

TIME CAUGHT BY THE TAIL
FAST FORWARD
PAUSE

ESHRAT ERFANIAN

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Abstract

This thesis examines the effect of the new technology and the virtual time on the visual language, production and consumption of image, and in particular image of alterity.

By revisiting works of 1960s artists and their relationship to the technological growth in post WWII, I examine the anxious subjectivity evident in their work in order to draw parallel with contemporary works of art, and their relationship to the new technology and notion of time. Relying on key debates, thesis explores the Modernist aesthetic dislike for representing the image of worker as political subject in Fordist mode of production (which measured time in blocks of production and cycle of consumption). It then addresses works of art that attempt to bring back the image of worker as political subject in recent years but face the shift from Fordist to Post-Fordist (with the new technology, time that it takes to produce an idea or the immaterial labor can not be measured).

Therefore, the museums have become the new factories and viewers are producing unpaid immaterial labor (“meaning” making). With images readily available on Internet from the new global unrest, it is evident that there is a search for the image of the next political subject.

With this in mind, I examine the representation of the image of alterity through cinema and visual arts. I conclude that production of image of alterity, or image as evidence, is more of a factory production than a human production, with camera and new technology used by the military and Hollywood. Again relying on key debates, this thesis revisits the art produced by the Futurists and their obsession with the production of aerial images of cities, and their similarities to our everyday exposure to areal images (Google Earth) and how these images in general have shifted our view from a horizontal point of reference to earth, and stability, to a vertical and unstable position, which historically is associated with time of war and conflict.

Finally, this thesis explores the use of special effect in video editing, which turns aerial images of city of Tehran, into an intricate tapestry. This special effect signifies the similarities between baroque quality of Islamic art of 12th century and the fragmentation of image and information in our present time, urging us to re-examine the fast forward idea of technology and make an effort for a pause.

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Introduction¹

I grew up in the 1960s in Tehran. One vivid image I have from my childhood is of my mother taking me and my two younger brothers to a pilgrimage in the city of Mashhad, home to the most beautifully built Islamic shrine. The vast complex of this shrine contains the mausoleum of Imam Reza, the eighth of the twelve Imams (similar to the twelve apostles in Christianity), and it also holds the largest mosque in the world. Goharshad, wife of the king Shahrokh during the Timurid dynasty, built this complex in 1418. The interior walls of the grand mosque are adorned with tiny triangles of cut mirrors covering the walls and high ceilings, making the rooms dazzle under the lights of Milanese and Venetian chandeliers made of Murano glass, which were custom ordered by the late Shah of Iran in the 1950s.

Every Spring break, my mother used to take my two younger brothers and I to the grand mosque for her prayers and, since the chapels were crowded, she would leave the three of us in the grand hall for twenty minutes to wait for her. As a twelve year-old and the eldest, I was left in charge of baby-sitting my brothers. The first time I did this I was terrified, but I was able to come up with an idea to keep my very energetic six and eight year-old brothers busy and at the same time close to me in the crowded main hall filled with pilgrims from all over the world, including Western tourists. Soon I realized that the tiny jewel-like mirrors on the walls and ceilings reflected images in a broken and

¹ This introduction is dedicated to John Greyson, who enjoyed listening to this story, and gave me the idea of setting it up as a false introduction. He was held in Tora prison in Cairo for fifty days with no charges, while I was writing this.

overlapped manner, which made the images hard to recognize. The reflections, of course, corresponded to the movements of people in the grand hall. The challenge of looking up at the ceiling and trying to find the cluster of three tiny kids in the middle of the grand hall, waiting for their mother, was the game I came up with! The kaleidoscope effect of the mirrored ceiling and walls kept us busy and fixed in one place even after we heard the familiar, soothing voice of our mother amongst the hum of the strangers praying, asking us to hold her hand and leave. We had a hard time leaving the dazzling, baffling, larger-than-life mirrored world behind, only realizing years later that it was the largest kaleidoscope we would ever see in our lives.

Perhaps the reflected and overlapped images in that mosque, and the perplexed sensation I experienced as a child in their presence, made me interested in the effect of images and how we look at and see things. How far the distance between the real and the image is, and yet how fatefully we believe in the images and reflections.

This study questions our contemporary perception of space and time: the transformation of the former and the acceleration of the latter in this current stage of globalized capitalism and the rise of digital media, and how these have changed the stakes for politicized visual arts. A common theme across my works is the evolution of perceived time in the context of capitalist global production's impact on time, money, and image. With "image" here I am referring specifically to the image of the "Other", and thus I examine works of art as well as theories on the relationship between labor, politics, temporality, and images of alterity. I address the displacement of artists and workers by the global economy, which has led to the transformation of art museums into factories

that control and disseminate the production of signs and meaning—which is the main source of surplus value in what Franco “Bifo” Berardi calls *semiocapitalism*. In these new factories, technology offers innovative ways to see, perceive, and think about the world we live in and its socio-political and economic processes. These new factories also turn the spectators into providers of free labor and, in these spaces, political action has at times been reduced to this form of labor. My interest in the new globalized sense of space centres on the consequences of the change from a horizontal and centralized view of the world—brought about by Renaissance painting, which guided us in navigating the sea—to the single point perspective of a vertical, groundless view of the world, fostered by computer generated images and programs such as Google Earth.

