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ARTÍCULOS
DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Benjaminian Reminiscences in Deleuze's and Daney's Dialogue about Images in Control Societies*

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Abstract: This article examines Gilles Deleuze's 1986 letter to French film critic Serge Daney about cinema, television, and images in control societies through a Benjaminian lens. While neither Deleuze nor Daney deeply engage with Walter Benjamin's thought, I argue that the ideas or dialectical images constructed by the German thinker are crucial to better understand Deleuze's and Daney's thoughts regarding the threatened death of modern cinema in the 1980s because of the predominance of television as a control apparatus. In the first part of the article, I analyze the aesthetical and political meaning of the concept of history as/of perception. I also show affinities between Benjamin's and Deleuze's works through their connection to art historian Aloïs Riegl. In the second part, I demonstrate how Deleuze's and Daney's reflections about mannerism as a weapon against the rise of clichés and the ideology of the visible in control societies must be supplemented by Benjamin's concept of "construction". In conclusion, I draw on Benjamin's discussion of politics as a body space to advocate for desiring mannerisms to fight control apparatuses and the reign of clichés.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, Serge Daney, Gilles Deleuze, control societies, cinema, television

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ARTÍCULOS
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Reminiscencias benjaminianas en el diálogo de Deleuze y Daney sobre las imágenes en las sociedades de control

Resumen: Este artículo examina, en clave benjaminiana, la carta escrita en 1986 por Gilles Deleuze al crítico de cine francés Serge Daney acerca del cine, la televisión y las imágenes en las sociedades de control. Aunque ni Deleuze ni Daney se comprometen profundamente con el pensamiento de Walter Benjamin, sostengo que las ideas o imágenes dialécticas construidas por el pensador alemán son cruciales para entender mejor el pensamiento de Deleuze y de Daney sobre la amenazante muerte del cine moderno en los años 80 a manos del predominio de la televisión como aparato de control. En la primera parte del artículo, analizo el significado estético y político del concepto de historia como/de percepción, y muestro afinidades entre los trabajos de Bejamin y Deleuze, a través de su conexión con el historiador del arte Aloïs Riegl. En la segunda parte, demuestro cómo las reflexiones de Deleuze y Daney sobre el manierismo, como arma contra el surgimiento de clichés y la ideología de lo visible en las sociedades de control, pueden ser suplidas por el concepto benjaminiano de "construcción". En conclusión, echando mano de la discusión de Benjamin sobre la política como espacio del cuerpo, abogo por manierismos deseantes para hacer frente a los aparatos de control y al reino de los clichés.

Palabras Clave: Walter Benjamin, Serge Daney, Gilles Deleuze, sociedades de control, cine, televisión

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Introduction: a Benjaminian flash in a moment of danger

Although there is no doubt that Gilles Deleuze knew and read at least some of Walter Benjamin's texts, affirming that references to the German thinker are scarce in his work would be an understatement. Except for a brief allusion to "The Work of Art in the age of its technological reproducibility" in the conclusion to *Cinema 2. The Time-Image* (1989, p. 264) and a passage about the importance of the Benjaminian concept of analogy to better understand the Baroque in *The Fold* (1993, p. 125), one finds no mention of Benjamin in Deleuze's monographs. However, Deleuze makes a decisive reference to Benjamin in his 1986 "letter" to French film critic Serge Daney—a letter that became the preface to Daney's *Ciné Journal* (1998),[1] a compilation of film reviews and reports Daney wrote in 1981 and 1982 for the French newspaper *Libération*. The fact that Benjamin only comes to play an important part in Deleuze's thought through his dialogue with Daney is telling. Born in 1944 in Paris, Daney became a prominent voice for French *cinephiles* as a writer for the famous *Cahiers du cinéma*, which he co-edited from 1973 to 1981. Influenced by May 1968 events and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Daney developed a singular writing style about movies, which is connected to his time's social, moral, and political issues without being subsumed to them. Deleuze acknowledges the uniqueness of Daney's interest in the relations between cinema and thought in his *Cinema* books. In the two last decade of his life (he died of AIDS in 1992), Daney, in turn, became more and more influenced by Deleuze's thought at the intersection of art, philosophy, and political tools of resistance to the neoliberal organization of Western societies.[2] In the context of the French reception of Deleuze, which I am writing from, where close to nothing has been written about the resonances between Deleuze and Benjamin, the fact that Benjamin's name surfaces in a direct dialogue between Deleuze and Daney is very significant: it is as if Benjaminian reminiscences could only take form in the meeting of Deleuze and Daney, in the particular mode of thought that can only deploy itself *between* these two thinkers. It is as if we need both Deleuze and Daney to actualize the potentialities of Benjamin's reflections about images and politics in the control societies characterizing the 1980s—with pressing questions that, as we shall see, echo our own time.

Let us then turn to Deleuze quoting Benjamin in his 1986 letter to Daney. In the letter, Deleuze begins by reflecting on Daney's previous book, *La Rampe* (1983)—which compiled articles written for the *Cahiers du cinéma* in the seventies—, and particularly the pages Daney devoted to German director Syberberg's movie *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland*, released in 1977. Deleuze writes:

1 Daney's articles have been sparsely translated into English but most of his books have yet to be translated in their original context, an endeavor begun by Semiotext(e) in 2022. Thorough this article, I thus use the original French texts and my own English translations. The situation is a bit better in Spanish, several of Daney's books having been published by Shangrila.

