6.   Mutation, Appropriation and Style*

Victor Burgin

Abstract

Victor Burgin's text provides a theoretical reflection on the technological transformations of what he calls the "field of 'photofilmic' practices." He postulates that "cinema" directs our minds to "technological mutation," while "art" evokes the "ideologico-economic appropriation." Using as a framework of reasoning themes that gave rise to the publications of the *Key Debates* series – screen and stories – and adding the idea of *virtual object* as resulting from the convergence of the digital with the contemporary, Burgin highlights the advent of new "photofilmic narrative forms" characterized by the combination of complexity and affectivity."

Keywords: Technology, screen, virtual

> Il n'est pas une culture du regard qui ne soit une culture
> de l'invisible au cœur de la visibilité elle-même.
> [There is not a culture of looking that is not a culture
> of the invisible within the heart of visibility itself.]
> – Marie-José Mondzain (2017, 45)[1]

* What I have to say about cinema is based mainly on a paper I presented at a 2018 conference in Paris devoted to the work of Laura Mulvey: *Féminism, énigmes, cinéphilie: Trois journées d'échanges avec Laura Mulvey*, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3, April 6, 2018. My intervention is reprinted in full as "The End of the Frame," 2018a. My summary account of the evolution of contemporary art is based on a talk I gave at Raven Row, London, on March 3, 2017 in the context of *This Way Out of England: Gallery House in Retrospect* – a series of events and exhibitions revisiting the activities of Gallery House during the period 1972-1973. The paper is reprinted as "Now and Then: Commodity and Apparatus," 2018b.

1   "There is no culture of looking that is not a culture of the invisible at the heart of visibility itself."

The subtitle of the *Key Debates* series contains the phrase "mutations and appropriations." These two ideas respectively characterize the two histories alluded to in the title of this present volume: *Post-cinema. Cinema in the Post-art Era*. Broadly speaking, for "cinema" the last half-century was most marked by technological mutation, while for "art" it was primarily a time of ideologico-economic appropriation. Across the same historical period the two institutions responded to the same technological and economic forces in different ways and according to different temporalities. Nevertheless, as the present conjunction of terms "post-cinema/post-art" may suggest, there is also now a sense of common ground for interests historically sited on the peripheries of the mainstream film industry and the official artworld. In this present context I take these interests to be schematically indicated by the titles of two previous volumes in the *Key Debates* series: *Screens* (2016) and *Stories* (2018). Under the former heading I shall say what appear to me the most substantive changes in a field of "photofilmic"[2] practices transformed by digitalization. Under the latter I envisage the possibility of a virtual theoretical object: "virtual" not only in the sense of its location in immaterial space but also in the sense – etymological and political – of *potential*. First, however, I shall briefly sketch what I understand here by appropriation.

Appropriation

Shortly before his death in 1975 Pier Paolo Pasolini repudiated the three films that comprise his "Life Trilogy"[3] on the grounds he could no longer maintain the convictions that had inspired them. Alberto Moravia observed that Pasolini had formerly viewed the rural and urban underclasses as: "a revolutionary society analogous to protochristian societies, that's to say unconsciously bearing an ascetic message of humility to oppose to a haughty and hedonistic bourgeois society."[4] Asceticism aside, Pasolini had also seen the "archaic violence" inherent in the sexuality of the lumpenproletariat as a source of vitality for the revolution to come. By 1975 however he had witnessed the assimilation of the sexually charged heterogeneity of popular culture to the uniform hedonism of mediatic mass culture. He writes:

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2   I prefer to use this existing neologism rather than invent another, albeit my own applica-
tion of it may differ from that of its authors. See Streitberger and Van Gelder 2010; Cohen and
Streitberger, eds. 2016.
3   The Decameron (1971), The Canterbury Tales (1972) and Arabian Nights (1974).
4   Cited by Philippe Gavi, "Preface" in Pasolini 1976.

> I have seen "with my own eyes" behaviour imposed by the power of consumerism remodel and deform the consciousness of the Italian people, to the point of an irreversible degradation; which did not happen during Fascist fascism, a period during which behaviour was totally dissociated from consciousness. (Pasolini 1976, 49)

Neither the popular culture in which Pasolini had believed nor the culture of the intelligentsia to which he belonged could any longer prevail against assimilation to the new totalitarianism. Reviewing Pasolini's late writings, Alain Brossat finds the recognition that: "[high] culture is not that which protects us against barbarism, and which must be defended against it, it is the very milieu in which the intelligent forms of the new barbarism thrive" (2005, n, 18).

The dissolution of "high" and "popular" cultural practices in a monoculture of spectacle, presciently described by Pasolini in 1975, became apparent in the field of "visual arts" a decade later. Writing in 1986 about the state of contemporary art, I observed,

> in a society where the commodification of art has progressed apace with the aestheticization of the commodity, there has evolved a universal rhetoric of the aesthetic in which commerce and inspiration, profit and poetry [...] rapturously entwine. (1986b, 174)

In a book of 2003 the French philosopher and art critic Yves Michaud notes an "epochal change" in the passage from "modern" to "contemporary" art in which "the aesthetic replaces art" (2003, 169). The literary theorist Philippe Forest remarks on the waning of the term "modern" and the waxing of "contemporary" to mark synchrony with the present. He finds that, at least since Baudelaire, to be "of one's own time"[5] in the sense of "modern" is to test what may be envisaged beyond both the status quo ante *and* the status quo. Like the word "modern," "contemporary" implies the new; unlike "modern" however, "contemporary" connotes:

> [A] "new" that implies no contestation of the world in which it arises, which satisfies the criteria of a society that manages, in its own best interests, the circulation of forms and the turnover and diffusion of works [...]. (2010, 89)

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5   *"Il faut être de son temps,"* an expression attributed to Daumier by Edouard Manet. See Nochlin 1971, 103.

