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DEBORD'S CINEMA WITHOUT SPECTACLE

JOSÉ MANUEL MARTINS
(UNIVERSITY OF ÉVORA)

Abstract

Fifteen years prior to his core piece, *La société du spectacle*, the artist-as-a-young-man Guy Debord makes a(n) (anti-)spectacular entrance into the realms of art, philosophy, cinema and politics with *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*, which retrieves the pure act of cinema without "a film."

This sequential black upon white grid suggests Malevich's founding Suprematist gesture of the "Zero of forms," and other milestones of Modernity that align battlefields of luminous rationality against archaic "darkness," such as Edgar Poe's "The Raven," Van Gogh's death-sign(ature) "Wheatfield with Crows" or Kubrick's "2001"'s empty signifier of the Monolith. This series of black on white in art, at large, redolent of the spectral nature of the primal *imago* as the shadow or the *caput mortuum*, is aggravated in that "kingdom of shadows" that both Maxim Gorky, Ingmar Bergman, Nathaniel Dorsky, Laura Mulvey and Garrett Stewart emphasize to be the innermost dark side of analogical film medium, while foregrounded inside out onto the screen.

If, according to Schelling, the future of spirit is to be found in art rather than in philosophy, and if a corresponding negative aesthetics should witness "the survival of art through its own death," in Adorno's words, Debord's "black squaring" has no equal among similar procedures carried out by Godard, Cronenberg, Kubrick, César Monteiro, Haneke or Béla Tarr, including Cage's contemporary (1952) silent piece 4'33."

Utmost singular among cineasts and artists, this paper will contend that Debord's non-philosophy contained in *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* will prove to be irreducible to all forms of the historically inherited theological

and/or philosophical apophases and aletheias across the prodigal domain of the Negative, from Neoplatonism to modern dialectics. What remains on screen from this determinate negation is indisputably 'cinema,' when its material intervention has overcome all questions of essence, apparatus, spectatorship or agency. Neither 'what' nor 'when' is cinema; cinema 'is' not: cinema hurls.

Keywords: Situation(ism), film, image, media determinism, Modernity

The philosophical legacy of Modernity: from being to hurling

Fifteen years prior to composing the bright core of his critical thought, the written and filmed (thus twofold magnum opus) *La société du spectacle*, and just one year after Isou's seminal anti-masterwork *Traité de Bave et d'Éternité*, the young and yet full-fledged Guy Debord starts out with a radical entrance into the realms of art, philosophy, cinema and politics; *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* retrieves the pure act of cinema without "a film" or the pure materiality of film without any cinematics going on. What must have been unbearable for the audience of that notorious première in the 1950s, is not that the filmmaker had arguably lost sight of the movies, but that we should sit still and watch cinema for the first time that no film whatsoever was played on screen (or better, that what was seen onscreen was the film strip's tacit spooling and that this might finally coincide cinema as such).

This sequential black upon white grid suggests Malevich's founding Suprematist gesture of the "Zero of forms," an icon which is at the same time a total eclipse—that is, the impossible and forbidden absolute Image, alongside a steady line of Modernity's *Tarrying with the Negative* (S. Žižek)—that aligns such battlefields of advanced rationality against its own immemorial, mute darkness, as we can find by travelling from Edgar Poe's "The Raven" (whose very Ultra-Romanticism elicits its delirious revisitation by the insanely compelling reasonings of "The Philosophy of Composition"), and Van Gogh's death-sign(ature) "Wheatfield with Crows," to Kubrick's "2001"'s impenetrable godless Monolith.

This series of black on white in art, at large, redolent of the spectral nature of the primal *imago* as the shadow or the *caput mortuum* according to the mythical report by Pliny the Elder, is aggravated in cinema as that "kingdom of shadows" that both Maxim Gorky, Ingmar Bergman, Nathaniel Dorsky, Laura Mulvey and Garrett Stewart emphasize to be the

innermost dark side of the medium of analogical film, while foregrounded inside out onto the screen.

If the future of spirit is to found in art rather than in philosophy, according to Schelling and the reverse of Hegel's determination, and if a negative aesthetics should be able to account for "the survival of art through its own death," as phrased by Adorno, then Debord's 'black squaring' is nonetheless unequal to seemingly similar procedures collectable among a legion of 'black magicians' of the cinematic *Bilderverbot* (including Godard, Cronenberg and Kubrick, and César Monteiro or Haneke, to Béla Tarr, or, to name another (?) domain, Cage's strictly contemporary [1952] silent piece 4'33'' and even Beckett's reiterated shutting down of the symbolic/imaginary orders, namely in his self-predicated "Film"). One conspicuous symptom of such a *dissidence from dissidence itself*, which is utterly non-experimental, is the significant lack of any reference to where it should be most expected to attain prominence, i.e. in the Deleuzian summa on the moving image.

Utmost singular among cineasts and artists, Debord's non-philosophy contained in "*Hurlements…*" (the Wittgensteinian meta-theoretical silence played against "The Society of the Spectacle' *tractatus*) will prove to be irreducible to all forms of the historically inherited theological and/or philosophical, be it Western or Oriental, apophases and a-letheias across the prodigal domain of the Negative, from Neoplatonism to modern dialectics. What remains on screen from this determinate negation is indisputably 'cinema,' unmoved at its post, as it were, when its material intervention has overcome all questions of essence, apparatus, spectatorship and agency. Neither 'what' nor 'when' is cinema; cinema 'is' not: cinema hurls.

The fourfold of the pure cine-image: *screened* whiteness, word, darkness, silence

To offer a minimal description, *Howls for Sade*, a 69 minute filmic/cinematic event constructed by the 20-year old (and already older than cinema) Guy Debord, famously consists of alternated steady sequences of white and completely dark screen(ing)s, which correspond to a soundtrack respectively comprised of five different stilted 'voices,'[1] including Guy Debord's and

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[1] "The voices, deliberately inexpressive // Les voix, volontairement inexpressives," editor's note to "Grande Fête de nuit" (1955) (Debord, *Œuvres*, 71)

Isidore Isou's, uttering separate and unconnected text fragments, thus imparting a double effect of resident and reciprocal détournements,[2] and total silence (the détournement of the détournement).