2 About the dialogue between Deleuze and Daney, see Dowd (2010).

> Syberberg extensively developed some remarks of Walter Benjamin's about seeing Hitler as a filmmaker [. . .] You yourself remark that "the great political *mise en scène*, state propaganda turning into tableaux vivants, the first mass human detentions" realized cinema's dream, in circumstances where horror penetrated everything, where "behind" the image there was nothing to be seen but concentration camps, and the only remaining bodily link was torture. Paul Virilio in his turn shows that fascism was competing from beginning to end with Hollywood. The encyclopedia of the world, the beautification of Nature, politics as "art" in Benjamin's phrase, had become pure horror (1995, p. 69).[3]

Readers familiar with Benjamin's work immediately understand the reference to "The Work of Art in the age of its technological reproducibility," as the text is haunted by the violent appropriation of technological apparatuses by fascism for means of propaganda—see for instance the first note of the epilogue, where Benjamin notes that mass movements such as "great ceremonial processions, giant rallies, [. . .] mass sporting events, and [. . .] war" are better suited to feed the bird's-eye view of the camera than the human eye (2003, p. 282).[4] But experts of Walter Benjamin probably also quickly notice the approximation—or even the clumsiness—Deleuze is guilty of when he writes about "politics as 'art' in Benjamin's phrase." Benjamin, indeed, famously distinguishes in the last lines of his essay the "aestheticizing of politics" practiced by fascism from the politicizing of art that communism should defend (2003, p. 270). "Politics as art" sounds too broad and approximative regarding Benjamin's text on the "Work of Art," indicating that Deleuze does not directly engage with Benjamin's work but instead focuses on Daney's own reading of Benjamin. If we turn to Daney's evocation of Benjamin in *La Rampe* and *Ciné Journal*, however, things become slightly more transparent but not that much. In *La Rampe*'s 1977 text about *Hitler, ein Film aus Deutschland*, Daney (1983) writes that Syberberg is more of a Benjaminian filmmaker than a Brechtian one because he fights Hitler, this "bad filmmaker," in his own terms: those of cinema (p. 111). Benjamin, Daney continues, may have been the first thinker to highlight that, in a world dominated by the technological reproduction of images, filmmakers and political leaders have become factual rivals as they work with the same material: political figuration (p. 113).[5] In *Ciné Journal*, Daney (1998) adds that we no longer need Benjamin and other visionaries to understand that the staging of a movie star, a politician, or a product is nothing but a matter of rhetoric (p. 41).

3 Deleuze refers to Virilio (1989).

4 Thorough, I quote the third version (1939) of "The Work of Art in the age of its technological reproducibility," and I use the adjective "technological" instead of "mechanical" in accordance with the Harvard translation of Benjamin's *Selected Writings*.

5 Although Daney never quotes specific passages from "The Work of Art," he clearly has in mind the note about "the star and the dictator" that can be found in section X of the 1939 version of the text (Benjamin, 2003, p. 277; see also Dousson, 2010).

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At this stage, one could easily brush off the relevance of Benjamin's work when engaging with the dialogue between Deleuze and Daney: Benjamin, here, seems to be nothing more than a name you have to mention when discussing Syberberg and, more generally, German cinema after World War II. But I argue this would be missing the opportunity to further engage with the material brought forth by Daney and Deleuze. For the context in which they mention Benjamin is crucial. If, according to Deleuze's phrase (1995, p. 69), cinema was able to "come back from the dead" after World War II under the form of "modern cinema," in the eighties, cinema seemed on the verge of dying again: it was less and less popular and consequently less and less politicizing as it was progressively being replaced by the advertising rhetoric of television (Daney, 1983, p. 113). History seemed to repeat itself: the optimism of the pioneers of cinema was murdered by the horror of World War II concentration camps behind every image produced, and modern cinema was now itself at risk of being murdered by the normalizing, controlling apparatus of television—a danger both aesthetic and political that Deleuze and Daney were acutely aware of.

With that context and its contemporary resonances in mind, I want to argue that the vague reminiscences of Walter Benjamin's work in the discussion between Daney and Deleuze on the state of cinema may look superficial but should nevertheless not be neglected. Benjamin wrote "The Work of Art in the age of its technological reproducibility" at a time when, even if a proactive vision could find a weapon for politicizing the arts in classical cinema, the risk of seeing cinema's power totally fall into the hands of fascism was very high. Similarly, Deleuze and Daney evoke Benjamin's name at a time when modern cinema itself could die of its own insignificance compared to the controlling power of television or of its own hysteria obsessed with showing, again and again, the unbearable images that spectators have to face (Daney, 1983, p. 175). The evocation of Benjamin by Deleuze and Daney can thus be construed, in the terms of "On the Concept of history," as the appropriation of "a memory that flashes up in a moment of danger" (Benjamin, 2003, p. 391). Like Benjamin in the 1930s, Daney and Deleuze in the 1980s face an emergency to think with and to defend cinema as a valuable aesthetic and political tool that may be at risk of going extinct—or, and it may be worse, of becoming socially irrelevant. From this shared sense of danger, from this necessity of thinking about what cinema can and should still mean, we can address what the reminiscences of Benjamin's work add to the thought of Deleuze and Daney.

Therefore, in what follows, I will not try to force a reading of Deleuze's and Daney's writings about cinema by making them more influenced by Benjamin than they were. But I will aim at constructing and multiplying "flashes in a moment of danger;" I will track coincidental and involuntary similitudes that can be found between the three thinkers and try to deploy their aesthetic and political potential, mainly sticking to the context of the 1980s and entrusting readers with actualizing the relevance of those flashes in the 2020s. I wager that, in these flashes, in these dialectical images that have to be

constructed, we can find new weapons to resist power apparatuses and the aesthetic and political normalization they never cease to produce.