As Brecht had earlier observed: "an innovation will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate existing society, but not if it is going to change it" (Willett 1964, 34). The ascendency of "contemporary art" accompanied a fundamental transformation of the Western economy described by the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre in their 2017 book *Enrichment. A Critique of the Commodity.* Boltanski and Esquerre bring together domains previously considered separately, with contemporary art now identified as a key element in an interrelated complex that includes the luxury goods industry, the trade in old objects, the creation of foundations and museums, and the national heritage and tourist industries. In these and other areas the enrichment economy, unlike the prior industrial economy, does not produce new things but rather exploits what already exists. It might be objected that although this observation may apply to such things as antique watches and medieval castles it cannot, by definition, be true of *contemporary* art. Here however Boltanski finds that "what is called 'creation' is most often nothing more than the art of reinterpreting." He notes: "The question of knowing how [contemporary] works will be inscribed in the history of art to come is central, this is what is at stake when the collections of big collectors are transformed into museums" (Boltansky and Esquerre 2017b).[6] Across the period analyzed by Boltanski and Esquerre – years inaugurated by financial deregulation – the source of authority in debates and judgments about art passed from artists and critics to curators.[7] Declining levels of state support compelled public museums to seek private funding and ever larger audiences to repay their corporate sponsors with "visibility" for their newly purchased cultural capital.[8] From its etymological sense of "custodian" the word "curator" took on the de facto meaning "entrepreneur." Consistent with a growing cultural and political populism, art became treated as one form of attraction among others and art museums opened their doors to exploitation by the fashion and entertainment industries. Massively attended art biennales, fairs and other international tourist mega-exhibitions extended the boundaries of the Western art world by showcasing "contemporary art" by non-Western artists – mining previously unexploited commodity resources under the

6   The institutional authority of the museum positions such recycling of the inventions of the twentieth-century avant-garde as if they were viewed from the future as "already classic" and therefore inoculated against criticism by the cautionary example of the reactionary reception of that same historical avant-garde.

7   See, for example: Foster 2015; Michaud 2007.

8   The Serbo-American economist Branko Milanovic (2019) has given the term "moral laundering" to, "the use of dubiously acquired wealth to fund educational or art institutions in order to acquire philanthropic status and enter 'respectable' social circles."

cover of cultural decolonization. Serving an aggressively expansionist multibillion dollar international art market. "Contemporary Art" became a glaringly visible means of effecting a seamless transition between power and the people through kitsch gigantism and other crowd-stupefying stunts (see Le Brun 2018). No longer a counterbalance to the society of the spectacle, as Jean-Paul Cunier observes in his own commentary on Pasolini's late writings: "Today [...] all of artistic production is from the very beginning a pitiless competition to win the possibility of being recuperated" (2006, 79).[9] It is against this general backdrop of cultural appropriation that the technological mutations of screens and stories emerge.

Screens

1.   Image and Spectator

For most of modern history, to juxtapose "cinema" and "art" was to evoke the difference between the still and the moving image – a distinction that digitalization has eroded. In her 2015 essay "Cinematic Gesture: The Ghost in the Machine," Laura Mulvey discusses the image of Marilyn Monroe in a thirty-second sequence from Howard Hawks's film GENTLEMAN PREFER BLONDES (1953), a sequence she digitally slows down in order to isolate four moments of arrest – "gestures" – in the dance Monroe performs. In her 2006 book *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*, Mulvey writes:

> [F]iction films are not necessarily structured to move inexorably, uniformly and smoothly forward [...]. Privileged moments or tableaux are constructed around an integrated aesthetic unity that is detachable from the whole, although ultimately part of it. (2006, 147)

In my own essay of 1984 "Diderot, Barthes, *Vertigo*,"[10] I outline the origins of the concepts of "privileged moment" (*peripateia*) and "tableau" in

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9   I offer my summary overview of contemporary art not as a comprehensive and even-handed account of all current visual art practices, but rather as an explanation of why so many in this field today may feel they are in a "post-art" situation. To those unfamiliar with the artworld to which I refer I recommend Ruben Östlund's film of 2017, THE SQUARE.

10   The paper was first presented at the colloquium *Film and Photography: An International Symposium*, May 18-19, 1984, jointly organized by the Department of English, Department of Art History, and Film Studies Program, University of California, Santa Barbara.

seventeenth and eighteenth-century theories of painting ([1984] 1986a, 112-139).[11] My 1984 paper intervened within the context of writing on photography rather than film, and drew on a different emphasis within Freud's work from that which informed Mulvey's writing. The dual basis of Freudian thought is the theory of the unconscious and a theory of sexuality.[12] Whereas Mulvey's essay focuses on sexual investments in looking, my own essay draws on psychoanalytic theory to describe the processes by which a materially poor still photograph may become enriched with associative meaning – not least, narrative meaning. Discussing a scene from Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 film VERTIGO I suggest that what may lead us to find equivalents of *peripateia* and tableau in photographs and films is our unconscious recognition of the *mise-en-scène* of a fantasy.[13] There are of course reasons other than unconscious ones for isolating a sequence from a film. The scene may belong to the image repertoire of a fully self-aware cinephilia – for example, to stay with Marilyn Monroe, the "subway dress" sequence from THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH.[14] On other occasions the reasons may not be immediately apparent, but accessible to introspection. In the course of thinking about Laura Mulvey's work I recalled a scene from Max Ophüls's film LETTER FROM AN UNKNOWN WOMEN (1948) in which the ill-fated heroine sits opposite her forgetful lover in the carriage of a "railway panorama" fairground attraction. The most immediately obvious explanation for this would be that Mulvey has written eloquently about the films of Max Ophüls. But she has written no less eloquently about films by other directors and about many other scenes, which invites the psychoanalytic question: "Why has this sequence come to mind now rather than some other?" I find that the sequence in the carriage succinctly evokes

11   The program of history painting dominated painting in the West from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. As the painter of "histories" had to show in a single instant that which took time to unfold, it was recommended that the moment selected by the painter for depiction should be the *peripateia* – that instant in the course of an action when all hangs in the balance. This idea returns in the work of Denis Diderot in the concept of the *tableau*. The tableau represented the ideal of an image whose meaning would be communicated at a glance. It is in this context that Diderot invokes the hieroglyph, he writes: "discourse is no longer simply a suite of energetic terms which expose thought [...] but a tissue of hieroglyphs gathered one on the other which paint what is to be represented" (Diderot 1875, 190).

12   The foundational texts are *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).

13   An operation I identify at work in Barthes's description of the "punctum" in a photograph by James van der Zee, and in my own privileging of a scene from Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 film VERTIGO.

14   THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH, dir. Billy Wilder, 1955.

Letter from an Unknown Women (Max Ophüls, 1948)

the contrasting forms of spectatorship that, again in broadly historical terms, have characterized "art" and "cinema."