This simplicity is deceptive, though.

By an independent act of invention, this infra-howling Sadean silence emulates total Cagean silence[3] or, to put it differently, it fulfills a 'negative quotation' of Rimbaud's gesture of turning away language, similar to Kafka's dictum about 'that something, more terrifying than the mermaid's chant: their silence:'[4] "I am enjoying Rimbaud very much these days. Not so much for what he wrote, but this silence. This terrifying silence."[5] Silence, as the absolutely inescapable, alternates according to the typical Modernist pathos with the single potency of ancient enchantment: long before Malevich's discovery, but quite a while after Poe's obsessive overlapping of reason and night, such is the ontology materialized in the film strip, and cinema's rarely played trump card. A 'non-Rimbaud' (neither his 'je' nor his 'autre'), then, who is more 'Rimbaud' than ever; or *mutatis mutandis* in its cinematic re-mediation by Debord, the most

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[2] It is in this sense, and only in this sense of a differed respondence, that in our interpretation the reiterated qualification of the spoken word as 'dialogues' is to be understood in two of the introductory writings of Debord on *Hurlements*…, "Grande Fête de nuit" (1955) and "Fiche technique"' (1964) (Debord, *Œuvres*, 71-73); e.g. among many other occurrences: "The dialogues, whose duration does not exceed twenty minutes (…). All the quotes from French works included in this chapter are translations by its author.

[3] Not insignificantly, John Cage's *4'33''* is strictly contemporary with *Hurlements*. His articulation of musical silence in three movements by variable ensembles on stage following blank scores, amounts to more than a scenographic *boutade*: it focuses on the palpability and malleability of the nowness of temporal silence: ever differing homogeneity.

[4] "Nun haben aber die Sirenen eine noch schrecklichere Waffe als den Gesang, nämlich ihr Schweigen. Es ist zwar nicht geschehen, aber vielleicht denkbar, daß sich jemand vor ihrem Gesang gerettet hätte, vor ihrem Schweigen gewiß nicht." (Kafka, *Das Schweigen der Sirenen*, [28.January.2019], https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Das_Schweigen_der_Sirenen ["But the Sirens have a still more terrible weapon than their singing, namely their silence. It has indeed not happened, but is perhaps conceivable, that someone could have saved himself from their singing—from their silence, certainly not."] Kafka, *The Silence of the Sirens* [28.January.2019]. https://dyssebeia.wordpress.com/2013/11/18/translation-the-silence-of-the-sirens/).

[5] "Rimbaud me plaît beaucoup actuellement. Pas tant par ce qu'il a écrit, mais ce silence. Ce silence terrifiant." (Debord, *Le marquis de Sade a des yeux de fille*, 63)

likeable is not so much the white talkative square, but the black mute one:
yet, this silence is at the same time 'silence as such,' and also a referential
'silence *of*,' determined (inimitably *Rimbaudian*) silence, chosen silence,
prefiguring the Situationist overcoming art and poetry in and by life itself,
constructed as a post-poetic performative *situation of situations* over the
dead, and otherwise resurrected, body of art. Beginning with a white
screen as a 'talkie' of sorts, the film advances by blocks of 'light and
meaning' intercut with the voiding of any block into nothingness. These
ecliptic interruptions (or is it the other way round?) becoming increasingly
longer until bringing the movie (?) to a 'negative climatic'[6] endurance
exercise of twenty-four consecutive minutes of silent darkness.

If Rimbaud had been a Lettrist *avant la lettre*, then he would have
exchanged *les belles lettres* of poetry for the poetry of letters; were he a
Situationist, he might have meaningfully détourned entire verses and
stances. Instead, he built a situation for himself: he *deturned* himself from
letters, verses and language altogether and—more radically than the
formal elements of the whole, or an altered meaning to the original one—
opposed the *other*, both *of* meaning and *of* its signifier—namely, silence—
to language. His method was the procedure of a radical, absolute Lettrism:
beneath silenced poetry, the silenced letters as well—for silence (elemental)
is more radical regarding language, as its negative, than the signifier
(elementary). Paraphrasing Adorno's formula, we could say that silence is
still 'the linguistic other of language,' so that Rimbaud's détournement of
language (like, famously, Elisabet Vogler's in Bergman's *Persona*) takes
place both 'from,' and yet still 'within,' its magic spell.

As magnificent as the silence of this young poet may look, self-détourned
as it became in his work, the cinematic re-mediation that Debord's '*contre
le cinéma*' imposes upon it (that we imagine as an operation that is not
merely *of* the silence but *over* the silence) completely changes how we
view things.

We contend that this new breed of silence, that is cinematic because it is
Debordian, and Debordian because it is cinematic, is both relative by
negating language and absolute by negating the negation (in the sense of
getting rid of it and of its [negative] relation to what-is-denied). This is the
case, not because it has now been reshaped as 'a black silence' (it is not,
and it could not be)—but because the absence of sound weighs in here and

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[6] "[S]on apothéose décevante" (Debord, *Œuvres*, 72 ["Grande Fête de nuit,"
Avant-propos pour le scénario de Hurlements en faveur de Sade, 1955])

now as pure darkness: 'black' in the sense of light, and not in the sense of colour. Sound-dimension translates itself into sight-dimension: the silence is not merely accompanied by darkness; it transubstantiates itself into darkness. Indeed, on a closer look, the 'black screen' no longer forms a square nor is the latter black or dark; it becomes itself by the all-surrounding total gloom of the movie theatre and disappears as a *separate* screen: its own dimness propagates itself as black light, plunging the entire space into complete darkness.