1. "All history is really the history of perception": the threatened death of cinema

In his letter to Serge Daney, Deleuze identifies three "ages" of cinema that can be deduced from Daney's writings. If Deleuze's obsession with classification, be it chronological or not, characterizes his whole work, the chronological classification of the ages of cinema is particularly noteworthy. In the twentieth century, indeed, cinema was the medium that most significantly reshaped the way we perceive and, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) underline in *A Thousand Plateaus*, "all history is really the history of perception" (p. 347). This idea is also clearly expressed by Daney (1998) who affirms that there is a history of our perception or "history of the eye" (p. 105) that we can only understand today through the forms of cinema, television and video. History, in other words, is made of both political and aesthetic assemblages that determine what can or cannot be perceived and thought: what media are dominant, what is buried, covered, or coming up to the surface–what we can see, and feel, under which conditions, and at what price. Understanding history as the history of perception is vital to better grasp Benjamin's, Deleuze's, and Daney's interest in cinema's fate. Caring for cinema is not (only) a matter of aesthetic taste or love of the art; cinema being a mass media shaping our collective perception, its contemporary relevance (or lack thereof) directly addresses matters of (in)visibility, of representation, and of apparatuses designing how we can relate to the social world.

To construct a first flash in a moment of danger, I need to bring closer Deleuze's, Guattari's, and Daney's understanding of history as the history of perception with Benjamin's at the time pioneering idea that perception itself has a history and needs to be historized. Let us turn to the third section of the 1939 version of "The Work of Art." In the first half of this section, Benjamin goes to great lengths to establish that perception has a history and may well be the driver of history if we want to understand it as the product of mass movements. In his own words:

> Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception. The way in which human perception is organized—the medium in which it occurs—is conditioned not only by nature but by history. [. . .] The scholars of the Vienna school Riegl and Wickhoff, resisting the weight of the classical tradition beneath which this art [late-Roman art industry] had been buried, were the first to think of using such art to draw conclusions about the organization of perception at the time the art was produced. However far-reaching their insight, it was limited by the

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> fact that these scholars were content to highlight the formal signature which characterized perception in late-Roman times. They did not attempt to show the social upheavals manifested in these changes of perception—and perhaps could not have hoped to do so at the time (Benjamin, 2003, p. 255 [Benjamin's emphasis]).

This passage is of great relevance to our inquiry into the Deleuze-Daney discussion about the death of cinema. First, Benjamin notices that the historical shaping of perception has to do with the medium in which it occurs, that medium being shaped by art forms. But, as the end of the passage makes clear, art is not the ultimate cause of those historical changes; it instead is a symptom of "social upheavals." And if the Vienna School of Art History was not able to grasp this connection between art forms and social upheavals, paying homage to its leading figures—Riegl and Wickhoff—was important as they were among the first to insist on the historically shaped characteristics of perception. The connection between history as perception, the history of perception, and art forms as symptoms of social changes brings me to construct a first dialectical image at the crossing of Benjamin's, Daney's, and Deleuze's thought: history as/of perception, the two prepositions being necessarily interwoven. Not only is all history the history of perception, which itself is historized, but evolving perception is the driver of history. This dialectical image becomes a true flash in a moment of danger when we take into consideration the significance of Riegl for both Deleuze and Benjamin.

One cannot miss, in the first lines of the "Letter to Serge Daney," Deleuze's explicit reference to Riegl despite his total absence from Daney's text: "An eminent earlier analyst of the plastic arts, Riegl distinguished three tendencies in art: the beautification of Nature, the spiritualization of Nature, and competition with Nature (and he took 'beautification,' 'spiritualization,' and 'competition' as historically and logically fundamental factors)" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 68).[6] One goal of Deleuze's letter will then be to understand Daney's own periodization of cinema through Riegl's historical and logical categories. In doing so, Deleuze insists both on the revolutions cinema has inflicted several times on our modes of perception and on the political charge of those revolutions (beautification, spiritualization, and competition being the opposite of neutral positions towards nature). To better understand this politics which has Benjaminian echoes through the unexpected mention of Riegl's name, let us turn to the three ages of cinema according to Daney and Deleuze.

First, Daney writes in *La Rampe*, there is classical cinema, that could be defined by the question "what can I see behind the image?" and the desire to always see more. Classical cinema is a cinema of depths, hidings, and doors, a cinema where each image has several ends that are as many endings: you can exit images, you can see behind—

6 About those tendencies of the arts, see Riegl (2004).

you will find secrets and lovers behind the door at the extremity of the image; you will find (happy) endings. Classical cinema always keeps "openings to breathe and outcomes to feel safe" (Daney, 1983, p. 172). This classical function of cinematographic images—opening to the will to see more, through, and behind—is the only one Benjamin ever knew. It is also the only one that can allow for the kind of pioneering enthusiasm Benjamin often displays in "The Work of Art." As Deleuze (1995) highlights, commenting on *La Rampe*, the will to always see more meets the desire to embellish Nature through the making of an encyclopedia of the World (p. 68): each image, each *montage*, each movie becomes part of a potentially infinite, universal encyclopedia of our desire always to see more. Both Deleuze and Daney mention Eisenstein as the paragon of this pioneering view and we should not be surprised that those new encyclopedic ambitions of better understanding and expanding the world through the artistic and scientific features of the cinematograph figure prominently in Benjamin's "Work of Art" (2003, pp. 265-266).

