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**The (Un)Scene of Memory: Energetic Theory and
Representation in Theatre and Film**

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DPhil English

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September 2010

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Graeme G Pedlingham – English DPhil

The (Un)Scene of Memory: Energetic Theory and Representation in Theatre and Film

Summary

The wager of this thesis is that, firstly, there exists an intrinsic relationship between memory and representation in visual performative media and, secondly, that a referential, Aristotelian conception of memory is made problematic by these same visual media. There are aspects within the ontology of both theatre and film, the specific media examined, which resist the model of representation that this memory constitutes. It is my contention that there is an alternative conception of memory, more appropriate to the difficulties that theatre and film present, which enables another way of understanding these media. This *other* memory is derived from the distinction in Freud's work between psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics, and as an energetics. I draw upon an 'energetic' conception of memory as the foundation for an energetic approach to theatre and film. In the first chapter I enunciate this distinction in Freud's work, tracing his energetic model from the *Project* of 1895 to the role of affect in the metapsychological papers, before moving to its elaboration by later psychoanalysts (including André Green, Christopher Bollas and César and Sára Botella). For the second chapter, I relate this psychoanalytic discussion to poststructuralist theory, which Freudian energetics has considerably influenced. This is examined through Jacques Derrida's interpretation of Freud's work on memory, and Jean-François Lyotard's own philosophy of energetics (with which much of my work is in dialogue). The third and fourth chapters turn to theatre and film respectively. Each chapter initially explores the aspects of each medium that complicate the more familiar notion of referential memory as a relevant model of representation. I then establish how these same points of difficulty demonstrate an affinity with an energetic approach, opening the possibility of a new way of thinking theatre and film through memory, and of thinking memory through these visual media. A comparative approach is taken to identify and articulate the distinctiveness of these particular media, through their unique interactions with energetic theory. Looking ahead, this aims to provide the foundation for developing a means of addressing emergent visual media (particularly the videogame), which similarly complicates hermeneutic readings, based upon a study of their most significant antecedents: theatre and film.

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Preface: Setting the (Un)Scene

Memory. The strangeness of this concept is our way in. But, not a concept, no, only ever notional, speculative, on the border of... 'A concept' would confer a sense of unity, stability, singularity: the resistance to these qualities makes memory, and makes memory our way in. Our way into where?

Let us start with a beginning. The evolution of the multifaceted, and multi-appellated, grouping of visual media that originate with, and are defined through, their application of digital, virtual and computer-based technologies challenge the practices of visual analysis, across the disciplines of 'visual studies'. Whilst this evolution is spoken of with much hyperbole, being heralded equally in tones of acclamation and condemnation, it remains a decidedly under-theorised phenomenon. We are certainly witnessing the emergence of a new, and composite, visual art-form, even though its shape has not yet cooled from the forge, if, indeed, it ever will. The necessary vagueness of 'new visual media' is perhaps the best approximation of a referent for it at this stage: an unashamedly non-committal term that reflects the spirit of the media that it signifies well. However, it is not only the inevitable shift in methods of reception, which is always necessitated by the development of a new genre, practice, or medium, that raises questions for criticism here, but also the nature of 'new visual media' themselves. Many of these media are spoken of as 'ephemeral' and 'transient'. This is partly due to the constantly changing technologies upon which they draw, and partly due to their frequent actualisation as one-off events, often within 'cyberspace', and often leaving no material record or detritus. However, they are also well deserved epithets owing to the challenges posed by these media for 'representation'. The representative function is complicated in new visual media, not least by their, only ever tangential, relationship with authenticity: the images that they create are, or at least can be, entirely fabricated. This is not an unheard of condition in visual studies. However, the degree to which this fabrication can be made indistinguishable from 'real world' perceptions is unprecedented, and becoming increasingly emphatic.

Whilst the image is 'representative' on one level, this is only ever secondary in new visual media. There are no spectators in these media forms, only participants. Or so it is claimed. As Auriea Harvey and Michaël Samyn, new media artists and directors of

independent videogame developer Tale of Tales, state in their ‘Realtime Art Manifesto’: ‘The user is not disembodied in virtual space / but takes the body into the experience.’¹ These media are positioned as *experiences*. And, as such, they are both instantaneous, and determinedly individual and subjective. This creates problems for critical responses that focus upon unpicking the meanings, or analysing the detail, of a single image or sequence of images. The ‘image’ here is no ‘fixed’ or repeatable object, for the participant-spectator *enters the world of the image* directly and becomes a part of it.

Perhaps the closest analogy we can find to this peculiar state of affairs is the experience of the first audiences of cinema. We have frequent descriptions of, for example, the apprehension felt at being splashed by water spraying indiscriminately from a garden-hose on screen,² and, of course, the apocryphal siderodromophobia that the Lumière brothers presumably traumatised into their first unfortunate spectators of 1895.³ Whilst the train does not change, the exact same image is there on film for us to view even now, the fear of those viewing it for the first time in the Paris Grand Café was a fear of being too close to the image: of the image entering the world of the human, of the human and the image sharing one world. As an observer for the *Cincinnati, Ohio, Star* wrote, and as quoted in advertising for the Edison Kinetophone, ‘one feels that he had been in another world.’⁴ With new visual media, it is, in a converse movement but to a similar effect, the participant-spectator that enters the other world of the image, becomes one with it. It is in this sense that the ‘transience’ and ‘ephemerality’ of these media challenge visual studies: there is no distance between subject and object. Whilst predominantly visual, they are ‘felt’ with immediacy. Dream-like, they are to be viewed, but primarily *traversed*. They are representative, but also experienced.

Despite their apparently revolutionary status, I would argue that new visual media do not appear *ex nihilo* but are, more accurately, an evolution. Both in terms of their formal organisation, and their ontological characteristics (particularly in reference to those that

¹ Auriea Harvey, & Michaël Samyn, ‘Realtime Art Manifesto’ (2006) <[http://tale-of-
tales.com/tales/RAM.html](http://tale-of-
tales.com/tales/RAM.html)> [accessed 10 November 2009].

² As Maxim Gorky states: “You think the spray is going to hit you too, and instinctively shrink back”. Maxim Gorky, ‘Review of the Lumière Programme at Nizhni-Novgorod Fair’, *Nizhegorodski listok*, 4 July 1896.

³ Martin Loiperdinger provides a thought-provoking discussion concerning the truth of this reaction, and its status as cinema’s ‘founding-myth’. However, there is enough primary evidence to support, if not this occurrence or this degree, then a similar hesitation and automatic response being provoked by other early film screenings.

⁴ The American Talking Picture Company, ‘Promotional material for the Edison Kinetophone’, 1895.

we have so far identified), new visual media find their antecedents, self-consciously and often by self-definition, in the practices and discourses of theatre and cinema. Of course, these are not the only influences. We can also consider television, painting, geography and architecture as just some of the fields which could be said to contribute towards the shaping of new visual media. However, theatre and cinema remain the most significant influences, not only through their shared constitution as the visual in movement, but also through the differing forms of spectator-relationship which they establish, through their mutual concern with the concept of presence/absence, used so often as the basis of their definitions and distinction, and through their play on the borders of reality and fantasy.

It is, then, one of the objectives of this study to provide a theoretical basis that has the potential for addressing new visual media in their originality. But the method that I follow in doing this, is to interrogate the processes and characteristics of theatre and cinema that challenge, that resist, modes of interpretation which seek to ‘uncover’ absent and external meanings, or that position the spectator as passive ‘receiver’ of the image. Through this strategy I seek to develop an approach that is both more suited to engaging with the ‘difficulties’ and ‘problems’ that the ‘progenitor’ media, theatre and cinema, present for interpretation, and is, consequently, better able to respond to the demand that new visual media seem to make for a radically alternative way of thinking them.

I suggest that it is through an examination into the nature and function of ‘memory’ that we will be able to begin to define a model that allows us to formulate such an approach. Why memory? This would seem to be the most immediate question when presented with such an assertion. Firstly, I find memory to be the most productive means through which to think visual representation due to the intrinsic relationship between them. This is a connection with an exceedingly long history, stretching back to the ‘mnemotechnics’ of the ancient Greeks, if not further, and discussed most eloquently by Frances A. Yates in her classic work *The Art of Memory*. In this she states, reflecting upon the opinions of her friend Gertrude Bing, that: ‘the problems of the mental image, of the activation of images, of the grasp of reality through images [are] problems ever

present in the history of the art of memory'.⁵ This connection between memory and the image is the foundation for, as Yates terms it, the 'fruitful interaction between the art of memory and the visual arts'.⁶ I would suggest that memory can be seen as an archetypal model for practices of visual representation, for how we think visual representation, due, at least in part, to its role in processes of representation in the psyche. As Freud has noted repeatedly, mnemonic representation works primarily through, privileges, the visual. A point that we shall come to when discussing his theories in greater detail. And, perhaps, the most prevalent, certainly the most vivid, form of visual representation in the normal functioning of the psyche is, Freud tells us, constituted through mnemonic images. We speak, of course, of the dream. As Jacques Derrida has said, 'expression in dreams... valorizes visibility'.⁷ It is thus quite appropriate for us to examine the practices of representation in visual media through memory, the first mode of visual representation that becomes known to us.

Secondly, memory provides a model for interpretive approaches, approaches that seek to recover a meaning, a prior signification, situated elsewhere. However, *memory can also be thought otherwise*. It offers the potential for a different model through which to approach visual media. This is a study of memory. But, then, it is also not a study of 'memory'. For we are working with a concept of memory that may be unfamiliar, that is little theorised, and never theorised in a definitive sense (I would argue), yet its influence has been substantial. We name this an 'energetic memory'. It is part of the wager of this work to bring this mnemonic conception out of obscurity, and demonstrate its value, particularly in the context of emerging or problematic modes of representation that challenge formerly hegemonic interpretive models.

In the first chapter we are concerned with elaborating the nature of an energetic memory. It is a concept derived, ultimately, from Freud, and is complicit with the demarcation that can be made in his thought between a 'hermeneutics', a theory of psychoanalysis that emphasises interpretation, and an energetics, a psychoanalysis that works with a 'dynamic' account of the psyche, that posits psychical processes in terms of an 'economics' of energy, a movement of intensities, and affective forces. Chapter 1

⁵ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p.14.

⁶ Yates, p.177.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978; repr. 2001), p.277.

describes Freud's energetic psychoanalysis, the relation that it has to a hermeneutics, and finds memory, which could be thought of as intrinsically associated with a hermeneutics due to its role as a 'repository' of the past, to be fundamental in Freud's presentation of the energetic. The second part of Chapter 1 explores the work of four contemporary psychoanalysts: André Green, Christopher Bollas, and Césaire and Sára Botella. Each of these has developed theories and practices for working with energetic aspects of the psyche. Through a close reading of some of the key elements of their theories, we further develop our understanding of the nature of the energetic, and some of the psychoanalytic concepts that are associated with it (such as 'negative hallucination'), whilst also beginning to see how an energetic approach can be used as a mode of response, here in the psychoanalytic situation.

In Chapter 2, we move on to examine the influence of an energetics, and its role in poststructuralist theory, in particular. We explore how a psychoanalytic theory of energetics has been thought, to some extent integrated, and most of all re-shaped by certain poststructuralist critical approaches. In the first instance we consider Derrida's treatment of energetics in his work *Writing and Difference*, its place within his depiction of a 'psychical writing', his discussion of the relation between 'force' and 'signification', and the consequences that this has for critical approaches to representation. In the second, we turn to the work of Jean-François Lyotard, who has written extensively on energetics and representation, but whose primary engagements with it occur at approximately the same moment, gravitating around his work *Libidinal Economy* (1974). As well as paying close attention to this text, amongst others, we shall also be looking in particular detail at his paper 'The Tooth, The Palm' (1973), as a self-acknowledged attempt to use energetic theory as a way of conceiving of theatre. It also provides one of the clearest explications of the way in which an energetic approach can work. This can be understood, as I argue, by reading this paper not, as Lyotard intends it, as a paradigm for a *practice* of theatre, but as an exposition of a mode for responding to, for *thinking* theatre. The final section of this chapter seeks to both summarise how we can understand an energetic conception of memory, and introduce its potential role in opening a model through which we can approach visual media energetically.

We begin to examine how an energetic approach can relate to specific forms of visual media, through looking at theatricality in Chapter 3. The structure of this chapter opens

with an exploration of recent studies looking at the relationship between memory and theatre, before moving on to focus upon a single element of theatricality. In the first part of Chapter 3, this element is ‘ontological coincidence’: the identity of the theatrical object and the theatrical image, the means of representation and the representation itself. We discuss this condition in terms of, what we can call, a ‘hermeneutic’ memory, a conception of memory as repository, as having a referential function, finding that it challenges such a conception and, finally, reveals it to be insufficient for this element of theatricality. Rather, ‘ontological coincidence’ aligns more appropriately with an energetic approach, and we seek to demonstrate how this approach can engage with ontological coincidence, through the model of hysteria. We show how ontological coincidence is closely related to ‘hysterical conversion’, and detail the energetic processes involved in this psychoanalytic concept, to elucidate how an energetics can engage with the ontological coincidence of theatricality. In Chapter 3, Part 2, we explore a further element of theatricality, through the same structure, this being what I term ‘elision’, which is discussed in reference to the energetics of ‘negative hallucination’. This reinforces the sense that an energetic approach has a wide purchase upon theatricality, having the potential to elucidate multiple aspects that resist or make difficult interpretive schemas.

However, we should not think that an energetics is restricted to, or even has a particular affinity with, theatricality. Chapter 4 involves an analysis of the filmic relation to memory, finding that aspects of the filmic complicate a ‘replicative’ sense of memory just as theatricality can. However, this is presented in a somewhat different way, through a discussion of the filmic relation to reality, and the perception of film as a hypomnesic medium, a medium of ‘mechanical reproduction’. Such a conception is discovered to be deeply problematic, not only upon grounds of suitability, but also ethically. An energetic approach enables an alternative way of ‘experiencing’ film, and this is theorised through a close reading of ‘haptic visuality’ in dialogue with Roland Barthes’s conception of ‘obtuse meaning’ and Lyotard’s ‘acinema’. The means by which we relate an energetics and the filmic, it will be seen, is of a different register than that through which we engaged with theatricality. And this reflects the need for adaptation in the method of approach, dependent upon the medium with which it is engaged.

This is an important point, as there is a potential danger in our kind of methodology: we may seem to teeter on the edge of homogenizing the media with which we are dealing. We may seem to be suggesting that a single approach, a single way of thinking, is equally appropriate for theatre and cinema, and consequently new visual media: that their differences can be disregarded and each medium freely compared through one theoretical perspective. What we are proposing is diametrically opposed to this. By examining the interaction between medium and theory we aim to develop an original way of comparing and contrasting each medium in its uniqueness. Thinking each medium *through* an energetic conception of memory does not only allow us to understand the nature of the medium differently, with new insight, but also requires us to re-shape our theory *of* energetics, memory and representation as we do so. Throughout our examinations of theatre and film it will be seen that we are holding in tension two conceptions of memory. These should not be thought of as mutually exclusive, and we make the point that these are alternative *perspectives* upon the relevant medium. They perform alternative functions, and are suited differently to different tasks. Our discussions of an energetic approach are, implicitly and explicitly, working with a model of energetic memory, just as ‘interpretive’ approaches are necessarily associated with a model of ‘referential’, ‘replicative’ memory.

Throughout this work our aim, it should be noted, is not so much to provide particular examples of an energetic approach, comprehensively defined and applied. Rather, it is to provoke a certain ‘way of thinking’, to ‘re-orientate’ thinking, so as to take account of the originality of the energetic within visual media. Often we will be drawing upon analogies and comparisons to gain insights into the processes and models that we are working with, due to the fact that they often seem to resist, or ‘slip away’ from, any conclusive verbal description or containment. This is true not only of the energetic, but also of the ‘theatrical’ and the ‘filmic’, which extend beyond the theatre and the cinema. They are constantly over-spilling any specific term or definition. But this condition is of the nature of the energetic, and it is an integral part of its value in the context in which we are situating it. For these reasons, this work is positioned very much as a speculative endeavour. It is an opening, a challenge, in which we do not seek an answer, but rather begin to discover how to ask the question.

Chapter 1: An Energetic Psychoanalysis: Images, Memory and Affective 'Interpretation'

1.i Freud and the Theory of an Energetic Approach

The importance of memory in any theory of psychoanalysis is difficult to overstate. Freud himself tells us that ‘a psychological theory deserving any consideration must furnish an explanation of ‘memory’.’⁸ Despite this, Freud himself never gave a full and coherent theory of memory. It is, however, a major preoccupation throughout his entire body of work and, I would suggest, becomes virtually an obsession in that part of his *oeuvre* which is associated with, what has been termed,⁹ an ‘energetic’ approach. Firstly, let us examine what is meant by this idea of the ‘energetic’, and what such an approach is held in distinction from. Freud’s theories can be seen as embracing two separate, yet inter-connected, modes of thought: the ‘energetic’ and the ‘hermeneutic’. They create a tension at the heart of psychoanalysis, with Freud discernibly oscillating between each pole, sometimes prioritizing one, sometimes the other, but always the less favoured lurks in the shadow of the preferred. They can never be entirely dissociated. The relation between these two approaches has been addressed perhaps most comprehensively by Paul Ricoeur in his work *Freud & Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, and he succinctly summarises this duality within Freud’s thought early on:

Freud’s writings present themselves as a mixed or even ambiguous discourse, which at times states conflicts of force subject to an energetics, at times relations of meaning subject to a hermeneutics.¹⁰

Freud alternates between emphasising a conception of the psyche based upon the movement of forces, comprised of ‘intensities’ or ‘quantities’ of energy and their interactions, and a project of interpretation, in which psychoanalysis is seen as a method for discovering hidden meanings and wishes ‘behind’ symptoms. The ‘energetic’

⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 1* (SE 1), ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1966; repr. 2001), p.299.

⁹ Some examples of note for their use of this term include, as referenced shortly below, Paul Ricoeur (particularly in *Freud & Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*), and, as discussed at length in Chapter 2, Jean-François Lyotard.

¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud & Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Yale University Press, 1970), p.65.

approach is most closely aligned with, what Freud terms, an ‘economic’ perspective: this is theorised in the triple division of psychical processes, which Freud undertakes as part of his ‘metapsychology’ (the other divisions being the ‘dynamic’ and the ‘topological’). It is crucial, for an understanding of the ‘energetic’, with which we are most concerned here, to examine closely Freud’s theorisation of the ‘economic’, through which we can see the central role that is accorded to memory. The foundational text and example *par excellence*, in respect to the economic conception, is Freud’s early work, the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895). And I would go so far as to say that a concern with defining the workings of memory is not only the ‘sub-text’ here, but also Freud’s principal motivation.

The crucial concept outlined in this work is that of Q , Freud’s shorthand for ‘Quantity’. Whilst the *Project* is significantly prior to the metapsychological works, the concept of Q is clearly the forerunner, indeed the early equivalent, of the ‘economic’ to which Freud later refers.¹¹ The quantity being referred to through this designation is ‘general’, ‘exogenous quantity’.¹² It is the ‘energy’ of stimuli which come from the outside world ‘into’ the psychical apparatus, via the body’s nervous system, and is of a greater magnitude than the second form of quantity distinguished by Freud: $Q\dot{\eta}$. $Q\dot{\eta}$ is ‘endogenous’ energy at an ‘inter-cellular’ level, within the psychic structure. It works at a far smaller scale, and is the ‘energy’, ‘excitation’ or ‘cathexis’ which moves across, or ‘fills’, neurones. It is the aim of the nervous system to ‘discharge’ both of these quantities, and attempt to achieve ‘inertia’. This endeavour is thwarted only by the need for the organism to retain a certain amount of $Q\dot{\eta}$ so as to perform actions necessitated by the ‘*exigencies of life*’¹³ (i.e. hunger). Despite this requirement, the aim of the system is to maintain the quantity ‘stored’ at a low and constant level. The first of many ambiguities and peculiarities, which proliferate throughout Freud’s depiction of the economic perspective, is to be found with this notion of ‘quantity’. For Freud, by his own admission, is unable to define the precise nature of quantity. Whilst he is able to recognise that it is ‘capable of increase, diminution, displacement and discharge’, he concedes that ‘we have no means

¹¹ This is indicated by James Strachey when he states that: ‘We shall be right therefore in regarding our enigmatic Q , whatever its ultimate nature, as the progenitor of one of the three fundamental factors in metapsychology [that is, the economic].’ (Freud, SE 1, p.397).

¹² Freud, SE 1, p.306.

¹³ Freud, SE 1, p.297.

of measuring it'.¹⁴ Indeed, quantity is frequently referred to as being un-measurable, or 'unknown'. As Céline Surprenant has pointed out:

Rather than clarifying the many understandings of quantity in his theory, Freud insisted on their indefiniteness, for unconscious processes take place 'between quotas of energy in some unimaginable substratum'.¹⁵

With these ideas, 'unknown', 'unimaginable', 'indefinite', in mind regarding the strange nature of quantity, we shall leave it here, momentarily, for later reference.

Quantity both flows across and cathects ('cathexis', or '*Besetzung*', literally meaning 'to occupy', with some militaristic associations etymologically) the neurones, which Freud identifies, based as he states on 'recent histology', as making up the nervous system. The characteristics of these neurones are also of great importance to the economic theory, for their methods of interaction with $Q\dot{\eta}$. Freud divides the neurones into two (and later three¹⁶) kinds: the permeable neurones (ϕ), and the impermeable ones (Ψ). These are determined by the attributes of their respective 'contact-barriers'. The permeable neurones are entirely freely traversable by excitation (Quantity): they are 'those which allow $Q\dot{\eta}$ to pass through them as though they had no contact-barriers and which, accordingly, after each passage of excitation are in the same state as before'.¹⁷ Conversely, the impermeable neurones offer resistance to this passage, and are thus altered by it. Their 'contact-barriers make themselves felt, so that they only allow $Q\dot{\eta}$ to pass through with difficulty or partially... [they] may, after each excitation, be in a different state from before'.¹⁸ The image frequently evoked for the action of $Q\dot{\eta}$ forcibly crossing the Ψ neurones is that of 'path-breaking', and it is a most appropriate one. For the Ψ neurone will permanently bear the mark of increased permeability after a first 'conduction' of excitation through it. This is termed by Freud as the process of

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 3* (SE 3), ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1962; repr. 2001), p.60. Also cf. Freud, SE 1, p.305.

¹⁵ Céline Surprenant, *Freud: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London & New York: Continuum Books, 2008), p. 124. Freud quoted from: SE 22, p.90.

¹⁶ The third being the ω neurones, which are associated with consciousness. They are perceptual neurones, which have no 'memory', and 'furnish only qualities', allowing no access to quantities. Whilst quantity has no direct contact with ω neurones, they do 'appropriate the period of excitation'. They are affected by the duration and temporality of quantity, which can thereby be 'echoed' in consciousness as quality.

¹⁷ Freud, SE 1, p.299.

¹⁸ Freud, SE 1, p.299.

‘differentiation’: he surmises that there must be a differentiation in conductive capacity within neurones caused by the conduction itself. A first conduction across the neurone creates an ‘improved conductive capacity for subsequent conduction’.¹⁹ Essentially, the neurone ‘remembers’ this first conduction in the form of a ‘path’ of more conductive material, along which repeated conductions will find it easier and more expedient to travel. As they do so, they increase conductivity, which is determined by both the magnitude of excitation and the frequency of its repetition. This is the Ψ neurone’s degree of ‘facilitation’.

Facilitations are different between neurones, owing to the differing amounts of excitation which originally breaks a path across them, the frequency with which this excitation is repeated, and the differing levels of resistance which the Ψ neurones offer. The ‘capacity’ of the neurone ‘for being permanently altered’ and, crucially, the ‘differences in the facilitations between the Ψ neurones’²⁰ are the fundamental and defining features that allow the ‘representation of memory’. Without this difference between facilitations in the Ψ neurones, if facilitation were equal across the system, memory could not function or, indeed, exist. I would suggest that Freud gives *memory* the role of justifying, as purpose and evidence for, his principal ideas on neuronal theory. That is, the classification of distinct types of neurone and the concept of facilitation. From this perspective, we can view the ‘economic’ approach as being, to a large degree, focused upon providing an ‘explanation’ for memory. Such an assertion is reinforced by the placing of memory in the *Project conceptually* ‘between’ the more mechanistic theories, and the expansion in scope to address wider functions and components of the psyche. Memory often acts as a ‘bridge’ linking the two. A case in point is directly provided by Freud when he discusses the impermeable neurones as being ‘the vehicles of memory and so probably of psychical processes in general.’²¹ This conceptual role is borne out by the directions then pursued in the *Project*. Memory is the starting point, in the economic, for Freud to develop the mechanistic theories towards other ‘psychical processes’.

¹⁹ Freud, SE 1, p.299.

²⁰ Freud, SE 1, p.300.

²¹ Freud, SE 1, p.300.

1.i.i Instinct & Affect

We shall move our investigation of Freud's economic approach on now from these early, preparatory formulations to two closely related subjects: the 'affect', and the 'drive' or 'instinct'.²² These are key topics for the 'energetic' approach, being, as Surprenant states, 'the elements of Freud that appear most biological... [and] are points of reference for debating whether one should develop an hermeneutic and/or an economic, determinist understanding of psychoanalysis.'²³ Both the instinct and affect are, as with much of the economic theory, fraught with ambiguity and obscurity, particularly when we attempt to think their status as, and in relation to, representation. The most sustained discussions of the instinct that Freud provides us with are in his metapsychological papers of 1915. Here, in 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', he gives us a suitably opaque definition of the instinct, which highlights some of its difficulties:

An 'instinct' appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind.²⁴

This clearly situates the source of the instinct with the endogenous (somatic) excitations, those excitations detailed in the *Project*, and referred to there as $Q\dot{h}$.²⁵ Here, the instinct begins to become problematic. Just as $Q\dot{h}$ cannot enter consciousness, 'the ω neurones are incapable of receiving $Q\dot{h}$ ',²⁶ so 'an instinct can never become an object of

²² There is some controversy, and ambiguity, over the translation of the German word '*Trieb*' as 'instinct', that should be noted. Freud uses both the terms '*Trieb*' and '*Instinkt*', and each has a unique signification. The former refers to a 'dynamic process consisting in a *pressure* (charge of energy, motricity factor)' (Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1973), p.214), whereas the latter is used in the sense of 'animal instincts', i.e. an 'instinctive recognition of dangers' (Freud, SE 20, p.168). However, both are translated, in English, by the word 'instinct'. The risk of this, as indicated by Laplanche and Pontalis, is that these may become confused, and the originality of Freud's theories become 'blurred' (p.214). Laplanche and Pontalis, therefore, argue for the adoption of the term 'drive' to translate '*Trieb*'. However, I have followed the practice of their own translator, Donald Nicholson-Smith, in retaining the translation 'instinct', due to its 'almost general adoption' (p.216). This is with the exception of any instances of doubt, in the case of which the term is clarified.

²³ Surprenant, p.121.

²⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 14* (SE 14), ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957; repr. 2001), pp.121-122.

²⁵ This connection is made explicit by Strachey in his Appendix C to the *Project*: 'It is evident, however, that they [the instincts] are the successors to 'endogenous Q ' or 'endogenous excitations' (Freud, SE 1, p.395).

²⁶ Freud, SE 1, p.310.

consciousness’.²⁷ The idea of the instinct being on a ‘frontier’ illustrates its status as being both psychical and somatic: it cannot enter consciousness itself, we never experience the instinct directly, but it can *appear* in consciousness. And this is the key word here, for the instinct has no ‘appearance’, but it can become ‘visible’, indirectly. The instinct, as quantity, does not ‘represent’ as much as attach to, infiltrate and appropriate other ‘representations’, in order to attain access to consciousness. At least, this is one aspect. As Freud tells us, ‘if the instinct did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, we could know nothing about it.’²⁸ The instinct is ‘represented’ then in two distinct ways. One of which does not warrant the need for caution indicated by the previous scare quote, it is more comfortably termed as a representation, but the other is one that does.

Firstly then, we have the ‘ideational representative’, or *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*.²⁹ As Laplanche and Pontalis note, and as is becoming a fairly common feature in Freud’s work, ‘Freud never really clarified this concept.’³⁰ However, we can get some sense of it from Freud’s descriptions of its functions. We can think of the ideational representatives as giving form to the instincts, form not only in the sense of an object which is derived from perception, but also in the sense of being ‘conceivable’ and ‘thinkable’. This is clarified when we find Freud describing the origins of the ideational representative thus: ‘ideas are cathexes – basically of memory-traces’.³¹ This claim is expanded upon in the later work ‘The Ego and the Id’ (1923). This work is firmly situated within Freud’s exposition of the second topography as opposed to the first, with which the metapsychological papers that we are primarily focusing upon are concerned. However, it also demonstrates a clear connection back to the earlier thoughts, in this point at least:

²⁷ From ‘The Unconscious’, another metapsychological paper, also from 1915. (Freud, ‘The Unconscious’, in SE 14, p.177).

²⁸ Freud, SE 14, p.177.

²⁹ It may be useful to bear in mind that the German word *Vorstellung* indicates not only the sense of ‘idea’, but also ‘image’ and ‘presentation’.

³⁰ Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), p.204.

³¹ Freud, SE 14, p.178.

Anything arising from within (apart from feelings) that seeks to become conscious must try to transform itself into external perceptions: this becomes possible by means of memory-traces.³²

The ideational representative is composed of perceptual material, drawn from the mnemic-traces, which have been 'taken over' by the instinct, to enable its entry into consciousness. As Freud points out, 'only something which has once been a *Cs.* perception can become conscious',³³ and it is therefore necessary for the instinct to use the mnemic-trace of such a perception to become conceivable and thus actionable.

The second way in which the instinct is 'represented', the second part of the division of the 'instinctual representative', is what Freud terms a 'quota of affect' or *Affektbetrag*. The affect, one of the most elusive and contentious subjects in Freud's work, is more closely aligned with the energetic than is the ideational representative: 'affects and emotions correspond to processes of discharge, the final manifestations of which are perceived as feelings.'³⁴ Whilst Freud often refers to the quota of affect as a 'representation'³⁵ of the instinct, it is difficult to directly relate these two terms. The affect is the energetic component of the instinctual representative and, opposed to the ideational, is better described as being 'felt' or 'experienced'. This is subtly indicated by Freud in 'The Unconscious' (1915) through his change of language, the affect is no longer described as 'representing' but as 'manifesting': 'if the instinct did not...manifest itself as an affective state';³⁶ 'repression can succeed in inhibiting an instinctual impulse from being turned into a manifestation of affect';³⁷ etc. Indeed, the affect, almost paradoxically, can be 'felt' in consciousness, but cannot be 'thought'. It does not need to take on external perceptions or memory-traces to become conscious, as is indicated in the quotation from 'The Ego and the Id' above. When Surprenant quotes André Green as saying that affect is 'a challenge to thought',³⁸ this is literally the case. Affect,

³² Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 19* (SE 19), ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961; repr. 2001), p.20.

³³ Freud, SE 19, p.20.

³⁴ Freud, SE 14, p.178.

³⁵ Cf. Freud, SE 14, p.152.

³⁶ Freud, SE 14, p.177.

³⁷ Freud, SE 14, pp.178-179.

³⁸ André Green, 'Conceptions of Affect', in *On Private Madness* (Madison, CT: International University Press, 1986), p.174. Quoted in Surprenant, p.104.

therefore, requires attachment to an idea, not to become conscious, but to become ‘analyzable’, as Freud tells us in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900-1901):

We cannot make any psychical assessment of an affect unless it is linked to a piece of ideational material.³⁹

We cannot ‘think’ affect without ideational content to work upon, which the affect can work through. Yet, the affect can still be ‘felt’ in consciousness without ideation. This is precisely what happens when the instinctual representative is repressed. In repression the quota of affect, or ‘instinctual energy’, is detached from its original ideational correlative, as Freud demonstrates through the definition he gives in ‘Repression’ (1915):

It [the quota of affect] corresponds to the instinct in so far as the latter has become detached from the [original] idea and finds expression, proportionate to its quantity, in processes which are sensed as affects.⁴⁰

Freud is clear about what happens to this detached quota of affect, giving it three possible outcomes, two of which do indeed allow it to be ‘expressed’ as affects, and one in which repression is successful:

Either the instinct [including the instinctual energy, or quota of affect] is altogether suppressed, so that no trace of it is found, or it appears as an affect which is in some way or other qualitatively coloured, or it is changed into anxiety.⁴¹

The quota of affect, in the latter two outcomes, is either able to find a substitute idea to which it can become attached (this being the ‘affect which is in some way or other qualitatively coloured’), or it is expressed as a general anxiety.

It should be noted here that the attachment of the affect to a substitute idea does not entail a transformation of the affect. The affect remains the same as that which was produced by the original instinctual representative, and originally connected with a different ideation. Freud identifies this characteristic in the process of examining

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. James Strachey, Penguin Freud Library: Volume 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958; repr. London: Penguin, 1991), p.595.

⁴⁰ Freud, SE 14, p.152.

⁴¹ Freud, SE 14, p.153.

dreams, which have a particular capacity for enabling these movements to be observed:⁴²

Ideational material has undergone displacements and substitutions, whereas the affects have remained unaltered...affects are always appropriate, at least in their quality.⁴³

We do find an apparent contradiction over this point, as Freud states in ‘The Unconscious’ that ‘the nature of that substitute determines the qualitative character of the affect.’⁴⁴ However, this surely cannot be the case. Freud’s theories are replete with examples of ideas being associated with affects which are unexpected and seem inappropriate, from dreams to the psychoneuroses. Indeed, in the same paper, Freud tells us that, in repression, ‘either the affect remains, wholly or in part, *as it is* [my italics]; or it is transformed into a qualitatively different quota of affect, above all into anxiety; or it is suppressed’.⁴⁵ The only time that the affect is ‘transformed’ into something ‘qualitatively different’ is when it is unable to find a substitutive idea, and becomes a general sense of anxiety. Further complications are raised, however, by the vagueness with which we found Freud describing this process in the paper ‘Repression’, above: that affects are ‘in *some way or other* qualitatively coloured’ [my italics]. The sense here is that affects are not entirely unaltered by attachment with the idea, but they are also not completely ‘determined’ by it. It is as though the affect is imbued with the characteristics of a different quality, is not so much fundamentally changed as ‘influenced’ by the substitute ideation. This vacillation in Freud’s thinking is partly, I would suggest, due to the ambiguity inherent to affect, and also to Freud’s evident reluctance to deprive substituted ideational content of any bearing whatsoever upon it.

Freud’s theories concerning affect leave us with problems. There is certainly a sense of indecision in Freud as to the relationship between the affect and representation, as there is between the affect as quality and/or quantity. To take the first of these points, the quota of affect is not so much represented as it is experienced. It can be ‘manifested’ in a ‘conceivable’ form by attachment with an ideational representative, through which the

⁴² As Surprenant states: ‘Dreams allowed Freud to “observe” the making of associations and disassociations between ideas, images and their energetic substratum’ (Surprenant, p.102).

⁴³ Freud, *Interpretation of Dream*, p.596.

⁴⁴ Freud, SE 14, p.179.

⁴⁵ Freud, SE 14, p.178.

affect can work (this is not a relationship of representation, as shown by the ease with which affect can move between ideas, substituting and displacing them). Alternatively, it can be felt as a general ‘anxiety’, which is both indefinite and indescribable. Affect has also been termed a representation itself, of the instinct. However, *ideational* representation is the criterion for the instinct to enter consciousness, and ‘even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea.’⁴⁶ The affect is purely the ‘manifestation’ of the energetic component of the instinctual representative, it is a ‘sum of excitation’, and to define it *as* a representative is, in this context,⁴⁷ I believe, a misnomer born of the attempt to privilege a hermeneutic approach at the expense of the energetic. This brings us to the problematic status of the affect in terms of quantity and quality. For the affect does, when in a form ‘thinkable’, ‘nameable’ to consciousness, have a qualitative dimension, as Freud tells us above, whether this is simply pleasure or unpleasure. However, the affect is also a quantity, an energetic phenomenon. It is produced by the *quota* of affect (a term directly developed from *Q̄η*), detached from its original ideational representative and ‘sensed as affect’ ‘proportionate to its quantity’. This is perhaps the most ambiguous aspect of Freud’s theories on affect. Whilst the ‘quota of affect’ is purely energetic, the affect itself has a qualitative dimension. How this comes about, Freud explains only very loosely:

Pleasure and unpleasure [affects], therefore, cannot be referred to an increase or decrease of a quantity... although they obviously have a great deal to do with that factor. It appears that they depend, not on this quantitative factor, but on some characteristic of it which we can only describe as a qualitative one. If we were able to say what this qualitative characteristic is, we should be much further advanced in psychology. Perhaps it is the rhythm, the temporal sequence of changes, rises and falls in the quantity of stimulus. We do not know.⁴⁸

In this rather abstruse definition, the qualitative appears to be determined by the quantitative: despite Freud claiming that affects ‘cannot be referred to an increase or decrease of a quantity’, the ‘qualitative’ factor that he replaces it with, in his best

⁴⁶ Freud, SE 14, p.177.

⁴⁷ André Green gives affect the status of a representation, but in a different context: his is a representation ‘of a completely different epistemological status’, ‘non-referential’ and ‘non-representational’, from that which is considered here (cf. André Green, *The Fabric of Affect in the Psychoanalytic Discourse*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p.269).

⁴⁸ Freud, SE 19, p.160.

estimation, may well be determined by ‘rises and falls in the quantity of stimulus’. The qualitative here, as elsewhere,⁴⁹ is based upon the movement of quantities, their waxing and waning, their ebbs and flows. Does this make the qualitatively distinguishable affects representative of the energetic quota of affect, and thus the instinct, however? I would suggest not. It is only through ideation that the representative function is established. Rather, they are coincident. They cannot be separated into a referent and referee as they are comprised of the same ‘material’, in a relationship which will become familiar to us as we go further in our analysis of affect and representation. These principal features of the economic approach will serve us for the time being, and will also, I propose, best be elaborated as we advance further through the theory.

1.ii Working with Affect in the Psychoanalytic Theories of André Green, Christopher Bollas and Césaire & Sára Botella

The question of affect and representation has been of significant interest to recent European (specifically British, French, and Italian) psychoanalysts, and none have contributed more to how we approach the substantial problems that it raises than André Green, Christopher Bollas and, although less widely recognised, Césaire and Sára Botella.

1.ii.i André Green: *The Fabric of Affect*

André Green has produced probably the most sustained psychoanalytic investigation into affect currently available, in the form of his 1973 work *Le Discours vivant*.⁵⁰ In this he elaborates a new theory, a new way of approaching affect and representation. *The Fabric of Affect* is a complex and wide-ranging text, which we will approach by focusing on specific points most relevant to our present concerns, often through the postscripts which were written at various stages after the main text. They provide useful summaries, reflections on and evolutions in Green’s theories. Firstly, Green suggests that the hierarchical dyad usually set up between affect and representation can be reversed:

⁴⁹ For example, in the *Project* Freud makes the case that the periodicity of quantities gives rise to consciousness (which is resolved as the locus and producer of qualities).

⁵⁰ Translated into English as *The Fabric of Affect in the Psychoanalytic Discourse* in 1999. It is this version that will be drawn upon here.

One always speaks of affect in terms of complement, of connotations. One says: there is representation and then one must not forget the affect that accompanies it. ...why not think, on the contrary, that *the profound nature of the affect is to be a psychological event linked to a movement awaiting a form?*⁵¹

Affect here takes on an active role. It is an 'event', a 'happening', 'linked to a movement' (the quota of affect), which is seeking representation. According to Green: 'the affect, indistinguishable from representation, is unrepresentable. It is looking for representations.'⁵² How is the affect 'indistinguishable from representation'? In the same way that Green postulates for the 'psychical representative' (a composite formation of 'what will be the ideational representative (which is a representation) and a quota of affect'⁵³):

What one is dealing with here is a completely different epistemological status of representation, in the sense that there is no model. But the psychical representative of the excitations that come from inside the body and reach the psyche is in no way representable. In other words, one is faced with a conception of representation... without any reference to what is represented, for the psychical excitations coming from inside the body cannot be the object of representation.⁵⁴

Just as with the psychical representative, which the affect is one transformation of/in and which the quota of affect is a part of, the affect, as a representation of quantity (an 'affect-representative' 'of essentially economico-traumatic significance'⁵⁵), is non-representative. To become truly representative 'an encounter with a form' is required. Green explicates this process when he states that:

If one regards the ideational-representative as coming from the external world, one must situate the affect-representative as coming from the level of the

⁵¹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.268.

⁵² Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.189. In the section that this quotation comes from, Green is looking explicitly at the second topography, rather than the metapsychology of the first topography with which we have mostly been dealing. However, we do not need to become overly distracted by the differences between the topographies in relation to Green's theories on affect, as he states: 'Nothing of the earlier acquisition is rejected...what is changed is the placing of the concepts' (p.188).

⁵³ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.171.

⁵⁴ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.269.

⁵⁵ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.189.

affective induction of the other. The drive... can come into existence, be manifested in a thinkable way, only by mediation.⁵⁶

‘Manifested’ links us directly back to Freud’s description of the instinct (drive, *Trieb*) being manifested as affect. And this is quite in keeping with what Green tells us here. The affect-representative seeks an ideational-representative to allow both itself as affect and the instinct to enter consciousness, to become ‘thinkable’. A process Green terms as ‘mediation’. ‘One is forced to have recourse to mediations; in the broad sense, they are representations. One can work only through these mediations.’⁵⁷

But let us go back a little way. Whilst the affect is integrated with ideational representations, and can be ‘manifested’ through these, it never loses its quantitative characteristic of non-representation. The affect poses a risk to the ego that we have not, up until now, explored, but which Green highlights. The ego attempts to avoid ‘affective processes’: these ‘psychical events’, which comprise of fluctuating quantity and tend towards discharge. ‘[D]ischarge *disturbs the activity of thought* by the intensity of the quantities that it mobilizes [my italics].’⁵⁸ Affect, it must be remembered, is anathema to thought: it is essentially ‘inconceivable’ without ideational mediation. It infiltrates ‘discourse’, the network of representations, as an unstable energy, always posing a disintegrative threat. *Affect is in motion*. It moves between psychical realms, between representations, and can reveal itself in any place, invasive and unanticipated. This moving, flowing, protean aspect is an important attribute of affect, one that we should note, and only serves to heighten its menace. This portrayal of the unnerving capabilities of affect is in keeping with Green’s characterisation of it:

*The essence of affect is its dynamic attribute, its capacity to seep into other domains and inhabit them.... the core of all affective phenomena: this reference to a force – which is not always noticeable as such but can always potentially manifest itself, movable by essence, capable of invading any or all parts of an individual... bearing an impressive capacity for unpredictable change.*⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.270.

⁵⁷ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.271.

⁵⁸ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.27.

⁵⁹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, pp.285-286.

There are echoes here which may strike a 21st century reader as having a, more than passing, descriptive affinity with accounts of the threat posed to the social body by terrorist activity. And this would not be an entirely inappropriate metaphor. The explanation that Green gives of the potential for affect to do violence to the ego and the order of representation reinforces this, as does the fear of the ego at its prospect. It is worth quoting this section in full as it addresses a crucial feature of the nature of affect:

Insofar as it [the affect] appears as an element of discourse, it is subjected to that chain [of cathected representations], includes itself in it as it attaches itself to the other elements of discourse. But insofar as it breaks with representations, it is the element of discourse that refuses to let itself be linked by representation and arises in its place. When reaching a certain quantity of cathexis, a qualitative mutation occurs; the affect may then snap the chain of discourse, which then sinks into non-discursivity, the unsayable.⁶⁰

Affect is within discourse, but alien to it. By its association and expression through the ideational, it is part of discourse. However, as a quantitative factor it can disrupt discourse by introducing a qualitative change, an overwhelming ‘passion... ruinous for the psychological organization’.⁶¹ Affect has the potential to ‘arise’ in the place of representation, meaning that it can exceed the *order* of representation, or ego organization. Under the pressure of affect, this organization then becomes fractured, fragmented. At its most extreme, Green tells us, the affect can break into consciousness, the id subsumes the power of the ego, and the affect is experienced as an ‘epiphany’: a *direct* manifestation without mediation. Normally, ‘as force, the affect is what sustains that linkage of the ideational representatives... what provides the energy necessary to the operations of the psychological apparatus. The affect, then, has this conjunctive-disjunctive role, a function of “penetration of the signifier”’.⁶² Conjunction and disjunction: within discourse and outside it. If the balance tips too far towards the affect (disjunction, non-discursivity), if the cathexis is too high, if it is ‘*discovered* in its manifestations’⁶³ [my italics], it can ‘*recover, abolish, replace representation*’ altogether. If this occurs, ‘*its*

⁶⁰ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.214.

⁶¹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.214.

⁶² Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.226.

⁶³ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.226.

most striking effect is negative hallucination'.⁶⁴ Negative hallucination is a relatively rare condition amongst patients in psychoanalysis, but one that Green gives an increased importance to, and one that we will return to throughout the course of this study. Green defines it as 'not the absence of representation, but *representation of the absence of representation*':⁶⁵ 'representation and affect are dissociated, together with the disappearance of the power to see the representation.'⁶⁶ Negative hallucination is experienced as an 'absence', but an absence which is also a representation. It 'covers over' an image, rather than 'annihilating' it.