In the railway panorama, seated spectators looked at a linear sequence of images for a predetermined period of time – a form of audience experience and behavior that invites comparison with cinema. The earlier "circular panorama" presented ambulatory spectators with an image *environment* they could enter and leave as they pleased – behavior we may associate with art galleries and museums. Reviewing the evolution of her own work in her preface to *Death 24x a Second* Mulvey writes:

> Then, I was absorbed in Hollywood Cinema, turning to the avant-garde as its binary opposite. Now, I think that the aesthetics of cinema have a greater coherence across its historical body in the face of new media technologies [...]. (2006, 7)

To this I would add that "then," in the 1970s, cinema studies and avant-garde filmmaking *together* formed a cultural unit that had the theory and practice of photography as its "binary opposite." Mulvey's critical cinephilia brought her to disengage the still implied within a narrative, I sought to explain how a narrative may be implied by the still. The opposition between movement

and still here is not to be reduced to the classical distinction between "narrative" and "image,"[15] it is rather a matter of two kinds of narrative structure historically located in two kinds of architectural setting, each presupposing its own specific form of audience behavior. Although it is possible to enter a movie theater after the film has begun, and leave before it ends, it is normally assumed that the duration of the film will coincide with the duration of the spectator's viewing of it. In the gallery it is normally assumed that these two times will *not* coincide, as visitors to galleries usually enter and leave at unpredictable intervals. Moving-image works made with this behavior in mind are therefore typically designed to loop, with a seamless transition between first and last frames. As any element in the loop – image, text, sound – may be the "first" to be experienced by the visitor then the elements that comprise the work should ideally be independently significant. In this, the experience of a moving image work designed specifically for a gallery setting is closer to that of a psychoanalytic session than to a narrative film: no detail of the material produced in an analysis is considered *a priori* more significant than any other, all elements equally are potential points of departure for chains of associations. The psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire describe the reiterative fractional chains that form daydreams and unconscious fantasies as "short sequences, most often fragmentary, circular and repetitive" (1999, 259), and characterize the fantasy as a *scenario with multiple entry points* (Laplanche and Pontalis 1985, 71). In all, the conditions

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15   In his essay of 1966, "Notes Toward a Phenomenology of the Narrative" (1974), Christian Metz distinguishes narrative from both the image and description. The distinction between image, description and narrative is, Metz says, "classical," by which I assume he means that it may be found in the philosophy of Greek antiquity. The differences between the three are differences in their relation to time. The *image* is outside of time. In the case of *description*, images are deployed over time but what they collectively describe is simultaneously present. In the case of *narrative*, images are deployed over time to signify events that unfold in an irreversible temporal order. Metz admits, however, that it is difficult to maintain the categorical distinction between simultaneous description and sequential narrative; the distinction between the two, he says, is inhabited by an "ambiguity." The time of the panorama was never simply that of simultaneity. Panoramic scenes of battle, for example, tended to display the temporality of their antecedents in the genre of history painting, where the before and after of an historic moment may appear alongside the moment itself, projecting the diachronic onto the plane of the synchronic. Even cityscape and landscape panoramas, where there is no depiction of events but simply the description of a topography, inevitably entail the time of the viewing, as it is not possible to take in the entire image at a glance. Joachim Bonnemaison has observed that the panoramic photograph is: "a matter neither of a framed object, as in conventional photography, nor of a narrative sequence, as in cinema, but rather something in the order of a gesture. The rotation about one's own axis […] is a total body gesture that is transmitted, with the panoptic, into an instantaneous visual memory" (1989, 34).

of spectatorship of moving image works made for the gallery are closer to those traditionally associated with painting than to those associated with cinema. The ideal viewer is one who accumulates her or his knowledge of the work, as it were, in "layers" – much as a painting may be created. We may note however that many works made for projection in galleries have a linear structure that makes no accommodation to peripatetic audience behavior. Further, not all works made for cinema audiences unambiguously meet audience expectations of linear narrative closure; for example, José Moure observes that: "most of [Michelangelo] Antonioni's films at the end are resolved by means of a 'spiral' structure [...] suspending the story in the void around which it has incessantly revolved" (2018, 111).

2. Mashup, Machinima, Amateur

Laura Mulvey's widely discussed essay of 1975 "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" not only offered a theoretical analysis of the symbolic reproduction of sexual subordination in mainstream cinema, it also argued for the invention of politically alternative forms of film practice – a project to which she herself contributed as co-director of such works as RIDDLES OF THE SPHINX.[16] In 1975 even such a "low budget" film production was beyond the economic and technical means of most individuals. In the inter-World War years of the twentieth-century some artists addressed the class basis of their avant-garde practices. Such movements as *Arbeiter-Fotograf* in Germany and *Protekult* in the Soviet Union sought to put the means of visual and written representation into the hands of workers, thereby erasing the bourgeois category "artist" from the pages of history. In an irony of history such ambitions have since been realized not by revolutionary organization but by capitalist innovation. The same technologies that allow Mulvey to dissect Hollywood movies frame-by-frame also allow for practices based, among others, on the historic example of cinema but with amateur and professional artists enjoying equal access to the means of production and distribution. On social media the ubiquitous practice of "iPhonography" not only facilitates the exchange of still and moving selfies, it is also used to assemble de facto communities around a potentially infinite variety of shared interests, from broken umbrellas to urban insurrection. In a popular counterpart to some avant-garde artworks "cinemagraphs" allow the freezing of a detail in a smartphone video frame while everything around it is in motion (for example, a child leaping into a swimming pool hangs motionless

16   RIDDLES OF THE SPHINX, dir. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1977.

in mid-air while her reflection dances on the surface of the water below). Under the parental gaze of GAFA, endless parades of such demotic works now pass in the company of hordes of "follows," "comments" and "likes."