But as we have seen in the introduction to this article, the pioneering spirit of the beautification of Nature was killed with World War II. If cinema were to come back from the dead, it would not be as the innocent beautification of Nature since the desire to always see more, always see behind, could barely meet the camps, and pure horror, as the only reality behind every image produced by Hitler and Hollywood. Our gaze does not find any opening beyond images but clashes against the screen and comes back at us. When great filmmakers assume this new age of the image, it opens up a new function for modern cinema, a function that refuses the theatricality of classical cinema and makes a weapon of the flatness of images (Daney—and Deleuze following suit— quotes Bresson, Godard, Antonioni, Welles, and others, but the most paradigmatic case is probably Alain Resnais, and especially *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima mon amour*). In Daney's (1983) words, "This scenography's central question is no more: what is there to see behind? It is rather: can I bring myself to look at what I can't help seeing anyway—which unfolds on a single plane?" (p. 174; see also Deleuze, 1995, p. 69). If Deleuze can see there is a new function of image— an "age" adapted from Riegl's classification—, it is because such images substitute a pedagogy of perception (we need to learn how to see and read images) to the encyclopedia of the world that characterized classical cinema. This is what Deleuze calls a spiritualization of Nature, and not a beautification anymore: there is no escape in Nature, and an encyclopedic attempt would only restore the naïve utopia of direct greatness and collective power. Rather, we discover, through this pedagogy of perception, the powerlessness of thought, which is also its singularity, its precarity (Deleuze, 1995, p. 71). This spiritualization of Nature, this precarious thought, may well be the only dignified mode of perception once the infamous theatre of horror is revealed, once, as Benjamin (2003) states, technology "demands repayment in 'human material'" for the social revolution it was prevented to accomplish (p. 270).

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But even the spiritualization of Nature seems to have faded out when Deleuze and Daney write about cinema in the 1980s, that decade marking a shift in history as/of perception. If the tiredness concerning the denunciative function of images may have played a part in the decline of the spiritualization of Nature, we should not put too much weight on it since we would then miss the most decisive factor shaping the new age of the history of perception: the replacement of the filmic image by images of a new kind, be they video or (already in the 1980s) digital. While those new kinds of images might have opened up new fields of experimentation for cinema (as is attested by Jean-Luc Godard's experiments with video in the 1980s and 1990s, for instance), they actually have been reterritorialized on a far more conservative and normative medium: television. If Daney was not a priori opposed to television (in 1987, he even devoted a daily chronicle to the medium for the French newspaper *Libération*),[7] he quickly came around to become a stern pessimist regarding the power of the apparatus, which he named an "anti-production and anti-desire tool" (Daney, 2015, p. 31). If television—along with advertisement—is responsible for the withering-away of modern cinema (Daney, 1983, p. 175), it is because of its social impact, that cannot be dissociated from its aesthetic qualities. On the one hand, aesthetically, the multiplication of video and numeric images leads to what Deleuze names the third period or function of image—"competing with Nature" (1995, p. 72). The questions are no longer "what is there to see behind images?" or "can I bring myself to look at what I can't help seeing anyway?" Now that images rival with Nature itself, one image always opening on and producing new images by all its sides, now that the eye always encounters flatten images in a blank gaze, the question has become: "how we can find a way into it, how we can slip in, because each image now slips across other images?" (1995, p. 71). On the other hand, the proliferation of images cannot be confined to the aesthetic problem of the decline of modern cinema and its pedagogy, as it is directly connected to the kind of society that the preeminence of television over cinema shapes. Daney never ceases to insist on the social damages brought forth by the dominance of television, which standardizes neoliberal individuals to better inscribe them in a "global village" with no place for desire and novelty (2015, p. 31). While cinema in its best moments was able to show us a world that was worthy of being invested by desire, television can only reflect and repeat social norms and cannot drive singular, revolutionary desires. In a filmed interview, Daney states:

> I still think the world is wonderful as it is, and I think it is formidable I have been able to inhabit it. It was this idea: we'll have this world, but we will finally inhabit it. This is the essence of my love for movies [*cinéphilie*]: we will finally inhabit it. But we will inhabit the word and not society, never. From society, you can only expect terrible things (2004).

7 See Daney (1993a).

If the reign of television and thus of social norms, as opposed to cinema as an art of desire for the world, is worrisome for Daney in the 1980s, it is because the struggle between the two media has been fought—and won by television—at the level of the social status of the masses, and because this status has also become a statute. Daney plays here with the French word *statut*, which can mean "status" or "statute." Quoting Deleuze and Parnet (about psychoanalysis), Daney indicates that masses are less a matter of contract than of a statute. "For what defines a mass function is not necessarily a collective, class or group character; it is the juridical transition from contract to statute" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 85; quoted in Daney, 1983, p. 156). In other words, one could say with Daney about television what Deleuze and Parnet wrote about psychoanalysis: while movie pioneers and lovers dreamt of an art able to constitute spiritualized masses in a contractual relation of desire that could be escaped or renegotiated, television assigns to the masses a "*statutory fixity*, rather than [. . .] a temporary *contractual relationship*" (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 85; emphasized by the authors). Television, as a mass-media, has thus deprived the masses of a contractual relation of desire in favor of a statutory, social fixity. This statutory mass-function imprisons desires and statuses mobility while also making history as/of perception invisible.

