularité de l'approche de Vaschide, qui connaît son aboutissement dans la publication posthume en 1909 de son livre illustré *Essai sur la psychologie de la main*<sup>8</sup>, repose sur plusieurs facteurs. D'une part, il s'appuie sur ses nombreuses recherches autour de la sensibilité de la peau, nourries de sa fascination pour l'occultisme et la croyance, qu'il aborde dans ses écrits sur les rêves et les hallucinations télépathiques. D'autre part, la variété de son appareil iconographique permet de remettre en cause la notion de « mechanical objectivity » défendue par Daston et Galison<sup>9</sup>, en attestant d'une démarche expérimentale originale qui traduit le recours désormais réfléchi des disciplines médicales à l'histoire de l'art.

Comme en témoigne la dernière partie de son œuvre, Vaschide est attiré par « les grands problèmes du *Sommeil*, du *Rêve*, de la *Mort*, et les hypothèses sur l'Au-delà » et surtout par « le *Monde occulte* dans lequel l'humanité cherche un asile à son inquiétude séculaire »<sup>10</sup>. En dépit de la dimension obscure de ce domaine pétri de croyance et de secret, Vaschide déclare dans l'introduction de son texte avoir écrit une monographie expérimentale, qui tient « rigoureusement compte des faits et des observations enregistrables [...] en étant pénétré par l'esprit de la méthode

Schmidgen, « Psychologies expérimentales. Leipzig-Paris-Würzburg (1890–1910) », *Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, 2006/1, n° 24, Paris, pp. 171–204.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Binet, « Le laboratoire de psychologie physiologique de la Sorbonne (Hautes Études) », *Revue de l'Enseignement Secondaire et de l'Enseignement Supérieur*, vol. 18, n° 19, Paris, 1892, p. 368.

<sup>7</sup> Issu d'une formation en anatomie et neurologie, marqué par les premières études sur l'inconscient, Binet fait bénéficier le laboratoire de son intérêt pour des méthodes qu'il qualifie de « descriptives », et qui se concentrent sur l'enregistrement graphique et visuel des phénomènes. Ses albums de recherche sont conservés dans les fonds Henry Piéron aux Archives Nationales des Paris, qui collectent les travaux de différents élèves. Ils consistent en une observation clinique menée via différentes formes visuelles : dessins, graphiques et photographies. Cf. Serge Nicolas, Doriane Gras et Juan Seguí, « Alfred Binet et le laboratoire de psychologie de la Sorbonne », *L'Année psychologique*, vol. 111, n° 2, 2011, pp. 291–325.

<sup>8</sup> À la mort de Vaschide, sa femme, Victoria Zamfirescu (fille d'un professeur de médecine), s'engage avec détermination à publier et à diffuser plusieurs œuvres inédites de son mari. En témoignent sept lettres envoyées à Gustave Le Bon entre 1907 et le 1910 et conservées dans les archives de la bibliothèque inter-universitaire de la Sorbonne de Paris, MS 2598, 182–195.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, New York, Zone Books, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Meunier, « La psychologie et la philosophie de N. Vaschide », *Revue de philosophie* (extrait), Montligeon, imprimerie-librairie de Montligeon, 1907, p. 8.

scientifique »<sup>11</sup>. Dans ce livre où il analyse l'organe de la main qui représente pour lui « le siège principal de la sensibilité motrice »<sup>12</sup>, il réunit plusieurs champs de recherche pour examiner les composantes psychologiques qui s'abritent dans les sciences divinatoires, en recourant aux sciences médicales comme l'anatomie et la physiologie, aux études de psycho-pathologie, à l'anthropologie mais aussi à l'histoire de l'art, en mobilisant des illustrations graphiques et photographiques. Le point de départ du médecin est donc d'explorer théoriquement et visuellement ce qu'il appelle « le mécanisme subconscient de la pensée », qui se manifeste à travers la physionomie de la main et ses mouvements, et qu'il traque en étudiant différentes « séances » divinatoires, telles que la chirognomonie et la chiromancie. Selon Vaschide, derrière ces pratiques très anciennes liées historiquement à l'astronomie et qui répondent au désir humain de déchiffrer une personnalité et de découvrir le futur, on a affaire à « des documents d'une valeur réelle [...] qui contiennent des données déformées, amplifiées, mais réellement vraies »<sup>13</sup>. Afin de conforter sa thèse à l'aide des images, l'auteur consacre deux chapitres au domaine artistique. Le plus original d'eux, « La main dans les œuvres d'art », se présente comme une galerie d'exemples de tableaux et de sculptures qu'il a rassemblés à l'occasion de voyages en Europe.

Pour la constitution de cet ensemble, Vaschide affirme avoir travaillé surtout à partir de rencontres directes avec les œuvres, tout en ayant également employé le médium photographique, un art qui « n'est pas à dédaigner dans une pareille étude »<sup>14</sup> et qui a pu le « renseigner d'une manière assez précise, faisant toujours la réserve d'un examen précis car, en peinture plus que n'importe où, il importe avant tout d'examiner la tache, de saisir la couleur pour mieux comprendre le modelage anatomique [sic] »<sup>15</sup>. Son incursion dans l'histoire de l'art débute avec l'Égypte et la Grèce antique, traverse ensuite l'art romain, chrétien et byzantin, puis poursuit avec la Renaissance italienne et flamande et s'achève jusqu'au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Il convoque différentes techniques : statues et bas-reliefs en bronze, pierre et marbre ; peintures à l'huile et fresques. Ce voyage illustré, qui brasse portails de cathédrales, basiliques et galeries de musées, se déploie selon une double démarche, qui d'une part s'appuie sur une description originale des œuvres, mêlant des considérations anatomiques à un regard qu'il qualifie d'« ethno-esthétique »<sup>16</sup>, et qui mobilise d'autre part les théories ésotériques les plus connues d'alors. Dans cette perspective, il reprend à son compte les modèles récents d'analyse chirognomonique et chiromantique de la main établis par Casimir Stanislas d'Arpentigny, qui cherche à tisser des relations entre la forme

<sup>11</sup> Nicolae Vaschide, *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main*, Paris, Marcel Rivière éditeur, 1909, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> *Ivi*, p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ivi*, p. 163.

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des doigts et de la paume et le caractère du sujet en considérant l'organe de la main comme une variété de visage expressif<sup>17</sup>.

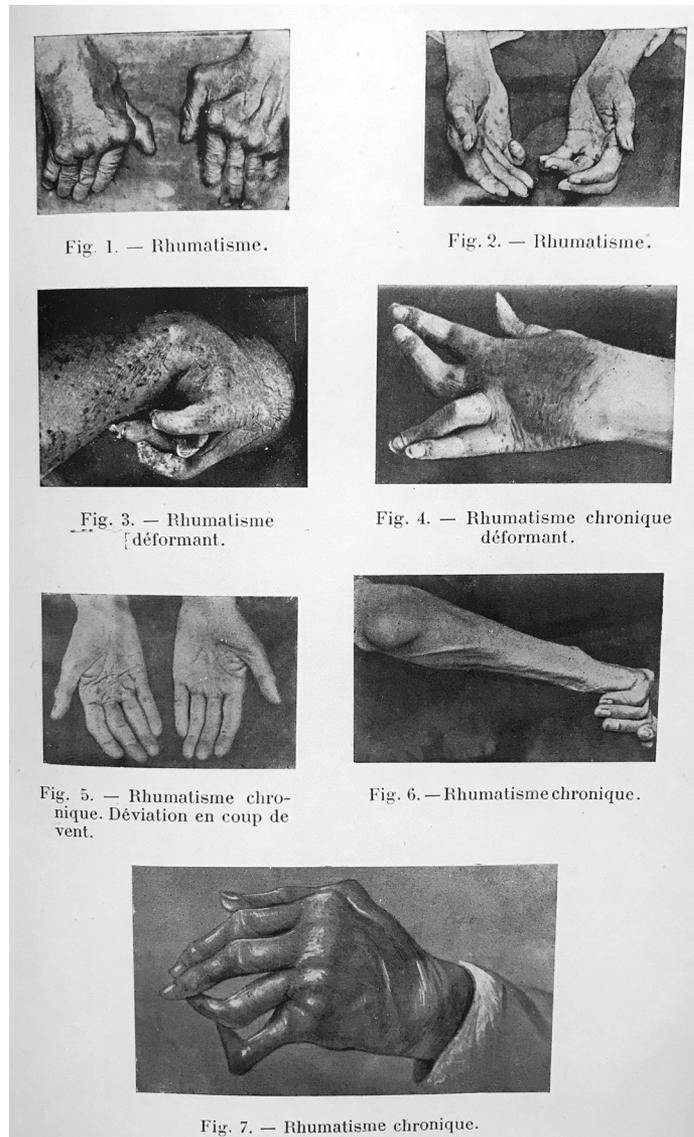


Fig. 1: Nicolae Vaschide, 'Planche xxx', dans *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main* (Paris, Marcel Rivière éditeur, 1909).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Casimir Stanislas d'Arpentigny, *La Chiromonie ou l'art de reconnaître les tendances de l'intelligence d'après les formes de la main*, Paris, Charles Le Clere Éditeur, 1843.

Il s'appuie aussi sur Alphonse Desbarolles, qui combine la lecture des lignes et des saillies<sup>18</sup> selon une « sorte d'anatomie-physiologie de l'imagination qui fait de la main un véritable dispositif (pré)technique »<sup>19</sup> (fig. 1).

Vaschide s'empare de ces taxinomies complexes qui envisagent les différentes parties de l'organe comme des révélateurs des traits de caractères et des facultés humaines. Dans ces systèmes de lecture, la paume de la main est analysée selon sa dimension, son degré de fermeté et sa couleur, qui représentent « les éléments subjectifs du cerveau, les éléments individuels caractéristiques de la mentalité, et la plus ou moins grande résistance de la santé physique et morale »<sup>20</sup>. Les doigts, observés dans le détail des phalanges, des ongles et de leurs proportions « indiquent l'expression, la forme, que l'on donne à la pensée »<sup>21</sup> comme les divers tempéraments et prédispositions spécifiques (élégance, sens artistique...). Quant aux lignes, elles forment une topographie graphique, où chacune est dotée d'une valeur linguistique propre, vouée à être complétée par la lecture d'autres signes pouvant apparaître sur la peau et les sept monts de la main, respectivement associés aux noms des planètes.

Dans son exposé, l'auteur s'arrête sur la pratique des chiromanciens, qui observent et viennent palper la main du sujet à l'aide d'un rituel très précis qui, ne se limitant pas au simple aspect du membre, tente d'accéder à la physionomie totale de la personne. À cet égard la pythie représente pour Vaschide une habile diplomate : « elle n'affirme jamais sans restriction ; ses oracles sont plein de réticences, et lui sont en partie dictés par les mouvements, les changements de physionomie, les altérations du visage du sujet »<sup>22</sup>. Le visage devient donc une deuxième source de renseignements, qui fait remonter à la surface émotions, fluctuations mentales et pensées intimes, que trahissent également les altérations de la voix, les mouvements et les gestes réprimés, qui constituent tous des indices très importants durant la séance de chiromancie. En décrivant sa méthode de travail, le médecin raconte avoir collaboré avec Mme Fraya, une chiromancienne alors bien connue en France, qui lui aurait expliqué les secrets de son métier et qui l'aurait aidé dans sa lecture divinatoire d'empreintes de différentes mains. Il rapporte en effet avoir réuni, en s'inspirant du procédé de Galton, « plus de mille empreintes de mains d'enfants, de femmes, d'hommes ; de peu civilisés, pour ne pas dire de sauvages, et de civilisés ; de malades et d'individus bien portants »<sup>23</sup> et avoir pris plusieurs empreintes de la même personne « à des époques et pendant des états psychiques différents »<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Alphonse Desbarolles, *Les Mystères de la main révélés et expliqués*, Paris, E. Dentu, 1859.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Grespi, « Dans la paume de la main. L'archéologie du cinéma en un geste », *Interfaces*, n° 39, 2018 <<http://preo.u-bourgogne.fr/interfaces/index.php?id=493>> [consulté le 27 Juillet 2020]. Sur ce sujet voir Barbara Grespi, *Figure del corpo. Gesto e immagine in movimento*, Milano, Meltemi 2019, pp. 349–402.

<sup>20</sup> Nicolae Vaschide, *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main*, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p. 107.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 434.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

Alors qu'il montre ces différentes empreintes à la chiromancienne, il lui rapporte pour chacun des sujets les expressions et les émotions qu'il a pu observer chez eux. Il s'aperçoit alors que Mme Fraya s'appuie énormément sur ces indications dans sa démarche chiromancienne. Dans le travail prédictif que la femme exerce sur ces différents cas, Vaschide n'identifie donc pas une véritable capacité prophétique mais plutôt une faculté étonnante, une perspicacité « mentale » hors du commun qui se loge dans un état subconscient. Elle fait d'ailleurs davantage ses preuves face à un sujet en chair et en os qu'à partir de sa seule empreinte digitale et du moulage de celle-ci. Vaschide en déduit que la chiromancie est un examen qui se fonde sur plusieurs sensations tactiles et visuelles : « il faut tâter les muscles de la main, il faut toucher la peau et il faut aussi connaître le visage de la personne »<sup>25</sup> mais qui nécessite également d'écouter ses paroles qui orientent facilement la pythie quant au caractère du sujet, qui se révèle tout seul. Vaschide introduit ensuite l'idée que les sciences divinatoires n'utilisent pas seulement les données des mains, mais aussi celles de la physionomie et du langage, et qu'elles étudient surtout les modalités selon lesquelles les êtres humains ressassent leurs mensonges et leurs vérités et les font ressortir devant le chiromancien, qui devient dès lors une sorte de psychologue moderne.

*L'observation de la main entre clinique et « critique scientifique des œuvres d'art » : la double vie de l'image photographique*

Dans son ouvrage, le médecin roumain présente des pratiques clairvoyantes comme des savoir-faire qui mobilisent différents sens — la vue, le toucher, l'ouïe — et qui prennent donc en compte dans leur analyse bien plus que la seule main du sujet : son visage, sa voix, ses mouvements et ses paroles. Mais, par ailleurs, la main offre de nouvelles possibilités pour révéler une mentalité et pour la comprendre à travers la peau, les doigts, les articulations et surtout les gestes. La main dévoile le mouvement de la pensée, elle traduit l'énergie intellectuelle et émotive sous la forme de gestes très variés ; elle recrée par des « images motrices » la nature humaine la plus intime. Pour déterminer s'il existe des types psychologiques spécifiques à des conformations physiques et aux gestes de la main, Vaschide insiste sur la nécessité de disposer non seulement des instruments techniques indispensables à un laboratoire de psychologie, mais aussi du médium photographique — qui requiert une salle spéciale<sup>26</sup> — ainsi que d'un musée rassemblant une documentation visuelle scientifique et artistique.

<sup>25</sup> Ivi, p. 460.

<sup>26</sup> Dans son premier manuel pratique consacré aux techniques de la psychologie expérimentale, Vaschide souligne l'importance des appareils et de leurs applications tout en affirmant la nécessité de lieux spécifiques pour les accueillir. Un laboratoire devrait selon lui posséder des locaux spéciaux, adaptables à chaque recherche, mais également disposer de bureaux, d'espaces d'expérience, d'ateliers, d'une bibliothèque, d'un musée et d'au moins une chambre noire pour les

En revenant sur son chapitre dédié aux œuvres d'art, l'auteur désigne la discipline de l'histoire de l'art comme une composante essentielle à sa démarche expérimentale, en ce qu'elle représenterait un outil de mesure visuelle pour documenter et illustrer les affirmations scientifiques de son texte. Les termes employés pour décrire sa galerie personnelle témoignent d'une observation des détails et des proportions des mains qui oscille entre analyse morphologique et exposé des périodes artistiques. S'il recourt à des adjectifs simples tels que « belles », « fines », « potelées » ou « fusiformes », il déploie aussi des considérations relevant davantage d'un discours scientifique et anatomique. Cette tension du discours est particulièrement remarquable dans les descriptions qu'il fait des artistes italiens, comme dans les passages consacrés à la *Joconde*, dotée d'« une main classique de Vénus, mais plus humanisée, plus couverte de chair : le poignet et la main précisent une forte musculature, une paume large mais harmonieuse, le pouce est large, pas modelé, court et non dessiné [sic] »<sup>27</sup> ; ou au *Moïse* de Michel-Ange, qui l'a affublé d'une « main vigoureuse aux tendons trop prononcés, aux aponévroses trop tendues et à ce genre de peaux trop souples, car elles facilitent aux vaisseaux sanguins de garder presque leur calibre normal [sic] »<sup>28</sup>. Pour l'auteur, qui avait passé quelques mois avant son arrivée à Paris à visiter hôpitaux et musées en Italie<sup>29</sup> et qui connaissait très bien les œuvres de la Renaissance italienne de Florence, Rome et Milan, ces cas illustrent comment la représentation de la main dans l'histoire de l'art peut constituer un instrument pour découvrir des données sur la psychologie individuelle des créateurs du passé. Indépendamment de l'imagination créatrice de l'artiste et de l'influence exercée sur son travail par différents mouvements et écoles, cette démarche permet donc de saisir des traits psychiques de la personnalité en question, et de voir à travers ses gestes « la vie intellectuelle en action »<sup>30</sup>.

La démarche de Vaschide, s'appuyant sur le support de l'image photographique et de l'histoire de l'art, n'était qu'une nouveauté dans le milieu médical parisien de la deuxième moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Pionnière en la matière parmi les institutions hospitalières, l'École de la Salpêtrière avait déjà travaillé dans cette direction en croisant pratiques artistiques traditionnelles et modernes, dans les espaces originellement créés à l'hôpital par Jean-Martin Charcot : les cabinets mutuellement dépendants de photographie et de moulage et le musée anatomo-pathologique<sup>31</sup>.

tests comme pour la pratique photographique. Cf. Édouard Toulouse, Nicolae Vaschide et Henry Piéron, *Technique de psychologie expérimentale* (1904), Paris, Doin, 1911.

<sup>27</sup> Nicolae Vaschide, *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main*, op. cit., pp. 164–165.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, p. 166.

<sup>29</sup> Sur ses voyages en Italie et sur ses rapports avec les psychologues italiens, on dispose de peu d'informations. Notons toutefois l'existence à Milan dans l'ASPI (Archivio della psicologia italiana) de vingt-sept lettres et cartes de Vaschide destinées à Giulio Cesare Ferrari entre 1896 et 1906. Voir Paola Zocchi, « Giulio Cesare Ferrari et Alfred Binet. Le rapport élève-maître dans les documents du fonds Ferrari », *Bulletin de psychologie*, vol. 67, n° 534, 2014, pp. 487–497.

<sup>30</sup> Nicolae Vaschide, *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main*, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>31</sup> Sur ces espaces voir Mary Hunter, *The Face of Medicine. Visualising Medical Masculinities in Late Nineteenth-century Paris*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015.

## Technologies de l'œil, psychologie de la main

L'hybridation de différents médiums comme le dessin, la sculpture, la photographie et la chronophotographie, renforcée par divers élèves et collaborateurs du maître tels qu'Alfred Londe, Paul Richer et Henry Meige au cours des années suivantes alimente également une production écrite très spécifique, qui emploie les arts plastiques et décoratifs comme autant d'éléments confirmant les découvertes de la médecine psycho-physiologiques et psycho-pathologique.

Parmi les premiers exemples de cette opération épistémologique figurent deux textes écrits à quatre mains par Charcot et Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'Art* et *Les Difformes et les malades dans l'Art*, respectivement publiés en 1887 et 1889. Dans ces livres richement illustrés, les auteurs décrivent les pathologies représentées dans les images de plusieurs collections muséales et privées d'Europe, inaugurant ainsi une nouvelle « critique scientifique des œuvres d'art »<sup>32</sup>. Le but de cette opération ne consistait plus seulement à consigner la maladie en tant que telle, mais aussi à démontrer son existence, ses variations et ses caractéristiques dans les époques passées à l'aide d'une histoire à la fois artistique et médicale. Une histoire donc menée certes par des médecins mais au service aussi bien de la science que de l'art, qui « ne sont plus que deux manifestations d'un même phénomène, deux faces d'un même objet »<sup>33</sup>. Cet ambitieux projet, qui aboutit dans les années suivantes avec la publication de la *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, une revue qui sort de 1888 jusqu'à 1918, visait à faire collaborer plusieurs médecins partageant un même intérêt pour le diagnostic visuel. L'objectif de la revue était clairement énoncé :

faire connaître des documents figurés dont l'utilité s'affirme chaque jour davantage : dessin d'anatomie normale et pathologique, de micrographie, photographies cliniques, études morphologiques, ainsi que toutes les œuvres d'art ayant un intérêt médical, tableaux, sculptures, gravures inspirées par les difformités, les maladies et les opérations chirurgicales<sup>34</sup>.

La représentation à travers l'image revêtait donc une importance centrale dans les études psycho-pathologiques de cette école, non seulement par la retranscription du cas clinique à travers différents médiums, mais aussi par la création d'une archive artistique originale, « icono-diagnostique », pour reprendre l'expression de la psychiatre Anneliese Pontius<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Jean-Martin Charcot et Paul Richer, *Les Démoniaques dans l'Art*, Paris, A. Delahaye et É. Lecrosnier éditeurs, 1887.

<sup>33</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot et Paul Richer, *Les Difformes et les malades dans l'art*, Paris, Lecrosnier et Babé, libraires-éditeurs, 1889, p. II.

<sup>34</sup> S. a., *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière. Clinique de maladies du système nerveux* (Fondée par J.-M. Charcot, publiée sous la direction de F. Raymond, A. Joffroy et A. Fournier), vol. VIII, T. IX, Paris, Masson et Cie, 1896, p. s. n.

<sup>35</sup> Anneliese Pontius, « Icono-Diagnosis. A Medical-Humanistic Approach. Detecting Crouzon's Malformation in Cook Islands' Prehistoric Art », *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, vol. 27, n°1, Autumn 1983, pp. 107–120.

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Fig. 2 : Nicolae Vaschide, 'Photographie collée sur papier annoté : Femme, Villejuif', Archives Collège de France, Fonds Charles-Émile François-Franck, 45 CDF 2/8, Paris, 1901.

Vaschide connaissait très bien cette méthode de travail née dans les nouveaux espaces de la médecine expérimentale, où théorie et image se développaient ensemble dans une « œuvre médico-artistique »<sup>36</sup>. Il l'avait apprise sous la direction d'Alfred Binet et il l'avait développée avant son entrée au service de Toulouse, en travaillant quelques mois à la Salpêtrière avec Pierre Janet et en participant également à la revue avec son collaborateur Claude Vurpas. Mais cet intérêt est également attesté par de rares sources manuscrites et photographiques produites pendant son travail au laboratoire de Villejuif, comme en témoigne sa

<sup>36</sup> S. a., « L'œuvre médico-artistique de la 'Nouvelle iconographie de la Salpêtrière' », *Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, vol. 16, n° 6, Paris, novembre-décembre 1903.

correspondance conservée au Collège de France dans le fonds de Charles-Émile François-Franck, dans laquelle le médecin roumain se montre disposé à fournir à son maître des photographies de différents sujets pour son cours ainsi que des reproductions d'œuvres (fig. 2).

Pour les médecins de cette époque qui font de leur découvertes leurs thèmes d'enseignement, les différents appareils iconographiques de leurs textes (dessins, dessins d'après photographies, photographies et reproductions d'œuvres d'art) sont minutieusement choisis pour illustrer des notions anatomiques et les cas observés, mais aussi pour confirmer leurs théories psycho-physiologiques, en déployant une histoire de l'art réinterprétée en des termes diagnostiques. Cette « lecture médicale sur tableau »<sup>37</sup>, comme le rappelle Vaschide, éclaire des hypothèses : « J'oublie de dire à quel point les œuvres d'art m'ont aidé dans ma tâche expérimentale : le dessin d'une main, un pied modelé par un artiste de grande valeur me précisent toute une psychologie »<sup>38</sup>.

Ces collections de corps peints par les grands artistes montrent l'autre versant de la technique employée par les médecins de la nouvelle tradition expérimentale, une méthode qui ne se limite pas à travailler avec les nouveaux médiums photographiques et pré-cinématographiques, mais qui s'appuie aussi sur la tradition historique et artistique pour élaborer un parcours complexe par l'image. Un discours théorique émerge de cette galerie iconographique et thématique, qui se met au service de la pédagogie scientifique que promeuvent les nouvelles disciplines médicales. La méthode pratique des psychologues s'effectue donc par une observation minutieuse, visuelle, comparative et analogique, qui ne s'arrête pas simplement à la mise en rapport entre les sujets étudiés, mais qui prend aussi en compte les études de cas représentés par les artistes. Connaître, regrouper, observer des symptômes et exercer les yeux pour lire des caractères semblables ou dissemblables est une opération qui repose sur l'image, et, en particulier, sur l'image photographique. C'est la photographie qui permet à l'expérimentateur d'examiner, d'apprendre, de créer une archive documentaire et didactique pour retrouver et conserver une réalité de l'être humain.

En conclusion, les images de la main choisies par Vaschide — photographies documentaires et reproductions d'œuvres d'art — sont le fruit d'un dispositif d'observation technique, qu'a longtemps occulté le voile de la prétendue « mechanical objectivity » de sa nature. Car dans la constitution de ces appareils iconographiques, le médium se dévoile comme un *mixed media*, qui oscille entre un instrument d'enregistrement et un outil de classement heuristique qui met en cause plusieurs autres médias, dans une stratification complexe « embedded in practice, experience, tradition, and technical inventions »<sup>39</sup>. Cette opération, qui se produit dans les nouveaux espaces de la médecine expérimentale, croise études de cas et documentation historique-artistique, tout en mettant en crise

<sup>37</sup> Catherine Bouchara, *Charcot. Une Vie avec l'image*, Paris, Éditions Philippe Rey, 2013, p. 102.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolae Vaschide, *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main*, op. cit., pp. 435–436.

<sup>39</sup> William J.T. Mitchell, « 'There Are No Visual Media' », op. cit., p. 259.

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l'opposition entre artistes et savants, où les premiers « were exhorted to express, even flaunt, their subjectivity, at the same time that scientists were admonished to restrain theirs »<sup>40</sup>, tandis que « the scientific self [... was] perceived by contemporaries as diametrically opposed to the artistic self, just as scientific images were routinely contrasted to artistic ones »<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, op. cit, p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

# Technological reproduction at odds: Hand and cinematography in Robert Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac*

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## *Abstract*

Around 1900, the paradigm of technological reproducibility threatened to replace the hand. As a matter of fact, though, hands speak the language of cinematic media specificity quite fluently. With its fine motor manipulations, the hand offers an intimate image of essentially human traits and showcases the logic of motion pictures at large. In addition, pointing gestures and dramatic poses establish narrative chains. A close reading of *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924) will explain how hands allow for this marriage between a cinema of attraction and of narration in the Weimar period. One can discern a scientific interest for the hand in parallel with its occult implications. Orlac's murderous hands feature both, the motif of the enchanted doppelgänger as well as newly established techniques like prosthetic labor or the use of fingerprint. Even though the *topoi* of the mythological and the technological hand challenged one another after World War One, occultism and scientific progress meant less of a contradiction than one might think. Instead, the hand makes *explicit* a discourse which was only *implicit* at the time: technology and its impact on works of art appear as the natural extension to the human body, rather than as a substitution.

## *Murderous Hands*

The elective affinity between the human hand and cinema is as alluring as it is complex. When a film chooses to make a hand its protagonist, the outcome is, more often than not, a discombobulated plot instead of a relaxing movie night. The murderous hands in *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924) shall serve as a case study for the fascinating relationship that the hand upholds with the cinematographic medium.

The film's plot is indeed quite convoluted. Based on Maurice Renard's novel *Les Mains d'Orlac* (1920), it uses a number of central motifs common in the

Weimar era,<sup>1</sup> most significantly the figure of the doppelgänger. The film tells the story of the pianist Paul Orlac (Conrad Veidt) whose hands are cut off in a train accident. To allow Orlac to pursue his career, a surgeon transplants the two hands of Vasseur, a recently executed murderer, onto Orlac's arms. When Orlac learns about the origin of his new hands, he is terrified by the idea that they might bear a natural disposition for violence and murder.

In this essay, I investigate how Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac* reflects a specific appeal of the hand. After the turn of the century, the hand lent itself to various kinds of uncanny fantasies of disfiguration and dismembering, thus generating a high degree of emotional expressiveness, as well as complex narrative chains. A faithful companion to early filmmaking, hands highlight the spectacular elements of the cinematic medium along with its various techniques of creating a narrative. I am following the distinction made by film scholar Tom Gunning, who argues that the novelty of images in motion was fertile ground for films that proved to be equally spectacular, bringing such attractions as boxing fights, vaudeville dancers or the Coney Island rollercoaster in front of the camera lens. Actual plotlines, editing continuity, and character depth and development, for that matter, were only introduced later. From roughly 1895 to 1906, Gunning describes this most common form of early cinema as follows: '[T]he cinema of attractions solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle — a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself.'<sup>2</sup> Yet, banal though it may seem at first glance, the very curiosity about cinema in the early days was precisely its ability to set still images in motion. The novelty of moving images made a one-of-a-kind technological apparatus.<sup>3</sup> It is no coincidence that the hand would often appear on-screen: its motoric abilities — the fine inclinations of each single finger, the act of grasping — made the hand a topic of particular interest in early filmmaking. What is more, the hand also served to attenuate the initial shock experience of the mechanical simulation of movement prompted by the cinematic apparatus. After all, hands bear a certain immediacy: their traits as well as their actions are of an essential human nature that makes it easy for the spectator to identify with a hand on screen.

Wiene had this mitigating effect of the hand fully in place. The motif of the hand as enchanted doppelgänger subject to the will of another — and, conversely, the motoric agency every hand theoretically possesses — mirrors the novel capacities of the cinematic apparatus. A case study for the hand as secret protagonist, *The Hands of Orlac* triggers a debate typical of the era, namely, the conflict between

<sup>1</sup> Already after its release, the film was praised for the use of expressionistic motifs, however embedded in the sober realism of *New Objectivity*: See Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg, *Der Caligari Regisseur Robert Wiene* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1995), p. 118–19.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 2008), pp. 56–62 (p. 59).

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 58.

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scientific progress and its representation in media of technological reproduction. As will become clear, the hand conflates the human and the technological, thereby allowing for a number of media-specific considerations that have arisen from the very beginning of cinema.

### *Moving Hands*

The plot of Orloc losing his hands has often been translated into a loss of his economic as well as sexual dexterity.<sup>4</sup> While such readings rightfully place Orloc within the prototypical postwar *conditio humana*, I argue that more than being a symptom of a troubled state of mind, Orloc's hands need to be assessed in their capacity to negotiate the rivalry between technological reproduction and manual handicraft. The conceptual curiosity of hands derives from the fact that they always already contain the very principle of representation. They illustrate and execute the materialization of the immaterial, the becoming of form and the procedures of artistic creation. Precisely in this meta-reflexive quality, the hand enters in dialogue with the ways in which technological variety in the film differs from, improves, or even replaces established frameworks of representation. The dilemma to enhance the human body by means of technology, and the concomitant need to reaffirm bodily sense perception against its replacement by the machine — in other words, the synchronous extension and amputation of the human sensorium by the technical apparatus — evolves as the film's central conflict.

Before diving into a closer reading of *The Hands of Orloc*, it is worthwhile considering some of the first theoretical framings of the relationship between body and film camera. Pioneering film theorist Béla Balázs, for instance, accorded a special value to the manifold appearance of cinematic hands in close-up. In *Visible Man*, Balázs writes:

[T]he magnifying glass of the cinematograph brings us closer to the individual cells of life, it allows us to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail. It shows you what your hand is doing, though normally you take no notice.<sup>5</sup>

He attests to the haptic quality of the object when framed in close-up, a framing that makes the material quality of life perceptible. What is important to note is the apparent indifference of the mind towards a more thorough topography of the everyday. Balázs's argument anticipates Walter Benjamin's passage on the

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Anjeana Hans, "'These Hands Are Not My Hands': War Trauma and Masculinity in Crisis in Robert Wiene's *Orlacs Hände* (1924)', in *The Many Faces of Weimar Cinema*, ed. by Christian Rogowski (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 102–15.

<sup>5</sup> Béla Balázs, *Early Film Theory: Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, ed. by Erica Carter (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 38.

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‘optical unconscious’ in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* a decade later:

We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object.<sup>6</sup>

Benjamin argues that the intervention of the camera, in conjunction with film editing, dissects the world with microscopic precision, enabling cinema to expose regions of human experience that hitherto had remained invisible. Pushing it further, I argue that the hand plays no incidental role in extending the human sensorium by means of the technical apparatus. Benjamin defines the significance as well as the function of the close-up with respect to tactility. He uses hands — more precisely, their ability to grasp — in order to show the extent to which tactile sensations condition the visual field that cinematography creates. In Benjamin’s example, in which someone absent-mindedly picks up a cigarette lighter, the hand figures as a medium to re-construct the logic of movement *within* the medium of film. ‘Filming something’ translates into ‘grasping something’.<sup>7</sup> In other words, bodily mechanics serves as a blueprint for the technical apparatus. Due to its proto-technological nature, the hand epitomizes a cinema of attractions, bridging the metamorphosis from the inanimate to the animated. In addition, the hand is intimate and gives the attraction a greater immediacy.

### *Uncanny Hands*

Inversely, the familiarity of the hand might also trigger its great potential for uncanniness. As understood by Sigmund Freud, uncanny effects are even more forceful when the object is familiar, an ambivalence he detected within the German word *unheimlich* (uncanny): it is the opposite of *heimlich*, which simultaneously means both ‘secretive’ and ‘homely, cozy’.<sup>8</sup> If we follow Benjamin, it can be said that film in general bears the logic of the uncanny when it presents what is real as the most unfamiliar ground of human existence. The commonality of a hand picking up a lighter reinforces the uncanny experience of film even

<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, ed. by M. Jennings, B. Doherty, and T. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Also in the implicit sense of understanding (‘grasping’) something better by capturing it on film.

<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Freud defines the uncanny as ‘something familiar that has been repressed’: Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, in Id., *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey, vol. xvii, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works by Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), pp. 218–53 (p. 244).

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further. A close-up of a hand, severed from the rest of the body, as if acting independently, thus reveals a high degree of eerie uncontrollability.<sup>9</sup> This leaves us with the hand as twofold: the attraction value of the hand is easy to identify with, and, simultaneously, its immediacy bestows the hand with a high degree of uncanniness which, in turn, creates the conditions for the hand to start talking and tell stories.

This twofold nature is precisely that on which *The Hands of Orlac* relies, and what marks the conjoining of a cinema of attractions with a cinema of narration. On the surface, *The Hands of Orlac* would be a simple crime story, were it not for the criminal Nera tricking Orlac into believing that supernatural forces are playing cruel games with him. Orlac's amputated hands are located at the border between the occult and science: their gestures make them indicative of Orlac's unsettled state of mind. At the same time, the topos of amputation turns them into a token of a new politics of the human body emerging after World War I, which tries to merge technology and physical ability.

First, let us turn to the persuasiveness of Orlac's cinematic hands.<sup>10</sup> Critics called the outstanding performance by Conrad Veidt, who plays Orlac, a 'work of genius' and extolled the eloquence of his hands.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, his acting leaves quite a mark on the spectator. Tricked into believing his transplanted hands commit murderous acts against his will, Orlac slowly loses control. Around halfway through the movie, we see him sleepwalking through the house, his hands stretched out, guiding his way. In such sequences, Veidt succeeds in completely externalizing his own hands. The film does not even need to rely on a caption of his hands in close-up since Veidt continually acts as if his hands were not part of his body, singling them out by means of his body language instead of editing techniques (fig. 1). The expression of Veidt's hands makes them an object of attraction precisely within the framework of a cinema of narration — as a matter of fact, his hands make the plotline plausible and effective in the first place. Orlac is presented as a completely detached onlooker to his own hands in motion, a detachment which becomes the film's central motif. The camera singles them out, puts his cramped hands in the very center of the frame, or lets Orlac get just close enough so that his hands seem to protrude from the screen, reaching out to kill. Nevertheless, the film is replete with hands in actual close-up, whether it be Orlac's hands failing to play the piano, a ghostly hand haunting his dreams, or the isolated frame of his hands sneaking around a corner as if they had a life of their own. Apart from Wiene's curiosity for severed, murderous hands

<sup>9</sup> Freud equally points to the uncanniness of the severed hand. Ivi, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Lucia Ruprecht provides an excellent study on sign language and hand gestures in the 1920ies: Lucia Ruprecht, 'Ambivalent Agency: Gestural Performances of Hands in Weimar Dance and Film', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 46.3 (2010), 255–75.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted after Claudia Liebrand and Ines Steiner, 'Monströse Moderne: Zur Funktionsstelle der *manus loquens* in Robert Wienes Orlacs *Hände*', in *Manus loquens: Medium der Geste – Gesten der Medien*, ed. by Matthias Bickenbach, Annina Klappert and Hedwig Pompe (Köln: DuMont, 2003), p. 250.

performing as uncanny storytellers, the media transfer from a literary to a filmic genre brings to the fore the proto-technological nature of the hand in an era that seems to have abandoned the need for this instrument.<sup>12</sup> Hence, the significance of the hand in the film is twofold: an occult object mimicking the enchanted doppelgänger and a scientific instrument that reflects the genealogy of modern media. This dual nature is spelled out by the way in which *The Hands of Orlac* showcases contemporary methods in criminology. In 1903, German police implemented fingerprint identification — so-called dactyloscopy — as the default procedure in criminal investigation.<sup>13</sup> It did not take long until the fingerprint appeared in film. Eerie fantasies of severed hands paired with state-of-the-art criminal investigation gave a special narrative grain to tales of law-and-order.<sup>14</sup> Forging Vasseur's fingerprints on a pair of rubber gloves, the criminal Nera proves to be the most tech-savvy character in *The Hands of Orlac*. An assistant to the surgeon at the hospital, he uses his knowledge about cutting-edge pathology — rubber gloves had just become a mandatory protective utensil in



Fig. 1: *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924). Screen capture.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew J. Webber makes a media-specific argument about *The Hands of Orlac*, claiming that film is particular prone to grasp the nervous symptoms of the modern subject in crisis. Andrew J. Webber, 'The Manipulation of Fantasy and Trauma in *Orlacs Hände*', in *Words, Texts, Images*, ed. by Kathrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 154.