Writing in 2003, Colin MacCabe observed: "In a world in which we are entertained from cradle to grave whether we like it or not, the ability to rework image and dialogue [...] may be the key to both psychic and political health" (301). In the 1970s the *détournement* of commercially produced films through dissembling and reassembling their contents was a practice of avant-garde filmmakers. Now anyone with broadband access may make collage films from inexhaustible streams of online images and sounds. FAN.TASIA (2016) by Lindsay McCutcheon, is a three-and-a-half minute video described by the author as: "A mashup of almost every Walt Disney Animation Studio release since their Renaissance began in 1989 with 'THE LITTLE MERMAID' (also Mary Poppins just for fun)."[17] The video is edited to the soundtrack "Pop Culture" by the electronic musician Madeon, which is itself a mashup of thirty-nine popular music tracks by performers such as Madonna and Lady Gaga. To date, FAN.TASIA has received over eight million views since being posted on YouTube. Such digital practices have grown out of the pre-digital fan culture that in the late 1980s became the object of the emerging academic field of "Fan Studies." In the early days of the discipline, academics celebrated fan culture as a site of resistance to industrial mass culture. In 1988 the prolific and influential American media scholar Henry Jenkins described fan culture as

> a subterranean network of readers and writers who remake programs in their own image. "Fandom" is a vehicle for marginalized subcultural groups [...] to pry open space for their cultural concerns within dominant representations; [...] a way of transforming mass culture into a popular culture. (1988, 87)

Thirty years later, in common with many others in the now established academic field, Jenkins came to nuance his view of the political potential of fan culture. For example, he observes:

> Too often, there is a tendency to read all grassroots media as somehow "resistant" to dominant institutions rather than acknowledging that citizens sometimes deploy bottom-up means to keep others down. (2008, 293)

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17   See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-6xk4W6N2o.

Jenkins now gives credit to the French philosopher and media theorist Pierre Lévy's concept of "collective intelligence" for offering, "a way of thinking about fandom not in terms of resistance but as a prototype or dress rehearsal for the way culture might operate in the future" (2006, 134).

Mashups cannibalize media contents external to the editing software used to assemble them. In contrast, the practice of "machinima" allows the production of films shot entirely with virtual cameras in such virtual worlds as those of videogames and Second Life. In 2005 two teenagers were accidentally electrocuted while attempting to escape from police in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois. Televised comments on the incident by the then Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy provoked widespread rioting. Alex Chan, a young industrial designer living in La Courneuve, one of the sites of the disturbances, responded with a thirteen minute machinima film: THE FRENCH DEMOCRACY (2006). Beginning with a scene of the two deaths, Chan's film moves on to represent the frustration of French youth minorities in their routine encounters with racial discrimination and police harassment. THE FRENCH DEMOCRACY was produced within the business simulation game *The Movies*, in which players adopt the role of managing a simulated film studio. Although not a requirement of the game, players who wish to do so can write and shoot their own "films" with sets and "actors" provided within the game. In THE FRENCH DEMOCRACY the limitations of the game's virtual world determine that, for example, the electrical substation where the deaths occur is represented by a rustic shack, and the Paris métro is represented by the New York subway.[18] After Chan uploaded his film to the Internet it "went viral" internationally.[19] In its economy of means and breadth of exposure THE FRENCH DEMOCRACY invites a reassessment of what today may constitute "political" cinema, in which one might reasonably conclude that the future of the "agit-prop" film is in machinima.

In addition to mashup and machinima there is a wide range and variety of other image practices that to some extent or other owe their possibility to the advent of computer technology. By way of example, three quite different works come to mind:

18   Although machinima productions are circumscribed by the possibilities offered by the software, the practice of "modding" may extend the range of these; for example, providing additional characters by clothing existing game characters in alternative "skins." Modding requires more or less sophisticated programming skills, and different game engines are more or less amenable to modification.

19   Interviewed for the *Washington Post* Chan said: "The main intention of this movie is to bring people to think about what really happened in my country by trying to show the starting point and some causes of these riots" (Musgrove 2005).

JenniCam.org (1996) was a website created by the American programmer Jennifer Ringley, at the time a student, to broadcast webcam images of her college dormitory room. Remote connection to the JenniCam opened a window on the visitor's computer screen whatever other program was running, piercing the walls of spreadsheets, company reports, unfinished novels, academic papers … What appeared in the window was a still image of the room, from which Ringley was most often absent, updated every three minutes.[20]

Present (2000) is a work distributed via the Internet by the Belgian artist David Claerbout. The host website offers digital video files of three flowers: amaryllis, gerbera, and rose. On downloading, the flower file takes root on the viewer's own hard disk and automatically opens an image that shows the evolution of the flower, from full bloom to decay, in real time over a period of about a week. After the flower dies a digital "seed" remains which may be distributed to others.

Summer (2013) is a work by the Russian artist Olia Lialina that may only be viewed on the screen of a computer connected to the Internet. Against a clear blue sky the artist swings to and fro on a swing that appears suspended from the location bar at the top of the viewer's browser window. Each frame of the looping GIF animation is hosted on a different server, the current URL displayed in the browser address bar changing with each successive frame of the animation, and with the speed of the swinging depending on the connection speed.[21]

The examples given above are all of amateur productions – if we allow that "amateur" is an attitude, a way of being in the world, rather than a social status. This is the sense Roland Barthes gives to the word. For Barthes, the amateur artist confronts the professional with the example of a practice undistorted by the market or bad faith. In a 1973 essay, he writes:

> The amateur is not necessarily defined by a lesser knowledge, an imperfect technique … but rather by this: he is the one who does not put on a show (*ne montre pas*), […] the amateur seeks to produce only his own enjoyment (*jouissance*) […] and this enjoyment does not tend toward any hysteria. […] the artist enjoys, no doubt, but […] his pleasure must accommodate itself to an imago, which is the discourse that the Other holds on what he makes. (396)

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20   After she graduated, the dormitory room gave way to a succession of other rooms. Ringley maintained the site until late 2003. See Burgin 2018b.

21   See Ramirez-Lopez, "The Internet Gets Processed Here: *Summer* by Olia Lialina," https://medium.com/@daleloreny/the-internet-gets-processed-here-summer-by-olia-lialina-d69c501c54f4.

For Jacques Lacan, whose language Barthes invokes here, the hysteric identifies with the lack in the Other, and desires to be what the Other desires. Barthes posits an ideal of amateur practice outside the arena of ruthless competition for attention, the place of egoism and narcissism, the hysterical show of fashion and publicity, all the parade he summarizes as: "stupidity, vulgarity, vanity, worldliness, nationality, normality" (1982, 9). With digitalization the camera now offers a common ground of democratization of the material means of production necessary, albeit not sufficient (cf. FAN.TASIA), to the emergence of the amateur as exemplar of resistance to the hysterical representational regimes of neo-liberal market culture.