Breaking the dream of both the beautification and the spiritualization of Nature, television, as a power apparatus associated with communication and advertisement, does not enable the perpetual reinvention of revolutionary desire that characterizes the agency of the masses, thus fixating them in a normative statute. In a sense, Deleuze is right, in his letter to Daney, to underline that the social danger posed by the decline of modern cinema because of the monopoly of television is akin to the danger Benjamin wrote about in "The Work of Art:" the aesthetic and political upheavals allowed by cinema are at risk of being made insignificant by more powerful assemblages of diffusion and perception of information. But we should not reduce Deleuze's Benjaminian "flash of danger" to the similarity between the situation described by Benjamin in the 1930s (classical cinema being threatened by Hitler's propaganda) and the threatened second death of cinema that could very well come from television in the 1980s (Deleuze, 1995, p. 75). Considering Benjaminian reminiscences in the letter to Daney as a question of epochal similarities would reduce us to a state of critical pessimism, our agency being limited to the denunciation of all too powerful media that cannot be defeated. But Deleuze's insistence on the ages of images inspired by Riegl's categories aims precisely at showing that it is only by deeply engaging with history as/of perception that we can resist critical pessimism (Deleuze, 1995, p. 72). As Deleuze writes about Foucault's thought in his "Postscript on control societies:" "it's not a question of worrying or of hoping for the best, but of finding new weapons" (1995, p. 178). Just like Benjamin did not stop searching for weapons in classical cinema when Europe was on the brink of succumbing to fascism, Deleuze's approach to the threatened assassination of modern cinema has nothing to do with

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political or aesthetic pessimism and everything to do with looking for "future forms of resistance, capable of standing up to marketing's blandishments" (1995, p. 182). Zabunyan (2019) underlines that the aim of Deleuze's letter to Daney is not to present the current state of the history of images in a declinist fashion but to find tools to turn (social) control inside down, to turn round the social function of television into an aesthetic one. This fight for and through the resistance of/to images is, I want to argue, what constitutes the real interest of interrogating Benjaminian (involuntary) reminiscences in Deleuze's and Daney's thoughts on cinema and, more broadly, on the aesthetic and political significance of history as/of perception.

2. Seeing beyond clichés; the need for mannerism and construction

The time of danger when Daney and Deleuze summon a reminiscence of Walter Benjamin is thus a particular period in history as/of perception, a period that Deleuze associates with control societies, where images control images, where "nothing happens to humans anymore, everything that happens, happens through the image" (1986b). The medium through which we perceive social upheavals has become so powerful at neutralizing human masses and affects through an abundance of images that the world itself—that which is worth desiring and fighting for—seems like a cliché in the middle of social standards. Clichés actually are a discreet but important theme in Deleuze's *Cinema* books.[8] Classical cinema, he argues towards the end of *The Movement-Image*, could not pursue its aesthetical function after World War II, as if classical images had become mere clichés—and Deleuze (1986a) underlines that, as classical cinema was mainly Hollywoodian, the death of those images was also the death of the American Dream (p. 210). If classical images become clichés, it is, according to Deleuze, for a series of historical, social, economic, and aesthetic reasons that fragmented the masses and made spectators less inclined to believe in the tropes and actions represented on screen, as if classical images had become false:

> We might mention, in no particular order, the war and its consequences, the unsteadiness of the American Dream in all its aspects, the new consciousness of minorities, the rise and inflation of images in the external world and in people's minds, the influence on the cinema of the new modes of narratives with which literature had experimented, the crisis of Hollywood and its old genres (Deleuze, 1986a, p. 206).

In *The Time-Image*, Deleuze goes beyond the analysis of the reasons for the rise of clichés in order to understand how they aesthetically organize our perception at

8 For a discussion about clichés in the *Cinema* books, see for instance Bogue (2003, pp. 108-111) and Marrati (2008, pp. 59-65).

the movies but also and most predominantly in our daily lives. Drawing on Bergson, Deleuze affirms that we never cease using clichés, understood as partial images of things and events that would be otherwise unbearable and impossible to assimilate.

> We mix with all that, even death, even accidents, in our normal life or on holidays. We see, and we more or less experience, a powerful organization of poverty and oppression. And we are precisely not without sensory-motor schemata for recognizing such things, for putting up with and approving of them and for behaving ourselves subsequently, taking into account our situation, our capabilities and our tastes. We have schemata for turning away when it is too unpleasant, for prompting resignation when it is terrible and for assimilating when it is too beautiful. It should be pointed out here that even metaphors are sensory-motor evasions, and furnish us with something to say when we no longer know what do to: they are specific schemata of an affective nature. Now this is what a cliché is. A cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés (Deleuze, 1989, p. 20).

Clichés are images that make the world bearable and allow us to carry on with business as usual since they meet our sensory-motor reflexes, selecting only what we are interested in perceiving. Clichés are not bad by themselves (one cannot live if constantly facing the unbearable) but their rise and dominance become a problem at all levels (historical, aesthetic, social, political, conceptual) when they multiply and become the only medium of perception our gaze encounters. We then become blind to the "powerful organization of poverty and oppression" and abide to a shameful social normalization of our "internal images" (our mental world) as well as of our "external images" (the politics of perception).[9] It is worth noticing here that, in the frame of *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*, clichés characterize classical cinema and the age of beautification of Nature after World War II (clichés are classical schemata unable to reinvent, or spiritualize, themselves). However, the letter he writes to Daney seems to bring Deleuze to a frightening realization: in the *Cinema* books, clichés could be overcome by the spiritualization of Nature operated by modern cinema (van Tuinen [2012] underlines that spiritualizing Nature means confronting Nature as it supposedly is with artistic creativity [p. 55]). But when television becomes the dominant mass-medium in the frame of control societies in the 1980s, clichés seem to

9 About the connection between clichés and shame in Deleuze, see O'Donnell, 2014.

have a fearsome comeback. If clichés are the sign of the decline of artistic creativity as well as what subject us to shameful compromises with the social, normalizing function of perception brought forth in control societies, one can only feel the horror and sense of danger that animate Deleuze when, in his letter to Daney, he recognizes we have entered the third age of images where images are direct rivals to Nature. The phrasing chosen by Deleuze (1995) in the letter clearly echoes his analysis on clichés in the *Cinema* books, but with the realization that clichés have overcome the spiritualization of Nature: "the world is lost, the world itself 'turns to film,' any film at all, and, as you say here, 'nothing is happening to human beings any more, but everything is happening only to images'" (p. 76; translation slightly modified).