In a remarkable turn of phrase, Debord refers twice to an intriguing quasi-causal and, arguably, consubstantial relation of silence and darkness that sooner belongs to the medium-specific ontology of cinema and film, rather than to some mediated phenomenological collusion of the sensible. This relation is named the "masses of empty silence."[7] The context suggests that this emptiness is as much optical and metaphysical-political as it is aural and semantic; and it supervenes as an act of interruption (of "the anecdote:" the verbal voiceover 'opening' together with the brightness of the screen), allowed by the "specific conditions of cinema." The general sense of this theoretical entanglement is the following: the black screen spreads out across the *thus* darkened movie theatre, while the chromic becomes photonic and blackness translates into darkness, in accordance with the "specific conditions of cinema."[8] And this diffusion from lack of colour to lack of light takes place *because* the former is already in itself a phenomenon of light; it ranks as a *projected* blackness, in the first place, the paradoxical beam of the projector sending the very lack of light across the room onto the screen.

But this unique feature of cinema, the projection of light, does not limit itself to the optical realm: light and sound merge in cinema because they are both cinematic in their origin and mode, i.e. recorded, stored, and *projected* (and projected, to the point that even negative light and negative sound, even black darkness and empty silence, are, cinematically, *projected* darkness and *projected* silence). They merge as apparatus-based projections, much before that as phenomenological *qualia*. They have a machinic, rather than human, metonymy ("noir" for darkness). They interchange as operations first, and then second as results: their emission-character founds their affinity: they hit us (and each other, mutually enhancing their explosion value, we could add) "as bullets," says Benjamin.

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[7] (Debord, *Œuvres*, 70)
[8] (Debord, *Œuvres*, 70)

It is now apt to read the full extent of those two aforementioned phrases. "The interruptions of the sound (…) left [our underscoring] the screen and the room absolutely black(ened) // noirs,"[9] where "leave" acquires a causal overtone: scotopic blackness is presented as the effect produced by the disruptive, 'dissident' *act* of silencing. An ob-jectified silence (the silent), patent 'there,' lacks the strength to turn off the light: but not so pro-jected overall silence (silencing). When nothing remains to be projected, except projection itself, this very silence over the silence absolutely forbids any form of disturbance; it allows for nothing whose very presence could impair the mutism of so heavy a mantle: it requires and imposes the extreme dimming of everything else, of any visual 'noise' in the first place. The ontology of this event relies cinematically on the well-known mechanical device called the projector; alternatively, the projector responds structurally to the material organization of the film strip whose material immateriality it precisely 'projects' (also in the sense of intensifying it and, even in the optical-physical literal sense, magnifying it)—the audio-visual through its synchronized double sourcing. The received light and sound are then mirrored by their projective emission, completing the palindromic arrangement of the dispositive. We shall return again to this point, which is resonant with Debord's own palindromistic propensity. The second phrase reveals itself to be strictly complementary to the first: "During the projection of the silences, the screen remains completely black; and, by way of consequence, the room."[10] The "interruption of sound," inertia, is cinematographically rephrased by its equivalent: the "projection of silence," operative. And the second member of the second phrase, depicted as a mere parallel event here, was dynamically deduced as a result in the former phrase.

So, we cannot say, trivially, that *Hurlements*… consists of an alternation between 'white' and 'black' screens (the 'black screen' no longer configuring a screen nor displaying the colour black, for lack of light), nor between lit and unlit screens (the latter simply vanishes as such). Rather, a total parallax takes place here, dismantling the affordable, lazy, conformist pair of comparable magnitudes that entice us into their never-ending ritual (light vs. darkness, black vs. white), as the filmic dispositive does not simply alternate two contrasting 'spectacles,' but reverses its own

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[9] "Les interruptions du son, toujours fort longues, laissaient l'écran et la salle absolument noirs" (Debord, *Œuvres*, 71-72 [Grande Fête de nuit," *Avant-propos* pour le scénario de Hurlements en faveur de Sade, 1955])
[10] "Durant la projection des silences, l'écran reste absolument noir; et, par voie de conséquence, la salle" (Debord, *Œuvres*, 72)

eventness and deeply alters its coordinates: now we exert the spectator's gaze and are looking at a luminous white cinema screen drawing a sharp-edged 4:3 square against the obscurity. Now we are materially submitted to the very substance of the environing darkness closing over us around the blind focal point of our unabashed desire and fascination: the virtual altar slab for the screening of the black mass of cinema; and Debord does not fail to notice that cinema comes here prior to phenomenology. Far from delving into an environment of immediate darkness, the spectator observes how it is the screen that sustains and emits the latter.

While Rimbaud's silence acquires the weight of absence, Debord's cinema makes that weight present as a suffocating thickness in itself. He does not, nevertheless, lend to it the equivalent visual form of a black darkness, nor does he bolster its persistent refusal through the synesthetic association with such a form 'of nothing.' Indeed, the visual form of the occlusion, the eclipse, is a legacy of Modernity, from Edgar Poe's shadow of "The Raven" "floating over that floor," through Van Gogh's death sign(ature) "Wheatfield with Crows" fluttering ominously over its bright solar shine now down to earth; this gesture was to be re-appropriated by Malevich's Suprematist endeavor, first under the guise of the partial eclipses ("victories over the sun") brought about by the invasive black quadrangles precluding all figuration and/or language of a 'world of objects' ('mundane meaningfulness'), then attaining the 'zero of forms' of the black square over a white background; to Kubrick's "2001"'s unfathomable Monolith. What these pictorial or literary representations have in common is that they still remain within the domain of the ob-jectified image presented to a frontal ocular grasp according to a dual ground/figure optical-logical gestalt. Cinema as a light (and not a lit) operation, allows us to elevate this *visual form*—visible darkness—to the *form of visuality* proper: darkened vision. 'Art' is now the very Situation and 'ambiance' thus created.[11]

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[11] The specific Situationist notion of, and societal context for, *Situation* is fully anticipated by Debord in his four introductive texts on *Hurlements*…, "Prolégomènes à tout cinema future" (1952), "Éclaircissement sur le film *Hurlements en faveur de Sade*" (1952), "Grande Fête de nuit" (1955) and "Fiche technique"' (1964) (Debord, *Œuvres*, 46; 70-73) And, naturally, in the conceptual framework of the film itself in its three versions, whose successive revisions constitute a theoretical, inasmuch as practical, assertion, and matrixial programme, in its own right. The opening line—the very opening word, actually—of his 1952 brief Notice (to the French Federation of cine-clubs) immediately establishes the whole forty years long enterprise that was to follow under and against the rule of 'the Spectacle': "The spectacle is permanent," "Le spectacle est permanent"

Yet not even this connection to the received view is correct; in fact, it is far from it.