<sup>13</sup> See William James Herschel, *The Origin of Finger-Printing* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916). Due to the enduring evidence of fingerprints, dactyloscopy replaced identification via face recognition, a much more complex system developed by the French biometrics researcher Alphonse Bertillon. See Alphonse Bertillon, *Identification Anthropométrique* (Melun: Imprimerie administrative, 1893). For a detailed history of the fingerprint see Simon A. Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Brigitte Peucker notes how Fritz Lang's interest in objecthood made him the master of this genre: Brigitte Peucker, 'Fritz Lang: Object and Thing in the German Films', in *A Companion to Fritz Lang*, ed. by Joe McElhaney (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 291–310.

### Technological reproduction at odds

medical practice — to twist the work of the police to his benefit.<sup>15</sup> Cultural historian Carlo Ginzburg scrutinizes the matrix of this transition from the face to the hand in criminal investigation. He attests to a paradigm shift in modern epistemology at the turn of the century. At a time when subjectivity is shaken to its very foundations, he argues, it is no accident that the fingerprint is favored as the primary means for individual identification.<sup>16</sup> The subject no longer leaves anything but traces, whose interpretation is left to the sciences:

[I]n the nineteenth century, traditional figures of those who control everyday life in society, such as priests, were increasingly superseded by new ones: physicians, policemen, psychiatrists, later on psychoanalysts and social scientists. It is in this context that we can understand the pervasive influence of the model based on clues — the semiotic paradigm.<sup>17</sup>

*The Hands of Orlac* reflects upon that reduction of the human subject to a semiotics of the trace. Actually, the film can itself be analyzed as a clue in Ginzburg's sense, since it delivers an apt description of modern society. Many a time, the hand and the technologies that surround it render the film a document of evidence on the impact of contemporary media of reproduction. Ostensibly a crime story, *The Hands of Orlac* is in fact an exposition of technological progress, from transportation to printing and beyond: the train accident covers the largest portion of the exposition of the film, with the camera hovering over the debris of destroyed wagons. At the film's beginning, a newspaper article praising Orlac's virtuosity on the piano is presented in close up. Other frames feature a vinyl record of Orlac's performances, or the telephones in the police office. Moreover, the film makes the science of fingerprinting its essential MacGuffin. Since all these devices and techniques are presented within the framework of a movie, the concept of technological reproduction — in a *mise en abyme* setting — is further reinforced. Apart from the technical procedures that the film quotes, its protagonist Nera himself defines the paradigm of reproduction. He reproduces identities, operates with fragments, and puts them back together as he wishes. He is a virtuoso of montage, embodying the art of cinema. Yet, the film countervails the technology with an emphasis on handwork. The printing press, for instance, is contrasted with Orlac's handwritten letter, while a central motif of the film remains the playing of the piano, a handwork whose success or failure determines Orlac's and his wife's wellbeing.

<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, felonies of manipulating and erasing fingerprints were common at the time. See: Jürgen Thorwald, *The Century of the Detective* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1965).

<sup>16</sup> See Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of a Scientific Paradigm', *Theory and Society*, 7.3 (1979), 273–88. Contrary to contemporary practices of pursuing a murderer in light of psychological traits, Wiene's movie highlights instead the technological aspects of crime and criminal investigation.

<sup>17</sup> Ginzburg, p. 284.

*Prosthetic Hands*

In this competition between technology and human nature, the film takes another twist, offering a slightly different and less obvious reading than the struggle of artistic ingenuity with the machine age. In addition to the considerations of form and narrative, *The Hands of Orlac* is a film that points beyond itself, foregrounding a social and political debate that was at its height when the film was made. In this light, the idea that the hands of a murderer could successfully be transplanted onto the stumps of a former pianist is less a matter of suspension of disbelief than the symptom of a philosophy of technology emerging at the time. Such a conception of technology treats the human hand not simply as an organ but as equal to mechanical prostheses. When Nera and Orlac meet for the first time at the climax of the film, this philosophy of technology becomes most visible. In a frightening sequence, Nera pretends to be a reincarnation of the murderer Vassaux, telling Orlac that the surgeon turned him into a sort of Frankenstein's monster, cutting off his hands to give to Orlac and transplanting a different head onto his body. To support his claim, Nera suddenly reveals two hand prostheses from underneath his coat. I read this sequence as emblematic for the interwar period. World War I had left over 24,000 soldiers with missing arms.<sup>18</sup> In the wake of such bodily mutilations, industrial psychology of the kind promulgated by Hugo Münsterberg experienced a heyday. This type of psychology was based on economic sustainability and aimed to enhance the physical and psychological disposition of human nature in its interaction with machine technology. With mechanization at full speed, the proponents of this type of applied psychology experimented with the optimization of humans' abilities for industrial labor. After the war, such endeavors opened doors for a large variety of research institutes to facilitate a reintegration of veterans onto the assembly line. There was also a proliferation of emphatic monographs on the topic, most notably the anthology *Ersatzglieder und Arbeitshilfen für Kriegsbeschädigte und Unfallverletzte*.<sup>19</sup> The focus on the human body's role in industrial labor brought about a fundamental shift in prosthetic design. What had been known as the *Sonntagsarm*, or 'Sunday arm' — a cosmetic device used mainly after the French-Prussian war to conceal discreetly the lack of a limb — became the *Arbeitsarm* ('work arm'), a prosthesis designed to execute specific work procedures. The dramatically increased population of amputees that returned from the trenches required economic rehabilitation. To replace the lost functions of missing limbs, chronophotography à la Eadweard Muybridge was used to study meticulously the ingenuities of physical movement. In that way, the use-value of the hand as instrument, hardly noticeable in the everyday,

<sup>18</sup> See Mia Fineman, 'Ecce Homo Prostheticus', *New German Critique*, 76 (1999), 85–114 (p. 88).

<sup>19</sup> *Ersatzglieder und Arbeitshilfen für Kriegsbeschädigte und Unfallverletzte*, ed. by Moritz Borchardt, Konrad Hartmann, Radike Leymann and others (Berlin: Springer, 1919); see also Fritz Giese, *Psychologie der Arbeitshand* (Berlin: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1928).

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was brought into focus. As art historian Mia Fineman notes, the interwar period signaled a ‘new notion of the human form as a functional assemblage of organic and mechanical parts’.<sup>20</sup> For that fusion to work, though, surgeons and psychologists alike took recourse to one of the first treatises to suggest an analogy between the physical and the mechanical: namely Ernst Kapp’s *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology*. Published in 1877, the book proposes the idea of ‘organ projection’, an evolutionary pattern in which technology follows the principles of human physiology. As far as the hand is concerned, Kapp relies on the Aristotelian idea that the body is both organ and tool and writes:

As the human being makes use of the objects ‘at hand’ in its immediate vicinity the first tools appear as extending, strengthening, and intensifying the human being’s bodily organs. If therefore the natural hammer is the forearm with clenched fist, perhaps reinforced by a stone clasped in the hand, then the stone attached to a wooden shaft is its simplest artifactual afterimage. For the shaft or the handle is an extension of the arm, the stone a replacement for the fist.<sup>21</sup>

Kapp maintained that the human body is equipped with its own proto-technology. In an evolutionary line of argumentation, he proposes that human beings, in exchange with their respective environment, exteriorize the tool function of their bodies. Thus, the hammer is not only modeled after the hand, the hand itself *is* a hammer. Just as the hand provides knowledge about the hammer, the hammer, inversely, explains what a hand is. I propose that the proliferation of work prostheses after World War I gradually raised Kapp’s approach to a new level. The prosthesis is not meant to replace a hand but to *become* one. Returning to Kapp’s expression of an ‘organ projection’, his concept might therefore be slightly misleading: what is at stake is less an *externalization* than the *internalizing* of the new body part.<sup>22</sup>

*The Hands of Orlac* takes recourse to a gradual softening of the fine line between the organic and inorganic. The congruency between body and machine is played out when Nera’s fake prosthetic hands are paralleled with Orlac’s useless new organic hands. What on Nera might first appear as the aforementioned ‘Sonntagsarm’, reveals a deeper layer of meaning: Nera’s stiff prostheses are a mere camouflage and therefore as inoperable as the amputated *organic* hands with which Orlac cannot come to terms. For a prosthesis or transplant to work properly — be it mechanical or organic — it must be internalized, i.e. both psychologically and physically re-integrated. This reintegration fails in both cases: for Nera, the prosthesis is no more than a hoax to trick Orlac into believing his

<sup>20</sup> Fineman, p. 88.

<sup>21</sup> Ernst Kapp, *Elements of a Philosophy of Technology: On the Evolutionary History of Culture (1877)*, ed. by Jeffrey West Kirkwood (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> Harrasser outlines the body politics of the interwar period in terms of prosthetic internalization. See Karin Harrasser, ‘Sensible Prothesen. Medien Der Wiederherstellung von Produktivität’, *Body Politics*, 1 (2013), 106–09.

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transplants are the hands of a murderer. Yet, this very scheme — the idea that he killed his own father — terrifies Orlac to such an extent that his hands gradually become as stiff as the fake prostheses on Nera's arms.

### *Hand Surgery*

Wiene leaves it at this. He does not indulge further in utopian fantasies of a prosthetic god.<sup>23</sup> Instead, his movie ends abruptly with an array of loose ends. Whether or not Orlac will come to terms with his transplant hands is hard to tell, yet the stilted way in which he embraces Yvonne in the very last shots of the film makes this reconciliation appear rather unlikely. The ending is telling in a different perspective. Orlac's two hands in close up clumsily grope around his wife's face until only his and her hairline remain visible. (fig. 2) In a very suggestive manner, the film sets the hand in scene one last time, detached from the protagonist, in order to leave no doubt about the fragmented, composite nature of Orlac's body.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is not only on the level of the plot that Orlac is left with a patchwork existence after his surgery. What is more, cinematography itself cuts off his hands in a literal sense.



Fig. 2: *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, Robert Wiene, 1924). Screen capture.

<sup>23</sup> Other filmmakers of the Weimar period, in turn, expounded upon this subject, most notably Fritz Lang in *Metropolis* (1927). The film delivers not just a fantasy of 'Man as Machine' but an abstruse reflection on the idea that 'Man is — *by nature* — Machine'.

<sup>24</sup> On the notion of the composite body, see Ursula von Keitz, 'Prothese und Transplant: Orlacs Hände und die Körperfragment-Topik nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg' in *Unheimlich anders: Doppelgänger, Monster, Schattenwesen im Kino*, ed. by Christine Ruffert, Irmbert Schenk, Karl-Heinz Schmid and others (Berlin: Bertz+Fischer, 2005), pp. 53–68.

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At this point, we encounter Walter Benjamin's artwork essay again in which he put the surgical aspect of filmmaking under scrutiny. The contrast between the detachment of a magician's hand and the high degree of the manipulative involvement of a surgeon leads Benjamin to make, famously, magician and surgeon the alter egos of painter and filmmaker respectively. As a consequence, what is at work in technological reproduction is the genius of hiding its conditions of possibility, insofar as the finished film delivers a totalizing imagery that leaves behind no traces of its former surgical fragmentation.<sup>25</sup> The last shot of *The Hands of Orlac*, however, puts this fragmentation in the spotlight. With its insistence on a body gradually falling apart as soon as it is exposed to an increasingly technological environment, the film can be conceived as an attempt to hold technology at bay. Orlac's body turns into a surgical makeshift of which the suturing lines remain visible if not to the eye than certainly to the manual dexterity of this technological site of investigation called Orlac. Ultimately, his hands allow us to retrace the intricacies that the age of mechanization exhibited in Weimar cinema.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin, p. 35.



## 'Rêve d'un geste' ou la main et l'œil dans quelques films du handicap sensoriel

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### *Abstract*

This contribution examines how and why a cluster of films from every period or genre in the history of cinema and exhibiting blind or deaf characters, or both — such as *The Wheel* (Abel Gance, 1923), *The Miracle Worker* (Arthur Penn, 1962), *Land of Silence and Darkness* (Werner Herzog, 1971), *Earth of the Blind* (Audrius Stonys, 1992), *The Silence* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1998) and *Mademoiselle Paradis* (Barbara Albert, 2017) — demonstrates a consistent paradigm linking the sensory deprived, the dream work or 'film work' (Thierry Kuntzel) and a high frequency of hands and eyes. This configuration entails a specific form of spectatorship and can be analysed both as a set of oniric and transmodal punctuation marks of sorts and an ethical and even political emphasis on gesture. Film analysis thus allows to decipher and exemplify the mediality of cinema when it is, as Giorgio Agamben suggests according to 'the beautiful definition implicit in Beckett's *Traum und Nacht*, [...] the dream of a gesture.'

« Le cinéma ramène les images dans la patrie du geste. *Traum und Nacht*, de Beckett, en propose implicitement une belle définition : il est le rêve d'un geste ».  
(Giorgio Agamben, *Notes sur le geste*)

De nombreux films abordent le handicap sensoriel (la cécité, la surdité et le mutisme, ensemble ou séparément), non pour livrer des scénarios sadiques et voyeuristes attachés aux pas d'une femme, comme dans *The Spiral Staircase* (Richard Siodmak, 1946) ou *See No Evil* (Richard Fleischer, 1971), mais pour se confronter à une limite perceptive qui engage un enjeu éthique et une dimension réflexive. Le cinéma donne en effet à voir et entendre le monde à travers la médiation d'un appareil dont les capacités de captation sensorielle, en différant des nôtres, nous font faire l'expérience d'un décentrement, d'une altérité, au cœur de son projet esthétique et anthropologique. *A fortiori* lorsque des fictions, essais ou documentaires s'attachent à des figures d'aveugles, de *La Roue* (Abel

Gance, 1923) à *Mademoiselle Paradis* (Licht, Barbara Albert, 2017) en passant par *Earth of the Blind* (Audrius Stonys, 1992) et *Le Silence* (Sokout, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1998), ou à ces cas extrêmes de double handicap comme Helen Keller dans *Miracle en Alabama* (*The Miracle Worker*, Arthur Penn, 1962) ou Fini Straubinger dans *Au pays du silence et de l'obscurité* (*Land des Schweigens und der Dunkelheit*, Werner Herzog, 1971). Sans prétendre à l'exhaustivité, ces exemples partagent une configuration qui associe présence insistante de mains, exhibées par le cadrage ou la focalisation, motif de l'œil filmique ou profilmique et, surtout, parti-pris de mise en scène du réel *comme dans un rêve*, selon un « travail du film »<sup>1</sup> qui décrit des œuvres où, à force de condensation et déplacement, l'on croit entrer de plain-pied dans le texte latent d'un songe.

Ce critère de la figurabilité inconsciente explique que soient écartés certains documentaires plus didactiques comme *L'Enfant aveugle* (*Blind Kind*, Johan van der Keuken, 1964), *Blind, Deaf* et *Multi-Handicapped* (Frederick Wiseman, 1986) ou *Le Pays des sourds* (Nicolas Philibert, 1992). L'un des derniers en date, *Signer* (Nurith Aviv, 2018), précipite néanmoins l'énigme d'une telle configuration en un plan suggestif dont la place liminaire fait ressortir la question irrésolue que pose l'articulation du rêve et du handicap : à l'arrière-plan, un ordinateur où voisinent deux photos d'une même femme, l'index droit à la tempe droite d'un côté et, de l'autre, l'index pointé vers le ciel ; au premier plan, Debbi Menashe, chercheuse au laboratoire de langue des signes de Haïfa (ce n'est qu'après quelques secondes de silence où la jeune femme s'absorbe dans sa tâche que la voix off livre ces informations, ajoutant que Debbi est sourde) en train de décalquer au feutre noir, sur une table rétro-éclairée, la silhouette qui condense les deux temps du mouvement décomposé en photos, qu'un sur-titre désigne alors comme l'illustration, pour un dictionnaire, du mot « rêver » en langue des signes des Juifs d'Algérie.

S'il y a bien un rapport évident entre la surdité et les mains qui, dans l'air ou sur le papier, tracent une parole à voir au lieu de l'entendre (pas moins de six mains, fixes ou animées, dans un dispositif qui met en abyme le défilement filmique), le choix de ce Signe en particulier indique sans l'expliciter un rapport secret entre le rêve et le handicap sensoriel. Ce sont deux expériences perceptives altérées impossibles à vivre à la place de l'autre mais qui se réfléchissent et s'approfondissent mutuellement — en ce sens, la manière dont rêvent les aveugles ou les sourds rejoue, au carré, le mystère de leur appréhension sensible du monde<sup>2</sup> ; si la surdité ou la cécité peuvent apparaître comme des déficits responsables d'un enfermement douloureux dont le rêve serait une évasion — le Signe dessiné par Debbi mime une échappée hors des

<sup>1</sup> Thierry Kuntzel, « Le travail du film, 2 », *Communications*, n° 23 (numéro monographique sous la direction de Raymond Bellour, Thierry Kuntzel et Christian Metz, *Psychanalyse et cinéma*, 1975), pp. 136–189.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Sacks, *Des yeux pour entendre. Voyage au pays des sourds*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1996, pp. 33–34.

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limites cérébrales –, elles fournissent également des perceptions compensatoires qu'active aussi de son côté la satisfaction hallucinatoire du désir *et* une langue visuelle à la syntaxe propre dont la puissance d'incarnation rappelle ce *langage* de l'inconscient qui ne se donne qu'à travers des rébus ou s'interprète à même le corps. Cet article se propose donc, à travers l'analyse de quelques séquences emblématiques où se déploie son spectre, de déplier les virtualités de cette transmodalité perceptive et onirique qui donne à penser la médialité du cinéma comme *rêve d'un geste*<sup>3</sup>.

Loin des œuvres qu'analyse Kuntzel pour appliquer le *Traumarbeit* au récit filmique, l'effet-rêve qui sous-tend la configuration retenue ici se fonde davantage sur l'intensification sensible que sur l'inquiétante étrangeté narrative. La main et l'œil y sont des motifs médiateurs et ponctuels, dans la commutativité qu'impose le handicap mais aussi en tant que symboles, surface d'inscription ou écran (dé)voilant cette autre scène qu'est l'inconscient, au service d'une sensorialité auxiliaire dont les rêveurs, comme les aveugles ou les sourds, jouissent chaque nuit à leur insu. Ainsi, malgré leurs huit décennies d'écart, les 5 000 kilomètres qui séparent leur lieu de tournage en France et au Tadjikistan, la vieillesse de Sisif et l'enfance de Khorshid, leurs respectifs héros aveugles, ainsi qu'un impact onirique relevant, pour le premier, d'une machine infernale lancée à la vitesse lente du rêve et, pour le second, du conte merveilleux, *La Roue* et *Le Silence* partagent une même organisation motivique. L'écho martelé des mains, des yeux et de leurs substituts figuratifs (notamment la roue à rayons évoquant aussi bien un iris qu'une paume aux doigts tendus) y fait en effet entendre un *autre* texte sous celui qui se donne au premier regard.

Dans sa reprise de *L'Homme qui rit* frappée au sceau de l'outrance et du déplacement, Gance peint un héros tragique tombé amoureux de Norma, la jeune orpheline qu'il a sauvée d'un déraillement meurtrier. Il y a de l'Œdipe en ce père symbolique qui paye de sa vue un désir incestueux, du Prométhée dans ce maître des éléments ferroviaires et du Sisyphe dans ce lutteur éternel dont *La Roue* figure le conflit intérieur comme l'affrontement indéfiniment étiré de l'œil et de la main dans une dialectique de refoulement et de castration : le regard interdit de Sisif est mis en abyme dans des gros plans d'œil à l'iris et démultiplié par des orbes omniprésentes, les mains que marque le tabou du toucher sont obstinément coupées par le cadrage, voire cernées par le resserrement du diaphragme. Le parcours de ces motifs insistants et la longue durée du film permettent ainsi d'organiser la résorption progressive du désir défendu qui laisse place — via toutes les formes possibles de la figure jusqu'à son ultime métamorphose en une ronde d'enfants se tenant par la main — à une sorte de sérénité cotonneuse après les enchaînements mécaniques du cauchemar.

<sup>3</sup> Chaque film offre une variation où le handicap sert de cas limite pour théoriser un constituant général de la réception cinématographique, dans le sillage de l'analyse figurative (Emmanuelle André) et de l'anthropologie sensorielle à tendance phénoménologique, de Vivian Sobchack à Jennifer Barker en passant par Laura Marks.

Ces *constellations* oniriques de motifs, selon le terme de Kuntzel, participent donc d'un travail figuratif et ponctuatif. Cette dimension s'affirme encore davantage, du muet au parlant : par son économie itérative qui fait se succéder quatre journées toutes inaugurées par le gros plan d'un poing acharné frappant à une porte close, le film de Makhmalbaf semble retrouver le sens propre du jeu de mot éponyme du traité de stigmatologie de Peter Szendy<sup>4</sup>. Car le double enjeu du *Silence* – la recherche d'un « beau son » sapant celle de l'argent du loyer – se voit scandé par la reprise de plus en plus musicale de ces quatre coups insistants, cinglés par la pluie sur les cordes d'un dotâr, orchestrés par des artistes nomades et enfin martelés par des chaudronniers jusqu'à devenir, dans l'éclat des cuivres, « dans l'écart de [leur] répercussion, aussi instantanée ou aussi différée soit-elle »<sup>5</sup>, ce qu'ils ont toujours été, la sommation abrupte du destin ouvrant la 5<sup>e</sup> Symphonie que Beethoven écrivit à mesure que sa surdité s'intensifiait.

Si la narration répétitive, allusive et discontinue incarne ainsi le rêve dans la vie réelle jusqu'à cette apothéose musicale, la mise en scène du film, à force de détails, célèbre la jouissance sensible en jouant du relief saisissant, haptique, que le décadage et la proximité confèrent aux couleurs et aux textures. Néanmoins, au regard de la cécité du jeune héros, il s'agit surtout pour le spectateur de prolonger l'expérience et, tout en continuant à voir le film, d'approcher la vision lorsqu'elle est empêchée et supplémentée par « la tactilité ponctuelle de la percussion »<sup>6</sup>, selon l'analogie parlante d'une auscultation qui ne serait pas réalisée via la médiation d'un stéthoscope mais de l'appareil cinématographique relayant les coups frappés à même la matité de l'image, non pour imaginer mais pour *voir*, à travers sa résonance, l'opacité vécue de l'aveugle. Métaphores usuelles dont le suspens du regard entre l'écoute et le tact<sup>7</sup> permet précisément, face au *Silence*, de révoquer le contenu visuel ainsi que la tonalité dysphorique, tant Makhmalbaf offre à cet œil différé, médié par les coups de poings et la ponctuation filmique, une présentation de l'absence, une expérience de vibration extatique qui, comme la question du toucher pour Jean-Luc Nancy écouté par Jacques Derrida, « rappelle d'abord au partage, à la partition, à la discontinuité, à l'interruption, à la césure : à la syncope. Selon un 'mon corps' qui se trouve d'entrée de jeu engagé dans une *techné* aussi irréductible à la 'nature' qu'à l'esprit »<sup>8</sup>. Depuis le gros plan obtus de cette porte obstinément fermée vibrant des coups de poing qui l'ébranlent jusqu'au finale qui voit les mains de Khorshid, comme des ailes d'oiseau, battre la mesure de cette envahissante symphonie, de l'aveugle en quête de beauté sonore au spectateur appareillé par le film, il s'agit

<sup>4</sup> Peter Szendy, *À coups de points. La Ponctuation comme expérience*, Paris, Minituit, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 76. La formule exacte, ici détournée : « ce suspens de l'écoute entre tact et regard ».

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, Paris, Galilée, 2000, pp. 179–180.

## 'Rêve d'un geste' ou la main et l'œil dans quelques films du handicap sensoriel

donc d'*ouvrir* « une vue dans l'obscur sujet du sens, ce soleil noir »<sup>9</sup>. La mise en scène dispose ainsi les éléments d'une vision transmodale qui lève sur fond de perte, excède ce qu'elle a sous les yeux, « image l'absence »<sup>10</sup> et en fait résonner le vide pour esquisser en creux ses contours.

Une scène poignante d'*Au Pays du silence et de l'obscurité* repose également sur les vibrations sonores et en accuse la capacité médiale autant que l'incapacité à représenter. Car, de l'euphorie du conte persan au lyrisme documentaire d'Herzog, il n'est pas question d'imaginer ce que vit et sent une personne handicapée, pas plus qu'on ne peut donner à rêver son rêve à autrui, mais d'activer un double sentiment de distance infranchissable et de proximité essentielle. Le cas de Vladimir Kokol, cet homme de 22 ans aveugle et sourd de naissance, touche d'autant plus que la nature de son être-au-monde est impossible à concevoir au niveau sensible et confronte à une limite cauchemardesque. Sa présence compacte et son visage fermé forment un bloc opaque qui résiste à l'appréhension et suscite par rebond des projections de solitude et de détresse. Lorsque Fini Straubinger lui rend visite pour tenter de briser cet isolement, elle ne peut signifier sa présence à celui qu'elle non plus n'entend ni ne voit qu'en lui prenant la main, sans pouvoir en faire la surface d'inscription des messages qu'elle y encode d'ordinaire, puisqu'il n'a jamais eu accès au langage. Après quelques instants d'échanges tactiles, on donne à Vladimir un transistor allumé dont il effleure l'enceinte : il semble alors s'animer de l'intérieur avant d'entourer la radio fermement de ses bras en pressant sa paume contre la membrane vibrante. Et la vieille dame, à qui la scène est simultanément d-écrite sur sa propre paume, de s'exclamer : « Il aime ça, il sent quelque chose de vivant ». L'étrangeté du terme *lebendig* pour qualifier les palpitations musicales concentrées dans le haut-parleur éclairé, d'un côté, le décalage entre les perceptions à la fois distinctes et émoussées des spectateurs et l'avidité du jeune handicapé devant le son qui frémit au bout de ses doigts et, de l'autre, la communauté sensible que matérialise à l'écran la chaîne des mains et des appareils, le poste radio mais aussi la caméra dont les mouvements indiquent à l'écran les élans de l'opérateur Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein.

Pour en prendre toute la mesure, la médialité de la main doit donc s'envisager à l'aune de sa disparition. Selon la formule de Straubinger que cite un carton : « Quand tu me lâches la main, tu pourrais aussi bien te trouver à 1 000 kilomètres de moi ». Le cinéma du handicap perceptif en manifeste l'omniprésence selon diverses déclinaisons sensorielles, cognitives, affectives – organe de la caresse, outil de la préhension, support expressif d'une adresse ou d'une interlocution, unique pierre de *touche* de l'extérieur — qui, toutes, travaillent la faculté de relier et rapprocher les êtres et le monde. Lorsqu'Arthur Penn met en scène la détermination d'Anne Sullivan à sortir la jeune Helen Keller de sa prison d'incommunicabilité, il utilise en contrepoint d'un apprentissage brutal l'histoire dramatique de l'enseignante qui a retrouvé la vue mais perdu son petit frère d'une tuberculose osseuse.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Au fond des images*, Paris, Galilée, 2003, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 128.

Dans une séquence où, isolée avec Helen dans une maison de campagne, Anne revit en rêve la mort de Jimmy, les mains sont le moyen de faire communiquer les régimes d'image, les temporalités, les protagonistes actuels et virtuels. Sur fond d'inassignables sanglots intermittents, la caméra remonte le long du bras d'Helen endormie, depuis sa main gauche tendue hors du lit qu'une surimpression paraît faire flotter dans la pièce jusqu'à sa droite près de laquelle son enseignante somnole dans un fauteuil. Le même plan fluide aimanté par les mains agitées de l'enfant se surimprime une seconde fois sur le corps convulsif d'Anne qui, gémissant dans son sommeil, projette sa main tendue au premier plan, transition vers le cauchemar doublée par une nouvelle surimpression de main floue. La rhétorique du rêve fait se succéder l'avancée de la jeune fille *en aveugle*, démarche raide aux bras tendus, puis sa fuite en raccord dans l'axe inverse, dans un surdécoupage où sa course bégaye vers une porte close dont les battants s'ouvrent enfin. Un nouveau raccord inverse place alors le cadavre du frère entre sa sœur et la caméra, un dernier gros plan livre le visage éperdu hurlant un cri muet qui fait entendre, pour l'œil seul, ce nom de Jimmy qu'Anne répète à son tour à haute voix en se réveillant en sursaut. Le travail du film condense ainsi la médialité tactile et la transmodalité perceptive, en faisant converger les sensibilités respectives des appareils optique et psychique : filmée avec le grain du super-huit dans un fort contraste noir et blanc pour simuler la vue défectueuse, encadrée par des effets de fondus matérialisant le flottement hypnotique, le reflux mémoriel et le jeu du proche et du lointain, la mort y est présentée par la répétition traumatique comme l'irruption d'un insensé que la chaîne des mains relance le temps du cauchemar mais parvient à contrer, dans le cas d'Helen, à force de Signes.

Dans cette configuration où rêve et handicap s'enchaînent et se relancent, le geste permet une nouvelle articulation de l'œil et de la main. Dans les notes qu'Agamben lui a consacrées, l'allusion à l'une des pièces de Beckett pour la télévision — ici en épigraphe — esquisse en effet une piste pour comprendre dans son rapport au rêve le rôle crucial du cinéma pour préserver les gestes que l'humanité aurait *perdus*. Cette perte signifie au moins deux choses : le champ des pratiques humaines s'est vu restreint au point que nombre d'attitudes ou de mouvements ont cessé d'être en usage, ce que confirme *a fortiori* l'omniprésence actuelle d'écrans sur lesquels les corps se recroquevillent et les mains *scrollent* frénétiquement (le néologisme indique, à rebours, l'apparition de nouveaux stéréotypes manuels) ; l'expérience de la modernité décrite par Walter Benjamin a sans doute minoré l'attention nécessaire à l'aperception des gestes, au profit d'un court-circuit entre « l'examen et la distraction »<sup>11</sup> auquel le 7<sup>e</sup> art a certes permis de s'adapter mais en exposant surtout le spectateur à des images, des informations, des influx d'innervation, réservant l'inconscient optique à certains gros plans favorisant l'haptique.

<sup>11</sup> Olivier Aïm, « Benjamin (Walter) », *Publictionnaire. Dictionnaire encyclopédique et critique des publics* [en ligne], < <http://publictionnaire.huma-num.fr/notice/benjamin-walter> > [consulté le 17 mars 2020].

## 'Rêve d'un geste' ou la main et l'œil dans quelques films du handicap sensoriel

Dans le cinéma, Agamben s'attache donc à dissocier le geste de l'image et, en mettant l'accent sur le rêve, semble favoriser un type de création et de réception spécifiques au sauvetage des gestes à l'écran. Sur le versant poétique, la figurabilité onirique l'est d'une intensité transmodale tout ce qu'elle fait percevoir ou halluciner et le pare d'un mystérieux entêtement, comme dans *Night and Dreams* (*Nacht und Träume*, Samuel Beckett, 1983) où le travail du clair-obscur crée un effet de persistance rétinienne qui se dissiperait peu à peu et, avec elle, « la puissance de l'image »<sup>12</sup> au profit de la rémanence des gestes hiératiques performés à deux reprises, sur un dormeur rêvant, par une main dont le corps reste invisible dans la nuit. Du côté de la réception, en le libérant de la sphère des fins, Agamben remarque que le geste ne se constitue comme « médialité pure » (et non fabrication ou action) que dans l'œil qui l'observe : c'est un mouvement effectué sans but si ce n'est d'être vu, dans son suspens, et de donner à entendre, dans son mutisme essentiel, la texture même de l'expérience humaine, ce lien qui unit les êtres dans leurs communes singularités. « *Le geste consiste à exhiber une médialité, à rendre visible un moyen comme tel. Du coup, l'être-dans-un-milieu de l'homme devient apparent, et la dimension éthique lui est ouverte* »<sup>13</sup>.

Dans *Earth of the Blind*, un film à la beauté sidérante où précipitent, comme chez Vigo, le souci épuré du réel et la fascination du rêve, Stonys tresse des blocs d'images distincts qui s'entrelacent de façon sérielle et allusive autour d'un centre que Pascal aurait appelé la *nature*<sup>14</sup>. Sur fond d'exploitation ou de compagnonnage avec des animaux (le film débute dans un abattoir et présente un bestiaire qui mêle chevaux, vaches, chats, poules...), offrant à la contemplation force paysages ou natures mortes (le dernier plan, large et fixe, vibre à bas bruit de l'énergie figurative d'une pluie fine qui tombe sur le lac que *regarde* le protagoniste), on y suit, de dos, les déambulations de deux vénérables vieillards, homme et femme solitaires, dont la cécité n'est dévoilée que lorsque leur visage aux yeux clos s'expose enfin en gros plan, le temps de les voir s'affairer avec lenteur mais comme si de rien n'était, l'un à gravir une colline en fauteuil roulant, l'autre à des tâches ménagères. Ces discontinuités énigmatiques font du court-métrage à la fois une expérience de concentration pour nos yeux happés par des gestes menus et opiniâtres saisis par une caméra rapprochée (mains masculines actionnant les leviers qui font avancer le triporteur bricolé ou jouant de l'accordéon, mains féminines précautionneuses ou encore inertes, hormis un pouce tressautant, offrant à même son giron une brassée de foin à brouter à ses chèvres) et la mise

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *L'Épuisé*, dans Samuel Beckett, *Quad et autres pièces pour la télévision*, Paris, Minuit, 1992, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Moyens sans fins. Notes sur la politique*, Paris, Rivages, 1995, p. 69 (souligné par l'auteur).

<sup>14</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1996, p. 26 : « Mais si notre vue s'arrête là que l'imagination passe outre, elle se lassera plutôt de concevoir que la nature de fournir. Tout ce monde visible n'est qu'un trait imperceptible dans l'ample sein de la nature ».

en œuvre du sensible donné en partage, à la fois approprié *et* solidarisé, distribué *et* mutuel. L'enjeu éthique du regard porté sur des gestes humbles et familiers s'approfondit de la révélation différée du handicap dont le titre donnait pourtant l'indice : la gestualité des deux aveugles y apparaît aussi étonnante de précision que légèrement décalée. Ce coefficient d'étrangeté onirique favorise l'absorption du regard dans les allures naturelles et les attitudes picturales des figures humaines et fait ainsi accéder le spectateur à cette terre que les aveugles honorent de tous leurs sens et qui était déjà sienne sans qu'il s'en rende compte.

Pas d'angle d'immunité<sup>15</sup> en revanche dans *Mademoiselle Paradis* qui expose d'emblée, de front et longuement, le visage rougissant aux yeux révoltés de l'héroïne au piano. Le film retrace la cure magnétique de cette virtuose du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, aveugle depuis ses trois ans et contrainte par ses parents de faire de son don et de son handicap une attraction lucrative dont Barbara Albert souligne la violence persécutrice. La réalisatrice choisit en effet de retracer cet épisode célèbre comme un cas d'émancipation féminine passant moins par le recouvrement de la vue que par la médiation manuelle. Deux types de manipulation s'y opposent, celle, figurée, des Paradis qui livrent leur fille au public, et celle, littérale, de Mesmer qui, par l'imposition des mains ou son insertion dans le cercle des pensionnaires auxquels il joue de l'harmonica de verre autour du baquet, lui ouvre peu à peu les yeux sur le monde et sa valeur propre, décorrélée de sa capacité à reconnaître des formes et de son mérite à être écoutée, loin du précepte maternel ânonné lors de leur première rencontre : « Si tu ne vois pas, tu ne peux être vue et si tu n'es pas vue, tu n'es pas entendue, tu ne vis pas ».