Negative hallucination is useful for our current purposes as an exemplification of the work of affect through an extreme condition. It is a psychoanalytic concept that can be experienced in analysis, but which may, at first, seem difficult to reconcile with a theory of visual response.⁶⁷ However, we will be examining the potential that negative hallucination can offer an energetic approach to visual media, through our exploration of its relation to theatrical representation. For the moment, as we will see below with Botella and Botella, we are primarily concerned with the difficulties and demands that it presents, even for the analytic situation. The main function it serves here is to begin to indicate the tension that affect puts representation under, the processes through which it operates and the threat that affect poses if taken to an excess.

Let us now turn, by going back a little, to look at how we can practically approach affect when it is in operation with/through discourse, how it can be identified and the methodology that it requires to be addressed. Green indicates the way in which we can do this when he examines, in 'Postscript 3' of *The Fabric of Affect* from 1997 (in the original), the role of affect in the psychoanalytic situation:

The evaluation of the interpretability of the discourse does not entail separating affect from other aspects of discourse.... what returns to the surface of analytic communication is extended over a spectre that mixes in various proportions an

⁶⁴ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.226.

⁶⁵ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.226.

⁶⁶ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.205.

⁶⁷ The highly original conception of negative hallucination, which is afforded to us by Green and the Botellas, in fact does provide us with the possibility for integrating and using the concept in visual theory. This is due to their consideration of negative hallucination as an 'absence'; a '*representation*' of the inability to see; a 'hallucination' that *covers* an ideational representative; a 'waiting for something that was not coming', rather than as a lack of representation *altogether*. But this is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, Part 2.

element whose content is usually appreciated in ideational terms and another that cannot be encompassed by the previous one, recognized as expressing ‘motions’, that is to say, movements in which affect is to be found, as a dynamic phenomenon.⁶⁸

Here, Green is examining how the discourse of the analysand can be ‘understood’ by the analyst, by looking at both the ideational aspects and the affective ones simultaneously. The affect works through the ideational representatives of discourse, and is ‘recognized as expressing ‘motions’’. ‘Movements’ which ‘cannot be encompassed’ by ideational representation. The manifestations of the affect can be ‘felt’, ‘experienced’, ‘identified’ through its movements across and through discourse, its motions and its dynamic characteristics. Receptiveness to this ‘movement’ is a key part of the sensibility that is required to enable a response that focuses upon this affective element within discourse/representation. To explore this approach in more detail, we turn now to the work of three psychoanalysts who have extensively addressed the ways in which affect can be ‘received’ and worked with in analysis: Christopher Bollas, and Césaire and Sára Botella.

1.ii.ii Christopher Bollas and The Idea of a ‘Receptive Unconscious’

Our interest in the work of Christopher Bollas is centred upon the concept, which he has developed, of a ‘receptive unconscious’. This is of considerable value, and use, primarily for what it tells us regarding the reception of affect and unconscious energetic processes. Bollas has discussed the idea of a ‘receptive unconscious’, briefly suggested by Freud in ‘The Unconscious’, at length in his recent work *The Freudian Moment* (2007). The significance of this term is to indicate that there exists an ‘unconscious perception’, and that one person’s unconscious can ‘react upon that of another without passing through the Cs.’⁶⁹ One example of this ‘perception’ is what Bollas has called ‘the “unthought known”’ (a concept that recurs repeatedly throughout his work). It is ‘unthought’ as it does not enter consciousness in a ‘thinkable’ form, but through and between the unconscious of the sender and receiver:⁷⁰ ‘what is known cannot be

⁶⁸ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, pp.298-299.

⁶⁹ Freud, SE 14, p.194. Quoted in: Christopher Bollas, *The Freudian Moment* (London: Karnac Books, 2007), p.33.

⁷⁰ The model for this is the interaction between the unconscious of the mother and the infant’s pre-repressive unconscious.

thought, yet constitutes the foundational knowledge of one's self: the "unthought known".⁷¹ It is 'transmitted' through elements of communication, particularly 'maternal communication', which are not ascertained or 'picked up' by conscious perception. Whilst the 'unthought known' does not correspond to the reception of affect *per se*, it does provide us with a model through which we can understand how the non-representative nature of affect is communicable, and how it can be apprehended through the receptive unconscious, through a 'receptive state' in the analyst. The communication of the 'unthought known' through the 'receptive unconscious' is a process that is repeated in the analytical situation, between the analyst and analysand:

What I term the receptive unconscious must be the unconscious to which Freud refers in... describing evenly suspended attentiveness, when the analyst catches the drift of his patient's unconscious with his own unconscious... he [Freud] has made it clear that the analyst's unconscious is indeed receptive.⁷²

The requirement for this kind of communicative relationship rests upon the determination that there are aspects of the psychoanalytic discourse which cannot be discerned consciously, or directly represented. Aspects, I would suggest, such as affect. Instead, the analyst looks for movements, 'rhythms' and 'patterns' in the unconscious of the analysand:

There are characteristic rhythms of a person's session... The analyst's unconscious will not only perceive that rhythm, he will attune to it.⁷³

These 'rhythms' are expressed, at a perceptible level, through such features within the discourse of the analysand as 'pauses', 'hesitations', 'divergences', 'sudden significant remarks' as well as, presumably, gestures and physical changes. Whilst these are, of course, individually observable at a conscious level, their significance is only received unconsciously by the analyst. At the level of conscious perception, they may be unnoticed, disregarded or determined to be unconnected. The analyst's unconscious is permeated by the unconscious 'rhythms' of the analysand, and he/she can become aware of this alteration within him/herself:

⁷¹ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, p.34.

⁷² Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, pp.36-37.

⁷³ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, pp.49-50.

It is only the psychoanalyst who understands that what goes on within himself or herself is often the patient's articulation of an idea that can only be thought through the other's inner experience.⁷⁴

It is then that he/she can begin to work with them, to approach them. The same is true, and perhaps more clearly so, of 'patterns'. Bollas determines that 'character' is only perceptible by the other: it is transmitted by the subject, but cannot be perceived by the subject. 'Character', as Bollas says, 'is a pattern'.⁷⁵ It is a mix of actions and categories of expression which 'follow a highly idiomatic pattern'. This pattern is then identified and constructed by the 'other's receptive unconscious': 'the other's receptive unconscious perceives any pattern.'⁷⁶ From here, the analyst can, surreptitiously, become aware of it consciously:

The analyst's receptive unconscious, which looks for and organizes everything into patterns, is discovering patterns in the connective tissues of thought and often the patterns of thought arrives in the analyst's consciousness as an inspired idea.⁷⁷

Unconscious expressions through 'rhythms' and 'patterns' in discourse are just two examples of 'perceptions' that can be made by the receptive unconscious. It is, I would suggest, a method by which the 'unthinkable', the 'non-representative', in psychoanalytic discourse⁷⁸ generally can be received. The 'motions' and dynamism of affects, crossing between, through, and within discourse, which Green identifies, may equally be received in this way.

The method which the analyst must adopt in becoming receptive to these movements, rhythms, patterns, is, paradoxically, a non-analytic one. This is captured by the significance of Freud's term 'evenly suspended attentiveness', which we have seen Bollas quoting above, and the similar condition which Bollas terms 'neutrality':

⁷⁴ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, p.47.

⁷⁵ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, p.58.

⁷⁶ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, p.58.

⁷⁷ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, p.59.

⁷⁸ Note that these rhythms, patterns, movements must be within discourse. They cannot be entirely external to discourse, as there must be an expressive material through which their actions can be discerned.

Because the analyst is neutral – he has neutralized his character up to a point – he opens himself to a deep reception of the other’s impact upon himself: to otherness.⁷⁹

The analyst must attempt to avoid organizing the material with which he is presented; avoid closing it by attributing meaning too early; avoid the temptation of interrupting with interpretation:

Analysts who *practise* neutrality enable the patient’s free associations to guide the sessions. They are more receptive to the analysand’s free talking than analysts who believe that analysis is a highly interactive event.⁸⁰

The analyst is encouraged to allow the analysand to speak, not to impose their own opinion or reading too soon, but to be ‘impressed’ by the discourse of the patient. And specifically to allow the non-representative movements within this discourse to be received and emerge as an ‘inspired idea’, without the intervention of hermeneutic analysis and active re-construction. This kind of sensibility, of sensitivity and ‘attentiveness’ is also articulated, in a comparable though different way, and reinforced by Césaire and Sára Botella. We will now, finally, turn to their theory of affective reception, and complete the section of our investigation that attempts to address what is required for approaching affect, from a psychoanalytic perspective.

1.ii.iii Césaire and Sára Botella: Introducing ‘Negative Hallucination’ and the Role of ‘Conviction’

The principal work of Botella and Botella would appear to have little direct association with exploring the relationship between affect and representation, or the energetic within discourse, or, indeed, with helping us towards a theory that responds to visual media. This suspicion would be first aroused, quite reasonably, by the title of this text: *The Work of Psychic Figurability: Mental States without Representation* (2001). The focus of Botella and Botella’s study is those mental states which retain an affective component, but not an ideational representative one. A key example here is, of course, negative hallucination. The affective component is generally experienced as a ‘void’, which has lost its mnesic representative. Indeed, Michael Parsons, in his Introduction to

⁷⁹ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, p.58.

⁸⁰ Bollas, *The Freudian Moment*, p.79.

The Work of Psychic Figurability identifies this as an ‘amnesic trace’,⁸¹ a term influenced by the Botellas’ phrase ‘memory without recollection’. An apt description of negative hallucination. The first way in which the work of Botella and Botella can be of assistance to us is in identifying how, given this extreme condition of affect and mental (non)representation, the analyst is able to apprehend affect. How he/she gains access to this ‘void’, how he/she is able to experience it and what action he/she can take as a result of this identification. The Botellas do not give an explicit definition of how the analyst can receive affective processes from the analysand, but do give us a very definite sense of this from their descriptions of the effects that it produces in the analyst. Parsons has succinctly described the state of the analyst required by the Botellas, and we find it to be strikingly similar to that required by Bollas. The analyst should endeavour to foster:

free-floating attention and avoidance, so far as possible, of preconscious assumptions... The analyst [then] picks up, at an unconscious level of awareness, the patient’s experience of non-representation... The sense of a void, which this can produce, may have a quality of horror.⁸²

The Botellas put forward the theory that the analyst can, through ‘working as a double’ with the analysand, give representation to what is un-representable by the analysand alone. What is of interest to us *here*, for we shall return to the Botellas’ treatment of negative hallucination in another context in Chapter 3, is that the analyst puts him/herself into ‘the state of session... halfway between the waking and sleeping state’.⁸³ This disables, to a certain degree, preconscious intervention and he/she can then undergo a ‘regression of his thought’.⁸⁴ This involves the analyst ‘receiving’ the manifest discourse of the analysand and, rather than interpreting it, allowing his/her thought to regress towards an earlier state. He/she comes into contact with the ‘unknown’ within the analysand, which he/she becomes aware of as ‘an affect, *signalling* the danger of non-representation’.⁸⁵ However, if the analyst can endure this affect, the ‘quality of horror’ that is non-representation, this will allow a representation,

⁸¹ Césaire Botella and Sára Botella, *The Work of Psychic Figurability: Mental States without Representation*, trans. Andrew Weller (Hove & New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), p.xix.

⁸² Botella, pp.xvii-xviii.

⁸³ Botella, p.81.

⁸⁴ Botella, p.82.

⁸⁵ Botella, p.34.

a product of both the unconscious of the analysand and of the analyst, to arise in his/her own mind (the analyst's). This thereby provides the ideational representation to the unrepresentable 'void', that the patient could not. It can then be related, 'given', to the patient by the analyst. In the Botellas' description of this process, we can note the determination that conscious interpretation on the part of the analyst should not take place too early, or too forcefully:

If the analyst's thinking can tolerate the movement of regression, without having recourse to defensive solutions such as investing the analysand narcissistically, analytic theories, 'ready-made' ideas, or again, memory... without the obstacle of the counter-transference and the field of pre-conscious memory, remaining as close as possible to the unknown of the analysand that is a triggering cause of the state of quality of his thinking, interpretations of a particularly intuitive nature can come to the analyst.⁸⁶

This process is essentially an artificial way of reproducing the process by which the affect attaches to ideational representation in normal psychical functioning. And this leads us to the second point in the Botellas' work which is of interest to our present investigation. The Botellas are insistent that the representations which become associated with the 'unknown', the 'negative hallucination', of the analysand do not have to be authentic memory traces. They need not have any association with the original ideational representative of the affect (the psychical representative, before their dissociation through repression), or even have ever been experienced by the patient. This provides us with a key way through which we can think the place of memory in an energetic theory of visual media. The 'value' of the 'construction interpretation' formed through the conjunction of the analyst and analysand, their 'work as a double', 'does not reside so much... in the recollections it can evoke or in its historical reality as in the degree of conviction that [it] arouses in the analysand.'⁸⁷ 'Conviction' is the key to providing the analysand with a representation⁸⁸ which can serve as an outlet for the affect, which has been denied representation through, for example, negative

⁸⁶ Botella, p.83.

⁸⁷ Botella, p.37.

⁸⁸ It should be noted that the representation that is 'constructed', according to the Botellas, must emerge from the combined work of the analyst and the analysand, so as to produce this sense of conviction. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the representation attached to the affect is not necessarily an authentic memory of a past event.

hallucination. This connects, as the Botellas note, with Freud's assertion that the 'conviction aroused in the analysand by the work of the analyst "achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory".'⁸⁹ From here they can claim that 'analysis could no longer be considered simply as a work of remembering.'⁹⁰ Indeed, the very question of memory has changed:

We are far from a problem of memory linked to repression. We are faced with an alteration concerning, not the contents presented, but the function of memory itself.⁹¹

If the ideational representatives constructed by the analyst do not have to correspond to authentic memories, it would suggest that the primary function of memory, both in this artificial psychoanalytic process and in normal psychical affective processes, is not its capacity for the accurate reproduction of past events, not its place as a directly referential 'store' of experiences. Rather, it is *memory's facility for being traversed by, for being manipulated by, for conducting, affect*. That this is precisely the aim of the analyst's constructed ideational representation is indicated by Botella and Botella:

The retrogressive movement of thought is a means of transforming the force of the affects into the 'sensory strength' of a visual image.⁹²

From an energetic perspective, the affect can distort discourse, can displace and disrupt ideational representation by its passage through and within it, can use representation as a means of making itself felt, of expressing itself. And it is this that is the principal focus of an energetic approach, not the meaning of the contents themselves. It is only through ideational representation, and specifically the tensions that their organization comes under, that the energetic (the affective) can be approached. This is true when we are thinking of the energetic in visual media, as much as it is exactly the reason why Botella and Botella must provide an ideational representation for the affective 'unknown', for it to become 'thinkable' in the psychoanalytic situation.

Our task now turns to examining how these psychoanalytic processes and phenomena link with a theory of 'interpretation', through its influence and development in

⁸⁹ Botella, p.70.

⁹⁰ Botella, p.71.

⁹¹ Botella, pp.101-102.

⁹² Botella, p.35.

poststructuralist theory and philosophy, before we then look at this in relation to its role as a way of approaching theatre and film.

Chapter 2: Out of the Consulting Room: Energetics in Poststructuralist Thought and Visual Media

Poststructuralism, as a mode of thought, attempts to integrate the same shift in critical focus as that which is necessitated by affective processes in psychoanalysis. Indeed, the shift in poststructuralism from structuralism is undoubtedly, at least partially, influenced by the co-dependent duality in psychoanalysis between affect and representation, between the energetic and hermeneutic. One of our primary sources in making this connection is Jacques Derrida's early paper 'Force and Signification' (1963), in *Writing and Difference*. In this Derrida is critical of structuralism for its singular emphasis upon the 'geometry', the 'form', the 'morphology' of a work:

One risks being interested in the figure itself to the detriment of the play going on within it metaphorically.⁹³

This 'risks stifling force under form.'⁹⁴ However, Derrida is not advocating a complete turn away from structure towards force. Such a move would amount to accepting nihilism. 'The geometric or morphological elements of *Forme et Signification* [by Rousset] are corrected only by a kind of mechanism,⁹⁵ never by energetics.'⁹⁶

What is this 'mechanism' which Derrida advocates? He explains it in terms of a relationship between form and force, of one being within the other, being simultaneous and inseparable:

Our intention here is not, through the simple motions of balancing, equilibration or overturning, to oppose duration to space, quality to quantity, force to form... we maintain that it is necessary to seek new concepts and new models, an *economy* escaping this system of metaphysical oppositions. This economy would not be an energetics of pure, shapeless force. The differences examined *simultaneously* would be differences of site and differences of force.⁹⁷

⁹³ Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978; repr. 2001), p.18.

⁹⁴ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.31.

⁹⁵ Most accurately in its now obsolete sense of an 'interconnection of parts in any complex process, pattern, or arrangement' (OED).

⁹⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.18.

⁹⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.22.

Like affect, force only becomes thinkable through form, ‘an encounter with a form’, as Green says. What is more, form and force must be simultaneous, not oppositional: they cannot be seen apart. It is as much of a problem to focus exclusively on structure and form, which reduce everything to a flat, dead, geometry, to ‘rings, spirals, and helices’,⁹⁸ the terms in which Derrida says one cannot define the beauty of *Le Cid*, as it is to focus exclusively on ‘shapeless force’. By this Derrida is referring to an energy equivalent to Freud’s quantity (*Q̇*): meaningless, literally, and unapproachable without ideational representation of some kind. There is no concept ‘which would permit the conceptualization of intensity or force’⁹⁹ in and of itself. What Derrida demands of criticism is to do away with the oppositional binary that it tends to create between force and form, not to regard them in a relationship of alterity or hierarchy: ‘force is not darkness, and it is not hidden under a form for which it would serve as substance, matter, or crypt.’¹⁰⁰ Neither is in possession of a greater ‘truth’ or ‘reality’. And until criticism has been able to accept this way of thinking, this way of approaching a work, it will, as Derrida says:

not be able to exceed itself to the point of embracing both force and the movement which displaces lines, nor to the point of embracing force as movement, as desire, for itself, and not as the accident or epiphany of lines. To the point of embracing it as writing.¹⁰¹

This view of ‘force as movement’ is crucial here, and highlights the conjunction of Derrida’s requirements from criticism with the approach that Green, in particular, and reinforced by Bollas and the Botellas, advocates for addressing the discourse of the analysand.

However, *Derrida establishes that an affective, ‘energetic’ mode of thinking is not restricted to the analytic situation.* His provocation at the point quoted above, near the closing remarks of his essay, is to term this coincidence of force and movement, which can only be a movement through and within form (the ‘lines’ which it ‘displaces’), as ‘writing’. Writing seems to be a, perhaps *the*, most ‘representative’, referential medium. But Derrida defines ‘writing’ differently. His paper ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’

⁹⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.21.

⁹⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.32.

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.33.

¹⁰¹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.33.

(1966), also from *Writing and Difference*, is one of the key moments in which he discusses precisely what this re-definition amounts to, and how it is being thought.

2.i Jacques Derrida: 'Freud and the Scene of Writing'

Throughout this paper Derrida performs an intensive re-reading of Freud's presentation, particularly centred on the *Project*, of memory, its relationship with force, and how Freud uses the metaphor of writing as a way of thinking these. Our main focus, here, is to consider how Derrida conceives of 'writing', and how it can be constituted as an 'amalgamation' of force and meaning.¹⁰² Derrida makes a key distinction between what he terms 'psychical writing' and 'the writing we believe to be designated by the proper sense of the word – a script which is coded and visible "in the world"'. This latter kind of writing 'would only be the metaphor of psychical writing.'¹⁰³ Writing proper can only bear this relationship with psychical writing due to the profound differences that Derrida reads Freud as having attributed between them. These attributes allow us to understand how Derrida is shifting our view of writing, and how this shift necessitates a different mode of criticism.

The primary point of comparison which Derrida identifies, in attempting to explicate the notion of 'psychical writing', is that of dreams: 'this writing, for example the kind we find in dreams'.¹⁰⁴ The first consequence of this is that it 'cannot be read in terms of any code':

No meaningful material or prerequisite text exists which he [the dreamer] might simply use... As much as it is a function of the generality and the rigidity of the code, this limitation [of predefined codes or lexicons for the dream, i.e. the *Traumbuch*] is a function of an excessive preoccupation with *content*, and an insufficient concern for relations, locations, processes, and differences.¹⁰⁵

A non-codifiable writing complicates the first condition of writing proper, the relationship between a signifier and its signified: 'The absence of an exhaustive and

¹⁰² It should be noted that Derrida's terminology has shifted here, from force and form to force and meaning. 'Meaning' and 'form', whilst not being entirely equivalent, should both be taken as referring to a representative (of the order of ideation), to a signifier, to a 'structure', also referred to by Derrida in this paper as an 'extension'.

¹⁰³ Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, p.262.

¹⁰⁴ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.262.

¹⁰⁵ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, pp.262-263.

absolutely infallible code means that in psychic writing... the difference between signifier and signified is never radical.¹⁰⁶ Signifier and signified become, not a matter of reference, but rather of coincidence. A phrase used by Botella and Botella, in a different context, fits this circumstance most aptly: 'the dancer and the dance are the same.'¹⁰⁷ As Derrida points out, this makes them 'no longer, properly speaking, signifiers'. They have only a 'status-as-meaningful',¹⁰⁸ determined by 'unconscious experience', by their investment and by their relations. The proper 'grammar' of this writing is how they make affective force *palpable*, how they are traversed and transgressed by it and how this passage is 'seen' in the distortions of the network of discourse, in the 'differences' *between* 'representations' (which do not strictly 'represent', but *are*, as experiences, as *living expressions*), in their relations. This, to echo Derrida's brief assertion in 'Force and Signification', is no 'energetics of pure, shapeless force'. It is to be thought of more as a 'mechanism', a network of relations, functioning through their inter-connectedness.

What does this make of the 'signifier' itself? It becomes identified with a certain 'materiality': the congruence of signifier and signified, the inseparability of force and form, which denies the possibility of 'translation' or 'transcription': 'the possibility of translation... is nevertheless and by definition limited.'¹⁰⁹ Indeed, translation and materiality cannot coexist: 'Materiality is precisely that which translation relinquishes.'¹¹⁰ But it is not only the translation of signifiers that becomes limited; it is the entire psychical 'text' itself. There becomes no 'unconscious text' shadowing the conscious one, which would provide a key to unlock all of its mysteries:

There is then no unconscious truth to be rediscovered by virtue of having been written elsewhere... There is no present text in general, and there is not even a past present text... The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united – a text nowhere present.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.263.

¹⁰⁷ Botella, p.43.

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.263.

¹⁰⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.263.

¹¹⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.264. A point that we shall return to in our discussion on theatre, in Chapter 3, Part I.

¹¹¹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.265.

There is only one text. The affective force works through and within ideational representation, it cannot be thought without this. The psychical text is thus always already worked over. Force and meaning cannot be disunited and still conceived of: 'The metaphor of translation as the transcription of an original text would separate force and extension.'¹¹² There is no beyond or elsewhere to be referred to, there is only, in my sense of Derrida's meaning, *surface*.

And this is crucial to determining the nature that Derrida attributes to the psychical text. The material quality of the signifier aligns it with the image. The image fulfils this idea of the material signifier through a particular pre-disposition for facilitating the cohabitation of form and force. The dream provides practical evidence for this: 'the materiality of the signifier constitutes the idiom of every dream scene'.¹¹³ As Freud has demonstrated,¹¹⁴ the dream expresses itself through images. And this is a feature that Derrida explicitly reminds us of:

Having recalled the archaic character of expression in dreams, which accepts contradiction and valorizes visibility.¹¹⁵

'Archaic expression', the most 'primitive' form of expression in the psyche is perception, is the image. And this psychical 'writing' is one of images. It is 'dream-like' in a literal sense: 'The border between the non-phonetic space of writing... and the space of the stage (*scène*) of dreams is uncertain.'¹¹⁶ To enable this comparison writing must be attributed with certain qualities:

Freud, in order to suggest the strangeness of the logico-temporal relations in dreams, constantly adduces writing, and the spatial synopses of pictograms, rebuses, hieroglyphics and nonphonetic writing in general. Synopsis and not

¹¹² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.267.

¹¹³ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.264.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p.455. Dreams exclusively use images as 'material' signifiers, as direct expressions, and they include nothing which cannot be visually perceived. 'A thing that is pictorial is, from the point of view of a dream, a thing that is *capable of being represented*... abstract expressions offer the same kind of difficulties to representation in dreams as a political leading article in a newspaper would offer to an illustrator.'

¹¹⁵ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.277.

¹¹⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.273.

stasis: scene and not tableau. The laconic, lapidary quality of dreams is not the impassive presence of petrified signs.¹¹⁷

This writing is not only ‘visual’ (formed of ‘pictograms, rebuses, hieroglyphics’), but also must be *seen* as a ‘totality’. ‘Synopsis and not stasis’: an interwoven whole rather than a series of discrete ‘moments’. ‘Scene and not tableau’: the scene is one of action, of change, as opposed to the stillness of the tableau. The ‘relations’ and interactions of signifiers is key here, rather than any fixed ‘signified’ or ‘meaning’, rather than producing ‘petrified signs’.

Derrida defines this writing through the single term ‘*Bilderschrift*’.¹¹⁸ Literally meaning a ‘pictographic script’, *Bilderschrift* is:

not an inscribed image but a figurative script, an image inviting not a simple, conscious, present perception of the thing itself – assuming it exists – but a reading.¹¹⁹

The psychic text as *Bilderschrift* is to be ‘moved over’. We are not presented with a ‘perception of the thing itself’, but a relational series, a network, a chain. Significance is derived from these relations, the movement through and between images. It is the discursive network which affective force disturbs, not the ideational representative itself, in any conception of singularity. This is how the *Bilderschrift* invites a ‘reading’: it is a process, constantly in motion, not autopsic stasis. ‘The figurative content is then indeed a form of writing, *a signifying chain in scenic form*.’¹²⁰ Given these conceptions of the psychical text, of a form of criticism that is sensitive to the amalgamation of force and meaning and seeks to approach writing in terms of this conjunction, of the *Bilderschrift*, Derrida is led to assert that ‘a psychoanalysis of literature respectful of the *originality of the literary signifier* has not yet begun’.¹²¹ This originality consists in ‘reading’ the signifier for its relational status, its figurative and material qualities, its affinity to, and definition as, *image in process*, a visual mechanism. If Derrida seeks to redefine the study specifically, as stated here, of literature in these terms, I find that the

¹¹⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.273.

¹¹⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.274.

¹¹⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.274.

¹²⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.275.

¹²¹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.290.

question we are led to ask is how much more could we think images in terms of this ‘writing’?

2.ii Jean-François Lyotard: Energetics, Tensors, Libidinal Economics

In proposing an ‘energetic’ methodology (which is a misnomer from the beginning, it would be better to say a perspective, a tendency, an anticipation), rather than allowing hermeneutics its assumed precedence, we should take our lead, in this as in many respects when engaging with such things, from Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard dealt repeatedly throughout his works, although most explicitly in those from the 1970s, with the notion of an ‘energetic’ or ‘dynamic’ theory in relation to representation and, often, to artistic representation. Our first point of departure is, naturally enough, Lyotard’s brief and speculative treatise on an ‘energetic theatre’, entitled ‘The Tooth, The Palm’, from 1973’s *Des Dispositifs pulsionnels* (translated in 1977 by Anne Knap). This work provides us with one of the clearest expositions of an energetic approach, and is thus primarily discussed here rather than in the next chapter, on theatre.

In this paper Lyotard calls for a new form of theatrical practice: a practice that is not based upon the idea of representation. Representation is described by Lyotard through an analogy in which ‘the action of the palm’ (clenching into a fist) ‘represents’ ‘the passion of the tooth’ (toothache) in a causal relationship, as ‘two investments of the libido’. Rather than this, he seeks a practice in which ‘signs are no longer looked at in their representative dimension... they do not represent, they permit “actions”’.¹²² Theatrical ‘signs’ are taken to be ‘transitory investments’, ‘forces, intensities, present affects’.¹²³ They are ‘transformers’ of the ‘libidinal flux’ upon and within which they are staged. The question which immediately presents itself in this context is one that Lyotard raises himself in the last expression of the piece: ‘is it possible, how?’¹²⁴

After finding clear parallels between his ‘energetic theatre’ and Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, Lyotard is ultimately forced to conclude that Artaud’s theatre is doomed to failure in its aims. Artaud cannot escape falling back on imposing a semiotic structure: he is too ‘European’. In Lyotard’s refusal to make this same capitulation, it becomes

¹²² Jean-François Lyotard, ‘The Tooth, The Palm’, in *Mimesis, Masochism, & Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, ed. Timothy Murray (University of Michigan Press, 1997), p.284.

¹²³ Lyotard, ‘The Tooth, The Palm’, p.287.

¹²⁴ Lyotard, ‘The Tooth, The Palm’, p.288.

undeniably possible that his ideal theatre is, in the last instance, not realisable. However, it is not this question that I am seeking to address. The theory of an 'energetic theatre' is the expression of a move away from representative theatre, and it is in this trajectory that we are most interested here. Lyotard's theories in 'The Tooth, The Palm' can be read, *not as a prescription for a future theatre, but rather as a mode of interpretation*. Which is, of course, *a mode of 'non-interpretation'*.

How this can function in practice is elucidated if we turn to the idea, defined by Lyotard in his 1974 essay 'Beyond Representation', of an 'economy of aesthetics'.¹²⁵ The *modus operandi* of this 'economy' is well surmised early in this same essay when Lyotard claims that:

Understanding will no longer be a matter of establishing an ultimate libidinal content (be it even a lack, the effect of an empty signifier) but rather of identifying, in all its ineffectual delicacy and complexity, the device by which the energy of drives is guided, blocked, freed, exhausted or stored up - in short, channeled into extreme intensities.¹²⁶

In this view, we must think of the 'work' as 'flat', its 'subject... conceals no content, no libidinal secret... force lies entirely in its surface. There is only surface.'¹²⁷ Lyotard's meaning here is that representations, for we can still speak of representations (if only through necessity for, in this sense, they do not strictly 'represent'), are not to be seen as 'substitutes', they are not in place of any supposed 'lack' or absence. They are only present in themselves: they are 'concentrations of libidinal energy on the surfaces of the visible'.¹²⁸ It is the task of an economy of aesthetics to attend to the movement of this energy, and the 'devices' through which we are not only made aware of it, but also put into direct contact with it. Not as something to be considered, digested or cognized, but as experiences: as sites of libidinal energy which act as immediate and discontinuous 'events'. We are perhaps approaching abstraction once again, as did Artaud. But let us keep the idea of 'movement' in mind. Hold it for revival shortly.

¹²⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation' in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), p.166.

¹²⁶ Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation', p.160.

¹²⁷ Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation', p.158.

¹²⁸ Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation', p.159.

If we leave the theory of an ‘energetic aesthetics’ at just this, we may, indeed, condemn it to pure theory: it can only ever be insubstantial idealism. However, Lyotard is careful to tread around this trap. His notion of ‘understanding’, it is true, does not rely upon ‘establishing content’. But this is not to say that he is calling for a ‘non-semiotic’ order, a renunciation of signs, or the inauguration of ‘another field, a *beyond representation*’.¹²⁹ As Lyotard elaborates, in his 1974 book *Libidinal Economy*, such a suggestion would ‘amount to saying: we quit signs, we enter the extra-semiotic order of tensors’, and would be ‘so “stupid”’.¹³⁰ *Libidinal Economy* is written at approximately the same time as the other texts to which we are here referring, all of which are working towards a characterization of the energetic, with which Lyotard is clearly preoccupied at this time. In it Lyotard posits his alternative to this ‘quitting signs’, which is, in the most concise terms, to think that:

signs are not only terms, stages, set in relation and made explicit in a trail of conquest; they *can also* be, indissociably, singular and vain intensities in exodus. Is it a question of another kind of sign? Not at all, *they are the same* as those turned into theory and textual practice by the semiotician.¹³¹

Lyotard’s definition of, what he calls, the ‘tensor sign’ is, thus, one which is within a semiotic network of signification, standing in relation to other signs, and both referring to and representing the lack which is meaning (deferred). Whilst *also* ‘indissociably’ being ‘a strained singularity, an instantaneous, ephemeral concentration of force.’¹³² Why strained? Simply because the sign becomes a co-existence of ‘impossibles’: ‘worlds’ which are possible, but not possible together. It is therefore defined through ‘tension’.¹³³

Libidinal force is not a different and independent ‘system’ to representative signs, but is ‘within’ (although this word gives an inaccurate sense of ‘depth’) them. ‘Beyond representation’ does not convey a ‘leaving behind’ or ‘exchange’ of representation, but

¹²⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Athlone Press, 1993; repr. London & New York: Continuum Books, 2004), p.49.

¹³⁰ Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.49.

¹³¹ Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.49.

¹³² Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.66.

¹³³ As Lyotard elaborates, it is ‘at the same time a sign which produces meaning through difference and opposition, and a sign producing intensity through force [*puissance*] and singularity.’ (Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.52).

an ‘addition to’, no, rather a ‘refocusing’, a change in how the sign is approached and what it is expected to do. ‘We *understand it otherwise*. It speaks to you? It sets us in motion’.¹³⁴ The distinction Lyotard is drawing here is between a sign that conveys a particular meaning, from someone to an addressee, and the sign serving to integrate one into the ‘libidinal flux’, to ‘move’ us (emotionally, physically, ‘instinctually’¹³⁵) between intensities. Whilst it remains a mode of communication, it also functions energetically. And this is why a different *understanding* is not a different interpretation of meaning, but a different, and pre-verbal, mode of reception.

2.ii.i The Tensor and the Transgression of Representation

To illustrate the kind of demands that the ‘tensor sign’ makes, and the way in which it functions, we can turn to Hans-Thies Lehmann’s 1999 work *Postdramatisches Theater: Verlag der Autoren* (translated into English in 2006 as *Postdramatic Theatre*). In this study Lehmann discusses Lyotard’s ‘energetic theatre’ in relation to his own notion of ‘postdramatic theatre’, and presents them in a fascinating and productive context. However, I take issue with his occasional lack of precision in this particular discussion, and it is with just such an instance that we are here concerned. He claims that Lyotard, influenced by Artaud, has found that:

In theatre, gestures, figurations and arrangements are possible that refer to an ‘elsewhere’ in a different way than iconic, indexical or symbolic ‘signs’.¹³⁶

This suggestion is to misunderstand the nature of the tensor sign, in which there is no ‘elsewhere’ indicated. Rather, the referential function of signs, in their semiotic and linguistic sense, is crucial for Lyotard’s theory as much as their status as ‘concentrations of libidinal energy’. To ‘refer to an “elsewhere”’ would make of the tensor sign (which is the model of the ‘sign’ Lyotard engages with in ‘The Tooth, The Palm’, the essay that Lehmann is primarily drawing upon), a sign which ‘stands for’ *something else* (albeit an unknown something), *somewhere else*. This once more entraps it within the discourse of ‘lack’, of nihilism, rather than addressing it as a ‘device’ or ‘transformer’ of libidinal

¹³⁴ Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.49.

¹³⁵ I am following this term’s dualistic use in psychoanalytic discourses, playing on the ambiguity, both to connote an ‘animalistic’ reception based upon non-rational responsiveness, and in the sense that Freud uses it in relation to drives and their dynamic processes.

¹³⁶ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p.38.

flux ('affirmatively', as Lyotard would say). Lehmann posits that 'Lyotard speaks of an "energetic" *instead* of a representational theatre' [my italics],¹³⁷ however the 'representational' quality of the tensor is vital to Lyotard's energetic theory. As Lyotard states in 'The Tooth, The Palm':

[T]heatre... where libidinal flux becomes representation, wavers between a semiotics and an economic science.¹³⁸

This undecidability, this 'wavering', serves a practical purpose in that the libidinal force of the tensor can only be identified thus:

The elements of a total 'language' [a totality of theatrical signs] are divided and linked together in order to permit the production of effects of intensity through slight *transgressions* and the *infringement* of overlapping units [my italics].¹³⁹

Much like Lyotard's notion of the action of the figural 'within' and 'upon' discourse, the network of signification is necessary for the 'energetic' to work through:

An account of the economy of works of art that was cast in libidinal terms... would have as its central presupposition the affirmative character of works: they are not in place of anything; they do not stand for but stand; that is to say, they function through their material and its organization.¹⁴⁰

The 'material' (content, 'signs') and its 'organization' are to be thought of purely in terms of its 'relations, not only between pitches, but also between intensities, timbres, durations.'¹⁴¹ This emphasis on 'relations' leads to 'dematerialization':

[T]his 'dematerialization'... [is] a result of the *mise en signes*, conquered and crossed by the trails of influxes, offering the libido new opportunities for intensification, the fabrication of signs through 'dematerialization' providing material for the extension of tensors.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Lehmann, p.78.

¹³⁸ Lyotard, 'The Tooth, The Palm', p.283.

¹³⁹ Lyotard, 'The Tooth, The Palm', p.284.

¹⁴⁰ Lyotard, 'Beyond Representation', p.158.

¹⁴¹ Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.43.

¹⁴² Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.43.

The ‘work’ becomes a relational (de)composition of signs, which are crossed, traversed, by ‘influxes’ (libidinal energy). It is both *transgressed*: the representing sign being distorted due to the movement of energy ‘underlying’ it being ‘revealed’, and ‘*dematerialized*’: the ‘*mise en signes*’ is fragmented through this movement of energy, to become ‘material’ for the development and discovery of tensors ‘within’ it.¹⁴³

The image that we should have here is of both ‘work’ and sign under stress. As Iain Hamilton Grant rightly states:

Lyotard’s wish to reintroduce into the sign a tension that prevents it from having either a unitary designation, meaning or calculable series of such designations or meanings... is an attempt to block this movement of referral and remain as faithful as possible to the impossible intensities informing and exceeding the sign.¹⁴⁴

It is important to recognise three key terms here: ‘wish’, ‘attempt’ and ‘as possible’. As we have seen above, and as Lyotard recognises himself, this ‘attempt’ will inevitably be unsuccessful due to the necessity of having the referential sign as a ‘cover’.¹⁴⁵ However, the crucial point is that Lyotard is reintroducing a ‘*tension*’ into the sign, which is simultaneously and ‘impossibly’ defined by both its unavoidable referential function and the attempt (intrinsically limited) to be ‘as faithful *as possible*’ to its intensities. The distortion characteristic of this ‘tension’ is the visible transformation of the libidinal energetic.

2.iii An Energetic Approach to Visual Media

2.iii.i Energetic Memory: Developing a Model for Visual Representation

Now that we have arrived at a grounding in the origins and theory of the energetic, we can begin to think about the kind of shape that an energetic approach may take in relation to visual media. We have repeatedly found the demand for a focus upon *movement*, upon a movement that distorts. A movement that is visible in the wake that it

¹⁴³ It should, of course, be noted that these allusions to layers of depth are quite inappropriate. Everything occurs only on and as ‘surface’.

¹⁴⁴ Iain Hamilton Grant, ‘Glossary’, in Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, p.xv.

¹⁴⁵ A further term denoting a sense of depth, which Lyotard is forced to use, although adding his reservation: ‘in the sense that it acts as a cover’ (*Libidinal Economy*, p.50) (i.e. not actually *being* a cover).

leaves. This movement is of affect, of force, of indiscernible energy, which is simultaneous with ideational representation, with the network of discourse.

And here we find the central place of memory in energetic theory. *Memory is redefined.* An *energetic conception of memory* is not seen for its referential, historical or verifiable qualities, but as a ‘text’ to be traversed, transgressed, to manifest and express the energetic, through relations and differences. It is a ‘tensor’, caught within the tension of ‘impossibles’. It is a *surface*. Any relationship of depth, of transcription or translation, is necessarily challenged. It is that which allows the energetic to be *felt*. It is important that this position is clear, so we will take this opportunity to re-state it, in the context of our previous discussions.

If Freud gives us one sense of memory as, essentially, a recording device (*à la* ‘mystic writing pad’), a ‘sign’ or ‘representation’ which ‘stands for’ a deferred presence, a ‘lack’ (in Lyotard’s terms), he also gives us another which is, perhaps, never given a comprehensive treatment but is frequently assumed, and which we have detailed in the previous chapter. The mnemonic image is fundamentally situated ‘within’ (with its now familiar reservation) the world of the primary processes. As we have seen throughout Chapter 1, this first description of memory accords with a hermeneutic approach in Freud’s thought and psychoanalysis generally. However, the second positions memory as an energetic concept. Thought in terms of its role as the facilitator of affective force, it is the means by which the affective can be expressed, through its movements, patterns and distortions in ideational representation (comprised of mnemonic images).

This conception of memory provides us with a model through which we can approach visual media energetically. And this model is well illustrated by Lyotard’s description of the ‘dream-work’ in his paper ‘The Dream-Work Does Not Think’. We can read this paper as an example of the kind of interaction between the energetic and visual representation that is operative in our engagement with visual media. Whilst Lyotard addresses the fact that the dream, which is comprised of mnemonic images, does represent a wish and ‘at bottom is fully intelligible’,¹⁴⁶ thus allowing the possibility of a hermeneutic approach, it is also an ‘always-already’ ‘worked-over text’,¹⁴⁷ a ‘surface’

¹⁴⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, ‘The Dream-Work Does Not Think’, in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), p.20.

¹⁴⁷ Lyotard, ‘Dream-Work Does Not Think’, p.51.

‘worked-over’ by desire. It is in the ‘dream-work’ that we see the ephemeral and transitory nature of the mnemic image and, as Lyotard quotes Freud as saying: ‘the dream-work... is the essence of dreaming’.¹⁴⁸ Desire ‘transforms’ the mnemic image(s) of the ‘text’,¹⁴⁹ making these transformations, the movement and relations between images, the means by which desire is expressed:

[T]he work of desire is the result of manhandling a text. Desire does not speak; it does violence to the order of utterance.¹⁵⁰

This violence provides an ‘*encounter*’ with desire, rather than a communication of it: the mnemic image does not ‘stand for’ desire, but desire irrupts through its transgression. The dream can be thought of as a surface, over which desire moves through distorting mnemic images. It is a conception of the mutual interaction of energetics and representation that is characteristic of Derrida’s ‘psychical writing’ as much as Lyotard’s libidinal economy of the tensorial sign. A conception heavily influenced by the psychoanalytic treatment of a theory of energetics, integral to the function of which is an original reading of memory, memory thought *otherwise*.

We can begin to see, typified through this example of the dream, how we can use an energetic conception of memory, a conception of memory that is defined by its place in an energetic theory, as a model through which to develop an energetic approach to visual media. By holding representation in visual media to be of an equivalent status to ideational or mnemic representation, as we have determined it in psychoanalytic theory, in poststructuralist theory and in Lyotard’s energetic approach to the dream above, *we can think the processes of representation in each medium differently: through their dialogic engagement with an energetics*, rather than privileging a hermeneutic response.

We have found this energetic approach often to be associated with a requirement for becoming ‘receptive’ to affective processes through what is variously termed ‘free-floating attention’, ‘evenly-suspended attention’, even, with some modification, the

¹⁴⁸ Lyotard, ‘Dream-Work Does Not Think’, p.20.

¹⁴⁹ The image of a ‘text’ is fully appropriate due to the referential aspect of the mnemic image (of which the ‘text’ of the dream is comprised), representing the wish (therefore, the mnemic image, *in totalis*, has two representative functions - in the context of the dream, representing the wish, and in the context of the wider psyche, representing past events). This representative function is here being juxtaposed with an energetic quality, which makes of the mnemic image an expression of desire, a ‘beyond’ (but not without) representation.

¹⁵⁰ Lyotard, ‘Dream-Work Does Not Think’, p.19.

‘receptive unconscious’. For as much as these processes are in motion, so they move us. We must seek to resist the temptation to ‘analyse’, but instead become passive, become sensitive to the displacements, ebbs and flows of affect. This involves allowing affective force to permeate our unconscious, so that it can develop into, *become conscious as*, the ‘inspired idea’. This sounds too abstract, too ‘spiritual’. Can this be avoided? We must attempt to deal in evidence. And so I shall try.

I shall endeavour, firstly, to do this through drawing upon a particular attempt to practically implement an energetic approach to painting. The source that we shall be looking at is the work of Anton Ehrenzweig, such a major influence upon the ideas of Lyotard and yet relatively forgotten in recent years.

2.iii.ii Anton Ehrenzweig: ‘Unconscious Scanning’ and the Potential Problems of an Energetic Approach

In his 1967 work *The Hidden Order of Art*, Anton Ehrenzweig makes a clear distinction between two different kinds of possible response to art: ‘conscious intellect’ and ‘unconscious intuition’.¹⁵¹ In a strategy which closely resembles the requirements that we have found being demanded in order to address an energetic approach, Ehrenzweig claims that:

What, of course, is needed is an undifferentiated attention akin to syncretistic vision which does not focus on detail, but holds the total structure of the work of art in a single undifferentiated view.¹⁵²

This ‘undifferentiated attention’ will clearly remind us of the practices called for in psychoanalysis by Green, Bollas and the Botellas, and this is no accident. Ehrenzweig is certainly drawing upon psychoanalytic practices for his model.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination*, (University of California Press, 1967), p.44.

¹⁵² Ehrenzweig, p.23.

¹⁵³ Cf. Ehrenzweig, p.277. Near the end of his study, Ehrenzweig aligns his approach explicitly with psychoanalysis: ‘I have discussed elsewhere the undifferentiated structure of the analyst’s ‘free-floating’ attention... Only in this way will he extract from it some inconspicuous detail that may contain the most significant symbolism’. A difference here: whilst Ehrenzweig asserts that the psychoanalyst is seeking some passed over detail which is of interest for its *symbolism*, the psychoanalytic theory with which we have dealt has used this strategy to connect with the *affective* aspects of the analysand’s discourse.