Stories

1.   The Real

Writing in 2013, with no apparent irony in respect of his status as a "best selling" novelist, the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgaard remarked:

> Wherever you turned you saw fiction. All these millions of paperbacks, hardbacks, DVDs and TV series, they were all about made-up people in a made-up, though realistic, world. And news in the press, TV news and radio news had exactly the same format, documentaries had the same format, they were also stories, and it made no difference whether what they told had actually happened or not […] the nucleus of all this fiction, whether true or not, was verisimilitude and the distance it held to reality was constant. In other words it saw the same. This sameness, which was our world, was being mass-produced. (2013, 496-497)

As Roland Barthes had put it: "always new books, new programs, new films, news items, but always the same meaning" (1975, 42). Beyond not only consensual verisimilitude but representation as such, is the *real*. In his 1977 inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, Barthes stated:

> From ancient times to the efforts of our avant-garde, literature has been concerned to represent something. What? I will put it crudely: the real. The real is not representable, and it is because men ceaselessly try to represent it by words that there is a history of literature. (1979, 8)

In the years following the Second World War differing views of the relation of representations to the real are at issue in debates over what constitutes the political in art. We may read Barthes's book of 1953 *Le degré zero de l'écriture* as a tacit response to Jean-Paul Sartre's book of 1948 *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*[22] Sartre had argued that the writer has a moral responsibility to offer works that in content manifestly engage with history and society. To the contrary, Barthes says: "writing is [...] essentially the morality of form [...] a way of conceiving Literature, not of extending its limits" (1970, 15). In this perspective the political import of a work of art is to be measured not with reference to its manifest content, but by the degree and nature of its relation to taken-for-granted reality – the horizon of what may be thought and said. In the field of visual art Barthes's modernist political aesthetics has a counterpart in the writings of the art critic Clement Greenberg; but whereas for Barthes formal invention serves to circumvent preformatted verisimilitude, for Greenberg form is an end in itself that eschews any representation whatsoever. In his 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" Greenberg presents avant-garde painting as a form of resistance to the emerging barbarism of mass culture, a resistance grounded in the reduction of painting to its material specificity as "paint on a flat support," with any further content being "something to be avoided like a plague" ([1939] 1961, 5). Greenberg's prioritizing of the material means of production was subsequently adopted in post-war "structural-materialist" filmmaking. In *Death 24x a Second* Mulvey describes the way modernist filmmakers "consistently brought the mechanism and the material of film into visibility" (2006, 67) and gives the example of the Austrian filmmaker Peter Kubelka, who says that the "harmony [of his films] spreads out of the unit of the frame, of the one twenty fourth of a second" (66). But the 24 frames per second of film became the 25 frames per second of PAL video and 29.97 frames of NTSC video. Next came the universal digital animation standard of 30 frames per second, while the normal rate of a videogame is currently 60 frames per second. In computer generated imagery the frame rate of the virtual camera, in common with that of any other of its attributes, is not given in advance by the operation of a physical mechanism – it is a numerically variable parameter. When the film camera is immaterial, political arguments based on the real of "medium specificity" become groundless.

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22   The two works originate in essays that precede their publication as books. For a succinct account of the history of their relations, see Sontag 1970, xivff.

2. Spatialization

Film theory in the 1970s described the "suturing" of the cinemagoer into the imaginary space of the film through her or his identification with a number of looks, the first of which is the look given by the camera and bestowed on the spectator. A digital virtual reality film knows only one look, moreover one that cannot be solicited by off-screen space as there is no longer a frame.[23] Even before the arrival of VR technology, videogame designers had already been required to reinvent camera and editing practices inherited from cinema, just as they had departed from inherited narrative forms. A writer on videogames observes:

> When games are analyzed as stories, both their differences from stories and their intrinsic qualities become all but impossible to understand. [...] an alternative theory that is native to the field of study must be constructed. (Aarseth 2004, 362)

As if in response, another writer on games says:

> [T]he change will surely be that the traditional emphasis in narrative theory on the syntagmatic (linear sequences) will increasingly be re-inflected to emphasize the paradigmatic (spatial) elements of all narrative experiences. (Dovey and Kennedy 2006, 96)

I think here of the genre of "first-person exploration" videogames, for example the game *Gone Home* (The Fulbright Company, 2013). The player of this game is given the role of a young woman who returns to her family home after a year abroad. Rather than the welcome she expected, she finds the house empty. She (the player) slowly pieces together what happened during her absence on the basis of clues found while searching the house. Although there is interactive navigation in this type of game (the player moves freely around the house using a console or keyboard) and interactive manipulation of objects (the player may open doors, drawers and cupboards) there are no set goals and no rewards, there are no enemies to defeat nor any other

23 Ludwig Wittgenstein compares the relation between the eye and the visual field to that between subject and world. Just as a description of the visual field cannot include any reference to the eye that sees it, so a description of the world cannot contain any reference to a subject. He writes: "The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world" (1922, 5.632). In these terms, the arrival of VR heralds the end of the frame in cinema, and with it the disappearance of the very subject of the cinematic apparatus.

dangers to escape. All that happens in the game is that in the process of exploring a physical space a mental scenario comes to be assembled on the basis of what is visible to the eye. The Canadian writer Alice Munro (1982) has used the metaphor of exploring a house to explain how she reads and writes short stories.[24] Munro says that when she writes a short story, and even when she reads short stories by other writers, she feels she can start anywhere. She also feels she can return to the story and read it again in a different order and from a different starting point – just as, in exploring a house, she might enter a room, wander out, go into another room and stay a little longer, in a potentially limitless process.

As already remarked, to pass from movie theater to museum is to pass from one kind of spectatorial interpellation to another, from one form of narration to another, from a determinate linear time to an indeterminate recursive temporality. However, just as the advent of digital technology filled the space between the cinema screen and the gallery wall with a variety of other screens, so it has engendered hybrid forms of attention, narration and time. If, at home, I attentively watch a 90-minute film on a mobile device, without interruption and with the room lights dimmed, I behave much as if I were at the cinema (albeit with a certain disrespect). If I extract a sequence from the same film and watch it repeatedly, understanding it differently with each reprise, then I may be behaving as if I were in an art gallery. Moreover, works positioned securely within the apparatus of cinema – festivals and prizes, star performers, mediatic attention, and so on – may offer "uncinematic" forms of narration. I think, for example, of the films of the Korean director Hong Sang-soo.[25] The characters in Hong's films are preoccupied with their emotional interrelationships to the almost total exclusion of such other concerns as the state of the world around them. In this, his films have much in common with classic Hollywood melodrama. In narrative structure however his films are radically different from those of such directors as Max Ophüls or Douglas Sirk. As one writer has remarked of Hong's films: "Instead of illustrating the logical process of narrative development, each shot (*plan*) is never the first or last link in a chain of facts, but restores the impression produced in the present by an event" (Park 2018, 102).