To put it differently, there is no 'pure black,' nor 'a pure black screen,' any more than there is 'pure darkness,' in *Hurlements…*. Just as there is not, correspondingly, a 'pure white,' or a 'pure white screen.' The 'white' with which the 'film' opens (and seldom does a metaphorical metonymy, such as the filmic material quality [='film'] of its cinematics [='film'], fit so aptly) is not as much a (lit) colour as it is the very colour of light; projectors paint as little as cameras actually 'write' like cine-stylos' (Astruc). We are not trying to culminate these thoughts with some Malevichian—or, for that matter, monochromic—'abstract cinematics' of sorts, the white and the black alternating now, instead of overlapping (we have stressed enough the asymmetrical nature of the two phasis). This so called 'white' is strangely put into motion by a flux of all sorts of (black)

(Debord, *Œuvres*, 70). The understanding of *Hurlements*…, not as a piece of artistic art, but as a countering praxis generating "this film" follows in 1955: "It was thus convenient to hinder [a merely Lettrist personal reaction] [through] a more serious action. (§) This film, made to meet that demand, does not contain one single image // Il convenait donc d'y mettre obstacle (…) [de la part de] ceux qui envisageaient une action plus sérieuse. (§) Ce film, fait en conséquence, ne comportait aucune image." (Debord, *Œuvres*, 71) The nature of the latter as a self-fulfilling event in life and not as an artwork is made explicit in the closing line of Debord's very first text: "Les arts futurs seront des bouleversements de situations, ou rien // The future arts will be the obversion of situations, or else nothing at all" [the 'henceforth', 'donéravant', is implied] (Debord, *Œuvres*, 46); of such situations, namely, like the daily activity of moviegoing. The distinctive Situationist '*détournement*' strategies leading the way towards this purpose are repeatedly invoked according to the celebrated coinage in the "Fiche technique" (1964): they attest retrospectively the anticipatory pulsation of Debord's démarche, coming full circle. The anticipatory character of Debord's op. 1 is not to be underestimated, if we are to read his entire oeuvre as a gigantic palindrome enacted to the point of achievement of a willful death that would close (and be self-included in) its meaning. See Levin, *Dismantling the Spectacle*, 8: "In so doing, i.e. in insisting on his own death as a precondition for the work of the ciné-fils to appear in the televisual dispositive that was effectively synonymous with at least one of the deaths of cinema, Debord revealed the history of his engagement with cinema as a critical *performative reflection* [our emphasis] on the cultural politics of the cinema across the complex history (before, with and after) of its multiple dispositifs."
(http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/art_and_cinematography/debord/scroll/ [retrieved 30.January.2019])

scratches and impurities happening to it (or it carries alongside its own motion), as they became imprinted in the filmic support and now 'run' alongside the secret animation of those photographic stills that are at the basis of André Bazin's necromantic arts of 'the mummy:' it shows a 'white-in-movement.' Nevertheless, as a photograph enjoys an immanent duration of its image (as opposed to the duration a cinematic photogram acquires while projected onto a screen, like in José Luis Guerin's *Unas fotos en la ciudad de Sylvia*), so does a screen: 'its' duration is only *ours*, whereas the duration (and the whiteness) of the image projected upon it is *its own*. The screen abides in time. The image screened upon / projected onto it carries the time of all abiding, presenting itself as such; still shots, like Ozu's famous 'pillow shots,' present directly their own temporality better than those other shots disturbed by a movement that structurally keeps time its hostage; it does this much more so than the bare image as form deprived of any imagetic content—Debord's white durée. The surface of the screen is not the image on that surface; the screen is not 'white'; the image is not fixed to it; it goes on being projected; it takes its (not altogether given) time. Spectators of no spectacle: we are not looking at a screen, but at its *whiteness instead of an image*, which Debord's cinematic imaging consists of.

Similarly with the black sequences, they are by no means an immanent, pictorial colour. They are the black of an image being projected as dark light—and it shows that fact across its negative luminosity of a 'Grande Fête de nuit'—pervaded by all manners of sudden microspots of light, sectorial blazes and grains, even diagonal lightnings. These are the impurities of the virginal film strip that was never exposed to the joys of light and no longer defiled as a quick succession of revealed photograms interspersed with inter-frames black millimetres. Now this dark, this black, is not the screen's, but the image's black and dark. But of the illuminated image *as* cast onto a screen, onto a presentational strong locus that is mesmerizing and blinds our gazes. This takes place within the semidarkness of a sombre room, where we still can devise the faint contour of the screen, and see the image it becomes during the séances, when Maxim Gorky's "kingdom of shadows" prevail.

What Debord himself understands as his film's depuration of all images,[12] against the contemporary 'integral spectacular', is that they centrally

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[12] "Ce film, fait en conséquence, ne comportait aucune image." [This film, made as a result, contained no images whatsoever] (Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, 71); "C'est un long métrage complètement dépourvu d'image." [It is a

contribute to bring something about (which was a conquest of the second and third film scripts over the first, and still envisaged a wealth of the author's close-ups, among other Lettrist-Situationist found footage appropriations). What begins to appear, instead, as the internal self-depuration of the image-character of images, leading to the crucial question, whose answer unites in the same fate the nature of Debord's oeuvre and the nature of cinema that is the following: what is an image, when, and when not, cinematically considered?

The negative core of the image:
towards an *imagologia superlative*

The 'howls' boast Sadean, supra-linguistic overtones, as well as Lettrist, 'elemental' undertones. And indeed, the footage brakes in beneath discourse. But such an understanding would dry up the Sadean input and leave it at a poor, anecdotical, 'sadistic' level. The Sadean connection unnerves from inside the smallest constructive aspects of the enterprise.