Raymond Bellour voit une préfiguration de la relation du spectateur à l'écran et, notamment, sa part inconsciente, dans le *couple-machine* incarné en 1777 par *Mademoiselle Paradis* et celui qui lui fait suivre des yeux pourtant aveugles le reflet des mouvements de sa main :

Assis à côté de la jeune fille, Mesmer est spectateur, comme celle-ci l'est ou le devient, de cette image qu'ils forment et animent ensemble dans la glace [...]. Mais le magnétiseur en est aussi une sorte d'opérateur, qui projette l'image et cherche à la révéler, selon une confusion de l'optique et de l'haptique qui sera celle de toutes les machines à voir du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle avant qu'elles ne trouvent une solution fixe, plus fixe, dans la projection à distance et l'effet de miroir du cinéma<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> C'est le nom que Beckett donne au dispositif de *Film* (1965), ce cauchemar d'être scruté dans chacun de ses gestes, pour désigner l'axe où se place un Buster Keaton borgne et muet afin de soustraire son visage à la caméra qui le traque et s'avère n'être que lui-même. *Earth of the Blind* use d'abord aussi d'une focalisation qui dérobe les visages à l'objectif même si le retournement n'y est pas un point d'orgue et sert une médiation éthique.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Bellour, « *Mademoiselle Paradis* », dans Dominique Païni (dir.), *Les transports de l'image*, Paris, Hazan-Le Fresnoy-AFAA, 1997, p. 62.

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Dans *Mademoiselle Paradis*, cette projection opère en effet dans le travail conjoint des appareils psychique et perceptif, dans deux domaines au moins. D'une part, le processus transférentiel, où l'enjeu du regard recouvré suscite une relation de père à fille fondant un amour inconditionnel de soi et, d'autre part, le rêve : les images subjectives présentant la conquête progressive de la vue sont calquées sur la figurabilité onirique mais aussi sur les possibilités optiques de la caméra (des apparitions floues rayonnant faiblement dans l'obscurité, des effets de matière qui texturent l'image à défaut de garantir l'identification) ; inversement, le récit de rêve que fait Marie-Thérèse à sa femme de chambre évoque un grand arbre, ce que le film interprète, par le biais d'une vieille servante, comme un signe de croissance. Si le parc est en effet le champ d'exercice de la jeune femme à peine guérie qui tente de saisir les arbres qu'elle croit toucher du regard, l'arbre rêvé symbolise la possibilité de s'opposer à la violence parentale qui finit par replonger la jeune femme dans sa cécité psychosomatique sans pour autant lui ôter sa capacité de résistance : entre les deux séquences de concert qui encadrent le récit, les mêmes gestes, d'ailleurs hors champ, d'une virtuose à son piano, le même cadrage rapproché sur le visage agité aux yeux tournés en eux-mêmes mais une différence essentielle. Le public a disparu et, si la mère est encore présente, la fille lui intime le silence et joue, apaisée mais frémissante, pour son plus grand plaisir. Quand cesse le morceau, Marie-Thérèse pousse un soupir suggestif et s'illumine d'un sourire éclatant. Cette imperceptible révolution féminine tient donc bien à l'alliance de quatre mains dévouées aux gestes de leur art (les passes magnétiques du médium, les prouesses de *Mademoiselle Paradis* au clavier), concrétisée au milieu du film dans un duo à deux clavecins et opérant à la faveur d'un fluide dont le film ne cesse de rappeler qu'il est invisible.

Que conclure au terme de ce parcours où, par l'analyse esthétique, il s'est agi d'écouter une configuration assez stable pour y déceler, via sa portée anthropologique, un potentiel réflexif intéressant la réception filmique, à partir de la double médialité du cinéma pensé, d'une part, comme un réceptacle de gestes que majore, d'autre part, le rêve comme mise en œuvre d'un regard lui-même appareillé, prothèse d'œil haptique ouvert sur l'obscurité d'un inconscient psychique et corporel ? Le contrepoint que le rêve offre au handicap suppose l'articulation de deux sphères théoriques : l'appareil — perception, conscience, inconscient ; humain, machine — et le geste<sup>17</sup>. La question que le handicap adresse à l'humanité s'approfondit ainsi dans la perception appareillée qui donne à voir et entendre, autrement, le monde ; la recherche d'une figuration onirique, concentrée et défamiliarisée, nimbe d'un surcroît d'intensité sensorielle et affective les gestes à l'écran afin d'en actualiser les virtualités éthiques, soit le fait

<sup>17</sup> L'appareil est central dans la théorie psychanalytique du cinéma, de Bellour à Kuntzel, puis dans les travaux philosophiques de Jean-Louis Déotte et Pierre-Damien Huyghe centrés sur la perception. Quant au geste, il est l'objet de nombreuses publications dont la plus récente est due à Christa Blümlinger et Mathias Lavin (dir.), *Geste filmé, gestes filmiques*, Paris, Mimésis, 2018.

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de se sentir relié à un sensorium vivant et machinique qui nous englobe et nous illimite. Pensé à partir de ce passage à la limite qu'est le handicap, le spectateur de cinéma se réfléchit dans un déficit sensible originaire auquel re-médie, le temps d'un film, le nouage audio-visuel de l'œil et de la main, de l'organique et de la technique aussi bien qui, à la faveur du rêve comme représentation, en décuple l'impact perceptif et psychique pour lui ouvrir à son tour l'espace transmodal de la mémoire.

## Minor Gestures: Chantal Akerman's *Un jour Pina a demandé...*

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### *Abstract*

Drawing on Erin Manning's concept of the 'minor gesture', this article engages with the choreographic and filmic value of gestural hands. It considers Bausch's choreography as a gestural practice that intervenes into everyday comportment and habits to show or incite potential variation; and it traces how Akerman's filmic intervention into Bausch's work intensifies and alters (our readings of) this work in turn, enhancing what is there and adding new orientations to thematic pathways that it might indicate. Akerman's 1983 documentary *Un jour Pina a demandé...* includes many activities that involve hands, both on and off stage, as they are engaged in forming dance gestures, but also in smoking, putting on make-up, tying ties, performing gestures of tenderness or of sign language, and also of 'marking' movement sequences. Hand gestures, here, embrace both signification and functionality; yet even more importantly, Akerman's filming brings to the fore their tactile and social dimensions. This is less a matter of appropriating, but of sharing a choreographic concern for gestural hands, testifying to an aesthetic preoccupation with conduct that ultimately belongs to the commitment of Akerman and Bausch to what might be called an *ethics of gesture*, carried out across the media of dance and film.

Transposing Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's concept of the 'minor' to the gestural, Erin Manning writes: '[t]he minor gesture punctually reorients experience', and she continues: '[t]he event and the minor gesture are always in co-composition, the minor punctuating process, moving the welling event in new and divergent directions that alter the orientation of where the event might otherwise have settled'.<sup>1</sup> This article draws on Manning's concept of the minor gesture in a double sense. It associates its metaphorical resonance with the ways in which Pina Bausch and Chantal Akerman open up experience and events to 'variability';<sup>2</sup> and, more literally, it zooms in on Bausch and Akerman as artists who are concerned with the small, actual gestures both of choreographed dance

<sup>1</sup> Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 2–3.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 72. My use of the concept of the 'minor gesture' uncouples it from Manning's strong focus on neurodiversity.

and everyday life. It considers Bausch's choreography as a gestural practice that intervenes into everyday comportment and habits to show or incite potential variation;<sup>3</sup> and it traces how Akerman's filmic intervention into Bausch's work intensifies and alters (our readings of) this work in turn, enhancing what is there and adding new orientations to thematic pathways that it might indicate.<sup>4</sup> Akerman's 1983 documentary *Un jour Pina a demandé...* creates a sense of intimate yet respectful proximity to the dancers. This proximity rests not least on the filming of activities that involve hands, both on and off stage, as they are engaged in forming dance gestures, but also in smoking, putting on make-up, tying ties, performing gestures of tenderness or of sign language, and also of 'marking' movement sequences. Hand gestures, here, can be both functional and meaningful; yet even more importantly, Akerman's filming brings to the fore their tactile and social dimensions. This is less a matter of appropriating, but of sharing a choreographic concern for gestural hands, testifying to an aesthetic preoccupation with conduct that ultimately belongs to the commitment of Akerman and Bausch to what might be called an *ethics of gesture*, carried out across the media of dance and film.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most urgent questions, when exploring Akerman's documentary, relates to the vast discrepancy there must have been between the available and the ultimately chosen footage; and to the thought that must have gone into singling out what to include. Akerman and her team accompanied Bausch on tour from Wuppertal to Milan, Venice, and Avignon, recording run-throughs and performances of five pieces: *Komm tanz mit mir* (1977), *Kontaktb Hof* (1978), *1980*, *Walzer* (1982), and *Nelken* (1983). All of these pieces are between about two and three and a half hours long. How did Akerman pick the passages that made it into her 57-minute documentary, how did she decide what to show and what not to show? We can only attempt to answer this question. What we see is that the filmmaker went for a collage of clips of performances, rehearsals, and backstage sequences that echoes Bausch's own collages of scenes in her performance works. These clips are juxtaposed or respond to each other across the length of the film in ways that go beyond the documentary in the strict sense, to bring about an insightful variation of Bausch's choreographies in the form of a new, co-authored piece of filmic dance theatre: *Un jour Pina a demandé...*

<sup>3</sup> The gestural quality of Pina Bausch's choreographies has often been commented on, see, for instance, Inge Baxmann, 'Dance Theatre: Rebellion of the Body, Theatre of Images and an Inquiry into the Sense of the Senses', in *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater*, ed. by Royd Climenhaga (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2012), pp. 142–51.

<sup>4</sup> While this article considers Akerman's specific ways of 'intervening' into Bausch's work, it is based on Douglas Rosenberg's definition of all 'screendance', which 'implies that the method of apprehension (the screen) modifies the activity it inscribes (dance)'. Douglas Rosenberg, *Screendance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> See Lucia Ruprecht, 'Introduction: Towards an Ethics of Gesture', *Performance Philosophy* 3.1 (2017), 4–22 <<https://www.performancephilosophy.org/journal/article/view/167/185>> [accessed January 2021].

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### *Handling Touch*

Among Akerman's chosen clips is the following: about twenty minutes into the film, we witness one of the most memorable stagings of tactile hands in Bausch's oeuvre, shown during a performance at the Scala in Milan. It is part of *Kontaktb Hof* and it draws out this piece's declared interest in (sites for) 'contact'. Dancer Nazareth Panadero, wearing a pink, flowy dress with lace inserts as if made for a doll, is surrounded by perhaps eight men, who touch and test her body with over-agitated but also business-like gestures. This is recorded in a medium shot, hardly allowing for an orientating scan of the entire group. Carrying out moves that are both childish and possessive, hands ruffle Panadero's hair, tickle or press the tip of her nose, pinch her cheek, massage her shoulders, stroke her belly, caress her temple, smack her bottom (fig. 1). The female dancer does not show any reaction, she remains passive and silent. The men let her down to the floor and pick her up again while her head and limbs hang loose. When she is on the floor, someone shakes the flesh on the inside of her upper arm, another one rubs his head on her stomach. The longer the routine continues, the more it speeds up, lasting approximately three increasingly unsettling minutes beyond the duration of the nostalgic love song 'Spring and Sunshine' (*Frühling und Sonnenschein*) which accompanies it. When the men finally let go of Panadero, she simply keeps on standing there, before she picks up her shoes and leaves. The men are joined by another woman in a pale blue dress, who leads them into one of Bausch's signature 'lines' or circles, in which dancers walk in linear procession behind each other while performing looped sequences of arm



Fig. 1: *Un jour Pina a demandé...* (Chantal Akerman, 1983). Screen capture.

movements and hand gestures. Now, the gestures are more subdued ones, resembling the typical displacement activities of social comportment: a little scratch of the neck, smoothing down one's jacket, a half-embarrassed smile across the shoulder; but also breathing out with puffed-up cheeks, as if in frowning, self-inflated commentary on the previous goings-on. The piece's other female dancers also join the line. *Kontakthof* ends with the entire cast walking in a large circle around the stage.

*Kontakthof's* 'doll scene' is the culmination of the piece's gestural leitmotiv of often problematic tenderness, which is performed in a number of hand-led choreographic sequences, and associated with the repeated use of the song 'Spring and Sunshine'.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the long take of the climactic scene, however, *Un jour Pina a demandé...* does not show us any of these other sequences. Instead, Akerman contextualises the doll scene by regularly punctuating her film with short, isolated clips of couples who enact encounters in front of the green padded walls of the company's working space, the Wuppertal *Lichtburg*. In one of these clips, we see a couple practicing the idiosyncratic gestures of tenderness on each other. As the performers keep on repeating their gestural routine, they give us a chance to observe with attentiveness what they do, so that we recognize single moves and touches from the doll scene without being distracted by the speed and multiplicity of hands that make up its spectacular group setting.<sup>7</sup> If that setting unfolds a disturbing emotional effect, the couple's rehearsal makes clear that it studies the form, not the dramatic impact, of touch. Akerman uses the analytical quality of this rehearsal to counter the affective blow of the performed version. Another one of Akerman's choices of footage works in similarly re-routing fashion. Showing one of the processional lines from *Walzer*, she makes us realise how this piece also takes up *Kontakthof's* ambivalent hand gestures, now possibly in order to redeem them by way of the light-hearted, hip-swinging élan and the greater agency of the female dancers, who perform the routine of hair-ruffling and nose-pinching first on the men, then in the air while waltz-stepping away from them.

In addition, Akerman places *Kontakthof's* doll scene in between two backstage sequences. The first sequence catches moments at various points of time before the beginning of a performance. It shows us dancers in calm, but also focused or expectant moods, resting, waiting, and smoking, in street attire; it shows them getting ready, applying makeup, rehearsing, already in costume, movement phrases by marking them with their hands. A dancer sits at a piano and plays a jazz piece, very different from the songs and musical excerpts that Bausch

<sup>6</sup> See Raimund Hoghe, 'Into Myself — a Twig, a Wall: An Essay on Pina Bausch and her Theatre', in *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook*, pp. 62–73 (p. 67).

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller analysis of the aesthetic of repetition in Bausch, see Gerald Siegmund, 'Rehearsing In-Difference: The Politics of Aesthetics in the Performances of Pina Bausch and Jérôme Bel', in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Politics*, ed. by Rebekah J. Kowal, Randy Martin, and Gerald Siegmund (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 182–97.

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chooses for her performances. We hear muffled talk. Another dancer is tying his tie and smoothing his hair in front of a full-length mirror. A female performer quietly sings 'My Bonnie lies over the Ocean' while applying powder with a brush.<sup>8</sup> The backstage sequence that succeeds the recording of *Kontakthof's* final passages displays a different mood; quick changeovers during a performance indicate an alert atmosphere. We see a male dancer (Lutz Förster) first standing, apparently just having changed into a new outfit, then sitting in front of a makeshift mirror in dim light while two women and two men help him with the final touches of his makeup and clothes. The film cuts to Dominique Mercy in pin-stripe suit who refreshes the foundation on his face, using a powder puff to cover the sweat. Panadero, chewing gum in mouth, takes over the puff as soon as he is done. More dancers huddle in front of another mirror to check their faces. Loud voices intrude from the stage, mingling with whispered chatting in the wings. Hairspray is passed round, pins attached to buns, hands rubbed clean with tissues. Mechthild Großmann is having a smoke and sipping coffee. While we saw Mercy cross-legged against a wall, taking a drag in comfortable clothes in a moment of rest at the beginning of the first backstage sequence, he is now smoking again, but in more formal fashion, sitting in his buttoned-up suit on a chair, with a collected, slightly tense face.

By including the functional, everyday backstage moves of professional performers in her documentary, Akerman echoes Bausch's own principle of putting on stage and choreographing mundane comportment. Framed by the camera, quotidian hand moves thus become gestures, acquiring equal value as those we see in the clips from performances.<sup>9</sup> Activating the interventionist potential of Manning's concept of the minor gesture, this becoming-gesture implies the creation by the filmmaker and the choreographer of conditions that allow for the 'variability' of the events or comportments that they work with.<sup>10</sup> As in the scene of the couple in front of the green wall that shows us another version of the touching that we have witnessed before, it is in this variability that a self-reflective dimension arises. Akerman chooses and places her scenes so that they yield gestural commentary on each other. In the case of the backstage sequences, it is especially the passage with Förster being swiftly looked after by four people that reflects back on the doll performance. Like Panadero, Förster does not object to being handled by a group of colleagues. Yet he, of course, receives services that help him getting ready in haste. In addition, he is in control of what happens to him, reacting to one of the women's touches by telling her that she

<sup>8</sup> This song is another element of *Kontakthof*, sung by the company sitting in a line of chairs parallel to the back of the stage, in front of the podium that is part of this piece's stage design; we do not see the scene in Akerman's documentary, however.

<sup>9</sup> For the aesthetic of the ordinary gesture in film, see Lesley Stern, 'Ghosting: The Performance and Migration of Cinematic Gesture, Focusing on Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Good Men, Good Women*', in *Migrations of Gesture*, ed. by Sally Ann Ness and Carrie Noland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 185–216.

<sup>10</sup> Manning, p. 72.

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just applied a little too much makeup. By contrast, Panadero puts all her strength into remaining controlled enough not to react to what the men do to her. She invests energy into the maintenance of her passivity. This way, she prolongs rather than shortens her ordeal. Akerman's clips follow the distribution of masculine and feminine norms of behaviour that define large parts of Bausch's oeuvre. But, like Bausch herself, Akerman also diversifies gender performance, by directing the camera at a man to whom make-up is applied; while filming the doll scene at such length as to reveal the steadfast endurance of the female performer whose stamina outlasts the men's handling. If the functional manual activities of the backstage setting become gestures through the direction of Akerman's camera, the persistent reiteration of hand gestures in the passages that show deliberately staged behaviour leads us to perceive them in their functionality, rather than their signification. In this way, and closely echoing Bausch's own strategies, Akerman handles touch: valuing the ordinary hand moves of the performers as gestures in their own right, while taking apart extraordinary gestures by giving us enough time to perceive them as (dis)functional units of manual operability.

### *Guiding the Gaze, Taking by the Hand*

Can the directing of the gaze be a gesture, in the sense of taking viewers by the hand to share a precious selection of impressions with them? Or of making them cover and uncover their eyes with their hands? In footage of a run-through of *Walzer* that is included towards the beginning of the documentary, we see dancer Héléna Pikon's head and bust in medium close-up. She is looking at something

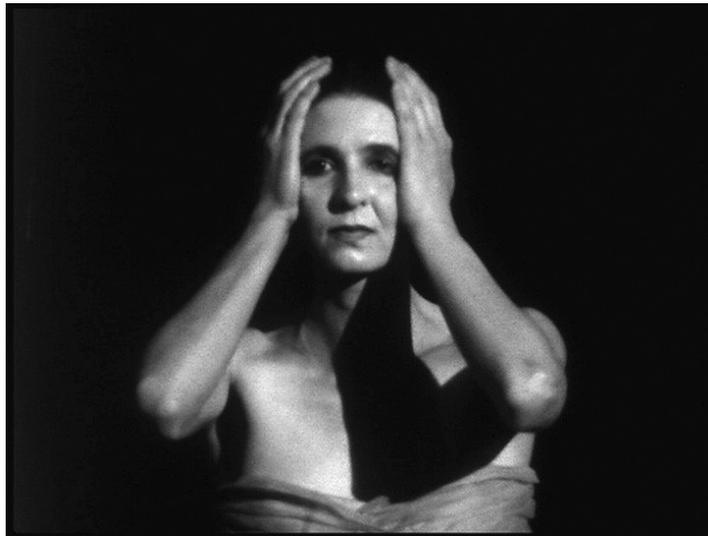


Fig. 2: *Un jour Pina a demandé...* (Chantal Akerman, 1983). Screen capture.

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motionlessly, lifting her hands to her head and placing them right and left on her skull, in a take of about 90 seconds. The weight of her arms very slowly drags her hands and the skin on her temples down, so that her left eye begins to be slanted downwards, impeding her vision (fig. 2).<sup>11</sup> If we carry out the gesture of the woman by ourselves, we feel the warmth of our skull, covered by layers of hair, the pressure of our palms, the slight tension in the arms that are lifted while the shoulders are held down, and the pull on our skin as the hands ever so slowly descend along the temples. We also notice the diminution of our visual field with the increased pull at the corner of our eye. Our sight is being disfigured alongside the disfigurement of our face. Akerman points up a concern with sight, with what to watch or acknowledge and, by extension, with what to show, in one of the brief interviews of the film. We see her sitting on the floor underneath a window, saying to a woman who is placed towards the left-hand side of the frame, with her back to us (thus echoing our own position):

When I watched one of Pina's performances for the first time a couple of years ago — it was *Bandoneon* — I was overcome by an emotion I can't quite define. But it was very very strong and had something to do with happiness. And now, we've been following her for two weeks. We've been watching her as she works, we've seen rehearsals, performances, rehearsals, performances. And something else has really happened. There really have been moments during which I felt I had to defend myself from what was being expressed, moments in the performance when I had to close my eyes. And at the same time I don't understand why.<sup>12</sup>

One specific sequence of the documentary seems to re-create this experience. It is a passage from a performance of *Nelken* in Avignon, which is inserted shortly after Akerman's confession, and makes us want to close our eyes, and ears, in turn. This wish to defend ourselves is brought about by Akerman's framing, restricting our gaze to the events at the front of the stage, while omitting that which happens in the background. What we see are women and men in evening gowns on a row of chairs, leaning back and placing their weight on their forearms while pushing their pelvis up — as if 'jumping' with their hips — so that they can change the crossing of their legs while momentarily being in the air. While we see them first from behind, the performers grab their chairs several times to rearrange them. As opposed to the many long, stable takes of the documentary, the camera here rushes around with the dancers' actions. Performers are filmed from a low angle so that we get glimpses of white underpants, worn indiscriminately by all of them.

<sup>11</sup> The image of the woman recalls the beginning of *Kontakthof*, not included in Akerman's documentary, where the performers enact exactly the same gesture of placing their hands on their skulls, yet moving them down by sliding their hair away towards the back of their necks when presenting themselves to the audience. A slight gestural variation turns the determined self-exhibition of *Kontakthof* into *Walzer's* melancholic stare, set to Edith Piaf's song 'No, je ne regrette rien'.

<sup>12</sup> English subtitles, *Un jour Pina a demandé...* (Chantal Akerman, 1983).

They repeat their movements at a frantic pace, interspersing their leg-crossing with fast seesawing passages where they lean backwards and forwards on their chairs while executing a brief arm routine. There is intensity in the soundscape too: the music is from Franz Schubert's string quartet *Death and the Maiden*, overlaid with the increasingly urgent cries of a woman whom we do not see and who breathlessly shouts (in French), as far as we can understand her: 'This is impossible! What are you doing? No, no; yes! Stop! Don't do this', ending in a piercing scream, after which Akerman cuts to another backstage sequence. The particular concurrence of sonic and physical exertion, together with our ignorance of the full picture, might force many of us to imagine rape. If Akerman had opened the entire stage to our gaze, we would know that the scene plays out in front of two large blocks of cardboard boxes that are built by a group of male performers while the upset woman paces between them, commenting on their actions. Independent of its filming, the scene is still unsettling as the men do not respond to the woman's pleading. The violent imaginary is however held further at bay. Akerman does not offer us this reassurance.<sup>13</sup>

Yet again, in the backstage scenes this imagined violation of intimacy is set off against a space of safe privacy. Dancers are at ease changing in front of each other, and in front of the camera — note the filmmaker's medium close-up of a bare-breasted female dancer who is brushing her hair.<sup>14</sup> Such scenes suggest that Akerman's film constitutes a document of friendship. Akerman and her team lived with the company for three months, and viewers are allowed to re-live this experience. She begins her documentary in the mode of familiarity, in the middle of a stage rehearsal, focusing on Bausch giving instructions to her dancers without informing us about time, place and title of the piece that was being rehearsed at that moment.<sup>15</sup> The documentary ends with a brief snippet of an interview with

<sup>13</sup> She also includes a similarly uneasy scene from *Komm tanz mit mir*, in which Jo Ann Endicott fails to convince a single man to dance with her and instead finds herself being encircled by a large number of men.

<sup>14</sup> In its confidence and ease, this shot of the bare-breasted woman might be the most emancipatory one of the documentary, next to the shot at the beginning that shows Bausch herself in a loose vest, visibly not wearing a bra, while directing her dancers on an open-air stage through kind but firm gestural communication. Is it coincidental that Akerman chose to show Bausch in this outfit, given that the choreographer is often seen without a bra underneath a vest or T-shirt, and given that bras were less compulsory in 1980s Europe than they are now? In any case, these shots exude calm authority, especially when we juxtapose them with staged scenes such as *Kontakthof's* underwear-adjusting march, in which two women continuously fiddle around with the layers underneath their formal wear.

<sup>15</sup> The lack of establishing shots makes orientation as to which of the pieces we are seeing at any one time difficult. It is also sometimes not immediately clear whether we are witnessing performances or rehearsals. To some extent, the subtitles that indicate titles of pieces are helpful here; but, Akerman certainly did not lay stress on conventional means of continuity and location, assuming a relaxed kind of acquaintanceship with Bausch's work. This is differently approached in Klaus Wildenhahn's documentary *What are Pina Bausch and her Dancers Doing in Wuppertal?*, also made in 1983, which begins with the presumably programmatic confession that the camera team (always) arrive too late when attempting to catch the liveness of rehearsal work. For a

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Bausch in a dressing room. Akerman, who is behind the camera, asks: 'Pina, how do you see your future?' The sweet and perhaps conspiratorial smile with which Bausch looks at Akerman before answering that she hopes for love and strength indicates a little less of the professional distance of other interviews. Familiarity between filmmaker and choreographer is also an effect of the pervasiveness of medium shots, medium close-ups, and occasional close-ups, allowing us to gain much more proximity to the dancers as compared to watching them in a theatre. Full-body shots that include the feet are rare.<sup>16</sup> Mostly, the camera is set at a low height, omitting the floor and catching performers from the hips upwards. While this angle is unusual in dance filming, which normally gives much attention to legwork, it epitomises Akerman's reading of Bausch as a gestural choreographer. The familial closeness and perspective of the shots enables us to access gestural detail, while simultaneously implying the director's presence. Giuliana Bruno writes: '[a] visitor to Akerman's world' — or to Akerman filming Pina's world — 'can even become sensitized to her own position in it. The placement of her camera sometimes indicates where the author stands in all senses, since it even includes the measure of her slight height'.<sup>17</sup> As Bruno's move from anatomy ('slight height') to attitude ('where the author stands in all senses') indicates, Akerman's filmic aesthetic is also an ethics, demonstrating a dedication to choreographic conduct that echoes Bausch's own.<sup>18</sup>

Such conduct might be best represented by the minor gesture of taking someone by the hand. As Marina Nordera explores, the motor functions and the sensory and kinaesthetic qualities of this gesture gain symbolic value in dance.<sup>19</sup>

discussion of Wildenhahn's film, see Annemarie Matzke, 'Was tut Klaus Wildenhahn beim Filmen von Pina Bausch und ihren Tänzern in Wuppertal? Das *Making Of* als Ethnografie von Probenarbeit', in *Die andere Szene. Theaterarbeit und Theaterproben im Dokumentarfilm*, ed. by Stefanie Dieckmann (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014), pp. 82–99. For a discussion of two recent documentaries by Lilo Mangelsdorf, Anne Linsel and Rainer Hoffmann, of stagings of *Kontakthof* with senior citizens and teenagers, see Christina Thurner, "Wirklich eines meiner Lieblingsstücke." Fokus auf Pina Bauschs *Kontakthof* mit Senioren und mit Teenagern', in Dieckmann, *Die andere Szene*, pp. 100–13.

<sup>16</sup> When recording Mercy's demonstration of virtuosic feats of ballet technique in *Nelken*, the camera suddenly drops down to his feet, echoing the abruptness of the dancer's display of technical prowess.

<sup>17</sup> Giuliana Bruno, 'In Memory of Chantal Akerman: Passages through Time and Space' in *Chantal Akerman: Afterlives*, ed. by Marion Schmid and Emma Wilson (Cambridge: Legenda, 2019), pp. 7–12 (p. 9).

<sup>18</sup> If Akerman is able to pursue and depict Bausch's gesturality so well, this is because the latter is characteristic of her own work too, independent of the choreographer. Her *Toute une nuit* of 1982, shortly preceding *Un jour Pina a demandé...*, is a Bauschian collage of gestural scenes that even includes a dance of objects, in the frontal shot of a couple whose precipitous departure from a shaking bar table makes their beer glasses tip over to the right, once they have hastily left the frame, in analogy to the couple's flight. Also note that Charlotte Garson, in her blurb for the *Cabiers du cinema* DVD leaflet, calls *Toute une nuit* a ballet 'à la Pina Bausch'.

<sup>19</sup> See Marina Nordera, 'Prendre par la main,' in *Histoires de gestes*, ed. by Marie Glon and Isabelle Launay (Paris: Actes Sud, 2012), pp. 165–79 (p. 167). Also note the title of Bausch's 1978 seminal adaptation of *Macbeth*, *He takes her by the hand and leads her into the castle, the others follow*,

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In footage of a rehearsal sequence of *Nelken*, Jan Minarik, Urs Kaufmann, and Förster lead Mercy by the hand. This is set to an instrumental version of the ‘he’ll take my hand’ line in George Gershwin’s song ‘The Man I Love’, which Förster enacted in sign language in two previous scenes.<sup>20</sup> It is a sequence in which the performers do not watch each other move, but make each other move, through gestural intervention. In her documentary, Akerman likewise does not merely record the choreographer’s work, but intervenes in it, by her choices of what she shows, and how she shows it; sometimes appeasing its afflictions, sometimes drawing out their urgency. Like a friend, the film takes Bausch and her dancers ‘by the hand’, as it were, leading them towards new constellations.

which marks the choreographer’s move to her rehearsal method of asking questions; see Gabriele Klein, *Pina Bausch’s Dance Theater: Company, Artistic Practices and Reception* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> For a queer reading of these scenes, see Eike Wittrock, ‘Pina Bausch backstage, oder: Tanztheater von hinten’, in *Staging Gender – Reflexionen aus Theorie und Praxis der performativen Künste*, ed. by Irene Lehmann, Katharina Rost, and Rainer Simon (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), pp. 81–102 (pp. 95–99).

## Hands-on Film: Media Archaeology as Gestural Practice

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### *Abstract*

This article explores the necessity of gestures for film analysis and argues for a conception of media archaeology as gestural practice. Celluloid film copies are not only projected and watched but also touched repeatedly: they are put together and taken apart again, collected, restored and stored — or, on the contrary, forgotten, sorted out and destroyed. Each individual film is an equally fragile material thing with a micro-history of its own. The broad spectrum of gestures practiced in handling films will be examined on the basis of three examples dating from the 1990s where video technology became an important tool: first, *Interface* (*Schnittstelle*, Harun Farocki 1995) and *Playback* (Hartmut Bitomsky 1995), which demonstrate a self-reflective practice of film analysis whereby pointing to details of the arrested images or touching a film strip with the fingertips are crucial gestures. Second, I analyse the careful handling of archival material in *Transparencies* (*Trasparenze*, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi 1998), in which the authors re-filmed severely damaged footage recorded during World War I, and examined it frame by frame in a gestural way. What is at stake here is a rethinking of how to archive films and the need for what I call an ‘ecology of archiving’.

### *Touching Film Material*

In his 1985 essay *Analyses in Flames (Is Film Analysis Finished?)*, film critic and theorist Raymond Bellour questions the future of film analysis, inevitably confronting not only the transience of the moving image but also the ‘irreducibility of the filmic substance’ — a substance that fascinates and stimulates, but nevertheless limits analysis because of ‘the exceptional resistance mounted by the analytic material’.<sup>1</sup> This resistance of film material manifests itself when a filmstrip is cut, jointed and glued, or runs through a projector. Among film professionals, the editing table was, at that time, the

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Bellour, ‘Analysis in Flames (Is Film Analysis Finished?)’, *Diacritics*, 15.1 (Spring 1985), 52–56 (p. 52).

preferred instrument for a frame-by-frame analysis of film material. Jean-Luc Godard's seminal *Histoires du cinéma* (1988–1998) poses the correspondence between freeze-frames at its centre. At the same time, the video recorder made it possible to fix the moving image, making it an ideal instrument for the analysis of videotaped imagery. Yet, as Bellour asserts, the resistance of the filmic substance remains as 'the mad desire to touch the film itself'.<sup>2</sup> He thus concludes: 'There are no longer, or should no longer be, any analyses of films. There are just gestures'.<sup>3</sup> Bellour places the singularity of the film experience at the centre of his understanding of film analysis and argues for a close viewing of the moving image frame by frame, shot by shot. By advocating gestures, he insists on the encounter with film as a singular event, experiencing the rhythm and the editing of the film and thereby approaching the filmic substance itself.

If gestures are to replace analysis, then, the question becomes what are the gestures with which to approach the filmic substance? In the following, I will argue that the desire to touch films is not a bad one — on the contrary, it can serve as the very source for the analysis of film as part of the material world. The sense of touch and, more precisely, gestures are not only a way to approach the materiality of photographs and films, they also possess a productivity of their own. Gestures stand for 'a concept that is fundamental to the creation and reception of visual images'.<sup>4</sup> Media theorist Vilém Flusser attributed great importance to gestures for what he called the 'universe of technical images'. In his understanding, the pressing of keys, for instance, is mainly linked to typewriter and computer keyboards operating computational programming.<sup>5</sup>

Gestures relate people and things in space as well as in time, they are a language of the body, and they can also create connections between images. It has been widely noted that the affinity of gestures with film and visual media, in general, consists in their close relationship to motion as well as to emotion. Furthermore, film theorists such as Laura U. Marks have reclaimed vision as a haptic perception and embodied experience.<sup>6</sup> Taking inspiration from Giorgio Agamben's widely discussed ethical notion of gesture as the heart of cinema, exposing what he calls 'mediality as such',<sup>7</sup> I will focus on film analysis as a gestural practice that is able to unfold the historicity of film at the level of the image's materiality itself. This

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> The quote is by Keith Moxey reviewing the edited volume *Gestures of Seeing in Film, Video and Drawing*, ed. by Asbjørn Grønstad, Henrik Gustafsson and Øyvind Vågnes (New York, London: Routledge, 2017); see also Barbara Grespi, *Il cinema come gesto. Incorporare le immagini, pensare il medium* (Rome: Aracne, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> See Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> See Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, 'Notes on Gesture', in Id., *Means Without End: Notes of Politics* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 49–60.

includes the desire to touch the filmic substance and the complex relationship between gesture and glance as part of a critical thinking *with* film that considers it a specific, historical material.

For the film director and critic Harun Farocki, the handling of film material played a crucial part in teaching film classes and doing film analysis. In a short contribution to the German film journal *Filmkritik* in 1980, he argues that the cutting room and the editing table were essential to his understanding of film analysis.<sup>8</sup> Here, he also speculates about a ‘gestural thinking’ as a way of practising film analysis. According to Volker Pantenburg, Farocki, in his essay film *Interface* (*Schnittstelle*, 1995), practises this way of thinking *with* film and demonstrates the importance of gestures in analysing some central filmic operations like framing and cutting.<sup>9</sup> He especially focuses on the differences between cutting a celluloid film and cutting a video.<sup>10</sup> To cut a film means to make an actual cut in the image or sound strip, as Farocki explains, whereas to edit a video requires only the operation of copying from one tape to another. The difference between the two visual media becomes evident when comparing the gestures implied in each case. As Farocki states, he touches a film strip or sound reel with his fingertips (‘Fingerspitzen’) to perceive the cut or the glue before he sees or hears it. For him, this simple gesture indicates a perception and a sensibility or intuition (‘Fingerspitzengefühl’) that is crucial for film analysis. That is, touching the film material creates a tactile experience initiating a sense of how the film was made — in other words: to touch a film is a way to think *with* the film.

Working with videotaped material involves gestures of another kind. Here, it is no longer about touching the material itself but about inserting a videotape into the recorder and pressing keys — gestures, which nevertheless need the sensibility of touch. In *Interface*, Farocki explicitly shows the different gestures in handling a filmstrip or a videotape and addresses the specificity of each media technology. However, the gesture of pointing to significant visual details presented on screen is a way to approach the moving image without touching the film material itself. The gestures inherent in the analysis of visual media change with the media technology that provide these images.

Farocki sustained a lifelong interest in gestures as a mode of productivity, connecting bodies and actions in space and in time. In *The Expression of Hands* (*Der Ausdruck der Hände*, 1997), he claims that film has to transform all tactile sensation into glances because it is not a medium of touch but of vision. Yet, in analysing the complex chains of gestures performed by a pickpocket in *Pickup on South Street* (Samuel Fuller 1953), Farocki uses his own hands over

<sup>8</sup> Harun Farocki, ‘What an Editing Room Is’, in Id., *Nachdruck/Imprint: Texte/Writings*, ed. by Susanne Gaensheimer, Nicolaus Schafhausen (Berlin, New York: Vorwerk 8, Lukas & Sternberg, 2001), pp. 79–85.