Similarly, he calls for ‘passivity’¹⁵⁴ and an ‘absence of mind’,¹⁵⁵ which enable the process that he terms ‘unconscious scanning’. We should be familiar, from our previous explorations in energetic theory, with the kind of sensibility that is being referred to by Ehrenzweig, but it is in the way that he presents its practical realisation in relation to a visual medium that we find our primary interest. He is emphatic in citing the necessity for unconscious scanning to be held in relation with conscious intellect. As he states:

The integration of art’s substructure is only observed through its conscious signal: pictorial space. In this way we are forced to observe the unconscious structure of art with the gestalt techniques of the (conscious or preconscious) secondary processes which will automatically infuse a more solid and compact structure into it.¹⁵⁶

Whilst we would take issue with Ehrenzweig’s assertion of a ‘substructure’ in art, and his apparent assumption that the ‘unconscious’ ‘hidden order’ is obscured by, hidden *beneath* the consciously perceptible image, it is the case that we can only become aware of affective force through the representative, the consciously apprehensible.

In art, the point which allows us access, as Ehrenzweig tells us, is ‘pictorial space’. In responding to pictorial space, the spectator must perform an alternation, a ‘swing[ing] between two poles... now focusing on single gestalt patterns, now blotting out all conscious awareness in order to take in the undivided whole.’¹⁵⁷ A ‘syncretistic’ vision: seeing the work as a totality, embracing it in its entirety in a single moment. How? Ehrenzweig means this literally, as he tells us in relation to ‘counterchange ornaments’ or ‘Rubin’s double profiles’: ‘it must be assumed that the artist can unconsciously comprehend both alternative views in a single glance.’¹⁵⁸ ‘Unconsciously comprehend’: this oxymoronic phrase not only strikes an awkward note, but also, I would surmise, exemplifies the point of difficulty within this model. A recognition that we shall return to momentarily.

But we stay for now with Ehrenzweig’s theory. ‘An undivided whole’ – the pictorial space is comprised, first and foremost, of relations:

¹⁵⁴ Ehrenzweig, p.279.

¹⁵⁵ Ehrenzweig, p.25.

¹⁵⁶ Ehrenzweig, p.78.

¹⁵⁷ Ehrenzweig, p.121.

¹⁵⁸ Ehrenzweig, p.23.

Pictorial space serves as a signal of the countless form relationships by which every single element of the work is tied to every other element in the structure.¹⁵⁹

These relations are of such variety and complexity that, whilst they can be perceived consciously, they can only be experienced as a network, in its entirety, through unconscious scanning. Relations are linked to form patterns (cf. Bollas), patterns which are constantly in flux, in motion:

Our vision is... directed to highly mobile and unstable patterns of pictorial space and its fluttering pulse... A mighty pulse skims through the entire picture plane, now lifting this or the other area to form a fleeting and swiftly crumbling pattern.¹⁶⁰

We can see the alternation here. A ‘fluttering pulse’, a ‘mighty pulse’: the waxing and waning of force, the difference it creates: the intensity of force is felt differently. It is ‘mighty’, overpowering the pictorial space, blindingly incandescent. It is ‘fluttering’, shifting, slipping. Ungraspable, without the most determined receptivity, the most intricate scrutiny of its distortions, of its affective impressions upon the spectator. Its patterns are in motion: perceived, *felt*, and then we are ‘moved’ to and by another ‘area’. We *see* the pattern, we *see* the distortion; we *feel* the affective force marked by representational difference; we are *moved* by its flow.

There is a first danger in this approach, of falling too far into one response or another. The balance must be kept between a conscious and ‘unconscious’ response, all aspects of this process must be in co-ordination and conjunction. They are indivisible. Ehrenzweig details the risk of consciously ‘fragmenting’ the pictorial space, of, somewhat artificially, seeing it as a surface of distortion, but not allowing oneself to be receptive to the force that is simultaneous with it, that innervates it. He describes artistic practices that exist in this condition as ‘schizophrenic art [which] only offers the surface experience of fragmentation and death without being redeemed by low-level coherence.’¹⁶¹ Patterns do not emerge; there is no movement in this art. As each element is in isolation, there is no network. And this is a danger also for criticism, a danger

¹⁵⁹ Ehrenzweig, p.80.

¹⁶⁰ Ehrenzweig, p.85.

¹⁶¹ Ehrenzweig, p.122.

which Ehrenzweig compares with the problems that analysis may face with a schizophrenic patient:

Highly articulate interpretations that appeal only to the rational surface level of thinking may only invite more violent fragmentation.¹⁶²

Interpretations which are either too complete, or too premature, risk closing the work, risk reducing it to a dead surface, to desertification. Conversely, Ehrenzweig states very simply the risk of over-undifferentiation, of losing contact with the network of discourse, a phenomenon that we have seen in relation to, for example, negative hallucination: 'Death is undifferentiation.'¹⁶³ It marks the end of any kind of response, denies the possibility of a pattern emerging and results in a pure homogenization for the spectator.

Finally, with this understanding, we can turn to look at perhaps the most complete concrete example that Ehrenzweig provides of the response that he is advocating. We find this being given in the rather unassuming form of the London Underground Map:

If we choose to look at it as a good design, the lines of the diagram will suddenly detach themselves from the surface and rhythmically intertwine and embrace each other. This change indicates that we no longer react with our reason alone, and have mobilized deeper levels of sensitivity.¹⁶⁴

But whilst Ehrenzweig provides us with examples of an energetic approach as a practice of vision, a way of seeing an image, he does not give any instances of it working as a mode of criticism or 'interpretation' ('response' remains the more accurate term) in relation to the image.

There is a clear reason for this, and it is a reason that poses a problem, that, as we shall find, constitutes another danger, and that constantly threatens any attempt to develop an energetic approach. Whilst there is much in Ehrenzweig's theory that our conception of energetics is in agreement with, and his explanations offer useful elucidation concerning some of the processes with which our energetic approach seeks to engage, he also

¹⁶² Ehrenzweig, p.278.

¹⁶³ Ehrenzweig, p.296. We can usefully think of this in terms of Freud's quantitative theory, with complete undifferentiation being equivalent to a complete unbinding of cathexis: the aim of the death-drive, a total reduction of tensions to zero.

¹⁶⁴ Ehrenzweig, p.60.

illustrates well a risk that we must attempt to avoid. His theory of a mode for viewing art results in an entirely *subjective* response. The ‘patterns’ that emerge are for the spectator, and only for the spectator in their idiosyncrasy. Subjective response is inevitably an aspect of any energetic approach, but to fall into this position exclusively has the consequence of refuting any possibility of a critical practice, any debate or dialogue over a work, any frame of reference through which it can be discussed. Ehrenzweig’s notion of ‘undifferentiation’ may pose the threat of ‘death’, of homogenization, for the spectator, disallowing ‘unconscious scanning’. However, the practices of ‘unconscious comprehension’ and ‘unconscious scanning’, themselves, pose a correspondent threat to the development of a non-hermeneutic methodology that engages with the energetic aspects of representation.

This is not a problem that we are necessarily attempting to solve. Rather, it is a challenge which we seek to address through our dialogic studies of energetics in theatre and cinema, respectively. As will emerge in greater detail during the course of the medium-specific arguments over the following chapters, we attempt to avoid the necessity of a pure subjectivity. Instead we focus upon the *processes* through which an energetics can be seen to work in each medium, upon the ways that each medium is *structured* towards particular modes of engagement with the spectator, and how aspects of each medium resist hermeneutic interpretation, becoming ‘thinkable’ through their affinity with energetic concepts and models. We focus upon structures and intrinsic features that are distinctive to the particular medium, over readings of specific works. One of the aims in this is to establish a framework through which the peculiarities, innovations and modifications that are established by individual works, interacting with the characteristics of their medium, may be thought. But for the present, we are concerned primarily with opening a debate, speculative as it inevitably is, regarding the nature of the tension between hermeneutic and energetic responses to the representational modes of specific forms of visual media, and the suitability of each approach.

Chapter 3: Theatre and an Energetic Approach, Part 1

3.i The Ghosts, Memory, Plays

The question of memory in the theatre is one that has attracted much recent attention. Several book-length studies having been published in the last ten years that take this problematic, and labyrinthine, subject as their point of departure, either for exploring specific forms of theatre or for attempting to define some of the constituent processes and features of theatre.

In *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama*, first published in 1999, Jeanette Malkin provides a key example of an approach that deals with the former: specific forms of theatre. She claims that there has been a significant shift in ‘the way we remember’, identifying this shift with a certain ‘postmodernist’ construction of memory. This change, she argues, is reflected in the ways that ‘postmodernist’ theatre performs the workings of memory. Malkin argues that each of the ‘postmodern’ plays and playwrights that she refers to exhibit this ‘postmodern’ memory in divergent ways (although some are more divergent, further from her characterisation of ‘postmodern’ memory, than others). In her analysis, ‘postmodernism is the form and worldview through which... memory is processed and inscribed into... drama/theatre.’¹⁶⁵ But what is this ‘change’ in memory, and what does this kind of analysis entail?

The group of playwrights that Malkin discusses (Samuel Beckett, Heiner Müller, Sam Shepard, Suzan-Lori Parks and Thomas Bernhard) are either said to express what has ‘happened’ to memory in its postmodernist conception, or they explore how cultural trauma is remembered, memorialised (or not). Often they do both. For Malkin, citing Richard Terdiman, each ‘era’ has its own memory. Both Malkin and Terdiman are working with a historicised idea of memory, presenting it as a concept that changes between self-defined historical periods. For example, Terdiman claims that the period from ‘1789 to 1920 or so’¹⁶⁶ can be termed a time of ‘memory crisis’. Malkin’s periodisation is slightly different. For her there is a ‘modernist’ conception of memory, in which ‘we find paradigms of a basically unified (personal or collective) consciousness, employing coherent dramatic enunciations in order that a past be

¹⁶⁵ Jeanette Malkin, *Memory-Theatre and Postmodern Drama* (University of Michigan Press, 1999), p.1.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Cornell University Press, 1993), p.4.

illuminated and a present explained... through memory'.¹⁶⁷ This is a deeply problematic definition, which we shall be looking at a little more closely further on.

By contrast, 'postmodernist' memory is determined to be the 'nonnarrative reproduction of conflated, disrupted, repetitive, and moreover collectively retained and articulated fragments.'¹⁶⁸ It is comprised of 'disconnected stimuli: conflicting discourses, overlapping voices, hallucinatory fragments.'¹⁶⁹ Between these two definitions there is not a change in our conception of memory itself, but rather within the referential function of memory. The way that memory refers to the past, the way that the past is 'accessed' (or now, as Malkin states, more often than not 'intrudes') is different. Memory remains a 'repository' of the past, but now a fragmented and nonlinear one. A 'traumatised' one. Each play is examined in relation to this notion of memory: each situates itself differently, approaching memory in a unique way, but all share the same fundamental ethos. Malkin sets herself the task of elucidating how the group of playwrights that she engages with, characterised by their shared thematic interest in memory and their shared 'postmodern aesthetic',¹⁷⁰ reflect this 'new way of remembering', and how they represent 'the wounds and commands of history as inscribed within their particular national, ethnic, or personal milieu.'¹⁷¹ These arguments serve to illuminate the plays with which Malkin is concerned in relation to a specific understanding of memory. But this is not our memory.

We are closer, perhaps, to the other side of our preliminary disjunction, to thinking theatre itself, its constituent processes and features, through memory:

[O]ne might argue that every play is a memory play.¹⁷²

This deceptively off-hand comment by Marvin Carlson, in his *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (2001), seems, momentarily, a strikingly sweeping one. However, Carlson does frame this statement with the recognition that he is referring to a particular idea of 'memory', and it is a quite specific one: 'cultural memory'. Carlson's

¹⁶⁷ Malkin, p.21.

¹⁶⁸ Malkin, p.4.

¹⁶⁹ Malkin, p.29.

¹⁷⁰ Malkin, p.215.

¹⁷¹ Malkin, p.215.

¹⁷² Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (University of Michigan Press, 2001), p.2.

argument here has two aspects. Firstly, that all plays, theatre in general, provide ‘society with the most tangible records of its attempts to understand its own operations’,¹⁷³ as ‘repositories’ for them. This view relates closely to Malkin’s claims regarding the expression of a ‘postmodernist’ conception of memory in a specific group of plays. The second aspect is that plays also integrate, are ‘haunted by’, the repetition of past performances, of previous perceptions and familiar experiences. Theatre is a recycling machine *par excellence*. This second characteristic is named ‘ghosting’ by Carlson: ‘unlike the reception operations of genre... ghosting presents the identical thing... in a somewhat different context.’¹⁷⁴ Both the figure of the ‘repository’ and the process of ‘ghosting’ construct an idea of memory as something to be ‘recalled’, as something that will present itself, unadulterated, in another time, another place, another ‘context’.

Alice Rayner identifies precisely the significance of this line of thought in her recent, and highly insightful, book *Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (2006):

If the returning thing is identical to what was encountered before, it... is rather part of an identifiable historical memory that is fully available to consciousness.¹⁷⁵

This factor of ‘identifiability’, this definition of memory as being accessible and localisable as part of a personal or historical narrative, again, this is not our memory. Rayner certainly finds such a conception troubling in relation to the idea of the ‘ghost’ or ‘haunting’. As she argues, if what returns is ‘identical’ to its previous incarnation, it loses any possibility of being an ‘uncanny’ return. Rather, ‘making full use of the terms *ghost* and *haunting* involves, it seems to me, their remaining in the realm of uncertainty.’¹⁷⁶ This disagreement over the nature of the ‘ghost’ is, at heart, *a disagreement over the function of memory*. The ghost for both Carlson and Rayner, I would suggest, is the manifestation of the action of memory in theatre, and a figure that marks, that institutes, very different ways of thinking theatre itself. For Rayner, the quality of spectral ‘uncertainty’ is illustrative of the theatrical medium. For her:

¹⁷³ Carlson, p.2.

¹⁷⁴ Carlson, p.7.

¹⁷⁵ Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p.xxii.

¹⁷⁶ Rayner, p.xxiii.

Theatre is the specific site where appearance and disappearance reproduce the relations between the living and the dead, not as a form of representation, but as a form of consciousness that has moved beyond dualities and problems of representation *without disregarding them* [my italics].¹⁷⁷

Carlson, however, through the process of ‘ghosting’ makes theatre indelibly representational and referential. The repeated image, gesture or motif refers the spectator to a past and previous source, to a different scene, to somewhere else. It is this ‘past’, ancestors at various removes, that haunts the play, every play. And I, like Rayner, as indicated by her above qualification ‘without disregarding them’, would not wish to argue that this process does not occur. It certainly does. Even though precisely *where* we are being referred to is perhaps another matter. However, to think that this backwards-looking, referential process is the limit and extent of the mnemonic model or, indeed, the ‘there-gone’, re-/dis-membered figure of the ghost, in relation to theatrical representation would be to close the discussion before it has really begun, and thus not ‘make *full* use’ of our terms or subjects. ‘We *understand it otherwise*’: Lyotard’s declaration echoes throughout.

But, if we think that there is another dimension to memory in theatre, as theatre, as a way of ‘thinking’ and ‘seeing’ theatre, what is this *other* memory that is at play?

Let us work this through. Initially, let us think what is unaccounted for by this retrospective, referential concept of memory, by exploring those aspects of theatricality that complicate, discomfit and render such a concept insufficient. Or, perhaps we could say more appropriately, incomplete.

3.i.i ‘Funesian’ Memory

The first thing to note, however, is that my constant need to refer to ‘this particular concept of memory’ imposes such awkward phrasing upon my prose. A more concise appellation would certainly allow a greater clarity in terms of both syntax and argument. I suggest the term ‘Funesian’ to describe the type of memory that, for example, we see Carlson drawing upon in relation to theatre, particularly through his concept of ghosting. It is a type of memory that is broadly analogous to the ‘construction of

¹⁷⁷ Rayner, p.xvi.

memory' that Richard Terdiman defines as 'the *absolute reproduction of unchanging contents*'¹⁷⁸ or 'the literalist memory model'.¹⁷⁹ The term 'Funesian' is derived from a short story, 'Funes the Memorious',¹⁸⁰ by Jorge Luis Borges. In this a young man obsessed with precision, named Ireneo Funes, comes to possess, as the result of an accident, a perfectly 'infallible' memory:

He knew by heart the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on 30 April 1882...
Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day; he never hesitated, but each reconstruction had required a whole day.¹⁸¹

As we can see, Funes is clearly an extreme example, and there is no shortage of wit in Borges's *ad absurdum* description of his condition. Thus, of course, I am not implying that Carlson's theory of 'ghosting' assumes or requires such a radical malformation. However, both presentations do make equivalent claims concerning how memory functions; their difference is simply a question of degree. If we are thinking of memory as a form of archive, a store of experiences to be recalled when required (and do all of us not usually consider it thus and, indeed, rely upon it throughout our daily lives?) then, in many ways, Funes represents an ideal. Who has not wished at some point for a more reliable, 'better' memory? But Borges is far from representing Funes's circumstance as an enviable one. As a result of his flawless powers of recall, Funes 'was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details'.¹⁸² The ability to think abstract thoughts, to think creatively, in fact, to think *well* ('capably') is denied to Funes. And Borges relates this side-effect to Funes's incapacity to dream, or at least to do so in any recognisable way, as Funes states:

'My dreams are like you people's waking hours.'¹⁸³

Funes's dreams are not marked by distortion, they are acts of recollection and nothing more. What is lost in Funes's dreams and, indeed, his psychical functioning, is the play

¹⁷⁸ Terdiman, p.288.

¹⁷⁹ Terdiman, p.190.

¹⁸⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, 'Funes the Memorious', in *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (London: Penguin, 1970; repr. 2000), pp.87-95.

¹⁸¹ Borges, p.92.

¹⁸² Borges, p.94.

¹⁸³ Borges, p.92.

of unconscious forces, of desire, of repression: they are not dreams as we would know them, but are essentially exact reproductions of Funes's days. There is no possibility of association (which, it could be said, is essentially a 'forgetting of differences'). Funes's memory sacrifices the affective, the energetic, in favour of precise, automaton reproduction. My use of the term 'Funesian', therefore, denotes a conception of memory that privileges this latter position or tendency.

3.i.ii Death: A Complication

'Memory' and 'the ghost' are entwined, and particularly so in theatre. They dance in connection, sometimes together, sometimes apart, but always held in tension one to the other. And this is truly a *danse macabre*, as the stage upon which they dance is a site for trafficking with death. A little melodramatic. Perhaps. But theatre has been posited in relation to death throughout its history, and this relation is embedded within theatre's founding narratives. As Roland Barthes notes:

We know the original relation of the theatre and the cult of the Dead: the first actors *separated* themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body *simultaneously living and dead* [my italics].¹⁸⁴

To partake of theatre is an act of 'separation': it is to become imbued with a certain impression of death that marks one as being not quite part of the world of the living, but between two worlds. We could say a state of 'un-death'; we could say a status akin to the ghost. And, indeed, in his typically rigorous work *Theatricality as Medium*, Samuel Weber echoes Barthes by discussing theatricality in precisely these terms: 'life and death can no longer simply be opposed to one another as mutually exclusive. In the spectral space of theatricality, the two are revealed to be inseparable'.¹⁸⁵

Funesian memory does not, it seems to me, fit easily as a model through which to approach such accounts of theatre. And this is represented most efficaciously by two distinct (but complementary) characteristics of theatricality, each a defining constituent in determining theatrical 'ghostliness'; phenomena that are situated between life and

¹⁸⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982; repr. London: Vintage, 2000), p.31.

¹⁸⁵ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p.189.

death. The names I give to these are: ontological coincidence and elision, each of which is explored individually below. Ontological coincidence is discussed, initially, in terms of its challenge to Funesian memory, which is then followed by an enquiry into its dialogic place within an energetic approach. This forms the remainder of this chapter. Elision is dealt with in the following chapter (Chapter 3, Part 2), and entails a similar structure, also culminating in a speculative analysis of how elision can be seen to engage with an energetics of theatricality, as opposed to a Funesian mnemonic model.

3.ii Ontological Coincidence: what is a dog, and yet not a dog?

Much of Bert O. States's now classic book, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, is concerned with a uniquely theatrical condition: the absolute coincidence between representation and the thing which it represents. As he succinctly explains:

A dog on stage is certainly an object...but the act of theatricalising it...neutralizes its objectivity and claims it as a *likeness* of a dog... [I]n the theatre there is no ontological difference between the image and the object.¹⁸⁶

The object is both 'a dog' and a '*likeness* of a dog', object and 'image'. What seems of most interest to me here is the question of what happens to the object?

If we consider the object that most preoccupies thinking about theatre, the human-as-actor,¹⁸⁷ we find this issue being described in similar terms by both States and Rayner. States observes, for example, that: 'No matter how he acts, there is always *the ghost of a self* in his performance [my italics]'.¹⁸⁸ And this identification, regarding the position of the figure of the ghost, is paralleled by Rayner when she says: 'To inhabit a character fully is to become a ghost who wears a human, living mask.'¹⁸⁹ Yet, we should note that States and Rayner diverge over their specific referents when using the term 'ghost'. For States the 'ghost' is the 'objectivity', in the sense of *being an object*: the term is ambiguous, but States's use of it is unavoidable, of the human-as-actor. It is the self of

¹⁸⁶ Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On The Phenomenology of Theatre* (University of California Press, 1985), pp.34-35.

¹⁸⁷ I use this term to indicate a distinction from the human form that is an object but not an actor playing a character (for example, director Tadeusz Kantor sitting on stage during performances of his plays, or the steadily growing corpse that reaches monstrous proportions in Ionesco's *Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It*, the status of both of which, in terms of characterization, is certainly debatable), and from the actor that is not human (such as the marionette or the animal).

¹⁸⁸ States, p.125.

¹⁸⁹ Rayner, p.xx.

the actor which has become ghostly in the performance, which haunts his/her performance of the character. Rayner, on the other hand, identifies the 'ghost' as 'the phantom of character': the human-as-actor is made ghostly by becoming the character. Essentially, these two perspectives are different sides of the same duality. The key point is that the performing of a role, the act of becoming a theatrical 'image' (although the more inclusive 'representation', referring not only to the visual, would perhaps be more accurate), is to depart one world for another and to exist between them, is to 'become a ghost'.

And, naturally, becoming a ghost involves a death. The death of a self, as Rayner states:

The launch into performance involves the death of a particular sense of self, of the particularity of self: a giving away of self.¹⁹⁰

However, as is perhaps becoming a familiar motif with references from Rayner's work, one must pay close attention to her use of qualifications. The death here is 'of *a particular sense of self*', 'the *particularity of self*', not of the self entirely. Indeed, States is quite explicit in rejecting, as he says, Rousseau's concern that the actor "annihilates himself" in the character.¹⁹¹ Rather, for States, the self is detectable as:

[s]omething else in the characterization, a superconsciousness that could be nothing other than the actor's awareness of his own self-sufficiency as he moves between the contradictory zones of the illusory and the real.¹⁹²

This claim risks, I would suggest, going too far in the opposite direction. The term 'superconsciousness' indicates, literally, an 'above', 'beside' or 'beyond' consciousness. But the question then becomes, what is this consciousness that is 'beneath', or that has been 'left behind' by, the actor's self or 'superconsciousness'? States's answer is: the self of the actor that 'consents to serve as the channel'¹⁹³ for theatrical representation. We see here that States attempts to counteract the notion of the actor's 'disappearance' by theorising a kind of dual-ego for the actor. The actor is at once 'someone who consents to be used',¹⁹⁴ and also 'unavoidably remains just outside

¹⁹⁰ Rayner, p.xx.

¹⁹¹ States, p.123.

¹⁹² States, p.125.

¹⁹³ States, p.128.

¹⁹⁴ States, p.127.

the character he is playing'.¹⁹⁵ The former constitutes 'perhaps... the true source of the sacrificial depth of playing',¹⁹⁶ yet this 'sacrifice' is really no sacrifice at all. It is, to use States's term, a 'displacement', in which the 'remains' of the actor are deemed 'self-sufficient'. For him there is a ghost, but no death; nothing is lost. Leaving aside the perhaps rather vexed questions of whether it is possible to demarcate and 'self-contain' one's ego in such a way, and what 'self-sufficiency' (i.e. not requiring 'aid or support from outside; able to supply one's needs oneself'¹⁹⁷) would entail for the 'superconsciousness' of the actor, this model seems both unnecessarily complex and counter-intuitive. That becoming a character involves a loss, a surrender, at least of some form, is both extensively posited¹⁹⁸ and, unlike States's argument, complies with the principle of Ockham's razor ('*Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate*',¹⁹⁹).

But, let there be no doubt, States is quite correct, in my view, to resist the idea of the actor's disappearance or 'annihilation in the character' ('annihilation': from the Latin *ad nihil*, 'to nothing', to no-thing). The human-as-actor is an object, a thing, and account must be taken of the actor's self in the theatrical image, which is always a composite, a compromise. Rayner indicates how we might do this in her reference to the 'particularity of self'. How might we interpret this phrase? The 'particularity of self' is the self as individual, the specificity of the self, as an entity whole and of-itself. *This particular* sense of self is sacrificed. It becomes something else. A new sense of self. Call it a ghost. It is this condition of theatrical representation that dramatist Howard Barker describes in one of the highly poetic, and provocatively opaque, vignettes that comprise a significant proportion of his pithy yet wide-ranging study, *Death, The One and the Art of Theatre*:

¹⁹⁵ States, p.125.

¹⁹⁶ States, pp.127-128.

¹⁹⁷ OED, under entry for 'self-sufficient'.

¹⁹⁸ One need only think, for example, of 'Method acting', or of Stanislavski's ideas on theatre, or Pirandello's.

¹⁹⁹ 'Plurality should not be assumed unnecessarily' ('*Quodlibeta* No. 5, Question 1, Art. 2' (c1324), in J.C. Way, *Occam's Opera Theologica* (1980), p.476).

I am consumed by a sense of intimacy with the world, the self disintegrated, a dissolution therefore, but also a belonging. The dead have known this, and some knew not only this but *precisely* this.²⁰⁰

Whilst these apparent digressions may seem to bear little relation to theatre, Barker's constant refrain of '[a]ll I describe is theatre even where theatre is not the subject'²⁰¹ encourages us to read them not simply as metaphors for theatre, but as illustrations of theatricality beyond theatre. In this dense quotation, Barker identifies theatricality with a 'dissolution' of the self. Literally, a 'separation into parts', a 'destruction of the existing condition' and, to take its scientific connotation, in physics, 'to diffuse the molecules of (a solid or gas) *in* a liquid so that they are indistinguishable from it'.²⁰² Just so, the self 'disintegrated', the self 'consumed', is 'diffused' with the character, to produce the theatrical 'image'.

And herein lies its *uniqueness*. There is a death, yes, but let us not forget that there is also a 'belonging': the self of the human-as-actor does not disappear, as States is fearful of, but is implicated in the image. More than this, however, 'belonging' is a requisite feature of the ghostliness of the image. The ghost is a figure that both belongs and does not belong: it is this characteristic that defines its uncanny status. *Unheimlich*, 'un-homely', Freud's now prevalent term that is commonly translated as 'uncanny': to be defined thus presupposes a link with the home, to disturb the homely requires that the disturbant be in some way *of* the home. The ghost un-settles specifically because, at least on some level, it *belongs here*. It always has. The ghost has a certain legitimacy, a claim on the place that it haunts, as Weber notes:

A ghost, in short, must *take place*... It is tied to a particular locale, and yet not to any single one.²⁰³

The ghost is 'tied', bound, to a 'locale', but not 'any single one'. What do we make of this?

²⁰⁰ Howard Barker, *Death, The One and the Art of Theatre* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), p.19.

²⁰¹ Barker, p.16.

²⁰² OED, under entry for 'dissolve'.

²⁰³ Weber, p.182.

‘Locale’ is a relatively uncommon term, and chosen very judiciously. It refers specifically to ‘a place considered with reference to some particular event or circumstances connected with it’:²⁰⁴ the locale is defined in relation to a ‘particular event’. Closely informing how we are to understand this concept is the preceding phrase, which Weber returns to throughout *Theatricality as Medium*, ‘taking place’. As he says:

They [theatrical ‘events’ or ‘happenings’] take place, which means in a particular place, and yet simultaneously also *pass away*.²⁰⁵

The ‘locale’ is the ideal figure, the ideal term, for referring to the site of such ‘taking place’. It indicates both the need for a specific, physical placing of theatrical representation, and also its status as an ‘event’, a ‘passing away’. We can see, therefore, that the corollary ‘not to any single one’, in the former quotation, is already implicit within the sense of ‘locale’. It fundamentally serves to elicit, to disinter, the tension that this word encapsulates in its theatrical context. A theatrical conception of ‘locale’ already suggests that, whilst the ghost is bound to a certain material ‘place’ (the objective), this place is never the same twice. This is concomitant with the notion that theatrical representation is an event which is ghostly at its inception, it is haunted from the beginning, is nothing before the ghost. So, whilst the ghost always ‘belongs’ in this place, it is also always different from any previous instance, no matter how familiar, similar or referential it may be. Weber succinctly enunciates the position that this leaves us in, when he states that:

Out of the dislocations of its repetitions emerges nothing more or less than the *singularity of the theatrical event*.²⁰⁶

‘Dis-locations’: the ‘putting out of place’ of the locale. The singularity of the event, of theatrical representation, is simultaneously and, paradoxically, co-dependent (we could say, to use a neologism, ‘intercausative’) with the originality of place. From this we can come to the conclusion that *ontological coincidence in the theatrical act is originary*. It is never identical to itself. And this condition of theatrical representation is problematic for Funesian memory.

²⁰⁴ OED, under entry for ‘locale’.

²⁰⁵ Weber, p.7.

²⁰⁶ Weber, p.7.

3.iii Always a First Time: Ontological Coincidence and Funesian Memory

Funesian memory, as has been described above, is based upon a theory of ‘recall’: it supposes that the primary function of memory is to return to mind a detailed impression of something perceived or experienced in the past (distorted to a greater or lesser degree, in practice). This assumes that there exists an authentic, recoverable version of the past, one that is more or less accurate and, theoretically at least, verifiable. A source, if you will, an origin. One of the key contributions in developing this concept of memory is Aristotle’s treatise *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* (or, *On Memory and Reminding Oneself*). In this work he proposes a model of memory that is very explicitly founded upon a causal relationship between an incorruptible ‘perception or conception’, which is the original, and an ‘affection’, ‘picture’ or ‘copy’ (the latter two of which are various translations for Aristotle’s term ‘*eikôn*’) that is consequently derived from it:

Memory is not perception or conception, but a state or affection connected with one of these, when time has elapsed... [P]erception is of the present, prediction of the future, and memory of the past. And this is why all memory involves time.²⁰⁷

Memory is conceived of as a kind of ‘copy’, a version of the thing itself, between which a period of time must have elapsed. Richard Sorabji articulates this relation with great clarity in a passage that is worth quoting in detail:

Aristotle’s theory of remembering requires not any kind of image, but an image that is a likeness or copy of the thing remembered... The image is causally derived from a past act of perceiving and from the corresponding object of perception.²⁰⁸

If we think of this in theatrical terms, we can see how this model complements Carlson’s theory of ‘ghosting’ well. Carlson similarly posits the existence of a prior and causally linked past ‘act’ (to take advantage of an equivocation) to which the present theatrical ‘image’ refers, of which it is a ‘likeness’ or a ‘copy’ (‘the identical thing... in a somewhat different context’). However, ontological coincidence complicates this idea

²⁰⁷ Aristotle, ‘De Memoria et Reminiscentia’, §449b24, in Richard Sorabji, *Aristotle on Memory*, 2nd edn (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co, 2004), p.48.

²⁰⁸ Sorabji, p.3.

by demonstrating that the theatrical image is unique, ‘singular’ and originary to itself. To reiterate, this does not *preclude* a certain notion of ‘ghosting’, which can certainly be maintained and provide useful insights when analysing plays, but it does suggest that this supposition (particularly when asserting identity between past and present incarnations) cannot appropriately account for the specificity of theatrical representation. Perhaps we can elucidate this argument further by turning to an example, in the form of a short digression, albeit a slightly circuitous one, the relevance of which, to a discussion on theatricality, may not be immediately apparent. However, it will allow us to consider a practice of theatricality that makes use of an extreme phenomenon, which has a bearing upon our current discussion, named the Immediacy of Experience Principle.

I spent some time over the winter of last year reading a book by American linguist Daniel Everett entitled *Don’t Sleep, There Are Snakes*, a past-time I would very much recommend. Whilst slightly outside my usual remit, I became quite engrossed in both his fascinating experiences from 30 years of field work with the Pirahã tribe in the Amazonian jungle, and his rather radical claims regarding their language. The key linguistic and sociological claim that Everett makes is that Pirahã culture is governed by a demand, or ‘taboo’, called the Immediacy of Experience Principle (IEP). The IEP states that only that which has been directly experienced or witnessed is of value or, even, to be believed:

The Pirahãs highly value direct experience and observation. The Pirahãs not only would agree that “seeing is believing”, but that “believing is seeing”. If you want to tell the Pirahãs something, they are going to want to know how you came by your knowledge. And especially they will want to know if you have direct evidence for your assertion.²⁰⁹

This connects with Everett’s observations that the Pirahãs ‘don’t store food, they don’t plan more than one day at a time, they don’t talk about the distant future or the distant past – they seem to focus on *now*, on their immediate experience.’²¹⁰ This demand is so

²⁰⁹ Daniel Everett, *Don’t Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle* (London: Profile Books, 2008), p.214.

²¹⁰ Everett, p.132. I do not wish to over-estimate this feature. It is not that the Pirahã have no conception of the past or that they ignore historical memory, it is only that they give privilege entirely to the present, what is happening *now*.

strong that it is even present in Pirahã linguistic structures, explaining not only their lack of ‘recursion’, but also their lack of perfect tenses (all statements are defined relative to the moment of speech). Such a conclusion suggests that the cultural mores of the Pirahã have a determining influence upon the formation of their language, in contravention of the phylogenetic principle governing Noam Chomsky’s theory of Universal Grammar. This may, hopefully, all be very interesting, but where does it lead us in relation to memory and theatre?

Everett includes a brief, but very revealing, section on the Pirahã use of ritual. Needless to say it similarly complies with the IEP:

The relative lack of ritual among the Pirahãs is predicted by the immediacy of experience principle... a ritual where the principal characters could not claim to have seen what he or she was enacting would be prohibited.²¹¹

The Pirahãs get around this prohibition in relation to the ‘enactment’ of one of their spirits, for example in a loosely ritualistic dance described by Everett, in a particularly theatrical way: ‘the man playing the role of the spirit claims to have encountered that spirit and claims to be possessed by that spirit.’²¹² Indeed, for Everett the most direct way to think of this ritual, and the frequent ‘encounters’ with spirits that the Pirahã have in their daily lives, is as ‘a form of Pirahã theater’.²¹³ For this performance to be acceptable, the events portrayed, the encounter with the spirit (in this case, Xaítóii), must be taken to have happened directly to the person ‘acting’ the role. The spectators must believe that he is not, in fact, acting at all. They must believe (for ‘seeing is believing’ and ‘believing is seeing’) that what they are seeing is not a representation of the spirit Xaítóii, but that it *is* the spirit Xaítóii, right there before them in the immediate present.²¹⁴ This ritual becomes an extreme example of ontological coincidence: there is literally no distinction between the ‘actor’ and the ‘role acted’, even to the point that the tribesman ‘being’ the spirit will, upon later questioning, deny all knowledge of having

²¹¹ Everett, p.84.

²¹² Everett, p.84.

²¹³ Everett, p.140.

²¹⁴ Whilst the Pirahã are not the only culture to employ such a feature in their religious ceremonies, one need only think of Vodou ceremonies in which spirits (or *Loa*) may attend by possessing participants and acting through them. However, to my knowledge, the Pirahã are the only culture that includes this requirement because of a cultural imperative for first-hand experience.

been present at all.²¹⁵ He *is* the theatrical image. And this case in point has clear implications for Funesian memory as both the concept of ‘ghosting’ and in terms of its philosophical precedents, exemplified by Aristotle’s theory, when related to theatre. As Everett notes, a consequence of the IEP is that:

The Pirahãs avoid formulaic encodings of values and instead transmit values and information via *actions and words that are original in composition with the person acting or speaking*, that have been witnessed by this person, or that have been told to this person by a witness [my italics].²¹⁶

‘Ghosting’, which identifies the transmission of a previous incarnation of a theatrical image within a present incarnation that implicitly or explicitly copies and refers to it, as we can see, is complicated under the IEP. These performances, firstly, are clearly original, not only in terms of the object, the body of the ‘actor’, but also as the ‘actions and words’ used will be different every time (i.e. he ‘tells them about where he lives in the jungle, and what he has been doing that day’:²¹⁷ there are no specifics to be repeated). Secondly, whilst very general aspects of each performance may be shared (such as the name of the spirit, his bravado, or the fact that he throws snakes towards the audience), the IEP would prohibit any understanding of it as a copy or derivative of another performance. Each performance of the Xaítóii dance rests upon the belief that it is, or has been, ‘immediately experienced’.²¹⁸ General similarities are to be explained by the belief that ‘this is just how Xaítóii is’, rather than that this performance is referring to a prior one. That the only other comparison Everett makes with Pirahã spirit

²¹⁵ Everett, p.141.

²¹⁶ Everett, p.84.

²¹⁷ Everett, p.84.

²¹⁸ One complication to this suggestion is that the IEP does not preclude the telling of something that one has heard from another witness, at *one* remove. If we are looking at these encounters through Western eyes (i.e. without belief in the Pirahã spirits: belief in the spirits enables the understanding that they can be encountered, rather than being constructed as a fiction), then this argument could be made. It would then be possible to assert that the ‘actor’ is imitating, to some degree, a past performance of the ‘spirit’ that he has seen or been told of. Certainly Everett, albeit tentatively, countenances this in his discussion of the dance as ‘a weak form of ritual’. However, this does not dilute our current argument, as to argue this one would be asserting that the ‘actor’ copies another in the attempt to create a ‘more accurate’ performance of Xaítóii. Such a notion would be alien to the Pirahã ‘actor’ as it would assume, at some level, the fictitiousness of the spirit. Everett unequivocally tells us that ‘the Pirahã do not create fiction’ (Daniel Everett, ‘Cultural Constraints on Grammar and Cognition in Pirahã’, *Current Anthropology*, 46, 4 (August–October 2005), p.625). And, as we are concerned here with elements of Pirahã culture (i.e. its ‘theatricality’), we must attempt, as far as possible, to discuss processes as they operate within a Pirahã context. Finally, it could be claimed that he/she is unconsciously imitating, but there is no possibility of supporting this argument evidentially and, even if the case, would not be recognised as such *by the Pirahã*.

encounters, in addition to theatre, is to say that ‘these... encounters with spirits – [are] similar to Western culture’s seances [sic] and mediums’,²¹⁹ should be of little surprise to us. Ontological coincidence is the conjoining of the living and the dead in one entity, which makes of the spectator a witness to an event that is happening in the here and now. In addition to this, the IEP *further* demands that the performance not be understood (by any participants) to make reference to, or copy in any way, a past event. To do so would be hearsay, would be to warrant disbelief. Thus, the conclusion to be drawn is that in theatre generally ontological coincidence opposes the identical quality of ghosting (or, indeed, the Aristotelian mnemonic model of copy-source) but, with the Pirahã, the IEP disallows the possibility of ghosting at all.

A slight aside. The Pirahã have one final facet that perhaps raises more questions than it answers, but is certainly of interest to our current discussion. We have said that Funes, as an extreme example of a certain kind of memory, had great difficulty working with abstract concepts, due to his over-precise memory function. This difficulty, Borges tells us, extended to his use of numbers, the implication being that numbering systems are imprecise due to their reliance upon numerical groupings (or place values), such as ‘tens’, ‘hundreds’, etc. Funes’s memory allows him to attribute a specific sign to each individual number. The Pirahã are a culture that operates near the opposite extreme of this. A 2008 article, jointly authored by M.C. Frank, Everett, et al, notes that ‘Everett has suggested, however, that there are no numerals in the language whatsoever and that these words instead indicate “small size or amount”’.²²⁰ He clarifies this in his 2008 book by positing that ‘number entails a violation of immediacy of experience in many of its uses’.²²¹ The Pirahã’s IEP, with its emphasis upon direct experience and the present, counteracts the use of a numbering system which ‘generalizes beyond the immediate’.²²² The result of this is that the Pirahã have very poor memories for exact quantities: ‘the case of Pirahã suggests that languages that can express large, exact cardinalities... allow

²¹⁹ Everett, p.141.

²²⁰ Michael C Frank; Daniel Everett; Evelina Fedorenko; Edward Gibson, ‘Number as a Cognitive Technology: Evidence from Pirahã Language and Cognition’, *Cognition*, 108 (2008), p.820
<<http://www.stanford.edu/~mcfrank/papers/FEFG-cognition.pdf>> [accessed 21 February 2009].

²²¹ Everett, p.196.

²²² Everett, p.196.

the speakers to remember and compare information about cardinalities accurately across space, time, and changes in modality.’²²³ Thus, one of the conclusions that the Frank, Everett, et al, paper reaches is that:

Number words [are] a cognitive technology, a tool for creating mental representations of the exact cardinalities of sets, representations that can be remembered and communicated accurately.²²⁴

Numbers are literally an *aide-mémoire*, a technology that assists the memory to be precise and work with exact quantities, no matter how large. It is striking, therefore, that both the Pirahã, on the one hand, with poor memories for exact quantities due to their concern with existence in the present, and Funes, on the other, with a perfect memory for exact quantities due to his infallible access to the past, are unable to comprehend the use of cardinal numbers. In both cases, numerical systems are too abstract, and do not relate to their experiences of the world.

We can see through the relatively extreme example of the Pirahã one of the ways in which ontological coincidence challenges Funesian memory (specifically through its originality). However, this is not the only way.

3.iii.i The Intimacy of Ontological Coincidence

In this talk of ontological coincidence, something crucial has been left behind. We can find it alluded to in the passage from Barker, a description of ontological coincidence (for such indeed is what it is) that we cited some time ago. One sentiment in particular we should recall:

I am consumed by a sense of intimacy with the world.²²⁵

‘Intimacy’ is a term that recurs often within discussions of theatre, and no more so than in the self-definitions of playhouses and theatrical institutions. We need only think of, most famously, August Strindberg’s ‘Intima Teatern’ in Stockholm, or the profusion of epithetical and eponymic uses this word is put to by theatres of all kind (from publicity

²²³ Michael C Frank; Daniel Everett; et al, p.823.

²²⁴ Michael C Frank; Daniel Everett; et al, p.820.

²²⁵ Barker, p.19.

material for the Globe, to the 'Intimate Theatre' of John Clements in London, or of Christopher Weare in Cape Town). Evidently, intimacy is, then, a virtue. How is this to be thought?

Intimacy is derived from a sense of 'closeness', of 'familiarity', specifically with another person. But it is more than this. Intimacy is predicated upon physicality, upon the tactility of the means by which theatre represents, upon an engagement with (and, indeed, through) the body. We have spoken of a 'sacrifice', a sacrifice of one 'sense of the self'. There is also a sacrifice in which the body partakes (this is, clearly, an artificial distinction for the purposes of our argument: they are of the same movement). This is broached by States when he refers to 'our creatural bond with the actor, who stands before us in a vulnerable place'.²²⁶ Intimacy does not arise only due to the simple co-presence of a person, like us, that is there to be touched (potentially), that is spatially contiguous with us. *In addition* to this, it is also due to the position, the status, of that fellow human being. 'A vulnerable place'. Ontological coincidence is tenuous. Always on the edge, its oscillation between reality and illusion, object and image, spins imperceptibly, unless tipped into a fall: decided by interruption, by denudement, by the 'shattering' of the image, in so many possible ways. And this is a risk that the actor exposes him/herself to. This is the vulnerability of his/her position. A body, essentially prone on a stage of wood or concrete, which wounds itself in the very act of consenting to become ontologically coincident, which accepts this exposure as the price of life for the theatrical image.

Whether it is coincidence or design is quite irrelevant, but the ideal illustration for this act is provided by Strindberg in *The Pelican* (*Pelikanen*, 1907), one of the chamber plays that he wrote for his new Intimate Theatre. At the end of this play Frederik (the Son), poignantly referring to his father, realises that 'it must have been him who was the pelican, because he plucked his feathers and gave them to us.'²²⁷ The allusion that this reference makes is to the reputed behaviour of the pelican in nature, which will, supposedly, wound itself by pecking at its own breast to feed its young. This is a common representation in heraldry, and is termed 'vulning' (from the Latin *vulnus*: a wound). This use of the word 'vuln' is the only use still current (and has been for

²²⁶ States, p.119.

²²⁷ August Strindberg, 'The Pelican', in *Strindberg: The Plays: Vol. 2*, trans. Gregory Motton (London: Oberon Books, 2004), p.200.

around 400 years). However, it is also the root of the more common word ‘vulnerable’. ‘Vulnerability’ is thus the acceptance of a wound to oneself, weakening oneself, sacrificing one’s own well-being, in favour of another. Intimacy in the theatre is a condition of vulnerability: the ‘creatural bond’ is accentuated by empathy for the sacrifice being undertaken *here*, before us, by a being that is just like ourselves. Whilst not a connection seemingly made by Strindberg, his image of the vulning pelican could be said to be a model for the intimacy that his newly designed theatre was striving for.