The idea that the world has turned to film (*fait du cinéma*)[10] is common to Deleuze and Daney. In *La Rampe*, Daney (1983) writes that it is television that turns the world into a generalized show and that this show—this succession of clichés—is all the more concerning because of its technical perfection: television capitalizes on the aesthetic of "evidence and splendor of the truth," a pseudo-objectivity that is nothing less than the ideology of the visible (p. 24). Daney clearly weights his words when he writes of the "evidence and splendor of the truth," which he associates with a gaze flattened and reduced by commercial images and advertising (p. 19). Advertisements, he claims, are nothing but this demonstration of evidence, of perfect visibility, where we are shown in precise details the most tenacious stain surrender to a brand of detergent (p. 19). It is the unimportant, uninteresting, and yet unescapable perfection of such images competing with Nature that worry Deleuze and Daney the most. As Deleuze underlines, it is because of the very perfection of the new images that Daney criticizes them: "*Dallas* is completely empty, but a perfect piece of social engineering. In another area, one might say the same of *Apostrophes*:[11] from a literary viewpoint (aesthetically, noetically) it's empty, but technically it's perfect" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 75). This perfection of inept images broadcasted in an infernal loop by control societies may well be the point where Benjamin's thought meets and complement Deleuze and Daney in a flash of danger, across the decades. It even is, in my view, the most significant encounter between Benjamin, Daney, and Deleuze. As early as the beginning of the 1930s, in his "Little History of photography," Benjamin diagnoses the main enemy in the contemporary production of images as being fashion or advertisement photography or "arty journalism" that focus on the "beauty" of nature as it supposedly is to better hide any social upheaval:

10 The French expression *faire du cinéma* (as in "*arrête de faire ton cinéma* !") means over-dramatizing a situation, making a scene rather than simply living one's feelings and relationships.

11 *Apostrophe* was a prominent literary talk show broadcasted on French public TV between 1975 and 1990. By equating a soap opera such as *Dallas* with a talk show having a "cultural" if not "educational" purpose, Deleuze emphasizes that the general nullity of televised production comes from the nature of the medium, which equivocates all contents.

> The more far-reaching the crisis of the present social order, and the more rigidly its individual components are locked together in their death struggle, the more the creative—in its deepest essence a variant (contradiction its father, imitation its mother)—becomes a fetish, whose lineaments live only in the fitful illumination of changing fashion. The creative in photography is its capitulation to fashion. *The world is beautiful*—that is its watchword. In it is unmasked the posture of a photography that can endow any soup can with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists, even when this photography's most dream-laden subjects are a forerunner more of its salability than of any knowledge it might produce (Benjamin, 1999b, p. 526).

All the constellations of concepts we have encountered with Daney and Deleuze seem to be condensed in this passage. Benjamin vividly describes the "beautification of Nature" when it is becoming a mere succession of clichés aimed at marketing and commercialization with such perfect technicality that we only encounter images and not human crisis and connection, "fashion" playing here the part of "social engineering." But in the next lines, Benjamin goes further, suggesting a solution to "find new weapons" according to Deleuze's coinage. Quoting Bertolt Brecht's 1931 monograph *The Three Penny lawsuit* (see Brecht, 2000, pp. 147-199), Benjamin (1999b) denounces the opacity of what Daney will later call the ideology of the visible, and suggests construction as a means of resistance:

> But because the true face of this kind of photographic creativity is the advertisement or association, its logical counterpart is the act of unmasking or construction. As Brecht says: "The situation is complicated by the fact that less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed" (p. 526).

In other words, the circulation of images through mass-media can only compete with Nature by reducing everything it exposes to the functional (Deleuze and Daney would say: to the social function), making human relations and struggles invisible and ineffective. Countering this aesthetic and political reduction (if not annihilation) must imply a strong rebuttal of the state of bewilderment produced by the technical perfection of the ideology of the visible. Activating this rebuttal necessitates all the strengths of Benjamin's, Daney's, and Deleuze's thoughts combined because, as Marrati (2008) highlights, the problem is not cognitive and cannot be solved at the sole level of knowledge (p. 86); resisting the ideology of the visible can only be accomplished at affective, political, and aesthetic levels. Turning to Brecht, Benjamin finds an aesthetic

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and political tool of resistance in construction—the necessity for building up something artificial that interrupts the loop of advertisement photography and clichés. We know that, for Brecht, this kind of artificial construction can be found in the principles of the Epic Theater he elaborates in the interwar years.[12] Benjamin (2003), on his hand, is very clear about the need for a "constructivist" reception images in "The Work of Art," where he notices that signposts and captions, however accurate, become mandatory to make sense of photographs and reach their political significance—in films, he adds, the political education of the gaze becomes still more powerful with the eye being guided by the sequence of images preceding a singular shot (p. 258).