The ensemble of Hong Sang-soo's films produce a sense of perpetual return: much the same types of people, in much the same work occupations and life situations, go through much the same types of interactions. I am

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24   My thanks to Christine Berthin for introducing me to this text. See Berthin 2019, 341.
25   Korean and Chinese names are written in this text in their traditional form: surname first.

left with the impression of a Monet returning to paint the same Cathedral facade under different lights, or a Cézanne returning again to paint Mont Sainte-Victoire.[26]

The paradox of narrative that resists temporal flow is at the center of Roland Barthes's 1970 essay "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills." Here, Barthes envisages a "filmic of the future" that "lies not in movement, but in an inarticulable third meaning that neither a simple photograph nor a figurative painting can assume since they lack a diegetic horizon, the possibility of configuration" (1977b, fn 1, 66). In an essay of 1975 the film theorist and videomaker Thierry Kuntzel imagines: "a virtual film [...] where all the elements would be present at the same time [...] each endlessly referring to the others" (2006, 114).[27] There are however already existing practices that, in Barthes's words, institute: "a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical" (1977b, fn 1, 66). Barthes recognizes this in an aside he adds as a footnote to "The Third Meaning":

> There are other "arts" which combine still (or at least drawing) and story, diegesis – namely the photo-novel and the comic-strip. I am convinced that these "arts," born in the lower depths of high culture, possess theoretical qualifications and present a new signifier (related to the obtuse meaning). [...] There may thus be a future – or a very ancient past – truth in these derisory, vulgar, foolish, dialogical forms of consumer subculture. (1977b, fn 1, 66)

In the decades following Barthes's essay on "The Third Meaning" there has been detailed discussion, from a mainly "cinecentric" point of view, of relations between film stills, photographs and moving images (see Bellour 2012; Mulvey 2006). Studies of cinematic "intermediality" have further taken account of the relations of cinema to such other "external" image practices as painting (see Jacobs 2011), and studies of "transmediality" have described the distribution of a "single" story across disparate media platforms (see Schiller 2018). There have however been relatively few advances in the more challenging of two directions indicated by Barthes's gesture toward "dialogical forms of consumer subculture." One path from Barthes's footnote might lead to a reassessment of previously overlooked representational practices.

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26   Hong Sang-soo himself passed through art schools before entering cinema. The figures of painters appear in several of his films, as do film directors who were previously painters.
27   The text was originally written as a textual analysis of a fragment from Chris Marker's LA JETÉE (1962).

This path has been taken, the forms Barthes found "vulgar and foolish" in 1970 have, fifty years on, gained institutionalized intellectual and artistic recognition.[28] The creation of such new medium-specific academic enclaves as "Comic Studies" however, for all they should be welcomed, nevertheless inhibits thinking about how such "derisory" forms might presage a "filmic of the future," and even less what this uncinematic filmic might *be*.

Virtual Objects

The second half of the twentieth century saw an expansion of what has become generally known as "visual cultural studies": from Art History, through Film Studies, then Photography Studies and most recently Digital Media. An effect of digital technologies however has been to challenge the primacy of "medium" implied in the widely used academic appellation "Digital Media." In 1986, as the first digital cameras were arriving on the consumer market, the German media theorist Friedrich A. Kittler writes:

> [O]nce optical fiber networks turn formerly distinct data flows into a standardized series of digitized numbers, any medium can be translated into any other. [...] a digital base will erase the very concept of medium. (1999, 1-2)

The Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky argued that fundamental changes in cultural history occur not in direct line of descent from what has gone before but rather as the Knight moves in chess, in an abrupt lateral departure from the established track. The attitudes enshrined in the expression "Digital Media" are in direct line of descent from the primacy allocated to "medium" in modernist aesthetics[29] and a misrecognition of the Knight's move effected by the essentially virtual nature of the image in algorithmic culture. In the 1930s Walter Benjamin saw the arrival of cinema as accompanied by a demand for the invention of the concepts that would be required in order to understand the new regimes of the image that cinema would bring. An analogous demand may be felt today

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28   For example, in 2014 the academic journal *Critical Inquiry* devoted a special issue to comics (Chute and Jagoda 2014) and in 2018 a graphic novel was cited for the Mann Booker prize: Nick Drnaso, *Sabrina*, 2018.
29   The preoccupation with "medium" is a characteristic of modernist aesthetics from Clement Greenberg to Rosalind Krauss; see my essay, "'Medium' and 'Specificity,'" 2006.

in relation to the products of digital image technologies, but whereas in Benjamin's day "cinema" named a circumscribed and relatively homogeneous institutional and aesthetic *object*, what we may provisionally call "virtual image practices" now present a heterogeneous and boundless technological and phenomenological *field*. If an object of study is nevertheless to be discerned within this field it can only be through a fundamental revision of what constitutes an object. Barthes's obtuse "filmic of the future" has little to do with film as such, it concerns the possibilities of "configuration within a diegetic horizon" in general. In my 2004 book *The Remembered Film* (2004; translated as *Le film qui me reste en mémoire*, 2019) I give the name "cinematic heterotopia" to the environment of fragments of films and related publicity – YouTube clips, street posters, lobby cards, magazine features, and so on – that fill the real and imaginary spaces between actual viewings of films; elements that may be associated not only with each other but with fragmentary images and texts from sources other than films. Such signifiers may take the material form of printed matter or they may appear on screens of the various kinds known to us today. The film and media theorist Vivian Sobchack urges that we, "go beyond thinking about screens as discrete devices with different forms, functions, and contents, and attempt to describe the "screenness" that grounds and connects them all" (2016, 162). I would further recommend that, beyond the materiality of such devices, we take account of "screenness" in all its aspects – as Dominique Chateau and José Moure write: "the screen could be considered to be material, mental or, more generally, a link between matter and mind" (2016, 17). In 1973, Roland Barthes wrote: "there will still be representation for so long as a subject (author, reader, spectator or voyeur) casts his gaze towards a horizon on which he cuts out the base of a triangle, his eye (or his mind) forming the apex" (1977a, 69). The image Barthes suggests here could describe an engraving from an antique treatise on perspective. Although based on natural phenomena – the physics of light and the physiology and psychology of visual perception – the perspectival system of representation is not in itself natural; nor, as the pictorial traditions of Islam and such civilizations as those of Egypt and China demonstrate, is it inevitable. Nevertheless it has come to universally frame hegemonic representations of the world. Perspectival representation now passes as quasi-natural and is largely unremarked *as a system*. Following the automation of perspective drawing through photography, the animation of the photographic image with the advent of cinema inaugurated a further stage in the naturalization of perspective. Across the twentieth century, from Lev Kuleshov's notion of perceptual experience as "films without film," through Pasolini's definition of film as