In all of this the body is the constant reminder, the incarnation or the *memento mori* (we could say), of vulnerability. It is the site of vulnerability, and this produces an unsettling tension between a certain empathy that comes from the ‘creatural bond’ and, as States terms it, ‘*the pleasure of this intimacy* [that] consists in the invitation to the audience to share a world of spirit and feeling [my italics]’.²²⁸ This ‘pleasure’, as I would frame it, is a desire for theatrical representation to continue, to evoke deeper responses, for the sense of intimacy to become stronger. Theatricality is structured to take advantage of this, to harness the quality of sadism that is implicit in this relationship. And this tension is one that Barker has described evocatively through another of his short, allegorical passages:

When the light came on, he saw her face was disfigured. This had the effect of extinguishing his desire. He found an excuse to avoid the consequences of what he himself had initiated. His actions were, however, dictated by consideration of a purely *public* kind. It was not in his sexuality that he experienced offence. On the contrary, he sensed his erotic instinct was enhanced by her disfigurement (*‘what or who had so damaged her? How had she inspired such mistreatment?’*). Once he was able to acknowledge this he accepted the challenge of her condition. He nevertheless stipulated that she wore tighter clothes. All I describe is theatre...²²⁹

This is a decidedly disconcerting passage, I think it will be agreed. It is also one that invites a wide variety of digressions, and could be debated at great length. However, I must keep to the task at hand. The disfigurement of the body is a mark of its vulnerability. It is evidence that the anonymous ‘she’ has been ‘damaged’, ‘mistreated’

²²⁸ States, p.114.

²²⁹ Barker, p.6.

(no accident this injury, this wound: she herself was to blame for it, had ‘inspired’ it) and, clearly, the power relation here presupposes that she is vulnerable to such mistreatment again. Simultaneously, his desire is ‘extinguished’ by this vulnerability and his ‘erotic instinct’ is ‘enhanced’ by it. Such ambivalence is characteristic of the organisation of intimacy that constitutes theatricality. And we can see the competing attitudes that determine the contradictory forces at work within ‘his’ desire. The element of empathy that we have associated with intimacy, with the creatural bond, precludes desire for the vulnerability of the body of the other. This is how I understand the meaning of the phrase ‘of a purely *public* kind’. It is that element of intimacy that is acceptable *publicly*. It is an acceptable admission to empathise, to pity the sacrifice being made. ‘His’ initial reaction is this empathic one. However, ‘intimacy’ also, we must not forget, carries with it a clear sexual connotation of ‘being intimate’ with another. The desire for this intimacy, the eroticism inherent to intimacy, is increased by the vulnerability, should we say the ‘suffering’, for there is certainly a sense of this, of the other. And this desire, this erotic investment of the vulnerable body is, ultimately, the stronger. Barker emphasises this through the final ‘acknowledgement’, private ‘acceptance’ and demand made by ‘him’ that ‘she wore tighter clothes’. This drawing attention to the vulnerable body, making a *spectacle* of it, is a necessity for theatrical representation. The desire to see must overcome the empathic pity for the fellow ‘creature’ who is just holding on, walking with trepidation along the edge, in the place of vulnerability that is the stage.

This conception of intimacy in the theatre, of the status of the body in ontological coincidence, has, as we might expect, an uneasy relationship with Funesian memory. To elucidate how, we turn to a short, yet exactingly intimate essay by dramaturge (amongst other things) Jan Kott, entitled ‘The Memory of the Body’ (from his 1992 book of the same name). Once more, this is not directly ‘about’ theatre. But it certainly addresses, as we have termed it before, the nature of theatricality *beyond theatre*. Kott frames his discussion by making an initial distinction, from which the rest of the paper is developed:

We all know that there are external and internal experiences, or, to put it another way, experiences that can be communicated and those that are memory or knowledge possessed by the body.²³⁰

Kott here claims that there is a certain kind of experience that is *of* the body, that which the body bears as a kind of ‘memory’, but that cannot be communicated through discourse. An experience that, indeed, cannot be represented to another without a sense of having ‘left something behind’, without there always being an enigmatic remainder just outside understanding. What kind of experiences could have this elusive quality? Kott provides us with two examples. The first of these, connecting with our previous discussion, is the erotic knowledge of the body (containing an ambiguity I would not want to remove, between knowledge *belonging to* the body and knowledge *about* the body), a form of, as Kott names it, ‘internal knowledge’.

The eroticism of intimacy, which we have spoken of, is constituted through an engagement with the body of the other, a body that is always potentially outside the purview of discourse, which is capable of experiences that are strictly *indescribable*. Kott announces such an experience by asking a question that is truly unanswerable in any definitive sense: ‘What do we know about sex?’²³¹ His response to himself is divided between the ‘external’ and the ‘internal’:

The experience of sex can be described [i.e. ‘as discourse’], but it is not the same as the knowledge of the experience... An orgasm given by a body is inarticulate speech... Right now I am trying to change this into discourse, but I know that there is an entire dimension that is inexpressible.²³²

Kott, by his own admission and in his own practice, finds himself at the limit of the communicative power of language, of discourse. The orgasm is an experience that cannot be fully contained within representation. It is an instance of ‘a peculiar memory without names or concepts’,²³³ a memory that is situated in the body, is too much of the body and cannot be ‘understood’ except through the body. Whilst Kott is certainly not original in discussing the orgasm (*jouissance*, could we not say?) in such a way, his

²³⁰ Jan Kott, *The Memory of the Body: Essays on Theater and Death* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), p.113.

²³¹ Kott, p.114.

²³² Kott, p.114.

²³³ Kott, p.114.

linking of this with the concept of a bodily memory that exceeds communication is, and this holds the most relevance for our present interests regarding the sense of vulnerability in ontological coincidence.

The second example that Kott provides, if anything a more *intimate* one, is a further refinement of this notion of ‘internal knowledge’. He relates how he has suffered from four heart attacks in his lifetime, with the fourth lasting a total of around thirteen hours, for which he was fully conscious throughout. Needless to say this has provided him with an uncommon perspective upon both the extremity of physical suffering that the body can experience, and also upon the nature of being in such close proximity to death. This is an experience that cannot be included in discourse because it is inseparable from the body:

No escape into discourse or *imago* is possible in this case. This is *in* me. I cannot separate this from myself.²³⁴

No word, no image: the experience of ‘somatic death’ is terrifyingly personal, individual. It is not the death of anyone else or of ourselves observed from a distance (which is how we can normally envisage death, particularly when trying to think of our own). And an attack on the heart is an attack on the very core of our being, figuratively and physically. It figures what is precisely indivisible about the body. As Kott, capturing the contradictory discordance that is at work here, writes:

The heart is both the signified and the signifier, the symbol and its referent. The pump and Eros are one and the same.²³⁵

This statement identifies precisely the difficulty that the body of the actor, and the relationship of intimacy that is provoked by the circumstance of the body, entails for Funesian memory.

There is an aspect, a ‘dimensionality’ (to use Kott’s term), of the body that refuses to enter into discourse: that can be replaced by no sign other than itself. It is demonstrated most efficaciously in those extreme bodily experiences that cannot be satisfactorily explained. Those that comprise a ‘memory’ based upon sensation, upon a physical

²³⁴ Kott, p.116.

²³⁵ Kott, p.117.

‘coding’,²³⁶ upon an intuitive ‘knowing’ that is necessarily indefinable and that will not be externalised. This memory refers to the past only in the way that a scar, specifically a scar that cannot be seen, refers to the past. It is of the same order as, in Kott’s words from his detailed and moving piece ‘The Heart Attack’, ‘a wound to the heart [which] heals like all wounds, and, like all wounds, it leaves a scar. A trace remains until death.’²³⁷ There is no ‘copy’, no way to ‘*re-present*’ the creatural bond: that which cannot be substituted or imitated, that is derived from a literally organic intimacy, ‘the pump and Eros’, the base connection of gross corporeality. The vulnerable body, the sacrificial body, the organic, sexual, dying body that is *just us*, that instigates an unspoken bond, that is founded upon nothing more nor less than the ‘irrepresentability of the living present’.²³⁸ This aspect has often been hidden in theatre through an excess of discourse: of ‘psychology’, of dialogue, of characterisation.

Does this sound familiar? Yes, of course. Artaud has been here, has wrought these concepts, these figures of theatre. He haunts them still, just as he has haunted theatre with an ideal of cruelty. Derrida’s famous essay (pre-emptively quoted from a little before), ‘The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation’, presents us with a portrait of Artaud’s theories that incisively illustrates how they are expressly concerned with the originality, the unicity of the body, and the challenge that it intrinsically poses to theatrical representation. Specifically, that it poses to representation as repetition. As Derrida identifies, ‘foreign to the theatre of cruelty’ is:

a message that would not be totally exhausted in the *act and present tense* of the stage, that would not coincide with the stage, that could be repeated without it...
*Artaud wanted to erase repetition in general.*²³⁹

Repetition is definition: it is the act of separation at the advent of representation that ‘*summarizes* negativity, gathers and maintains the past present as truth, as ideality’.²⁴⁰ It is the constitution of an original, a guarantee of past authenticity, which allows the possibility of the copy, or, to secure the allusion to Aristotle’s theory of memory, the

²³⁶ Kott, p.116.

²³⁷ Kott, p.103.

²³⁸ Jacques Derrida, ‘The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation’, in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978; repr. 2001), p.297.

²³⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.310.

²⁴⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.311.

‘*eikôn*’. Indeed, Derrida positions the Theatre of Cruelty in opposition to Aristotelian theories of imitation in the realm of aesthetics: ‘Artaud wants to have done with the imitative concept of art, with the Aristotelian aesthetics in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own.’²⁴¹ However, we can extend this to include Aristotle’s theory of an imitative mnemonics also: the same dialectic is at work. As we are beginning to see, Artaud, and specifically the argument on the status of the body in theatre that he imbricates with, offers a challenge not only to Aristotelian aesthetics and theatrics, but also to Aristotelian memory (Funesian, as we say).

Artaud’s aim, as Derrida declares, is to ‘restore “existence” and “flesh” in each of their aspects’²⁴² through theatricality. Through theatricality? Indeed. As the irreducibility, the irrepresentability, of the body, “existence” and “flesh”, is at the core of theatricality (as we have discussed above). Except that it has been ‘violently erased’: not ‘negated’, but ‘covered’ (still to be read), ‘corrupted’, ‘perverted’.²⁴³ The aim, then, is to promulgate a ‘true’ theatricality, one that is founded upon, celebrates, the body’s abrogation of discourse (or, to cite a particularly appropriate image, the ‘word cadaver’²⁴⁴). This task is to rid theatre of repetition, to restore theatre to the status of life, not as an imitation of life. As Artaud asserts:

We can no longer subscribe to theatre which repeats itself every night according to the same, ever the same, identical rites. The show we are watching must be unique and give us the impression of being as unexpected and as incapable of being repeated as any act in life, any occurrence whatsoever brought about by events.²⁴⁵

‘Living presence’, life and the body (but this ‘and’ is asked to do so much, it could easily be ‘of’, ‘through’, ‘needs’, all of these and more: ‘and’, at least, marks their inseparability *and* difference), it is these that Artaud uses to oppose repetition. Repetition, which is known by many titles. Just one, for now: ‘Another name of repetition: Being.’²⁴⁶ Artaud makes this opposition explicit when he claims (quoted by

²⁴¹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.295.

²⁴² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.293.

²⁴³ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.298.

²⁴⁴ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.303.

²⁴⁵ Antonin Artaud, ‘The Alfred Jarry Theatre’, in *Collected Works: Vol. 2*, trans. Victor Corti (London: Calder & Boyars Ltd, 1971; repr. London: John Calder Publishers, 1999), p.18.

²⁴⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.310.

Derrida) that: “There is no greater enemy of the human body than being.”²⁴⁷ ‘Being’ what? Precisely. ‘Being’ something, something other than *simply human*. ‘Being’ defined, determined, making of the human body something repeatable, which, an argument that Artaud is certainly the greatest advocate of, in theatricality it is not.

And it is this refusal of ‘being’ that disturbs Funesian memory, for the two are of the same nature, are equivalent through, as Derrida says, ‘the thinking of Being as memory.’²⁴⁸ Writing, which serves for Artaud as a figure of repetition, of memory, is criticized by him, in Derrida’s interpretation, for being ‘the erasure of the body, of the living gesture which *takes place only once* [my italics].’²⁴⁹ In this phrase we find an adequate summation of the problem posed by ontological coincidence: its physicality (introducing a condition of intimacy) and originality, which counteract the demands of Funesian memory, fundamentally undermining its imitative, referential organisation as a structural model for theatre.

However, we have dealt here exclusively with only the first half, although they are unequal halves, of Derrida’s discussion of Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty. I would suggest that there is a clear hinge around which his essay functions, found in the line: ‘There is no theatre in the world today which fulfills Artaud’s desire.’²⁵⁰ A majority of Derrida’s paper is concerned with an ideal, Artaud’s unrealisable ideal, but the second half turns to examining exactly the difficulty of escaping the repetition at the centre of representation. And there is much in our present investigation that has similarly dealt with concepts playing at the boundaries of representation/non-representation. Although this is an issue that we shall come to in due course.

3.iv ‘Transforming the self into an event’:²⁵¹ Ontological Coincidence and Hysteria, An Energetic Approach

‘Seeing is believing’:²⁵² we recall the injunction of the Pirahã. It is an injunction to experience the event, here the theatrical event, *immediately*, always for the first time. This is the wager of ontological coincidence. The establishment of a ‘creatural bond’, a

²⁴⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.311.

²⁴⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.311.

²⁴⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.312.

²⁵⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.313.

²⁵¹ Christopher Bollas, *Hysteria* (Hove: Routledge, 2000), p.118.

²⁵² Everett, p.214.

relationship of intimacy. This is its vulnerability, its risk and its return. ‘Seeing is believing’;²⁵³ such is the experience of hysteria, both for the hysteric and for those that the hysteric involves in his/her world, as described by Christopher Bollas in his original and interventionist work *Hysteria* (2000). Hysteria is a condition that is eminently theatrical, as Bollas notes, it is ‘the art of turning the self into an event’ in which ‘the hysteric sets the stage for... this living theatre’.²⁵⁴ It is a theatricalization of the body of the sufferer. And it is, indeed, a suffering of the body in the process of representation. For support in this line of description, we need look little further than Freud and Breuer’s case history of their patient Anna O. This is a case history that we will return to throughout this chapter and that serves as a locus, a nexus, for many of our paths of enquiry into theatricality. As Breuer details, Anna would often retire into a state of withdrawal, in which she spent her time ‘day-dreaming’. She herself termed this her ‘private theatre’, and Breuer expressly determines this ‘private theatre’ to be a ‘pre-disposing cause for her subsequent hysterical illness’.²⁵⁵ Although it is used much more generally (cf. Laplanche & Pontalis), the term ‘acting out’ has frequently been applied to hysterical symptoms,²⁵⁶ and the connection, and consequent terminology, which Breuer deploys here, may well be seen as a precursor to this.

But we should pause here. Before turning to its relation with theatricality, let us start by exploring how hysteria is characterised in terms of an energetics, for it is perhaps surprising how completely Freud, Breuer and later psychoanalysts have identified the concept of hysteria with an energetics. Indeed, Breuer describes hysterical conversion, literally, in ‘comparison with an electrical system’.²⁵⁷ Hysterical conversion occurs when ‘the excitation arising from the affective idea is “converted” into a somatic phenomenon’;²⁵⁸ the affective force of an ‘incompatible idea’,²⁵⁹ of ‘sexual desire’,²⁶⁰ of ‘a psychical conflict’²⁶¹ (I quote these various references as a means of indicating the generality of possible causes for conversion across the literature) is transformed or

²⁵³ Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.123.

²⁵⁴ Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.118.

²⁵⁵ Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, ‘Studies on Hysteria’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 2* (SE 2), ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955; repr. 2001), p.41.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.108; Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.109; etc.

²⁵⁷ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.203.

²⁵⁸ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.206.

²⁵⁹ Freud, SE 3, p.49.

²⁶⁰ Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.114.

²⁶¹ Laplanche & Pontalis, p.90.

‘converted’ into ‘corporal innervation’.²⁶² The energy is transferred to the body, which expresses and discharges it through physical, somatic symptoms. Hysterical conversion is, thus, a process of energetic displacement. Yet, as Green points out, following Freud and Lacan amongst others, its mode of symptom-formation should also be thought of as a form of language:

Conversion is not a de-differentiated somatisation. The language changes tools, but it continues to sustain a discourse. The hysteric ‘speaks with his flesh’ as Lacan puts it.²⁶³

This notion of hysterical conversion as a ‘language’ takes on a certain ambiguity, a certain strangeness. Particularly so as Green, in one instance, describes it as ‘continu[ing] to operate in the register of the symbolizable’,²⁶⁴ whilst later noting that ‘for Freud, this substitute formation [hysterical conversion] can have nothing to do with representation in the classical sense of the term and be corporal innervation’.²⁶⁵ This latter sentiment is reinforced by Bollas, who refers to ‘the hysteric’s conversion’ as ‘the route for the unwording of desire’.²⁶⁶ However, this seeming ambiguity has its source, ultimately, in Freud and Breuer’s own descriptions in *Studies on Hysteria*. One of Freud’s patients (Elisabeth von R.) suffered from a hysterical symptom that involved a pain in her legs. He notes during her treatment that ‘her painful legs began to “join in the conversation”’.²⁶⁷ Laplanche and Pontalis cite this description as evidence of Freud’s ‘symbolic conception’²⁶⁸ of conversion. However, it appears somewhat incongruous when placed alongside Breuer’s remarks that ‘hysterical phenomena (abnormal reflexes) do not seem to be ideogenic... because the idea that gave rise to them is... no longer marked out among other ideas and memories. They emerge as purely somatic phenomena, apparently without psychical roots’.²⁶⁹ What can we make of these, on the face of it, contradictory statements?

²⁶² Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.267.

²⁶³ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.108.

²⁶⁴ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.108.

²⁶⁵ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.268.

²⁶⁶ Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.114.

²⁶⁷ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.148.

²⁶⁸ Laplanche & Pontalis, p.90.

²⁶⁹ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.208.

Hysterical conversion is here presented as a kind of language, which is symbolic, referential to a past occurrence, but which is also not ‘representative’, in a ‘classical sense’.²⁷⁰ Let us take this latter point first. Green’s reference here to ‘representation’ is perhaps a little misleading, being unnecessarily generalized, and we must take his, albeit rather ambiguous, qualification seriously. By ‘classical sense’, he is mirroring the point made by Bollas and Breuer, that hysterical conversion is not ideational, that it is not ‘represented’ through words or images, that its substitute formation is not ideogenic,²⁷¹ but is an expression through an action or event situated in the body. Does this preclude representation? I would suggest not, but in a ‘classical sense’... How can we think the nature of this non-ideogenic, non-verbal, language?

One way open to us is to think it in relation to Derrida’s description of a ‘psychical writing’, from his essay ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’, which we have explored in the previous chapter. We will recall that Derrida postulates a notion of ‘psychical writing’ when discussing Freud’s work, specifically on dreams: ‘this writing [‘psychical writing’], for example the kind we find in dreams... cannot be read in terms of any code’.²⁷² Whilst dreams, as we have noted, constitute a ‘language’ of images (mnemonic images), the way in which Derrida formulates, and de-familiarises, this ‘language’ provides us with an apt figuration of hysterical conversion’s own determination as language. Indeed, there is an affinity between the processes involved in structuring dreams and hysterical conversion, as Bollas notes: ‘hysterical theatre is dream-like’,²⁷³ which allows us to consider hysterical conversion’s relation to ‘psychical writing’ as being more than simply coincident or convenient. For Derrida, ‘psychical writing’ is characterised by ‘an absence of an exhaustive and absolutely infallible code’.²⁷⁴ To speak of hysterical conversion in terms of a signifying ‘code’ contains precisely the same flaw as to speak of dreams in this way. And this absence of a code, Derrida tells us, results in the condition that ‘the difference between signifier and signified is never

²⁷⁰ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.111.

²⁷¹ A neologism that signifies, in my understanding, ‘a medium well-suited for the reproduction or dissemination of ideas’ (derived from OED). ‘Ideas’ referring to ‘that which one represents to oneself, that which forms the concrete content of an act of thought’ (Laplanche & Pontalis). It is closely related to the word ‘ideogenic’, defined by the OED as ‘producing ideas or images’.

²⁷² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.262.

²⁷³ Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.108.

²⁷⁴ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.263.

radical’.²⁷⁵ It is the condition in which ‘meaning and force are united’,²⁷⁶ in which the ‘expression’ is distinguished by its ‘materiality’.²⁷⁷ And these definitions are mutually implicit, one with the other.

The ‘signifier’ of hysterical conversion, the hysterical symptom, is indissociable from the affective force of which it is the expression or manifestation. Corporal innervation, that which is ‘signified’ by the symptom, is simultaneous with the symptom: both constitute the act, the event, that is conversion. This simultaneity precludes the possibility that conversion, *in its ‘materiality’* (a point we shall return to), can be ‘translated’ into another ‘language’, i.e. ideation. As Green identifies, hysterical conversion is unique for Freud among forms of repression, unique as:

[in] hysteria, the substitute is corporal innervation and the substitute formation coincides with the symptom formation: the two stages are combined into one.²⁷⁸

The symptom and the corporal innervation, the expression of the energetic ‘thing’ and the ‘thing itself’ (which, in actuality, is not a ‘thing’, is strictly inconceivable on its own), are coincident. Ontologically coincident. Situated within the body of the sufferer, these are two aspects contained within a single event: conversion. The nature of this intrinsic coincidence makes hysterical conversion an appropriate metaphor, or, to be more precise, an appropriate model for thinking the energetics of ontological coincidence in theatricality.

But we need to address a matter that has, seemingly, been left behind. We noted previously the ‘symbolic conception’ of conversion, and have since neglected to follow this line of thought. Freud tells us that hysterical ‘symptoms are... mnemonic symbols of particular (traumatic) experiences’.²⁷⁹ We may, therefore, suppose that the hysterical symptom is a powerful exemplification of Funesian memory, that it has a closer relation with a model of memory that is referential to the past in the form of recollection, than it does to the ontological coincidence of theatricality, which complicates such a Funesian

²⁷⁵ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.263.

²⁷⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.265.

²⁷⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.264.

²⁷⁸ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.267.

²⁷⁹ Sigmund Freud, ‘Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 11* (SE 11), ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957; repr. 2001), p.16.

conception of memory. And, certainly, this reading is a valid one: a hermeneutic approach to hysteria is fundamental to analysis, just as a hermeneutic reading is necessarily a possibility in addressing theatricality. As we have argued, the energetic and the hermeneutic are two *ways of understanding* memory and representation, which are both operative and interact with each other in particular ways in particular circumstances. The point is that this is not our present understanding, our way of accessing, hysteria. Our emphasis is upon its energetic processes, rather than methods of interpretation for discovering past events or traumas. It is for this purpose that we are focusing upon hysterical *conversion*. For, just as the ontological coincidence of theatricality does not fit easily with Funesian memory, so hysterical conversion, *specifically*, is incongruous with a past referentiality.

The hysterical symptom has two aspects, which in truth are not separable, but for our purposes we can think of these as two functions of a single act. The first (by which I do not mean to suggest any priority) is that it is the expression of a corporal innervation, a release of affective force: it is this relationship that is ontologically coincident. The second is its reference to a past trauma. Of course, these are linked, the corporal innervation being a substitute formation *of* the trauma. Freud makes this same distinction in the first of his ‘Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis’, of 1909:

[T]hese ‘strangled’ affects... in part they remained as a permanent burden upon the patient’s mental life and a source of constant excitation for it; and in part they underwent a transformation into unusual somatic innervations and inhibitions, which manifested themselves as the physical symptoms of the case. For this latter process we coined the term ‘hysterical conversion’.²⁸⁰

Freud’s reference to “‘strangled’ affects’ is interchangeable with his earlier reference to ‘traumatic experiences’, which we have followed: both indicate an experience, and its consequent force, which is inassimilable and must, therefore, be ‘substituted’ for. As this quotation from Freud illustrates, the ‘symbolic conception’ of the symptom relies upon the symptom performing the dual roles that I specify above (referring to the event at which a ‘strangled’ affect was produced, and manifesting ‘somatic innervations’).

²⁸⁰ Freud, SE 11, p.18.

However, it is here that hysterical conversion challenges the model of a symbolic referentiality, of a Funesian memory. For in *the moment of conversion*, and therefore in *the act* of the symptom, the reference to the past experience, the ‘origin’, is abandoned. It is the point at which the ‘symbol’ is ‘detached’ from its referent: they are only thought together *through analysis*. It is the point at which the symptom, as ontologically coincident, becomes originary to itself, ‘with apparent spontaneity’.²⁸¹ Or so we can conclude from such assertions as Freud’s:

Wherever there is a [hysterical] symptom there is also an amnesia.²⁸²

To elucidate this claim, we can draw upon the theorisations of hysteria provided by both Green and Breuer. Breuer describes hysterical symptoms as being ‘based on recollections which revive the original affect – or rather, *which would revive it if those reactions* [hysterical conversion] *did not, in fact, occur instead* [Breuer’s emphasis]’.²⁸³ This statement enunciates well the tension that the symptom is constituted through. As a symbol it *should* refer to a past experience, but, ‘in fact’, it arises *in the place of recollection*: hysterical conversion, which is ‘apparently without psychological roots’,²⁸⁴ which bears no trace in itself of its past derivation, is what substitutes and erases a referential mnemonic connection. As Green summarises: ‘one can understand how conversion collaborates with repression’.²⁸⁵ Repression is simultaneous with conversion: when conversion occurs there is no memory to speak of. And in this we find the disruption that hysterical conversion introduces for a Funesian model of memory. Its self-contained, non-referential, ontological coincidence, whilst it is an act of conversion, precludes its being thought through a condition as mnemonic symbol. It is an act in which signifier and signified are united in the body of the sufferer, an act which is ‘originary’. And it is this that makes hysterical conversion a fitting model for determining the energetic processes of, and a relevant approach to, ontological coincidence in theatricality.

With this connection established, we can return at this point to fulfil a promise made a short time ago. Derrida’s essay on Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty’, as we have said,

²⁸¹ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.205.

²⁸² Freud, SE 11, p.20.

²⁸³ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.205.

²⁸⁴ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.208.

²⁸⁵ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.110.

performs a kind of *volte-face* at the point at which the ‘reveal’ is made, a particularly dramatic effect, that Artaud’s theatre is an unrealisable ideal. That even Artaud knew this. That it ‘will always remain the inaccessible limit of a representation which is not repetition’.²⁸⁶ An ideal based upon Artaud’s radical emphasis upon, and positioning of, ontological coincidence as the core of theatricality. Ontological coincidence: the simultaneity of *the expression of a thing and the thing itself*, which aims to disturb any relation to an ‘external’ referent or code and, thus, confound repetition, the basis of Funesian memory. Ontological coincidence, which, as it functions within both theatricality and hysterical conversion, is, I would suggest, therefore best thought of as an event: an event of the performative.

The ‘performative’ is a category of language which was first introduced, in this linguistic sense, by JL Austin in his famous 1962 book *How to Do Things with Words*, and theorised by Derrida in his concise but dense piece ‘Signature Event Context’ (1971). Most pertinently for our discussion, ‘the performative is a “communication” which does not essentially limit itself to transporting an already constituted semantic content’.²⁸⁷ Rather, as Austin’s translator notes, it ‘allows us to do something by means of speech itself’: ‘speech’ or, to extrapolate, by means of the sign itself, generally. It signifies an act and is the act itself. As Derrida explains: ‘the performative’s referent... is not outside it... It does not describe something which exists outside and before language. It produces or transforms a situation’.²⁸⁸ And, in a description that will remind us of our exposition of hysterical conversion, in particular, the performative ‘communicate[s] a force by the impetus of a mark’.²⁸⁹

However, as our argument has been leading us, for Derrida there is no sign, there is no ‘origin’ which has not always already been infiltrated by repetition. This is as true for Artaud’s theatre, for which ‘what is tragic is not the impossibility but the necessity of repetition... The origin is always penetrated’,²⁹⁰ as it is for the performative, for which there is always the possibility of ‘citation... the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a

²⁸⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.313.

²⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.322.

²⁸⁸ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.321.

²⁸⁹ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.321.

²⁹⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.313.

“successful” performative’.²⁹¹ As for the performative, so this is just the case for ontological coincidence also, in both theatricality and hysterical conversion. Predicated, as it is, upon its own originality: in its becoming, becoming original, ontological coincidence inevitably becomes compromised by repetition. How do we justify this, perhaps rather startling, peripeteia?

It essentially comes down to Derrida’s introduction and use of his concept of ‘iterability’. For it is precisely this that haunts ‘the event [that] supposes... its allegedly present and singular intervention’.²⁹² Iterability is, as Nicholas Royle defines it, that which ‘must carry with it a capacity *to be repeated in principle* again and again... at the same time as being in some way singular every time. Iterability thus entails both ‘repetition’ (sameness) and ‘alterity’ (difference) [my italics]’.²⁹³ We must take care with our reading here. For the iterable does not prevent ontological coincidence from being originary, and indeed so it is, but iterability does insist upon the ‘necessary possibility’ that this ‘origin’ could, potentially, ‘in principle’, be repeated. Iterability is *the possibility* of repetition. As Derrida tells us, in relation to Artaud:

Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been penetrated. Affirmation itself must be penetrated in repeating itself.²⁹⁴

Once something *is*, once it originates, as an event, it is iterable. This is not to say that there is no singularity, ‘it is simply that these effects [i.e. of the performative, of presence] do not exclude what is generally opposed to them term by term, but on the contrary presupposes it in dyssemtrical fashion, as the general space of their possibility’.²⁹⁵ It is a logic that always seems to me to be well-captured by a particularly melodramatic address to the viewer made by a voice-over in the animated TV series *Futurama*: ‘You saw it... you can’t un-see it!’ It *happened*. You saw it happen. It has an existence. It will always have happened, and could, just possibly, theoretically, happen again.

²⁹¹ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.325.

²⁹² Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.326.

²⁹³ Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), p.68.

²⁹⁴ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.314.

²⁹⁵ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.327.

Although, it may be useful to note, iterability has its degrees. There is a ‘differential typology of forms of iteration’,²⁹⁶ as Derrida notes, and these have differing potentialities in relation to repetition. Artaud, for example, ‘kept himself as close as possible to the limit: the possibility and impossibility of pure theatre’:²⁹⁷ the prospect of repetition of Artaud’s theatre, as of the performative, is ‘relative’. As Derrida says, quoting Austin, ‘there is a “relative purity” of performatives’.²⁹⁸ However, my telling you this, these words I write now, are infinitely repeatable, if you so wish. They are, in ‘relative’ terms, highly ‘impure’. With ontological coincidence, as a kind of performative ‘event’, we are in Artaud’s territory, very close to the limit. Repetition is a possibility only in the back of our minds, in the shadow of the event. It is not, necessarily, a ‘present danger’, we could say, but does constitute a *threat*. And Derrida clearly posits it in these terms, by referring to, for example, ‘the *menace* of repetition’,²⁹⁹ and noting that ‘*failure* is an essential *risk* in the operations under consideration’ [my italics].³⁰⁰

But how is this notion of ‘failure’ to be thought? What kind of ‘failure’ are we talking about here? ‘Failure’ as an ever-present possibility is, of course, no absolute. As a qualitative judgement, it is always implicated in ‘success’, just as ‘success’ is in ‘failure’. It depends upon where you’re standing. As Derrida says: ‘what is a success when the possibility of failure continues to constitute its structure?’³⁰¹ Let us better ask, what is the ‘risk’ here? What is the nature of this threat for ontological coincidence? Firstly, let us explore this question in relation to hysterical conversion. How is hysterical conversion ‘threatened’ by iterability? This is our question.

Green provides a brief, but highly detailed and revealing, analysis of the energetic process of conversion and, what he considers of crucial significance, condensation. In his theory, hysterical ‘condensation’ refers to the ‘condensation of signifiers’, the ‘condensation of roles’ and ‘also the condensation of affects that drives to discharge in the form of an enactment...’.³⁰² It is this latter that is most relevant for our purposes.

²⁹⁶ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.326.

²⁹⁷ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.314.

²⁹⁸ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.326.

²⁹⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.311.

³⁰⁰ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.323.

³⁰¹ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.324.

³⁰² Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.109.

Condensation involves ‘an increase in energetic density’:³⁰³ this increase directly results in conversion, in ‘discharge’. In this model, conversion is characterised as ‘*the hysteric... devouring his affects* [Green’s italics]’:³⁰⁴ conversion ‘aim[s] at swallowing – literally – the excess, absorbing it into the body’.³⁰⁵ The act of conversion, this site, as we have described, of ontological coincidence, is driven by what Green terms ‘the hysteric’s *affective avidity*’.³⁰⁶ This is a trait that, he claims, ‘every psychoanalyst has noticed’.³⁰⁷ For conversion to take place, for this hysterical enactment to occur, there must be an increase in energetic tension and this increase in quantity is, indeed, desired by the hysteric. As Green, referring to Lacan, states: ‘Lacan is right to say that the hysteric desires unsatiated desire’.³⁰⁸ Desire for what?

Green describes this process in terms of object relationships in libidinal organisation, a particularly ‘clinical’ account, with which we need not go into great detail. What we should note is that what the hysteric *seems* to desire are ‘phantasy objects’, ‘love objects’ or ‘objects with phallic value’. The tension accrued through this desire is subject to, in energetic terms, an ‘affective avidity’, a greed for an increase in affective tension. In truth, it is not ‘possession of the object’ that is desired, for this ‘satiety would suppress the desire for unsatisfied desire’.³⁰⁹ The ‘achievement’ of the object would result in the end of condensation, of the accrual of affective tension, and the abolition of hysterical conversion. The hysteric, therefore, the sufferer in the grip of hysteria, as much as he or she may pursue the object, truly desires only the pursuit, only the desire, itself. He or she only seeks an increase in affect, not the dispelling of the source of their affective accumulation. The key point for us is that ‘affective avidity’ is correspondent with corporal innervation and, just as corporal innervation ‘can have nothing to do with representation in the classical sense’,³¹⁰ so ‘affective avidity is installed as a substitute for the object’.³¹¹ The giving of an object to ‘desire’, to the affective force of hysteria, is incompatible with corporal innervation, and thus with hysterical conversion. As we have referred to above, hysterical conversion is an ‘unwording of desire’. The

³⁰³ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.109.

³⁰⁴ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.111.

³⁰⁵ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.111.

³⁰⁶ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.110.

³⁰⁷ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.110.

³⁰⁸ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.111.

³⁰⁹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.111.

³¹⁰ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.268.

³¹¹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.111.

attainment of the object is, *in energetic terms*, the equivalent to its ‘wording’. Of course, this ‘wording’ would be the ‘talking cure’ that Freud and Breuer developed, initially in relation to hysteria. To put the desire of the hysteric into words, to provide the ‘strangled affect’ of a traumatic experience with an ‘outlet’ in language, in representation, rather than corporal innervation. Or, as Bollas terms it, ‘facilitat[ing] the patient’s matriculation in the paternal order’,³¹² the paternal order that privileges ‘word and “truth”’.³¹³ This is psychoanalytic success. But for hysteria, this is a failure. The aim of hysteria is to ‘devour affects’, to consume them, to force them onto the body: to sustain itself as ontologically coincident. Success, failure: implicit one in the other.

It is through this ‘threat’ of being ‘worded’, of attaining the object, that iterability haunts hysterical conversion. The ontological coincidence of hysterical conversion, the unity of affective force and its symptom-expression, is iterable as there is the constant possibility that this affective force will be ‘worded’, that the act of hysterical conversion could be repeated through this wording. Through wording as repetition: the repetition of hysterical conversion is its ‘wording’; its ‘wording’ is its repetition. A ‘necessary possibility’, the ‘wording’ of hysteria brings its resolution, brings its ‘death’. As Royle describes: ‘our desires are oriented towards certain goals... We are, if you will, drenched in the teleological’.³¹⁴ Hysteria is certainly *oriented* towards a goal: the object, the word. But does not, in actuality, seek its arrival. And, in energetic terms, this ‘wording’, this installation of repetition, results in the loss of affective force. As Green describes in relation to hysterical conversion: ‘once the substitutive formation is created, the affective tension drops... Having passed into the somatic, the hysteric finds peace once more’.³¹⁵ However, in hysterical conversion this is a continuous process: affective avidity will build up energetic density again, corporal innervation will occur again, hysterical conversion will be performed again. But when ‘worded’, affective avidity is replaced by the ideogenic and affective energy is lost permanently (at least in the theory of a successful analysis). This loss is presented as happening either suddenly, as experienced by Anna O.: ‘as a result of an accidental and spontaneous utterance... a

³¹² Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.112.

³¹³ Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.113.

³¹⁴ Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, pp.67-68.

³¹⁵ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.109.

disturbance which had persisted for a considerable time vanished',³¹⁶ or gradually, as in the process of 'wearing away' described by Breuer:

'Wearing away'... which deprive[s] it [an affective idea] little by little of its quota of affect... The 'wearing-away' influences, however, are all of them effects of association, of thinking, of corrections by reference to other ideas. This process of correction becomes impossible if the affective idea is withdrawn from 'associative contact'.³¹⁷

In other words, the 'quota of affect' must be attached to an idea that is capable of being in 'associative contact' with other ideas. It must, we could say, exist within a discursive chain, or have been 'worded'. In either instance, the 'wording' of the affective force of hysteria results in its final dissipation, rather than continuation through somatic expression. The threat of repetition for ontological coincidence in hysterical conversion, the threat of its 'wording', is a threat to its affectivity.

Now, if we think back, Derrida's description of 'psychical writing', to which (we argued earlier) the 'language' of hysterical conversion is closely related, provides useful insights in this context. For the same reason that Derrida argues that 'dreams are untranslatable',³¹⁸ so too is hysterical conversion. The 'wording' of hysterical conversion is not a 'translation' *as such*, a translation that would be a 'transcription', as it, like dreams, has 'no text *present elsewhere*... to be transposed or transported'.³¹⁹ There is no prior original to which a translation would refer, *as if* it were the act of hysterical conversion. It is more a potential movement, a possible teleological realisation, of the energetic. And the implications of this intrinsic possibility for an energetics and for ontological coincidence are well-illustrated by Derrida, in a passage that contains numerous connections with our preceding discussion, and is worth quoting at length:

Force produces meaning (and space) through the power of "repetition" alone, which inhabits it originarily as its death. This power, that is, this lack of power, which opens and limits the labor of force, institutes translatability, makes

³¹⁶ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, p.34.

³¹⁷ Freud & Breuer, SE 2, pp.213-214.

³¹⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.264.

³¹⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.265.

possible what we call “language”, transforms an absolute idiom into a limit which is always already transgressed: a pure idiom is not language; it becomes so only through repetition; repetition always already divides the point of departure of the first time.³²⁰

Hysterical conversion is precisely just such an ‘absolute idiom’ and the iterability that haunts it is this original repetition, this necessary possibility of being ‘worded’ (which makes for hysterical conversion the condition of always already being ‘worded’), that makes possible its ‘transformation’ into language, its ‘translatability’. A ‘translatability’ that would make of the ‘translated’ something *the same, but different*. This is what is indicated by the ‘power of repetition’, which is also a ‘lack of power’: repetition as ‘death’ is the possibility of the energetic *and* its limit. A limit that makes possible ‘what we call “language”’, that takes the place of the ‘idiom’ and that, in thus instituting ‘translatability’, cannot sustain the ‘materiality’ of psychical writing. As Derrida explicates: ‘the materiality of the signifier constitutes the idiom of every dream scene’,³²¹ just as it does, I suggest, of hysterical conversion. And, perhaps most importantly, ‘materiality is precisely that which translation relinquishes’.³²² For hysterical conversion, this loss of materiality is equivalent to the loss of ontological coincidence: its affective avidity, its corporal innervation, the unity of signifier and signified, are ‘relinquished’ in being ‘worded’. This is the ‘threat’ of iterability: always already operative at the origin of hysterical conversion, it is the possibility that ‘continues to constitute its structure’.³²³

3.iv.i Theatrical Avidity and the Vicissitudes of Materiality

The materiality of ontological coincidence, which we have seen in hysterical conversion and in psychical writing more generally, is also a condition of theatricality. Derrida indicates as much, in one of the very same discussions that we have been focusing upon here in relation to psychical writing, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’. In this he notes that ‘the materiality of the [dream] expression, does not disappear before the signified... It acts as such, with the efficacy Artaud assigns it on the stage of cruelty’.³²⁴ As we have

³²⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.268.

³²¹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.264.

³²² Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.264.

³²³ Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, p.324.

³²⁴ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.264.

observed, for Artaud ontological coincidence occupies a vital place in theatricality, promulgating the simultaneity of the 'expression' in both the theatrical 'image' and the thing itself (for example, the body of the actor), so as to advocate the 'non-representative'. The 'expression', the 'gesture',³²⁵ in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is 'as close as possible to the limit'³²⁶ of non-repetition, through emphasising the 'unicity' of ontological coincidence as a condition of theatricality. What Derrida here implies is a correspondence between the materiality of ontological coincidence in psychical writing (i.e. in hysterical conversion, I have argued) and in theatricality, through its most effusive priest, Artaud. As I have claimed, ontological coincidence in theatricality resists 'representation', resists referentiality, by producing what we have named a 'creatural bond'. This bond is established upon the recognition that there are aspects of the body that will not 'go into' discourse, that, following Kott, evade description, that will not be 'worded'. And this aspect serves as a kind of 'guarantor' of non-repetition. However, as with ontological coincidence in hysterical conversion, and as we have seen in our previous discussion of Derrida's insights into Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, the creatural bond in theatricality is similarly 'threatened' by the 'necessary possibility' of iteration. And it is through comparison with the consequences of iterability for the energetics of hysterical conversion that we can approach this condition of theatricality in energetic terms. This methodology, it is worth reminding ourselves, is based solely upon the suggestion that hysterical conversion provides *a model* for thinking the particular processes of ontological coincidence in theatricality. One specific affinity that I would now propose is that the creatural bond is premised upon a form of 'affective avidity', just as hysterical conversion is. How can we think this?

Firstly, we can note the 'greed' that is a characteristic of ontological coincidence in theatricality. This is reflected repeatedly by Bert O. States. For example, he argues that:

³²⁵ Whilst Derrida is referring to Artaud's conception of speech in the Theatre of Cruelty, for Artaud speech has the same status as any other action in theatre, being of interest for its sound, tonality, 'physicality', etc, rather than its meaning. Derrida acknowledges this in his later essay 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', and his translator Alan Bass notes that 'speech [is] but one element of language and representation among others' (*Writing and Difference*, p.428, n.12). It is, therefore, quite appropriate to extrapolate from 'speech' to the more general 'expression', both sharing a status as 'gesture' for Artaud.

³²⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.314.

Theatre is the medium, par excellence, that consumes the real in its realest forms: man, his language, his rooms and cities... Its permanent spectacle is the parade of objects and processes *in transit* from environment to imagery.³²⁷

This sentiment is reinforced, even more explicitly, by his statement that: ‘theatre *ingests* the world of objects and signs only to bring images to life [my italics]’.³²⁸ In States’s presentation the ‘object’ is continuously (a ‘permanent... parade of objects... *in transit*’) ‘consumed’ in the course of producing the theatrical image: in our terms, it is made ontologically coincident. And States is not the only theorist of theatre to frame its relation to ontological coincidence in such a way. We can consider Kantor, who inverts the priority that States assumes by proposing that it is the object, the world of objects, that ‘consumes’ the fictive to produce the ontological coincidence of the theatrical ‘image’. He extols the utilitarian space of the ‘cloakroom’ as an exemplar of his ideal theatre: ‘A cloakroom works, / expands, / *devours more and more* spheres of the imagination. / It is continuously working.... [my italics]’.³²⁹ Despite this reversal, Kantor’s conception remains within the dynamics of ontological coincidence.³³⁰

Or we can also consider, perhaps the most explicit and ‘bodily’ portrayal of the ‘greed’, the ‘hunger’, inherent to ontological coincidence in theatre: Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu* trilogy. Throughout these three plays (*Ubu Roi*, *Ubu cocu*, and *Ubu enchaîné*) Ubu is relentlessly ‘consuming’ all that he can, whether this be food, ‘phynance’, people or things. Being ‘in-corporated’ within Ubu is a constant threat throughout the play, which is noted specifically in this final exchange between the Turkish emperor, Soliman, and his Vizier:

³²⁷ States, p.40.

³²⁸ States, p.37.

³²⁹ Tadeusz Kantor, ‘The Impossible Theatre’, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944 – 1990*, trans. Michal Kobiak (University of California Press, 1993), p.277.

³³⁰ The key point for us here is the characterisation and epithets of ‘consumption’ that Kantor attributes to ontological coincidence. The reversal in terms of the ‘consumer’ and the ‘consumed’ does not, I would suggest, deny the fundamental processes or condition of ontological coincidence: there remains a simultaneity of the expression and that which expresses, although this status is made particularly apparent by Kantor’s re-emphasis; there remains a creatural bond (Kantor’s theory of ‘bio-objects’ raises interesting questions here, but I would not necessarily seek to make a distinction between these and the situation of the human-as-actor); and the object remains in a ‘vulnerable’ place. However, this reversal does, of course, modify how the specific function and significance of ontological coincidence is thought in particular performances and practices of theatre. A study of Kantor’s theatre in terms of ontological coincidence, and the energetic, would certainly be of interest and value, but would be too great a digression for our present purposes.

VIZIER: He's [Ubu] in a terrible rage and threatens to stuff everyone in his pocket...