This need for the artificial construction of a politically educated gaze is exactly what Deleuze is looking for when he asks, in his letter to Daney, "how we can find a way into it, how we can slip in, because each image now slips across other images?" (1995, p. 71). And for this reason, it is this passage from the "Little History of photography" that constitutes the core of Benjamin's reminiscences in the dialogue between Deleuze and Daney about cinema and television—even if neither Daney nor Deleuze quote that text. As alluded to above, in Deleuze's *Cinema* books, the question of clichés is contemporary but can be overcome through modern cinema and the "spiritualization of Nature." Only in the general conclusion to *The Time-Image* does Deleuze (1989) acknowledge that the proliferation of new forms of (televised, video, digital) images can be a deadly threat to this spiritualization of Nature that modern cinema helped brought forth to overcome clichés (pp. 264-270). But it is truly in his letter to Daney that Deleuze directly confronts the new age of images competing with Nature—and the terrifying comeback of clichés it signifies—in the history of perception. The path forward (or the weapon) Deleuze suggests on the basis of Daney's writings to fight this new age of clichés can be summed up in one word: mannerism. The mannerism Deleuze is referring to is akin to Brecht's and Benjamin's concept of construction, of something artificially built up. Deleuze (1995) defines mannerism as "the tense, convulsive form of cinema that leans, as it tries to turn round, on the very system that seeks to control or replace it" (p. 75). Mannerism is thus the battlefield to be constructed between the spiritualization of Nature and the competition with Nature. It is the irreducible constellation of multiple practices of production and reception of images through which cinema resists the never-ending sliding of images only characterized by their social function of control, and tries to turn those images upside down (pp. 76-77). Cinema's resistance, according to the letter to Daney, is the opposition to the monopoly of the social function of images that television develops, and the reappropriation of control technologies from within:

12 See Benjamin's "What is the Epic Theater?" for an analysis of the constructivist principles of Brecht's Epic Theater (Benjamin, 2003, pp. 302-309).

> Cinema ought to stop "being cinematic," stop playacting, and set up specific relationships with video, with electronic and digital images, in order to develop a new form of resistance and combat the televisual function of surveillance and control. It's not a question of short-circuiting television—how could that be possible?—but of preventing television [from] subverting or short-circuiting the extension of cinema into the new types of image (p. 76).

Quite ironically, this last quote is built on two necessary short-circuits. First of all, cinema "ought to stop 'being cinematic'," that is it ought to connect to video, electronic, and digital images, but without losing what distinguishes it from other regimes of image (a seemingly close to impossible task in the 1980s that seems all the more difficult in the 2020s). Deleuze mentions video previsualizations by Coppola, Syberberg's strange puppetry plays, movies by Snow, Resnais, the Straubs, or cinema of bodily postures, as battlefields between the spiritualization of Nature and the competition with Nature. Secondly, Deleuze establishes a few pages before the quote mentioned above that what distinguishes cinema from the never-ending loops of technically perfect images in control societies is its power of *preservation* (p. 73-74). But how could this power of preservation, as an aesthetic function that television and control apparatuses cannot recover, be compatible with cinema stopping being cinematic? Precisely through mannerism. As van Tuinen (2012) underlines in an essay devoted to mannerism between Daney and Deleuze, since television trivializes every content, cinema has no choice but to activate mannerist gestures to counteract this trivialization. Mannerism, van Tuinen continues following Daney, has nothing to do with "putting on airs (*faire des manières*)" but is a matter of "taking samples:" "We enter Mannerism when we take (from inside), and we leave Mannerism when we animate (from outside)" (Daney, 2009; quoted in van Tuinen, 2012, p. 65).[13] Mannerism, in the Daney-Deleuze dialogue, is thus a constructivist gesture that takes the materiality of sensation from within all kinds of (video, electronic, digital) images and preserves the violence of this material sensation in the heterogeneous medium of film. This preservation of the violence of sensation, which Deleuze equates with a faith in life against homogeneous representation or clichés, is what resists the flattening of perception operated by the normative function of television.[14]

Cinema's mannerist power of preservation is thus something that cannot be found but only "created" in the meaning Brecht and Benjamin give to construction. Preservation is the aesthetic and noetic supplement television eradicates from the perception exploration in its perfect adequation of technology and society (Deleuze,

13 On a side note, this definition of mannerism allows to rebut fake news and deepfakes, which are animation from the (ideological) outside rather than a reappropriation of images from the inside.

14 I am paraphrasing and adapting the arguments made by van Tuinen (2012, pp. 57-61).

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1995, p. 74). But why do we encounter so many reminiscences—from the sixteenth century Mannerist artists to Brecht and Benjamin—to analyze the crux of Deleuze's and Daney's dialogue about images in control societies? It is, once again, a matter of flashes in a moment of danger. As van Tuinen (2012) notes, Mannerism developed in the sixteenth century, at the time of a "spiritual catastrophe" connected to the first crisis of capitalism (p. 55). When faced with the spiritual catastrophe of television's technically perfect "new clinic for social engineering" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 77), Daney and Deleuze need the aesthetic and spiritual forces of mannerism to make cinema a still relevant weapon of resistance to the homogenization of images, ideas, and sensations operated by television. For the mannerism at stake here relies on the multiple manners each filmmaker, each viewer, must take samples from within the never-ending loop of images, extract the violence of sensation they hide, and reinvent for themselves the supplements, singularities, or constructions that escape social normativity and the ideology of the visible. Daney's concept of mannerism, Deleuze writes, "is particularly convincing," *because* of this heterogeneity, "once one understands how far all the various mannerisms are different, heterogeneous, above all how no common measure can be applied to them", this heterogeneity fighting forces of control's "new clinic for social engineering" (1995, p. 77). In a construction of my own, I argue that this mannerist reminiscence must be complemented with the construction called for by Brecht and Benjamin for several reasons. Firstly, although neither Daney nor Deleuze seemingly read the "Little History of Photography," the text helps precise the genealogy of television's social engineering with the question of the opacity of the visible raised at the decisive time of the 1930s. Secondly, Benjamin's reminiscence further politicizes Daney's and Deleuze's approaches, instead focused on individual reception, with his insistence on how images in control societies hide social upheavals; this politization is a way of activating the ideas of the three thinkers beyond critical description or desperation. Thirdly and most significantly, reading the Daney-Deleuze dialogue through a Benjaminian lens is particularly helpful regarding the impossibility of fighting clichés and technically perfect images at the sole level of cognitive knowledge. Thorough all of his texts, Benjamin never ceases to insist on the shocks technological mass media impose upon our nervous systems—an insight that supplements and completes Deleuze's and Daney's insistence on desire when thinking our relationship to images.