<sup>9</sup> See Volker Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard: Film As Theory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 157–220.

<sup>10</sup> The German word ‘Schnitt’ (‘cut’) indicates the main procedure in film editing, and ‘Schnittstelle’ literally means the exact place of the cut.

the video monitor. Together with the spoken commentary, they are his most important instruments to analyse film. As film scholar Doreen Mende's detailed examination shows, Farocki frequently points with his hands to specific details of a sequence to emphasize his analytical observations of technical images ranging from celluloid film to computer simulations.<sup>11</sup>

Hartmut Bitomsky, like Farocki a former student at DFFB, was also interested in new ways of film analysis.<sup>12</sup> His video *Playback* (1995) focusses on the practice of film analysis with videotaped images in the context of a workshop on film preservation. The participants of the workshop discuss early films that were transferred to video in order to watch them several times, fast forward and rewind the moving images easily and analyse them in detail. *Playback* shows the gathering of film directors, scholars, archivists and students around a collection of monitors: they speak about what they are seeing; they operate the keyboard of the video recorder and point, with their almost touching hands, to details of interest. These people execute a film analysis as gestural and participatory practice in a very direct manner. Moreover, their operating and indicating gestures sometimes encounter the gestures performed by people on screen. This random encounter expresses the potential of gestures to connect people and things in space and in time.

It is no coincidence, that one aim of the 1995 workshop was to decide which film copies are worth being preserved and restored. To make this decision, the film scholars discuss the historical and aesthetic value one can attribute to these copies archived in the Netherlands Film Museum (Amsterdam), the organizer of the conference. Among the participants was Peter Delpout who advocated for the preservation of damaged nitro film reels. His compilation film, *Lyrical Nitrate* (1990), resulted from the growing interest in the history of singular film copies from early cinema — and from a profound understanding of the fragile materiality of cellulose-based film.<sup>13</sup>

While electronic media and digital editing now dominate the film industry, nitro and celluloid film has not entirely disappeared. Film archives and other cultural institutions continue to store and maintain vast inventories of films that once were not only projected and watched but also, more importantly, handled over and over again. These films have been put together and taken apart, collected, stored and restored. As such, these nitro or celluloid films were not only perceived visually and acoustically, but also physically and they were repeatedly touched by human hands. Passed, as they are, from hand to hand, they might even be understood as 'distributed objects' — objects possessing a history

<sup>11</sup> See Doreen Mende, 'The Many Haruns. A Timeline Through Books and Hand Gestures from 18,000 BC-2061', *e-flux journal*, 59 (November 2014) <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/59/61102/2061/>> [accessed 29 February 2020].

<sup>12</sup> See Frederik Lang, *Hartmut Bitomsky: Die Arbeit eines Kritikers mit Worten und Bildern* (Wien: Synema, 2020). I thank Michael Baute for drawing my attention to Bitomsky's *Playback*.

<sup>13</sup> To mention are also the found footage films *Decasia* (Bill Morrison 2001) and *Film ist* (*Film ist*, Ernst Deutsch 1998–2009).

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and an agency of their own.<sup>14</sup> This touching and handling leaves innumerable traces on the film material and affects our ability to preserve them. Moreover, photochemical substances such as celluloid are subject to their environments. That is to say, films and photographs are fragile material things that undergo numerous states of transformation, changing in accordance with the varying conditions of temperature, light and humidity to which they are exposed — and they are always in the process of deterioration and decay.

In the 1990s, new film history shows a great affinity with media archaeology in investigating the dispersed genealogies of media technologies and the variety of localized media practices.<sup>15</sup> Far from being a single scientific discipline with a clear-cut research methodology, media archaeology is a heterogenic field where different research interests meet. In addition to Friedrich Kittler's and Jussi Parikka's approach,<sup>16</sup> I would identify as a key media archaeological issue the fragility of the media materials and the related bodily practices of care and repair. The observation of the short or long lifespan of substances and their compounds from which technical devices and media infrastructures are made, opens media archaeology to ecological questions because these substances interact with their environment and react to heat or cold, dryness or wetness.<sup>17</sup> The limited stability and durability of technical devices and media infrastructures is strongly related to these interactions and thus to environmental conditions. The global circulation of media materialities depends on economic calculations and geopolitical conditions that must also be considered.<sup>18</sup>

From a media-ecological perspective, the traces of their use and storage form part of the 'social biography'<sup>19</sup> of every reel of celluloid film or photographic print. As individual, material things, they have a singular micro-history demanding specific practical approaches. My proposal of media archaeology as gestural practice stems precisely from this idea that accounts for the ecology of media materiality, its 'variations in texture, ductility, rates of decay'.<sup>20</sup> To illustrate it, I will refer to the method of 'analytic camera' which was developed

<sup>14</sup> See Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Media theorist Siegfried Zielinski has coined the term in 1994. See his *Deep Time of the Media: Towards an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2006). See also *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge UK, Malden MA: Polity Press, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> See Jussi Parikka, 'Green Media Times: Friedrich Kittler and Ecological Media History', *Archiv für Mediengeschichte*, 13 (2013), 69–78.

<sup>17</sup> See my article 'Medienarchäologie und Film', in *Handbuch Filmtheorie*, ed. by Bernhard Groß, Thomas Morsch (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019), pp. 1–16 <[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-09514-7\\_35-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-09514-7_35-2)> [accessed 9 November 2020].

<sup>18</sup> See Jennifer Gabrys, *Digital Rubbish: A Natural History of Electronics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> See *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 58.

by two filmmakers, Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, in order to examine damaged nitro-film material frame by frame. Through this gestural film analysis, they contribute to the idea of a 'critical cinema' focusing especially on the entanglement of Italian visual culture with the geopolitical histories of imperialism, colonialism and racism.

*An 'Analytic Camera'*

Since the 1970s, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi have been employing a gestural practice in their work on the battered material of films from the early decades of cinema, which they track down in local archives as part of their project to reconstruct their complex geopolitical and colonial histories. Many of their 'archival films'<sup>21</sup> make use of the extensive film material recorded by Italian filmmaker and cameraman Luca Comerio in the early decades of the twentieth century, including, primarily, battles of World War I, as well as extended travels through various European and African countries, and the rise of Italian fascism. In spring 1982, when Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi were granted access for the first time to Comerio's private archive in Milan, they became immediately aware of the precarious state of the film material that had survived two World Wars and decades of time in Comerio's old film lab.<sup>22</sup> In order to work with this fragile material, their preliminary operation became preserving it for analysis by re-filming it frame by frame, a process they describe explicitly as 'vivisection'.<sup>23</sup>

Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi demonstrate their sensitive handling of the found archival material in their short video *Transparencies* (*Trasparenze*, 1998) through the audible whirring of the camera as it approaches the highly damaged footage, capturing every scratch, every sharp crack or cut at close range. The camera follows the careful handling of the sensitive and highly flammable nitro-film material with a pincer to start a detailed examination of each individual frame (fig.1). The transparent frames are illuminated to provide a better view of the captured figures and their environment. In a 1995 essay, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi describe their method for dealing with damaged footage, employing the principle of the 'analytic camera' consisting of two interdependent elements: first, the careful preparation of the damaged filmic substance and, second, the re-filming of the material frame by frame using a sort of a 'microscopic camera' in order to examine every detail.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi made their first long 'archival film' *Karagoz – Catalogo 9.5* in 1981.

<sup>22</sup> See Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, *Notre caméra analytique* (Paris: post-éditions, Centre Pompidou, 2015), pp. 88–90.

<sup>23</sup> Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 3: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 274–84 (p. 277).

<sup>24</sup> Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, pp. 85–97. The filmmakers here refer to experiments with stop-motion cameras conducted by Eadweard Muybridge and Jules-Étienne Marey, in the nineteenth century.

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Fig. 1: *Transparencies* (*Trasparenze*, Yervant Gianikian, Angela Ricci Lucchi 1997).  
By courtesy of the authors.

The objective of these operations is to prevent further damage and decay from the sensitive material and to point to the fragility and volatility of every single frame. By appropriating and reediting decayed film material, the filmmakers turn documentary film into a monument: it is the film material that speaks (and acts) for itself, as film scholar Christa Blümlinger has claimed.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, viewing the film material from the perspective of the filmmakers' camera, we experience the extent of its decay to the point that virtually none of the image's visual content can be identified. In their approaching camera guiding the view of the spectator, gestures are transformed into glances — Farocki's claim is made literal here. When the camera zooms in and focuses on individual frames, more and more singular signs of damage and deterioration become recognizable. In *Transparencies*, the preparation of the film material, the touching of it with a pincer and the re-filming frame by frame, including enlargement and duplication, are related gestures of work that are part of a gestural film analysis.

<sup>25</sup> See Christa Blümlinger, *Kino aus zweiter Hand: Zur Ästhetik materieller Aneignung im Film und in der Medienkunst* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2009), p. 143.

The filmstrip investigated in *Transparencies* belongs to the material that Comerio himself recorded or collected in 1916 from battles at Monte Adamello in the Southern Alps. What particularly affects the two filmmakers here, is the double erasure of human life: once through acts of war and second through the decay of the photochemical emulsion on which their figures had been fixed, but which happened to leave only the rocks intact. In their close examination of the footage, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi refer to this ghastly double erasure of human figures. A red line across a frame reminds Gianikian of a trace of blood and captures the filmmaker's particular interest. Of course, it is impossible to determine the origins of the red trace after so many years, but had it actually been human blood, it is plausible that it originated from an injury. However, every scratch or cut, every sign of damage or chemical decay, every trace, like the red line, makes the filmstrip a singular event of film history and, at the same time, a material thing with a singular biography.

*Transparencies* ends with a common gesture in handling footage: the camera follows the unrolling of a heavily damaged film reel that has been preserved. Unfortunately, the entire strip of rolled up film sticks together, and a strange sound can be heard as it is pulled apart by hand — a gesture that is, however, not captured by the camera and thus remains outside the visual frame. Despite the fact that hands are completely out of sight, they are not absent at all. Without question, hands are necessary to adjust and operate the camera, to open the film can and unroll the film, to hold the pincer and manage the light source. All these common gestures remain largely unseen and unnoticed.<sup>26</sup> Gianikian's and Ricci Lucchi's work of documentation and preservation is an analytical gesture through which to approach and finally unveil human bodies and their environment captured on film — a substance that is itself subject to the passage of time.

The gestures in their analytical work include not only the re-filming, reframing and precise examination of individual frames, it incorporates also off-screen gestures: unrolling film reels, putting strips of film on a light table and fixing them. For the filmmakers, as for film preservation in general, touching the material in one way or another is not, as Bellour's statement suggests, a 'mad desire' but a necessary practice. For in the work of preservation, filmic substance is not primarily the projected moving images but the reconstitution of the material of which these images are made.

As was customary at the beginning of the twentieth century, the images Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi seek to preserve are fixed on nitrate or nitro-film, a highly inflammable and, hence, particularly dangerous material that also decomposes quickly under unfavourable storage conditions. The unstoppable decay of this footage represents the *ultima ratio* for their analysis of the films, as

<sup>26</sup> Bellour asserted that Gianikian's and Ricci Lucchi's constituted a 'gigantic catalogue of twentieth century gestures'. See Raymond Bellour, 'L'arrière-monde', *Cinémaèque* (Autumn 1995), 6–11, reprinted in Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, pp. 205–211 (p. 210).

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the filmmakers emphasize, ‘C’est là toute l’histoire du nitrate, qui nous intéresse autant pour sa forme que pour sa contenu, pour ce qu’il contient de mémoire et de violence. Pour nous, cette mémoire qui lentement s’efface a une grande valeur symbolique’.<sup>27</sup> For them, then, the photosensitive material, its form as film and its visual content, holds historical value for its symbolic relationship to memory. In their perspective, the decay of nitro-film material is similar to the fading of cultural memory. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi even speak of the self-extinction of film material — ‘auto-effacement’ — and emphasize their artistic intention to preserve the cultural memory inscribed in the archived films of Luca Comerio. Yet, their desire to make visible and indestructible the traces of memory inscribed on the decaying film material does not allow them to fall prey to a well-known archival phantasm — the desire to come into a complete possession of the past. As film scholar Jamie Baron has shown in her study *The Archive Effect*, every historical film document is inevitably only a fragment and, therefore, any reconstruction, whether analytical or artistic, must deal with the inevitable gaps in the archive.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 2: *Memory Reel* (Adela Muntean 2015). Screen capture.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> See Jaimie Baron, *The Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (London: Routledge, 2014).

Moreover, as philosopher Jacques Derrida has prominently argued, archives are institutions of power and have ever been subject to destruction and the desire of extermination.<sup>29</sup> Adela Muntean's short film *Memory Reel* (2015) captures the remains of an abandoned film deposit in the Romanian town of Cluj that became obsolete after the political and economic collapse of the country in 1989. The unrolled film strips are distributed everywhere covering the soil populated by plants where they undergo intensified processes of decay (fig. 2). The destruction of the film deposit and the decay of the film material are parallel with the desire to forget a past that is permeated by memories of a repressive socialist regime. To save these memories captured on film, the artist interviewed contemporary witnesses and rewound some of these films on a big reel by hand. The installation of her *Memory Reel* in art exhibitions is not simply a gesture of care, it points to the necessity of a politics of remembrance that is also an ecology of archiving.

### *Ecology of Archiving*

Once composed, photochemical materials undergo a continuous process of decomposition. Cellulose-based photographs and films, negatives as well as positives, gradually fade under the influence of light, humidity and air, they get scratches and stains through frequent use and change their colours, until finally the photochemical emulsion dissolves. Every negative, every print and every reel of film is ultimately an unstable assemblage of various chemical substances interacting with its surroundings and thereby in a permanent state of flux.<sup>30</sup> They are not simply manufactured things, objects of visual pleasure or critical analysis, but transitory compounds of matter that produce, as sociologist of science Bruno Latour has put it, their own 'waves of action'.<sup>31</sup> Following this argument, we might think of materials performing gestures and, in doing so, extending gesturality beyond human action.

A media archaeology understood as a gestural practice might profit from these considerations in two ways: firstly, the self-empowerment of substances, materials and their mixtures present considerable challenges, especially to archivists and cultural memory institutions that have the task not only to store and preserve photochemical materials, but also to work with them in a way to acknowledge their potentials as materials and material compositions. Under the label 'archival art', artistic methods and strategies are combined,

<sup>29</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Anthropologist Tim Ingold places the many interactions of concrete substances, such as clay and wood, at the centre of what he calls an 'ecology of materials.' See Tim Ingold, 'Toward an Ecology of Materials', *The Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), 427–42.

<sup>31</sup> Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017), p. 101.

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so that the transience of archived objects becomes the starting point for exploring our critical engagement with the archive materials.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, a gesture-based media archaeological approach should be combined with the ecology of archiving. The gestures performed by archivists and artists alike produce a ‘tacit knowledge’ in Michael Polanyi’s sense;<sup>33</sup> a knowledge that, once more in our era of digitization, deserves to be re-evaluated as a crucial legacy of film history.

<sup>32</sup> See for instance *Living Archive: Archivarbeit als künstlerische und kuratorische Praxis*, ed. by Stefanie Schulte-Strathaus (Berlin: b\_books, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) and *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).



## Dancing Fingers: Moving Mimicry and Abstract Tactility

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### *Abstract*

In the episode ‘Love Among the Ruins’ of Matthew Weiner’s *Mad Men* (AMC, S03xE02, 2009), Don Draper (John Hamm) is fascinated by Suzanne Farrell (Abigail Spencer): his fingers represent and caress the barefoot dance steps of this Flora of the sixties. I study this vicarious performance in light of the theories of empathy (Vischer, 1873) and ‘embodied simulation’ (Gallese, Freedberg, 2007). This haptic displacement of the male gaze is an erotic interplay between projection and incorporation, predatory aspirations and un-reflected imitation, the masculine and the feminine, leading to a hysterical embodiment akin to Aristotle’s tactile illusion and the reprise of scientific iconography by Max Ernst in *Au Premier Mot Limpide* (1923). Driven by the movement of the camera, our gaze leaves the dance and ends in foliage stirred by the wind. Watching this non-intentional ‘touch in nature’ (Ebisch, Perrucci, Ferretti, Del Gratta, Romani, Gallese, 2009), we are moved as if we mirrored a real moment of contact, both material and animistic. In discussing *A Day in the Country* (*Une Partie de Campagne*, Jean Renoir, 1936) and Jeff Wall’s *A Sudden Gust of Wind* (after *Hokusai*) (1993), I show how this visual phenomenon — an obsession of cinema — triggers an abstract and tactile empathy within us (Gallese, 2009).

### *TV Fiction with an Ancient Touch*

I wish to discuss ‘Love Among the Ruins’, an episode of *Mad Men* (AMC, S03xE02, 2009) dramatized by Matthew Weiner and Cathryn Humphries and directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. The title itself suggests a kind of survival. Borrowed from Robert Browning’s ‘Sicilian’ pastoral poem (1855) and George Kukor’s television adaptation (ABC, 1975), it points to the ongoing relevance of the clash between male and female in the early 1960s, between ‘Earth’s returns’, i.e. the cyclical phases of nature, and the ruins of the City, i.e. the vanity of human society and culture.

I consider the brief dance *all’antica* of ‘Love Among the Ruins’ as a testing ground for the theory of ‘embodied simulation’ and tactile empathy, as applied to audiovisual images in movement. Whether seen live or in representation

— and whatever the medium: painting or sketches, sculpture, plays, films or photographs — the movement of a dancing body is the most powerful visual appeal to our attention and potentially to our kinetic mimicry.<sup>1</sup>

I shall develop my hypothesis in two stages: first, through some visual examples (not by seeking out iconographic sources, but rather by suggesting comparative illustrations); I shall stress the polarity, already well defined under Robert Vischer's theory of *Einfühlung*, of the empathy of motion, as displaced in the male spectator's hand movements, both absorbed and proactive; I shall attempt to unveil, in the mimetic assimilation, a latent sexual identification and ambiguity. Then, while following the movement of the camera, but no longer taking into account the kinesthetic feedback between living beings, or between human bodies and similar moving objects, I shall propose a mimetic tactility that is more abstract and responsive to a contingent, non-intentional touch in nature. This haptic attraction for a self-replicating movement without a visible cause, and for a metonymic animation through contact between undifferentiated elements, haunts the spectator and the cinema itself.

### *Apparitions and Renewals*

In the scene of the maypole school dance, a captivating, over-the-shoulder shot create the impression that we ourselves are mirroring bodies,<sup>2</sup> behaving *as if* we were actually there, perceiving and suffering everything, in the same way as the fictional character's body. In the case of Don Draper (John Hamm), we are not only consciously suspending our disbelief, but, to borrow the term used by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars of *Einfühlung*,<sup>3</sup> we are also experiencing an involuntary 'empathy of activities' [*Tätigkeitseinfühlung*], along with an 'inner mimicry' [*innere Nachahmung*], of the same dancing body that he observes and desires from afar.

Thanks to an alternating series of reverse camera angles, our point of view coincides with the on-screen focus of our delegated male viewer, who sits on a folding chair, lounging and still, as if it were a seat in a movie theatre, or in a laboratory of experimental psychology. A young dancing woman exercises a powerful attraction on his erotic attention, gripping our hermeneutic

<sup>1</sup> See Dee Reynolds, 'Kinesthetic Empathy and the Dance's Body: From Emotion to Affect', in *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, ed. by Dee Reynolds, Matthew Reason (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), pp. 121–38, and Corinne Jola, 'Choreographed Science: Merging Dance and Cognitive Neuroscience', in *The Neurocognition of Dance: Mind, Movement and Motor Skills*, ed. by Bettina Bläsing, Martin Puttke and Thomas Schack (Abingdon: Routledge, 2nd edn, 2019), pp. 258–88.

<sup>2</sup> Vittorio Gallese, Corrado Sinigaglia, 'The Bodily Self as Power for Action', *Neuropsychologia*, 48.3 (2010), p. 752.

<sup>3</sup> See Andrea Pinotti, 'Empathy', in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, ed. by Hans Reiner Sepp, Lester Embree (Dordrecht, New York: Springer, 2010), pp. 94–95.

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interest about the unreflective movements of his hand in response to the movements of the body observed from afar. The effectiveness of this amateur performance, however, is due neither to the abilities of the dancer, nor to the cultural preparation of the spectator. No one in this small, fictional New York suburban neighbourhood knows or remembers the erudite meaning of the maypole school dance, or of 'Earth's returns' from the Browning poem, nor do they realise that the name of this young Flora reborn, Suzanne Farrell (played by Abigail Spencer), is that of the celebrated muse of Balanchine's New York City Ballet. It is worth mentioning that, when considering the Nymph<sup>4</sup> in Renaissance dances and popular festivals, Warburg stressed that the female body is the 'living figure' that manages to merge everyday life, art and archaeology. The *Ninfa rediviva* of 'Love Among the Ruins', with her bare feet, flowing hair and head crowned with a wreath of wild flowers is also a manifestation in movement of the ancient rites, reprised and imitated in the daily choreographies of fashion and school recitals before being interpreted as an erudite iconographic motif.

The natural gaze of the male spectator of the maypole school dance responds to this amateur, popular choreography, extending beyond the sensorimotor economy of mere vision. As Robert Vischer<sup>5</sup> once said, his vision becomes 'attentive sensation' and 'attentive feeling' [*Anempfindung, Anfühlung*], like that of a hunter stalking the prey. Hidden behind the dark lenses of his trendy aviator glasses — comparable to the *Kulturbrille*, or 'cultural lenses', criticised by Aby Warburg and Franz Boas because they blind us to the living force of ancient, or archaic and ritual, images — Don Draper's ignorant, avid gaze expresses itself in virtual actions performed in an intensified, indirect, condensed fashion: his hold on his drink loosens, freeing his fingers from their limited scope of action and the pragmatic completion of perception, at which point they stroke the grass below, mimicking the dance steps. In a rapid succession of reverse-angle shots, close-ups and details, heightened by a slow-motion effect, we see — and feel — *as if* they were ours: not the static body or the hidden gaze, but only the lazy, empty fingers of the spectator's hand, attentively and erotically entranced as they perform an immediate, unintentional corporeal imitation of the dance steps. The movements of these dancing fingers are a narrative focal point and an expressive hotbed, they are ultimately a vicarious, tactile, peripheral and symptomatic sensory adventure as well as an almost imperceptible endokinetic autoaffection.

<sup>4</sup> Aby Warburg, 'The Theatrical Costumes for the Intermedi of 1589' (1895), in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, intr. by Kurt W. Forster and trans. by David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the Research of Arts and Humanities, 1999), p. 381.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Vischer, 'On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics' (1873), in *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893*, ed. and transl. by Harry Francis Mallgrave, Eleftherios Ikononou (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), p. 105, p. 107 and p. 109.

*Loving Hands*

The pirouettes *sur place* performed by the fingers of the on-screen spectator, and potentially by our own fingers, embody what Robert Vischer termed ‘kinaesthetic responsive feeling’ [*motorische Nachfühlung*] triggered by a visual and ‘sensory immediate feeling’ [*sensitive Zufühlung*].<sup>6</sup> Such peripheral and aimless movements personify the ‘mimicking, acting or affective empathy of a truly or apparently moved object’.<sup>7</sup>

What are Don Draper’s fingers doing? Such organic miniaturisations and synecdoches of the desire of the hidden gaze and the inactive body of the spectator generate a two-fold embodiment, at one and the same time an ‘incorporation’ and a ‘projection’. The lightly implied movements of our spectator’s wandering, almost autonomous fingers are both concrete and abstract gestures, both iconic and metaphorical, pantomimic and expressive, rhythmic and non-representational.<sup>8</sup> They are not only a schematic imitation of the movements of the female body viewed from afar, but also a performative manifestation of the autoaffection of the spectatorial body. They are both *mimémata* and *pathémata* in action, an endokinetic resonance of the body of the Other and a crypto-prensive pulsation that wishes to touch it. They are both echo and caress.<sup>9</sup>

The spectator’s fingers, while doing their cross-step, embody an *undecidability* between imitation and sensory appropriation, emulation and tactile usurpation. The molecular movements of the male spectator’s fingers hold the two opposites together: a passive, centripetal incorporation of the expressive qualities of the object in movement and an active, centrifugal projection of actions, or the equivalent of actions. Both poles are iconic, i.e. mimetic, and loving, i.e. acting: as they move ‘in and with the forms’,<sup>10</sup> they repeat the sinuous movements of the woman’s legs and feet, while figuratively stroking her moving contours and fleshy substance. This is a true haptic reversibility: the hand of our spectator gauges the body in movement and adapts to what is seen from afar, ultimately becoming one with it. The male spectator’s hand touches and is touched, it is transferred and transformed by the Other: the dancing female legs.

In order to arrive at an initial assessment of this reversibility and potential sexual inversion in kinetic and tactile empathy, before relating it first to an

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 105; see Vittorio Gallese, ‘Embodied Simulation: From Neurons to Phenomenal Experience’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 4.4 (2005), 34–36.

<sup>8</sup> According to David McNeill, *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 104–34 and pp. 145–81.

<sup>9</sup> As regards ‘responsive sensation’ as ‘a successive enveloping, embracing, and caressing of the object’, see Vischer, ‘On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics’, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 101. The original text states: ‘Wir bewegen uns in und an den Formen. Allen Raumveränderungen tasten wir mit liebenden Händen nach.’ I quote Robert Vischer, *Über das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik* (Leipzig: Hermann Credner, 1873), p. 15.

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unambiguous male desire, and subsequently to a pantheistic empathy with nature and movements per se, I feel that a brief reference is in order to two visual examples.

First, I wish to discuss Max Ernst's *Au Premier Mot Limpide*.<sup>11</sup> The source of this painting, executed with the techniques of Pompeian frescoes, was an illustration found in an anonymous scientific article on the Aristotelian 'illusion du tact'.<sup>12</sup> Ernst places the two elements described by Aristotle side by side:<sup>13</sup> an insect, perhaps a mantis, sits next to a window, while a right hand with its index and middle fingers crossed, holding a bead between them, extends out from a second, larger window. There is no indication of the gender of the hand, isolated as it is from the rest of the body, so that the overall vision, which normally dissolves the tactile illusion, is of no help. The surrealist painter, hearkening back to stereoscopic and cinematic pornographic images, uses repetition to amplify the haptic inversion.<sup>14</sup> The isolated hand is detached from a hysterical body, while the vertical, tapering shapes of the fingers are like those of a woman's crossed legs, forming an X, the symbol of the mystery of Eros and the intertwining of sexual genders;<sup>15</sup> just like the fingers, both mimicking and loving, of the man who observes and repeats the agile choreography of a re-enacted Flora in an American Yankee park.

In contrast, as an example of the unambiguous tactile intensification of the sexual desire of the male gaze, I wish to cite *A Day in the Country* (*Une Partie de Campagne*, Jean Renoir, 1936).<sup>16</sup> Rodolphe (Jacques Borel, a.k.a. Jacques Brunius) looks out a window and strokes his moustache, twisting its tips between the thumb and index finger of his right hand. During this autoerotic game, he stares at Henriette Dufour (Sylvia Bataille), ecstatically absorbed by the movements of a swing that pushes her figure upwards, against the empty blue backdrop of the sky, and then, on the other side, against the dense foliage

<sup>11</sup> Max Ernst, *Au Premier Mot Limpide*, 1923, oil on plaster transferred to canvas, 232×167 cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

<sup>12</sup> *La Nature: Revue des Sciences et de leurs Applications aux Arts et à l'Industrie*, n. 415, 14 May 1881, p. 384; the illustrator is Louis Poyet. See Charlotte Stokes's 'The Scientific Methods of Max Ernst: His Use of Scientific Subjects from *La Nature*', *The Art Bulletin*, 62.3 (1980), 453–65, and Volkmar Mühlreis, *Kunst im Sehverlust* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005), pp. 29–35.

<sup>13</sup> *Met.* IV, 1011a, *Probl.* XXXI, 11, 958b ss.

<sup>14</sup> See Trotter David, 'Stereoscopy: Modernism and the "Haptic"', *Critical Quarterly*, 46.4 (special issue *Low Modernism*, Winter 2004), 38–58, and Abigail Susik, '“The Man of These Infinite Possibilities”: Max Ernst's Cinematic Collages', *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture*, 1 (2011), 86–87.

<sup>15</sup> The scientific iconography of a bodiless hand is taken up in ... *Et la Troisième Fois Manquée*, the fourth plate of the 1929 narrative-collage *La Femme 100 Têtes* (Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1929). See Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 76–80, and Emmanuelle André, *Le Choc du Sujet: De l'Hystérie au Cinéma (XIX–XXI siècle)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 118–21.

<sup>16</sup> The film is available on DVD with unpublished material and the documentary *Un Tournage à la Campagne* by Alain Fleischer (CNC Images de la Culture, 1994); see Dominique Chateau, 'Diégèse et Enonciation', *Communications*, 38 (1983), 143–45.

of trees stirred by the invisible motion of the breeze. In another scene, Henriette reveals a kind of tenderness for everything, for grass, water and trees, a sort of vague desire above and beyond the separation between subject and object, as if possessed by an impersonal empathy that touches and unites living beings and things, all moving phenomena. While she expresses this, something happens, in the form of a random, natural, moving entity that breaks into the scene and crosses the line between profilmic and filmic, between life and fiction: namely, a butterfly that comes and goes, returns, touches down, flies away and then comes back again. The spectator is moved less by Henriette's emotional realism than by this touch of reality in motion, by this incidental *punctum* and material point of contact with the film itself. The apparition is less pathetic than Dreyer's fly on Joan of Arc's sweating face, and less striking than the creeping black tarantula on James Bond's masculine chest in *Dr. No* (Terence Young, 1962), quoted as an opening example in an experimental study on 'touching sight'.<sup>17</sup>

The effect on the spectator of a similarly contingent, minimal and repetitive tactility could perhaps be measured empirically; in any case, my hypothesis considers an index of a more abstract, mimetic, motor empathy between living beings, things and movements.

### *An Abstract Tactility, an Obsession*

After following the man's gaze in 'Love Among the Ruins', and the way in which he touches the dancing woman from afar, depicted in a fetishistic manner, with a focus on anatomical details and expressive accessories, the camera leaves the body the moment it stops moving. As soon as the centripetal, clockwise curve of the dance around the wooden maypole ends, our gaze — no longer entrusted to the over-the-shoulder shot, but, as several recent studies have shown,<sup>18</sup> still driven by the impersonal movement of the camera — gently ends its centrifugal movement in the top-right portion of the frame, amidst the densely packed leaves stirred by the wind.

As we know from many experimental papers on embodied simulation, the responsiveness of the visuotactile mirroring mechanism also applies when we watch movements and contacts between living beings, whether animal or human, as well as between inanimate objects and phenomena. The space that surrounds us is full of entities which touch each other without any 'human [or] animate involvement', due to 'accidental-animate' or 'non-intentional contact'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Christian Keyzers, Bruno Wicker, Valeria Gazzola and others, 'A Touching Sight: SII/PV Activation During the Observation and Experience of Touch', *Neuron*, 42.2 (2004), 335–46.

<sup>18</sup> See Katrin Heimann, Sebo Uithol, Marta Calbi and others, 'Embodying the Camera: An EEG Study on the Effect of Camera Movements on Film Spectators' Sensorimotor Cortex Activation', *PLOS ONE*, 14.3 (2019), 1–18.

<sup>19</sup> Sjoerg J.H. Ebisch, Mauro Gianni Perrucci, Antonio Ferretti and others, 'The Sense of Touch: Embodied Simulation in a Visuotactile Mirroring Mechanism for Observed Animate or Inanimate

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What we witness is ‘a touch in nature’, when we observe and are emotionally moved: i.e. when we move with, and are touched by, not merely the falling of a pine tree in a park — erect and individual like our bodies — but also by the rain piercing the quiet surface of a river or dripping from leaves, or by leaves moved by the wind — in short, by moving shapes that are barely discernible from one another, whose contact does not consist of a singular, precise physical touching.

In adopting the two principles of Fraser’s magical logic, I believe we are not just dealing, in this case, with analogy or corporeal similarity as the basis for metaphors, symbols and meanings, but also with metonymy, i.e. contact, contagion and confusion. On the other hand, Freedberg and Gallese, in addressing dynamic empathy in response to images, prefer the law of similarities. A discussion of this problematic point is well served by the following example, also meant to provide further support for my concluding hypothesis on the subject of abstract tactile empathy.

When considering Jeff Wall’s *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)*, a lightbox at the Tate Modern, Freedberg states that our bodies do not ‘twist and turn’ merely in response to those of others of our species, but also find themselves ‘almost in a complete physical *sintonia*’ with the trees, upright and bent over, as if they were ‘a twisted Romanesque column’.<sup>20</sup> Wall’s monumental work (250×397×34 cm), and Hokusai’s view of Mount Fuji (25.4×37.1 cm),<sup>21</sup> also reveal something further. Together with the winter scene of two tall trees, overarching and bare, and the four men who are struggling against the invisible gusts of the wind, there are bits of paper that are scattered in the air and almost indistinguishable. Freedberg insists, on the one hand, that mimicry and motor empathy are not limited to human actions and gestures, but also encompass movements and contacts in nature without any visible causes, though he points only to plant forms, described as if they were inorganic and lifeless. The architectural analogy is an epistemological symptom of the desire to distance oneself from the abstract and animistic connotation of motor and tactile empathy, from its conversion into sympathy with all moving beings and elements in nature, with their touching and being touched. Moreover, the comparison to a Doric column, already made by Lipps and others, and later put forth in modernist dance theory,<sup>22</sup> denotes a preference for the constructed and

Touch’, *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 20.9 (2008), 1621; see Vittorio Gallese, ‘Motor Abstraction: A Neuroscientific Account of How Action Goals and Intentions Are Mapped and Understood’, *Psychological Research*, 73.4 (2009), 486–98, and Matthew Ratcliffe, ‘Touch and the Sense of Reality’, in *The Hand, an Organ of the Mind: What the Manual Tells the Mental*, ed. by Zdravko Radman (Cambridge MA, London: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 144–45.

<sup>20</sup> David Freedberg, ‘Movement, Embodiment, Emotion’, in *Wie sich Gefühle Ausdruck verschaffen: Emotionen in Nabsicht*, ed. by Klaus Herding and Antje Krause-Wahl (Tausenstein: Driesen, 2007), p. 61, and David Freedberg, Vittorio Gallese, ‘Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Aesthetic Experience’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11.5 (2007), p. 197.

<sup>21</sup> Katsushika Hokusai, *Ejiri in Suruga Province (Sunshū Ejiri)*, 1830–1833, polychrome woodblock print, ink and colour on paper, 25.4×37.1 cm, MFA, Boston.

<sup>22</sup> See Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (New York:

artistic rather than the natural and incidental, ultimately betraying a removal of pantheistic empathic feeling.

We are, therefore, more than just eyewitnesses: we are also tactile witnesses of the invisible but material force that touches and drives the myriad tiny objects in movement in Hokusai's print and in its subsequent variations. The countless pieces of paper flying in the air are both metaphors and metonymies of our individual bodies. When our visual attention is attracted by their upward movement away from us, i.e. by a motion without visible cause, produced and reproduced by a non-intentional and contingent contact, what happens to us? Paul Valéry perfectly described this amorphous and autogenerated movement as a generalized imitation without models, like an expanded kinetic and tactile analogy without terms of comparison, producing itself by contact and through differentiation and repetition: 'This tree, whose leaves are so agile, confounding my gaze, entangling, self-replicating, infinitely changing, defying my thought, visible and non-imaginable, this is not something of mine'.<sup>23</sup> Like Valéry, we too imitate the natural and material mimicry that is the movement of the leaves stroked by the wind or beaten by rain drops; we replicate and repeat it with our corporeal schemas and motor responsive feelings or actions, just as we do when we move our fingers to emulate the woman dancing in 'Love Among the Ruins', virtually twisting and turning our bodies, like the bending trees of Hokusai and Wall. But looking at the leaves touched by the rain or moved by the wind, or at the material whirlwind of countless sheets of paper — or of plastic envelopes<sup>24</sup> — scattered in the air, we respond with a mimetic, empathic and kinaesthetic sense of touch that is no longer limited to our hands, but more abstract: an 'abstract' that, once again, should not be considered conceptual or general, but rather embodied and pre-linguistic, sensitive and pre-categorical.

Such challenging movements, with no apparent cause or direction, constitute a haunting topic for filmmakers, cinephiles and scholars.<sup>25</sup> In the short sequence

Routledge, 2010), pp. 252–53, and Robin Curtis, 'Is the Movement of the Filmic Image a Sign of Vitality?', in *Touching and Being Touched: Kinesthesia and Empathy in Dance and Movement*, ed. by Gabriele Brandstetter, Gerko Egert and Sabine Zubarik (Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), pp. 257–58.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Valéry, *Cabiers/Notebooks 5*, trans. and ed. by Brian Stimpson, Paul Gifford, Robert Pickering and others (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Brussels, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 193.

<sup>24</sup> I am thinking, in particular, of *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999), as well as of Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky in *Incidents* (14' and 49", 2007, Tate Modern, London), an extraordinary video that covers one year, from 1996 to 1997, and shows the dance of myriad discarded objects and waste blown by the wind in the outer boroughs of Manhattan.