SOLIMAN: ...if he got an inkling of it [Ubu's claim to the throne] he'd immediately install himself here... and he'd be bound to gobble up my fortune in no time at all.³³¹

All of this consumption, this rapacity, is given concrete form through Ubu's 'Strumpot' (or '*gidouille*' in the original, a neologism that refers to his giant 'stomach'), of which he self-reflexively pronounces, as the ironic dénouement to the final instalment of the trilogy (*Ubu enchaîné*):

PA UBU: Private sources have revealed to me that my Strumpot is huger than the whole world.³³²

Ubu's service to his Strumpot is a figuration, I would suggest, of the 'avidity' of theatricality. As Linda Klieger Stillman identifies, '*gidouille*' is 'possibly derived from its similarity to the verb *ouiller* (to fill a cask as the level of its content diminishes)... *Ouiller* also indicates, by definition, the transfer of matter, and in exactly the same process of assimilation and rejection, input and output, that we associate with Ubu.'³³³ Ubu, like theatricality, 'devours' objects, takes them into himself, in order to produce something else. For theatricality it is the production of the ontologically coincident theatrical image; for Ubu it is 'the production of shit'.³³⁴ The fact that his 'Strumpot' (a theatrical image, let us not forget) has grown to be of greater enormity than 'the whole world' symbolizes, in Jarry's own paradoxical and self-consciously '*absurd*' way, the potential of theatricality to incorporate 'the world', the world of objects, any, and every, 'thing'. Indeed, as Stillman points out this condition is made even more 'explicit in a version of *Ubu cocu* entitled *Ubu cocu ou l'Archéoptéryx*, in which the entire first act takes place inside the *Gidouille*: it has literally become the universe.'³³⁵

³³¹ Alfred Jarry, '*Ubu enchaîné*', trans. Cyril Connolly & Simon Watson Taylor (London: Methuen Publishing, 1993), pp.130-131.

³³² Jarry, p.131.

³³³ Linda Klieger Stillman, 'The Morphophonetic Universe of Ubu', *The French Review*, 50, 4 (Mar. 1977), p.591.

³³⁴ Elizabeth K. Menon, 'Potty-Talk in Parisian Plays: Henry Somm's *La Berline de l'émigré* and Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*', *Art Journal*, 52, 3, 'Scatological Art' (Autumn, 1993), p.63.

³³⁵ Stillman, p.591.

The insatiable consumption of objects, a constant process in the ontological coincidence of the theatrical image, is, as we have noted, premised upon a sacrifice, most particularly of the human-as-actor. A giving oneself up to the ‘voracity’ of theatre. Theatricality, like the hysteric, suffers from what Green terms a ‘bulimia of objects’.³³⁶ And it is this requirement for a ‘vulning’ of one’s body that, we have seen, institutes a ‘creatural bond’. As with hysterical conversion, of which Bollas notes there is ‘a sense of the self as sacrificial host’,³³⁷ it is a form of avidity, an avidity for sacrifice, bodily sacrifice, like the blood-thirsty Huitzilopochtli or thunderous Taranis, like Artaud’s victim-martyrs ‘tortured at the stake, signalling through the flames.’³³⁸ Of course, this process is often presented in wildly ‘dramatic’ terms – such as Artaud’s, for which he will always inspire exhilaration. However, in truth, it is an act more accurately thought of as quiet, self-effacing, unflamboyant: succeeding by going unnoticed. A creatural bond is established in silence. A creatural bond whose ‘embodiment’ determines its singularity, but that, in its iterability, is also originally subject to the possibility of repetition. As with affective avidity in hysteria, theatrical avidity is threatened by iteration. A threat directed against the ‘materiality’ of ontological coincidence. The avidity that we find in theatricality can be thought in energetic terms as an accumulation of ‘tension’, as an increase in ‘energetic density’ through the continuous intensification of the desire to gather ‘objects’ *into* itself. The force of this desire results in the ontological coincidence of the theatrical image (much as condensation in hysteria results in the ontological coincidence of hysterical conversion). Theatrical ontological coincidence is, thus, the event through which this desire is expressed. This force, which is intrinsic to and impels the unity of ontological coincidence, is another way of thinking the ‘materiality’ of the theatrical image. What is the manner of this desire?

Much as the desire that ultimately drives hysterical conversion, in theatricality it is a desire to desire to consume the object, the ‘desire for unsatiated desire’. We have elsewhere described this as a sadistic element in relation to the vulnerability of the creatural bond (produced through ontological coincidence): a desire *for* this vulnerability as a condition of continuing the performance, of sustaining the theatrical image. And, as with hysterical conversion, the threat posed by iterability to the

³³⁶ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.111.

³³⁷ Bollas, *Hysteria*, p.118.

³³⁸ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Victor Corti (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970; repr. Richmond, Surrey: Oneworld Classics), p.7.

continuation of this desire is one of 'wording'. How can we think this? As Derrida describes, in relation to the 'performative', it is best thought in terms of a 'relative purity', as a 'differential typology of forms of iteration',³³⁹ as a question of degree. The performances that offer the lowest degrees of resistance to repetition are those that, to some extent, efface their status as ontologically coincident, whether unwittingly or by design. Such performances suffuse themselves 'more fully' with iterability by bringing themselves, perhaps we can say, closer to the word and further from the 'embodiment', the Artaudian ideal of 'the purity of a presence without interior difference and without repetition',³⁴⁰ of the performance that emphasises ontological coincidence. We can think of performances in the former modality as being imbued with a certain predisposition towards referentiality. This is exhibited, typically, through reference to a text or (although there is really no effective distinction) other prior codification of the performance.

And it is such performances as these that are criticised from the perspective of a theatricality conceived through the latter 'typology' of iterability; by those that, we could say, *develop* the role of ontological coincidence, as a fundamental condition of theatricality, within their own theories and/or practices of performance. For example, Artaud, of course, voices his criticism by disparaging the performance in which the actor is 'required to give nothing more than a certain number of sobs'.³⁴¹ Or we could turn to founder and director of the Odin Teatret, Eugenio Barba, who is critical of 'many directors... [who] tend to believe that a specific image or sequence of images can only transmit a particular meaning'.³⁴² In this case, they will 'ask for explanations and demand coherence from the performer':³⁴³ coherence as reference to a pre-determined meaning, which can only be represented in a singular way. This highly iterable theatre, if we take it to its extreme, can, in practice, be thought of as indistinguishable from recitation. We can imagine the scene. Objects are presented, displayed on stage: there is the actor, and s/he says these words. Ontological coincidence is minimal and, thus, the creatural bond enfeebled, if palpable at all. There is the hysteric and, instead of corporal

³³⁹ Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p.326.

³⁴⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.315.

³⁴¹ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.70.

³⁴² Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p.87.

³⁴³ Barba, pp.87-88.

innervation, s/he says those words. It is a scene that is eminently repeatable. It is this conception of theatricality that leads Austin to derogate it in relation to performativity, finding the performative to be 'hollow', 'non-serious' and 'parasitic' when 'said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy'.³⁴⁴ Derrida is quite correct in determining that what Austin rejects here, and demonstrates in his linking of these three instances, is '*citation* (on the stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy)'.³⁴⁵ Austin excludes theatricality as long as it is thought *primarily* in terms of its citability, hence the association of it with the *re-citation* of poetry (considered as precisely the speaking of a text memorised or, even, read aloud).³⁴⁶ And, to go one step further than this, there is the 'true' 'wording' of the theatrical image: the text itself. *Unrealisable in performance*, the text is the *telos* of iterability in theatricality: the end, the 'death', of ontological coincidence.

As with hysterical conversion, 'wording' arises in the place of ontological coincidence, dissipating affective force. Extrapolating from this conclusion, I would also suggest that the tendency towards 'wording', towards repetition, in theatricality is concomitant with a progressive *reduction* in affective force. Just as, in the converse case, a 'heightened' ontological coincidence (i.e. theatricality that, as Derrida says, keeps 'as close as possible to the limit') is accordant with an increase in affective force. To illustrate this we can perhaps think of Harold Pinter's 2006 performance of Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, at the Royal Court, London. Whilst this may not be quite as exact an example as could be found for detailing manipulations of the energetic through ontological coincidence, it remains highly relevant to our purposes and is certainly worth drawing upon for its poignancy. Pinter's performance took place in the context of his own serious illness and impending death (on 24th December, 2008). Indeed, much of the physical comedy and many of the humorous set-pieces that characterise the play (such as Krapp's banana-related antics) had to be cut, owing to Pinter's frailty. For a majority of the play's duration he remained seated in his motorised wheelchair, hunched over the famous tape-recorder. But I do not wish to give the impression that this performance is exemplary due to its biographical context, due to the pathos that it may, and surely does, arouse for Harold Pinter, the great literary figure, the great Name.

³⁴⁴ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Oxford University Press, 1962), pp.21-22.

³⁴⁵ Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p.325.

³⁴⁶ The soliloquy being a theatrical device, often deeply poetic and sufficient to itself, which, I suggest, tends to urge such a citationality.

Rather, it is because of the introduction or, perhaps we would be better to say, revelation of mortality, of the closeness of death, as a condition of *the* theatrical image and of *this* theatrical image. The status of the theatrical image as ontologically coincident with the 'object', here the human-as-actor, is emphasised as it is the place of Pinter-as-actor, the object *itself*, if we can speak so impersonally, that instates a circumstance of 'near-death' into the image, that determines the image as such. Near-death: not, to repeat, in the sense of a hind-sight, but as an unspoken 'knowledge'. Pinter is Krapp, Krapp is Pinter: the fact is that when, as Michael Billington describes in his review of the play, 'at two precise moments, Pinter looks anxiously over his left shoulder into the darkness as if he felt death's presence in the room'³⁴⁷ it is impossible to finally decide *who* is looking, fearfully, for death, Pinter or Krapp. Indeed, it is both. This undecidability establishes the distance of this performance from iterability. It remains, but we are far here from the threat of 'wording'. And the fact that it is no other feature that serves to enunciate the ontological coincidence of image and object than the mortality of the actor only heightens the power of the creatural bond (already amplified through the highlighting, rather than subsumption, of ontological coincidence). Pinter's vulnerability is there for all to see. Vulnerability as human. Only human. This sense of being near-death makes the phantomatic image (the status of ontological coincidence being, we recall, *between* life and death, both at once), paradoxically, more 'alive'. In energetic terms, we can think the intensity of the creatural bond, the prominence of ontological coincidence, which we find here as an expression of the desire, the avidity, of theatricality to desire to consume the object. It is to be compared with the more 'worded' performance, in which affective force is significantly dissipated resulting in the diminishment of materiality. By contrast, in the current instance, the desire to consume is promulgated by both the constant expenditure of the object in the process of constituting the image (the consumption of the object in the theatrical image being always a first consumption: the object, i.e. the human-as-actor, is always consumed each time anew, necessarily) owing to its resistance to repetition and non-identity with a prior 'code', *and* by the dependent sustaining of the creatural bond, which requires a constant enactment and re-enactment of vulnerability, or 'sacrifice'. Affective force ebbs and flows, waxes and wanes, with, to put it in general terms, the degree of

³⁴⁷ Michael Billington, 'Review of *Krapp's Last Tape*', *The Guardian*, 16/10/2006
 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2006/oct/16/theatre.beckettat100>> [accessed April 2010].

simultaneity between object and image, the degree, or ‘typology’, of iterability as a possibility of theatricality.

Finally, whilst the actual reception of affective force is necessarily subjective, the actual experience of affective force being unique to the spectator or participant, an energetic approach will think theatricality in terms of its processes, its energetic movements and its manipulation of intensities through the play of ontological coincidence in its performance. In considering this, we can see the inadequacy of a criticism that seeks to codify theatricality, to name its parts, when confronted by an aspect of that theatricality which resists referentiality and repetition, as ontological coincidence does. Such a criticism works within, and often seeks to enforce, a conception of representation in theatricality that is allied to, that is even, we could say, modelled upon, Funesian memory. A model that ontological coincidence discomfits. We are reminded, perhaps, of Derrida’s remarks at the beginning of *Writing and Difference* in which he says of structuralist criticism:

*Form fascinates when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself. That is, to create. This is why literary criticism is structuralist in every age... Criticism henceforth knows itself separated from force... Thus is explained the low note, the melancholy pathos that can be perceived behind the triumphant cries of technical ingenuity or mathematical subtlety that sometimes accompany certain so-call “structural” analyses.*³⁴⁸

Structuralism, and such ‘structural’ methodologies, separates form from force, focusing upon form to the exclusion of force. It enacts, thus, a kind of ‘wording’ in itself, divesting materiality from that which it, quite literally, ‘analyses’. For this reason, Derrida identifies a correspondent ‘low note’, a sense of depleted intensity, of diminished affective potential, in even the most virtuoso critical evaluation that functions to codify or works from a ‘code’. In theatrical criticism, we need only think of the semiotic ‘project’, typified by the quite brilliant, in relation to its purpose, work of Keir Elam, for example. However, as Derrida tells us, criticism, that which seeks to approach, discuss, engage with a work; criticism cannot entirely avoid this condition. It can be self-aware of it; it can be ignorant of it; it can even relish it. But it cannot entirely

³⁴⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.3.

avoid it and remain a means of *understanding*, of *comprehension*. We cannot, through an energetic mode of approach, speak of force itself. No ‘energetics of pure, shapeless force’.³⁴⁹ But, rather, we aim to speak of its *facilitations*, of which the play of ontological coincidence is one in theatricality. An aim whose foundations we are just starting to build, offering a speculative beginning through which we can perhaps approach the energetics of theatricality in its distinctiveness. And, of course, ontological coincidence is not the only distinct aspect of theatricality that opens a path to, and that aligns with, the energetic. We turn now, in the second part of this chapter, to address precisely another of these aspects, fundamental to theatricality and equally inconsistent with a model of theatrical representation derived from Funesian memory: theatrical elision.

³⁴⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.22.

Chapter 3: Theatre and an Energetic Approach, Part 2

3.v Theatrical Elision, or ‘Something Missing’

It seems to me justifiable to anticipate that the first question raised by this title is precisely what does this phrase ‘theatrical elision’ mean? The *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, an excellently hypomnesic source of reference, defines elision as: ‘the omission or slurring of a syllable’.³⁵⁰ Which corresponds with the Oxford English Dictionary’s: ‘The action of dropping out or suppressing: **a.** a letter or syllable in pronunciation; **b.** a passage in a book or connecting links in discourse’,³⁵¹ and derives from the Latin *elidere* (‘to crush out’). Whilst most often associated with the scansion of poetry or with the cadence of speech, elision is a feature that is also frequently found in theatrical representation. Not as a characteristic of speech or script, which would be literary uses, but as a formal device of the theatrical image and one that is, I would suggest, exclusively available to theatre. By theatrical elision I am not referring to actions, persons, places or objects that are situated ‘off-stage’ (not the Muscovian promised land of Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, or the attic of Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* in which young Hedvig tragically shoots herself). No. An elision is not external to the chain of representation, to the image that we see before us. Its absence is *right there*, [not] to be seen. When an elisionary act is ‘performed’ it is an on-stage absence, structured not as ‘nothing’, or as ‘something’, but as ‘*something missing*’. It is an absence that is to be taken as having potency, as influencing and interrelating with characters and objects on stage that are physically and perceptibly represented.

To think of elision we can consider such instances as, just in the case of *Hamlet*, the famous metonymic convention of Act 4 Scene 4, in which the stage directions demand: ‘*Enter FORTINBRAS with his army over the stage.*’³⁵² Here the ‘army’ is typically substituted for by a handful of actors representing, the audience would then be asked to

³⁵⁰ J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, 4th edn (London: Penguin, 1999), p.255.

³⁵¹ OED, under entry for ‘elision’.

³⁵² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Susanne L. Wofford, (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1994), p.114.

assume, many thousands of soldiers.³⁵³ The rest of the army, which this device depends upon, would then be assumed to be there, as part of the image, even though ‘represented’ by an absence. In other words, elided. We find another form of elision in the figure of the cliff, earlier, in Act 1 Scenes 4 & 5:

HAMLET: ...It waves me forth again, I'll follow it.

HORATIO: What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,

Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff

That beetles o'er his base into the sea. (1/4/68-71)³⁵⁴

The cliff in this exchange is a threat. It is one of the ways that the Ghost poses a mortal danger, in Horatio's view, to the body and mind of Hamlet. When combined with the other two threats that Horatio names ('the flood' and 'madness'), the site of the cliff becomes a decidedly sinister place: it is the precipice over which the raging sea below waits, and intrinsically imperils the sanity of any who go there even without the added disturbance of a beckoning ghost ('The very place puts toys of desperation, / Without more motive, into every brain / That looks so many fadoms to the sea' (1/4/75-77)). In production this setting, particularly as it is thus described, I would suggest, is rarely (if ever) realised. However, this omission or simplification cannot be classified as 'off-stage'. Act 1 Scene 5 opens in an ambiguous location. Various descriptions, the text seems to refer to an unspecified part of the castle exterior further away from the action of Scene 4 (the *Riverside Shakespeare* version calls for 'the battlements of the castle'), but the context (and, not least, the dramatic potential) of the scene appears to suggest that the action of Scene 5 takes place in the vicinity of the precipice, of 'the flood', of the madness-inducing vista. It is for this reason that Hamlet declares 'Speak, I'll go no further' (1/5/1). This is spoken surely for fear of imminent danger, rather than fatigue or impatience. Given either interpretation, the point holds no matter how far along the path over 'the battlements' to the cliff-edge we suppose that these events are occurring. The

³⁵³ Although sometimes, of course, this scene is played for comic effect, particularly the exchange between Hamlet and the Captain in which Hamlet asks 'Good sir, whose powers are these?' To which he receives the reply 'They are of Norway, sir.' The fact that the 'forces of Norway' seem to, rather disappointingly, comprise of two or three men, when played to maximise the sense of false aggrandisement, will usually elicit a touch of humour from the audience. But, it must be emphasised, such a staging voluntarily and knowingly breaks with the elisionary act that could otherwise be performed.

³⁵⁴ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, p.50.

high battlements (and the drop below), the cliff-edge, the view of the sea, these are parts of the image that are directly on-stage, not off-stage referents.

Of course, this example depends entirely upon staging and specific decisions made regarding each production, but serves as an apt illustration for what we mean by ‘theatrical elision’. For theatre, there is no *need* to portray these elements. We can think, for example, of Peter Brook’s *The Tragedy of Hamlet* (2000), in which the encounter between Hamlet and the Ghost takes place on an essentially bare stage (with the exception of a single candelabrum). The performance of an absence can replace perceptible representation in a way that other visual media are not able to. If, for instance, we look to the same sequence in Laurence Olivier’s classic 1948 film of *Hamlet*, we find a very different presentation from that which is practicable in theatre. We find Olivier’s Hamlet warily ascending a stone staircase to the edge of the cliff, which is discernible just behind the Ghost, although shrouded in mist (Figures 1 & 2).



Figure 1: *Hamlet about to follow the Ghost up the staircase to the cliff edge. Hamlet (1948), dir. Laurence Olivier, Two Cities Films.*



Figure 2: *Hamlet encounters the Ghost. The cliff edge is visible, just, in the lower left hand corner. Hamlet (1948), dir. Laurence Olivier, Two Cities Films.*

The camera keeps close to his footsteps, emphasising the ‘completeness’, the ‘reality’ of the image before us: there is nothing that the screen cannot show, this is the suggestion. There is *nothing missing* from this image (certainly there is an off-screen, as there is an off-stage, but this is not the site of elision). Film shows all that happens. This is one of its founding premises (although not a straightforward or uncontested one), and this is something that we will be exploring in greater detail in the next chapter.

With some explanation of what theatrical elision is, the next question that arises is how does it actually function? To answer this we can turn back to the term itself. ‘Elision’ is an apt description for this process in theatre, as the absence that it creates functions in the same way in both language and the theatrical image. It involves an absence within the chain of representation, identified and determined by its context, the effects that it has upon other representations, and their interactions with it. For example, in a line such as ‘If a man’s brains were in’s heels, were’t not in danger of kibes?’,³⁵⁵ spoken by the Fool in *King Lear*, that it is the words ‘his’ and ‘it’ that have been elided is discoverable from both the narrative and syntactical contexts. The significance of the words surrounding the elisions provides us with a means for identifying their significance. In a manner of speaking, we could say that elisions are identifiable through their effects, are deduced, therefore, retrospectively. So it is in theatre (the main difference being that the written elision is denoted by a punctuation mark, such as an apostrophe or ellipsis, which theatrical elision is not), with the ‘effects’ of the elided representation influencing the perceptible representations that engage with it, which can be said to be responding to it.

Samuel Weber describes the action of theatrical elision, although he does not give it this name, in similar terms. He recounts a performance by the Liyuan Theatre, a Peking Opera company, of “Autumn River”. The scene itself involves a young nun, named Chen Miaochang, pursuing her banished love, Pan Bizheng. She comes to a river, across which she must travel, and a boatman with his ferry, which is her means. What is unusual about this performance, in terms of Western theatre, is that only the two actors are physically present on stage, and with a single prop (a long pole for the boatman’s oar). The issue of the scene, Weber notes, is not to do with whether she will be successful or with the progress of her journey, but with the interrelation between theatrical objects, with the play of balance and influence through which they affect one another, with a staging of the capacity and unicity of theatrical representation. As Weber describes:

This rustic figure glides onto the stage in his (invisible) boat, suggested by the way he holds and moves the oar... With the suggested movement of the boat, there is inevitably that of the water itself, “*visible*” *only in its effects*: the

³⁵⁵ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Arden, 1997), p.213.

rhythmic swaying of the man's body, rigid as it leans against the pole. [*My italics*].³⁵⁶

This 'exemplary allegory of theatricality'³⁵⁷ is a precise example of elision, as we have defined it. In this scene, the boat and the water (their existence as well as their qualities) are only 'suggested' by the 'responses' of the perceptible objects to them, like a black hole that absorbs all light, made visible only through its distorting interactions with other entities.

The theatrical image is here conceived of as a play of mutually determining encounters, not only between perceptible objects (actors, props, music, lighting, spectators, etc.) but also between perceptible objects and elisions, non-perceptible objects, active absences. As Weber goes on to say:

It is this ballet of balance, expressed, not just in Chen's movements, but above all in the way they interact with those of the boatman, that constitutes the exquisite theatricality of this scene, which, in our context at least, can be read, witnessed, seen, and heard as an allegory of theatricality as *medium* – not as a medium of representation, but as a medium that redefines activity as reactivity.³⁵⁸

An initial point. Weber's characterisation of theatre as a medium is somewhat ambiguous here. It is not a medium of representation, if representation is given a particular meaning, one that is suggested by his previous reference to the "drama" of this scene' being 'not the search to be reunited with one's beloved'.³⁵⁹ It is not, fundamentally, a medium of representation if representation is taken to mean 'narrative' or, in one of the definitions ascribed by Derrida as being anathema to Artaud's project, 'the sensory illustration of a text already written... which the stage would then only repeat but whose fabric it would not constitute'.³⁶⁰ Although, as both Derrida and Lyotard have extensively shown, a complete escape from representation is as impossible as it is, ultimately, undesirable. But, the primary detail that I wish to emphasise from this quotation is the notion of theatre as a medium of 'reactivity'. The

³⁵⁶ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p.28.

³⁵⁷ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p.28.

³⁵⁸ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, pp.28-29.

³⁵⁹ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p.28.

³⁶⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.299.

elisionary act certainly addresses the spectator through reactivity: it is structured as an active, causative phenomenon to which other theatrical objects react. Its nature is, consequently, complicit with a degree of ‘assumption’, or being ‘taken for granted’. And, when employed, it is necessary for the theatrical image, for the chain of representations, that the elisionary act is successful in addressing itself thus. However, *its secret* is that the perceptible events on stage are not ‘re-actions’ to moments of elision, the boatman is not moving because of the action of the water, but they are, rather, ‘retro-actions’. Elisionary acts are constituted through a process of ‘backwards discovery’: the medium of theatre and theatricality generally, in these moments, is *definable not through reactivity but retroactivity*.

This condition is exemplified by a passage of Don DeLillo’s, from his 2001 novel *The Body Artist*, which is, in turn, insightfully discussed by Nicholas Royle in his succinct article entitled ‘Clipping’ (2008). DeLillo describes the experience of dropping ‘something’, something unknown, which is determined only ‘belatedly’ and through its effects upon one’s awareness and perceptions. Initially ‘you know it only as a formless distortion of the teeming space around your body’³⁶¹ and, then, ‘you hear it hit the floor’. These effects determine one’s awareness of what the unknown ‘something’ is: ‘you hear the thing fall and know what it is at the same time, more or less, and it’s a paperclip.’³⁶² ‘The same time’, but ‘more or less’, not ‘the same time’: the mark of an imperceptible, undecidable ambivalence between being determined and expected. Retroactively, one comes to know the nature of the fallen ‘thing’, of the fall that *happened*, through its discernible effects in the present:

Now that you know you dropped it, you remember how it happened, or half remember, of sort of see it maybe, or something else.³⁶³

The memory of the event comes about only after the ‘knowledge’ that the event happened, ‘knowledge’ which has been ascertained through the ‘evidence’ of the event’s apparent influences upon perceptible reality. As Royle says, ‘everything in a

³⁶¹ Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist*, (London: Picador, 2001), p.89.

³⁶² DeLillo, p.89.

³⁶³ DeLillo, p.89.

sense is already being re-created here'.³⁶⁴ It constitutes what DeLillo later calls a 'ghostly moment'³⁶⁵ within, to use Royle's terms, a 'ghostly narrative' or 'spectral text'.³⁶⁶ The passage of DeLillo's from which I am quoting here, and with which Royle works in his paper, is a relatively lengthy one. One which I am necessarily *cutting short*: an editorial 'clipping', a decision (*dēcīdēre*: to cut off) to elide for the sake of concision (*concīdēre*: to cut up, i.e. into pieces).

My elision speaks to the notion of 'something missing', something that exists but is known only through its effects, which DeLillo describes. I have 'cut' DeLillo's text into pieces, and then 'cut off' that which I do not wish to represent. I ask my reader to assume, rightly, that the missing part, the part that I have concised, exists, is real and is both *here*, in the background informing my citations, quite literally haunting them, and is in another place. It is the same request that is being made by DeLillo's falling 'thing'; it is the same request being made by the theatrical elision. However, the key distinction is that, in both of these instances, the thing elided does not exist. It never did. As DeLillo concludes this passage: 'The paperclip hits the floor... but when you bend to pick it up, it isn't there.'³⁶⁷ Unseen, it haunts the present, without an origin, without being 'somewhere else'.³⁶⁸ Retroaction, rather than reaction. In this circumstance, everything 'is already being re-created *here* [my italics]', only here, always already.

3.vi "What are rats?" Jeopardizing Theatre: Funesian Memory and Elisional 'Representation'

The first episode that I ever saw of the enormously successful US game-show *Jeopardy!* was one aired in 1984. (Although it may sound like a confession, there is a relevance to

³⁶⁴ Nicholas Royle, 'Clipping', *Forum: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture & the Arts*, Issue 7: 'Haunting' (Autumn 2008), p.3 <<http://forum.llc.ed.ac.uk/archive/07/index.php>> [accessed April 2009].

³⁶⁵ DeLillo, p.91.

³⁶⁶ Royle, 'Clipping', p.1.

³⁶⁷ DeLillo, pp.89-90.

³⁶⁸ A peculiar kind of ghost this, particularly for a visual medium, particularly for a medium that is used to *showing* us its ghosts. But a ghost it is. The kind of ghost found otherwise primarily in the séance-rooms and phantasmagoria of spiritualists and psychics, which are experienced initially through their effects before being identifiable as ghosts. As Marina Warner writes in her 2006 book entitled *Phantasmagoria*: 'the phenomena produced during a successful séance – apports of flowers or objects...sudden noises, cool breezes... do not body forth individual phantoms at all' (Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p.247). They do not involve the physical appearance of an embodied ghost, rather an amorphous spectrality that can be deduced as being ghostly. Of course, these effects are open to being interpreted as fraudulent, but, as in theatre, does this matter? A point regarding 'belief' that we will come to.

this statement beyond simply catharsis.) As many readers will know, contestants are presented with the answer to a question and, from this, must extrapolate the correct question, phrasing it in the form of “what is...” or “what are...”, etc. The first answer of this particular instalment was ‘questioned’ by a contestant named Greg, from Waverly, Ohio, who was presented with: “These rodents first got to America by stowing away on ships”. Greg, quite rightly, of course, gave the question “What are rats?”

This little anecdote quite neatly illustrates the difficulty that theatrical elision creates for Funesian memory. Elision can be usefully thought of as a response, an answer, to a question *that has never been asked*. The elisionary act is known through the responses to it that are perceptible in the theatrical image, as in the *Jeopardy!* comparison, in which responses are given, the cause of which (the question) must be deduced from said responses. But how does this reversibility of causality place Funesian memory in ‘jeopardy’: imperil it, produce a moment in which everything ‘hangs in the balance’,³⁶⁹ in which memory becomes undecided? This problem has a close affinity with the logic of the archive explored by Derrida in his wide-ranging work on memory, history and psychoanalysis (amongst many other things), *Archive Fever*.

One enters an archive, searching for a truth. But the concept of the archive, as Derrida tells us, is more accurately described as a response, a response directed, not towards the past, but towards the future:

The question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past... It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.³⁷⁰

Theatrical elision elicits a search for a truth, an origin. And for the Funesian model of memory, there must be the possibility, the theoretical possibility, of finding one. For Funesian memory, the response (the perceptible representation that bears the mark of the elided event) must have a cause, situated in the past, to which the response refers. When we consider elision, that which ‘respond’ to its unseen, unheard acts serve as addresses directed towards the future, towards determining a ‘knowledge’ of the elided

³⁶⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, under entry for ‘jeopardy’.

³⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.36.

act, as an act which has no existence prior to receiving such a response. Just as the archive, so elision. An archive of elision. How can we say this?

Perhaps to think elision as an archive: as the institution and destruction of an archive, which is to say that the elisionary act is an archival act. Question and answer: a figure of locution, which seems, for Derrida, to be a figure characteristic of engagement with the archive. Elision participates in the temporal indecision of the archive, Janus-faced, it looks to the past and the future at the same time. To look to the archive as a means of accessing the past is to be, as Derrida terms it, '*en mal d'archive*'. As he explains, this being in 'need of archives', which is also a 'sickness', which is 'archive fever', is:

To burn with a passion... It is to run after the archive... It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin.³⁷¹

The 'effects' produced by the elisionary act (the perceptible 'responses' to it) prompt this desire to capture what has been 'missed', the *something missing*, the something 'dropped', 'cut out', elided. The desire to find the origin, the 'live origin', to see it happen.

This, Derrida tells us, is the desire of Freud as 'archaeologist', as, so I have suggested in Chapter 1, 'hermeneuticist'. In a careful reading of Freud's reading of Jensen's *Gradiva*, Derrida articulates this position explicitly:

Freud claims again to bring to light a more originary origin than that of the specter... He wants to exhume a more archaic impression... an impression that is almost no longer an archive but almost confuses itself with the pressure of the footstep that leaves its still-living mark on a substrate, a surface, a place of origin.³⁷²

Freud, like Hanold in Jensen's story, is searching for an 'irreplaceable place', the site, 'the very ash'³⁷³ (*la cendre même*), at which he will find the 'ultimate cause'.³⁷⁴ *Gradiva* serves as an illustration for this aspect of psychoanalysis, as a science of lost

³⁷¹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.91.

³⁷² Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.97.

³⁷³ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.100.

³⁷⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.97.

histories, of forgotten truths: the moment sought is that which is ‘an archive without archive, where, suddenly indiscernible from the impression of its imprint, Gradiva’s footstep speaks by itself!’³⁷⁵ And so, with elision, which is predicated upon the desire to make that which is elided ‘speak’, to experience it directly.

The theatrical representations which constitute its ‘effects’ function as ‘prompts’, a familiar notion for theatre, a term derived from the Latin ‘*promptus*’ (‘brought to light’³⁷⁶). These ‘prompts’, as does Freud, as does Hanold, ‘*claim* to bring to light’, to offer a means of revealing, bringing to mind, *as if for the first time*, the missing origin, the absent event. However, the possibility of unearthing this origin in its ‘uniqueness’ is, Derrida argues, a possibility only in dreams and speculation:

This uniqueness is not even a past present. It would have been possible, one can dream of it after the fact... The faithful memory of such a singularity can only be given over to the specter.³⁷⁷

His point here is that the unique, singular origin, thought in its uniqueness, is always already compromised by iterability from the moment one thinks it. As he says of the secret, ‘there can be no archive, by definition’:³⁷⁸ once the secret is known, it is no longer a secret. But elision is radically anarchivic. Its secret is that it is not only ‘not even a past present’, but also *not even a past*. The effect is the same: the original moment is irrecoverable. All we can do is communicate with specters. Or try to. This phantasmatic elision. As Derrida says of Yerushalmi’s attempts to speak with the ghost of Freud: ‘*the phantom does not respond*’.³⁷⁹

The elisionary act concurs with the mode of Yerushalmi’s attempt in its replication of the analytic situation (as we shall see further in subchapter 3.vii), in its replication of Freud’s self-decreed practice. And whilst this parallel is not entirely precise (for instance, one reason that Freud will not respond to Yerushalmi, Derrida tells us, is that ‘he has *already* responded’,³⁸⁰ not so with elision), it concurs as far as this:

³⁷⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.98.

³⁷⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, under entry for ‘prompt’.

³⁷⁷ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.100.

³⁷⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.100.

³⁷⁹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.62.

³⁸⁰ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.62.

Leaving one to speak, he [Freud and the phantom] makes one speak, never responding except to silence himself, only being silent to let the patient speak.³⁸¹

The elisionary act is equally silent in itself: we know it through its effects, not directly, not in person. It tells us nothing. The unspoken question, the elisionary process compels us to enunciate it, to create it (which is also, of course, to assume that we are 're-creating' it). For Funesian memory, which posits the existence of a verifiable original, of which mnemonic images or experiences are exact copies, elision is anathema.

Just as Derrida disturbs the status of an origin as singular and authentic origin, the idea of an accessible 'first time', so elision corresponds with this condition by never having a 'first time', never having taken place at all. Just as Hanold cannot revivify Gradiva, the desire impelling his archaeological exploits, despite her one-time existence, so the elided act cannot be returned to a life that it has never had. As 'something missing' its characterisation is predicated upon an experience located in the future, and retrospectively assumed, rather than a nostalgia for a lost original, source or authority. Yet it 'leaves' traces, not copies (how could it?), of itself. It leaves an archive. A promptive archive which claims to bring the elided into the light. An archive which, quite literally, 'produces as much as it records the event'.³⁸² Indeed, with elision, it 'records' *upon condition* that it produces the event. This is why we can say that the elisionary act is structured as something missed, but is *also always 'to come'*.

Derrida defines 'the archive as an irreducible experience of the future':³⁸³ it is to be engaged with in the future, and is thus 'never closed'. The archive is 'an unconditional affirmation, it is the affirmation of the future *to come* [*l'à-venir*]'.³⁸⁴ And Derrida is very specific over his use of this term, '*avenir* rather than the *futur*' because, as he says, the former 'point[s] toward the coming of an event rather than toward some future present [i.e. '*futur*']'.³⁸⁵ The archive of the elisionary act, its 'effects', which are truly prompts, are just such an address to the future. They give an impression, are an impression, of what has been 'missed'. The elisionary act is always 'to come', but not as a future present. It will never appear, in person, as an evidential or demonstrable

³⁸¹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.62.

³⁸² Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.17.

³⁸³ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.68.

³⁸⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.68.

³⁸⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.68.

object, but only as an ‘assumption’ (a taking into *oneself*) based upon the form of the archive, the structuring of the elided event by its own effects. This status of theatrical elision as *l’à-venir* is similarly suggested by Weber when, describing the “Autumn River” scene, he finds that theatre ‘emerges as a powerful medium of the *arrivant*’.³⁸⁶ ‘The *arrivant*’: this signifies the ‘arrival’, the ‘new comer’, from ‘*arriver*’ (‘to arrive’). Theatre as *arrivant* is always in the process of arriving. The *always new* comer. This cuts to the heart of theatricality. And it is with this example, this model of elision, that Weber chooses to illustrate the constant ‘displacement’ intrinsic to theatricality, the condition of theatre as being ‘not bound to arrive at a final destination’.³⁸⁷ For elision is the epitome of this aspect of theatricality: it *will not* arrive, as it *cannot* arrive as *futur*, only as an experience of the promise, an opening to the future, as *l’à-venir*.

3.vi.i The Unborn Object: Elision and Pseudocyesis

We can also think of elision as another kind of ‘to come’, a ‘coming into the world’ (*venir au monde*). A pregnancy, in a literal sense (*prae-gnāscī*: ‘before being born’³⁸⁸), the *potential* to be born, the before of being realised. But for elision, as a model of elision, this pregnancy is a phantom pregnancy: a pseudocyesis. As neurologist V.S. Ramachandran defines this condition:

Some women who desperately want to be pregnant – and occasionally some who deeply dread pregnancy – develop all the signs and symptoms of true pregnancy... Everything seems normal except for one thing: There is no baby.³⁸⁹

This traumatic phenomenon is still largely unexplained, at least conclusively. Infamously, and to the professional embarrassment of many doctors who come across this relatively uncommon occurrence, there is no way of differentiating between a true and a phantom pregnancy based upon the symptoms. Sometimes even to the extent that positive results are produced on pregnancy tests. Every symptom is the same. The only methods for distinguishing are based upon, as Ramachandran identifies, the physical lack of a baby. These methods are listed by Paul Paulman, a family practitioner at the

³⁸⁶ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p.29.

³⁸⁷ Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p.29.

³⁸⁸ Oxford English Dictionary, under entry for ‘pregnant’.

³⁸⁹ V.S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee, *Phantoms in the Brain*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p.213.

University of Nebraska Medical Center, in an interview upon the subject with the *New York Times* (2006):

You don't hear heart tones from the fetus, you don't see the fetus on ultrasound, and you don't get a delivery.³⁹⁰

It cannot be heard, it cannot be seen, it does not arrive. It is known only through its effects, effects from which a belief, an assumption, a knowledge adopted unto oneself, is derived.

The 'phantom' of the phantom pregnancy and the phantom of elision are of the same order. It is certainly highly resonant, although the connection is surely unintended, to hear Ramachandran state: '*Pseudocyesis is dramatic* [my italics]'.³⁹¹ But this connection is more than coincidental. Pseudocyesis is similarly caught, suspended, between two temporal prospects: it both looks backward to seek an origin and looks forward to the delivery of a meeting, in the flesh, an actualisation. In other words, pseudocyesis is caught between expectation and mourning. Expectation that the blessed event, the birth, will happen, the delivery will be made: that these promptings, symptoms, signs, are a prelude to the object itself appearing. And mourning that what is missing will, in fact, never appear. In pseudocyesis, I would suggest, the overwhelming belief and expectation in the reality of the pregnancy is predominant. It is this that is experienced consciously. The element of mourning here is akin to the 'illness of mourning' that Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok develop through their concept of the 'entombed' secret. It would be appropriate to consider the secret in pseudocyesis, that the pregnancy is a phantom one, that there is no physical origin to the bodily symptoms manifested, as a secret that the sufferer keeps from herself. The loss of the mourned object is, essentially, 'split' from the psyche. In Abraham and Torok's words, it 'leads to the establishment of a sealed-off psychic place, a crypt in the ego',³⁹² the 'crypt' of the secret.

³⁹⁰ Paul Paulman, quoted in: Elizabeth Svoboda, 'All the Signs of Pregnancy Except One: A Baby', *The New York Times*, 5th December 2006 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/05/health/05pseud.html>> [accessed March 2010].

³⁹¹ Ramachandran, p.218.

³⁹² Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, "'The Lost Object – Me": Notes on Endocryptic Identification', in *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. Nicholas T. Rand (University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.141.

Theatrical elision, whilst not being experienced to the same degree as such extreme and traumatic states as those that are to be found in pathology, entails a similar process due to a similar relationship with the loss of an object. In pseudocyesis, the force driving the condition is, as Ramachandran tells us, the wish to be pregnant (or the fear of this, but I would posit that the same process could be shown to function in each case, the wish always being contemporaneous with its opposite in the unconscious, as Freud teaches), the ‘intense longing for a child’ which leads to the “baby” being ‘literally conjured out of thin air through a process of unconscious learning’.³⁹³

However, I would further suggest that the wish that motivates pseudocyesis is more usefully thought of not *necessarily* as the wish for a baby, or to be pregnant, but as the wish for a physical object that will correspond, give form, to an aspect of the unconscious. The reason for this refinement is the episode provided by Freud in reference to, arguably, the founding case of psychoanalysis: that of Anna O. Anna O. presents symptoms of pseudocyesis just as her psychoanalytic treatment is coming to an end.³⁹⁴ Whilst this is not referred to in the initial case history in *Studies on Hysteria*, or in the *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (in both of which the Anna O. case is discussed extensively), it is related at some length in both Ernest Jones’s biography of Freud (as having been told to Jones by Freud) and in a letter from Freud to Stefan Zweig (No. 265: June 2nd, 1932). Freud describes Breuer’s termination of his treatment of Anna O., and his subsequent summoning back to her (that evening) owing to a sudden and grave deterioration in her condition. According to Jones, Breuer now found her:

In the throes of a hysterical childbirth (pseudocyesis), the logical termination of a phantom pregnancy that had been invisibly developing *in response to Breuer’s ministrations* [my italics].³⁹⁵

³⁹³ Ramachandran, p.217.

³⁹⁴ Whilst the accuracy of Freud’s description of these events is highly controversial, and a source of much debate, in my argument the truth of this event does not, frankly, affect the significance of it. The key point, even if we take Freud’s narrative to be a fictitious one (owing to the numerous factual inconsistencies, although his motivation, if such a conclusion is reached, is most obscure), is that it both forms a part of the founding mythology of psychoanalysis and also, most importantly, it provides an insight into what Freud considered possible or likely within his model of the psyche and psychoanalytic treatment, primarily through the terms with which he describes the event.

³⁹⁵ Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud: Vol. 1* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp.224-225.

The one time that Freud (or Jones) gives voice to Anna O. in this episode is to quote her cry upon being asked ‘what was wrong with her’:

“Now Dr. B’s child is coming!”³⁹⁶

What should we note here? Firstly, there is no evidence that Anna O. ever expressed a desire to be pregnant or to have a child. Indeed, Freud notes in *Studies on Hysteria* that ‘the element of sexuality was astonishingly undeveloped in her’.³⁹⁷ If the wish driving her pseudocyesis were the wish to have a child, this ‘intense longing’ would surely have been noted elsewhere in the case histories. Secondly, in the exclamation that Freud quotes, Anna does not take ownership of the child that her symptoms lead her to believe is about to be born. She does not cry ‘now *my* child is coming’, or even ‘*the* child’, but identifies it exclusively with Breuer. If her pseudocyesis were the result of the wish for a child, this is certainly the opposite that we might expect. My suggestion, and it is inevitably a tentative one, is that the unspoken wish of Anna’s pseudocyesis is not for a child, but is rather to materialise a physical, representative object³⁹⁸ that will correspond to, embody, the *rappor*t between analyst and analysand. A way of bringing their therapeutic relationship, indeed we could also say the experience of the psychoanalytic treatment and the transference that it unavoidably entails, into the world (*venir au monde*). The ‘child’ is a ‘response’ to Breuer’s influence, his treatment, his ‘ministrations’. It becomes a potential representation of Anna’s experience of Breuer, which explains her identification of it with him, rather than herself.

I feel sure that more could be said on this case. However, for our present purposes the key point is that we find in pseudocyesis a model of elision, an elision of the phantomatic child, certainly, but also an elision of the phantomatic object. The missing object that is desired, that is desired to be seen, to be heard, to arrive. There is an expectation that this representative object will appear, due to its ‘effects’, its symptoms, and a mourning, from a ‘secret’ knowledge, that it never will. And we find in theatrical elision that the ambivalence between a mourning for the ‘something missed’ and an

³⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, ‘Letter No. 265: June 2nd, 1932’, in Stefan Zweig, *Briefwechsel mit Hermann Bahr, Sigmund Freud, Rainer Maria Rilke und Arthur Schnitzler*, ed. Jeffrey B. Berlin, Hans-Ulrich Lindken and Donald A. Prater (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1987), pp.199-200.

³⁹⁷ Sigmund Freud, SE 2, p.21.

³⁹⁸ To distinguish from an ‘object-representation’, which is a hallucinatory representation of an object, the ‘representative object’ is an object that materially represents an intangible.

expectation that it will appear, is similarly predicated upon the wish for an object, a 'lost' object. Like Gradiva, the phantom cannot be met in life; unlike Gradiva, the phantom in pseudocyesis and theatrical elision has never had life. For the Funesian model of memory, elision presents a radical challenge. It cannot be incorporated within the Funesian, Aristotelian, schema of authentic, authoritative originals and mnemonic copying. However, elision complements another model of memory well, and this alternative, 'energetic' model offers another way of approaching theatre. A way that can take account of such distinctive constituents as elision.

3.vii 'I am looking for you in the image and I can't find you any more':³⁹⁹ The Energetics of Theatrical Elision as Negative Hallucination

Having discussed the nature of, and problems posed by, theatrical elision, we can turn now to examining its place within an energetic theory of mnemonic representation and how they dialogically inform one another, exploring the consequences that this has for how we understand the processes and possibilities of both theatricality and energetic theory.