Why 'Sade'? Because the dubious Marquis, for one, dared to enact and to embody his own oeuvre in excruciating live Situations—a model for Debord's accomplishment of Situationism as a non-art of pure living. Furthermore, he was the one who destroyed all established order from the inside, by practicing a liberating excessiveness that transcended the ordinary little life; and, in so doing, hopefully redeems the evil which such a derailment carries along with it or is carried by it. As Mishima put it in his play *Madame de Sade*, "above a certain amount, vice is miracle." This means to say: up to a certain amount, the excess is still bound to incur moral judgement under the terms of the established mindset. From there on, its sheer surfeit of excess blows the given socio-moral framework apart and attains absolute liberty (the kind of liberty Debord supposedly sought all through his life, and arguably fulfilled, by keeping his thought, work, deeds and being in perfect unison, like a Greek sage, or a monk, but even more so through a Nietzschean hint of an uncompromising self-possession of his own existence).

Such a unison should be propelled by a kindred spirit, namely, between Sade, Marx… and the film strip.

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feature film completely devoid of images] (Debord, *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes*, 72).

Let us begin with the latter, by adding a Sadean flavour. Once set in motion, the filmstrip's projection upon a screen highlights the homothetic aspect of the given configuration of the (cinematic) celluloid. When made enormous, and etymologically too, it becomes monstrous: the invisibly quick alternation of myriads of photosensitive frames and neutral dark intervals of almost equal length. What is projected and therefore homothetic, is both film, i.e. the dark-and-bright discreet sequence of quadrangles, made bigger, and its cinematics. i.e. the continuous image resulting from that strip being defiled, made longer. "Above a certain amount" of such an apparatus-driven never-ending flagellation, cinema is prone to become… Sadean. However, how does cinema ordinarily convert its viciously hidden repetitive drive, its 'thanatos,' "beyond the pleasure principle," into the miracle of life eternal, "the world of my immortality," as in Cavell's ecstatic formula: the appearance of a world to which, but not in which, I attend to. How does 'film' commonly accomplish its magic metonymy and comes to life again, from the dead?

Not Sadeanly enough, *hélas*. Indeed, the filmic nature of cinema and the cinematic pact that film uses to disguise itself reciprocally, and doubly: by replacing the impressionable pellicle with actual photographic images— that is, reflected (not direct light) just as if cinema was not materially filmic, but immediately imagetic; and by speeding it up, to the point of suppressing, the physical phenomenon of intermittence and the photogrammatic immobility is at its base.

In contrast—by dissidence which disrupts the home-made pace of experimentation, but not by experimentation, whose form of continuity facilitates the cautious mitigation of dissidence—Sadean cinema, via Debord, reinstates the fold of the cinematic *fiat lux*, before and after: both the whiteness of the virginal encounter of the photosensitive pellicle with premature light, instead of the image (like the way in which the cuckoo nests), and the blackness of the unpolluted aboriginal strip, encompassing both the untouched frames and the untouchable interframes, instead of its spooling mobilization through projection, which effaces the interruptive constitution of cinematic visibility *ad majorem imaginis gloriæ*. In other words: this is *how* cinema must be, in order to become *what* it is. Cinema's *existentiale* framework prescribes the principle 'heautonomously:' the medium foreruns its essence.

Sadean-Debordian cinema negates the moving image by restoring the original 'non-imagetic' blocked whiteness and blackness that the former is made of (or with, or through); but then it negates negation, by reshaping

that primal film through its own primeval cinematics. This is immobility as such (e.g. atemporal white) set in motion (persistent, durative white), and the filmic non-image is converted into the cinematic image *of* that very non-image. If photography mediates cinema, cinema, in turn, mediates photography, and, *pace* Bazin, the ontological basis of cinema is not linear, but reciprocal; in fact, they compose a palindromic cluster of sorts.

But, more important still, is the fact that as in Bergson, the cinematic function does not consist in *replacing* 'des coups immobiles'. This is to say the frozen image #1 is not replaced by the frozen image #2, but the cinematic function is in the making of *each* image into something that *defiles*, e.g. to pass by, to become in itself movement. The *cinematic* photogram is not the *replacement* of one photo by the next one, but *the moving state*, however brief, of the one photo and then its successor; it is not 'image,' but, emphatically, the '*movement of* image.' It is not projected immobile, but it is in motion. The properly *imagetic* of the cinematic image is its kinetic and durative incoincidence (for minimal) with itself. It is also, and primarily, the successiveness of (necessarily) moving images and moving non-images; accordingly, the synchronized projector of images is, rotatively, the very non-projector of non-images that cinema as a (w)hole requires.

Let us examine closer now the import of the dark side of the image.

To start from the beginning, the first and foremost distinctive property of the image is its own reversal: the arcane shadow, the Double, is the innermost dead we are ourselves, which, as *imago*, menaces (again, doubly) to separate itself from the living whose double it is, and to give us at once (its and our) death and (our and its) immortality; indeed, the economy of the double as a scheme of exchange should not be socio-culturally underestimated. Not by chance, Pliny the Elder's myth of the cumulative invention of drawing, painting and modelling/sculpture by Butades of Cicyon and his daughter, starts with the negative drawing of the silhouette of a young death-prone warrior leaving for battle; his anticipated and utmost truly *caput mortuum* retains magically, ambiguously protective and ominous, and his being is soon long gone. At its heart, the intensely imagetic and representational element within the image is the non-image; hence, the power of Malevich's apophatic icon— the *negative* of the image, as the purely occlusive at its core, is therefore its *superlative*: more image than an image. The aboriginal drift of representation is already the 'hyperreal' simulation, as Baudrillard failed

to acknowledge, because all image is already, *via negativa*, more than itself.[13]

Four authors, among others, found cinema's innermost media-determined ontology on the strict opposite to the ontophotographic realism of Bazin, whose over-simplified positivity also shares an immanent approach to the terms of a Bergsonian theory of the image, such as Deleuze's optimistic one, is actually only half-realism. I refer here to Dorsky, Bergman, Mulvey and Stewart.