<sup>25</sup> See Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 29–53; Nico Baumbach, 'Nature Caught in the Act: On the Transformation of an Idea of Art in Early Cinema', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 6.3 (2009), 373–83, and Jordan Schonig, 'Contingent Motion: Rethinking the "Wind in the Trees" in Early Cinema and CGI', *Discourse*, 40.1 (2018), 30–61.

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of 'Love Among the Ruins' that I have set out to analyse, I have pointed to three aspects of this haptic obsession.

At first, I showed how our gaze does not cast itself off from indirect motor affection, but is triggered by our embodied belief in the point of view of the on-screen spectator, i.e. by Don Draper's erotic perspective. Our sense of tactile sight shifts between the aimless actions of the beauty in motion of the female dancer and the visual-motor imitation of the spectator's fingers, at one and the same time displaced, projective and incorporating, but ultimately embodying an ambivalent tactile and erotic self-affection, as exemplified by Max Ernst's painting and the scene from Renoir's movie. I then assessed the camera movements and their effects on our tactile eye as spectators. After leaving the dancing body, or some other inanimate object that is similar to our own body and is moved by an external cause, our gaze is drawn to the most unstable and ephemeral aspects of the visual — like the butterfly of *A Day in the Country*, or the sheets of paper shifting in the wind in Jeff Wall's *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* — at which point it is touched by that which, in an absolutely contingent, material manner, also touches the very body of the film. Finally, I have attempted to show how our vision dissolves itself in an impersonal, unintentional visual field, like the foliage blown by the wind evoked by Valéry, and how the empathic feeling-in and feeling-with this raw and material movement transports us ecstatically out of ourselves, into the very texture of the film.

At the end of this lengthy empty-handed visual journey, when our eyes and hands, as both spectators and readers, once again have to deal with everyday life, we may murmur to ourselves something to the effect of: 'I was in thee, O movement — outside all things [...]'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Paul Valéry, 'The Soul and Dance' (1924), in *An Anthology*, ed. by Jackson Matthews (London, Henley: Routledge-Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 326.



# Refining Data by Pointing the Index Finger

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## *Abstract*

This essay argues that data analysts refine data that is rendered visible through data visualizations by pointing the index finger. On the basis of an observation made from Werner Herzog's documentary *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World* (2016), I argue that pointing makes the voice of data accessible through communicative reading and modeling work. Pointing is applied as an embodied method for cinematic knowledge production. The essay also proposes that the history of the invisible hand, introduced as market metaphor by Adam Smith, has to be updated by film and media studies and must be written towards active knowing processed through fingers. This article brings together perspectives from the history of art, media culture, social and economic theory.

## *Freeing Fingers for Pointing Work*

Considering documentary films as a medium for the study of cultural and communication processes,<sup>1</sup> it becomes clear that pointing index fingers play a central role in the age of Big Data. This is particularly clear if one takes a closer look at Werner Herzog's documentary *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World* (2016). The film deals with the past, present, and future of

<sup>1</sup> In the context of Niklas Luhmann's system theory, culture is understood to be a second level of observation that allows for studying communication; see, for instance, Niklas Luhmann, *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik: Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995), pp. 32–51. The sociologist Armin Nassehi recently has argued that under the condition of big data and digitization, data adds a third level of observation. Data are observers par excellence making the form of observation, that is their own method as well, relevant for the study of data; see Armin Nassehi, *Muster: Theorie der digitalen Gesellschaft* (München: C. H. Beck, 2019), p. 109. A film's capacity to be understood as a medium to make communication processes observable is highlighted, once more, in Rebecca Boguska's and Vinzenz Hediger's introduction for John Mowitt, *Tracks from the Crypt* (Lüneburg: meson press, 2019), pp. 7–18 (p. 17). From this point of view, documentary film allows all viewers to be critically engaged theorists of their own social framework, which is an idea that is evident also in Emma Rothschild's work on the use of the invisible hand. See Emma Rothschild, 'Adam Smith and the Invisible Hand', *The American Economic Review*, 84.2 (1994), 319–22 (p. 320).

the Internet, and, in the manner of Herzog's interest, the human component of technology. From the title alone, the film puts an act of indexing at the center and lets representations of pointing index fingers become observable. The film contains six scenes in which pointing index fingers are put to work by collections and visualizations of data: computer scientist Danny Hills points to addresses in an imaginary telephone book during his interview; the Internet pioneer Ted Nelson is staged in his office on a houseboat using his index finger to explain visualizations of interconnectivity on his computer screen; the computer scientist Adrien Treuille gesturally emphasizes the helical structure of an RNA molecule by pointing; autonomous car engineer Raj Rajkumar displays data dots, which are not visible in the trunk of a car where the dots are actually translated into driving commands, in his office on a screen; safety analyst Shawn Carpenter illustrates the placing of a Trojan by imitating the click on a computer mouse with an index finger; and, robotics engineer J. Michael Vandeweghe uses his index finger to explain on a screen how the robot Chimp perceives the world.

Media history shows that the pointing index finger processes the guidance of attention. In Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* the pointing indicates the animation of life through the production of relationships between God and humans. The creation of man takes place right before our eyes, embodied in the pointing gesture the image depicts, but also through the depiction as pointing gesture itself.<sup>2</sup> The pointing gesture is ubiquitous in Leonardo da Vinci's works, where it signifies the binding of the spiritual and the sensual by indicating directions through and out of the image to guide the spectators' view.<sup>3</sup> The didactic function of the use of the pointing finger is even more obvious when looking at media practices such as reading. For instance, as Mary Lee Griffin has found pointing with index fingers is a nonverbal action children use to communicate, allowing them to underline parts of texts to generate extra focus or to indicate page and read changes by literally touching the book through 'nudging, tapping, poking'.<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Crary relates such generation of attention to the history of vision and refers to, among other works, Edouard Manet's *In the conservatory* to show that the pointing finger is representing an unstable perceptual entity in need of guidance. In the painting, the pointing, as Crary puts it, envisions a binding energy within a 'system of deflection, in which vision is bound up in a relational field within which every point of fixation is a deferral and relay to another one'.<sup>5</sup> In the field of Science and Technology Studies pointing finger

<sup>2</sup> See Paul Barolsky, 'Michelangelo and the Spirit of God', *Notes in the History of Art*, 17.4 (1998), pp. 15–17.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Isaacson elaborates this perspective considering da Vinci's *Saint John the Baptist*, *The Last Supper*, and *Saint Anne* among many others. See Walter Isaacson, *Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018). Particularly pp. 278–92 and pp. 463–74.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Lee Griffin, 'Why Don't You Use Your Finger? Paired Reading in First Grade', *The Reading Teacher*, 55.8 (2002), 766–74 (p. 768).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 113.

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work is exemplarily discussed in Morana Alac's study of fMRI images, arguing that seeing as knowing becomes an embodied process through the coordination of gesture, talk, and screen.<sup>6</sup>

In film studies, the connection between knowledge, embodiment, and fingers has been previously emphasized by Vivian Sobchack, who introduces the concept of 'habituated knowledge' and 'embodied intelligence'. She argues that knowing relies on the ability to bodily grasp and sense what one sees.<sup>7</sup> Wanda Strauven has taken up this notion, arguing that the film experience is '(still) embodied' under the condition of so-called passive gaming practices that require highly 'sophisticated finger skills'.<sup>8</sup> From a broader media theoretical point of view, Till Heilmann states that digitality, which constantly motivates acts of touching, tipping, swiping and clicking, is built on touch to give sense to the senses and emphasizes that the hand acquires its meaning only because of its jointedness.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it becomes clearer what Flusser meant when he hypothesized that the future person will be the handless fingering human being.<sup>10</sup>

Against the background of these observations and references, this article argues that the pointing index finger is subject to a change from symbol, object of depiction, and representation to being an embodied method to refine data. This change is indicated in Tess Takahashi's work on data visualization when introducing the analogy between pointing finger and vision to suggest, metaphorically, that the voice of data is speaking to the human eye, 'with the subtlety of a road sign, with a finger pointing the way'.<sup>11</sup> Sobchack also refers to this separation between metaphorical and actually felt, sensed knowledge. As method, even more, the pointing index finger mediates between object and theory, between data visualization and the knowledge that is supposed to be contained in the data.<sup>12</sup> The pointing gesture makes the object accessible and

<sup>6</sup> See Morana Alac, 'Working with Brain Scans: Digital Images and Gestural Interaction in fMRI Laboratory', *Social Studies of Science*, 38.4 (2008), pp. 483–508.

<sup>7</sup> See Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Particularly see the chapter 'What My Fingers Knew', pp. 47–70 (pp. 64–67).

<sup>8</sup> See Wanda Strauven, 'The Observer's Dilemma: To Touch or Not to Touch', in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 148–63.

<sup>9</sup> See Till A. Heilmann, 'Digitalität als Taktilität: McLuhan, der Computer und die Taste', *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft*, 2 (2010), 125–34 (p. 126).

<sup>10</sup> See Vilém Flusser, *Medienkultur* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> Tess Takahashi, 'Data Visualization as Documentary Form: The Murmur of Digital Magnitude', *Discourse*, 39.3 (2017), 376–96 (p. 377).

<sup>12</sup> This notion can be found, among others, in see Karin Knorr Cetina, 'Viskurse der Physik: Wie visuelle Darstellungen ein Wissenschaftsgebiet ordnen', in *Konstruktionen Sichtbarkeiten. Interventionen 8*, ed. by Jörg Huber and Martin Heller (Wien, New York: Springer Verlag, 1999), pp. 245–64 (p. 249); Nick Srnicek, *Plattform-Kapitalismus*, trans. by Ursel Schäfer (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2018), p. 56 and p. 99; Rita Raley, 'Dataveillance and Counterveillance', in *"Raw Data" is an Oxymoron*, ed. by Lisa Gitelman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 121–45 (p. 123).

enables knowledge to be formed. As embodied method, the pointing index finger generates value in and through the relations it establishes, or not.

The second chapter of *Lo and Behold* carries the subtitle ‘The Glory of the Net’, and stages the computer scientist Adrien Treuille, who is working at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh with Dr. Rhiju Das, a physicist from Stanford University. Treuille has invented the computer puzzle-solving game Eterna, which combines citizen science with deep learning algorithms.<sup>13</sup> Eterna takes advantage of the Internet’s capability to bring people and their minds together in order to build the best RNA models, aiming to predict the most likely structure RNA will form in the future.<sup>14</sup> Overall, Eterna’s goal is to decipher the secrets of RNA’s robust folding capacities to cure cancer, HIV, and other diseases.<sup>15</sup>

When Eterna comes into play in *Lo and Behold*, the pointing index finger of data scientist Adrien Treuille is put to work to indicate, select, and communicate data dots that are generated through the game and made visible in RNA models. A close-up shows a model that appears to be a digital woollen knot. Treuille highlights properties by circling the model with the help of his computer mouse first. With the click on the mouse he pulls one end of the model to demonstrate its shape from different perspectives, allowing an almost all-round view in the virtual 3D space of the screen. The camera zooms into the image to get closer to the visualization and Treuille’s clenched hand, with his index finger sticking out, appears from behind to the left of the camera and outlines the shape and size of the model twice — without touching the laptop screen, however. (fig. 1) By surrounding the model, Treuille emphasizes what was previously shown by the all-round view of the model. Equal to processes of weighting, his gesture emphasizes the model’s shape in relation to individual data threads. In the second part of the scene, the procedure of weighting comes into play again when Treuille is staged holding a real 3D model of RNA in his hands. He puts the model in one hand to free the other (his hands act like scales) to stretch his index finger out and circles the model defining its shape in a live voice-over once more: ‘It forms a helix’.<sup>16</sup>

### *Bringing Data into Circulation*

The pointing finger supports the shaping of data visualizations as an embodied method to transform data into circulable knowledge. The scene

<sup>13</sup> See EternaSoft Website, <<https://software.etergame.org/>> [accessed 11 February 2020].

<sup>14</sup> See ‘What Is the EteRNA Game?’, Carnegie Mellon University Channel, Youtube, 10 January 2011, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\[JhHg89h7bo\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=[JhHg89h7bo])> [accessed 5 February 2020].

<sup>15</sup> See ‘Online Game Helps Unravel Secrets of RNA’, Carnegie Mellon University Website, Robotics Institute Archive, 1 January 2011, <<https://www.ri.cmu.edu/online-game-helps-unravel-secrets-of-rna/>> [accessed 5 February 2020].

<sup>16</sup> The whole scene can be watched in *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World* (Werner Herzog, 2016).

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stages the pointing index finger and renders the directing of knowledge visible on three levels: by guiding camera movements, the observer's eyes (of data scientists at their workplaces and in front of their work desks, the director Werner Herzog, and the spectator), and the interpretation of visualized data by making data as object of knowledge accessible. The pointing gesture draws attention to single aspects within the data visualization by deviating attention from others. The gesture motivates the audience to leave its 'subsidiary awareness of the finger' behind, as Michael Polanyi calls the fact that one follows the index finger to look at an object, but does not pay attention to the pointing finger itself.<sup>17</sup>

Inspired by this reading, the pointing gesture not only directs the interpretation of visualized data. It also creates an object of knowledge by making data accessible. Rather, the pointing gesture becomes an applied method of cinematic knowledge production itself as it answers a problem that arises at the interaction between data analyst, the public of data science, and data visualizations — or, more generally, it refers to, and occurs at the interaction between human and machine. In contrast, Tess Takahashi claims that data has a 'voice' that is embodied in data visualizations that show the way to the eye. The metaphorical use of the pointing gesture becomes a method performing an action and allowing the data expert to sensually touch what he or she *sees/knows*.

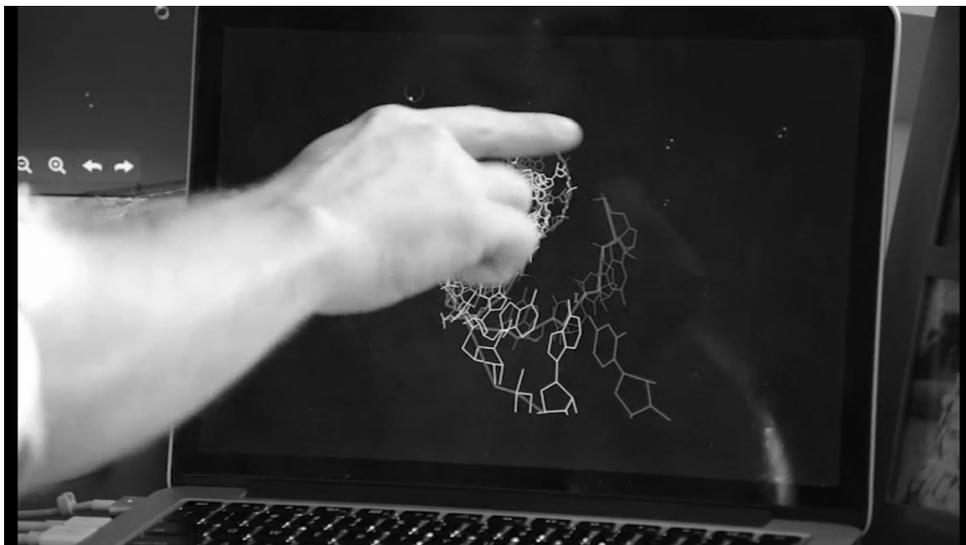


Fig. 1: *Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World* (Werner Herzog, 2016). Screen capture.

<sup>17</sup> See Michael Polanyi, 'Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading', *Philosophy*, 42.162 (1967), 301–25 (p. 301 and p. 316).

This transformation is processed by the shifting gesture of the pointing index finger. As the scene with Treuille shows, the pointing is repeated,<sup>18</sup> always moving towards the image and away from it. The movement itself embodies the change between three-dimensionality, which Treuille's body and the real RNA model have in space, and the virtual 3D model presented on the two-dimensional screen. In and through this movement the finger processes the generation of meaning, which needs to be stabilized as it is fragile because it is caught in relationality.<sup>19</sup> Theories of indexicality, as presented by Rosalind Krauss in reference to Roman Jakobson, for instance, have emphasized this movement. It is in a state of relational change and it processes a shifting relationship that shows that after all it is the index that means nothing, but produces meaning by establishing values through relational connection.<sup>20</sup> Between the data visualization that is embodied in the screen and the reading, listening, and interpreting process that is performed by the embodied method of the expert and his/her pointing finger, the gesture switches between and interconnects the value of data with the value of the linguistic sign aiming to communicate knowledge.

### *Refining Data*

Within the history of economy, this paper argues, the index finger processes refining work, insofar as the pointing gesture contributes to the creation of economic value by the execution of a division, which allows the distribution and sharing of knowledge with an audience. Pointing, similar to zooming, divides data visualizations into visible and no longer visible, more important and no longer important, focused and unfocused aspects of the visualized data that the analyst decides to communicate. This division answers to the circumstance that the visualization *says/knows*, to a certain extent, too much. Pursuant to a decision forming part of an ordering process,<sup>21</sup> the pointing selects data dots and combines them with what the data has communicated to the eyes of the analyst.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> On the repetition and temporality of gestures, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2011), p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> On the production of value through the linguistic sign, see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Grundfragen der allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> See Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America', *October*, 3 (1977), 68–81 (p. 70); see also E. C. Evans, 'On Pointing', *Philosophy*, 38 (1963), 366–69.

<sup>21</sup> Hartmut Winkler points to the organization of access within media constellations arguing that the finger is, introduced by television and the practice of zapping, a tool of choice, decision even. See Hartmut Winkler, 'Zugriff auf bewegte Bilder: Video on Demand', in *Medien und Ästhetik: Festschrift für Burkhardt Lindner*, ed. by Harald Hillgärtner and Thomas Küpper (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2003), pp. 318–31 (p. 323f).

<sup>22</sup> The process of selecting, combining, and relating are central for the work of narration, which Wolfgang Iser considers as acts that enable affection for and access to the world. See Wolfgang Iser, *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektiven literarischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991), pp. 42–51.

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The economist Brian J. Loasby, referring to Friedrich August von Hayek's works introducing knowledge as the central aspect for economic growth, emphasizes that knowledge grows by division only and that the 'primary means of increasing the division of knowledge' is the division of labor.<sup>23</sup> This division takes place not only on the organizational level of the game Eterna, which from a market perspective exploits the participation of amateur computer gamers to 'harvest [...] the "cognitive surplus"',<sup>24</sup> as reported by the *New York Times* about the potentials of the game, but also by means of the jointedness of hands and the division of the visualization which the pointing index finger performs. Eterna shows, on the one hand, that finger work is being performed by letting thousands of gamers perform invisible finger work exercised at private desks when solving puzzles. On the other hand, Treuille's analysis of the output of the game serves as an example to show to what extent knowledge is only divisible when applied as 'active knowledge',<sup>25</sup> embodied in the pointing act allowing the distribution, consumption, and sharing of knowledge.

Recently, Shoshana Zuboff in *Surveillance Capitalism* argues with reference to the sociologist Émile Durkheim that the division of knowledge is now the dominant principle of ordering processes in a society in which data is understood to be the opportunity for potential knowledge and the ultimate resource for economic growth. She even speaks of a division of learning, according to different accesses to knowledge production.<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, Nick Srnicek emphasizes the crucial role of data as a resource in his argument that data does not necessarily contain knowledge, but data must firstly be transformed into knowledge. Like other raw material, the refining process of data includes storage, standardization, recording, visualization and analysis.<sup>27</sup> If one follows Enzo Rullani, who stresses that, in a knowledge economy, it is crucial to recognize the motor of value creation leading towards increasingly interactive communicative, intellectual, creative, and advisory work activating and distributing knowledge based on data,<sup>28</sup> the pointing finger mediates this work and represents the knowing how to apply pointing as embodied method.

<sup>23</sup> See Brian J. Loasby, *Knowledge, Institutions and Evolution in Economics* (London: Routledge Publishing, 1999), p. 135f.

<sup>24</sup> John Markoff, 'RNA Game Lets Players Help Find a Biological Prize', *New York Times*, 10 January 2011, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> The economist Enzo Rullani suggests this term in Enzo Rullani, *Ökonomie des Wissens: Kreativität und Wertbildung im Netzwerkkapitalismus* (Wien, Berlin: Verlag Turia+Kant, 2011), p. 370. The knowing in action, what motivates people to actively produce knowledge, is discussed in Christoph Wulf, 'Unknowing and Silent Knowledge as a Challenge: Iconic, Performative, Material Perspectives', in *Non-Knowledge and Digital Culture*, ed. by Andreas Bernard, Matthias Koch and Martina Leeker (Lüneburg: meson press, 2018), pp. 123–40 (p. 128f).

<sup>26</sup> See Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019), p. 19, p. 32f and p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> On the processing of data as raw material, see Srnicek, pp. 39–53.

<sup>28</sup> See Enzo Rullani, 'Wie wird durch Wissen Wert geschaffen?', in *Kognitiver Kapitalismus*, ed. by Isabell Lorey and Klaus Neundlinger (Wien, Berlin: Verlag Turia+Kant, 2012), pp. 133–57.

As a dividing process, the pointing mediates the expertise of computer scientist Treuille, who becomes a communication expert just by producing connections. This is a notion that can be found, for example, in a concert hall the moment an orchestra conductor functions as a communication hub, or (musical) mediator par excellence.<sup>29</sup> The moment the data analyst literally pulls single strands of data, Treuille expresses a specification of knowledge that is put into circulation. Viewed this way, the pointing finger guarantees the authenticity of what experts communicate, also because of the movement that repeatedly indicates and protocols the authentication of the object of knowledge to which the speech refers. The movement of the embodied method not only ensures the binding of the object of knowledge, the speech, and gesture of knowing, but also, the refinement of data by pointing to an aesthetic method of knowledge production.

This method is based on revelation. When the observer follows the pointing finger, the eye zooms in even more than the camera does and the image is divided by the gaze. The finger removes layers and comes even closer to the image through the sense of touch than the eye appears to be able to achieve. This notion of pulling apart threads is considered an act of ‘artful revelation’ in Catelijne Coopmans’ work. Coopman shows that data visualizations are made accessible by following the construction of the story to be drawn from them. Thus, in order to uncover the value of the data in the image and generate commercial success, the image itself is processed and evaluated.<sup>30</sup> Such notion can be found in Michel Serres’s work on the senses, in which Serres writes that revelation requires tact to unravel the state of things, and can only be unveiled by using the sense of touch.<sup>31</sup> More precisely, Serres states that unveiling is being patiently performed with a respectful tact and argues that the sensitivity of touch makes information accessible as it opens information: ‘a soft correlate of what was once called the intellect’.<sup>32</sup>

The revealing division of data visualizations, which the pointing gesture transacts and which also mediates the production of surplus in a knowledge economy based on data. It is a dividing process that is also found in Wolfgang Iser’s literary theory, in which Iser refers to the division that the reading and narrating process performs with regards to the ground and building of a figure of narration. Exemplified in Treuille’s case, this division is expressed by the

<sup>29</sup> See Jürgen Osterhammel, ‘Kühle Meisterschaft: Dirigenten des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts zwischen Selbstdarstellung und Metierbeschreibung’, in *Kommunikation in Musikleben: Harmonien und Dissonanzen im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Sven Oliver Müller, Jürgen Osterhammel and Martin Rempe (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), pp. 154–78 (p. 159).

<sup>30</sup> See Catelijne Coopmans, ‘Visual Analytics as Artful Revelation’, in *Representation in Scientific Practice Revisited*, ed. by Catelijne Coopmans, Janet Vertesi, Michael Lynch, and others (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 37–60 (p. 52).

<sup>31</sup> See Michel Serres, *Les Cinq Sens: Philosophie des Corps Mêlés* (1985), Engl. transl. *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies* (New York: Continuum 2008), p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Serres, p. 84.

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repetition of the pointing gesture towards and away from the screen. The gesture itself becomes a figure (in motion between the virtual model on the screen and the execution of the gesture as a figure during the act of pointing) that models air that fills the space between screen and body. The pointing index finger refines data by supporting the communicative work that the data visualization demands from the eyes by making it figurative and even touchable. In this way, the refining process, which one could imagine and discuss, for example, in relation to oil as a dirty and mechanical process, becomes an embodied, directed, and gentle process performed through withdrawn but repeated knowing how to touch with fingers.

### *From the Invisible Hand towards Knowing how of Fingers*

One must assign the data analyst's pointing finger a central place in the media cultural history of the invisible hand. This refers to the usage of Adam Smith's metaphor, which was introduced in moral philosophy in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776. However, it has been part of a history of film and moving images because Adam Smith's metaphor easily serves as a model to set imagination and the rewriting of history in motion. As political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss emphasizes, Smith's theory actually enabled the documentation of the activities and 'effects of the invisible hand' by graphically representing them via charts.<sup>33</sup> Viewed in this way, the history of the invisible hand and the history of its visualization stand for the principle of knowing how to give body to knowledge via moving images.

With regards to the ubiquity of data visualizations in data-based economies, an update of the metaphor of the invisible hand must be carried out by film and media studies because film and moving images not only own the capacity to show, but rather demand work from fingers to deal with non-knowledge. Through Alfred Dupont Chandler's work *The visible hand: the managerial revolution in American business* published in 1977, this metaphor has already been adjusted in managerial studies. Film scholar Lee Grieveson relates this update to a 'replacement' of market systems that has taken place through the course of a change of capitalist systems from small proprietary businesses to large corporate and managerial companies that integrate various functions at different levels.<sup>34</sup> The metaphor of the invisible hand had to have been corrected under these circumstances to some extent, precisely because these enterprises required more coordination through managers.<sup>35</sup> Data economies and data

<sup>33</sup> See Susan Buck-Morss, 'Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display', *Critical Inquiry*, 21.2 (Winter 1995), 434–67 (p. 354f).

<sup>34</sup> See Lee Grieveson, *Cinema and the Wealth of Nations: Media, Capital, and the Liberal World System* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 45–53.

<sup>35</sup> See Alfred Dupont Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 484–500. See also Grieveson, pp. 37–50.

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visualization challenge these understandings and coordination once more as they place the sense of touch and its relationship to moving images in the center of economic value production, which relies on the application of fingers and its tacit communication to produce knowledge by evaluating it.

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**Beyond Cinema**



# Disclosing the (Temporal) World of Depression, by Means of Audiovisual Media: An Exploration between Cinema and Virtual Reality

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## *Abstract*

Individuals suffering from depression often experience a condition of isolation, which relegates them in a separate and neglected world of their own. In light of this issue, could audiovisual media contribute to drawing attention to the world of depression, and make it more familiar to the general population?

The first part of this paper provides an extensive and in-depth description of depression. More specifically, by combining the psychiatric account of Thomas Fuchs with Jakob von Uexküll's notion of *Umwelt*, it frames it in terms of a 'psychopathology of time', and introduces the notion of a self-enclosed 'temporal world' that is usually home (or rather cage) to depressed people. In turn, the second part of this paper discusses some media strategies that may actually *disclose* the temporal world of depression. After taking into account a cinematographic option and showing how it succeeds in making this world *visible*, it further examines a VR-based alternative in order to assess whether it can make the same world not simply visible, but fully *accessible*: that is, affording an up-close, first-person grasp of depression to ordinary, non-affected spectators.

## *Introduction*

Mental health issues have been spreading at an increasing rate during the last decades: among them, one of the most prominent is depression.<sup>1</sup> In several contexts, depression is still associated with a strong social stigma, which frequently results in depressed people refusing to seek professional help. As stigma is based on prejudice and misrepresentations about a given condition, better information concerning the nature of depression may reduce stigma. In turn, this may encourage help-seeking attitude in affected people.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, *Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2017). According to this WHO report, the total number of people living with depression worldwide amounts to 322 million, and this number has increased by 18,4% from 2005 to 2015.

<sup>2</sup> On the notion of stigma and its consequences, see for instance Klara Latalova and others, 'Perspectives on Perceived Stigma and Self-stigma in Adult Male Patients with Depression', *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, 10 (2014), 1399–405. Studies have demonstrated that

Given this scenario, one could ask whether audiovisual media, based on their representational tools, can contribute to unveiling the world of depression and promoting awareness about this disorder among those who do not have any direct experience of it. This paper proposes a starting exploration of such broad and complex issue, based on two selected case studies belonging to two specific domains of the audiovisual mediascape.

The first of these two domains is cinema. Indeed, cinema has often been employed to make visible what normally is not: dreams, phantasies, hallucinations, and —precisely— altered mental states.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it may be sensible to explore how it could make visible the depressive condition more specifically, and whether this could make the disorder more relatable. At the same time, the ongoing developments in the contemporary mediascape invite to push the boundaries of cinema itself, and to take into account new immersive media, like virtual reality (VR). By using the latter, the current debate suggests, it may be possible to make the world of depression not simply *visible*, but more radically and fully *accessible*.

The first part of this paper provides one of the possible conceptualisations of depression. The second part discusses whether, how, and to what degree different media options across cinema and VR may convey the experiential traits of the depressive condition to non-affected spectators.

### *The Temporal World of Depression: a Multi-disciplinary Approach*

When describing depression, it may be advisable to start from the fields of clinical psychology and psychiatry. Depression, however, is not the object of these disciplines only. Therefore, a multi-disciplinary approach may reveal advantageous to provide a scientifically solid yet multifaceted description of the pathology.

‘approximately half of the general public is convinced that people with depression are weak, responsible for their own condition and unpredictable; and nearly a quarter considers them to be dangerous’; and that information campaign can contribute to change public perception of depression (Elisabeth Kohls and others, ‘Public Attitudes toward Depression and Help-Seeking: Impact of the OSPI-Europe Depression Awareness Campaign in Four European Regions’, *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 217 (2017), 252–59.

<sup>3</sup> For an exhaustive and quite updated catalogue of movies about mental issues, organized by disorder types and including a chapter on ‘Bipolar and Depressive Disorders’, see Danny Wedding and Ryan Niemiec, *Movies and Mental Illness. Using Films to Understand Psychopathology*, 4th edn (Boston: Hogrefe Publishing, 2014). For a more recent and more critical view on Hollywood depictions on mental issues, see Erin Heath, *Mental Disorders in Popular Film: How Hollywood Uses, Shames, and Obscures Mental Diversity* (London: Lexington Books, 2019).

## Disclosing the (Temporal) World of Depression

### *The DSM-5 Description of (Melancholic) Depression, and Beyond*

For practitioners in clinical psychology and psychiatry, one of the main references is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.<sup>4</sup>

According to this source, major depression can be diagnosed when five or more of the following symptoms are registered during at least two weeks: 1. Frequent and persistent depressed mood, comprising deep sadness and 'hopelessness'; 2. Loss of interest or pleasure in previously enjoyed activities; 3. Significant weight loss or gain; 4. Recurring insomnia, or hypersomnia; 5. Frequent and persistent psychomotor agitation, or retardation; 6. Frequent and persistent fatigue, or loss of energy; 7. Recurring and excessive feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt; 8. Difficulty to focus and/or to take decisions; and 9. Recurring thoughts of death and/or suicidal ideation. At least one of the observed symptoms must be depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure.<sup>5</sup>

As it constitutes the specific sub-type of the pathology described in the next paragraphs, it is worth complementing the above description with the characterising features (i.e. 'specifiers') of *melancholic* depression. These include at least one among: 1a. Loss of pleasure in all or almost all performed activities; and 2a. Diminished or absent reactivity to normally pleasurable stimuli. Furthermore, they comprise three or more of the following symptoms: 1b. A distinct quality of depressed mood, expressed by 'profound despondency, despair, and/or moroseness or by so-called empty mood'; 2b. Peak of depressive mood in the morning; 3b. Recurring morning awakening before usual time; 4b. Marked psychomotor agitation or retardation; 5b. Significant weight loss; and 6b. Excessive feeling of guilt.<sup>6</sup>

Undoubtedly, the description of (melancholic) depression derived by the DSM-5 is operationally valuable. On the other hand, precisely in light of its essentially operational scope, it may result quite scant and under-detailed. This observation is consistent with the criticisms raised by some contemporary psychiatrists. For instance, Kenneth S. Kendler has observed that 'focusing solely on the symptoms and signs in DSM risks producing an impoverished view of psychopathology'.<sup>7</sup> To mitigate this risk, he suggests to draw from

<sup>4</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013). For a critical history of the Manual, which is acknowledged here to be 'considered *the* reference for characterisation and diagnosis of mental disorders', see Shadia Kawa and James Giordano, 'A Brief Historicity of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*: Issues and Implications for the Future of Psychiatric Canon and Practice', *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*, 7.2 (2012). For a discussion of both the relevance and the limitations of the Manual, see Lee Anna Clark and others, 'Three Approaches to Understanding and Classifying Mental Disorder: ICD-11, DSM-5, and the National Institute of Mental Health's Research Domain Criteria (RDoC)', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 18.2 (2017), 72–145.

<sup>5</sup> Ivi, pp. 160–61.

<sup>6</sup> Ivi, p. 185.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth S. Kendler, 'The Phenomenology of Major Depression and the Representativeness and Nature of DSM Criteria', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 173.8 (2016), 771–80 (p. 771).

phenomenology, and phenomenological psychiatry more precisely. Indeed, these disciplines have historically devoted great attention to mental disorders as they are experienced by patients, thus building richer accounts than those summarised in the DSM-5. Kendler's opinion resonates with that expressed by Aaron L. Mishara and Michael A. Schwartz, who have followed closely the development of the latest version of the Manual. Even more radically than Kendler, these authors stress the inescapability of a collaboration between a DSM-oriented and a more phenomenologically grounded view of psychiatry.<sup>8</sup>

Complementing the DMS-5 descriptions with phenomenological materials might help better specify the symptoms listed in the Manual for given pathologies. However, and most crucially, it might as well lead to unveil new experiential traits characterizing them.

Depression in particular has indeed been the object of in-depth phenomenological studies. Interestingly, some of these studies have highlighted the importance of one particular facet of the experience of depression, i.e. its *temporal* facet.

*Depression as a Psychopathology of Time: around Thomas Fuchs's 'Desynchronisation'*

Depression has often been addressed in phenomenological psychiatry by bringing to the fore its temporal dimension.

Most notably, Eugène Minkowski maintained that essential alterations in the relation with time lie at the core of the depressive condition.<sup>9</sup> Building on previous work by Erwin Straus,<sup>10</sup> Minkowski proposed depression to be grounded in a suppression of the human original propulsion towards the future. Such suppression is connected to a discrepancy between 'world time' (i.e. the shared temporality of a group of individuals and their environment) and 'ego time' (i.e. the temporality experienced by a given individual, in this case the depressed one). More precisely, since the others keep moving towards the future while the depressed individual loses this propulsion, her/his own 'ego time' detaches from the shared 'world time'. As the latter seemingly proceeds at unsustainable speed, the depressed individual conversely experiences a progressive slowing down of her/his own 'ego time', or even its total arrest.

<sup>8</sup> Aaron L. Mishara and Michael A. Schwartz, 'What Does Phenomenology Contribute to the Debate about DSM-5?', in *Making the DSM-5*, ed. by Joel Paris and James Phillips (New York: Springer, 2013), pp. 125–42 (p. 126).

<sup>9</sup> Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time. Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies*, trans. by Nancy Metzel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). The book was originally published in French in 1933.

<sup>10</sup> Erwin Straus, 'Das Zeiterlebnis in der endogenen Depression und in der psychopathischen Verstimmung', *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie*, 68 (1928), 640–56. Both Minkowski and Straus were at the same time theorists and practitioners in phenomenological psychiatry. They belong to the 'first wave' of studies in the discipline, preceding the contemporary wave of studies of which —for instance —Fuchs is representative.

## Disclosing the (Temporal) World of Depression

These ideas have been retrieved by the contemporary psychiatrist Thomas Fuchs. Fuchs picks up the basic notion of a temporal slowing down. At the same time, he reframes it within a more markedly relational approach. The result is a conceptualisation of depression —and melancholic depression more precisely —as ‘intersubjective desynchronisation’.<sup>11</sup>

Human life, Fuchs claims, is regulated by an essential and normally unnoticed synchronicity. Indeed, human beings tend to acknowledge the rhythms proposed by the world they live in, and to conform to them spontaneously. This concerns both environmental aspects regulating human physiology (e.g. the alternation of day and night, and the ‘synchronic’ drive to match the former with activity and the latter with sleep) and social aspects (e.g. the institutionalised ‘proper times’ to find a job, have children and so on, and the ‘synchronic’ inclination to organise life accordingly). Against this background, desynchronisation is defined as ‘an uncoupling in the temporal relation of organism and environment, or of individuals and society’.<sup>12</sup>

Desynchronisation is not necessarily pathologic. On the contrary, it often characterises ordinary life as well. Periodically, indeed, subjects experience minor delays or misalignments, which normally can be dealt with in different ways. However, in melancholic depression, desynchronisation cannot be managed effectively. Hence, it becomes unbearable and —most crucially—irreversible.