the "written language of reality," to Hollis Frampton's idea of reality itself as an "infinite film," the prevailing imaginary of the world was submitted to the organizing principles of montage: "reality" – by default equated with the real – became viewed not only as intrinsically perspectival but as inherently *cinematic* (see Levi 2012, chap. 4). Today, as the term "post-cinema" may imply, the classic fiction film no longer has the predominance it once had among contributions to the popular imaginary of the real. Although by definition the real stands outside representation we may nevertheless speak of the *real of representations* – in this sense the real has a *history*. The subject who casts her or his gaze toward the real of representations today does not immediately confront the preformatted objects of media studies, but rather the type of object formulated in recent work in epistemology and philosophy of science. In a rudimentary and opportunistic appropriation of the technical complexities of such work, two basic procedural tenets may be extracted: a *flat ontology* – a non-hierarchical attitude to phenomenologically given things;[30] and a definition of the "complex object" made of these things to include the intention of the observer – what the philosopher of science Anne-Françoise Schmid calls a *contemporary object*.[31] Schmid suggests that "we treat this object as a kind of unknown 'X' the properties of which are distributed in an unprecedented way between different disciplinary forms of knowledge. An object with multiple dimensions, each of which is a discipline" (2015, 65-66).[32] Schmid's "contemporary object" has much in common with the "digital object." In his 2016 book *On the Existence of Digital Objects* the Chinese philosopher of technology Hui Yuk writes: "By digital objects, I mean objects that take shape on a screen or hide in the back end of a computer program, composed of data and metadata regulated by structures or schemas" (2016, 1). A fire-breathing dragon in a videogame, the gamer's medical records on a hospital computer, the Wikipedia entry for "Hospital," are all digital objects.[33] Hui bases his conception of the "digital object" on the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon's idea of the "technical

30   For example, the French philosopher and novelist Tristan Garcia writes: "We live in this world of things, where a cutting of acacia, a gene, a computer-generated image, a transplantable hand, a musical sample, a trademarked name, or a sexual service are comparable things" (2014, 1).

31   I assume Schmid alludes to Edmund Husserl's notion of the "contemporary object" as one that elapses in synchrony with apprehension of it – Husserl gives the example of a melody.

32   Schmid continues: "This is the way designers and inventors think: Not by seeing the object as the result of a disciplinary rationality, even a composite one, but by putting an unknown 'X' in relation with islands of knowledge that cannot all be foreseen in advance."

33   Albeit of different types. Respectively, they exemplify the two basic forms of digitization that Hui Yuk terms "mapping" and "tagging." See Hui 2016, 50.

object." In his book of 1958 *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*
Simondon opposes the view in which technology is seen simply in terms
of the *tool*, an instrument by means of which humans act upon nature. For
Simondon, technology is not something added to an already existing human
being, it is only through technology that the "human" *comes into being*.
Simondon therefore argues that the technical object has a role in culture as
foundational as that of the aesthetic object or the sacred object. He charges
that Western philosophy has nevertheless largely ignored technology, and
as a result is incapable of understanding either the mode of existence of
technical objects or our condition of being in a world increasingly occupied
and shaped by them. Gilbert Simondon died in 1989, four years before the
release of the Mosaic web browser that first popularized the World Wide
Web and inaugurated the commercial exploitation of the Internet. Hui
Yuk aims to account for a new kind of technical object in the milieu of the
Internet – the "digital object" – significantly different from that described
by Simondon in that it has no material substance. In terms consistent with
those employed by Schmid, Hui writes:

> The existence of digital objects is constituted by the materialized milieu
> which gives it an identity, which does not come from the "matter" [...], nor
> from the imposition of form, but by the relations in it, created by it, and
> that surround it. [...] the materiality of form cannot be fully accounted for
> by the abstract notion of matter or the concrete material that the object
> is composed of. [...] This materiality seems to come from elsewhere (a
> different reality or order of magnitude). (2014, 61)[34]

34   Both Gilbert Simondon and Hui Yuk base their understanding of the object on a critique
of the Aristotelian doctrine of "hylemorphism," according to which all existing things result
from a combination of matter and form. Aristotle gives the example of a brick, which results
from the imposition of the shape of a wooden mould on clay. Simondon objects that this purely
abstract picture leaves out everything essential in the production of the real brick. The mould
cannot impose its form on any matter whatsoever, nor can the clay lend itself to just any form;
they are preadapted to each other. When wet clay is thrown into the mould the wood resists
the impact as if "pushing back" – here again there is reciprocal action, rather than an active/
passive relation. Simondon finds such interdependencies and exchanges at play throughout
the production of Aristotle's brick, from the molecular level to the system of slave labor. In
another example, Simondon writes: "The technicity of the automobile does not lie entirely in
the automobile object; it consists in its adaptive correspondence to the travelled environment,
through the intermediary network of roads [...]" (2015, 22). The image of a network of roads may
easily be mapped onto the prevailing image of the Internet, but the type of object invoked may
not. An "automobile object" moving down a road has physical substance, an "image object"
traveling across the Internet does not. Simondon's 1958 critique of hylemorphism redirects the

In the philosophical tradition within which Hui Yuk works there is a shift from the pre-industrial "natural object" through the industrial "technical object" to the present "digital object." Unlike the objects of philosophical enquiry that precede it the digital object is immaterial – but it is not the *only* immaterial object, there is also the *psychical object*. The dragon on the gamer's screen is a component of the gamer's psychical reality, one that elapses in synchrony with their consciousness as their avatar does battle with it. The digital object and the contemporary object converge in the *virtual object*.