Mulvey relies mainly on the nature of the paralyzed photogram, which she (in)correctly names "death 24x a second." I quote:

> (…) [T]he stillness of the celluloid frame"[14] (…) "represent[s] the individual moments of registration, the underpinning of film's indexicality.

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[13] For the ambivalence and the paradoxical logic of the exchange that imbues the sacral figure of the Double, and is at the root of the more profane trope of the self-negativity of the image, see (Morin, *L'homme et la mort*, 149-172) For the counter-cycle of 'life and death' of the image, from archaic times to the present day, see (Debray, *Vie et Mort de l'Image*) especially 15-57, where it is attested that not only does the *imago*, the thing itself, carry an overwhelming power over the living, but it also is the case that its vocabulary, the names of the thing, testify to the ontological priority of the shadow in the mimetic process: *figura*, *simulacrum*, *imago*, *eidolon*, mean in the first place the *spectrum*, and only secondarily the lively traces of a representational portrayal). Both Gorky and Bazin are redolent of this ancient wisdom, as they did not fail to recognize the potency of the 'kingdom of shadows' and of the 'mommy complex' as the secret (and ages-old) drive at the bottom of cinematic fascination, and the obverse *Unheimliche* within the image: namely, the medusa effect of death (*more* than sex), the 'erotics of thanatos' indivisible dyad to which the ultimate cinematic thrill reduces itself, according to Hitchcock. Last but not least, José Gil draws on the inaugural myth of the image's death-drive to pinpoint the 'void of the face' as a (self-imploding) 'black hole' (José Gil, "Sem Título", 31 *et passim*) and the art of the portrait as a privileged connection with death (however alive and happy the models may be). This fundamentally unrepresentable feature that 'deconstructionistly' spurs all attempts at representing, this blind spot in the middle of the eye, in the middle of the face, undermining presence, echoing the doubly negative condition of *a-lêtheia*, directly leads to yet another theoretical series, such as, for example, a filmmaker like Bergman explores also poietically (supremely so in *Persona*) and Deleuze highlights in his approach to the so-called affection-image: the close-up as face tend, either to self-dissolving in nothingness (Bergman—*Persona*…etc.), or to transcend itself (Bergman—*Fanny and Alexander*; Dryer—all over). Its revelational outreach stems from its sheer irreducibility to an ontology of presence. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, 87-122.

> In Jean-Luc Godard's film of 1960, *Le Petit Soldat*, the answer to the
> question 'what is cinema?' is 'truth 24 times a second.' (…) the answer to
> the question 'what is cinema?' should also be 'death 24 times a second.'
> The photograph's freezing of reality, truth in Godard's definition, marks a
> transition from the animate to the inanimate, from life to death.[15]

This truth, however, belies itself when it comes to death: both in the film
strip and during its cinematic afterlife, death occurs not just 24x a second,
but circa 48x. This is so because in film not only life but also death itself
dies. There is a second uncanny resident in cinema, which is, not the dead
photogram, but the death of the photogram, the death of each photogram.
Two very different kinds of death partake in the cinema's naked feast: the
dead white being the corpse and the black death of being the nothingness.

Nathaniel Dorsky proves himself to be a better arithmetician for this
(preemptive) post-mortem acrobatics: "The quality of light, as experienced
in film, is intermittent. At sound speed there are twenty-four images a
second, each about a fiftieth of a second in duration, alternating with an
equivalent period of black."[16] According to Dorsky, this basic constituent
transfers itself to a distinctive quality of the cinematographic image—
namely, intermittence, whose spell the flickering germane to silent movie
speed (and era) preciously entreasures. Moreover, not only does this
ontological materiality emerge within the (and as) image, reminiscent of
Hegel's beginning of the Science of Logic: the pure becoming—cinematic
projection—between the uttermost abstract categories of being (the still
frame before any image whatsoever—and nothing—the inter-frame
'cuts'—giving rise to 'something'—the moving image). And it also finds
itself repeated by the very theatrical condition of cinema as dispositive, as
pointed out by Dorsky:

> We view films in the context of darkness. We sit in darkness and watch an
> illuminated world, the world of the screen. This situation is a metaphor for
> the nature of our own vision. In the very process of seeing, our own skull is
> like a dark theatre, and the world we see in front of us is in a sense a
> screen. We watch the world from the dark theatre of our skull.[17]

An intermedial complex we should call techno-phenomenological articulates
the strongly analogical strata of the material 'black-and-white' filmstrip,
the projected flickering image, the spectatorial condition in-between light

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[14] (Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 7)
[15] (Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, 15)
[16] (Dorsky, *Devotional Cinema*, 31)
[17] (Dorsky, *Devotional Cinema*, 26)

and shadow, and the ontophenomenological constitution of human perception. Far from being casual, this repetition feeds back a reciprocal reinforcement of each factor. The latter is at the core of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, since only the blindness of the *punctum cæcum* enables vision, and of his ontology of the being-in-the-world, as visibility is enabled by, and through, the invisible as the absolute negative (that is the originarily non-presentable) of the visible. Without the blindness of being (its negativity), the blindness of the eye (its cecity), the blindness of light (its intermittence), the blindness of the movie theatre (its acosmic darkness), and the blindness of the filmstrip (its bla(n)kness, synchronized with the projector's shutter which closes the gate in order to obturate the light beaming, at the pace of a 48th of a second each, during the transition between the 24x a second frames), there would be no image, no film, no perception, no world, no being.

And it is precisely at this unprecedented crossroads that Guy Debord intervenes. For the first and only time in history, he grasps that blackness-darkness has no form, no meaning and no presentation. These are not the over-significant symbols of Goya, Poe or van Gogh; they are not Kubrick's empty signifier and astonishing cypher; it is not the brilliant black hole concealing the whiteness of infinity, like the Suprematist Zero/Icon; and it is certainly not the night of time undoing backwards the six days of the Creation (like the irrevocable extinction of everything that, in Tarr's cinematographic testament, is happening to mankind to whom, in the end, is still the Word—and a potato, perhaps). They are not the mystical "nada de nada de nada" of Juan de la Cruz's 'noche oscura;' not the apophatic turn of theology, and even less the supra-ontological Neoplatonic One—not, at least, as part of a film, whose cinematic materiality transcends all abrogated transcendence. And they could perhaps stand for the Hegelian 'strenuous work of the negative,' were it not for the cinematic materiality of the Situation itself, which refuses either to become a dialectical tool or to crumble as abstract unilaterality. Its attentiveness is not even that of a yogi's void or of a Cagean 'silence' as a modality of listening and a modulation of resilient sound. Debord's theoretical soulmate is perhaps Adorno, but we must pass over in silence, here, the all too proliferous affinities between the author of *In girum immus nocte et consumimur igni* and the author of *Methexis am Finsteren*, the author of *Hurlements*… and the one of *Negative Dialectics*.