Such drastic result is the product of a detrimental loop between social and environmental (thus physiological) uncoupling. Most often, a social delay occurs first. The subject prone to depression would mostly be inclined to make up for it, but she/he fails to do so. Importantly, among the key factors contributing to such failure is an abnormal sense of guilt. Indeed, the subject prone to depression typically over-emphasises both the scale and the irreversibility of her/his assumed mistakes and faults. This contributes to anchor her/him in the past, at the same time undermining her/his present and future-oriented actions.<sup>13</sup>

As a consequence, a physiological delay adds up. Indeed, in the urge to regain synchronisation, the subject pushes her/his daily routine, which may affect her/his sleeping habits or other relevant physiological patterns. With re-synchronisation nonetheless not being achieved, discouragement and exhaustion increase. Ultimately, this results in ‘a reaction of the entire organism, namely

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Fuchs, ‘Melancholia as a Desynchronization: Towards a Psychopathology of Interpersonal Time’, *Psychopathology*, 34 (2001), 179–86; Thomas Fuchs, ‘Temporality and Psychopathology’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 12.1 (2013), 75–104.

<sup>12</sup> Fuchs, ‘Melancholia as a Desynchronization’, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> The urgency experienced by the subject prone to depression to stay ‘in synch’ with others is equally described in Fuchs’s 2001 and 2013 papers already referred to here. As for the mentioned feeling of guilt and its consequences, they are devoted special attention in two additional papers in particular, which are not discussed at length here as their focus is more on the (inter)corporeal than on the temporal dimension of depression: Thomas Fuchs, ‘The Phenomenology of Shame, Guilt and the Body in Body Dysmorphic Disorder and Depression’, *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 33.2 (2002), 223–43; and Thomas Fuchs, ‘Depression, Intercorporeality, and Interactivity’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 20.7–8 (2013), 219–38.

a psycho-physiological slowing down or *stasis*' that is described in Husserlian terms as a 'fundamental loss of conation' (i.e. intentional drive).<sup>14</sup> At this point, the loop is activated: the inability to act aggravates the social uncoupling, which aggravates in turn the bodily slowing down.

In such essential stasis, the depressed subject becomes unable of even conceiving a future in which she/he will experience the same temporality as others again: hopelessness arises, stasis aggravates. With the intersubjective delay increasing exponentially, the impression of living within a slower temporality of one's own arises. Eventually, 'the depressed drops out of shared time, he lives in an "anachronistic", slow-moving time of his own'.<sup>15</sup> Desynchronisation translates into exclusion.

The concept of exclusion immediately points at a subsequent one: namely, that of isolation. It is certainly true that depressed subjects isolate themselves in the first place, due to their perceived inability to take part in the events surrounding them. On the other hand, their isolation may also be fostered by non-affected people, who may consider the depressed subjects' experience too distant to be grasped. Hence, providing appropriate tools to break through the (temporal) world of depression may constitute an important step to reduce the gap between subjects suffering from this pathology and non-affected people around them.

### *Depressive Time as a Temporal World: Re-working von Uexküll's 'Umwelt'*

The notion of a different world generated by peculiar experiential conditions is reminiscent of some concepts put forward by the Estonian biologist Jakob von Uexküll, and particularly of his concept of *Umwelt*.

The concept of *Umwelt* is introduced most clearly in von Uexküll's booklet *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*.<sup>16</sup> Imagine, the author suggests, to take a walk in a meadow populated by animals and insects, and to draw a bubble around each of them. In von Uexküll's words: 'The bubble represents each animal's environment and contains all the features accessible to the subject. As soon as we enter into one such bubble, the previous surroundings of the subject are completely reconfigured. [...] A new world arises in each bubble'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Fuchs, 'Temporality and Psychopathology', p. 96. Fuchs's entire framework is rooted in Husserl's thought and Husserlian phenomenology more broadly. In relation to 'conation' more precisely, Fuchs explains in a footnote: 'This "energetic" or affective side of intentionality is hardly present yet in Husserl's earlier writings, but it comes increasingly to the fore in his later works, especially as regards the role of affection for attention (cf. Depraz 1994, 1998). The pre-reflective experiential directedness means a (self-)affection which Husserl also refers to as "awakening of an intention" and "drive-intentionality" (Husserl 2001, p. 198)' (ivi, p. 78).

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 97.

<sup>16</sup> Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans. With a Theory of Meaning*, trans. by Joseph D. O'Neil (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). The booklet was originally published in German in 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 43.

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Each organism, the author maintains, lives in a world of its own, which is created by the organism itself based on its perceptual and motor skills. It is well known that distinct species differ — for instance — in their visual abilities. Dogs can see fewer colours than humans, yet humans cannot see in the dark as cats do. In von Uexküll's view, these differences concretely project onto the world as a whole, fragmenting it into as many perceived *worlds* as the types of organisms inhabiting it: in this case, a dog-world, a human-world, and a cat-world. Unless they develop further perceptual and motor skills allowing them to expand their experiential horizon, organisms normally cannot step out of their own worlds, which is what makes them bubble-like.

Importantly, in addition to visual and other sensory features, the temporal features of a given environment as well can be modulated based on the organisms' specificity. Von Uexküll recurs in this regard to the example of the tick, which can wait for food for as long as eighteen years. Such extended waiting period would be unsustainable for a human being. Hence, it must be admitted that the tick and the human being not only generally live in distinct *Umwelten*, but also — and more specifically — they live in distinct *temporal Umwelten*.

What is most relevant here is that different temporal *Umwelten* may not only characterise different species, but also different categories of organisms within the same species. Von Uexküll himself allows for this possibility, when he refers as an example to the *spatial Umwelt* of an astronomer, which is built in a radically different way compared to that of other human beings less inclined to the observation of the sky.

What could it be, in a similar vein, an example of a *temporal Umwelt* that is specific of a circumscribed category of humans?

An interesting hint in this regard comes when combining von Uexküll's with Fuchs's account. Indeed, Fuchs's depressive temporality and the notion of a category-specific temporal *Umwelt* share some essential qualities. First, a separateness and peculiarity compared to other subjective temporalities. Second, the fact that such separateness and peculiarity originate from the (depressed) subjects' possibilities of perception and action in the world, their very disposition within and towards the world. What emerges, then, is an original interpretation of depressive time as a peculiar and pathologically inflected type of temporal *Umwelt*, specific of the human category of depressed people.

As it was anticipated, von Uexküll tends to describe the *Umwelt* as something self-enclosed, since it is strictly dependent on a given organism's perceptual and motor possibilities. It is true that each organism is *naturally* assigned only a selection of such possibilities. It is also true, however, that these can be extended *artificially*, by means of specific technologies. Crucially, as it was foreseen shortly after this medium's birth, these technologies include cinema.<sup>18</sup> Thus, it can be

<sup>18</sup> Consider for instance Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2, Part 2, 1931–1934*, ed. by Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings and Gary Smith, 4 vols, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004/2006), ii.

hypothesised, cinema could be employed in order to open given *Umwelten* to those who are normally not included in them.

This possibility has been envisioned clearly, in recent years, by Inga Pollmann.<sup>19</sup> Pollmann works on a specific case study: namely, Charles Urban's film series *The unseen worlds* (1903). Urban employed magnification to show ordinary objects at an extremely close distance. By doing so, he offered spectators an unprecedented visual experience, thus breaking their usual perceptual bubble.<sup>20</sup> Hence, he established 'a technical analogue of the soap bubble that Uexküll asked his readers to create imaginatively'.<sup>21</sup>

The case study proposed by Pollmann is functional in relation to the *visual* properties of a given *Umwelt*. The question arises, now, as to whether something similar to what achieved by Urban with regard to these properties could be attempted with regard to *temporal* properties as well, and, in relation to the specific scope of this paper, to the temporal properties of the depressive condition. In other words, the question arises as to whether cinema could disclose the usually isolated temporal *Umwelt* of depression, making it available to the general population.

An original perspective on how the concept of *Umwelt* may intertwine with the domain of temporal properties can be found in a 2010 book by film scholar Pasi Väliäho. Väliäho shares the view presented here that cinema can give rise to specific *Umwelten* in von Uexküll's sense. Importantly, he also believes that, among the factors characterizing such *Umwelten*, a key role is played by their temporal texture. The latter indeed, according to Väliäho, is what allows cinema to convey its 'vitality affects', a notion that he borrows from psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Daniel Stern and that indicates the 'the force, intensity, quality, form, or rhythm of experience'.<sup>22</sup> In Väliäho's view, the moving image and the given *Umwelt* it creates basically 'consists of breathing rhythms, intensities of affective states, and form and texture dynamics', which — crucially — spectators not only witness but *embody*.<sup>23</sup>

Within the frame of this paper, then, the question expressed above may as well be formulated in terms of whether the 'vitality affects' corresponding to a depressive temporal *Umwelt* may be picked up and embodied by an audience that normally lives a different experience of time.

<sup>19</sup> Inga Pollmann, 'Invisible Worlds, Visible: Uexküll's *Umwelt*, Film, and Film Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 39.4 (2013), 777–816.

<sup>20</sup> An experiment, it should be noted, already somehow attempted by von Uexküll himself by employing photography and the 'grid method' (see *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, pp. 62–5).

<sup>21</sup> 'Pollmann, 'Invisible Worlds, Visible', p. 79. Clearly, other and possibly more suitable examples than Urban's work may exist. However, I chose to focus on Urban as he is explicitly mentioned in relation to von Uexküll's theory in Pollmann's essay, which I rely on in this part of the paper.

<sup>22</sup> Pasi Väliäho, *Mapping the Moving Image: Gesture, Thought and Cinema circa 1900* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 92.

<sup>23</sup> Ivi, p. 93.

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### *Getting 'in Synch' with Depression: a Media-oriented Approach*

Given the (audio)visual nature of the medium, disclosing the temporal world of depression by means of cinema may first be interpreted in terms of making this world *visible*. This may constitute a valuable way of bringing the general population closer to it; or — with a little pun — to get them 'in synch' with it.

However, if what is at stake is an actual advancement in the general population's understanding of the depressive condition, making it *visible* may not be sufficient. In contrast, it may be necessary to make it somehow experientially *accessible*. Hence, the focus on cinema may have to be extended to different media.

### *A Cinematographic Option: Son of the Lovely Capitalism*

Coherent with Pollmann and Väliaho's hints, the first option analysed here for disclosing the temporal world of depression is a cinematographic one. More specifically, it is the 2015 short movie *Son of the Lovely Capitalism* by Suranga D. Katugampala.

*Son of the Lovely Capitalism* depicts the psychological consequences of the 'inexorable progress of capitalism' on '[a] boy, metaphor of today's youth'.<sup>24</sup> As it will emerge, the movie explicitly aims at representing some behavioural traits that are typical of the depressive condition. Moreover, though possibly less deliberately, it expresses very appropriately the temporal features of (melancholic) depression.

*Son of the Lovely Capitalism* can be divided into three main sections.

The first section consists of six static shots, comprising no camera movements. In particular, after an extreme close-up presenting a face devoid of any expression, five shots follow each other in which the main character — a young male adult — occupies passively different urban scenarios. In each shot, the more or less pronounced dynamism of the scenario is contrasted by the character's immobility: slumped over a subway stairway, sitting on the edge of a sidewalk, lying on a bench, he appears completely detached from the events surrounding him, and he is either ignored or looked at with suspicion by passers-by. Each of these first six shots largely exceeds the duration of one minute (fig. 1).

An extra-diegetic ominous sound rising gradually and the intensification of the pace of the editing (i.e. the cutting rate) mark the beginning of the movie's second section. This section is stylistically opposed to the former: within one single minute, five shots are presented repeatedly and at lightning speed. The fast rotation of the shots is accompanied by a progressive increase of the volume of the extra-diegetic sound, which reminds the sound of metallic components clashing. This second section is closed by a powerful image: as if leaning out from a huge piece of graffiti,

<sup>24</sup> <[http://katugampala.com/son\\_of\\_the\\_lovely\\_capitalism/](http://katugampala.com/son_of_the_lovely_capitalism/)> [accessed 18 August 2020].

a monstrous animal — perhaps a zebra — and its empty-eyed knight tower over the main character, who is lying below the animal's hoof in a gesture of shocked surrender. The camera lingers on this image for about one entire minute (fig. 2).

In the movie's third and last section, the duration of the shots increases again. Echoing and relaunching the first section, three additional urban scenarios are presented, in which the main character keeps manifesting his immobility and isolation. The only element of differentiation is provided by a sub-section, which shows the back of the protagonist, who is sitting on the ground, in front of a wall. A series of images are projected onto his back; some of them reach the wall he is looking at. The images depict working men from different regions and epochs. Once this sub-section ends, one last, extremely long shot presents the main character standing in a field, in the dark, as he stares dully at the sky.

As anticipated, the psychological condition addressed by *Son of the Lovely Capitalism* and expressed by its main character matches quite precisely the depressive condition, as well as Fuchs's phenomenology of melancholic depression. It does so — more specifically — with regard to three main traits of the pathology.

First, the immobility of the main character relates to the idleness and apathy that characterise melancholic depression. These states not only mark the character's body, but they extend to his face as well, which may be seen to show the typical depressive feeling of hopelessness.<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, the dynamism around the main character, and thus the discrepancy between such dynamism and the character's static attitude, may be interpreted to point at the desynchronisation that, according to Fuchs, constitutes the core of melancholic depression.

That what is at stake is not a generic form of marginalisation but rather the temporal construct of desynchronisation can be inferred by focussing on the temporal texture of the representation, hence by working not at the *diegetic* but at the *discourse* level.<sup>26</sup> At the discourse level, *Son of the Lovely Capitalism's* most remarkable features are the pace of the editing, which is extremely slow, and the duration of the single shots, which becomes consequently very long. These features, which are eloquently among the constitutive traits of so-called 'Slow Cinema',<sup>27</sup> mirror quite clearly the temporal slowing down (or even stasis) that Fuchs associates with melancholic depression.

<sup>25</sup> The intention to represent these behavioural and attitude traits is made explicit by the filmmaker himself. Indeed, in the official 'Concept' he associates to the short movie (available on the same webpage indicated in the previous note), he overtly uses the words 'apathy', 'waiting without purpose', 'life without goals' in order to describe the condition exemplified by the movie's main character. As already suggested, these words match precisely some of the key symptoms of depression according to both Fuchs's account and the DSM-5: i.e. apathy, idleness, and hopelessness.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Giannetti, *Understanding movies* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2014). For a broader yet classic argument, see Seymour Chatman, 'Towards a Theory of Narrative', *New Literary History*, 6.2 (1975), 295–318.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Lee Carruthers, *Doing Time: Temporality, Hermeneutics, and Contemporary Cinema* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2016).

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In this regard, it could be argued that — by contrast — the central section of the movie is characterised by a marked speeding-up of the editing. It should not be overlooked, however, that the acceleration of the images leads to a quasi-impossibility for spectators to grasp their content. Together with the ominous soundtrack accompanying it, this invites to conceive the section as a depiction of the environment's temporality as it is perceived by the main character: excessively fast, disorienting, exhausting if not impossible to follow. The (static) frame concluding this section, in which the main character appears dominated by the hoof of a gigantic monster, seems to support this interpretation. In fact, it may be read as epitomising the eventual defeat of a character that is smashed by a temporality he cannot bear, and thus that is pushed back — in the subsequent section — to the isolation of his own and separate temporal condition.

### *Stepping inside the Movie, or Not*

Based on the argument above, it seems safe to conclude that *Son of the Lovely Capitalism* succeeds in making the depressive world, and its temporal traits more specifically, *visible*. Making a world visible, however, is not the same as making it *accessible*. Roughly, a merely visible and a more radically accessible representation may be said to correspond to two modalities of engagement: an observational one, based on a primarily third-person and outdistanced positioning; and a more decisively close-up one, based on the adoption of a first-person and internal standpoint within the representation. When adopting the first modality, spectators would primarily *witness* a given experiential condition as lived by someone else; on the other hand, when adopting the second one, they would more radically feel *as if* they were living the same experiential condition themselves. Hence, making the world of depression accessible would mean enabling the spectators to quite literally 'step inside' the movie and to gain an experiential grasp of the pathology.

Whether this would be desirable or even necessary connects to a broad debate, which has witnessed an impressive revival in recent years within the field of virtual reality (VR) — and in relation to VR-based 'immersive journalism' more specifically.<sup>28</sup> The debate revolves around how to promote increased awareness and proactive behaviour with regard to disadvantaged categories of people, which are the typical objects of this type of journalism.

Most scholars involved in this debate believe that the audience must be brought as close as possible to the disadvantaged people in the representation; and they claim that VR is the most suitable medium to do so, due to its immersive and

<sup>28</sup> On virtual reality as a new kind of image and its aspects of experiential novelty, see Andrea Pinotti, 'Towards An-Iconology: the Image as Environment', *Screen*, 61.4, 2020, pp. 594–603. On immersive VR-based journalism more specifically, see Ana Luisa Sánchez Laws, 'Can Immersive Journalism Enhance Empathy?', *Digital Journalism*, 8.2 (2020), 213–28.

illusionistic potential and to its possibility to superimpose a diegetic character's point of view to that of the members of the audience.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, when wearing a VR headset, the spectator finds herself/himself *de facto* projected within the represented world, and possibly within a character's body. Hence, what VR can produce is basically a coincidence between the represented subjects' and the audience's respective experiences.

Before pushing the argument forward, a couple of clarifications are due. Indeed, both the concept of an observational mode of engagement and the idea just proposed of a coincidence of experiences, which would be exclusive of VR, are seemingly vulnerable to criticism.

To start with, the term 'observational' appears to evoke an interpretive view that has been severely criticised in the field of film studies: namely, the view that cinema is a purely visual experience.<sup>30</sup> However, the emphasis here is not much on the visual component of the act of 'observing', as on the connected idea of standing in front of something that remains at some distance. This is precisely what — from both a technical and a phenomenological standpoint — *does* happen in cinema, and *does not* happen in VR. Indeed, though avoiding reducing the experience of a given medium to its technical properties, one may not want to completely neglect them either. Even if choosing to adopt a phenomenological approach, or precisely *because* of this choice, one should always bear in mind the 'conditions of possibility' of a specific media experience.<sup>31</sup> With regard to the precise case at stake here, it is hard to deny that the technical difference between a flat screen presenting images some metres away from the viewer and a VR headset literally placing the user within the images does not have any consequence at the level of the respective experiences.<sup>32</sup>

The technical argument just proposed also helps to defend the view that in VR only it is possible to observe the precise coincidence between the represented subjects' and the audience's experience described above. Indeed, it is true that certain cinematographic solutions, most blatantly the point-of-view shot, seemingly achieve a similar result. However, even when a point-of-view shot is used, in cinema a physical distance between the screen and the audience

<sup>29</sup> Chris Milk, 'How Virtual Reality Can Create the Ultimate Empathy Machine' (2015), talk presented at TED2015 conference, <[https://www.ted.com/talks/chris\\_milk\\_how\\_virtual\\_reality\\_can\\_create\\_the\\_ultimate\\_empathy\\_machine](https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine)> [accessed 18 August 2020]; Mel Slater and Maria V. Sanchez-Vives, 'Enhancing our Lives with Immersive Virtual Reality', *Frontiers in Robotics and AI*, 3 (2016), 74.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance Vivian Sobchack, 'What my Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh', in *Carnal Thoughts. Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 53–84.

<sup>31</sup> Which is a very different position compared to plain technical determinims: the technical properties of a medium do not *determine* the experience of it. At the same time, they most likely *impact* on it.

<sup>32</sup> The issue can also be read in terms of the presence or the absence of a frame (or *unframedness*); see for instance Andrea Pinotti, 'Towards An-Iconology: the Image as Environment'; and Pietro Conte, *Unframing Aesthetics* (Milano: Mimesis International, 2020).

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nonetheless remains; whereas inside a VR headset such distance is abolished, so that the audience is not only *in line with* the position of a given character, but literally *occupies* that position. Moreover, in cinema the movements of the point of view are still pre-established and delegated to an external ‘entity’ directing them (i.e. the movie’s discourse); whereas in VR the point of view is created as the representation unfolds by each spectator, who appropriates and actively directs it by means of her/his own movements. Lastly, and tackling the issue from a slightly different angle, cinema seems to struggle when it comes to maintaining a first-person perspective for extensive amounts of time. In fact, in cinema this solution is normally temporary, if not exceptional;<sup>33</sup> whereas in VR it is structural. And even in the rare cases in which cinema adopts a first-person perspective extensively — or even for the entire duration of a movie — it is difficult that it manages to calibrate it in a way that does not convey any sense of unnaturalness or claustrophobia.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, based on these observations, it appears reasonable to claim that the ability of producing a coincidence of experiences proper between a diegetic character and the members of the audience is in fact VR-specific.

Still, going back to the debate introduced above, some scholars have put forward compelling arguments against the usefulness of such coincidence. More specifically, they have pointed out that the latter may not necessarily translate into emotional or ideological proximity, that it may reveal uncomfortable, or even impossible.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Ruggero Eugeni, ‘Il first person shot come forma simbolica: i dispositivi della soggettività nel panorama postcinematografico’, *Reti, Saperi, Linguaggi*, 2.2 (2013), 19–23.

<sup>34</sup> See for instance Vivian Sobchack’s discussion of Delmer Daves’ *Dark Passage* (1947), in ‘The Man Who Wasn’t There: the Production of Subjectivity in Delmer Daves’ *Dark Passage*’, in *Subjectivity: Filmic Representation and the Spectator’s Experience*, ed. by Dominique Chateau (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011) pp. 69–83. In this regard, another example of an extended first-person perspective that possibly results in claustrophobia (and by the way aimed precisely at representing a condition of illness) is Julian Schnabel’s *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). Examples of movies entirely shot in a first-person perspective — arguably with an even more problematic outcome — are *Lady in the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947) and *Hardcore Henri* (Ilya Naishuller, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Anna Caterina Dalmasso, ‘The Body as Virtual Frame: Performativity of the Image in Immersive Environments’, *Cinéma&Cie. International Film Studies Journal*, 19.32 (2019), 101–19; Robert Hassan, ‘Digitality, Virtual Reality and the “Empathy Machine”’, *Digital Journalism*, 8.2 (2020), 195–212; Andrea Pinotti, ‘Autopsia in 360°: Il rigor mortis dell’empatia nel fuori-cornice del virtuale’, *Fata Morgana*, 13.39 (2019), pp. 17–32. From a slightly different angle, other scholars have warned against the ethical and (bio)political risks implied in the peculiar nature of the experience of VR. According to Pasi Väliäho, for instance, those risks would derive precisely from the fact that the latter experience is less an ‘optical process’ and more a holistic experience that can be used in order ‘to modulate affect and to pattern behaviour or, in more general terms, to produce, manage, and channel psychic and somatic flows’. The author refers specifically to some problematic aspects of using VR in order to treat post-traumatic stress disorder among the members of the US army; Pasi Väliäho, *Biopolitical Screens: Image, Power, and the Neoliberal Brain* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2014), pp. 12, 68. Though important to monitor, such risks, and the fields of application of VR in which they may occur, seem quite remote from the scope of the present paper. Therefore, they will not be addressed in detail here.

This paper, though in no way aiming at settling such complex and long-debated issue, expresses the view that the effectiveness of placing the spectators inside a representation should not be overemphasised nor dogmatised. Indeed, that this is in itself a sufficient condition (or even the only condition) for improving the audience's attitude arguably sounds simplistic. Still, based as well on recent empirical data attesting the prosocial effects of this modality of engagement,<sup>36</sup> this paper proposes that it may be useful to check whether given media representations have the possibility of inducing a first-person and up-close experience of the state of affairs they depict. Such checking procedure can be applied precisely to *Son of the Lovely Capitalism*.

To this aim, it is necessary to go back to the main traits of depression expressed by the short movie and to evaluate whether the way they are represented appears suitable for making them not simply visible but also experientially accessible. These traits, it was argued, are: the idleness and apathy characterising depressed subjects; the desynchronisation between them and their environment; and the slowness or even stasis of depressive time.

Concerning the last one, it is quite straightforward to argue that the modality of representation may trigger in the spectators a first-person involvement. To start with, long shots and a slow-paced editing are mostly used, as anticipated, in so-called Slow Cinema, precisely because they are supposed to slow down the spectators' style of reception. This observation also links back to Väliaho's notion of cinematographic 'vitality affects' and the way they are conveyed by means of the temporal texture of the moving image. It appears reasonable to assume that, indeed, in this case the spectators do appropriate the slow temporality expressed by the movie. Interestingly, this point can be substantiated by recurring to some empirical evidence as well. Indeed, a recent study comparing different styles of editing and their effects on spectators found that a slow-paced style of editing, involving long shot durations, induces a greater sensation of 'time dragging' compared to faster-paced styles.<sup>37</sup> In the case of *Son of the Lovely Capitalism*, this would imply that the slow temporality of the movie — reflecting the slow temporality of depression — 'spreads' to spectators as well.

The argument gets trickier, though, in relation to the other traits recalled above. As for the character's idleness and apathy, a first-person engagement would require a first-person appropriation of these states. Since cinema — as it was argued — cannot create a literal overlapping between the spectators' and the character's positions, such appropriation must imply a 'bridging' mechanism

<sup>36</sup> Fernanda Herrera and others, 'Building Long-Term Empathy: A Large-Scale Comparison of Traditional and Virtual Reality Perspective-Taking', *PloS One*, 13.10 (2018), <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0204494>> [accessed 31 March 2021].

<sup>37</sup> Ruggero Eugeni and others, 'It Doesn't Seem\_It, but It Is: A Neurofilmological Approach to the Subjective Experience of Moving-image Time', in *The Extended Theory of Cognitive Creativity*, ed. by Antonio Pennisi and Alessandra Falzone (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 243–65.

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connecting the two. In film studies, this mechanism has been accounted for in several different ways: identification, empathy, and (embodied) simulation are among the key-concepts that have been used to do so.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most prominent models in this domain, based precisely on the notion of embodied simulation,<sup>39</sup> proposes that spectators spontaneously ‘mirror’ the characters’ bodily activity and emotional states, thus always getting to some extent a first-person experience of them. In this case as well, empirical evidence is already available.<sup>40</sup> However, the debate surrounding the idea of a first-person appropriation of a character’s experience still comprises unsolved issues and diverging positions.<sup>41</sup> Hence, it appears unsafe to put forward any definite prediction with regard to the spectators’ reaction to the character’s idleness and apathy in *Son of the Lovely Capitalism*.

As for desynchronisation, the issue gets even more complicated. Indeed, if desynchronisation is meant as a state experienced by the character alone, experiencing it in first-person would lead back to the problem just discussed. However, the representation of desynchronisation is not based on a depiction of this character only. On the contrary, it brings on screen a multiplicity of additional elements, as the construct intrinsically depends on the presence of an environment and other people in relation to which he is not in synchrony. Therefore, the required appropriation process could be different from that required by individual behaviours and states. In this case, due to the complexity of the resulting representation, it may even be easier for spectators to grasp the idea of desynchronisation by means of a ‘bird’s eye’ view: hence, rather by adopting a third-person, observational stance.

In sum, while making it successfully visible, *Son of the Lovely Capitalism* seemingly has little chance of plunging spectators experientially into the character’s depressive condition. Thus, it may be worth exploring whether a VR-based alternative may be better suited for this goal.

### *A VR-based Alternative: VR Experience of Depression*

When it comes to VR-based representations of depression, one salient example is *VR Experience of Depression*, created in 2018 by the Singapore-based group Vere360.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Amy Coplan, ‘Empathy and Character Engagement’, in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, ed. by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 117–30.

<sup>39</sup> Vittorio Gallese, ‘Embodied Simulation: From Neurons to Phenomenal Experience’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 4 (2005), 23–48.

<sup>40</sup> For a collection of commented empirical studies, see Vittorio Gallese and Michele Guerra, *The Empathic Screen: Cinema and Neuroscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> Jane Stadler, ‘Empathy in Film’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, ed. by Heidi L. Maiborn (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 317–26.

<sup>42</sup> <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EP28kc3DfGo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EP28kc3DfGo&feature=emb_logo)> [accessed 18 August 2020].

The protagonist of *VR Experience of Depression* is a young girl, who is depicted as she struggles with the pathology during a brief segment of her day.

The short VR movie starts in the girl's bedroom, showing her as she tries (unsuccessfully) to get up. The camera is placed slightly above the character's top of the head, so that her point of view coincides quite precisely with the spectators'. A diegetic voice — the girl's own voice — makes her thoughts available to the spectators. The girl first urges herself to move, then she tells herself she does not want to do so, and finally that she *cannot* do so. In these words and attitude, it is immediately possible to recognise the typically depressive fatigue, idleness, and hypersomnia.

An alarm rings, and the girl manages to sit upright. After turning off the alarm on her phone, the girl starts reading multiple text messages sent by people checking on her and inviting her to join different activities. As the girl goes through the messages, the spectators become aware of her heartbeat, which was present since the beginning of the movie but which now accelerates and increases in volume. The girl reacts to the invitations with anxiety and declines all of them. At the same time, however, she repeatedly says 'Sorry' in her mind. This arguably attests again to the character's idleness, but it also shows that tendency towards perceived guilt that characterises depression and its melancholic version; moreover, it can be interpreted as a first sign of desynchronisation, in terms of an unwillingness or incapability to join social events.

Desynchronisation, however, becomes most evident in the subsequent part of the movie. Here, a friend knocks on her door, bringing some notes from a class that the depressed girl has been skipping. Dropping out from institutional obligations like school is a blatant sign of severe desynchronisation. The friend proposes the depressed girl to study together sometimes, which triggers a new increase in the girl's heartbeat. Manifesting another typical trait of depression, i.e. hopelessness, the voice expressing her thoughts tells the depressed girl that there would be no point in studying, because she would fail anyway. In the absence of a reply, the friend leaves. The depressed girl's heartbeat slows down, but her occasion to get back 'in synch' with her peers has faded. The short VR movie ends. As it was highlighted throughout its description, *VR Experience of Depression* appropriately illustrates some of the main traits of (melancholic) depression. The most urgent question now, however, is whether it presents advantaged compared to *Son of the Lovely Capitalism* in making these traits also *accessible*.

The first clear difference between the two media options concerns the point of view strategy adopted. Indeed, *VR Experience of Depression* creates a superimposition between the character's and the spectators' perspective. In fact, the spectators are quite literally put in the character's shoes, thus inhabiting her depressive condition from within. According to the prevalent view in the debate summarised above, this would be exactly what affords an experiential grasp of such condition. The girl's lack of energy would be the spectators' lack of energy, her effortful movements would be the spectators' own movements.

Such experiential proximity appears to be reinforced by the auditory features of the representation. What is key in this regard is the diegetic internal voice expressing

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the main character's thoughts. The effect of this voice is twofold: on the one hand, it strengthens the perceptual sensation of being 'inside' the character's experience; on the other hand, at a more cognitive level, it contributes to make this experience more understandable. Indeed, seen from the outside and in the absence of any cue regarding its underlying motivations, the static and unresponsive behaviour of a depressed person may result puzzling or even annoying, as it may be the case in *Son of the Lovely Capitalism*.

In a sense bridging the point of view and the auditory choices made by *VR Experience of Depression*, another factor comes into play: the character's heartbeat. Auditory in principle but bearing very strong 'embodied' connotations, the heartbeat is appropriately combined with the first-person perspective expressed by the movie and its diegetic 'thought-track', thus marking a maximum degree of proximity to the character's experience. In this sense, *Son of the Lovely Capitalism's* ominous soundtrack is certainly more refined and evocative, but at the same time less effective communicatively.

It should be noted here that *VR Experience of Depression* and *Son of the Lovely Capitalism* are animated by slightly different intentions, which result in correspondingly different styles. Indeed, *Son of the Lovely Capitalism* manifests a primarily aesthetic intention, which it pursues at the expenses of the clarity of its message. Conversely, *VR Experience of Depression* is first and foremost devoted to a didactic goal. Thus, it adopts extremely plain and straightforward solutions, leaving aside any aesthetic ambition.

Selecting cinematographic and VR-based options with more similar intentions may allow a more balanced comparison. However, a medium-specific advantage of VR can be glimpsed already. Indeed, at least something of what *VR Experience of Depression* proposes in terms of the spectators' engagement would simply not be achievable by means of cinematographic techniques. Hence, if aiming at bringing spectators inside given representations, and inside particular subjective worlds, VR-based options like *VR Experience of Depression* may prove more suitable than their possible cinematographic counterparts.

### *Conclusion, and Further Directions*

After presenting one of the possible conceptualisations of depression, the paper has discussed the respective ways in which a cinematographic and a VR-based representation of the pathology may engage non-affected spectators and convey to them some of the main traits of the depressive condition. The proposed VR-based option proved more effective than the cinematographic one in affording an up-close and first-person grasp of depression. However, the conclusions reached in this paper are subject to some limitations.

First, as anticipated, that accessing someone else's experience rather than simply witnessing it is desirable (or even necessary) is still uncertain in the current debate. Second, even in case such issue was settled, the view that was

proposed in this paper would still need further validation, as it does not yet apply to cinema or VR *in general*. Indeed, additional case studies should be taken into account as well, in order to cover different genres and domains.

For instance, one may note that this paper has focussed on short, fictional products only. The question therefore remains open as to what would be the effect of longer and/or non-fictional alternatives. In this sense, one cannot avoid thinking about the domain of documentary.<sup>43</sup> In this domain, according to the view expressed in this paper, VR would still maintain its media-specific advantages. However, could the bursting-in of ‘reality’ itself somehow constitute a game-changer? Moreover, could the supposed media-specific advantage of VR be contrasted by the cinematographic documentary’s more durable tradition, and thus its more mature stylistic and rhetoric tools? Or, more specifically, by the power of the director’s voice or framing, gently walking the audience through a specific interpretive path? These and other factors<sup>44</sup> may challenge the view that the ‘mere’ visibility of cinema is not enough in order to afford an appropriate understanding of given mental disorders, like depression. Such understanding, however, would still need to be better defined by means of a comparison with the more ‘embodied’ one supposedly afforded by (at least certain instances of) VR.

In sum, in spite of its openness, or perhaps thanks to it, the discussion on the prosocial effects of audiovisual media like cinema and VR is among the most lively and stimulating today. Hopefully, its developments will benefit people suffering from depression as well, by breaking down the walls that allegedly divide separated worlds, revealing their unexpected proximity.

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<sup>43</sup> See for instance Des O’Rawe, ‘The Politics of Observation: Documentary Film and Radical Psychiatry’, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 11.1 (2019), <<https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2019.1568791>> [accessed March 31 2021]. This paper comprises notable examples of documentary films aimed at representing life in mental health institutions during the instable times of the post-war revolution of psychiatry.

<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the possible differences between a documentary movie and the short, fictional options analysed in this paper are far from being limited to those suggested here. Just to make one additional example, the case studies discussed in this paper revolved around one main subject only, whereas documentary movies often depict large groups of individuals, both in their interactions and with specific focus on each subject (see again O’Rawe).

# Vertical Screening: Aesthetics and Formatting of Relocation

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## *Abstract*

Although the vertical format is widespread in still images such as photography and painting, it is unusual for cinema and film outside experimental explorations. For decades, the rectangle dominated the appearance of cinematography and other moving images and was conventionalized as their natural form. In recent years, however, the vertical format of moving images became very popular. Initially associated with smartphone videos, vertical videos and films have increasingly attracted attention on online platforms, inspiring projects such as Vertical Film Festival (VFF), giving the ambitious project *Vertical Cinema* a specific cultural context and stimulating a (self-)historization of vertical framing and screening. In digital moving image culture, the vertical format becomes successively normalized while, remaining connected to the traditional cinematographic rectangle in several conflicting ways. Drawing on Francesco Casetti and format theory, the paper suggests to discuss vertical formats as an aesthetics of relocation which involves cross-media adaptations, reciprocal transformations and plasticity of cinematic formats. With it, it shifts the focus from experience to formats as a key for the understanding the cinematic and filmic relocation and the (dis-)continuities between analogue and digital moving images. In order to examine its relationship to vertical formats, the paper explores relocation as both the *formatting of image circulation* and the *circulation of image formats*.

In 2011, Tate Modern presented Tacita Dean's monumental cinematographic installation *Film*, which was shaped as a 13-meter-high perforated filmstrip. At the time when film scholars and filmmakers alike were controversially discussing the technological transition from analogue to digital, Tacita Dean's work became an emblematic statement in the discourse of 'the end of film'. While the industry successively abandoned analogue technology, many experimental filmmakers and artists embraced the materiality of film — often in order to counteract the industrially planned obsolescence.<sup>1</sup> For Francesco Casetti, this exhibition of the

<sup>1</sup> Vicky Smith, 'The Full Body Film', *Sequence*, 3 (2012), 42–47; Kim Knowles, 'Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Bodily Inscriptions in Contemporary Experimental Film', *NECSUS*, 2.2 (Autumn 2013), 447–63.

analogue materiality in a gallery or museum constitutes a relocation of cinema. Principal elements of cinematographic setting such as a dark room, a projector and a screen are reinstalled in an art space.<sup>2</sup> The relocation goes along with transformations imbuing cinema with expectations usually linked to art.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the shifts do not result from the changed institutional framing alone. One of the most striking features of *Film* is its vertical format: the vertical CinemaScope. It was produced by turning a 35 mm anamorphic lens ninety degrees. This verticality connects the analogue film technology with the site-specific traits of the Turbine Hall: The format refers to the vertical image transport that prevails in almost all analogue film apparatuses.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the work was commissioned by Tate Modern to depict the Turbine Hall and to be exhibited in its eastern part.<sup>5</sup> The format adopts the proportions of the hall and embodies the architectural oblongness. Thus, the verticality negotiates between the analogue materiality and the new location of cinema, anticipating an upright and mobile spectator in the museal dispositive.