The idea of the 'something' that has been 'lost', that which has been 'missed', that which is experienced as an elision in theatrical representation, is, as we have seen, a source of desire. This is a phenomenon that is treated at length throughout psychoanalysis. Analysts such as André Green have discussed the 'absent object' through an analysis that helps us to understand the impulse towards 'finding' that which is 'missing', which we have characterised as mourning and expectation. As he states:

It is the absence of the object that causes the affect of unpleasure; the representation of satisfaction and of the object that conditions it... it is during that absence that the tension becomes the spur of phantasy.⁴⁰⁰

Green refers here to the oft-repeated argument that the absence of the object leads to the hallucinatory representation of it, the phantasy of it, as a means of replacing the satisfaction that would have been gained from the object itself. However, as we have seen with the phantom 'child' in pseudocyesis, the 'object' that is missing *is a representation*. Inevitably this is the case when we are working with theatre, a

³⁹⁹ Botella, p.73.

⁴⁰⁰ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.185.

representational medium (representational, as Derrida has shown, even in such apparently anti-representational works and theories as those of Artaud). It is an absence, in a chain of representations, where a representation *should* be, as indicated through its perceptible ‘effects’, its promptings (in a causal ambivalence that is entirely appropriate), its ‘archive’, its ‘responses’. We have multiply named these as such.

But this circumstance, making theatrical elision the mark of a missing representation rather than the loss of a once-possessioned, once-known object that can be substituted by a hallucinatory object-representation, does not fundamentally alter the experience of its absence. As Green goes on to note:

[The] absence of any representation of the subject is accompanied by a rise in the anxiety affect, which may be compared with anxiety about loss of the object.⁴⁰¹

Whilst Green is talking about the non-representation of the subject (specifically in the frame of the mirror), the equivalence that he describes is applicable to non-representation generally. This is expanded upon by César and Sára Botella (whose work on non-representation we will be relatively familiar with from its discussion in Chapter 1) when they state:

*In our view, it is not the loss of the object but the danger of the loss of its representation and, by extension, the risk of non-representation, which denotes distress.*⁴⁰²

The absence of representation is, so the Botellas argue, a threat to the psyche, a threat to the psyche’s power to represent, a threat of *falling* into non-representation. A threat that is pre-figured by sleep, *falling* asleep, which, for the child at least, risks ‘drowning the representation of his objects in the effusion offered by sleep’.⁴⁰³ And a key characteristic of this non-representation, indeed what, I suggest, makes it a source of conscious distress and disturbance is the awareness of the non-representation, the sense that there is an absence and, thus, an absence *of* something, something missing. This

⁴⁰¹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.205.

⁴⁰² Botella, p.30.

⁴⁰³ Botella, p.30.

‘sense’ is identified by Green when he states that: ‘what is lacking is not the sense of existence, but the power of representation’.⁴⁰⁴ Something ‘exists’, but is not perceptible.

This is an example of the kind of phenomena that Christopher Bollas is referring to in his suggestion that: ‘nothing is a presence that can be felt’.⁴⁰⁵ Whilst Bollas is discussing a more generalised definition of ‘nothing’ in psychoanalytic theory, including all kinds of psychoanalytic phenomena and aspects of ‘lived experience’ that can be characterised as ‘nothing’, the type of non-representation that we are concerned with here is certainly included. However, it is described most explicitly, and with great clarity, by psychoanalyst Michael Parsons in his introduction to the Botellas’ *The Work of Psychic Figurability*. Here he explains their concept of ‘memory without recollection’ (which we will return to shortly) as:

an inchoate awareness of *something having occurred* [my italics], or some state having obtained, at some time other than the present moment; but an awareness that cannot be psychically represented.⁴⁰⁶

He introduces an appropriate term for this, of his own, naming it ‘*an amnesic trace*’. But let us stay with this sense, this pre-knowledge, of ‘*something*’ having happened. This ‘awareness’ is the initial stage of one’s reception of theatrical elision, before what we have called ‘promptings’, the ‘effects’ of what is missing, have given us an indication of the nature of what is missing. It is contemporaneous with the stage that DeLillo describes, if we think back to his portrayal of the falling ‘paperclip’, when he says: ‘[Y]ou drop *something*... It takes a second or two before you know it and even then you know it only as a formless distortion of the teeming space around your body [my italics].’⁴⁰⁷ Only ‘something’, no more specific than this. At this point it is only a rough awareness of something *formless*: without representation. There is a ‘gap’, something has ‘fallen out’, this much we understand, but its ‘effects’, its context, have not yet been thought retrospectively. Not yet been prompted towards a certain identification, a certain definition. Theatrical elision is just such a space of ‘something’,

⁴⁰⁴ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.205.

⁴⁰⁵ Christopher Bollas, *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p.59.

⁴⁰⁶ Michael Parsons, ‘Introduction’, in Botella, p.xix.

⁴⁰⁷ DeLillo, p.89.

in which there is nothing. And this condition of non-representation finds an affinity in the theorisation of ‘negative hallucination’.

Negative hallucination, which we have detailed to a different purpose in the first chapter, is neatly defined by Green in these terms:

I understand negative hallucination not as *absence of representation*, but as *representation of the absence of representation*, which is expressed clinically by an excess of affect.⁴⁰⁸

The refinement that Green makes from ‘absence of representation’ to negative hallucination (and which is followed by the Botellas, amongst others), is an apt way of describing the way that we have been thinking non-representation and coincides closely, as it does, with our definition of theatrical elision as ‘something missing’. A non-representative representation, we could say, which is awaiting representation, and mourning that it will never acquire *objective* representation, a past authenticity.

Let us think about negative hallucination a little, this peculiar and little discussed occurrence. We have seen already that it is a state that emerges from extremes, a manifestation of affect that breaks the chain of representation, whose ‘peculiarity is *to recover, abolish, replace representation*’.⁴⁰⁹ It is an *amnesic trace*, that useful term of Michael Parsons, which indicates its status as belonging to a model of memory alien to the Funesian, archaeological model that we have seen being undermined by the inassimilable nature of elision. What is meant by Parsons’s term is that the non-representation is a mark that has been left upon the psyche, but that does not refer back to a memory. It is not composed of mnemonic traces and has, therefore, no correspondent representation. The memory itself has normally been destroyed or has never existed, due to a significant trauma. As the Botellas describe it in relation to one of their cases, that of a young Vietnamese girl named Jasmine whose parents were killed in the Vietnam war when she was two years old: ‘the analytic session could not be brought to a halt at the level of the representable mnemonic traces; the memories were unreachable or rather non-existent.’⁴¹⁰ There can be no return to an origin, a source, as there is no memory to return back to, and thus no copy in the form of mnemonic images. The excess of affect

⁴⁰⁸ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.256.

⁴⁰⁹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.226.

⁴¹⁰ Botella, p.101.

involved in this trauma has resulted in non-representation, and it is this process that will often lead to the formation of a negative hallucination.

A statement of our position. Let us be frank now. Such extremes do not sit comfortably, do not accord, with our general experience of theatre. Whilst elision is a common feature of the theatrical image, it is more usually experienced as a kind of ‘abdication’ of representation, rather than a forced destruction of representation caused by such traumatic affects. From our velvet-cushioned auditorium seats, programme in hand, we do not generally suffer from the strain, tension and terror that non-representation, and particularly negative hallucination, is so often described as being a site of. Why would a staging wilfully decide to ‘abdicate’ representation?

To speak plainly, as we all know, it is frequently for practical reasons. To physically represent Fortinbras’s army in its entirety would require thousands of extras and costumes, a stage the size of the Champs-Élysées, and a budget of Croesusian proportions. For a scene of, perhaps, 10-15 minutes. It is quite impracticable. Indeed, it is a source of some comment and pleasing novelty that Mike Kenny’s 2010 production of *The Railway Children* numbers a steam train amongst its props (famously, via the conversion of a platform at Waterloo Station). This is precisely the kind of object that we would perhaps anticipate being elided in a more conventional staging. Although, we should note that practicalities are certainly not the only or even, arguably, the primary reason for elision as a staging device, and it is often used precisely to produce a particular effect through its qualities and status, as we have been defining it. Examples of such productions would include Peter Brook’s previously cited *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, or Ingmar Bergman’s radical 1970 version of Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* (or, *The Dreamplay*, as Bergman called his), of which contemporary critic Åke Perlström said “the only thing we see – and hear – are the actors”.⁴¹¹

But the question becomes, if such psychical extremes as negative hallucination do not seem to involve the same order of experience as theatrical elision, how do we justify using them as elucidatory models that can, as is my claim, dialogically provide insights into the processes of theatrical representation due to their equivalence? Whilst, in a

⁴¹¹ Åke Perlström, ‘Review of *The Dreamplay*’, *Göteborgs-Posten*, 15th March, 1970, quoted in Frederick J. Marker, & Lise Lone Marker, *Strindberg and Modernist Theatre: Post-Inferno Drama on the Stage* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.97.

qualificative argument that we have made in another context, the degree, the force, of the experience may differ, the key point is that *the model* is analogous. We are working within the framework that theatrical representation (indeed visual performative media generally, as stated in our introductory preliminaries) and mnemonic representation are correspondent and inform one another. We also find that the Funesian definition of memory is incongruous with theatricality. Given these conditions, I suggest that we can turn to an energetic approach to memory, one which seeks to *take account* of the affective aspects of representation rather than treating it exclusively as a signifier referring to an absent signified or meaning, to provide a more appropriate alternative. And theatrical elision is a point of tension where this argument is precisely demonstrated.

Elision disturbs Funesian memory, but is entirely in accord with an energetic conception of memory through its affinity with negative hallucination. Negative hallucination which is a concept that, if we can follow Celine Surprenant and make use of a convenient if slightly arguable distinction (in its seeming absoluteness), appears to align with an economic, an energetic, rather than hermeneutic ‘understanding of psychoanalysis’.⁴¹² This is a claim encouraged by Green’s portrayal of negative hallucination as a condition in which ‘the affect is experienced with maximum intensity, being unable to rest on any representation’:⁴¹³ negative hallucination is primarily an experience of affect, rather than of ideational representation that could be hermeneutically interpreted. And, even if negative hallucination in the analytic situation involves very high intensities of affective force, its significance, as functionally equivalent to theatrical elision, in terms of an energetic conception of theatrical representation is *structural*, as a kind, a specific instance, of ‘transitory investment’.⁴¹⁴ Although we should also note that we are not precluding the possibility that theatrical elision will result in a high intensity of affective energy, will even be disturbing in its effects, it is simply that in this case the model that I am proposing is more self-evidentially at work.

We recall here Lyotard’s exposition of ‘an energetic theatre’, in his piece ‘The Tooth, the Palm’, which, as we previously argued, is useful not so much as a practical

⁴¹² Surprenant, p.121.

⁴¹³ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.205.

⁴¹⁴ Lyotard, ‘The Tooth, the Palm’, p.287.

proposition or schema for a realisable design of theatre, but as a means of approaching, of understanding, theatre generally (particularly those aspects of theatre and performances that resist analysis). Lyotard makes use of this term, 'transitory investment', in his discussion of 'the tooth' and 'the palm', which are not so much 'signs' as they are 'two investments of the libido'.⁴¹⁵ Let us remind ourselves of Lyotard's description in detail:

[T]he tooth and the palm no longer have a relationship of illusion and truth, cause and effect, signifier and signified (or vice versa), but they coexist, independently, as transitory investments... The tooth and the palm no longer mean anything, they are forces, intensities, present affects.⁴¹⁶

From an energetic perspective, elision has no 'meaning', represents nothing *in itself* outside its own non-representation (as Green identifies in negative hallucination). And whilst we assert that the elisionary act is knowable only through its 'effects', this is quite in keeping with Lyotard's rejection of a causal relationship. For Lyotard it is the 'reversibility' of the tooth and the palm, rather than one representing the other or 'a hierarchy of one position over the other',⁴¹⁷ that entails the destruction of causality and, thus, of the referential sign. As we have detailed above, theatrical elision is similarly constituted as a challenge to causality through its reversibility, which the Funesian model of memory cannot incorporate: the elided act is 'assumed' to produce 'effects' through which it can be known (elision as something missed), whilst simultaneously there is no elided act and, therefore, the 'effects' are actually 'prompts' that retrospectively denote the elision (elision as never having happened at all).

Elision, this key aspect of theatricality, is intrinsically accordant with Lyotard's theory of theatrical representation (or, in this case, the representation of a non-representation) as a 'transitory investment'. As is negative hallucination, which is similarly characterised by a condition of reversibility in its 'representative' capacity, but this point we shall address momentarily. Negative hallucination, which figures the structural role and potential of the elisionary act within an energetics of theatrical representation, demonstrates the consequences that elision involves for an energetic approach. As

⁴¹⁵ Lyotard, 'The Tooth, the Palm', p.282.

⁴¹⁶ Lyotard, 'The Tooth, the Palm', p.287.

⁴¹⁷ Lyotard, 'The Tooth, the Palm', p.282.

Green tells us in the quotation above, in affective terms, negative hallucination is determined by an inability of the affect to ‘rest on any representation’. The result of this is ‘a rise in the anxiety affect’ linked to the loss of representation. With this we are familiar, and the corollary of it is that theatrical elision is also subject to anxiety. It is this that impels the wish for representation.

However, another feature of negative hallucination is detailed by Green in his later work *The Work of the Negative* (1999, originally published in 1993 as *Le travail du Négatif*), when he describes how:

the deletion [the non-representation of negative hallucination] simultaneously sharpens the details and suppresses their existence, as if to draw attention as well to the danger that it is thought to be the cause of this deletion.⁴¹⁸

Negative hallucination involves an increased prominence (partly as a result of the increased anxiety that it provokes) that highlights its status as deletion, that signals its existence as a representation of a non-representation. This notion of the deletion ‘drawing attention to itself’ can be seen throughout the case studies that Green and the Botellas present of negative hallucination. For example, Green relates the case of a female patient whose ‘intense stare’ disturbed and diverted him, however, the reason for this intensity is revealed to be that ‘she was in the grip of a negative hallucination in which she no longer saw me’. As the patient states: ‘I have two great black holes in place of eyes, I see and I don’t see you... In fact, I can’t see you’.⁴¹⁹ The negative hallucination draws attention to itself, not only through the patient’s striking description of her experience of it as having ‘holes in place of eyes’, but, furthermore, through the ‘intensity’ with which the patient focuses upon that which has been ‘deleted’ (i.e. the analyst).

A similar account occurs in the Botellas’ work with their patient Florian, in which Florian, after relating his sighting of the analyst that morning before his session, grows increasingly concerned that his observation had been fictitious until the figure of the analyst is erased from his mnemonic image of that morning altogether. As per our titular quotation, he states:

⁴¹⁸ André Green, *The Work of the Negative* (London: Free Association Books, 1999), pp.197-8.

⁴¹⁹ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.326.

“I don’t know any more if I saw you... I am looking for you in the image and I can’t find you any more”.⁴²⁰

Florian is ‘looking’ in the image, but, as with Green’s patient, cannot find the deleted figure of the analyst, which is a source of preoccupation for him. The increased ‘significance’ of the deleted content is indicated by the increased ‘sharpness’ and sense of portentousness in its surrounding context and representations. We see, for example, Florian’s fixation upon, and repetition of, ‘dark glasses’:⁴²¹ for him a significant object that forms part of the image, and which both precedes and is derived from the negative hallucination. Or, we can cite the Botellas’ identification that, just preceding the negative hallucination itself, there was ‘a heavy silence, longer, *more pregnant than usual* [my italics]’.⁴²² This inevitably reminds us of pseudocycosis, a connection that is far from coincidental. For this silence acts as a ‘prompt’ and ‘effect’, which is recognised as being a site of abnormal potency and potentiality. An ‘alert’, if you will, to the proximity, no, better to say *l’à-venir*, of negative hallucination.

And the ‘prompts’, ‘effects’, that similarly contextualise theatrical elision are also, we find, received as being of ‘more than usual’ significance, as being, let us say, *over-determined*.⁴²³ They are dually determined as objects themselves, gestures with their own significance, and *also* markers of the elided act (‘producing’ and ‘responding to’) functioning *in relation* to the elision. Are these two functions ever truly separable? I would suggest not: their interaction is constitutive of the object. But the key point is that the act of elision leads to a ‘sharpening’, an increase in intensity and conspicuousness, of those representations that are indicative of it. We can think of Chen’s interactions with the elided boat: here we take note of Chen’s movements as transformations, as aspects, that speak to us of the object Chen, but also that are in dialogic relation with the movement of the boat. Such gestures bear the force of each object, one perceptible, one elided.

⁴²⁰ Botella, p.73.

⁴²¹ Botella, p.73.

⁴²² Botella, p.73.

⁴²³ Metaphorically speaking. Laplanche and Pontalis define over-determination as ‘the fact that formations of the unconscious can be attributed to a plurality of determining factors’ (Laplanche and Pontalis, p.292). These ‘prompt-effects’ are not unconscious formations.

3.vii.i 'Working as a double': Engaging with Negative Hallucination

This leads us to the consequences of this line of thought. These conditions of negative hallucination and elision can result in a certain mode of approach from both the analyst and, I would suggest, the spectator, respectively. In negative hallucination, the anxiety aroused by non-representation and the 'sharpening' of its correspondent details evoke a certain mode of working between the analyst and the analysand. As the Botellas note:

There are grounds for thinking that an affect, signalling the danger of non-representation that was almost awakened in the analyst, immediately 'created found' a figure, an adequate representation.⁴²⁴

This is a process that we touched upon briefly in Chapter 1, although we shall reiterate what is relevant for this context, and is what the Botellas refer to as 'functioning or working as a double (*travail en double*)'.⁴²⁵ They provide a practical example of this 'figuration' by the analyst in the case of Florian, in which they describe that: 'at the same time as this psychical phenomenon [negative hallucination] took place in Florian, there occurred in the analyst a work of figurability'.⁴²⁶ This 'working as a double' involves the psyche of the analyst facilitating the giving of form to that which has been deleted in the psyche of the analysand. The analyst allows him/herself to be 'infiltrated by an image',⁴²⁷ an image arising 'under the influence of what the analysand has told him'.⁴²⁸ In this way the analyst 'reflects what is only potential in the other'.⁴²⁹ The affective energy of the negative hallucination is 'transformed', 'displaced', into a representative figure that emerges, in an animistic form, from the psyche of the analyst or, to be more precise, from between the psyches of the analyst and analysand: 'the product of a common work'.⁴³⁰ It is a question of providing the 'amnesic trace' with a 'recollection', but, in a reversal of the more usual analytic process:

⁴²⁴ Botella, p.34.

⁴²⁵ Botella, p.71.

⁴²⁶ Botella, p.73.

⁴²⁷ Botella, p.72.

⁴²⁸ Botella, p.73.

⁴²⁹ Botella, p.84.

⁴³⁰ Botella, p.71.

The analyst did not formulate a latent content that he had discovered behind a manifest content, but in the absence of both he advanced preconscious formations susceptible of... serving as manifest content.⁴³¹

The radical difference that this approach inaugurates from a Funesian conception of memory is noted with the remark: ‘we are far from a problem of memory linked to repression’.⁴³²

We are working here with a model of memory that is conditioned through reversibility, just as we have seen in the case of elision, and just as Lyotard associates with an energetic conception of representation (against the referentiality of the sign). This is demonstrated, firstly, through Green’s identification of ‘negativity’ as ‘what is appreciated as absent cause retroactively deduced’.⁴³³ An *absent cause*, only determined *retroactively*: causality is here made precisely *uncertain*. And, secondly, through the Botellas’ description of the figuration that emerges from ‘working as a double’ as being ‘created found’: the temporal ambivalence here is between the figure that is created for the first time, and the experience (falsely assumed, as with the elided content in theatricality) of this figure as one that has been lost and is to be recovered. As we have said previously, the result of this is that the validity, the ‘truth’, of the figuration as a mnemonic image is, so the Botellas suggest, essentially irrelevant. The prime objective is that a representation, to which the affective energy of the negative hallucination can be attached or can be manifested through, is installed. Although, this representation must be assumed to be appropriate, must be believed, in the manner of a screen memory, for the non-representation to be moved past. The Botellas support this theory through reference to their reading of Freud, who, as they detail, ‘put forward an idea, which, it seems to us, was revolutionary – namely, that the conviction aroused in the analysand by the work of the analyst “achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory”’.⁴³⁴

That this process, this therapy, is possible, this is our concern. However, we are also in the same territory as Derrida uncomfortably finds himself in *Archive Fever*, at the point at which he discusses the difference between the ‘intention to kill [Moses]’ and the

⁴³¹ Botella, p.33.

⁴³² Botella, pp.101-102.

⁴³³ Green, *The Fabric of Affect*, p.256.

⁴³⁴ Botella, p.70.

‘acting out of this desire to kill’ for the unconscious. He determines that ‘the unconscious does not know the difference here between the virtual and the actual’.⁴³⁵ This is the same characteristic of the unconscious that the Botellas’ strategy of figurability exploits. And, as Derrida notes, so we should also note, that ‘we will never have finished, we have not in truth begun, drawing all the ethico-juridical consequences from this’.⁴³⁶

It is my contention that this process of ‘working as a double’, of facilitating the emergence of a mnemonic image derived from a continuity between two psyches, which will serve to figure the elided, the non-representation, is also operative in theatrical elision. Elisionary acts address the spectator (indeed, all participants in the theatrical image) in such a way that he/she comes to be in the same position as the analyst. Not as interpreters, but by ‘working as doubles’. The elisionary act seeks to move from being ‘something missing’ to being an ‘assumption’: literally, as a ‘taking unto oneself’, a ‘taking for granted’ (from *crēdere*: to *believe*), and, perhaps most resonantly, a ‘pretence’. A pretence that one believes, fooling oneself, playing oneself false: a *delusion*. Unnoticed, this self-deception ‘just happens’, the image *infiltrates*... and, if successful, should be silent. This is the structure through which this element of theatricality aims to engage the spectator. After the show is over, we can often have an image of an elided content, even if we do not know where this image has appeared from. How is this possible? As Freud tells us, ‘there is a grain of truth concealed in every delusion’.⁴³⁷ What truth? Here, this truth is one’s own.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the spectator’s work with the theatrical image actually *is* a work of two psyches, an anthropomorphic fallacy, but rather that the spectator works ‘under the influence’ (as the analyst with the analysand) of the ‘prompt-effects’ that structure, that ‘produce as much as record’,⁴³⁸ the elided event. These perceptible representations address the spectator through informing him/her as to the context, the boundaries, we could say, of the elided representation. It is only through community with the spectator that the ‘missing’ object can be figured. Hence, one’s own truth: each spectator will have their own understanding of what has been elided.

⁴³⁵ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.66.

⁴³⁶ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.66.

⁴³⁷ Sigmund Freud, ‘Jensen’s Gradiva’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 9 (SE 9)*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961; repr. 2001), p.80.

⁴³⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p.17.

This leaves energetics, as a way of approaching theatre, with a self-evident problem. A problem that is frequently, even inevitably, raised amongst methodologies that work with alternatives to hermeneutic analysis. The problem of subjectivity haunts an energetic approach: it is a snare easily fallen into. Why is this a problem? Specifically because the subjectivity of the representation, the product of ‘working as a double’, associated with the elisionary event forestalls discussion, debate, a critical engagement. With each spectator responding personally, there is no single object. The ‘content’ of the ‘image’ is different every time. How can we, therefore, *practically* take account of elision within energetics as a mode of criticism: a criticism based upon an energetic understanding, which is more appropriate to engaging with key aspects of theatricality?

This is the impasse that Ehrenzweig, as we noted in Chapter 2, comes up against in his theory of ‘unconscious scanning’, in relation to art. It is also the consequence of *avant-garde* New York theatre director Richard Foreman’s advice to his spectators when he states that: ‘it is the impulse that is your deep truth, not the object that seems to call it forth’,⁴³⁹ the ‘impulse... [is] unconnected to the objects’.⁴⁴⁰ Foreman’s ideas on theatre consistently engage with psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic concepts, and his theatrical strategies are often derived from the experience of the analytic situation. And the analysand’s subjective response is an integral aspect, in practice, of the analytic situation. Freud makes this quite clear when discussing dream interpretation:

I should like to utter an express warning... against restricting the work of translating dreams merely to translating symbols and against abandoning the technique of making use of the dreamer’s associations.⁴⁴¹

Foreman is clearly quite content for his plays to, equally, be responded to in a purely subjective way, as he later says, more explicitly: ‘I try to make plays as hard to remember as a vivid dream... you know you’ve lived with intensity, yet try as you might you can’t remember’.⁴⁴² For the critic, for the study of theatre, such exclusive subjectivity makes life somewhat difficult. But, whilst Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* is not designed to provide a foolproof reference guide to the symbolic meaning of

⁴³⁹ Richard Foreman, ‘Foundations for a Theatre’, in *Unbalancing Acts*, ed. Ken Jordan (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992), p.4.

⁴⁴⁰ Foreman, p.4.

⁴⁴¹ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p.477.

⁴⁴² Foreman, p.24.

dream-content (despite ‘feel[ing] tempted to draw up a new ‘dream-book’’,⁴⁴³ such must be resisted), neither does it leave us with a method that extols only the subjective (as Foreman leads us to). Rather, Freud is concerned with the processes, the conditions, the characteristics by which the dream functions, and by which it can be thought.

And it is precisely this that I have attempted to elaborate here, in relation to theatrical elision. The content, the image, that is the figuration of the elisional act may be individual, but our concern is not with determining the significance of the elided representation for the spectator, nor is it to ‘re-place’ the elisional with an image of our own through which we may seek to deduce the interaction of affect and object. Rather, we accept the profoundly unsettling place of non-representation. We work with it, as it is, by exploring its processes, its purposes and effects within the theatrical image, within the theatrical production. We look to take account of, what Christopher Bollas has evocatively termed, ‘an aesthetics of nothingness’.⁴⁴⁴ Although he seeks to convey a sense of the numerous kinds, the multiplicity, of nothingness that typify our psychic and ‘lived’ experiences, the depiction is entirely applicable (as indicated by negative hallucination being explicitly included by Bollas). In this ‘aesthetics’ it is the ‘prompt-effects’ that allow us access to thinking the energetics of elision, as Bollas describes, capturing our familiar causal ambivalence: ‘each inner intensity bears the mark of the nothing which immediately precedes it and follows it’.⁴⁴⁵ And it is the challenge of an energetic approach to theatricality, an approach that incorporates the elided within the theatrical image, an approach that gives the affective force of the non-represented ‘the right to exist’,⁴⁴⁶ to develop an ‘aesthetics of nothingness’, of the ‘amnesic trace’. Better still, it is the challenge posed *by theatricality* to engage with it *fully*, not only with that which is perceptible, and to construct a means to do so. This is the challenge posed, first, by the elisionary, and a challenge that we have only just begun to address.

⁴⁴³ Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p.467.

⁴⁴⁴ Bollas, *Cracking Up*, p.59.

⁴⁴⁵ Bollas. *Cracking Up*, p.59.

⁴⁴⁶ Botella, p.75.

Chapter 4: Film and an Energetic Approach

4.i A Memorious Medium: Replication, Reality and the Memory of Early Cinema

‘Copyright 1896 by T.A. Edison’. One need not watch too closely to see the repeated instances of this handwritten inscription flashing, momentarily, before our eyes whilst watching the short ‘actuality’ film *Feeding the Doves*.⁴⁴⁷ A single frame inserted into the continuity of moving pictures, almost subliminal, it is a mark of ownership stamped into the body of the film itself. And this is far from an isolated occurrence: similar additions were frequently made, which is perhaps not surprising given the Edison Company’s vociferous and obdurate pursuit of exclusivity and copyright protection. But we are, I think, entitled to ask why such extreme measures, in the case of film, were necessary? Measures that, no matter how briefly, break the ‘flow’ of the film and the viewer’s engagement, inevitably affecting his/her experience in an adverse way.

One reason, I would suggest, is that it is a response to the nature of the medium itself. The ‘actuality’ was a source of great interest and curiosity primarily due to its offer to replicate the pro-filmic world exactly. This possibility was the new technology’s main selling feature, as we can discern from its exploitation by filmmakers such as Mitchell and Kenyon, who famously produced, among many others types, a number of ‘factory-gate’ pictures (a staple genre of actuality). These were made by recording the deluge of workers that, as a shift ended, streamed from their factory towards a well-positioned camera, next to which would be a sign reading: ‘*Come and see yourself as others see you*’, along with the appropriate time and place. And, as Ian Jack reports (after the first screenings, in 2005, of a then newly-discovered mass of footage, now comprising the Peter Worden Collection), ‘there they would go and, according to contemporary accounts, point to themselves on the screen and shout out, tickled by the strangeness of it all.’⁴⁴⁸

One consequence of the precise replication of reality, offered by the actuality film, was that the work, the hand, of the film-maker goes unseen. To ‘see yourself as *others* see you’ is specifically not to see yourself as the cameraman sees you. This is necessarily so

⁴⁴⁷ Thomas Edison, ‘Feeding the Doves’ (1896), in: *Landmarks of Early Film, Vol. 1* (Image Entertainment, 1997).

⁴⁴⁸ Ian Jack, ‘The lost world’, *The Guardian*, 07/01/2005 <www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/jan/07/1> [accessed June 2010].

for, as implicitly claimed, reality to be seen as reality is: objectively rather than subjectively, if we can put it in such terms. It is thus that the Lumière brothers, and those that shared their aspirations and methodology, could claim to be ‘placing the world within one’s reach’.

Allied to this ‘capturing’ and ‘replication’ of reality, *as it happened*, is the potential for perfect repetition that film provides. In terms of the object *itself*, there is no distinction between one ‘showing’ and another. The film does not change. This repeatability allows the film to be screened without the necessity for any unique or qualitatively differentiable skill or ‘talent’ as a condition of its *screening*, unlike media experienced as human performance such as music or theatre. The potential for dissociating the identity of the filmmaker from the film is, therefore, very high. The actuality, in particular, would be very easy to anonymize, to fraudulently claim as one’s own or to simply duplicate and sell. Indeed, this frequently occurred during these formative days of cinema, in which copyright law was a grey area at best. For example, in the case of J. Stuart Blackton (one of the founders of American Vitagraphic, along with Albert E. Smith), as Charles Musser describes: ‘The new International Film Company paid Blackton the compliment of duping all three films and offering them for sale in the first issue of *The Phonoscope*, a new trade journal that began publication in September 1896’.⁴⁴⁹ As Musser goes on to say, it was in response to this ease of unsanctioned repetition that ‘Thomas Edison was soon copyrighting the films produced by his company’.⁴⁵⁰ The irony of this situation is that one of the primary misappropriators of films at this time seems to have been the Edison Company itself: ‘In his deposition of 1900, however, Blackton indignantly indicated that many of their films had been copyrighted by the Edison Company.’⁴⁵¹

The promise of the actuality to reproduce faithfully, purely, time and time again, and the correspondent assumption regarding the characteristics of film to be able to do so, are, I believe, quite genuine, and precipitate the Edison Company’s means of copyrighting. To physically state that this is *his*, Edison’s (synecdochically), recording of reality is the only way for his name to be attached to the work, which could, after all, have been produced by *anyone*. Indeed, by *everyone*. Reality, just as the film that has recorded it,

⁴⁴⁹ Charles Musser, ‘American Vitagraph: 1897-1901’, *Cinema Journal*, 22, 3 (Spring 1983), p.8.

⁴⁵⁰ Musser, p.8.

⁴⁵¹ Musser, p.25.

does not change: this is the true version, what *you* would have seen if you had been there.

That the Edison Company's statement of ownership is, in our present instance among others, situated within the field of the object itself, rather than less intrusively locating it at the beginning or the end of the film, is, I would speculate, with the aim of resisting any repetition of the material without the appropriate assignation. It is an attempt towards permanent inscription: making as difficult as possible any simple, perfidious 'cutting' of the copyright frames. How much of a deterrent would this be? We cannot possibly know. But the key point is that this willingness to disrupt the viewer's experience of the film even to gain this, in all likelihood rather marginal, additional benefit and security demonstrates ably the anxiety produced by the perceived capacities of this new medium. Anxiety over control, over ownership, over *individuality* even: the assertion that 'my' reality is 'everyone's' reality, that 'everyone's' is 'mine', and the attack upon the conception of self that this entails, is guarded against here only by the 'signing' of the film. 'See yourself *as others see you*', all others, all perspectives, as one. This is reality, up on the screen. Edison's 'signing' of his work serves to destroy this apparent 'impartiality'. As Gilberto Perez states, in his expansive treatise *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*, in relation to photography, but that for our present purposes also has a bearing upon the qualities of film from which the actuality derives: 'a photograph gains in credence on account of its lack of a signature.'⁴⁵² Edison's 'signature' may compromise the 'credence', the 'impartiality', of the 'actuality' (from *actum*: 'a thing done',⁴⁵³ linking it indelibly with 'reality', from *rēs + ālis*: 'pertaining to things or matter';⁴⁵⁴ the very appellation of the 'actuality' pronounces its status as 'reality'), but the significant aspect is that the medium seems to offer, to threaten, this possibility.

Paradoxically, the same characteristics of the filmic medium that are exploited by the

⁴⁵² Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p.32.

⁴⁵³ OED, under entry for 'actual'.

⁴⁵⁴ OED, under entry for 'real'.

actuality to create an ‘attraction’,⁴⁵⁵ its seemingly impartial replication of reality and its repeatability, are also perceived as being threats, making it a site of almost supernatural, certainly inhuman, disturbance. The association of this latter quality with the new cinematic medium is similarly identified by Mary Ann Doane in her re-telling of the story ‘The Kinetoscope of Time’, from the December 1895 issue of *Scribner’s Magazine*, at the beginning of her highly insightful 2002 work *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive*. This story describes the Faustian offer, made by a ‘mysterious man’, to show the protagonist his own past and future through ‘viewing machines’ that ‘are clearly kinetoscopes’.⁴⁵⁶ The price of this offer is time, given over to the stranger, from the protagonist’s life. As Doane remarks, this story highlights concerns over the status and significance of film’s ostensible capabilities:

Because time’s corruption is ‘proper’ to it, its fixed representation also poses a threat, produces aesthetic and epistemological anxiety. ‘The Kinetoscope of Time’ registers this threat as the complicity of the machine with the demonic.⁴⁵⁷

Cinema’s seeming ability to halt the ‘corruption’, the decay, of time is presented by Doane as deciding its connection with ‘the archival impulse of the nineteenth century’.⁴⁵⁸ In combining an exact replication of reality, in duration (unlike photography), and absolute preservation through potentially limitless repetition, cinema proffers the dream of complete archivization, of a complete repository of reality. Doane makes this characterisation explicit: ‘the significance of the cinema, in this context, lies in its apparent capacity to perfectly *represent* the contingent, to provide the pure record of time... In it images are *stored*, time itself is stored.’⁴⁵⁹ Even, indeed particularly, the contingent, the unexpected, the ‘trivial’, we could say, is preserved. The power of cinema is *not to discriminate*. It records everything, mechanically unaware of significance or value, which are, after all, human impositions. ‘Cinema presents the

⁴⁵⁵ A term that refers to Tom Gunning’s conception of ‘the cinema of attractions’: ‘a cinema that bases itself on... its ability to *show* something... this is an exhibitionist cinema’ (Tom Gunning, ‘The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde’, in *Theatre and Film: A Comparative Anthology*, ed. Robert Knopf (Yale University Press, 2005), p.39). Its appeal is derived entirely from the novelty of the cinematic machine itself, and the display of its powers of visualisation.

⁴⁵⁶ Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Harvard University Press, 2002), p.1.

⁴⁵⁷ Doane, p.3.

⁴⁵⁸ Doane, p.23.

⁴⁵⁹ Doane, pp.22-23.

illusion – and the commercially successful illusion – of what [Étienne-Jules] Marey could only dream about, the possibility of a continuous and nonselective recording of real time.’⁴⁶⁰

We will come to this point regarding the ‘illusionary’ nature of this ‘possibility’, but for the moment let us stay with this initial, totalising conception of cinematic potential. For in this conception of cinema we can see the influence of a Funesian conception of memory, as a structuring of thought, as a model through which to define the processes and functions of this emergent medium. This mode of thinking cinema in terms of a kind of ‘mnemic repository’ is discernible really at the time of its origin, as almost a primary means of understanding the medium. As Lisa Starks has noted: ‘Moving pictures were first seen as the storehouse of memory providing a material record that promised immortality.’⁴⁶¹ Funesian memory, as we have defined it, is an ‘ideal’ of memory as flawless recollection, as a ‘storehouse’ of perceptions and experiences, which facilitates the possibility of identical reconstruction. So Borges, in describing Funes’s abilities, announces: ‘Now his perception and his memory were infallible.’⁴⁶² We can think of Funesian memory as a model that works through the recording and replication of a perception or event that ‘actually happened’, as a model that involves the assumption that a past experience is ‘verifiable’ through its recollection, and as a model that posits memory as being constituted through the causal relationship of a ‘copy’ referring to an ‘original’ (i.e. Aristotelian). And through this we can see how Doane’s description of the actuality as that ‘which appeared to capture a moment, to register and repeat “that which happens”’⁴⁶³ is equally applicable both to the actuality, in its emphasis upon the perceived cinematic qualities of replication and repetition, and to Funesian memory. Indeed, Borges himself makes the connection between Funes’s indelible mnemic powers and the comparable capacities of the cinema, when he remarks that ‘in those days there were no cinemas or phonographs; nevertheless, it is odd and even incredible that no one ever performed an experiment with Funes.’⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁰ Doane, p.61.

⁴⁶¹ Lisa S. Starks, “‘Remember Me’: Psychoanalysis, Cinema, and the Crisis of Modernity”, in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53, 2, ‘Screen Shakespeare’ (Summer 2002), p.184.

⁴⁶² Borges, p.91.

⁴⁶³ Doane, p.22.

⁴⁶⁴ Borges, p.92.

Quite what kind of ‘experiment’ Borges has in mind we do not know. But the key point of interest for us is that Borges is clearly suggesting that cinema, and the phonograph, would stand as the appropriate, the most fitting, media through which an experiment could be carried out. They have for Borges some purchase upon, and some affinity with, Funes’s abilities, that allows them to provide a form of privileged access to his experience and mode of hyper-mnesic (not to be confused with ‘hypomnesic’) existence. Funes and these reproductive, recording machines ‘remember’ in the same way.

We can elaborate on this relationship, working from this particularly productive quotation from Borges, still further. Whilst we are not told from when the narrator is reminiscing, we do know (for a precision in dating is characteristic of this short piece) that this encounter between the narrator and Funes, the encounter that occurs after Funes’s accident, is supposed to have taken place in February 1887 (with Funes dying shortly after, in 1889). These technologies, which Borges, writing in 1942, would of course have been quite familiar with, do, in fact, become relatively widely available *almost immediately* after the date we are given for Funes’s death. The cinema, as we know, is developed in a recognisable form later than the phonograph: 1895 being, we can justifiably claim, the beginning of its mass appeal, with the first public showing that charged admission. Although it is true that various forms of the technology, such as that of Eadweard Muybridge, existed before this, they were generally experimental and not easily accessible. The phonograph, on the other hand, was developed by Edison in 1877 and patented in 1878; however, its mass production did not begin until around 1890. In terms of the ‘availability’ of the cinema and phonograph, therefore, Borges is quite correct. I take the implication of this reference, when combined with the chronological proximity of Funes’s biographical history and the historical development of these recording technologies, to be that cinema and the phonograph (although mainly the cinema due to its visual status, aligning it more closely with the primarily imagistic nature of memory⁴⁶⁵) are positioned by Borges as veritable ‘successors’ to Funes’s means of engagement with the world. As Funes leaves the world so these, properly hypomnesic, machines continue to operate within the model that he inaugurated, continue to offer the ideal that he represented.

⁴⁶⁵ We could even think that the evolution of cinema, from the silent-era to the ‘talkies’ was essentially a combination of the function of the early cinematic machine with the function of the phonoscope.

4.i.i 'Curses and ghosts', or 'the haemorrhage of significance'⁴⁶⁶

After establishing this connection, we can perhaps recall our association of Marvin Carlson's theory of 'ghosting' with Funesian memory in Chapter 3, Part 1, and consider that the term takes on a particularly resonant significance in relation to cinema. The 'mnemic repository' of film offers the 'actual' ghost of the past: not so much a *re-enactment* as a *re-animation*. The image is, literally, an insubstantial *emanation* of the thing itself, specifically of the thing *in time*, of *the moment* of the thing. This is what appears before us, the replication of the thing itself in the reality of its time. And it is this condition that, I suggest, prompted the strikingly similar responses of two separate reviewers of the Lumière brothers' mythically originary show of 28th December 1895 at the Salon Indien, as related by Ian Christie: 'Both the Paris papers which reported the first Lumière show ended on the same note:... *death will cease to be absolute*... [and] it will be possible to see our nearest *alive again* long after they have gone [my italics].'⁴⁶⁷ Whilst the tone of these two reviews is certainly one that captures the excitement at the novelty and unknown promise of this cinematic innovation, another contemporary report sounds a note of *dissatisfaction* and even distaste. Russian author Maxim Gorky, then working as a newspaper journalist, described the people that he saw on screen in a typically evocative style, writing that:

Their smiles are lifeless, even though their movements are full of living energy... the grey, the soundless, the bleak and dismal life... it is the movement of shadows, only of shadows. Curses and ghosts.⁴⁶⁸

This dissatisfaction is a dissatisfaction with the ability of the cinema of the actuality to present life, to present reality, *in its entirety*. The promised 'replication' of reality that the actuality, in particular, is predicated upon is found, by Gorky, to be *of* life but 'lifeless'. 'Bleak and dismal', it is but a 'shadow' of itself. Such a sense directly leads, I would suggest, to the rapid demise of the actuality, whose popularity wanes and collapses in quite short order around 1906, to be subsumed by the self-determinately

⁴⁶⁶ Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p.8.

⁴⁶⁷ Ian Christie, *The Last Machine: Early Cinema and the Birth of the Modern World* (London: BFI, 1994), p.111.

⁴⁶⁸ Maxim Gorky, 'Review of the Lumière Programme at Nizhni-Novgorod', in Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp.407-8.

‘fictional’ film. As Tom Gunning has illustrated, ‘actuality films outnumbered fictional films until 1906’.⁴⁶⁹ However, it is only a short time between the first great successes of a cinema that could properly be called ‘narrative’, particularly Edwin S. Porter’s innovative and influential films *Life of An American Fireman* followed by *The Great Train Robbery*, both being released in 1903, and its development as the dominant mode a mere 3 or 4 years subsequent. As Gunning states: ‘The period from 1907 to about 1913 represents the true *narrativization* of the cinema’.⁴⁷⁰ But the ‘fictional’ film that comes to dominate cinema serves, I would argue, to provide a kind of salve that masks the sentiment of dissatisfaction, as expressed by Gorky; a sentiment that, as we shall see, persists and often haunts cinema in later times.

Now though to return to the source of this dissatisfaction: in a cinema that is conceived of as the unadulterated replication of reality, then, something is found to be ‘missing’, something is ‘lost’. But what is this element of ‘life’ that is ‘lost’? There is no one answer, although, to my mind, it is nothing more or less than *the human*. This strictly ‘inhuman’ notion of cinema is identified by Doane, through her equation of it with ‘other nineteenth-century machines’: ‘as a machine, a motor, the cinema... harness[es] energy in an unrelenting movement *seemingly* independent of human labor [my italics]’.⁴⁷¹ The cinema is, in this view, simply a machine: a replication machine.

Of course, film, as a medium, does not function in such an exclusively mechanistic way, despite its appearance (particularly in the actuality) and early promise. Doane’s qualification ‘seemingly’, in the preceding quotation, alerts us to this fact. To begin with, we can think of the long history in film criticism that has debated the extent to which film can be considered as ‘art’. This question is a relatively early one in the life of film, particularly in the life of film as a subject of academic study. It is one fraught with a certain anxiety over the status of the medium and its works, and is notably considered by Rudolf Arnheim in his definitional work *Film as Art* (first published in German as *Film als Kunst* in 1932; in English translation in 1933). In this, he declares his intention ‘to refute thoroughly and systematically the charge that photography and film are only mechanical reproductions and that they therefore have no connection with

⁴⁶⁹ Gunning, p.38.

⁴⁷⁰ Gunning, p.42.

⁴⁷¹ Doane, p.108.

art’.⁴⁷² Rather, he claims that ‘even in the simplest photographic reproduction of a perfectly simple object, *a feeling for its nature* is required which is quite beyond any mechanical operation [my italics].’⁴⁷³ This ‘feeling’ can only have its source in the human engagement with the object being filmed, whether consciously (‘selected deliberately’) or unconsciously (‘not by any means always chosen’⁴⁷⁴). Whilst Arnheim does note that ‘film... may, but need not, be used to produce artistic results’, that ‘the movies are not necessarily film art’,⁴⁷⁵ they do, I suggest, always involve a human element in their construction.

We move from film not always being ‘only mechanical reproduction’, and often being classifiable as ‘art’ (according to Arnheim) because of a human origin and organisation, to film *always* being the product of human ‘design’ (although this should not be taken to suggest that film is always *art*, the definition of which we are little concerned with here, but always *artifice*). As Perez has described in relation to the documentary, the genre of film that can be considered perhaps most ‘faithful’ to reality, and of a type with the actuality:

In a way the camera deceives us, by its very directness, whenever its depictions seems so immediate that we take them for reality plain and simple, forgetting the artifice that goes into them, the slant of which they are capable.⁴⁷⁶

And whilst Perez is somewhat critical of Christian Metz’s assertion that ‘every film is a fiction film’,⁴⁷⁷ to a certain extent he is in agreement with this sentiment. As he persuasively argues: ‘what a movie depicts can, in each of its details, be said to have been... But the movie as a whole, the world of the movie, comes into being on the screen. What has been is documentary, what comes into being is fiction’.⁴⁷⁸

Every film is, then, at the least a compromise between the ‘documentary’, the depiction of what ‘has been’, and the human organisation, the ‘ordering’, that produces the film on the screen. Without this ambivalent duality, without this human element, not only

⁴⁷² Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (University of California Press, 1957), p.9.