Ingmar Bergman famously put and resolved the equation in his film *Persona* (1966). A strong media-determinist, he employed cinema to both

amplify, as "impostor," and redeem, as "conjurer," its techno-ontological original sin:

> (…) if I see a film which has a running time of one hour, I sit through twenty-seven minutes in complete darkness—the blankness between frames. When I show a film, I am guilty of deceit. (…) Thus, I am either an impostor or (…) a conjurer.[18]

In the middle of light and image—darkness and void; in the middle of the face, the blurred fate of a whitish dissolution; in the middle of presence and being—"nothing(ness)," the sole (anti-)word of the 'silent mover' Elisabet Vogler. Blank, blank, blank. The unsurpassable film-philosophical Prologue had from the outset staged the conceptual framework; spectral creatures are animated like cartoons out of their photo-mortuary rigidity before the projector of divine light that creates the world and crucifies it on the way; and, within that limbo, somewhat Pirandellian, they change positions with the actual living through the translucid, mysterious divide of the screen. Bergman's first choice of a title for his masterwork was 'Cinematography.' *Persona*, as a double-titled charade, is a treatise on the insanely bi-univocal relation between the human, at narrative level—its face, its being, its impossible truth—and cinemato-graphism at medial and semiotic levels—its overblown close-ups, its contraption. If, in the experimental laboratory of the movie theatre, 'the great chain of Being' is unravelled as ontological imposture, as porous being impregnated by the negative linkage of non-being, the faithful magician must comply simultaneously with two opposite designs: to help the cinematic illusion of a seamless world-as-image to stand (on a business-as-usual basis); *and* to bring the contrivance to the forefront. The overlapping faces, the metaleptic setting on fire of the filmic material itself, the evanescence of sense and meaning all-over, are examples of the latter. Bergman discovered that cinema's meontology is the best suitable instrument to deal with existence's fundamental meontology: in which case it would be more rigorous to coin his approach as a media-parallelism, working both ways, rather than a reductive media-determinism.

Now, theoretically, Bergman did formulate the correct *thaûma*. Half of the time, film, like being, is absolute darkness (an abyss, not grounded, ontological, not ontic, which is the very feature that keeps recurring through, and deeply pervades, his entire opus, under the guise of existential unsettlement). However, he shied away from realizing this cinematically.

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[18] (Bergman, *Four Screenplays of Ingmar Bergman*, 15)

Like Dorsky, he converts this temporal-ontological discontinuity into self-referential illusion, be it as intermittence or as narrative/imagetic crisis. Unlike Mulvey, Bergson or Deleuze, reluctant as they are to admit non-being, he delves into it like a child or a knight armed only with his lightsabre, the projector in 'the dark room;' but then, fearful, Christian to the bone, he keeps the world lit and darkness apart. Not so Debord, *in imo noctis*, if the detournement is allowed. Debord does not *translate*; he does not 'mediate' into spectacle the doings of the material device. He directly *transfers* the crude truthfulness of the apparatuses chain (filmstrip, camera, projector, screen), in all the possible harshness of an anti-media strategy by (re)mediating such mediation, by revising the process as such through the very resources of the process; in sum, by letting cinema enter into the possession of itself, as Situation, the same way human beings should 'become themselves' within the glory of unencumbered life, and by undoing the 'pure cinematics' of the image to the very bulk of its becoming-image, via an accrued act of media-consciousness, such transfer is operated. Cinema is the ethical fork par excellence: it either *translates* itself, in the sense of an intra-logic operation into Spectacle, through simple mediation/negation, or *transfers* itself in the sense of the *Entäusserung*, the self-extrapositioning of the Logical Idea as Reality into Situation, through a speculative mediation of mediation.

The master of the former would be Garrett Stewart.[19] The supporters of the latter, as accomplished by Debord's move beyond Hegelian idealism, are Feuerbach and Marx. Quoting from the first of these authors:

> Narratography would pinpoint instead the medial tension (again in both senses of medial: material and mediatory) around which is pivoted—and renegotiated the dyad of representation versus narration. This is where a narratography of the filmic within the cinematic fastens on the photogrammatic actual rather than the projected virtual [untrue: the cinematic projection synchronizes itself with that actual[20]]. Thus can it track, more definitively than otherwise, such eruptions of medium into imaged plot. (…) For at such moments the constituents of the medium—rather than the epiphenomena of stylistic enhancement—surface from

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[19] See the two works of Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time. Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (Chicago and London, Chicago University Press, 2007); and *Between Film and Screen. Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago and London, Chicago University Press, 1999).

[20] My comment.

within the image precisely as the narrative form of that image's representational work.[21]

Stewart's '*narratography*,' as both correlated discipline and object, designates the graphic (re)inscription of the underlying medium's formal constitutive structure at the emergent level of the narrative content, both in imagetic-representational and in plot-wise linguistic terms; the neologism refers at once both to the object of study and to the discipline that studies it (like geography). Trains, for example, as a quintessential avatar, provide unparalleled cinematic self-referential ambiences; dark tunnels stand to intermittent railways just as car windows are to mysterious vanishings *during* the interspaces. Outwards as well as inwards, the moving train is the medial image for the strong sense of film's metonymy between strip and plot. The train does not limit itself to be there as a contingent vehicle for transportation; it tells a story. But the plot's story is, at another level, telling a second story; it is retelling the medium's story. The train travel is as much a literal part of the story, as the story is embedded in its metaphor, the Travel; but meanwhile they are both 'filming,' somewhat anamorphically, the very film they are cast into, that is, the very way they are presented by, and structurally as, a filmed image. Cinematic trains inscribe the latent filmstrip and its convoy of windowed frames into, and as, patent image. Trains as such appear in cinema (also) as cinema.