When Tacita Dean's gigantic *Film* was shown, Apple's iPhone had already been on the market for four years. Launched in 2007, iPhone enlarged the screen surface by relinquishing a hard keyboard and implementing a touchscreen. From the start, it was advertised as a new screening device for watching films, constituting another end of possible relocations, namely onto a small and intimate screen.<sup>6</sup> Functioning also as a recording device, iPhone furthermore contributed to the spread of the moving images in vertical format and, with it, to the transformation of the cinematic formats in the digital realm, showing how sites of relocation may actively shape the images they have to accommodate.

In Casetti's concept of relocation, formats, however, do not play a major role. Rather, experience is a key factor in exploring the continuities and discontinuities between analogue and digital cinema as well as between theatrical and nontheatrical viewing sites. Basing the notion of media on experience, Casetti aims to avoid reducing (post-)cinema to questions of media materiality. He thinks of medium not primarily as a device or a material support, but as a cultural, site-specific form of experience.<sup>7</sup> The relocation follows two paths: the *relocation of films*, as a question of content delivery, and the *relocation of cinema*, as a question of viewing settings.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, formats seem to vitally

<sup>2</sup> Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> David Bordwell, 'Paoli Gioli's Vertical Cinema', in: *David Bordwell's Website on Cinema*, August 2009, <<http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/gioli.php>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Cullinan, 'Tacita Dean, Film, 2011: Summary', <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dean-film-t14273>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

<sup>6</sup> Martine Beugnet, 'Miniature Pleasures: On Watching Films on an iPhone', in *Cinematicity in Media History*, ed. by Jeffrey Geiger and Karin Littau (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 196–210 (197).

<sup>7</sup> Casetti, pp. 19–20.

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, pp. 47–53.

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affect both forms of relocation: initially indicating the shape and size of an image, formats impact the way images are exhibited and experienced. They help us to grasp the environmental dimension which relocation emphasizes.<sup>9</sup> As Tacita Dean's installation illustrates, an image format is operative in two ways. Externally, it regulates the fitting in, the embeddedness into an existing environment; internally, it regulates the compositional, aesthetic and motivic affordances.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, formats not only influence how relocating images are presented at their destinations, how they fit into the new spaces, formats also address the process of media migration and, thus, the distances images have to cover in order to reach a new destination: While relocation raises the question 'Where is Cinema (Today)?',<sup>11</sup> formats offer a productive category for reflecting the actual transitions between different locations or screen technologies. In the process of relocation, images have to face different technological workings, varying aspect ratios and screen sizes. Large cinema images have to be adapted to small screens and to their aspect ratios, or vice versa. For this purpose, formats have to be standardized, protocols for reformatting, rescaling and compatibility such as letterbox, pillar-box, pan and scan or blow up have to be established. Thus, formats concern and interrelate the destinations and the routes of relocating images.

Therefore, I suggest shifting the focus from experience to formats in order to reflect on the relocation and the digitalization of the cinematic. Vertical formats of large and small screens are of particular interest. Although the vertical format is widespread in still images and is considered portrait format in photography and painting, it is unusual for cinema and film outside experimental explorations. For decades, the rectangle dominated the appearance of cinematography and other moving images and was conventionalized as their natural form.<sup>12</sup> The history of the standardization of the cinematic rectangle is well documented and did not develop in a linear fashion. It can be briefly summarized by three caesuras: introduction and implementation of 35 mm and 4:3 aspect ratio by Thomas Edison and his chief engineer William K. L. Dickson c. 1900; specification of the Academy standard and readjustment of the aspect ratio (1:1.37) after introduction of film sound in the 1920s; finally, the institutionalization of widescreen cinema, resulting from the success of Cinerama and CinemaScope in the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> In recent years, however, the vertical format of moving images became very popular. Initially associated with smartphone videos, vertical videos and films have increasingly attracted attention on platforms such as YouTube, Vimeo, and later

<sup>9</sup> Ivi, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> On these two aspects of image formats see Michael Niehaus, *Was ist ein Format?* (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2018), pp. 25–31.

<sup>11</sup> Malte Hagener, 'Where Is Cinema (Today)? The Cinema in the Age of Media Immanence', *Cinéma & Cie. International Film and Media Studies Journal*, 11.2 (Fall 2008), 15–22.

<sup>12</sup> Ted Hovet, 'The Persistence of the Rectangle', *Film History*, 29.3 (Fall 2017), 136–68.

<sup>13</sup> For a full historical account see John Belton, *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

IGTV and TikTok, inspiring projects such as Vertical Film Festival (VFF), giving the ambitious project *Vertical Cinema* a specific cultural context and stimulating a (self-)historization of vertical framing and screening.<sup>14</sup> In digital moving image culture, the vertical format becomes successively normalized while, at least for the time being, remaining connected to the traditional cinematographic rectangle in several conflicting ways and also indicating the changes images undergo in the process of migration. In the following, I will discuss the vertical form of moving images as an aesthetics and formatting of relocation, arguing that relocation implies both the *formatting of image circulation* and the *circulation of image formats*. The latter involves cross-media adaptations, reciprocal transformations and the plasticity of formats.

### *Formatting of Relocation*

In his study on mp3, sound studies researcher Jonathan Sterne made a case for integrating format theory into media theory. Formats specify ‘a set of rules according to which a technology can operate’<sup>15</sup> and have a ‘contractual and conventional nature’.<sup>16</sup> They are standardized measurements which impact the appearance, aesthetics and inner workings of a given medium. Following Sterne, Haidee Wasson called for the formatting of film studies, arguing that formats are more precise categories for examining digital culture than the ahistorical, unchanging and expansive concept of a medium.<sup>17</sup>

However, it is not very productive to play off formats and media against each other, and there is also a risk involved. Terminologically, formats contain the notion of form and shaping (in-forming). Historically, image formats often denote the size, proportions and, thus, the outward shape of a picture.<sup>18</sup> Thereby, formats risk introducing the form/matter distinction which has a long philosophical pedigree. Especially with regard to the digital and its discourses of immateriality, formats can reinforce the (still deployed) opposition between the analogue material medium and digital immaterial information. In the Aristotelian-Platonic tradition, it is precisely the concept of form that is ahistorical and is intended to secure the essence of an entity. In media theory, too, the concept is often dematerialized, such as in Luhmann’s medium/form distinction and in other

<sup>14</sup> The Australian Vertical Film Festival and the Austrian *Vertical Cinema* project both provide brief histories of vertical format in moving images functioning, at least partially, as a way of self-legitimation. See the webpage of the festival <<https://www.adamsebire.info/vertical-film-festival/about>> [accessed 29 November 2020] and the special issue of *Kontraste Cahier*, 3 (2013), dedicated to the *Vertical Cinema* project.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Sterne, *Mp3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ivi, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Haidee Wasson, ‘Formatting the Film Studies’, *Film Studies*, 12.1 (Spring 2015), 57–61 (p. 58).

<sup>18</sup> Niehaus, p. 9, pp. 9, 26–37.

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Aristotelian-inspired concepts of mediality.<sup>19</sup> Instead of being an alternative to medium, formats have to be addressed as part of material media arrangements. They are productive analytical tools because they can reorganize established media-theoretical framework and raise different questions about media. For Sterne, for example, formats function both at a smaller and larger scale than media. They highlight ‘smaller registers like software, operating standards, and codes, as well as larger registers like infrastructures, international corporate consortia, and whole technical systems.’<sup>20</sup> In any case, formats have to materialize in order to be operative. Formats can be distinctive because an individual medium employs many different formats. Specific formats can coalesce with specific cultural practices, such as mp3 or GIFs facilitating a culture of sharing and spreading of content. Some formats such as 16mm or Super8 are closely linked to amateur or avant-garde practices, while others such as CinemaScope prevail in the film industry. The affordances of formats equally affect the production, circulation and exhibition of media content. Instead of hierarchizing media and formats, Sterne invites us ‘to ask after the changing formations of media, the contexts of their reception, the conjunctures that shaped their sensual characteristics, and the institutional politics in which they were enmeshed.’<sup>21</sup>

Recent research on formats, which is conducted against the background of digital technologies, often emphasizes their role for distribution, circulation and spreadability of media content.<sup>22</sup> This close relationship between formats and circulation makes them suitable for the analysis of relocation. Whereas the focus on ‘the flows and mobilities of contemporary visual culture can also obscure new formations of material and contextual specificity’, formats can help to illuminate how ‘moving images also touch down at identifiable moments’, ‘in particular places’ and at ‘differentiated and material social sites of cultural engagement’<sup>23</sup>. Formats and relocation are intertwined in several ways, which I suggest to differentiate into the *formatting*, *preformatting* and *reformatting* of circulation on the one hand and the *circulation of formats* on the other.

First of all, we can briefly introduce three different kinds of analogue and digital *formatting* that may be involved in the exhibition, circulation and relocation of moving images. In the digital realm, (audio-)visual container formats such as GIF, Matroska (MKV), mp4 or mov and corresponding compression codecs, being standardized algorithmic actors which encode and decode data, are

<sup>19</sup> On hylomorphism and media theory see Olga Moskatova, *Male am Zelluloid: Zum relationalen Materialismus im kamerlosen Film* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), pp. 57–79.

<sup>20</sup> Sterne, *Mp3*, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Ivi, p. 1; Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009); Erika Balsom, *After Uniqueness. A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Haidee Wasson, ‘The Networked Screen: Moving Images, Materiality, and the Aesthetic of Size’, in *Fluid Screen, Expanded Cinema*, ed. by Jeanine Marchessault and Susan Lord (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 74–95 (p. 76).

usually measured in file size and resolution. Analogue film formats are defined by different measurements, which do not automatically coincide. Formats such as 35mm, 16mm or Super8 specify the width of the filmstrip, while they are furthermore differentiated according to the aspect ratio of the projected image as standard or widescreen. For example, a 35mm film may equally feature an aspect ratio of 4:3, being a standard gauge, or 1:2.35, being an anamorphic wide gauge.

As Tacita Dean's installation exemplifies, the relocating images have to fit into new environments which are already *preformatted* somewhat.<sup>24</sup> This way, compatibility between formats — for example, between cinematic image formats and televisual or digital screens formats — becomes an issue, which impacts not only the circulation but also the exhibition and production of relocating images. In particular, the art history and image theory by Jacob Burckhardt,<sup>25</sup> David Summers,<sup>26</sup> and Wolfram Pichler and Ralph Ubl<sup>27</sup> underline the close relationship between formats and space. Without initially being concerned with the circulation of images, they can nevertheless productively complement the media theoretical perspective because traveling images have to finally reach a definite location that confronts the images with its own site-specific conditions. Drawing on their different accounts of the relationships between formats, image and space, Michael Niehaus develops the idea of a *preformatted* space.<sup>28</sup> Format is a particular feature of a pictorial object that occupies space and, thus, raises questions of embeddedness and separation from the surroundings.<sup>29</sup> By giving images their material shape, formats perform the task of situating them within a spatial context and regulate whether an image can be placed in given surroundings or not.<sup>30</sup> Invoking the typical function of the image frame, Niehaus further entrusts the formats with the task of differentiation between interior and exterior, a virtual space of representation and a concrete space of presentation — a focus which can be also found in Summers' as well as Pichler's and Ubl's writings.<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, the space of presentation establishes a preformatted space.<sup>32</sup> Drawing on art historical considerations of Jacob Burckhardt, Niehaus argues that architecture and architectural elements such as wall surfaces, domes or alcoves functioned as historically specific preformatted spaces for images and sculptures.<sup>33</sup> The art historical epochs differ in how rigorously the architectural preformatting is imposed upon the images or harmonized with the depicted. To a

<sup>24</sup> On preformatted environments see Niehaus, p. 12, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, 'Format und Bild' (1886). In *Jacob Burckhardt: Vorträge 1844–1887*, ed. by Emil Dürr (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1918), pp. 312–23.

<sup>26</sup> David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Wolfram Pichler and Ralph Ubl, *Bildtheorie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Niehaus, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ivi, pp. 26–27.

<sup>30</sup> Pichler and Ubl, p. 145.

<sup>31</sup> Niehaus, pp. 26–28; Summers, p. 43; Pichler and Ubl, pp. 143–44.

<sup>32</sup> Niehaus, p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Ivi, pp. 29–30.

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certain extent, formats themselves therefore result from the ‘previous structuring of space’<sup>34</sup> and, subsequently, begin to act not only as a material boundary, but also as a preformation that affects image genres, composition and depiction.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, relocation also implies *reformatting*, i.e. changes of formats. Films can relocate as VHS into the domestic sphere and establish cinephile practices of collecting and watching.<sup>36</sup> On today’s small screens, formats such as mp4, AVI or GIF turn films into clips and image quality into accessibility.<sup>37</sup> Changes of formats can imply diminishment or enlargement of images and screens and, thus, also pose a problem of fitting in. Furthermore, formats can not only facilitate, but also impede relocation. For example, digital cinema package is a theatrical container format that territorializes films by preventing their uncontrolled exhibition, distribution, and relocation.

Reformatting of relocation also gives relevance to nontheatrical screen formats, since moving images formatted in VHS, DVD, GIF, mp4, mov, etc. are dependent on televisual or computerized screens for display. Screen formats are measured in aspect ratios, which affect their outward form and at the same time constitute a preformatted site for the relocating images. They particularly concern the main issue of this paper, namely vertical screen formats, which — as I will show in the next sections — also illustrate mutual exchanges between big and small screens in the course of relocation: It is the shape of the screens that especially indicates that relocation not only involves the *formatting of circulation*, but also the *circulation of formats*.

Being standardized, formats guarantee not only operativity within one medium and its infrastructure, but also cross-media interoperability, which necessitates the dissemination of formats.<sup>38</sup> Historically, the relocation of cinematic content onto different screens and displays is accompanied by the adaptation of cinematographic Academy and widescreen formats by television and later by computers and smartphones. Early television screens and computer screens were round, sometimes even vertical, for technical reasons; they had, first and foremost, to implement the early cinematographic 4:3 aspect ratio in the postwar, and later, in the 1990s and 2000s, the widescreen as standard, as a result of media rivalry and content migration.<sup>39</sup> The 16:9 aspect ratio, which is typical for HD

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, p. 30 (my translation).

<sup>35</sup> Ivi, pp. 30–33.

<sup>36</sup> Hilderbrand, pp. 34–49, pp. 175–90.

<sup>37</sup> Hito Steyerl, ‘In Defence of the Poor Image’, *E-Flux Journal*, 10 (2009), 1–9 (p. 1), <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Sterne, ‘The mp3 as Cultural Artifact’, *New Media & Society* 8.5 (2006), 825–42 (p. 829).

<sup>39</sup> Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine, *Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Status* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 100–128. On round and vertical television screens see Erkki Huhtamo, ‘Elements of Screenology: Toward an Archaeology of the Screen’, *Navigationen – Zeitschrift für Medien – und Kulturwissenschaften*, 6.2 (2006), 31–64 (pp. 60–63). On early round computer screens see Jacob Gaboury, ‘The Random-Access Image: Memory and the History of the Computer Screen’, *Grey Room*, 70 (Winter 2018), 24–53.

television and many computer and laptop screens, is developed in such a way as to mathematically contain all common cinematographic widescreen aspect ratios such as European 1:1.66, the American 1:1.85 and the anamorphic 1:2.35 as well as the standard aspect ratio 4:3.<sup>40</sup> Thus, digital screens, on which images circulate as digitally born JPEGs, GIFs, mp4s, etc., materialize historical analogue film formats, i.e. the aspect ratios and their shape.

The proliferation of cinematic aspect ratios and of the cinematic rectangle bear witness to the expectations of what kind of content is likely to circulate and relocate on the screens. Whereas Casetti and Sampietro emphasize the repetition of cinematic experience as a precondition of relocation,<sup>41</sup> it seems that the repeated circulation of cinematic formats also contributes to a successful relocation of cinema and films alike. Also, the screen shape indicates which formats are believed to be cinematic at a given time and epitomizes a hierarchy of media positioning cinema as a desirable standard. As research on series, quality television, computer games and online advertising has shown, widescreen formats, i.e. horizontal rectangles, and letterbox were coded as especially cinematographic in the 1990s and 2000s and were adopted by other visual media on their way into the digital future.<sup>42</sup> Digital media created a cinematic impression by means of remediation or materialization of the widescreen rectangle in order to legitimate themselves and strengthen their cultural value: 'In the era of convergence, the cinematic shape of the picture is ultimately as significant to many viewers as the qualities of its content.'<sup>43</sup> Before digital screens 'cinematized' as flat 16:9-screens, remediation of letterbox format was a common strategy. By deploying a letterbox view on 4:3 screens, computer games signalled a shift out of play to the spectatorial, cinematic mode.<sup>44</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s, series such as *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993–2002), *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999–2007) and *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999–2006) began to letterbox the images on 4:3 television screens, drawing a distinction between regular and cinematized content while accepting the overall shrinkage of the image.<sup>45</sup> Letterbox format results from the *relocation of films* and was originally implemented in order to adjust the cinematic widescreen to 4:3 television without cropping the image. It signifies both the incompatibility of image formats in transition and the necessity to fit into a preformatted space.

<sup>40</sup> This mathematical compromise goes back to Kerns H. Powers. On 16:9 see Neman and Levine, pp. 119–21.

<sup>41</sup> Francesco Casetti and Sara Sampietro, 'With Eyes, With Hands: The Relocation of Cinema Into the iPhone', in *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media*, ed. by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 19–32 (p. 20).

<sup>42</sup> Newman and Levine, pp. 100–28; Harper Cossar, 'The Shape of New Media. Screen Space, Aspect Ratios, and Digitextuality', *Journal of Film and Video*, 61.4 (Winter 2009), 3–16; Glen Creeber, *Small Screen Aesthetics: From TV to the Internet* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 84–104.

<sup>43</sup> Newman and Levine, p. 123.

<sup>44</sup> Cossar, pp. 9–10.

<sup>45</sup> Newman and Levine, pp. 115–23; Creeber, pp. 101–04.

## Vertical Screening: Aesthetics and Formatting of Relocation

Turned into an aesthetic choice and conscious strategy, the letterbox began to denote the *relocation of the cinematic experience*.

### *Vertical Video Syndrome, or the Persistence of Cinematic Rectangle*

Smartphones, and the vertical format they enable, take part in this history of circulating cinematographic formats, which testify to the relocation and cinematization of noncinematic screens. In 2007, Apple launched its touchscreen-based mobile phone. The design and advertisement of the screen anticipated the relocation of filmic content onto the new small screen: replacing the keys with touchscreen enlarged the screen area, which was the size of stamps on other mobile phones at that time, and also allowed it to be held lengthwise.<sup>46</sup> This way, iPhone's aspect ratio came closer to the widescreen format, prefiguring the viewing and streaming of filmic images or cinematized series on platforms such as Netflix. Furthermore, the phone was promoted as a mobile viewing device, intended for moving images. Regardless of the small screen, iPhone was explicitly presented as a medium of relocation: Steve Jobs illustrated its distinctive qualities as a viewing device by showing sequences from *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (Gore Verbinski, 2006) — a spectacular costume drama cast with international stars and boasting special effects.<sup>47</sup> The next generations of iPhone added further features such as video recording and a CinemaScope application for film viewing, flagging the device both as a camera and a portable cinema.<sup>48</sup>

Whereas the particularities of watching films on smartphones were often discussed, especially the aspects of miniaturization and tactility,<sup>49</sup> I am primarily interested in the format. It is as a cinematized screen of filmic relocation — by means of *circulating* a cinematographic wide format, which then leads to its cinematographic *preformatting* — that smartphone, like no other, has contributed to the popularization of the vertical format. As a medium of relocation, iPhone materializes the cinematographically coded widescreen. Surprisingly, the CinemaScope application introduced the format that was historically intended to differentiate small screens from big screens in the first place, namely televisual from cinematic.<sup>50</sup> The easy rotatability of the phone and its recording function made it possible to transform — to *reformat* — the cinematographic format into

<sup>46</sup> Beugnet, p. 197.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Alexandra Schneider, 'The iPhone as an Object of Knowledge', in *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media*, ed. by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 49–60 (pp. 53, 55).

<sup>49</sup> Beugnet, pp. 196–210; Casetti and Sampietro, pp. 19–32; Wanda Strauven, 'The Archaeology of the Touch Screen', *Maske und Kothurn*, 58.4 (2012), 69–79.

<sup>50</sup> André Bazin, 'Will CinemaScope Save the Film Industry?' (1953), *Film-Philosophy*, 6.2. (January 2002), <<https://www.film-philosophy.com/vol6-2002/n2bazin>> [accessed 8 March 2020].

a vertical one in a twinkling of an eye. In this way, mobile phones facilitated the spread of vertical images, which originated in amateur videos circulated via social media and messaging services such as WhatsApp. Accordingly, the vertical mode was initially perceived as an amateur rather than professional format.<sup>51</sup> While the discourses of mobile phone aesthetics often focus on low-res, intimacy, and mobility of recording, the vertical format often goes unmentioned.<sup>52</sup> However, it is precisely the vertical form that emphasizes the mobility and physical presence of a human observer behind the camera and deictically marks him, endowing the image with codes of subjective witnessing and authenticity.<sup>53</sup> Because smartphones, like early film apparatuses, combine the functions of production and display of images,<sup>54</sup> they are the primary sites for viewing vertical videos. On computer screens or on smartphones and tablets with diverging aspect ratios, vertical videos are framed by pillar-box. Originally introduced to show older 4:3 filmic or televisual images on a widescreen without distortion, the pillar-box is a sign of the processes of relocation. Like letterbox, it is trade-off that communicates the historical asynchronicity between image formats and the intricate relationship between image formats and screen formats as a key question of circulating images.

One year after Tacita Dean's installation, videos in 9:16 or even vertical CinemaScope were widespread to such an extent that they started to provoke negative reactions. Especially, the ironic video *Vertical Video Syndrome — A PSA*<sup>55</sup> (Glove and Boots, 2012) has shaped the ongoing depreciative discourse. In this video, the protagonists of the puppet show *Glove and Boots* value the vertical orientation as bad taste and technical error: 'Vertical video happen when you hold your camera the wrong way. Your video will end up looking like crap.' In doing so, the vertical format is not only pathologized as a 'syndrome', but also naturalized with recourse to screen technology and physiology: 'Vertical Video Syndrome is dangerous. Motion pictures have always been horizontal. Televisions are horizontal. Computer screens are horizontal. People's eyes are horizontal. We aren't built to watch vertical videos.' The video also visually reaffirms the primacy of the rectangle and the necessity to rotate the phone by using horizontal framing, including the pillar-box. This normative line of argumentation has often been picked up in written commentaries or further videos on the net. It fails to recognize that the horizontal rectangle and its prescriptive force are not natural or physiological, but date back, first and foremost, to the modelling of

<sup>51</sup> Miriam Ross, 'Vertical Framing. Authenticity and New Aesthetic Practice in Online Videos', *Refractory. A Journal of Entertainment Media*, 24 (2014), <<http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2014/08/06/ross/>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

<sup>52</sup> Caridad Botella, 'The Mobile Aesthetics of Cell Phone Made Films: From the Pixel to the Every Day', *Revista KEPES*, 9.8 (2012), 73–87.

<sup>53</sup> Ross.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> The original video is no longer accessible. For shorter version *Vertical Video Syndrome (Clean Version)* see: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2picMQC-9E>> [accessed November 2020].

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noncinematic screens on cinematographic (widescreen) formats and to the (pre) formatting of historical and anticipated relocation.

Considering the historical plurality of image formats and also the technically motivated round shapes that many screen media have had at the beginning, it is only in view of the naturalized persistence of the cinematic rectangle and its adaptation by other media that the vertical format can appear as deviation, lack of techno-aesthetic expertise, or experimental innovation in production and display of moving images.<sup>56</sup> Formats prove to be more than technical problems; they also embody aesthetic values. The implicit aesthetic norms and discursive strategies, such as pathologizing or perfection, become especially visible in times when new formats are introduced. In his historical analysis, Ted Hovet has shown that the cinematic rectangle became prevalent not only for technical or economic reasons; rather, the processes of standardization were always imbued with aesthetic preferences, judgments of taste and opinions on what moving images ought to look like.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, he remarks:

[...] the display of an image is also rhetorical: it asserts an argument about the proper and correct way to frame the image and in its most extreme form admits of no alternative. Reducing the discussion to issues of technical properties (or economic expediency) disguises its function to control, contain, and, of course, shape the content of the image in a particular way.<sup>58</sup>

The aesthetic control asserts a conservative impulse and correlates projection and production according to the rectangular format. The latter is materialized in a series of further rectangles: in screens, projectors, cameras, masks, and on filmstrips.<sup>59</sup> Due to the circulation of cinematographic formats, the control also extends to analogue and digital screen media, which have assimilated and, thus, simultaneously reaffirmed the cinematic shape. *Vertical Video Syndrome — A PSA* testifies to the persistence of the rectangle and its role in the history of the relocation of films onto small screens. As if echoing Manovich's statement that new media are mathematical in logic and cinematic in appearance,<sup>60</sup> the video also implicitly embraces a historically specific format of cinema as model for digital media.

Historically, the delegitimizing of non-horizontal rectangular formats needs explanation. Luke McKernan recalled the history of round image formats in painting, early photography, optical toys and projecting technologies, starting from the contemporary film experiment *Lucifer* (Gust van den Berghe, 2014), which shows images recorded in a round shape with the aid

<sup>56</sup> On persistence of cinematic rectangle see Hovet, pp. 136–68.

<sup>57</sup> Ivi, pp. 140, 156, 165.

<sup>58</sup> Ivi, p. 140.

<sup>59</sup> Ivi, p. 162.

<sup>60</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 180.

of a Tondoscope.<sup>61</sup> In the nineteenth century, magic lantern projections were often round due to the shape of the lens and the light beam.<sup>62</sup> William K. L. Dickson, too, experimented with round formats in addition to square and rectangular ones,<sup>63</sup> as evidenced by his recordings [*Newark athlete No. 1*] (1891). In early film, these conventions survived in terms of circular masking, which may be partially applied, such in the film *Santa Claus* (G. A. Smith, 1898), or completely dominate a moving image, such as in *London's Trafalgar Square* (Wordsworth Donisthorpe, 1890).<sup>64</sup> In 1918, the Italian journalist and illustrator Emmanuele Toddi still bothered to question the omnipresence of the cinematic rectangle in favour of round picture formats, by referring to the physiology of the human eye.<sup>65</sup>

In order to become the dominant cinematic shape, the rectangle first had to displace the circle, which was widespread in magic lanterns in the nineteenth century.<sup>66</sup> The manuals of the time seem to presuppose the circle rather than the rectangle as the default mode for the magic-lantern projection. Also, it was common to vary the formats and outlines of the projected image by means of different masks. The masks could not only be of round, square, oval or oblong shape, but also vary in horizontal or vertical orientation.<sup>67</sup> The pre-cinematic practices of projection in the nineteenth century enact the famous 'dynamic square' which, for Eisenstein, could incorporate the plurality of formats, including the vertical ones.<sup>68</sup> The aesthetic considerations dominated. The image shape and orientation were expected to be appropriate to the object. For example, vertical rectangular or oval forms were recommended for portraits as well as tall objects and buildings, while rounded squares were considered suitable for landscapes.<sup>69</sup> Thus, formats have been associated with specific genres, entrusting them with the task of internal compositional, aesthetic and figurative regulation.

### *The Dynamic Square of Digital Moving Images*

Eisenstein advocated a comparable plurality of formats in his lecture "The Dynamic Square" given at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and

<sup>61</sup> Luke McKernan, 'The Round Window', in *Luke McKernan*, 18 October 2015, <<https://lukemckernan.com/2015/10/18/the-round-window/>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

<sup>62</sup> Hovet, pp. 146–50.

<sup>63</sup> Belton, pp. 19–22.

<sup>64</sup> The short films can be seen at Luke McKernan, 'The Round Window'.

<sup>65</sup> Emmanuele Toddi, 'Rectangle-Film [25x19]' (1918), in *Screens*, ed. by Dominique Chateau and José Moure (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), pp. 25–28.

<sup>66</sup> Hovet, p. 146.

<sup>67</sup> Ivi, p. 151.

<sup>68</sup> Sergej M. Eisenstein, 'The Dynamic Square', in *Film Essays and A Lecture by Sergej Eisenstein*, ed. by Jay Leyda (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 48–66 (p. 52).

<sup>69</sup> Hovet, p. 151.

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Sciences in 1930. The Academy held a meeting aiming to discuss widescreen alternatives to the existing film format, which had become almost square with the introduction of sound. Three horizontal rectangles with an aspect ratio of 3:4, 3:5 and 3:6 were under consideration.<sup>70</sup> Eisenstein immediately defeated the standardization, declaring the horizontal formats ‘the terrible enslavement of mind by traditionalization and tradition’, which ‘represent the limits within which revolves the creative imagination of the screen reformers and the authors of the coming era of a new frame shape’.<sup>71</sup> Above all, he opposed the exclusion of the vertical and its compositional potential. Instead of reinforcing widescreen ‘horizontalism’, Eisenstein proposed embracing the vertical composition. After presenting several anthropological, art historical, psychological and motivic arguments in support of the vertical, he finally pleaded for a reconciliation of both the horizontal and the vertical in a dynamic square, which could contain many projection formats and variable shapes.<sup>72</sup>

As is well known, his vision didn’t take hold in the film industry. However, there is a history of diverse experimentation with vertical and dynamic framing paving the way to their today’s popularity in digital culture. Eisenstein’s lecture came at the end of a decade that has seen many experiments with multi-shaped masking, including vertical ones, such in Ernst Lubitsch’s *Sumurun* (1920) or Fritz Lang’s *Der müde Tod* (1929), multiple-screen dispositifs such as Abel Gance’s *Napoléon* (1927), or multiple projection in dynamic formats on concave screens such in László Moholy-Nagy’s idea of *Polykino* or ‘simultaneous cinema’ (1927).<sup>73</sup> In 1928, the vanguard architect Frederick Kiesler even designed a dynamic cinema architecture in Mondrian-like style encompassing a ‘screen-o-scop’-a device changing the screen size and shape with respect to projected images.<sup>74</sup> Later, films such as *The Door in the Wall* (1956) by Glenn H. Alvey Jr., which declare itself being dedicated to “dynamic frame” in the opening credits, came very close to Eisenstein’s conception in using changing shapes for dramatic needs. For David Bordwell, Paoli Gioli’s films such as *Commutazioni con mutazione* (Paolo Gioli, 1969) and *L’operatore perforato* (Paolo Gioli, 1979) form a ‘vertical cinema’.<sup>75</sup> By manipulating the images on the optical printer and making filmstrips, perforation holes and film frames visible, the films ostentatiously emphasize the vertical orientation and transport of moving images which is technically implemented in almost

<sup>70</sup> Eisenstein, p. 49.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>72</sup> Ivi, p. 52.

<sup>73</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Antonio Somaini, ‘The Screen as “Battleground”: Eisenstein’s “Dynamic Square” and the Plasticity of the Projection Format’, in *Format Matters: Standards, Practices, and Politics in Media Cultures*, ed. by Marek Jancovic, Axel Volmar, and Alexandra Schneider (Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2020), 219–36 (pp. 226–31).

<sup>74</sup> Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2018), pp. 46–47.

<sup>75</sup> Bordwell, n.p.

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all analogue projectors, printers and cameras.<sup>76</sup> This vertical aesthetic, which seemingly draws attention to the mismatch between the verticality embodied in apparatuses and the horizontality of projected and framed images, can be also found in materialist and structural films such as *Slides* (Annabel Nicolson, 1971) or *Little Dog for Roger* (Malcolm LeGrice, 1968) and in many found footage films by Cécile Fontaine such as *Golf-Entretien* (1984) or *Japon Series* (1991). Besides rich history of alternative and multiple projection techniques in expanded cinema, two famous World Expo projects are also worth mentioning, which specifically experiment with large scale vertical screening and, forming a monumental ‘sensory architecture’, express the historical desire to ‘expand the cinematic experience and challenge the frame of projection’<sup>77</sup>: Designed by Colin Low and Roman Koitor, and produced by the National Film Board of Canada for the Expo 67, the multiscreen project *Labyrinth* consisted, among others, of a 12-meter long vertical screen extending over several stories and a complementary vertical screen on the floor. Both were surrounded by elliptically shaped balconies. The closely aligned architecture and the screened material were designed to interpret the theme of Expo ‘The Man and His World’ by drawing on Theseus myth, turning the *Labyrinth* into an immersive, quasi-religious ‘viewing machine’ and a ‘total experience’.<sup>78</sup> Three years later, at Expo 70, the British Columbia pavilion housed the ambitious project *Vertical CinemaScope*, developed by Jaroslav Frič, the head of the group SCARS (Science Art Sense).<sup>79</sup> Consisting of two screens, one high placed in the rear and one of regular dimension in the front, the project was architecturally composed in order to create a dynamic aesthetic of size and to enable dramatically contrasting monumentality of the screen with small projected objects.<sup>80</sup>

Although this brief, by no means exhaustive history bears witness to vertical framing and screening predating smartphone aesthetics, it is only in today’s digital image culture that the format becomes prevalent on an everyday basis, embedding its aesthetics of plasticity, size and spatialization into a new cultural context. Remarkably, the contemporary advancement of vertical moving images was driven neither by artists nor by prestigious undertaking, but instead owes its existence to user-generated content. Although vertical format is still met with refusal, it is increasingly gaining currency online, eased, among others, by trendy application such as IGTV or TikTok. David Neal has compiled an online

<sup>76</sup> Ivi.

<sup>77</sup> Mirna Belina, ‘Mount Vertical’, *Kontraste Cabier*, 3 (special issue: *Vertical Cinema* ed. by Mirna Belina and Sonic Acts, 2013) 4–8 (p. 5).

<sup>78</sup> Seth Feldman, ‘Minotaur in a Box: The Labyrinth Pavillion at Expo 67’, in *Reimagining Cinema: Film at Expo 67*, ed. by Monika Kin Gagnon and Janine Marchessault (London: McGill, 2014), pp. 27–45 (pp. 35–42).

<sup>79</sup> Timothy Druckrey, ‘Sensory Architecture and the Cinematic Imaginary’, *Kontraste Cabier*, 3, 2013, 9–32, (pp.22–29).

<sup>80</sup> Ivi, p. 27–29.

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retrospective of the most successful vertical videos, which shows that the initially amateur format is now being taken up in the professional fields of music videos, journalism, online and offline advertising, and also narrative film.<sup>81</sup> Meanwhile, the list also includes series and previews of moving images on smartphone apps. The vertical format is beginning to circulate and to be repeated itself. Although its exceptionality remains to refer back to cinema, it is starting to break away from and to rework the cinematographic norm of the rectangle.

David Neal's ambitious project *Alicewinks* (2012) is one of the first vertical moving images with the length of a feature film that explores the narrative potential of the format. At the same time, the work unfolds an astonishing aesthetic of relocation and of the dynamic square. The animated film is 164 minutes long and draws on different children's book illustrations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which mainly appeared in vertical book formats. Therefore, there is no consistent aesthetics or representation of the main characters. Instead, the respective book illustrations undergo different manipulations in order to capture their peculiarities. Moreover, the shrinkage and enlargement of Alice begins to comment on the everyday scalability of the images circulating on digital screens – both in terms of the differences in screen sizes and the scaling effects on particular screens, namely computer desktops and pinchable touchscreens. On the one hand, the relocation of moving images is characterized by the co-existence of very large screens (such as media façades, cinema or IMAX) and very small ones (such as tablet, laptop and smartphone), so that the scaling, malleability and adaptability of images to different *screen sizes* becomes a genuine problem of formatting.<sup>82</sup> 'We become witness to the abstractions attendant upon that meeting between screens of an unchanging size and the fluid images which grow or shrink to fill them. In other words, the pictures that travel among these screens participate ... in a drama of distortion and size.'<sup>83</sup> In the digital realm, Alice's aesthetics of scale become an aesthetic of relocation, indicating issues of both delivery and of fitting into an environment. On the other hand, Alice's 'drama of distortion' and scale also refers to the plasticity of *image sizes* and ratios, which is distinctive of display on small digital screens. On computers, laptops, tablets or smartphones, images appear in multiple windows, which Friedberg has framed as 'multiples',<sup>84</sup> and have to permanently adjust to the shape and the size of the screen. On tablets and smartphones, this adaptability is closely connected to the rotation from the vertical to the horizontal mode, and vice versa. On touchscreens, the images also change their size and scale through pinching gestures. This necessity of the image

<sup>81</sup> David Neal, *Vertical Video: A Retrospective. The First Ten Years (2007–2016)*, <<http://www.exit109.com/~dnn/vertical/>>, [accessed 29 november 2020]. On offline advertising see also Ross.