⁴⁷³ Arnheim, p.11.

⁴⁷⁴ Arnheim, p.11.

⁴⁷⁵ Arnheim, p.8.

⁴⁷⁶ Perez, p.30.

⁴⁷⁷ Perez, p.31.

⁴⁷⁸ Perez, p.34.

does film become a source of ‘dissatisfaction’, but it also becomes a form drained of ‘meaning’. It is to this condition that the suggestive phrase ‘the haemorrhage of significance’, emphasised by its titular role above, refers. The quotation in full is drawn from Ben Brewster’s discussion of Noël Burch’s comprehensive study of early cinema, *Life to Those Shadows*. Brewster describes Burch’s ‘history of the “primitive” cinema’ as:

A history of the discovery and installation of means of cinematic representation to control the dispersal, the haemorrhage of significance characteristic of simple replication.⁴⁷⁹

In this view, cinema progresses from the ‘simple replication’ of the actuality (which is still, we should note, subject to a degree of human control) to the development of increasingly sophisticated methods for organising the images on screen, the cinematic. Whether this is through editorial practices and devices, or the establishment of complex narratives, genre conventions, and fictional diegeses, the film image is imbued with meaning, with context, with the ‘significance’ that comes from a sense of intentionality. This progression marks a shift in the anticipated question of interest for the cinematic spectator, from ‘*how* am I being shown these images?’, to ‘*why* am I being shown *these* images?’ Whilst the filmic object is always ‘organised’ to a certain extent, later developments amount to an intensification in the ‘control’ of this organisation. This increase in control facilitates, and provides the potential for, the *reading* of increased levels and sophistication of ‘significance’.

4.ii The Predicational Image and the Filmic Connection with Reality

Yet despite this requirement for organisation, and to return to the tension between replication and organisation, a tension, an undecidability and an almost schizophrenic oscillation that my own practice, perhaps inevitably, becomes caught in, cinema cannot escape its connection with reality even if it should so wish. There remains a sense, a belief, that cinema offers *reality itself*. This condition is explicitly noted by Susan Sontag, in her classic essay ‘Film and Theatre’, when she states that: ‘In the cinema, however, every member of the audience... believe[s] that the camera cannot lie...

⁴⁷⁹ Brewster, p.8.

Cinema, therefore, gives us *what is experienced as* the truth of life [my italics].⁴⁸⁰ It is a belief that recalls the claims for film, the perceived threat and opportunity that it entailed, from its very earliest days of marketing the actuality and the copyright anxiety of Edison. It is a belief that can, however, *occupy the same space* as a conception of film that determines it as being inevitably organised, an aspect unacknowledged when the actuality was described in terms of its ‘non-discrimination’, its ‘non-selectivity’, its impartiality. And it is a belief that is *extrapolated*, I would suggest, from the fact that *the material of film is reality*. What I mean by this is that the cinematic image, the image that is organised and is always organised (‘always already’ organised, we could say) into a diegesis, for example, is a replication of ‘reality’. It shows a moment that occurred in front of a camera, one that *happened* in reality, and that, as Perez says of the photograph, thus ‘has its own kind of aura... stemming from the uniqueness, the original particularity, not of the picture but of the referent whose emanation it captures.’⁴⁸¹ This ‘aura’, if we can call it that, invests the film with an ‘experience’ of ‘truth’, of ‘life’, through its relation to ‘reality’. It causes a tension, a certain degree of undecidability, around the status of the filmic image.

Whilst the spectator may ‘*know*’ that the diegesis of the film is fictional, or at least the product of human intervention, and any notion of the fictional film being mistaken by the spectator *for* reality has, generally (a point we shall come to), long been a discredited one,⁴⁸² the image through which it is constituted maintains this relation to ‘reality’. In this sense, Sontag is quite right that there is a belief that ‘*the camera cannot lie*’. Deriving from the cinematic image’s historical status as being aligned with photographic reality, noted by Perez when he states that: ‘what a movie depicts can, *in each of its details*, be said to have been: *each thing* we see must have been there before the camera, which has no imagination and “infinite appetite for the material” [my

⁴⁸⁰ Susan Sontag, ‘Film and Theatre’, in *Theatre and Film: A Comparative Anthology*, ed. Robert Knopf (Yale University Press, 2005), p.141.

⁴⁸¹ Perez, p.33.

⁴⁸² As Žižek has noted: ‘usually we say that we should not mistake fiction for reality’ (Slavoj Žižek. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London & New York: Verso, 2002), p.19), although Žižek goes on to argue that ‘we should not mistake reality for fiction’ either, which is clearly a relevant position that our current discussion is in agreement with, it is this former, ‘usual’ case that serves our present purpose.

italics]’,⁴⁸³ the image is structured towards the assumption that ‘this is what reality is really like’.

But is it? If we are focusing exclusively upon ‘realistically’ produced films, such as *cinéma-vérité*, this claim may be quite comfortably attributed to the cinematic image. However, what of films that deploy high levels of special effects or animation, and that are composed of images that could not possibly have ‘been there before the camera’? The connection with reality remains. We will recall Sontag’s qualification, in her assertion quoted above, that cinema ‘*is experienced as the truth of life*’. The ‘reality’ that such cinematic images, in the former case (special effects), which are subject to technological manipulation, enhancement or other ‘non-photographic’ modification, is a ‘predictive’ reality. They show us, *authentically*, the wager is, what reality *would be* like if certain events occurred or if certain conditions were met (including psychological or perspectival ‘realities’, such as Bergman’s *Hour of the Wolf* (1968), or Gilliam’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998)). It is a *predicational reality*. For example, to



Figure 3: the predicational image. 'If a gargantuan alien spaceship destroyed the White House...?' From *Independence Day* (1996), dir. Roland Emmerich, 20th Century Fox.

cite a well-used example, the image of the White House being utterly destroyed by an alien space-ship in the 1996 blockbuster *Independence Day* (Figure 3) shows the spectator the reality that would be, if such

⁴⁸³ Perez, p.34. I have highlighted certain points in Perez’s statement to emphasise that his argument here is referring to individual elements, images, in the film, which *in themselves* are said to have ‘been’. This is in distinction to the *organisation* of these ‘details’ or discrete ‘things’ in the production of the film.

an event were to occur. It is an offer of omniscience that cinema has been making throughout its history, a feature that Tom Gunning indicates when he describes (through the example of the 1924 film *Ben Hur*) ‘the Hollywood advertising policy of enumerating the features of a film, each emblazoned with the command, “See!”’⁴⁸⁴ The spectator is given the opportunity to witness a replication of the reality that would be or would have been (in Gunning’s instance, of ‘The Star of Bethlehem’ or ‘The Last Supper’, for example).

This cinematic phenomenon, this connection of the filmic image with reality, is a characteristic that accords with the concept of ‘premediation’ developed by Richard A. Grusin. Grusin describes premediation as ‘the desire or demand... to make sure that when the future comes it has already been remediated, to see the future not as it emerges immediately into the present but before it ever happens.’⁴⁸⁵ It is the desire, and potential seemingly offered by film, to ‘see’ reality before it becomes reality. An example of premediation is provided by Slavoj Žižek who, in his *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2002), has provocatively discussed ‘Hollywood disaster movies’ as providing an ‘object of fantasy’.⁴⁸⁶ The fantasy that they involve, that they give object to through their imagining and imaging of ‘reality’ (fantasies due to their status as desired/feared realities, ‘libidinally invested’, as Žižek says), is the ‘unthinkable’, the ‘defining catastrophe’. Žižek proposes that these filmic images of ruination prefigure, ‘premeditate’, we would say, the disaster of 9/11. It is for this reason that we may get an impression, when watching news footage of the planes striking the World Trade Centre, of having ‘seen this before’. For Žižek, in a sense, we have. These are images that we have seen ‘replicated’ in countless ‘disaster’ and ‘action’ films, and the experience of *déjà vu* that is prompted by seeing the image of the World Trade Centre falling evinces the connection of the cinematic image with reality. As Despina Kakoudaki tellingly recounts, in her study of race and the ‘disaster’ film:

Personal accounts of the aftermath of the attacks often revisited the disaster film genre. “I thought it was an ad for a new blockbuster movie,” “I thought I was in

⁴⁸⁴ Gunning, p.43.

⁴⁸⁵ Richard A. Grusin, ‘Premediation’, *Criticism*, 46, 1, (Winter 2004), p.21.

⁴⁸⁶ Žižek, pp.15-16.

a disaster film,” “This was just like *Independence Day*,” were some of the responses I heard from friends and in news reports.⁴⁸⁷

The cinematic image is ‘experienced as the truth of life’, not reality itself, but *an experience* of reality, of the perception of reality, that foreshadows the terrible truth of the images first broadcast by CNN at 8.49am on September 11th, 2001. Indeed, Žižek provides a useful anecdote that illustrates well the implicit connection with reality that the cinematic image has, no matter its production through special effects or the degree of its ‘photographic’ realism:

The ultimate twist... at the beginning of October 2001, the press reported that a group of Hollywood scenarists and directors, specialists in catastrophe movies, had been established at the instigation of the Pentagon, with the aim of imagining possible scenarios for terrorist attacks and how to fight them.⁴⁸⁸

This episode demonstrates a tacit understanding of the power of cinema to replicate ‘reality’ before it has happened: why turn to filmmakers? Simply because the images that they display to us are images that seem to show the ‘reality’ of what is imagined, of what is, often, fantasy. To reiterate, this is not to suggest that the spectator believes that the diegesis on screen is ‘real’, but that *the image* shows the reality of ‘what would happen’, ‘what it would be like’. The image’s indexicality is assured (self-assured): *this* is what the White House would look like; *this* is what you would see if the Statue of Liberty were washed away by rising sea levels (*The Day After Tomorrow*, 2004); See! The Colosseum of Rome! (*Gladiator*, 2000); See! Zombies tearing into the flesh of their victims! (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968).

In addition to this we should note the converse, the exceptions that prove the rule: we are all, I am sure, familiar with filmic images that claim to present a predication reality, a reality that ‘would be’, but that instead elicit a response of ‘it wouldn’t happen like that’, ‘that’s wrong’. Of course, this is often intentional, for example for diegetic purposes (such as the Yakuza conflict that ends with the destruction of Japan, and the world, in Takashi Miike’s *Dead or Alive*, 1999), often for comedic effect (the horse-drawn carriage that careers over a cliff in *Van Helsing*, 2004, exploding upon impact),

⁴⁸⁷ Despina Kakoudaki, ‘Spectacles of History: Race Relations, Melodrama, and the Science Fiction/Disaster Film’, *Camera Obscura*, 50, 17, 2 (2002), p.109.

⁴⁸⁸ Žižek, p.16.

but is equally often due to errors and deficiencies (one only need glance at the multitude of internet forums that rail against the breaking of a claim to reality, such as ‘the absence of interleaved roadwheels on the Tiger/T-34 tank’⁴⁸⁹ in Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*, 1998). Such instances as these play with, or inadvertently diminish, the connection with reality that the film image offers any particular spectator.

Animation can take this element of play to an extreme: often there is no claim for the image to be ‘replicating’ reality, to be presenting a vision of ‘how reality would be’ under certain conditions (of course, including fictional conditions).⁴⁹⁰ Chuck Jones’s decidedly postmodern 1953 Warner Bros. classic *Duck Amuck* serves as an exemplary illustration of this extremity. However, I would suggest that even here the filmic image remains *in relation* to ‘reality’ in that it presents a view (in both senses) of ‘what reality *is not*’. Whilst it does not ‘replicate reality’, the image bears a relation to ‘reality’ through deliberately displaying an image that could not occur ‘in reality’. The status of this image as being within the filmic medium, which is archetypally suffused with its identification as a machine for replicating ‘reality’, creates a tension between image and medium. This is a similar model to that proposed by Doane in relation to the ‘irreversibility’ of filmic time, as she says: ‘irreversible linearity forms the substrate and support for any particular film’s temporal experimentation’.⁴⁹¹ Just so, the cinematic image’s relation to ‘reality’ through ‘replication’ ‘forms the substrate’ for any divergence from, experimentation with or negation of ‘reality’. Often we find this tension being developed into, and with, a sense of playfulness and the comedic. As such, it is a condition that closely mirrors one of Freud’s ‘techniques’ of the joke, which he describes in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, that is, ‘faulty reasoning’. Freud relates an example of this:

An impoverished individual borrowed 25 florins from a prosperous acquaintance... The very same day his benefactor met him again in a restaurant with a plate of salmon mayonnaise in front of him. The benefactor reproached him: “What? You borrow money from me and then order yourself salmon

⁴⁸⁹ From: <<http://www.armchairgeneral.com/forums/showthread.php?t=4295>> [accessed August 2010].

⁴⁹⁰ Although it should be noted that this is not always the case, that animation can equally aim towards a ‘replication’ of reality by including a number of ‘reality-effects’, as discussed in detail by Naomi Wood in her essay ‘Domesticating Dreams in Walt Disney’s *Cinderella*’ (*The Lion and the Unicorn*, 20, 1 (1996), pp. 25-49.

⁴⁹¹ Doane, p.113.

mayonnaise?”... “I don’t understand you”, replied the object of the attack; “if I haven’t any money I *can’t* eat salmon mayonnaise, and if I have some money I *mustn’t* eat salmon mayonnaise. Well, then, when *am* I to eat salmon mayonnaise?”⁴⁹²

The humour here is derived from the fact that the reply of the ‘impoverished *bon vivant*’ ‘has been very markedly given the form of a logical argument. But quite unjustifiably, for the reply is in fact illogical.’⁴⁹³ Similarly, with the kind of cinematic image that we are dealing with, such as the animated, we may be prepared for the cinema to address us through an image that pertains to ‘what reality is like’, or ‘would be like’. Any such expectation is incited by the ‘form’, that is, the medium. But instead we are presented with, so it is supposed, ‘what reality is not like’: a contravention of expectation, ‘logic’, and ‘reality’. Freud describes an aspect of ‘faulty reasoning’ as being that ‘the value of phantasy is exalted unduly in comparison with reality; a possibility is almost equated with an actual event’.⁴⁹⁴ And we can deploy this same characterisation for the filmic image’s ‘unreality’, specifically through animation, with the simple modification of ‘a possibility’ to ‘an impossibility’ being ‘equated with an actual event’. The key point to be taken from this discussion is that the filmic image, whilst, clearly, not being reality itself, always involves an ‘experience of reality’, always bears a relation to reality. Whether this be through the image’s (not the diegesis) claimed replication of ‘reality’, the ‘replication’ of a predication ‘reality’, or the tension created by the ‘negation’ of reality.

4.ii.i The Replication of ‘Reality’: Threat and Opportunity

And this relation of the filmic image to reality is a feature that constitutes both a threat and an opportunity. The replication of ‘reality’ poses a threat to any diegesis, indeed to any film, that seeks to convey meaning, what Doane refers to as the ‘consistently disturbing potential of meaninglessness, of providing the spectator with *nothing to read*... in the process of an unthought and mechanical recording.’⁴⁹⁵ The image taken as

⁴⁹² Sigmund Freud, ‘Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 8* (SE 8), trans. James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960; repr. 2001), pp.49-50.

⁴⁹³ Freud, SE 8, p.50.

⁴⁹⁴ Freud, SE 8, p.63.

⁴⁹⁵ Doane, p.63.

image, through its implicit or explicit claim to be replicating ‘reality’ as it was or as it would be, constitutes a potential aspect of the filmic image that posits itself as ‘unthought and mechanical recording’. This facilitates the *possibility* of the image *only* being seen in relation to its replication of ‘reality’: in this case, there is nothing outside this function. There is no diegetic ‘meaning’, no ‘significance’. The threat that this entails is a return to the ‘*dissatisfaction*’ that Gorky elaborates. It is *an apparent loss of the ‘human’ element*: the organisation that, as I previously suggested, serves to obscure, to palliate, the dissatisfaction that Gorky identifies with the inability of film to re-create reality in totality, but that can equally be identified with the ‘meaninglessness’ with which the filmic image threatens this organisation.

In regard to our previous example, the image of the destruction of the White House in *Independence Day* could here be seen *apart* from its status in the narrative of the film, *apart* from its symbolic associations. Associations with, for example, the fear of a faceless, unknown and implacable force that threatens to destroy America, aligned by Jan Mair in the context of this film with a fear of Islamism,⁴⁹⁶ and *apart* from its possible significance in comparison and contrast with, perhaps, images from other ‘disaster’ movies, or with other films by Roland Emmerich. It can be seen as only a recording, a replication of ‘reality’. A possible, predication reality, certainly, but there is a sense, an element, of the image which finds it presented as the product of an impartial camera nonetheless. Indeed, the threat to ‘meaning’ or narrative from this simple ‘showing’ of ‘reality’, as it was or would be, is noted even as recently as 2002 by William McDonald, who makes the point (paraphrased by Kakoudaki) that ‘special effects diminish the ability of audiences to imagine things for themselves... and overwhelm whatever story there is’.⁴⁹⁷ It is due to their ‘replication’ of ‘reality’ that these images, so it is implied here by McDonald, make any work of imagination on the part of the spectator seemingly unnecessary. And, as we can see, an image that is not constructed through such special effects, thinking, for example, of the actuality, or

⁴⁹⁶ Jan Mair, ‘Rewriting the ‘American Dream’: Postmodernism and Otherness in *Independence Day*’, in *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Ziauddin Sardar & Sean Cubitt (Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002), pp.34-50.

⁴⁹⁷ Kakoudaki, p.115.

Dogme 95 films,⁴⁹⁸ poses this threat of ‘meaninglessness’ through ‘mechanical reproduction’ even more directly.

In many ways, we can usefully consider this aspect of the cinematic image, which is defined through its relation to reality, as a mode of thought analogous to Gunning’s ‘cinema of attractions’, discussed earlier. It is the medium’s apparent capacity to replicate ‘reality’, ‘that bases itself on... its ability to *show* something’,⁴⁹⁹ and nothing more, which makes it ‘different from the fascination in storytelling’,⁵⁰⁰ which works against any sense of ‘significance’. This simultaneity is quite unsurprising, as the notion of a ‘cinema of attractions’ *emphasises* the image’s relation to reality: it does not introduce, but *accentuates* this ever-present, ontological characteristic of film. As Gunning states: ‘the cinema of attractions does not disappear with the dominance of narrative, but rather goes underground, both into certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative films, more evident in some genres... than in others.’⁵⁰¹

Whilst we have been discussing the replicative relation of the image to ‘reality’, we should, however, briefly note that the negation of reality established by the image in animation, in particular, is not exempt from this threat of ‘meaninglessness’. Instead, it poses a modification of the model that requires a fuller treatment than we can allow digression for here. Suffice it to say that, I suggest, rather than the possibility of there being nothing outside this image except its relation to reality, there is the possibility of there being nothing except its relation to ‘unreality’, to what is not possible in reality.

Indeed, the threat of possible *de-signification* is one that ‘haunts’ film, one to which it is constantly exposed, by the nature of the image, by its own composition through and as a replication of ‘reality’. We can see this threat realised in, for example, the manipulation

⁴⁹⁸ Which, in the so-called ‘Vow of Chastity’ contained within the *Dogme 95 Manifesto* composed by directors Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, makes the demands, amongst others, that ‘1. Shooting must be done on location’, that ‘5. Optical work and filters are forbidden, and ‘7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)’ (Reproduced in: Tim Walters, ‘Reconsidering *The Idiots*: Dogme 95, Lars von Trier, and the Cinema of Subversion?’, *The Velvet Light Trap*, 53 (Spring 2004), pp.40-54). There is, then, a clear drive towards attempting to ‘authentically’ replicate the ‘reality’ that has occurred before the camera. The threat of ‘meaninglessness’ that this strategy entails is vociferously argued by film critic Armond White, when he claims that ‘the manifesto... brought filmmaking closer to amateur porn’ (Armond White, ‘Digital Video Dogpatch’, *New York Press*, 16/03/2004 <<http://www.nypress.com/article-9025-digital-video-dogpatch.html>> [accessed July 2010]).

⁴⁹⁹ Gunning, p.39.

⁵⁰⁰ Gunning, p.39.

⁵⁰¹ Gunning, p.39.

and viewing practices of the ‘possessive spectator’, as theorised by Laura Mulvey. What the ‘possessive spectator’ desires to ‘possess’, according to Mulvey, is ‘the driving force of the movie, the star’.⁵⁰² the actor or actress with whom this spectator identifies, who they, often, idolise and with whom they seek proximity. In attempting this act of possession, the ‘fetishistic’ spectator fixates upon an image or sequence of images of their desired object, which they are ‘driven... to stop, to hold and to repeat’.⁵⁰³ The film seems to offer the reality of the star him/herself but, in the obsessive repetition of the possessive spectator, ‘the apparatus overtakes the figure’s movements as they are inescapably repeated with mechanical exactitude. The human figure becomes an extension of the machine’.⁵⁰⁴ Like a word repeated over and over again, the significance of the image, both in terms of its status within the organisation of the diegesis and in terms of the desired star’s apparent reality, supported by the diegetic fiction, is subsumed by its status as a replication of a moment of pro-filmic reality, of the means of its production, of the ‘reality’ of the film’s physical construction and mechanistic aspects. As Mulvey describes how: ‘the fetishistic spectator... can suddenly, unexpectedly, encounter the index... so that the fictional world changes into consciousness of the pro-filmic event. As fictional credibility declines... ‘reality’ takes over the scene’.⁵⁰⁵ Film is, thus, always in a tenuous position as far as its ‘signification’, its ability to convey ‘meaning’, is concerned. The filmic image’s relation to ‘reality’ through replication constantly threatens to destabilise diegetic, or any other, signification.

However, we have focused thus far upon the threat that the image’s relation to reality poses but, as indicated earlier, it also provides cinematic opportunities. Earlier we quoted Perez’s claim that ‘in a way the camera deceives us, by its very directness’.⁵⁰⁶ His meaning here, and our meaning in quoting him, is that the film itself is always a product of human organisation, to a certain degree, even the documentary or actuality, despite the status of the filmic image as a replication of ‘reality’. However, we can take this notion of ‘deception’ further. Film has the potential to exploit the sense of ‘belief’

⁵⁰² Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p.170.

⁵⁰³ Mulvey, p.173.

⁵⁰⁴ Mulvey, p.170.

⁵⁰⁵ Mulvey, p.173.

⁵⁰⁶ Perez, p.30.

in its authenticity, what is ‘experienced as the truth of life’, that it garners from the relation of its filmic images to reality. We previously claimed that the fictional diegesis itself is not, ‘generally’, mistaken by the spectator for reality. Only that it has a ‘sense’ of reality. Clearly, there are some diegeses that are in a sense ‘fictional’, in that they are organised, as all diegeses are, and yet are usually ‘believed’ as being ‘real’, such as the documentary and the actuality. Belief, as with all things, is a matter of degree. But, more often than not, I would suggest, it is the *intention* of the films in these genres to provide a genuine replication of reality ‘as it is’, as faithful a rendition of reality as possible. We can put it in the following terms: that there is a concurrence between the filmic image’s relation to ‘reality’, its mechanical reproduction, and the correspondent claim made by the diegesis to be an ‘authentic’ duplication of ‘reality’, in duration. The claim of the diegesis is based upon, and derived from, the ‘evidence’ provided by the filmic image. It actively seeks to deny itself any sense of signification. Examples of this approach would include, for instance, such documentaries as Luc Jacquet’s 2005 *La Marche de l’Empereur* (*March of the Penguins*). The organisation of the filmic images is intended to act *in the service* of accurately presenting the ‘reality’ that the images show, explicating it, distilling it. The spectator’s belief in the diegesis depends to a significant degree upon trust in the intention of this organisation.

However, let us consider an alternative case, one in which the diegesis of the film is similarly presented as an absolutely faithful reproduction of ‘reality’. It also bases this claim upon the relation to ‘reality’ of the filmic image, denying itself diegetic signification or meaning. The difference here is that the ‘reality’ that the diegesis claims to be presenting is not the reality that the filmic image reproduces. It only seems to be. The reality that the filmic image actually replicates, so there is the potential for in these cases, is the ‘staging’ of a reality, made to seem as though it is an ‘authentic’ reality that would concur with the claims of the diegesis. Let us cite a brief example to illuminate our meaning here. The early documentary film *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert Flaherty, detailing the daily existence of the eponymous Canadian Inuit, has been famously criticised for the fact that Flaherty staged many of the scenes, whilst the diegesis of the film claims them to be ‘reality’. For example, in Figure 4, below, we see ‘Nanook’ (real name Allakariallak) preparing to throw a spear, a pose adopted, so the spectator is to suppose, in the course of hunting. However, at the time that



Figure 4: 'Nanook' throwing a spear: the diegetic misrepresentation of the filmic image. *Nanook of the North* (1922), dir. Robert J. Flaherty, Pathé Exchange.

Flaherty is recording this image, Allakariallak hunted exclusively with a gun. The 'reality' that the camera captures is certainly what a reality 'would look like': it is a replication of the 'reality' of

Allakariallak enacting traditional Inuit pursuits, we

could say. But this is not the 'reality' that the diegesis claims, it is not a replication of the reality of Inuit daily life in 1922, not a 'genuine' reproduction of 'Nanook's' life.

In this instance, *the image's relation to reality has been made to serve the claims of the diegesis*, not vice-versa. The diegesis has, essentially, parasitized the aspect of the filmic image as mechanical reproduction, and manipulated the sense of belief that this has the power to arouse. It is, ultimately, a deception. But, once again, there are degrees. It is arguable, for instance, that Flaherty was attempting to approach a more 'authentic' Inuit lifestyle, free from the influences of Western technology. Flaherty's is a 'deception' far removed from similar manipulations that have been undertaken through the potential that the filmic image's relation to reality offers.

We can also think of more extreme instances, such as the famous example of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). The promotion of this film meticulously presented it as 'genuine' footage. The publicity and the diegesis of the film posited that the film itself was recovered from a handheld video recorder, found in the log cabin in which the final scenes occur. And whilst this diegetic device is far from original (in the horror genre alone one only has to think of the slightly earlier *The Last Broadcast* (1998) or *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980)), its elaborate interweaving with the publicity campaign,



Figure 5: Blurring the boundaries of 'reality'. A promotional poster for *The Blair Witch Project*, dir. Daniel Myrick & Eduardo Sánchez, imitating a 'Missing Persons' announcement. 1999, Haxan Films.

and the mythos thus established, in my judgment, are. This marketing even went so far as to construct publicity material in the form of mock, but certainly realistic, 'Missing Persons' posters of the three protagonists (Figure 5). Again, we see that the claims of the diegesis as to *what* reality

is being shown conflict with the reality that the filmic image replicates.

Of course, in relation to *The Blair Witch Project*, the claims of 'authenticity' were never entirely serious. However, an interesting phenomenon, which has arisen due to this initial diegetic and promotional claim, demonstrates aptly the strength, the *potency*, of the belief engendered by the filmic image's relation to reality: the assumption among a number of spectators that this film is real. Even a cursory survey of Internet newsgroups and posting sites demonstrates the continuing extent of doubt, and of mistaken conviction, over the status of the film, with such anxiety-ridden questions as 'did the people on *The Blair Witch Project* really die?' or 'did *The Blair Witch Project* really happen?'

It is a situation assessed in detail by Margrit Schreier in her 2004 examination of how, through the use of various 'cues', spectators distinguish between fact and fiction when approaching particular forms of media. *The Blair Witch Project* serves her as a 'hybrid case' 'situating itself on the borderline between fact and fiction'.⁵⁰⁷ This film is of particular interest to her precisely because, echoing our identification of its diegetic and

⁵⁰⁷ Margrit Schreier, "'Please Help Me; All I Want to Know Is: Is It Real or Not?': How Recipients View the Reality Status of *The Blair Witch Project*", *Poetics Today*, 25, 2 (Summer 2004), p.306.

promotional claim to be an authentic replication of a 'reality' that is not the reality to which the filmic image relates, as she says: 'on the pragmatic level, the paratext... locates the film within the category of nonfiction products'.⁵⁰⁸ Schreier's study is composed, in the main, of a statistical analysis drawn from Internet-based newsgroups and the prevalence of varying responses to *The Blair Witch Project* within the discussions that occur there. A majority correctly ascertained the fictional status, the 'deception', of the diegesis, whether this be through 'background knowledge (concerning the marketing strategy)', oddly the primary reason, or 'the sheer impossibility of the film content'⁵⁰⁹ (which generally focused not upon the implicit requirement for the spectator to accept the existence of supernatural 'witches', but upon such relatively minor details as the inability of the protagonists to read a compass). However, there remained a substantial minority (approximately 40%) that comprised 'a third group of viewers [who], while eventually coming to realize the film's fictionality, are nevertheless temporarily confused as to its ontology.'⁵¹⁰ Indeed, Schreier leads us to understand (as is borne out by my previous remark regarding the continuing doubts and convictions that seem widespread on Internet forums) that there exists another, albeit small, minority that remain convinced of the authenticity of the film. A minority that are convinced to the extent that some 'recipients of *The Blair Witch Project*... actually confused the two ['fact' and 'fiction'] by forming search parties for the fictional characters who had gone missing.'⁵¹¹

What these reactions of confusion, temporary or otherwise, clearly demonstrate is a certain susceptibility, a certain willingness or tendency, amongst some spectators, to accept the claim of the diegesis that it is an authentic reproduction of reality. As with *Nanook of the North*, *The Blair Witch Project* establishes its claim of reality upon the filmic image's ontological relation to 'reality'. The 'reality' that the diegesis claims, on the basis of apparent concurrence with the reality reproduced by the image, is that of the self-filmed and recovered footage of Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard and Michael Williams as they are shown exploring Burkittsville, Maryland, as they are shown lost in the woods around Coffin Rock, as they are shown becoming increasingly distressed and as they are shown, finally, being attacked and presumably killed in a deserted house in

⁵⁰⁸ Schreier, p.320.

⁵⁰⁹ Schreier, p.329.

⁵¹⁰ Schreier, p.331.

⁵¹¹ Schreier, p.307.

the middle of the forest. However, the reality that actually takes place before the camera, which the image actually relates to, is that of the *actors* Heather Donahue, Joshua Leonard and Michael Williams, that which shows what the reality put forward by the diegesis *would* 'look like', that shows the 'reality' of a 'staging'. There is a disconnection between the reality replicated by the image and the claim of the diegesis, which is elided by manipulation of the 'experience of reality', the sense of belief in the reality of the film, prompted by the image's ontological relation to reality. Whilst *The Blair Witch Project* performs the same 'deception' as Flaherty, we can come back to this question of degree, of intention. An intention which is, in this case, most plausibly and directly, the acquiring of publicity through innovation, and an attempt to heighten the engagement and response of the spectator for the purposes of entertainment.

What this example demonstrates, developing from that of *Nanook of the North*, is the strength of the sense of belief in the reality of film that we have been describing. It illustrates an aspect of desire, an aspect associated with this nudging, tugging, *insinuating*, sense of belief. Let us speak of this 'belief' that we seem to return to again and again. Firstly, there is a willingness to believe, against the protestations, we can suppose, of conscious thought. There is an opening to belief. As Julia Kristeva has recently described, there is a "need to believe," that narcotic that makes living easier'.⁵¹² As a 'narcotic' this 'belief' has an addictive, compulsive quality, and is an object of desire, an object to be sought. Kristeva quotes Pascal near the beginning of her interview with Carmine Donzelli, the form taken by her 2009 work *This Incredible Need to Believe*, and it is a quotation that certainly has resonance for our present subject matter: "The mind believes naturally, and the will loves naturally; so that, lacking real objects, they have to cling to false ones" (*Pensées*, 2.81).⁵¹³ This 'need' to believe facilitates, opens the way to, the 'deception' of which cinema is, potentially, capable through exploiting the image's relation to reality. And this element of 'belief' can be thought of in another way, for, as Kristeva determines, 'when I say "I believe," I mean "I hold as true."'⁵¹⁴ The desire to believe is a desire for truth (at least a truth that can be accepted, 'held', as truth), for the truth of reality, for an encounter with the genuine, for an experience of the *origin*.

⁵¹² Julia Kristeva, *This Incredible Need to Believe* (Columbia University Press, 2009), p.vii.

⁵¹³ Kristeva, p.3.

⁵¹⁴ Kristeva, p.3.

As Alain de Mijolla says of film footage taken of Freud in his twilight years, for psychoanalysts ‘especially’ for whom an encounter with the ‘reality’, the ‘original’, of Freud holds a particular appeal (as the original of the origin, as it were): ‘they [viewers] find the Founding Father in these films... they [the films] contribute to giving us a better sense, rather than comprehension, of Freud’.⁵¹⁵ Let us look again at the mock-‘Missing Persons’ poster that advertises *The Blair Witch Project* (Figure 5). Towards the bottom of this we will note the words, written larger than any other except for ‘Missing’ itself, ‘*Evidence Exists*’. This is what the diegesis of the film wants to be taken as, and claims that it can be taken as: ‘evidence’. Evidence of a reality that it claims to replicate. ‘Evidence Exists’: there is an insistence here, an insistence that the truth can be ‘seen’ (evidence, from *ē* + *vidēre*: ‘to see out’⁵¹⁶), ‘*seen out*’. This implication of externality constitutes an impression that there is *only* the external ‘showing’, there is no ‘signification’ beyond this. This ‘evidence’ is ‘impartial’. It can be believed. And this desire to believe is always prior to the experience of the film itself. The spectator, so the filmic situation assumes, in at least some part, to at least some degree, has a desire to believe before being shown the film, and a sense of belief deriving from the image’s relation to ‘reality’ during the film. By presenting itself as ‘evidence’, the diegesis legitimises this belief, allows it license to exist.

We have seen the ‘opportunity’ that the image’s relation to ‘reality’ affords the film, affords the diegesis of the film, we could say. The opportunity to enact a ‘deception’ (an accurate description, even if vaguely ‘puritanical’ in its associations). However, we have presented cases in which this potential, this potential for the intentional manipulation of the ‘sense of belief’, of the ‘experience of the truth of life’, has been employed to relatively innocuous ends. As a final example, I would like now to reference a case that exemplifies the danger intrinsically posed by the potential for exploiting this ontological feature of film: what can be at stake in accepting the correspondence of diegesis and image as equivalent relations to reality, in believing the filmic as ‘evidence’.

⁵¹⁵ Allain de Mijolla, ‘Freud and the Psychoanalytic Situation on the Screen’, in *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*, ed. Janet Bergstrom (University of California Press, 1999), p.192.

⁵¹⁶ OED, under entry for ‘evident’.

4.ii.ii A Film Unfinished

‘Film was the most efficient tool to show that because, when you see an image, it is evidence, you can use it as evidence’.⁵¹⁷

The ‘that’ referred to in this quotation, from an interview with Israeli director Yael Hersonski, is the ‘immorality’ and ‘corruption’ of seemingly wealthy Jews, as depicted in a 1942 Nazi propaganda film ‘recording’ life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Her 2010 documentary, *A Film Unfinished*, is composed primarily of footage from this earlier film (which was, indeed, left unfinished, for an unknown reason). To achieve their aim, the Nazi filmmakers contrasted images of said ‘wealthy’ Jews with images of their destitute and suffering co-religionists. Thus they would suggest that the former were to blame for the plight of the latter, with a chillingly calculated irony, and seek to ‘demonstrate’ the apparent callousness of the ‘rich’ Jew for his fellow man. It is an unsurprising revelation that the scenes in this ‘documentary’ featuring the lifestyle of bourgeois Jews (Figure 6) were completely fabricated.



Figure 6: The ‘reality’ of life for ‘wealthy’ Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. A diegetically imposed fabrication. *A Film Unfinished* (2010), dir. Yael Hersonski, Oscilloscope Pictures.



Figure 7: The ‘reality’ of life for poor Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. Similarly a fabrication, constructed to contrast with images of the ‘bourgeois’. *A Film Unfinished* (2010), dir. Yael Hersonski, Oscilloscope Pictures.

However, it is surely quite unexpected, startling even, that the images of poor Jews (Figure 7) were also ‘constructed’. One of the eye-witnesses from the Warsaw Ghetto, who was interviewed by Hersonski during the research for her film, recalled the working practices of the Nazi film-crews and, as related by Hersonski, described how:

⁵¹⁷ Yael Hersonski. Interview in: Tom Brook, ‘Mystery Surrounding Documentary Film Set Inside Warsaw Ghetto’, *BBC News*, 19/08/2010 <www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-11012773> [accessed August 2010].

When we see a street [in the film] we can't know that they stopped it from both sides, outside the frame, and chose the exact people they wanted to enter the frame because they wanted to achieve an image, which will include the dying person on a sidewalk and the rich man or woman passing by him and not looking at him.⁵¹⁸

It is clearly insufficient to simply record the dying person, rather the context must be just right, the setting just so. We can perhaps identify with Hersonski when she expresses her astonishment that 'even the scenes I regarded as purely documentary or authentic one [sic] were not'.⁵¹⁹

And herein lies the insidiousness of this image, as one among many. The inclusion of the person dying, an element of tragic, historical accuracy (documented in a thousand forms, from contemporary reports and diaries, including the heroic archival work of the group Oyneg Shabbos, to photographs and recorded survivor accounts), lends authenticity to the elements that are deliberately connived (i.e. the staging of the indifference of the 'rich man or woman'). The truth of death, valuable as a 'guarantor' of authenticity, is put *in the service* of the wholly subjective and ulterior intended 'meaning' of the image: the perception of this 'indifference'. As Hersonski notes, the Nazi filmmakers are clearly displaying 'quite an advanced thinking about filmmaking'.⁵²⁰ Indeed, the *entire* diegesis of the film, as a propagandist impression of the Ghetto, is the product of human manipulation.

Despite such constructions and misleading practices, when, in the aftermath of the war and for many years subsequently, excerpts from this film and similar images were shown they had a substantial influence in forming social, cultural and historical impressions of the reality of life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Perhaps understandably, as Hersonski explains: 'During the first decades after the war it was more urgent to just show what happened, and there was not a good opportunity to discuss the nature of these images.'⁵²¹ The desire to 'show the truth', to 'evidence' it, intensified through

⁵¹⁸ Yael Hersonski. Interview in: Jeffrey Brown, 'Conversation: Director Yael Hersonski Puts New Lens on 'A Film Unfinished'', *PBS Newshour*, 20/08/10
<www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2010/08/conversation-director-yael-hersonski-on-a-film-unfinished.html> [accessed August 2010].

⁵¹⁹ Hersonski, interview, (20/08/10).

⁵²⁰ Hersonski, interview, (20/08/10).

⁵²¹ Hersonski, interview, (20/08/10).

temporal proximity to the events, supersedes close interrogation of the precise validity of these films. They were taken as ‘truth’, believed to be ‘evidence’. ‘When you see an image, it is evidence’: the diegetic narrative, the significations that it seeks to convey, uses this understanding to give credence to its claims regarding the ‘reality’ of the Warsaw Ghetto.

However, the ‘evidence’ that the mechanical reproduction of the image provides here is not of *this* ‘reality’, despite its appearance and despite its ‘paratextual’ contentions, but of a ‘reality’ that accords with the diegesis, that is ‘produced’ exclusively for this purpose: ‘we can understand *not in the way of the reality that we see but the way the image itself was produced*’ [my italics].⁵²² We can see, in Figure 8, this production at work: the image, from *A Film Unfinished*, shows a member of the *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*, or Jewish Ghetto Police, escorting away a Jewish man involved in



Figure 8: Recording the 'riot'. The disconnection between diegetic claim and the reality reproduced by the image. *A Film Unfinished* (2010), dir. Yael Hersonski, Oscilloscope Pictures.

the German camera-men (circled) recording the ‘event’. Clearly this is one of the images assigned to be cut from the final version of the film: it exposes the ‘reality’, claimed by the diegesis, to be a fraudulent one. And when we apprehend this disconnection between the claim of the diegesis and the reality that the image replicates, the disconnection revealed in this moment, the nature of the diegesis changes. It becomes a replication of reality, but the reality of the production and intention of a deception, of an exercise in Nazi propaganda: this is the ‘experience of reality’ that comes to be derived from the reality to which its images relate. However, this

‘rioting’ that is supposed to have just taken place. This riot was, as we may now expect, staged for the benefit of the camera. If we look to the left of this image, in the background behind the Police officer, we see one of

⁵²² Hersonski, interview, (19/08/10).

apprehension is, of course, only possible with non-diegetic, external knowledge. It is for this reason, in particular I would suggest, that eyewitness accounts become so important.

Through these cases we see, then, the potential for ‘deception’ that is made available to film by the ‘sense of belief’ that it institutes, arising from the relation to ‘reality’ of its images, and the possible dangers that are facilitated by this. We have seen, therefore, how this relation to ‘reality’, from the perspective of the filmic, constitutes both a threat, to the conveyance of meaning or diegetic signification, and an opportunity, for the abdication of said meaning, and the correspondent exploitation of the willingness to attribute evidentiary status to the film that this enables. The filmic exists in tension with this ontological condition, which is not a constant, but ‘characterises’ the film through its *varying degrees* and intensities, and the interactions of this phenomenon with the film’s inescapable element of human organisation. The way in which the film integrates and responds to this intrinsic relation to reality, this essential feature that lies at its heart, either experiencing it as a risk to be wary of, or as a prospect to embrace and thus situating it as a fundamental aspect of its diegesis, each present their own problematic issues and limitations. To explore these further, I return now to the model of Funesian memory, engaged with in the previous sub-chapter, and how its affinity with these particular principles of film, the element of human organisation and the filmic relation to reality, helps us to think the difficulties engendered by them. It will also enable us to think some of the restrictions and omissions that conceptualising, defining, film through these terms, through these processes, imposes.

4.iii The Filmic Relation to Reality and its Association with Funesian Memory

We have posited, in our previous discussion of the actuality, that cinema, through its status as a ‘recording machine’, accords closely with the exactitude of a Funesian model of memory. They can be said to ‘represent’ in an analogous manner. We can now refine this assertion further. Clearly the filmic image’s relation to reality is commensurate with Funesian memory: it is this element that the actuality emphasises, and they share the presupposition that they are able to precisely record, store and replicate reality, with theoretically infinite and exact repetition. Indeed, the camera does, at least on one level, do this. However, upon enunciating this, we immediately found that a strand of

contemporary responses to such a conception of cinema were profoundly negative, with Maxim Gorky's description prompting our attribution of the epithet to which we have consistently returned in this context: 'dissatisfaction'. The source of this dissatisfaction, we averred, was the fact that this model of cinema excluded a crucial aspect. Defining the cinema as a 'recording machine', exclusively, had the consequence that *the human element was missing*. We found this human element in the inevitable 'organisation' that the film, the film on screen, undergoes, as soon as that first judgement is made to point the camera, to record a certain space, and all that is in it, for a certain duration. However, the question that we unavoidably come to is whether this is sufficient? Whether this is the human element that we, and Gorky, and the original promises for the medium, were previously 'missing'? Does this satisfy?

Firstly, we can say that the threat of being 'only reality' still exists, despite this human organisation. The filmic image still bears a relation to reality. This means that a straightforward, literal adoption of Funesian memory as a model for cinematic representation is always possible. However, the mode through which a human influence is identified here, as the organisation of a signifying diegesis, remains fundamentally bound to the model of Funesian memory. The reasons for this are two-fold. We can immediately see the connection established through the film's intrinsic repeatability. Once the diegesis is organised, it becomes precisely repeatable. It is exactly the same object each time it is shown. This is not the same as the de-signification compelled by the privileging of the filmic image's replication of reality, the condition that there is nothing 'external' to this replicative function. The diegesis is only, here, being identified as repeatable, including its potential to convey 'meaning'. And this conveyance of 'meaning', this signification, constitutes the second means by which the organisation of the film connects with a model of Funesian memory. The act of organising filmic images to form the diegesis, and to convey signification, presupposes the appropriateness of an interpretive schema that seeks to 'uncover', to 'excavate', an existent and previously established 'meaning' to which the diegesis refers. Just as with Funesian memory, this assumes that this conception of the diegesis, as the referent to an absent 'meaning', an absent 'text', an absent 'object' (akin to Funes's perceptions) that exists 'elsewhere' and which can be accessed through this referentiality, is the only possible alternative, *without which the diegesis must be given the status of direct*

'evidence'. It is an argument that we may be somewhat familiar with, having seen a comparable position put forward in relation to theatre, and having analysed the problematic relationship that it has with theatricality. But what problems does this position entail in relation to cinema? Why, as I imply, should we be suspicious of it?

Firstly, we have implicitly indicated the danger to which this conception exposes us: the expectation of finding 'meaning' within the filmic diegesis, the organisation of filmic images, necessitates the condition that, if one believes that there is no 'meaning' to be found, the logical corollary is that there is no organisation. The diegesis then seems to bear the same status as the filmic image, as a replication of 'reality'. Of course there is always a degree of organisation but, as we have noted, the 'abdication' of significance acts to elide it, *claiming* impartiality. Such a conception of cinema based upon the model of Funesian memory asserts a binary opposition, in which the filmic image relates to reality in a precisely mnemonic manner that is *either* organised and 'signifying', thus being hermeneutically decipherable, or 'rejects' organisation and is 'non-signifying'. This oppositional structure, founded upon an implicit willingness to trust the hypomnesic offer made by the medium, opens the risk of the kind of manipulation that we saw in *A Film Unfinished*. When film is thought of as congruent with the model of Funesian memory, then the denial of diegetic organisation, and thus of reference to an external 'meaning', provokes an understanding of the film as '*implacable memory*'⁵²³ of a reality 'almost intolerably precise'.⁵²⁴ as 'evidence' of what *actually occurred* in a form that exceeds the capacities of distracted, interrupted, fatigable and fallible human vision (with the exception of the 'superhuman' Funes).