Debord limits himself to carry this assumption one step further: cinema appears in cinema solely as cinema. And, conversely, it appears *as* cinema. This 'idealistic' appearance appears *in* cinemas, in the material Situation of cinema theatres visited by the everyday moviegoer. Going to *the* cinema, not 'to see a movie,' becomes now the *actus communis* of both cinema and the Situationist moviegoer—as a unique Situation, they are one.

This crucial distinction is made among the various manners (from Bergman or Stewart to Debord) under which the innermost kernel of cinema reaches patency, as well as the way an image comes to be image (connecting a general, onto-historic-psychic, archaeological survey with the unique filmic variety); an image makes for *Hurlements*' strict singularity even within Debord's production, and thus needs to be clarified still further.

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[21] (Stewart, *Framed Time*, 30)

Praxis, not representation: the *imago* as material(ist) Situation

Valid for both filmic and digital medium-determinacy, Garrett Stewart's narratography, as the inner dynamic surfacing of the structure of the medium inscribing itself at narrative and semiotic levels, explores in the former case, the filmic (the role not only of the photographic, positive basis of the cinematic, but also and mainly the inflow of its non-photographic, '*negative* continuity,' as well as their unmistakeable interplay, on the resulting phenomenon onscreen).

Already in Stewart, the paradoxical role of the interstitial negative image and of the image as connective gap is fontal in film and emanates 'ontologically' (*narratographically*) from the very constitution *of* the medium as an immanent operation of self-inscription. This is to say, it does not step in as some external shape added *by* the medium. In contrast to Boutades's daughter's drawing of the silhouette, where the negative of the image is image-like and takes on a recognizable shape, be it the traditional Icon or its squared eclipse "in our time," it amounts but to the mimetic shadow. All plastic media, all figurative arts, literature or poetry included, reify the negative. Evennon-figurative geometrical or 'informal' shapes still allocate positive morphisms, separate entities. Only cinema should be able to present the latter as a pure function directly, for it is itself made of the stuff. But even cinema takes, almost without exception, the detour of an indirect presentation through objectual stand-ins, like tunnels….

What the four aforementioned authors have in common is the awareness that the projector amplifies the medium no less than the message, often intertwiningly, and a film theory is firmly anchored therein. What is magnified and modelled into cinematic significance and manifest screening is the alternation of frames and blanks (the mystery of the indispensable darkness as 'the Negative at work,' the relationship between stills, their movement and their succession, the co-original photographic factor in cinema and cinematic factor in the medium-specific photogram). In this vein, Dorsky's view would correspond to a climatic amplification, the oneiric twinkling of intermittence; Stewart's corresponds to a semiological-narratological one, the semiotic equivalence of train and filmstrip; Bergman's corresponds to a magician's or conjurer's play with the "necessary illusion," in Lloyd Michaels' famous saying; and Mulvey's corresponds to a metacinematic self-reflexive amplification where marked narrative occurrences turn their gaze to their photographic background,

restlessly popping up at the living surface of events like a swarm of the undead.

Debord proceeds by blocks of raw materiality. The frame is projected as frame, undiscernibly as colour and light (the blanks between frames, as black darkness). Their size on the filmstrip and time-lapse while being projected are magnified *ad nauseam* and gives rise to a continuum of developed and undeveloped celluloid stripe exploding against the screen as image. But it is moving image, though, for movement and time are projected and amplified too. The image records its own micro-movements and variable intensity, and the space is suspended nowhere else than from time awaiting itself, offering the duration of nothing else besides duration. As it goes for the two photographic modes, developed and undeveloped, they merely express the alternate homogeneity of frame and interspace and celebrate cinema's alchemistic conversion of discrete into continuous.

Thus described, such a phantasmagory could very well correspond to an abstract, or even to a dialectical, Logic. But this Logic is a pure categorial functioning of the cinematic factors, elements and parameters, which is *projected* as event, materialized outside itself. What is more, just like Hegel's 'absolute idea,' it bears as its innermost constitution a characteristic outwards proclivity. Not only does this medium-rooted Logic mediate the spectacular mediation of cinema (thus consisting of a dialectical mediation of the logic of the spectacle, that is, a mediation of that mediation, achieved *not* by laying bare the process of image-making, because Debord's film is *not* 'metacinematic' but rather, *verbi gratia*, 'selfcinematic') but by thematizing its pure logic and submitting the latter to a second, immanent, not abstract, logic, thus it results in a dialectical logic of logic, or a 'science of logic.' Additionally, this 'science of logic' also consists of its own self-realization.

Feuerbach's, and later Marx's criticism of the Hegelian speculative jump from 'the Logical' to *Realphilosophie* is well-known: the passage from the formal to the real takes place within, and in terms of the idealistic realm of pure thinking,[22] and reminds us of the dreamer who dreams he has just awoken. Apparently, Debord's 'Modernist' hyper-abstraction that *Hurlements*… seems to showcase would provide a fatal illustration of this formidably adversative theoretical remark. The screen would merely render sensible the most disincarnated intelligible as such, in this case.

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[22] For this crucial ingredient in Debord's intellectual scaffolding (not its cinematic bearing), see (Seddiki, *Guy Debord automythographe*, 49-54)

Debord risks to be negotiating here the sharp edge that cuts across idealism and materialism. But there cannot possibly ever exist such thing as a movie-watcher of this film, calmly contemplating the 'logic-become-reality' on the screen. The sheer 'Sadean' overflow concerns rather the active moviegoer to whom it is unbearably happening, and who undergoes the cruellest situation in his daily life; indeed, the same Situation the twenty-year-old Debord put himself in, namely, to face in deepest dissent and absolute detournement, all alone, the entire history of film and the society of the spectacle, and to make this unique event the stuff of his entire life.

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