<sup>82</sup> Casetti, p. 135–36; Wasson, 'The Networked Screen', pp. 74–95.

<sup>83</sup> Wasson, 'The Networked Screen', p. 86.

<sup>84</sup> Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), pp. 217–39.

to fit the screen frame, to stretch and to be malleable, highlights that the sizes, aspect ratios and edges of today's screens have become the dominant properties of visual experience.<sup>85</sup> While Eisenstein positions the dynamic square against standardization, the plasticity that Alice perfectly personifies in the vertical moving image *Alicewinks*, becomes a question of the insertion and adaptivity of images and their formats on preformatted digital screens.

The circulation of vertical format is also documented by Vimeo channel *Tallscreen*, which is dedicated to artistic exploration of the format. Among others, the channel presents works which were originally released on *Vertical Film Festival*, taking place in Australia since 2014. While *Tallscreen* recommends using HDSLR cameras to avoid undesired mobile aesthetics and, thus, dissociates itself from smartphone as a means of moving image production,<sup>86</sup> the festival also renounces smartphones as a means of image display. This detachment also represents an autonomization of the vertical format, which, with the aid of artistic involvement, becomes suitable for cinematographic projects and the big screen. In this respect, *Vertical Cinema* proves to be an especially significant phenomenon. The project invited internationally renowned filmmakers and media artists to produce short site-specific films for the vertical projection. Ten films premiered at the Kontraste *Dark as Light* Festival in 2013, followed by several further festival screenings up until now. Commissioned to be shown in narrow, tall spaces, especially churches, the films establish a highly visible relationship with the architecture. The verticality of the screens takes up the verticality of the church windows. In this way, it not only reflects on the traditional metaphor of images and screens, but also becomes a means of insertion into the new environment, a means of compatibility with the surrounding. As in Tacita Dean's *Film*, the verticalization of a big screen goes along with the relocation of the cinematographic dispositive into the church, even including collective reception and sitting, immobilized spectators. Although the films were produced by mixing different analogue and digital techniques, they were printed on 35mm and vertically projected with a custom-built projector in 1:2.35 aspect ratio and, thus, in vertical CinemaScope.<sup>87</sup> It is no coincidence that Billy Roisz and Dieter Kovačič dedicate their film *Bring Me the Head of Henri Chrétien!* (2013) to the squeezing and unsqueezing of the images. The anamorphic technology of the CinemaScope, which relied on the lenses and widescreen experiments of the Frenchman Henri Chrétien dating back to 1920s, compresses the image by a ratio of approximately 2:1 during recording onto 35mm and dilates it again in projection.<sup>88</sup> Roisz and Kovačič elevate this compressions and decompressions to an aesthetic principle by verticalizing and combining them with the glitch

<sup>85</sup> Stephen Monteiro, 'Fit to Frame: Image and Edge in Contemporary Interfaces', *Screen*, 55.3 (Autumn 2014), 360–78 (pp. 360–61).

<sup>86</sup> Tallscreen, <<https://vimeo.com/groups/tallscreen>> [accessed 29 November 2020].

<sup>87</sup> Belina, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> Belton, pp. 40–43, pp. 138–57.

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art process datamoshing in order to emphasize the vertical shape of the new screen. Basing the work on a genre historically associated with CinemaScope, the film recycles visual and acoustic fragments from Western movies such as *Once Upon A Time in the West* (*C'era una volta il West*, Sergio Leone, 1968), while the Western *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (Sam Peckinpah, 1974) also appears in the title.

Although the initiators of *Vertical Cinema* contextualize their project within the tradition of expanded cinema and name Jaroslav Frič' *Vertical CinemaScope* as a source of their inspiration,<sup>89</sup> it is impossible to think of it undependably from mobile phones and vertical videos. After all, smartphones have propagated not only the 9:16 format, but also 9:21 and, thus, have implemented a vertical CinemaScope to go. A simple rotation allows the user to switch between the persistent cinematic rectangle and its vertical suspension. *Vertical Cinema* tells of both the history of expanded screens and the everyday rotation of smartphones. With it, the circulation of vertical formats results in the reformatting of the cinematic. The cinematic widescreen, which was adapted by numerous electronic and digital small screens as sites of relocation, returns transformed. In current digital culture, the verticalization of a cinematic screen does not merely mean experimenting with the plasticity of image formats anymore, it also means approximating the verticality of intimate small screens and monumentalizing it, and thus negotiating the relationship to technologies that are in the process of changing the long-standing paradigms of visual entertainment.

<sup>89</sup> Belina, pp. 4–8.



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## XVIII Limina Award for Film Studies Books

Thomas Elsaesser

### *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy: Film as Thought Experiment*

New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, pp. 341

Thomas Elsaesser passed away on 4 December 2019 in Beijing during a visiting professorship in China. His death occurred completely unexpectedly during a life of high-speed scientific activity in many countries around the world, as most of us have known and loved him for years. The Limina Award 2020 conferred on his last book is also a posthumous homage for his whole work, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the development of cinema and media studies during the last four decades. It is no exaggeration to say that he occupied a leading role in international film historiography.

Born 1943 in Berlin, growing up in Mannheim, in 1963 he went to England as a student, where he then became a teacher at the University of East Anglia, founding a Film Studies department there in 1976. In 1991 he moved to the University of Amsterdam to build up a new and large Department of Film and Television Studies. He taught as a Visiting Professor in the USA and many other countries.

His books cover European and American cinema, often with a comparative approach and covering a wide range from early cinema to digitalisation nowadays, with a special focus on German film history. Elsaesser opens a broad historical contextualisation in a complex methodological setting using the results of different disciplines bringing up a completely new analytical reading of film history. His *Weimar Cinema and After* (2000) is certainly the most important writing on this topic; it is grounded on Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, but at the same time methodologically goes beyond Kracauer.

In 2007 Elsaesser already received the Premio Limina for his *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (2006). His latest book, *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy: Film as Thought Experiment*, is in a certain sense a continuation of the previous work. Starting from an analysis of the crisis of European cinema and society and referring to philosophers such as Badiou, Rancière, Nancy, Deleuze, Žižek, Agamben, Lévinas and Julia Kristeva's concept of the 'abject' as well as to films by Claire Denis, Aki Karismäki, Fatih Akin, Lars von Trier, Christian Petzold and others, he postulates filmmaking as a 'thought experiment,' as a kind of a new 'politique des auteurs,' a cinematic philosophy with 'post-heroic narratives' told from the perspective of social outsiders. The

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book, which includes new and older essays, presents a highly experimental and radical line of argumentation, and it is not free of contradictions. But it is exactly this analytic radicality that reminds us of Thomas Elsaesser, who has given so many fundamental impulses to many colleagues and students all over the world, thus setting a new standard for film historiography and film theory.

[Irmbert Schenk, Bremen Universität]

This is the last book that Thomas Elsaesser saw published during his lifetime. It brings together two concerns that were close to his heart and that he continuously returned to: European cinema in all its permutations and transformations and contemporary theory for which he had a voracious appetite. Whenever you would have a coffee or drink with him, he would inquire if you had seen or read something interesting and new. His gift for quickly grasping the essential intellectual essence of a thought system and integrating it into his own intellectual universe were formidable. This book is a testament to Thomas' talent, as it presents some of the most exciting current European filmmakers (Claire Denis, Christian Petzold, Lars von Trier) and confronts them with contemporary theoreticians (Jean-Luc Nancy, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Rancière) — and vice versa. *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy* is itself a thought experiment that will continue to be influential long after Thomas' untimely death.

[Malte Hagener, Philipps-Universität Marburg]

**Giorgio Bertellini**

***The Divo and the Duce: Promoting Film Stardom and Political Leadership in 1920s America***

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019, pp. 352 (open access)

Centred on the public notoriety of Hollywood actor Rudolph Valentino and fascist dictator Benito Mussolini, *The Divo and the Duce: Promoting Film Stardom and Political Leadership in 1920s America* is a unique and fascinating multidisciplinary dialogue between film and political studies, and media and social history. Three main areas of research are at the core of Giorgio Bertellini's book: celebrity culture, political leadership and publicity practice. The complexity of the task in hand is reflected in the questions guiding the investigation: 'How was it possible that in apparently nativist and isolationist 1920s America, a foreign leader like Mussolini, who never set foot in the country, could become a paragon of authoritative leadership? [...] When and how did film stardom and political leadership, as apparently distinct institutions of mass governance, become comparable, parallel and analogous?' (p. 4).

*The Divo and the Duce* opens with a discussion of two unexpected photographs capturing Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford giving the fascist salute. The first was taken in 1926 during their visit to Rome, where the two actors met Mussolini, and the second in 1927 at their home in Los Angeles. As Bertellini argues, the images, and the events behind them, highlight 'two converging historical phenomena: the rising political import of celebrity culture and the growing popularity of authoritarian political leadership' (p. 4). At the beginning of the 1920s for a brief but significant moment, both Mussolini and Valentino were objects of fascination in the American popular imagination. As the wide range of archival sources interrogated by Bertellini indicate, the celebrity of the two Italian-born icons reached beyond their respective domains of politics and cinema. Publicity departments played a crucial role in this process and capitalized on the well-rehearsed practices of mass communication management developed by Hollywood during World War One.

It is within the collaboration between Woodrow Wilson's administration and Hollywood that Bertellini contextualizes the establishment of publicity practices that ultimately informed the strategies used to promote Valentino and Mussolini. Bertellini's attention to the role played by, for instance, the Committee on Public Information (CPI), a propaganda office established a week after the U.S. declared war on Germany, is particularly insightful. Chaired by the journalist

George Creel, the CPI launched a range of propaganda initiatives that relied on the film industry's collaboration. The CPI's Division of Films not only produced documentaries and newsreels but also became involved in writing pro-government scenarios for commercial films and their international distribution. In Hollywood, part the film industry and its stars eventually embraced propaganda efforts. Within Bertellini's frame of analysis the focus on the widely reported involvement of Fairbanks and Pickford in the patriotic Liberty Loan campaign might sound obvious. However, *The Divo and the Duce* skilfully combines the discussion of the effects of World War One on the two actors' rising stardom with their key role as publicity vehicles for the industry and the consequent global expansion of Hollywood. It is within this precise context that Bertellini shows the links between propaganda discourse, public opinion management and celebrity culture. As he highlights, during the 1920s the popularity of film stars was 'not a *fait accompli* but the result of actions taken by individuals on the basis of institutional imperatives, guesswork, and artful manipulation of popular rituals and preferences' (p. 8).

A multitude of intersecting social and ideological dynamics gave rise to Rudolph Valentino's stardom. Institutional and cultural discourses about race, on-screen narratives of Italian immigrants and representations of masculinity are some of the tropes that Bertellini discusses to introduce the case study of Valentino. Of particular note is the meticulous attention payed to the key role of Hollywood's publicity and promotional executives in constructing Valentino's persona, which reveals novel and enlightening aspects of his story. For instance, the remarkable detective work conducted by Bertellini on the origins of the notorious Pink Powder Puff article sheds new light on the scandal. At the centre of the story was publicist Victor Mansfield Shapiro who founded the Associated Motion Picture Advertisers in 1916. It was during his collaboration with United Artists for the distribution of *The Son of the Sheik* that Shapiro saw an opportunity to create an arresting publicity stunt that challenged Valentino's on and off-screen image of masculinity. Similarly, Bertellini shows how a series of articles, interviews and promotional news items written by the publicity agent Herbert Hove built on Valentino's assertive and authoritarian character portrayed in *The Sheik*. As Bertellini explains, during the three years that Hove worked as Valentino's publicists, 'the divo signed off on rare but studied pronouncements that merged film stardom with politics' (p. 123). It is, in fact, in one of Hove's articles that the parallel between Valentino and Mussolini was first drawn.

By the time of Valentino's premature death in August 1926, Mussolini's personality cult and his legitimization had already met with consensus within America's public opinion. *The Divo and the Duce* concentrates on networks of individuals spanning political and cultural spheres that facilitated Mussolini's acceptance in the U.S. With its connections to diplomats and financiers, the Italy America Society (ISA) promoted Mussolini's public image, and Bertellini very astutely evidences the detailed operations of its members. Similarly, fiction and non-fiction films produced in Hollywood attempted to capitalize on Mussolini's

## The Divo and the Duce

popularity. In 1927, Fox chose to premiere Murnau's debut American film, *Sunrise*, alongside one of the first newsreels produced with its new Movietone sound system. For the first time American audiences were able to hear the Duce's voice in *The Man of the Hour*, which showed Benito Mussolini in a close-up delivering a brief, bi-lingual speech. Another example, *Mussolini Speaks*, was, as Bertellini suggests, a summary of the Duce's 'cinematic visibility.' Produced by Columbia Pictures and released in 1933, the film functioned as a biography of the Fascist leader and recounted his political achievements whilst showcasing his unique personality and celebrity status.

*The Divo and the Duce* is the result of impressive archival research and Bertellini's skilful application of a diverse range of theoretical frames and historical perspectives. The illustrations that accompany each section of the book are visual evidence of the depth and breadth of the investigation. Alternating his analyses between close-ups on key protagonists and panoramic views of film and political histories, Bertellini offers a truly innovative and distinctive approach to studying the relationship between celebrity culture and political leadership.<sup>1</sup>

[Pierluigi Ercole, De Montfort University, UK]

<sup>1</sup> *The Divo and the Duce: Promoting Film Stardom and Political Leadership in 1920s America* received the 2020 Italian American Studies Association Book Award.



**Francesco Pitassio**

***Neorealist Film Culture, 1945–1954: Rome, Open Cinema***

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 382

Addressed to ‘a readership that is already widely familiar with neorealist cinema,’ Francesco Pitassio’s ambitious new study, *Neorealist Film Culture, 1945–1954: Rome, Open Cinema*, stands deliberately at the leading edge of scholarship in Italian screen studies. Rather than surveying once more the well-trodden territory of the neorealist canon, Pitassio has boldly ‘walked along the margins of neorealism,’ exploring terrain entirely overlooked in previous accounts and providing far-reaching insights well beyond the scope of more traditional investigations.

In the first chapter, Pitassio makes the case for abandoning the more restrictive definitions of neorealist art and for recognising instead the many different varieties of realism — local and international, traditionalist and modernist — that converged in the transitional moment of Italy’s post-war reconstruction. This convergence, he argues, led to the creation of ‘unique hybrids’ that could never be confined to the narrow strictures of the retrospectively created neorealist orthodoxies. The results of the convergences that characterised the post-war Italian scene were often contradictory: an anti-Fascist culture indelibly marked by its Fascist origins; a popular culture founded on a rejection of popular taste; a national cinema predicated on a transnational film style. As Pitassio shows, ‘this set of contradictions illustrates the difficulties neorealist culture had with the nation’s past and with national Otherness.’

Chapter 2 examines neorealism’s difficulties in rigorous detail. These difficulties, Pitassio shows, complicate traditional accounts of neorealism’s political significance, which have tended to celebrate, at times uncritically, the apparent commitment to represent with ethical fidelity the tragedies and triumphs of recent Italian history. Pitassio makes the provocative claim that ‘neorealist cinema has always been at odds with memory,’ not just betraying but also concealing the experience of history, and superseding it, until fictional representation displaces historical reality. Neorealism, in this account, serves the cause of post-Fascist political equivocation and moral obfuscation, allowing Italians to deny their complicity with Mussolini’s regime. Indeed, argues Pitassio, it succeeds in doing so by virtue of the very aesthetic innovations that have traditionally earned it the highest critical accolades: by rejecting the linear

narratives and unambiguous morality of Hollywood films, he contends, Italian filmmakers implied that notions of causality, responsibility, and culpability were too complex to resolve. ‘The neorealist style thus perfectly matched the need to jettison a troubled past and to begin again with forging national and international bonds,’ Pitassio explains.

Even as he identifies this perfect match between form and content, Pitassio — ever attentive to the margins — details its exceptions and complications, presenting a nuanced picture of neorealism’s politics and style. In chapter 2, with its stress on the evasion of historical memory, the compelling exception is documentary filmmaking, which was not only more politically forthright in its content but also more experimental, more modernist in its style than were fiction films. Chapter 3 examines post-war Italian film promotion, which Pitassio finds to be more innovative than was film production, and which he uses to complicate the relationship between neorealism and its Fascist past. Whereas neorealist filmmaking demonstrated substantial continuities with film under Fascism, film advertising, in contrast, broke new ground. ‘Instead of the abstraction used in pre-war examples,’ Pitassio explains, ‘post-war graphic film advertisements sought verisimilitude through “iconisation,”’ which entailed figurative rather than photographic realism, and which mirrored the aesthetics of the era’s popular art, exemplified by the covers of pulp novels and the contents of photo-romances. Pitassio thus identifies what he calls ‘a trilateral relationship between neorealism, the popular press, and post-war melodrama,’ revealing new connections between films, photography, graphic design, and advertising that advance the case well beyond the typical auteurist framework within which neorealism still tends to be discussed.

The fourth and final chapter proposes a similar advance in our understanding of the contributions of nonprofessional actors to neorealist cinema. Once again, Pitassio casts a wider net than is typical, attempting to capture not only the supposed quest for authenticity that led prominent directors to cast amateur actors in key roles, but also the competing considerations that inspired the creation of casts far more diverse than is often recognized. As he aptly puts it, ‘human figures within neorealist cinema came from varied training and professional backgrounds, carrying into films different social gestures, acting styles, and aesthetic traditions and conveying various cultural values attached to them.’ Pitassio is particularly interested in the new female figures that came to prominence after the war, explaining persuasively why we should not be surprised that actors like Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida, Lucia Bosè, and Silvana Mangano all got their first break in neorealist films, even as their subsequent star personas would seem to owe little to the neorealist aesthetic. He is no less persuasive in his analysis of the star who would seem instead to embody most fully the neorealist aesthetic: Anna Magnani, whose persona reveals for Pitassio the manifold ways in which post-war culture created authenticity.’ Crafting her ‘composite’ style, which borrowed from the theatre, the music hall, and other forms of popular performance, Magnani skilfully

### Neorealist Film Culture, 1945–1954: Rome, Open Cinema

cultivated what Pitassio identifies as the ‘close relationship between her performing body and a popular crowd working both as a representative of the Italian people and an audience for her expressive behaviour.’ That relationship has never appeared with the kind of depth or clarity it does here, and with good reason. To take it in fully, to appreciate the sophisticated on- and off-screen operation that ensured its success, requires the kind of comprehensive approach Pitassio adopts in this study.

If there is a limit to *Neorealist Film Culture 1945–1954*, it is that the book contains no conclusion, afterward, or epilogue, no attempt to synthesise its arguments or to speculate about its implications for the field. The reviewer is thus compelled, even more than usual, to conjecture. Of course, it takes little imagination to see how, informed by Pitassio’s insights, scholarship on neorealism will be renewed and revised, evolving to consider more films — and much more besides film — than has been customary. Yet I would hazard to guess that scholarship across the field of screen studies — not just neorealist, and not just Italian — will likewise benefit from Pitassio’s countless discoveries and his capacious methodology.

[Charles Leavitt, University of Notre Dame]



## International Conference

### Histories of Tacit Cinematic Knowledge

Frankfurt am Main and worldwide (September 24–26, 2020)

Organisers: Rebecca Boguska, Guilherme da Silva Machado, Rebecca Puchta, Marin Reljic and Philipp Rödning

2020 has been full of challenges to do things differently. Attending an academic conference in your pyjamas — at least from the waist down — might be one more in a long list of things done for the first time in a year marked by social distancing and restricted travel to avoid the spread of the coronavirus. Moreover, joining the ubiquity of talking heads already present on the internet, scholars had to get used to exposing their ideas in front of a (computer) camera instead of a live audience. This was no different for the participants of the conference *Histories of Tacit Cinematic Knowledge* organized by the Graduate Research Training Program *Configurations of Film* (Goethe University Frankfurt). Given the impossibility of realizing the event in person, as had been planned, the chosen format combined two moments: recorded video presentations were made available online and, a few days later, live discussions took place via Zoom over the course of three days.

The conference brought together different approaches to the concept of ‘tacit cinematic knowledge,’ in order to embrace a variety of templates where the previous experience with film and cinema influence life in unforeseen ways. The three keynote speakers represented the diversity of objects and methodological takes on the topic. Henning Schmidgen (Bauhaus University Weimar) developed his talk *Reconsidering Minor Cinema: René Laloux, Félix Guattari, and the Machinery of Signs* starting from the use of cinematic praxis in the French psychiatric clinic of La Borde in the 1950s. During the Q&A, an interesting discussion about the role of the canon and structures of power in the field of film studies emerged. It became clear that the presented objects — be it the collective artistic practice in the clinic, the genre of animation developed by Laloux, or the legacy of Guattari’s work — could each still be seen as relatively ‘minor’ in terms of recognition, but that this perception is not static. Nothing is immune to canonization, and we were reminded to stay attentive to the way we are producing (and making explicit) knowledge today.

In her presentation *Cinematic Guerrillas in Mao’s China*, Jie Li (Harvard University) talked about the reception of revolutionary cinema in rural China, stressing aspects of the personal exchange of (tacit) knowledge, between on and off-screen guerrilla tactics, while also inviting us to rethink these films and practices in the broader context of Third Cinema. Li’s use of the term ‘guerrilla’

was then discussed by the participants, both in the potential of (counter) revolution or resistance, as well as in a sort of contradiction of the moving image that tends to render the martyrs and heroes of the revolution static.

Motion and stillness were also thematised in a way in Teresa Castro's (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3) keynote, entitled *The 1970s Plant Craze and the Cybernetic Paradigm*, in which the examined films presented vegetable beings not as simply motionless but as sentient creatures. The examples brought representations of (more or less) scientific studies that supported the argument that technical mediation, and the tacit knowledge thereof, was indispensable to access plants' intelligence. In the discussion, Castro went even further back in the genealogy of such experiments, as well as pointing to more recent developments, like in animistic currents in cinema today.

In the five panels named, respectively, *Directions*, *Templates*, *Archives*, *Cities* and *Sciences*, an even greater variety of objects were discussed. Tacit cinematic knowledge(s) were central when analysing, for instance, US-election campaign videos, the role of female spectatorship in Malayalam society, fan-made scrapbooks and videos, ultrasound imagery, astronomic representations and industry films advertising skyscrapers or dam constructions<sup>1</sup>. The panellists joined the online audience to answer questions and develop some ideas further, with enough breaks between the sessions to avoid the by now (in)famous 'Zoom fatigue.'

The final discussion saw a debate around the term 'tacit' and its use in the context of the conference's theme. According to the organizers, the idea came from discussions inspired by Eric Ketelaar's article<sup>2</sup> as well as by the concept of 'tacit knowledge', as elaborated earlier by Michael Polanyi.<sup>3</sup> Even if Polanyi's ideas remain somewhat controversial, the acknowledgment of 'tacitness' in relation to the approach to film studies being put forward by the Research Collective proved relevant throughout the conference. As became clear in the final round table, attempting to make the 'invisible' visible, or the 'implicit' explicit, can have an important political role, by bringing other aspects from the peripheries of film studies to the centre of the discussion and challenging our own structures of knowledge and power.

As for the format of the event, the tools deployed were probably more challenging to the speakers and organizers than to the audience, already accustomed to watching videos online and video-chatting with colleagues, friends and family. Our tacit cinematic knowledge certainly contributed to making the experience smoother, and that in the comfort of our own homes. The freedom to watch the video contributions in a self-curated order and the alternance

<sup>1</sup> Full program and video presentations can be found under <[www.tacit-histories.com](http://www.tacit-histories.com)> [accessed December 9, 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Eric Ketelaar, 'Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives', *Archival Science*, 1.2 (June 2001), 131–141.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

## Histories of Tacit Cinematic Knowledge

of temporality between recorded presentations and live Q&A sessions were rightfully praised by the participants, adding to the positive feeling of making such a conference not just possible but also enjoyable in a pandemic year. On the other hand, technical limitations and the lack of a real shared space for informal social contact represent undeniable downsides. The unequal availability of material conditions could be felt through some instances of internet connection problems. And personal interactions, as in small talk before a panel or in a coffee break, cannot anymore be taken for granted in their key role for the development of ideas and collaborations. That is why, as soon as the health situation so allows, it would be important to re-establish forms of un-mediated conviviality, even if that means that we will need to get out of our pyjama pants and get used to meeting in person again.

[Laura Teixeira, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main]



## Projects & Abstracts



## Italian Cinema and Prison: Problems, Models and Practices (1989–2019)

Stefania Cappellini, Ph.D. Project<sup>1</sup>  
Università degli Studi di Firenze

The topic of prison has been always present in cinema both in America and in Europe, sometimes just as a setting, but very often such an essential part of the plot: this was the case in some *gangster movies* of the thirties, and in many movies that, in the following decades, gave rise to the *prison movie*.<sup>2</sup> In Europe there may not be a well-defined equivalent genre, but there are many films located in prison, based on the analysis of the social relationships existing in places like these.

I chose to investigate the presence of prison only in Italian cinema of the last thirty years for a twofold reason. First, narrowing the field both chronologically and geographically allows a more detailed study of this topic; second, the laws concerning detention are different from country to country, so the way directors may enter prisons and be allowed to meet inmates can vary significantly, according to each national judicial system.

It is practically impossible to survey all similar experiences, and perhaps is not useful to do so. To date, however, I have found about 35 movies (including videos, documentaries and fiction films): as the title of my thesis suggests, the aim of my research is to identify common or variant features that allow me to describe specific practices and to identify models of representation. As consequence of the difficulties of shooting in such a particular place, I intend to expand on the practical, theoretical and merely artistic issues that many movies express.

Faced with this large range of films, I narrowed down the field even further, considering only non-fiction or semi-fictional works, in order to address these criteria: the way the image can testify and how it encapsulates the loss of freedom; the concept of power in philosophical debates.

In Italy, shooting directly from inside the prison has been possible since 1986, when the so-called Legge Gozzini for the first time allowed directors to enter prisons: from then, inmates have become the centre of plenty of initiatives, and also beginning audiovisual workshops under the supervision of many filmmakers.

While many films are hard to classify, others can be more easily grouped into categories. A first such category includes *Le rose blu* (Anna Gasco, Tiziana Pellerano,

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<sup>2</sup> Rick Altman, *Film / Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999).

Emanuela Piovano, 1990) and *Caesar Must Die* (*Cesare deve morire*, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 2012), two especially important films that present the representation of a space ‘suspended between documentary and fiction’<sup>3</sup> that Dottorini identifies as one of the most relevant feature of contemporary Italian cinema.

A second category, which is easier to classify but no less interesting, includes *Imprisoned Lullaby* (*Ninna nanna prigioniera*, Rossella Schillaci, 2016), a classic ethnographic documentary (called also observational or dialogic),<sup>4</sup> like most of the movies contemplated in my research.

The choice of documentaries, or even just of a documentary style combined with the general concealment of the director and his role, make these movies a genuine representations of what Foucault intended as *heterotopias of deviation*<sup>5</sup> (places to which individuals are relegated when their behaviour is deviant in relation to the laws), and they can become instruments that expand on the analytics of power.

Many of the directors working in prisons report a feeling that is very similar to Levinas’s idea of *proximity*: Enrica Colusso, director of *Life After Life* (*Fine pena mai*, 1994), describes what she calls the *ethical encounter* as

The frames, the shots, the scenes, thus turned into the arena where my own interior conflicts and resolutions interacted with the various conflicts and resolutions I was witnessing and mediating through the film; the sites where I dialogically situated myself in relationship to what I was witnessing, where “reason, without abdicating, is found in a position *to receive*” (Renov 2004, 151).<sup>6</sup>

Perniola in *L’era postdocumentaria* offers another perspective, when she writes: ‘In the *cinema del reale* the world of prison becomes the perfect small-scale reproduction of the conflicts taking place in the external society, apparently “free”’.<sup>7</sup>

This society (the Italian one, but also the Western one generally) is the same described by Didier Fassin as a society obsessed with the idea of punishment,<sup>8</sup> as the origin and the result of *penal populism*: many films covered in my research maintain a documentary point of view and draw attention to some relevant issues regarding the concepts of *hyperincarceration* and the *penal state*.

Another relevant feature of Italian cinema about prisons is its marked tendency

<sup>3</sup> Daniele Dottorini, ‘Introduzione. Per un cinema del reale. Il documentario come laboratorio aperto’, in *Per un cinema del reale. Forme e pratiche del documentario italiano contemporaneo*, ed. by Daniele Dottorini (Udine: Forum, 2013), p. 15 (my translation).

<sup>4</sup> The terms are not synonymous but are used according to the classifications introduced in: Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Guy Gauthier, *Le documentaire au autre cinéma* (Paris: Nathan, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Eterotopia’, in *Eterotopia. Luoghi e non-luoghi metropolitani*, ed. by Michel Foucault (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 9–20.

<sup>6</sup> Enrica Colusso, ‘The space between the filmmaker and the subject – the ethical encounter’, *Studies in Documentary Film*, 11 (2017), 141–56 (p. 145).

<sup>7</sup> Ivelise Perniola, *L’era postdocumentaria* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), p. 141 (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> Didier Fassin, *Punir. Une passion contemporaine* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2017).

### Italian Cinema and Prison

towards intermediality; in the majority of cases, we can see the use of different media, as well as the dialogue and intersection between them. In my research I will also try to explain how this extensive use of mixed media could be the way directors fill a void of the narration of a condition that most of us will never experience in our lives.



# The Distribution of Arthouse Films in a Constantly Changing Industry: The Era of New Digital Protocols, Virtual Reality and Other Video on Demand

Katia Andrea Morales Gaitán / Ph.D. Thesis Project<sup>1</sup>  
Université de Montréal

With the goal of reaching wider audiences, a new ‘media chronology’<sup>2</sup> has arisen: these days movie theaters are no longer the exclusive place to premiere a feature film. In many cases the gap between the first public screening and the film’s availability on online platforms can take less than 6 months, instead of 36 months as it happened in the past. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more films were even released directly on online platforms. Given this changing scenario and with the growth of other agents in the film distribution industry, the central issue of this project is understanding the challenges and new practices for the distribution of arthouse films.

This doctoral research under the direction of André Gaudreault will examine the innovations of the economic, political and creative aspects involved in the distribution of this type of cinema. The study will focus on platforms based on Blockchain (disintermediation and transparency) and Virtual Reality technologies, as well other kinds of Video on Demand. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this project will bring insights from Film Studies, Sociology of Art and Economics of Creative Industries.

Although the French theory of auteur cinema developed in the 1960s is a classic reference, I consider practical to use the term *cinéma d’art et essai* (arthouse films), a contemporary classification of the French-language film industry. This concept corresponds notably to the films that have received public funding and are often co-productions between several countries. In more radical cases, there are films resulting from collective work — produced by cooperatives or small companies — motivated only by artistic creation, without the interest in making profits. Consequently, their aim is creative freedom, formal experimentation, questioning the establishment,<sup>3</sup> and emancipation from studios or any other intermediary.

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. dissertation supervised by Professor André Gaudreault. For information: katia.andrea.morales.gaitan@umontreal.ca

<sup>2</sup> This concept claims specially in France a juridical frame about the order and the time that a film should take to transit between different media: from movie theaters to Blu-ray then to TV and finally at online platforms.

<sup>3</sup> One of my favorite forerunners is Pasolini. About his narratives, Magny says the following: ‘Pasolini contests the dominant culture, but he tries to get from what he calls the culture before pre-

After 72 editions, in 2020 an institution such as the Cannes Film Festival has begun to gradually move into the virtual world<sup>4</sup> with the realization of the first completely online Marché du Film.<sup>5</sup> From the field of Film Festival Studies, Narváez's<sup>6</sup> contribution reveals the characterization of Latin American films included in competition at the Cannes Film Festival and its audiences, a category for which Mexicans have received top awards and recognition.<sup>7</sup> His work highlights the fact that arthouse and commercial cinema do coexist within this institution. If for some viewers arthouse cinema is synonymous with boring films, for others it is an opportunity to enjoy a piece of art that puts the creative production of a director or a collective on display. These audience members know that they will find an original and personal story, without editorial guidelines or prefabricated production codes.

Gaudreault and Marion's<sup>8</sup> recent research on Netflix is a key piece of scholarship for investigating the commercial policy of this platform. According to the authors, Netflix's strategies and operations are very similar to those of drug traffickers. They claim that the Los Gatos, California-based company not only acquired various films and series for its catalogue, but also is buying off as many filmmakers as possible to produce their own productions. Faced with this monopolistic trend, it is the aim of my research to amplify the alternative sources in arthouse film for the French and Spanish speaking market.

I have provisionally selected two titles to serve as case studies for this thesis. First, *I am No Longer Here* (*Ya no estoy aquí*, Fernando Farías de la Parra, 2019); second, *La flor* (2017), officially directed by Mariano Llinas, but created collectively by the cooperative *El Pampero Cine*. *La flor* is a 14-hour film with a

capitalism or paleo-capitalism [...] what is necessary to found a new civilization' (my translation), Joël Magny, 'Pier Paolo Pasolini, « Et Dieu dans tout ça? », *Cahiers du cinéma* (special issue *Cinéma* 68), 1998, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Etienne Sorin, 'Thierry Frémaux: « On peut imaginer un label "Cannes2020" pour valoriser les films », *Le Figaro* [online], 15 April 2020 <<https://www.lefigaro.fr/cinema/thierry-fremaux-on-peut-imaginer-un-label-cannes2020-pour-valoriser-les-films-20200415>> [accessed 16 April 2020].

<sup>5</sup> 'Day 4 here we go! You are now 10,000 registered industry professionals at the Marché du Film Online, THANK YOU! We're proud to experience this with all of you! Still 2 days to enjoy our virtual market!' #mdf20 #mdfonline #cannes2020 #filmmarket #filmindustry» (@mdf\_cannes, 25 June 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Geovanny Narváez, 'El cine latinoamericano contemporáneo y la estética de festival. El caso de Cannes (2000–2015)', *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, 77 (2019), 21–46.

<sup>7</sup> Carlos Reygadas, director of titles such as *Luz silenciosa* (2007), *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012), is the one with the most work catalogued as 'Festival Art Cinema' that is to say, narratives that are complex, difficult to interpret, and intended for intellectual audiences. On the other hand, the title *Beautiful* (2012) by Gonzales Iñárritu falls into the category of 'Medium Art Cinema'. The films by Guillermo del Toro and Alfonso Cuarón would be in the category of 'Art Cinema and Commercial film', whose main audiences are those of an average culture.

<sup>8</sup> André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, 'Les intervalles sériels à l'aune des « séries culturelles »', forthcoming in the online journal *Sens public* (article derived from the opening lecture given at the international conference *Intervalles sériels: littérature, cinéma, télévision, médias* held in Montréal in April 2019).

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non-linear structure, made over 10 years in complete freedom — without co-productions, public funds, pitching, or bureaucracy. Eventually, I will include in my thesis a film shot in Virtual Reality from Quebec.

This project will encompass both qualitative and quantitative tools. First, I plan to conduct interviews with directors, producers, distributors, exhibitors, aggregators, and representatives of digital platforms that have a decisive role in the distribution of this content. These semi-structured interviews will focus on 1) distribution strategies, 2) promotion, 3) economic aspects, 4) audiences, and 5) challenges of implementation. Secondly, I will conduct two focus groups with experts — one with agents from the French-speaking world, the other with representatives from Spanish language cinema. Finally, I will also gather quantitative data from other sources such as Comscore, institutional reports from the National Film Board of Canada, the *Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée* and the *Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía*.



## Contributors / Collaborateurs

**Ada Ackerman**, PhD in Art history at University Paris-Ouest-Nanterre-la Défense and Université de Montréal, works as a Permanent Researcher at THALIM/CNRS (French National Research Center). A former student of Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, and a specialist of Sergei Eisenstein's work, she has published *A biblioteca infinita de Sergei Eisenstein/The infinite Library of Sergei Eisenstein* (2019) and *Eisenstein et Daumier, des affinités électives* (2013). She focuses on the relations between art (mainly cinema and painting) as well as on cultural exchanges between Soviet Union, Europe and the United States. She has curated the show "The Ecstatic Eye: Sergei Eisenstein at the crossroads of arts", for the Centre Pompidou-Metz, and edited its catalogue (2019–2020). She has also curated for the Jewish Museum in Paris the show *Golem! Avatars d'une légende d'argile* (2017) and directed its catalogue.

**Federica Cavaletti** obtained her PhD degree in Humanities (curriculum: Communication, media and performing arts) at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan. Her dissertation consisted in a theoretical and empirical exploration of time perception in the audiovisual experience. She was recently appointed as Post-Doc researcher in Aesthetics at the University of Milan, within the ERC project 'AN-ICON – An-iconology. History. Theory and Practices of Environmental Images'. In the context of this project, she works on several experiential aspects of virtual reality, and on this medium's applications in professional domains such as psychology and medicine.

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