Art Nevertheless

We may today confirm the terrible prescience of an observation Walter Benjamin made almost a century ago: "Capitalism is entirely without precedent, in that it is a religion which offers not the reform of existence but its complete destruction" (1996, 289). Contemporary Art has become finance capitalism's church. Unlike the church it replaced, there is no place in it for that "ascetic message of humility to oppose to a haughty and hedonistic bourgeois society" that in Moravia's view Pasolini once found in the people. One should not be misled by the chorus of voices raised against capitalism within this church. As Jacques Rancière notes: "there is a whole school of so-called critical thought and art that, despite its oppositional rhetoric, is entirely integrated within the space of consensus" (2017, 239). The rapacious and unrestrained pursuit of material enrichment has led to the decimation of some human populations and annihilation of many non-human species, it has ravaged terrestrial habitats and poisoned the oceans. It is unsurprising that these and other such manifestations of the spirit of the anthropocene should find their reflection in works of art. We may however question the political value of *reflection*. In a 2007 interview Rancière indicts at length:

> this circulation of stereotypes that critique stereotypes, giant stuffed animals that denounce our infantilization, media images that denounce the media, spectacular installations that denounce the spectacle etc. There is a whole series of forms of critical or activist art that are caught up in this police logic of the equivalence of the power of the market and the power of its denunciation. (2017, 240)

question of the identity of the technical object from physical substances to relations, which allows Hui Yuk to posit a purely relational object.

Rather than denunciation of the form of life proffered by capitalism we might better consider its *renunciation*. Like Herman Melville's Bartleby we might say "I would prefer not to." I would prefer not to perform in the circus of the enrichment economy. I would prefer neither to speak its language nor adopt its *style*. The French literary historian and cultural critic Marielle Macé has undertaken a detailed work of recuperation of the words "style" and "lifestyle," terms long taken into ownership by the fashion and publicity industries. In her 2016 book *Styles. Critiques of Our Forms of Life* she pays homage to Pasolini:

> who dared a diagnosis of disconcerting brutality of his own present, of that which wounded him and mattered most to him: the sentiment [...] of a vast *crisis of style*, the crisis of gestures, of modes of relating, of the manners and powers of the people (which had once incarnated for him a space of exemplary stylistic, that's to say human, accomplishment). (2016, 15)

In her 2011 book *Ways of Reading, Modes of Being*, she writes:

> What does it mean to give a style to one's existence? This is not the mo- nopoly of artists, aesthetes or heroic lives, but is intrinsic to the human: not because one needs to coat one's behavior with a veneer of elegance, but because in any practice whatsoever one engages with the very forms of life. (2011, 10)[35]

Style is no more the monopoly of artists than is creativity, and neither of these concepts is to be abandoned to definition by the "creative industries" – any- more than is the idea of "art." Macé notes, "an intrinsic articulation between style and values, or rather between style and valencies, semantic reliefs" (2016, 151). The definition of "art" has been appropriated by Contemporary Art. The recuperation of the idea, the restoration of its "values, valencies, semantic reliefs," requires that we seek alternative stylistic forms not only in the interstices of the art institution itself but also beyond it. Neo-liberal ideology naturalizes the existing order by insisting "there is no alternative," not only in the registers of the economic and political but also in the spheres of education and culture. Against this it is necessary to imagine and assert the possibility of alternative worlds, different societies, different ways of

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35   The passage appears in English translation in Macé 2013. The translation here however is my own.

relating to each other. The amateur is a figure in an alternative imaginary landscape. The Barthes scholar Mathias Ecoeur insists on the *figure* of the amateur in Barthes's work:

> because "amateur" in the work of Barthes seems to have neither the somewhat frozen dignity of a concept nor the supposed homogeneity of a notion. *Figure*, then, to allow a presaging of *reconfigurations*, an eruption of mobility in a wide variety of contexts. (2018, 171)

In his recent book *Capital and Ideology* (2019) the French economist Thomas Piketty substantively expands upon his widely influential study of 2013, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014). In a commentary on the book the Serbian-American economist Branko Milanovic observes that the advent of "big data" has now allowed Piketty to bring to his analyses a degree of previously unavailable empirical support (2019, 26). Summarizing his conclusions, Piketty writes:

> [R]elations of force are not only material: they are also and above all intellectual and ideological. [...] ideas and ideologies count in history. They allow us perpetually to imagine and structure different worlds and different societies. (*Le Monde*, 2019, 24)[36]

Piketty notes that this observation contradicts the notion, "often characterized as 'marxist,'" that "economic forces and relations of production determine almost mechanically the ideological 'superstructure' of a society." To the contrary, he insists, "there exists a veritable autonomy of the sphere of ideas, that is to say of the ideologico-political sphere" (*Le Monde*, 2019). This insight may come as no surprise to those who followed the debates in 1970s Film Studies and Cultural Studies. What it may nevertheless remind us of is the extent to which attention to ideology has faltered in these academic fields in the intervening half-century. If the film theory that emerged in the 1970s may be viewed in retrospect as more than erudite fan literature it is because of its contributions to theories of ideology, without this attention it becomes talk about something that does not matter.

  In the context of the *Key Debates* series, the constellation of terms "art," "cinema," "stories," "screens" suggests to me critical inquiry directed toward emergent photofilmic narrative forms in which formal and semantic

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36   Not published at the time of writing. Extracts published in advance of publication, *Le Monde*, Friday, September 6, 2019.

complexity are allied with an affective dimension, and which offer alternatives to the mass-produced verisimilitude of hegemonic mass culture.[37] In the introduction to his 1977 book *Stanzas*, Giorgio Agamben remarks that although it is accepted that a novel may not deliver the story it has promised to tell, it is usual to expect works of criticism to offer "working hypotheses." However, he notes, "when the term criticism appears in the vocabulary of Western philosophy, it signifies rather inquiry at the limits of knowledge about precisely that which can be neither posed nor grasped" (1993, XV). Anne-Françoise Schmid's "contemporary object," Hui Yuk's "digital object," are at the limits of what may be discerned in our mutating real of representations; nevertheless, faced with the diversity of image practices consequent upon digitalization we may consider a quasi-phenomenological *epoché* in which the categories "cinema" and "art" are "bracketed out" in order to better discern, in the glare of the spectacle, the outlines (however sketchy) of a "culture of the invisible at the heart of visibility itself."

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37   A long sentence that in short defines my own working definition of narrative art for this society at this time. I offer it as a point of departure, rather than a model to be adopted.

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