Willingly, 'naturally', as Pascal says, it is the belief initiated, inaugurated and sustained by this characterisation, this ontological condition, that enables a potential manipulation, a re-writing, of reality and the formation of what we can think of as a 'false memory'. 'False memory', defined by Elizabeth F. Loftus as being 'constructed by combining actual memories with the content of suggestions received from others',⁵²⁵ is, indeed, an apt comparison for such manipulation, such 'deception'. This can be seen as it involves the integration of the filmic image's relation to reality (taken as an 'actual

⁵²³ Borges, p.95.

⁵²⁴ Borges, p.94.

⁵²⁵ Elizabeth F. Loftus, 'Creating False Memories', *Scientific American*, 277, 3 (September 1997) <<http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/sciam.htm>> [accessed August 2010].

memory') with the 'suggestions', the persuasions, that are *intended* through filmic organisation, with the effect of forming the diegesis into a 'construct' with the status of a 'false memory'. When the purpose of this process is the substitution of historical truth, its prospects for iniquity are profound. Such are the stakes at work in this, and such are the grounds for our initial scepticism and wariness regarding the conception of filmic representation in association with a Funesian mnemonic model.

Secondly, there remains a sense of 'something missing'. Still. There remains another aspect of film, one that these discussions, these modes of thinking, do not approach. We have identified the 'human element' of film with its 'organisation'; however, this does not seem, I think it will be agreed, quite sufficient. Just as, so I have argued, a Funesian conception of memory does not encompass the totality of possible ways of thinking memory, so there is an aspect of the cinematic that is not understandable through this conception either. And it is an aspect of the cinematic that entails another identification, another recognition, of the 'human element'. But first we must think how we come to this notion that 'something is missing'? How do we see this being expressed?

Much of our discussion thus far has accorded and overlapped with the structure of various 'levels' through which film can be approached, proposed by Roland Barthes in his important essay 'The Third Meaning' (originally published as '*Le troisième sens*' in 1970). Barthes distinguishes, in the first instance, between two such levels: the 'informational', 'which gathers together everything I can learn from the setting, the costumes, the characters, their relations... This level is that of communication',⁵²⁶ and the 'symbolic', which he divides into the 'referential', the 'diegetic' (or 'thematic'), the 'Eisensteinian' (although Eisenstein is only Barthes's example, this facet is concerned with the symbol that refers to the filmmaker's 'networks', and is in relation to his/her *oeuvre* and practices) and the 'historical'. The crux of the 'symbolic' is given by Barthes when he states that: 'taken in its entirety, this second level is that of *signification*'.⁵²⁷ For Barthes, 'signification' is defined in its distinction from 'communication': it requires *interpretation*, in contrast to the direct 'message' of 'informational' communication. The framework with which we have been working engages with that of Barthes quite comfortably, without in any sense duplicating or

⁵²⁶ Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning: Research notes on some Eisenstein stills', in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p.52.

⁵²⁷ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', p.52.

precisely coinciding with it. The 'symbolic' level in Barthes's schema provides an apt correlative with the notion of human 'organisation', as we have thought it. Each is concerned with the conveyance of 'signification'. Although it should be briefly noted that the way in which Barthes is using the term 'diegetic' is somewhat different from our use of it: his has a narrower focus upon the 'range of topics' and their treatment discernible in a film, whereas we have used it to refer to the 'world' created by the film, its narrative and any meaning-bearing structure.

However, I would not propose any simple similitude between Barthes's demarcation of the informational and the symbolic, and ours between filmic organisation and the 'direct' replication of reality (not least as this always involves an element of organisation in any case). No. The informational level is also, in our understanding, an aspect of human organisation of the filmic. But this qualification is not the key point that I am seeking to address. The key point is the correspondence between Barthes's symbolic level and our recognition of human organisation as the site of filmic signification. For, just as we have suggested that there is an insufficiency in the Funesian notion of the human element in film, that is, limiting it to exclusively functioning through the formation of a signifying organisation, so Barthes also notes a sense of 'something missing' within this model, within the Funesian model. For Barthes's 'levels' of the informational and the symbolic are also complicit with the Funesian mnemonic model, as demonstrated through their similarity with our conception of filmic organisation, and the mode of referential interpretation that its status as signification presupposes. It is this 'sense' that induces Barthes to put forward a third level for approaching film, as he says:

Is that all? No, for I am still held by the image, I read, I receive (and probably even first and foremost) a third meaning – *evident, erratic, obstinate*. [My italics].⁵²⁸

I will have cause to return to this quotation more fully in due course, but for the moment I wish to stay with this point that there is something 'dissatisfying' about cinema approached through the model of Funesian memory. It is a point that returns us to Gorky's original pronouncement of his displeasure, that leaves us with but 'curses and

⁵²⁸ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', p.53.

ghosts', despite their configuration, re-configuration and modification by human organisation, shaping them to carry a particular significance, however interpreted. A Funesian approach produces ghosts as it cannot completely take account of that which, as Barthes says, 'still *holds*' us, that is '*received*', not interpreted: that which is an 'unthought' aspect of the human. In this approach, there is always an aspect of the human experience *missing*. It is a limitation that is alluded to, inconspicuously, in Borges's narrative: the encounter between Borges's narrator and Funes demonstrates the nature and extent of what has been lost, as the price for Funes's mnemonic capacities.

When the narrator first encounters Funes, after his accident, Funes describes his prior state in disparaging terms: 'he had been what all humans are: blind, deaf, addle-brained, absent-minded'.⁵²⁹ None of these 'faults' are for Funes. His mind is clear, 'intolerable in its richness and sharpness'.⁵³⁰ And he is, thus, appropriately dismissive of the *human* narrator (by implication of the previous statements, Funes is no longer entirely human: 'superhuman', as he is termed at the beginning of the narrative, perhaps, but certainly to some degree *inhuman*), as the narrator notes in, almost embarrassed, parentheses: '(I tried to remind him of his exact perception of time, his memory for proper names; he paid no attention to me.)'⁵³¹ The engagement between Funes and the narrator is entirely one-sided; it consists of the narrator sitting 'in the dark, because he [Funes] knew how to pass the idle hours without lighting the candle',⁵³² and 'out of the darkness, Funes's voice went on talking to me'.⁵³³ Just a voice, disembodied, as the narrator recalls: 'It seems to me I did not see his face until dawn'.⁵³⁴ The parallel of this scenario with the supposed position of the spectator sitting, passively viewing, *accepting*, believing, interpreting, in the darkness of the cinema is certainly, I suggest, more than a coincidence. This is the experience that the Funesian model assumes. Any sense of mutual engagement is confounded, leaving the narrator, as he finally terms his condition, '*benumbed*'.⁵³⁵

⁵²⁹ Borges, p.91.

⁵³⁰ Borges, p.91.

⁵³¹ Borges, p.91.

⁵³² Borges, p.90.

⁵³³ Borges, p.92.

⁵³⁴ Borges, pp.90-91.

⁵³⁵ Borges, p.95.

This ‘numbness’ is a useful way for us to think the ‘dissatisfaction’ that a Funesian mnemonic model produces, as it implies a certain reduction in ‘sensation’, a deprivation in the faculty for experiencing, ‘physically’, ‘affectively’, we could say. The Funesian model constitutes a form of ‘deadening’, to take advantage of the range of definitions associated with ‘numbness’, felt as a ‘theft’ (‘numb’: from ‘*nim*’, which etymologically corresponds to various senses of ‘take’ or ‘to steal’⁵³⁶), a theft of potential intensity from the cinematic situation. The associations that ‘benumbing’ has with a discourse and terminology of energetics, as a loss of nervous (electrical) energy, for example in the loss of feeling in a limb or, paradoxically, as the result of an excess of energy, for example due to a shock, also feeds into this depiction, this impression, that I am attempting to convey. A depiction that enables this term to be used as a means of moving towards an alternative way of thinking and approaching the filmic.

This characterisation is supported by the allusions and conceptions through which some sources have expressed a sense of dissatisfaction, or an identification of some kind of indeterminate ‘lack’, some kind of ‘deficiency’, with the filmic medium, and often done so in connection with an energetic description. An example of this is Antonin Artaud, who, despite primarily working in and theorising theatre, also wrote presciently about cinema (as Susan Sontag notes in ‘Film and Theatre’), acted in several films and even created a scenario for Germaine Dulac’s 1927 Surrealist film *The Seashell and the Clergyman*. Artaud wrote, in the short text ‘Theatre and Cruelty’, from *The Theatre and Its Double*, that:

Cinema, in its turn, murders us with reflected, filtered and projected images that *no longer connect with our sensibility*, and for ten years has maintained us and all our faculties in an intellectual stupor. [My italics].⁵³⁷

We can see the associative connection between Artaud’s criticism of cinema as instilling an ‘intellectual stupor’ and the ‘numbness’ that we discussed previously. But the key point is that cinema is seen as cutting the spectator off, we could say, from their ‘sensibility’, from their ability to engage with a work, not through ‘analytic’ interpretation or passive ‘acceptance’, but through sensation, through *experiencing* it

⁵³⁶ OED: under entry for ‘numb’. The etymology of this word is, however, complex and mostly ambiguous.

⁵³⁷ Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, p.60.

affectively, through being ‘moved’. Or, even more explicitly, we can cite André Bazin who, whilst certainly no sceptic as to the merits and potential of film, claimed in his 1951 essay entitled ‘Theatre and Cinema’ that:

It is as if a certain inevitable lowering of the voltage, some mysterious aesthetic short circuit, deprived us in the cinema of a certain tension.⁵³⁸

Here we come to the heart of the matter, in regard to this sense of ‘something missing’. It is not, I would suggest, that there is actually anything ‘missing’ in the filmic, but rather that a ‘blind-spot’ has developed owing to the means of approach, the perspective through which the filmic is seen. How is this so? We can note the terms with which Artaud, for example, elaborates his portrayal of cinema, and they are quite telling: the fact that he typifies the cinema as being *defined* by its constitution as ‘reflected’ and ‘filtered’ images demonstrates that he is viewing cinema exclusively through its status as an organisation for the conveyance of signification. Indeed, both Artaud and Bazin come to these particular conclusions, and characterisations, based upon a perspective of cinema that corresponds to the Funesian mnemonic model. Such a perspective results in a duality of mutually-determining conditions: there is an aspect of the ‘human experience’ that is found to be ‘missing’, an aspect of the human that is deprived, that is ‘exiled’ from how the filmic is engaged with, making the experience somehow ‘inhuman’, *and* there is a sense of a *depletion* in the energetic, the ‘voltage’ or ‘a certain tension’. Therefore, a turn to, and focus upon, the role of cinematic organisation is not, I would suggest, the ‘redemption’ of the human, of *life*, we can say, that it appears to be.

That this is the result of a Funesian mnemonic perspective is a connection made by Lyotard in his most direct exposition on film, *Acinema* (1973), which we shall be examining in greater detail in due course, but for now is of interest primarily for its critique of cinematic organisation. As Lyotard argues:

Direction first divides... a reality and its double, and this disjunction constitutes an obvious repression. But also, beyond this representational disjunction... it eliminates *all impulsional movement, real or unreal, which will not lend itself to*

⁵³⁸ André Bazin, ‘Theatre and Cinema – Part 2’, in *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. Hugh Gray, (University of California Press, 2005), p.98.

reduplication, all movement which would escape identification, recognition and the mnestic fixation.⁵³⁹

Lyotard's concern here is the organisation, the editing, the construction of a signifiatory diegesis: what he refers to as the 'direction' that institutes a 'disjunction' between the film 'on screen' (the diegesis) and the film as mechanical recording of reality, but that, *more importantly* ('*beyond* this representational disjunction'), particularly for our present argument, has the effect of 'eliminating *all impulsional movement*'. Filmic organisation, which works as part of and in collaboration with the Funesian mnemonic model, silences any engagement or experience of the energetic aspects of cinematic representation, of the affective force that, we have demonstrated, is concomitant with representation, as its 'other', and its conjunctive/disjunctive, 'tensorial' constituent. The suppression of which, in this instance, indeed leaves us with only 'curses and ghosts'.

However, Lyotard's meaning here requires some reinterpretation, in much the same way that we found it necessary to reorient his suggestions regarding theatre in 'The Tooth, The Palm': to regard what is, by Lyotard's own tacit admission, an unrealisable model for practical realisation ('That is my question: is it possible, how?'⁵⁴⁰), rather as *a mode of thinking and approaching the particular medium*. So, whereas Lyotard discusses in 'Acinema' a conception of cinematic *practice*, one that would, for example, embrace rather than 'eliminate' the 'movement... which will not lend itself to reduplication', I propose, as with 'The Tooth, The Palm', that Lyotard's approach in this text be taken as an introduction, better, a provocation towards a certain way of seeing, *a certain way of thinking*, the filmic.

And the correlation between these two texts is far from accidental: Lyotard is developing his proposed 'energetic theatre' through 'The Tooth, The Palm', at the same time that he is also exploring the possibilities of what could appropriately be called an 'energetic' cinema in 'Acinema',⁵⁴¹ both having been originally published in 1973 ('L'Acinéma: Le nihilisme des Mouvements convenus' in *Revue d'esthétique*, Vol. 26,

⁵³⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Acinema', in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), p.175.

⁵⁴⁰ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.288.

⁵⁴¹ Whilst Lyotard does not describe it in these terms, there are clear allusions to such a conceptualisation, seen, for example, through his repeated attention to the 'libidinal'.

Nos. 2-4, and 'La dent, la paume' in *Des Dispositifs pulsionnels*), a year before *Libidinal Economy* (1974), with which we were significantly concerned in Chapter 2. It is at this moment that Lyotard is most actively exposing his ideas regarding an 'energetics'.

The mode of thought that we derive from 'Acinema', in this instance, involves an engagement with film that does not focus upon the Barthesian informational or symbolic levels of 'meaning', nor upon the organisation of the filmic diegesis or its relation to a past reality, but upon that which 'would escape... mnesic fixation'. 'Mnesic fixation': Lyotard's term for the model of memory that we name Funesian. We seek another conception of memory, another model for approaching cinematic representation, one that is not defined through fixity or referentiality: an energetic conception of memory, an energetic model of representation.

For it would be a mistake to think that the structures, processes and qualities of the cinema are only, or even best, realised in comparison to a Funesian model of memory. And cinema does not, in fact, presume this. Rather, as Todd McGowan has noted, in his eminently judicious 2007 re-evaluation of the place of Lacan in film theory, *The Real Gaze*: 'Film art captures and mirrors the logic of an internal world'.⁵⁴² Cinema does not reflect only one element of the psyche, one perspective of, in this instance, memory, but engages with the 'logic of an internal world', of the psyche, in a non-exclusive sense. It engages with the energetic as much as the hermeneutic, or the hermeneutically addressed. The task here is now to explore how the filmic can be approached through an energetics? How can we restore that which is experienced as 'something missing' in the engagement with the cinematic?

4.iv Exceeding the Image: Obtuse Corporeality and Filmic Resistance to 'Mnesic Fixation'

We have said that this 'something missing', the 'blindness' in an approach to cinema through the Funesian mnemonic model, is experienced as the confluence of both an absence of a certain 'human element' and a depletion or suppression of the energetic. And it is precisely the connection between these two that provides us with the means through

⁵⁴² Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (State University of New York Press, 2007), p.31.

which we can engage with an energetic approach to the filmic. We made a promise earlier to return to a quotation from Barthes in which he claims to ‘receive... a third meaning – evident, erratic, obstinate’⁵⁴³ when viewing the cinematic image, and here so we shall. For Barthes, this ‘third meaning’ is characterised as an ‘excess’. It is that which ‘exceeds the copy of the referential motif... exceeds meaning’.⁵⁴⁴ It cannot be ‘delimited’ through the ascribing of a ‘fixed meaning’, or by defining it through its referentiality or reproduction of reality. In fact, it is ‘that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented.’⁵⁴⁵ The ‘third meaning’ is ‘the one “too many”, the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive, I propose to call it *the obtuse meaning*.’⁵⁴⁶

But we can hold these characteristics in mind for the time being; it is another epithet that I wish to emphasise at this moment: that which names this ‘third meaning’, this ‘obtuse meaning’, as being ‘*evident*’. We are familiar with the notion of the filmic image being ‘evidentiary’ (‘when you see an image, it is evidence’), and with the possibility for the diegesis to claim evidentiary status (‘you can *use* it as evidence’). However, this is not the sense in which Barthes is using the term. This former use of the designation ‘evidence’ is described by Barthes in relation to the symbolic meaning of film, which ‘is intentional... evident certainly (so too is the other), but *closed* in its evidence, held in a complete system of destination. I propose to call this complete sign *the obvious meaning*.’⁵⁴⁷ It is ‘closed’ as this understanding of evidence is based upon a presupposition of *fixed referentiality*. We will note the understated acknowledgement, hidden in parentheses, that ‘the other’ is also ‘evident’. *This ‘other’ is Barthes’s ‘obtuse meaning’*. It is also ‘evident’, but not in a way that accords with the Funesian mnemonic model.

Rather, it is closer to the notion of ‘evidence’ explicated by Rosalind Galt in her short paper on ‘The Obviousness of Cinema’, particularly in reference to the thought of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. To begin, on a point of detail, both Nancy and Galt explicitly connect the terms ‘obvious’ and ‘evident’. As Nancy states: ‘the image, clear

⁵⁴³ Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, p.53.

⁵⁴⁴ Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, pp.53-54.

⁵⁴⁵ Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, p.64.

⁵⁴⁶ Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, p.54.

⁵⁴⁷ Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, p.54.

and distinct is something obvious and evident.⁵⁴⁸ Galt argues that there is an opposition between the way in which Nancy uses these terms ‘obvious’ and ‘evident’, which for him have a certain degree of equivalence, and the way in which Barthes is using them. As she states:

Bordwell, Metz and Bellour read the obviousness of classical Hollywood largely through the structures of narration and meaning production. Likewise, in Roland Barthes’s analysis of Eisenstein stills, the “obvious meaning” of symbolism and signification are contrasted with the poetic, elusive “obtuse meaning.”⁵⁴⁹

And this is certainly Barthes’s correct position in as far as the ‘obvious’ goes. However, in terms of the ‘evident’ (synonymous with the ‘obvious’ for Galt), Barthes’s position is more complex. It is only the ““obvious meaning” of symbolism and signification’ that is ‘closed in its evidence’, the “obtuse meaning” is also ‘evident’, but in a different way. It is, in fact, akin to Galt’s depiction of Nancy’s use of the ‘obvious’ and the ‘evident’:

For Nancy, by contrast, the image’s obviousness is precisely that which separates it from the world of meanings and things... Here, the image is obvious because it is distinct – sacred even – separate from the quotidian world of meanings and pleasures... cinema’s codification of language and subjectivity are, in this analysis, what’s left when you take away the image.⁵⁵⁰

It is a somewhat confusing linguistic eventuality that Nancy’s ‘obviousness’ is the aspect of the image, or the filmic as his theory is being deployed here by Galt, and by myself, that refuses to enter ‘the world of meanings’, whereas Barthes’s ‘obvious meaning’ is that of signification, symbolism, and ‘meaning, which comes to seek me out’⁵⁵¹ (that is, meaning that is ‘conveyed’, that exists priorly and ‘elsewhere’). The connection that I am seeking to establish is actually between the description attributed to Nancy’s notion of the ‘obvious’, and the ‘evidence’ of Barthes’s ‘obtuse’. Whilst Galt makes no reference to the ‘evidential’ status of the obtuse, she does assert its ‘elusiveness’. ‘Elusive’ for the same reasons, I would suggest, that Nancy’s ‘obvious’

⁵⁴⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p.12. Quoted in: Rosalind Galt, ‘The Obviousness of Cinema’, *World Picture*, 2 (Autumn 2008), <http://english.okstate.edu/worldpicture/WP_2/TOC.html> [accessed 21 February 2009].

⁵⁴⁹ Galt, p.4.

⁵⁵⁰ Galt, p.4.

⁵⁵¹ Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, p.54.

could also be termed ‘elusive’. Both ‘elude’ meaning, elude language, elude being represented through another form and elude the referentiality or fixity that would integrate them within a Funesian model of memory and representation, whilst constituting something ‘fundamental’ to the filmic, something literally ‘essential’.

What do we mean by this? There is a sense in which the ‘obtuse’, and Nancy’s ‘obvious’, are ways of denoting a certain experience of ‘corporeality’, of ‘tangibility’, within the filmic. This is the ‘alternative’, but really coincident, mode of reception that they propose in their ‘elusiveness’, in their ‘over-spilling’ of signification. And it is summarised neatly in a turn of phrase used by Galt when she says that: ‘Nancy addresses the nature of the cinematic image; its *intimate materiality*’ [my italics].⁵⁵² His ‘obvious’ and Barthes’s ‘obtuse’ are conveyed, are ‘received’, and are ‘knowable’, not through ‘intellection’, as Barthes says. But they are rather experienced, I suggest, through a ‘physical’, ‘sensual’, awareness of, and connection with, their simple ‘beingness’. They *exceed* meaning and interpretation, they *overwhelm* through their quality of ‘fullness’, to become a ‘materiality’ that is engaged with, interacted with ‘intimately’. And it is in this ‘other’ aspect of the filmic that we can perhaps find the ‘human element’, which we discovered to be ‘missing’ from a Funesian mnemonic model.

4.iv.i Considering ‘Haptic Visuality’

Our ability to consider this ‘human element’ comes to the fore if we try to consider the ‘location’ of Barthes’s ‘obtuse meaning’. Where is it taking place, if not referring to an absent meaning to be discovered? How is it ‘received’, if it ‘bears precisely on the signifier not on the signified’?⁵⁵³ Vivian Sobchack provides a clear and effective answer to these questions, when she states that:

It is *the lived body* that provides both the site and genesis of the ‘third’ or ‘obtuse’ meaning that Roland Barthes suggests escapes language yet resides within it. [My italics].⁵⁵⁴

Sobchack’s 2004 book, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, is one of the key texts in a relatively recent turn in film studies towards what is often termed

⁵⁵² Galt, p.4.

⁵⁵³ Barthes, ‘The Third Meaning’, p.53.

⁵⁵⁴ Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (University of California Press, 2004), p.60.

the ‘haptic’. The emphasis of this approach is to explore the mutual engagement of film and spectator at a bodily level. It works from the supposition that the film is not there simply to be ‘viewed’ by a passive spectator, but that it is also *experienced* physically: that the film ‘touches’ the ‘spectator’, as *an encounter between two bodies*. Jennifer Barker, in her recent work *The Tactile Eye*, defines this method in a particularly comprehensive way, as one that:

approaches the film and the viewer as acting together, correlationally [sic], along an axis that would itself constitute the object of study... It is not a matter simply of identifying with the characters on screen, or with the body of the director or camera operator, for example. Rather, we are in a relationship of intimate, tactile, reversible contact with the film’s body.⁵⁵⁵

And Sobchack is clearly identifying Barthes’s notion of the ‘obtuse’, by ‘situating’ it at and in the ‘lived body’ of the spectator, as being complicit with just such a way of thinking the filmic.

The ‘obtuse’ comes into existence only through contact with the ‘lived body’: it is experienced as being ‘of’ the film, but is determined through a certain mutuality, an interaction with the body of the spectator. This interaction, this mutual ‘touching’ between the film and the spectator, constitutes the sense of ‘excess’ that characterises the obtuse and serves to denote the ‘human element’ that goes beyond meaning, that is strictly ‘indescribable’. As Sobchack states: ‘the body [is] a “third term” that both exceeds and yet is within discrete representation’.⁵⁵⁶ The body’s sensual experience of the filmic is necessarily in conjunction with the field of filmic representation, it is derived from an engagement with the filmic representation, but it is also that which is found to be ‘other’ to filmic representation, ‘more than’ filmic representation.

One need only look to an example given by Barthes to gain a sense of how this notion of ‘excess’ is being thought here, how it is functioning. As Barthes describes: ‘Look at another bun [of hair] (that of the woman in image IX [from Eisenstein’s *Ivan the*

⁵⁵⁵ Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (University of California Press, 2009), pp.18-19.

⁵⁵⁶ Sobchack, p.67.



Figure 9: The hair and the fist: the obtuse meaning. A still of Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*. Reproduced from Roland Barthes's 'The Third Meaning' (Image Music Text, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1970). The poor quality of the image is regrettably unavoidable, being a reproduction of a poor quality original.

mass, the impression of an 'excessive mass of the hair',⁵⁵⁹ the touch of the hair, the delicateness of the fist. The obtuse meaning of the image is *experienced physically*: it refers to no signified. It is *felt* as a contact between the 'surface' of the filmic 'body' and the 'surface' of the spectator's body.

That this corporeal mode of engagement is experienced as a meeting of surfaces is an important characteristic of the haptic. It is one enunciated by Laura Marks in another of the foundational texts of the 'haptic turn', as we could call it, *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (1999): 'Haptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than to plunge into depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture'.⁵⁶⁰ It is important for us to clarify this characteristic of the model, for the purposes of gaining a more accurate and nuanced understanding of the nature of the interaction between the filmic body and the spectator's body. It is not so much an interaction between two discrete and separate entities, as it is an experience of mutuality, *in a shared moment and a shared surface*; each body defining itself, experiencing itself, in relation to the other. As Elena del Río has explained:

Terrible, see Figure 9]): it contradicts the tiny raised fist... it gives the woman something *touching... or sensitive*'.⁵⁵⁷ Barthes's 'bodily' experience of this image, that which he finds 'touching' in a double sense of the word, is in relation to a contradiction within the field of representation: the difference between the hair and the fist.⁵⁵⁸ But *this is a contradiction that is experienced entirely at the level of the signifier*: this difference is a *tactile* one between the varying impressions of physical

⁵⁵⁷ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', pp.58-59.

⁵⁵⁸ This is ironically emphasised, although it is not the aspect with which we are currently concerned, by their respective significance in terms of their diegetic, or 'obvious', meaning.

⁵⁵⁹ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', p.58.

⁵⁶⁰ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), p.255.

As the image becomes translated into a bodily response, body and image no longer function as discrete units, but as surfaces in contact, engaged in a constant activity of reciprocal alignment and inflection.⁵⁶¹

But, as Jennifer Barker has been precise in arguing, we should not take this to indicate that the bodies of the filmic and the spectator become identical. She clarifies this, rather evocatively, when she describes the condition of the bodies involved in ‘haptic seeing’:

We are up against each other, entangled in a single caress, but we do not elide the boundaries altogether between our body and the film’s body; rather, we exist for a moment *just on both sides* of that boundary.⁵⁶²

‘For a moment... on both sides’ and a ‘constant activity of reciprocal alignment’: constantly for a moment. Despite its appearance, there is no contradiction in this statement. It is a situation encapsulated by Barker in the phrase ‘constant oscillation’.⁵⁶³ I take this to mean, neither one nor the other, always one *and* the other. Indeed, always already, as there is no haptic experience without it already existing as such: it *becomes* in the moment of its experience. It is through this corporeal engagement, this ‘understanding’ between and of the bodies of the filmic and the spectator, that we can begin to approach that which is experienced as ‘missing’ in the filmic, when perceived exclusively through a Funesian mnemonic model. This is the ground for a different model, a different conception of filmic ‘evidence’, based upon a tangibility that eludes referential meaning: an association that the word ‘evidence’ certainly can be seen to bear, through its legal definition as signifying ‘proof’. ‘Proof’ is of legal use precisely for its capability to be ‘known’ directly, to require no interpretation, to not refer elsewhere for its meaning. This is a model that eludes mnemonic fixity, being an experience of the surface, of the encounter between two surfaces, in a moment. Always in a moment. Given this initial outline of a model, we can turn now to see specifically how it connects with, and can adapt, an energetic approach to the filmic.

⁵⁶¹ Elena Del Río, ‘The Body as Foundation of the Screen: Allegories of Technology in Atom Egoyan’s *Speaking Parts*’, *Camera Obscura*, 38, (1996), p.101.

⁵⁶² Jennifer Barker, p.36.

⁵⁶³ Jennifer Barker, p.161.

4.iv.ii Lyotard's Acinema and the Energetics of an Obtuse Corporeality

To state my position from the opening, it is my supposition that there is an imbrication between the energetic and the haptic models. We have seen the way in which the interaction between the body of the spectator and the filmic body have been theorised in the 'haptic turn' above. However, I suggest that a parallel structure of interaction is posited by Lyotard in his exposition of an energetics in film, throughout his paper 'Acinema'. Indeed, my positioning of this key paper by Lyotard constitutes an important intervention in the debate around the haptic in film studies. Whilst Barthes's conception of the obtuse has, as we have seen, been noted as a precursor to the haptic theory, Lyotard's energetics has, to my knowledge, never been raised in this context. We have shown how Lyotard is critical of 'organisation' in cinema for its effect of 'eliminating all impulsional movement', and ensuring the unchallenged establishment of 'mnestic fixation'. This is an argument that we have repositioned to be an attack, equally, upon critical approaches to the filmic that function through a Funesian mnemonic perspective. However, we have not addressed the alternative that Lyotard posits. The alternative that Lyotard presents as a 'libidinal economy of cinema',⁵⁶⁴ and that comprises his answer to his own question: 'how and why the specular wall in general, and thus the cinema screen in particular, can become a privileged place for the libidinal cathexis'.⁵⁶⁵ For Lyotard there are two 'poles' of cinema which, at the extreme of each, offer an experience of 'intensity', of 'discharge': these are 'extreme immobilization and extreme mobilization'.⁵⁶⁶ We shall briefly define each of these in turn, and identify how Lyotard is thinking the state of the energetic in them.

The archetype of 'extreme immobilization', that Lyotard offers, is that of the 'tableau vivant'. The tableau vivant 'holds a certain libidinal potential',⁵⁶⁷ through the eroticisation of that which is immobile. In the tableau vivant it is the 'whole person', of the immobile human model, that is invested with intensity through becoming a 'detached erotic region to which the spectator's impulses are connected'.⁵⁶⁸ For the realisation of this energetic potential, the apparent unity of the 'whole person' has to be undone through their immobility. As Lyotard explains:

⁵⁶⁴ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.176.

⁵⁶⁵ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.176.

⁵⁶⁶ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.177.

⁵⁶⁷ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.177.

⁵⁶⁸ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.177.

We must sense the price... that the organic body, the pretended unity of the pretended subject, must pay so that the pleasure will burst forth in its irreversible sterility.⁵⁶⁹

This price is the 'pretended unity' of which Lyotard speaks. As Eleanor Kaufman explicates in her discussion of this passage: 'the posed immobility of the characters highlights and eroticizes certain bodily *parts*' [my italics].⁵⁷⁰ The 'unity' becomes distorted, fragmented, and this facilitates the expression of intensity. The relevance of this is that, for Lyotard, the 'body' of the cinema is open to the same process. He claims that:

This is the same price that the cinema should pay if it goes to the first of its extremes, immobilization: because this latter... means that it would be necessary to endlessly undo the conventional syntheses that normally all cinematographic movements proliferate.⁵⁷¹

In this conception, the cinema necessarily involves 'identification, recognizable forms, all in all, matter for memory',⁵⁷² that is, 'unity', 'syntheses', which must be present, even if 'pretended', so that they can be distorted. Thus, it 'give[s] rise to the most intense agitation through its fascinating paralysis',⁵⁷³ paralysis which necessarily involves fragmentation. In energetic terms, Lyotard is quite clear that this 'agitation' is situated with the spectator. It is the spectator that experiences 'intensity' due to his/her distortion, his/her 'perversion', of unity in filmic representation, which its immobility provokes. The impression that we should arrive at here is of an interaction between the spectator and the filmic body: the immobility of the latter 'connects' with the libidinal impulses, the 'agitation', of the spectator (through its 'fascinating paralysis'), which distort and fragment the unity of the filmic body in the act of their release. This distortion of the filmic body is both the means and effect of an energetic expression. And whilst, as we have said, Lyotard is proposing this immobility to be a practice of avant-garde cinema, I would suggest that we can more usefully think of it as a mode of

⁵⁶⁹ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.177.

⁵⁷⁰ Eleanor Kaufman, 'Deleuze, Klossowski, Cinema, Immobility: A Response to Stephen Arnett', *Film-Philosophy*, 5:33 'Deleuze Special Issue' (November 2001), < www.film-philosophy.com/vol5-2001/n33kaufman > [accessed May 2010].

⁵⁷¹ Lyotard, 'Acinema', pp.177-178.

⁵⁷² Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.178.

⁵⁷³ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.178.

viewing cinema generally. Is it not possible to define immobility as a *way of thinking* the filmic, a way of ‘experiencing’ it, which results in the distortion of filmic representation? I believe that it is. However, we will return to this discussion shortly, after we have examined the second ‘pole’ that Lyotard identifies: ‘extreme mobilization’.

The first point that Lyotard makes regarding ‘extreme mobilization’ is that the locus of ‘agitation and libidinal expense’⁵⁷⁴ is changed. It is now situated with ‘the support itself’,⁵⁷⁵ that is, with ‘the screen itself, in all its most formal aspects’.⁵⁷⁶ This ‘extreme mobilization’ is experienced as a mobility of the cinematic apparatus, entailing the ‘opacity’ of the means of production. This is an abstract cinema, rather than an apparently unified, representative one in which the ‘film strip’ as Lyotard says, is ‘abolished (made transparent)’. Here, the film strip ‘offers itself as the flesh posing itself’.⁵⁷⁷ It is not concerned with the formation of an identifiable form, which is then subject to distortion, but ‘blocks the synthesis of identification and thwarts the mnesic instances’⁵⁷⁸ through a sheer abstraction, which is the result of the support’s lack of a fixed position, its constant ‘mobility’. However, the aspect of this that primarily concerns us is the ‘movement’ of the energetic. And we can see that this is the reverse movement of that which we found in ‘extreme immobilization’ above. Here the filmic body is experienced as being originally distorted, requiring a paralysis and distortion in the unity of the spectator’s own body, for the release of libidinal intensity (experienced by the spectator, of course, for the filmic body is a machine body and is without libidinal force if apart from the spectator). Lyotard frames this model in the following terms:

It is at the price of renouncing his own bodily totality and the synthesis of movements making it exist that the spectator experiences intense pleasure: these objects [the filmic body in extreme mobilization] demand the paralysis not of

⁵⁷⁴ Lyotard, ‘Acinema’, p.178.

⁵⁷⁵ Lyotard, ‘Acinema’, p.178.

⁵⁷⁶ Lyotard, ‘Acinema’, p.179.

⁵⁷⁷ Lyotard, ‘Acinema’, p.179.

⁵⁷⁸ Lyotard, ‘Acinema’, p.179.

the object-model but of the 'subject'-client, the decomposition of his own organism.⁵⁷⁹

As with 'extreme immobilization', Lyotard proposes 'extreme mobilization' as a practice of cinema. However, we can again reconfigure this to become a mode for approaching the filmic more generally.

The ground for this, perhaps, becomes clearer when we note that, for Lyotard, extreme mobilization and extreme immobilization are not two opposing alternatives for cinema. Rather, 'it is only for *thought* that these two modes are incompatible. In a libidinal economy they are, on the contrary, *necessarily associated*' [my italics].⁵⁸⁰ We can see these 'modes' as two intrinsic *aspects* of the filmic, both experienced through the interaction between the filmic and the spectator. They involve *the mutual distortion of the unity of the body, filmic or spectatorial, in the contact between these bodies*. Just as 'haptic seeing' involves a 'constant moment' of reciprocity, of inter-mingling in an 'entangled caress', so Lyotard's 'acinema' (the term that he uses to designate the cinema that takes place at the extremes of mobility and immobility) involves the coincidence, the simultaneity, of these two bodies in contact. A contact experienced as an oscillation, a 'constant oscillation', between two loci of libidinal investment. In this contact they exchange libidinal energy, become invested, because of, and resulting in, their loss of unity. A loss of unity that is mirrored in 'haptic seeing' by the notion, enunciated by Barker, of 'existing for a moment *just on both sides*': being both one and the other, two surfaces as one, fragmented in their experiencing of each other.

Existing as an engagement between two bodies, in a moment, 'haptic seeing' is an experience that 'does not copy anything',⁵⁸¹ as Barthes says of the obtuse. It refers to nothing outside itself, as del Río claims: 'the notion of human and electronic bodies as surfaces in contact is not in keeping with rigid binary demarcations of externality and interiority'.⁵⁸² Its experience is determined entirely in the instant of contact. This condition is directly opposed to that which is deemed of value through a Funesian mnemonic model: the 'production' of meaning. Lyotard elucidates this position near the beginning of 'Acinema': 'the object [i.e. the filmic object]... is valuable only insofar as

⁵⁷⁹ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.179.

⁵⁸⁰ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.177.

⁵⁸¹ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', p.61.

⁵⁸² Del Río, p.101.

it is exchangeable against other objects... such a process is not sterile, but productive; it is production in the widest sense'.⁵⁸³ The Funesian model cannot accommodate that which is not 'exchangeable', that which cannot be exchanged for an absent referent, a signified, a meaning. In this sense, 'haptic seeing' can be depicted in terms of being, as Barthes names it, 'useless expenditure'.⁵⁸⁴ Indeed it accords with Lyotard's acinema and Barthes's obtuse in 'conforming to', what Lyotard calls, 'the pyrotechnical imperative'.⁵⁸⁵ This is a 'dissipation of energy' without return, a release of energy with the purpose of simply expending it, not in the *production* of anything. As Lyotard describes, through the examples of a child striking a match and fireworks, it is: a 'sterile consumption of energies'.⁵⁸⁶

And the experience of the 'human bod[y] to be, in fact, really... "moved" by the movies'⁵⁸⁷ is, I would suggest, an experience of precisely such a 'sterile motion', such a 'sterile explosion of libidinal discharge'.⁵⁸⁸ Barthes's conception of the obtuse provides a way of thinking this connection, through his description of it as both a corporeal engagement with the filmic, a feature of 'haptic seeing' (as we have found Sobchack claiming it to be), and as an energetic concept. Barthes's attribution of an energetic schema to the obtuse is an element of this concept that is infrequently drawn upon, but is of great interest to our present discussion. Barthes determines that the obtuse, the 'third meaning', is at once in 'a permanent state of depletion',⁵⁸⁹ whilst also finding that:

We can also say on the contrary – and it would be just as correct – that this same signifier is not empty (cannot empty itself), that it maintains a permanent state of erethism, desire not finding issue in that spasm of the signified which normally brings the subject voluptuously back into the peace of nominations.⁵⁹⁰

Firstly, we should define this unusual word 'erethism', for it is crucial to our use of this passage. 'Erethism' is a pathological term designating 'the excitement of an organ or

⁵⁸³ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.170.

⁵⁸⁴ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', p.55.

⁵⁸⁵ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.172.

⁵⁸⁶ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.171.

⁵⁸⁷ Sobchack, p.59.

⁵⁸⁸ Lyotard, 'Acinema', p.73.

⁵⁸⁹ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', p.62.

⁵⁹⁰ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', p.62.

tissue in an unusual degree'.⁵⁹¹ Secondly, how can we reconcile this duality of 'permanent depletion' and 'permanent erethism'? In fact, this circumstance is quite to be expected, given our previous assertion that the obtuse 'conforms' to the 'pyrotechnical imperative': it expends its energy instantly, in the moment. It is experienced as a release of energy, but cannot be thought as such: as soon as the obtuse is 'known' its energetic force has been consumed. It is, thus, appropriate to characterise it as being at once 'depleted' and 'erethismic'. The obtuse is an experience of the movement of libidinal intensity, in that it involves the passage of 'desire', unattached to a signified, 'not finding issue' through a signified. This desire is thus in motion, expressed through the 'excess', the tangibility of the obtuse. Expressed through the 'haptic seeing' with which the obtuse is complicit. The feeling of being 'moved' through a haptic engagement with the filmic is accurate, thus, I ultimately would claim, in both a physical sense and an energetic one, as an experience of 'sterile motion', of the movement of libidinal intensity through its discharge. Although these senses should not be taken as being separate, they are entirely coincident, as Jennifer Barker rightly states, in a slightly different context: '*we are moved*, both emotionally and physically, in two directions at once.' [My italics].⁵⁹²

This, finally, is the way in which we can consider the conflation of the energetic and the haptic in cinema: as an experience of a movement. However, Barthes is specific in detailing the nature of the movement that we are referring to, when he identifies that: 'the "movement" regarded as the essence of film is not animation, flux, mobility, "life", copy, but simply the framework of a permutational unfolding'.⁵⁹³ Cinema has often been defined in terms of diegetic or mechanical movement, for example as Doane states: 'at its most basic level, the film moves forward relentlessly'.⁵⁹⁴ Cinema as a medium of motion, of the moving image, is very familiar to us. However, I contend that this movement can be thought in another way, a way indicated by Barthes. As 'permutational unfolding' this movement is a 'transformative' movement. It is a transformation that is enacted through an engagement between the filmic body and the spectatorial body, that sees the becoming of an interactive modality, a reciprocal mutuality, through the contact that these bodies make with one another. It is a

⁵⁹¹ OED: under entry for 'erethism'.

⁵⁹² Jennifer Barker, p.6.

⁵⁹³ Barthes, 'The Third Meaning', pp.66-67.

⁵⁹⁴ Doane, p.112.

transformation that occurs in the moment, as a 'sterile' expenditure of energy that is always already consumed in its expression. It is the transformation that these bodies undergo through the exchange, the oscillation, of libidinal intensity that their contact facilitates: the distortion, the 'decomposition', of their apparent unity.

Finally, this transformative movement is entirely opposed to a Funesian mnemonic model of representation. As Barthes says, it does not 'copy', it is not referential and, as Lyotard notes, it resists 'mnemonic fixity'. The difficulty that this leaves us with, as with all attempts at an energetic approach, is how can we use these ideas, critically, without falling into pure subjectivity? My tentative answer to this, as with similar issues concerning theatricality in the previous chapter, is that we should not be seeking to establish any new kind of mnemonic fixity based upon new concepts. Rather, an energetic approach calls for a focus upon the processes at work themselves, rather than attempting to discover a 'meaning'. As we have seen from the role of energetics in psychoanalytic practice, this involves responding to the ways in which these processes, these movements of intensity, affect and challenge representation, and how they are functioning *in each case*. However, the present discussion should be seen, not as a definitive solution, but rather as a beginning, a provocation and an opening into a potential way of thinking these issues.

Final Words...

The aim of this work has been to raise questions.

I have sought to demonstrate that an energetic approach offers a radically alternative way for understanding visual media. And from this, I have intimated that it has the potential for addressing the challenges of new visual media, in the same way that it addresses those aspects of the antecedent media, theatre and film, which resist interpretation.

Memory has been our point of access. It has provided us with two models of, two ways of approaching, visual representation, based upon two definitions of memory, held in tension one with the other. A Funesian mnemonic model posits visual representation in terms of being a 'copy', as being referential to an 'elsewhere'. It suggests a mode of response that seeks 'meaning', that seeks to excavate a hidden truth in the image. And, as we have seen, it is an approach that is not always appropriate to its subject. It is challenged and resisted by specific aspects of the media to which it is directed, only some of which we have enunciated here.

In the second definition, an energetic conception of memory is one which presents memory as being determined not through its capacity to refer to the past, to recall previous impressions, but as the facility through which the affective can be expressed. Energetic memory functions as a 'surface' of mnemonic images that are distorted and fractured by the passage of affect. When serving as a model through which visual media can be approached, the unique characteristics of the medium with which it is engaged demand a reactive capacity from the mode of address, a sensitivity to the differentiation of their intrinsic features and a change of emphasis in terms of the way that energetic theory functions. We have thus drawn upon different aspects of an energetic theory, as appropriate to the aspect of the visual medium to which we are attending. But, we must not forget that our point of departure in thinking visual representation through an energetics is inevitably memory. As we see from Freud, and later psychoanalytic theory in particular, memory is the means and model by which an energetics can be thought through visual representation. The archetype of an energetic approach is the coincidence of the affective force with the mnemonic image, the conjunctive-disjunctive relationship that they establish.

This work is then an outline, a framework, a theory, which seeks to gesture towards a possible way of thinking visual media. It is not prescription, but speculation, and is thus to be responded to, to be developed, to be expanded and, it is hoped, to be engaged with in new and surprising encounters. It is a process that, even by the nature of its conceptual structure, is necessarily unfinished.

Finally, to return to the challenge that provided one of the key impetuses for this study, we can consider what I assert to be the most productive and valuable ‘next encounter’: the bringing of our energetic model into communication with new visual media. Through this we would seek not only to instigate an original and innovative method for responding to the ‘difficulties’ of new visual media, but also to articulate their intrinsic distinctiveness from their precursors, as we have described. The particular form of new visual media that, I believe, offers the most fascinating routes for further investigation is that of the videogame. Its growing cultural significance together with its status as both screen and interaction, as both a bodily and imagistic engagement with the spectator-participant, the player, make it an especially promising field of enquiry.

Whilst the aim of this work has been to raise questions, we know that it is not answers that we seek. Rather, it is an understanding of how to frame the *right* questions. All that remains is for us to keep asking, how...?

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