Conclusion: Shock and desire to reclaim the body space

Revisiting Deleuze's and Daney's dialogue about cinema and television can feel unsettling in the 2020s. When Deleuze (1989), in the middle of the 1980s, wrote about screens losing their verticality to conquer and reshape all of space, transforming

themselves into "table[s] of information, an opaque surface on which are inscribed 'data', information replacing nature" (p. 265), a contemporary reader might have found a sci-fi aspect to the phrasing. Today, Deleuze's quote seems to merely describe our daily, relentless interactions with "information feeds" on our numerous tactile screens. Stating as Deleuze does, that our eyes only meet "an opaque surface on which are inscribed 'data', information replacing nature" is not describing a dystopia for intellectual longing the good old days of modern (or classical) cinema; it is merely noticing that the main canals of diffusion and reception of images today are social devices of control and normalization, suppressing risk and desire and, consequently, any possibility to spiritualize Nature and constructing a world worth inhabiting. In a distinct but complementary fashion, Daney (2004), in an interview given at the beginning of the 1990s, worried that the majority of moviegoers at the time were children viewing American movies—and while some of these movies are not bad, he argues, "you cannot construct a world on the basis of an eight-year-old's desires." How could we not think today of the predominance of franchise movies such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or even of studio executives dreaming of replacing (human) writers with AI-generated scripts that could only feed the loop of fainted tropes and clichés? As mentioned above, resisting the numbing and bewildering effect of the infinite, sliding images produced by control societies cannot be done at the sole cognitive level; the battlefield is affective, full of the repressed violence of sensation social engineering works so hard to erase. One last Benjaminian reminiscence in the Daney-Deleuze dialogue may be useful here because it provokes a generative tension—or flash in a moment of danger.

At the end of his 1929 text "Surrealism," Benjamin (1999a) notes that the space of political action has become "the one hundred percent image space" (p. 217). If politics is a matter of images and if any political efficiency can only rely on this insertion into images, Benjamin continues, then the intelligentsia cannot politically accomplish anything by entrenching itself into contemplation. The image space cannot be fought at a distance; it is a battlefield requiring our full implication. Although this phrasing may sound abstract, Benjamin gives practical accounts of what it could mean. In "Surrealism," "Little History of photography," or "The Work of Art," Benjamin credits Surrealist artists with having understood for the first time the revolutionary power of images to politically and physically modify our eyes and turn our gaze upside down. The image space, he argues, is first and foremost a body space organized by technology (1999a, p. 217). As long as we let the dominant, technically perfect images organize our perception and bodies, we are stuck on the opaque table of data, what Benjamin calls the "prison-world" (2003, p. 265)—and it is telling that this prison-world presents itself, today, under the guise of superheroes' bodies both exceptionally apt and disconnected from the bodily training we undergo every day in factories, subways, malls, or in front of our computers. But if we construct images able to disconnect

the body space from its social engineering through technologies, our gaze is no more captive of its mass-mediatic environment. In his "Surrealism" text, Benjamin (1999a) particularly focuses on Surrealists' interest in the "outdated:" constructing images showing the misery of what was fashionable a few years earlier is a tool, he argues, for substituting a politically educated gaze on the past rather than a merely historical one (p. 210). According to Benjamin, the estrangement between the body space and its technological engineering, between humans and their technologically modified physis, is the key to any revolutionary discharge in history as/of perception (1999a, pp. 217-218). In that endeavor, technological devices were never doomed to be the enemy. As Benjamin underlines in the "Work of Art," the relentless succession of images in films produces a "physical shock effect" (2003, p. 267) that could act as a propaedeutic for the shocks characterizing contemporary existences at individual and historical levels (p. 281).

Benjamin's insistence on the need to accustom our nervous systems to the dangers of societies of shocks can be considered an ancestor to Daney's and Deleuze's concept of mannerism. Here again, we take samples from the inside of technological images to turn round their normalizing, social function and extract the violence of sensation to weaponize it against the numbing effect of social engineering. Benjamin's (pre-) mannerist plan would be as follows: first, we need constructions that separate bewilderment and contemplation in front of standardized, massive images from our bodily innervation; second, we need to weaponize our politically educated bodies and gazes inside the very technological space that made them captive and blank. This weaponization of our bodies and gazes can be better construed if we supplement it with the importance Deleuze and Daney give to the desiring relationship that ought to be established between our bodies, our minds, and images (desire and affects being mainly disregarded by Benjamin in "The Work of Art"). As Dowd (2010) highlights, Daney and Deleuze both share a conception of *cinéphilie* as "affective politics" (p. 44) that relies on the specific temporality and body space of cinema, which requires "the time for the 'maturation' of the film in the body and nervous system of a spectator in the dark" (Daney, 1993b; quoted by Dowd, 2010, p. 43). This individual, desiring maturation is key to weaponizing our gazes and bodies in a vast array of heterogenous mannerisms that cannot be computed by any algorithm. In the battlefield against social engineering, there is no formulaic mannerism, but continual reinventions of manners to turn round the shocks and violence muted by technically perfect images. Each and every one of us, whether filmmaker or spectator, has to perpetually redefine a desiring relation to images in the affective politics of the body space. The apparent frailty of desire as a weapon is also what makes it strong: only by ceaselessly multiplying the ways to turn round the shocks and violence of images at individual and collective levels can we reclaim the body space as the site of a mass-history as/of singular perception.

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