Analyses of these issues provide a useful context for an overview of my artistic practice and contribute to an ongoing enquiry into the politics of images, and images of politics. In chapter one, I trace the origin of my work to a moment in the 1960s in which artists were inserting subjectivity into images in order to cope with the post-war environmental changes they were experiencing, as well as with the Post-Fordist division of time and its impact on the everyday. Along with photographic series by Bernd and Hilla Bechers that monumentalize industrial structures, the work of Robert Smithson and his photo-essay *Passaic New Jersey* (1967) is analyzed here, which sheds light on the fast growing American suburbs. I examine Smithson’s concerns for the transformation of landscape into environment in light of the massive industrialization and development of suburban America in the late 1960s. These concerns are also shared by Michael Angelo Antonioni, whose depiction of industrialization in a small town in *The Red Desert* (1964)

provides glimpses into the sea and its shifting boundaries with respect to the globalized movement of goods. Allan Sekula's 1995 *Fish Story* reminds us of the movement of an American invention, the shipping container, which measures time in the globalized economy.

In the aftermath of the uprisings in 1968 Paris, we also realize that the image of the industrial worker disappears from Modernist aesthetics and from politics as the figure that personifies social struggles. In chapter two, I address how Harun Farocki and Allan Sekula try to bring back this figure as a matter of politics. As we will see, even a Google technician loses his job by simply videotaping the coming and going of the night shift workers who scan books for Google from dusk until dawn. Chapter three directly addresses the relationship between images and power, specifically through state deployment of sophisticated imaging technologies. Finally, it is in taking up Laura U. Marks's historical account of Baroque art and its relation to both Islamic art and digitally generated images, in chapter four, that this study considers the relationship between state power and contemporary aesthetics.

The concluding section in chapter four of this paper is a discussion of conceptual and aesthetic decisions I have made for producing my dissertation installation *Time Caught by the Tail: Fast-Forward: Pause*. In parallel with the installation project, this study makes an attempt to reveal the politics of images by taking into account historical examples of the political images produced by artists in recent history, and seeking to understand how an image is able to allow the political subject to unfold.

In the art work, I make use of a triple split screen to put the subjectivity back in the hands of viewers by offering disjointed images, which enables the viewer to glide through or fold within the images, with her/his own reading. This implies opening up a space for contemplation; hence the *Pause*. With the addition of sound, this installation is composed of four elemental courses of time, linked and disassociated. Concerning the presence of the Other in this work, I have long juxtaposed seemingly disjointed images or text and image in my artistic practice, similar to the logic of the Chinese Emperor's encyclopedic list invented by Jorge Luis Borges – this taxonomy of animals collapses the age-old distinctions between Same and Other, a strategy that I emulate². In *Time Caught by the Tail*, sound creates the fourth image: it has in common with the machine a forward rhythm and thrust; the solid note of a drone aircraft transforms the readings of the visuals. The images unfold at a slow measured pace where visually and aurally they take us from mechanical perception of time to the virtual world where time and space fold and unfold, which is also the moment of “pause.” *Time Caught by the Tail* is the final expression of this study. It uses a kaleidoscope effect in editing, which works as a vortex to blend and overlap images and create a hypnotic “pause,” allowing the viewer to not only fold and unfold the images but also to reflect in the pause. I use the installation as a way of suggesting that the hypnotic, digitally generated images we are immersed in reflect

² Jorge Luis Borges famously invented a “certain Chinese encyclopedia” which, he asserts, divided all the beasts of the world into the following categories: 1: Those who belong to the Emperor. 2: Embalmed ones, 3: Those that are trained, 4: Suckling pigs, 5: Mermaids (or Sirens), 6: Fabulous ones, 7: Stray dogs, 8: Those that are included in this classification, 9: Those that tremble as if they were mad, 10: Innumerable ones, 11: Those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, 12: *Et cetera*, 13: Those that have just broken the flower vase, 14: Those that, at a distance, resemble flies, and the list goes on.

contemporary state power, in a similar way to hypnotic patterns in Islamic art of the twelfth century or the baroque images of Spanish and Italian art of the sixteenth century, as we will see in the discussion in chapter four.

CHAPTER 1

SPACE (ARCHAEOLOGY): AT THE LIMIT OF INDUSTRIAL TEMPORALITY

If grain elevators are secular cathedrals, is it because the spiritual has invaded the domain of the material, transforming dross into gold, or has the material appropriated the spiritual, reducing it to a hypocritical justification for the exploitation of the land and the pursuit of wealth?

Frank Gohlke, *Measure of Emptiness*³

The problem that I addressed in two earlier works, *Vestigium II* (2003) and *Start Dreaming* (2007), is time and its relationship to industrial capitalism and everyday life. *Vestigium II* is a series comprised of sixty-eight stills from video, in which I paired images of industrial landscape and manufacturing architecture from the city of Toronto with addresses of industrial and manufacturing sites in the Far and Middle East and Asia. *Start Dreaming* is a dual video installation with an audio component. One screen depicts real time footage of row houses in the city of Vaughan juxtaposed with shots of an interior courtyard from pre-WWII housing in Berlin, and the second screen depicts images of model cities made up of Bauhaus toy houses based on actual blueprints of ideal living arrangements. Filmed from an aerial perspective, the models spin rhythmically on their axis. Suddenly, the urban arrangements clumsily implode and fall apart, accompanied (or perhaps prompted) by unexpected quirky explosions. The audio component is a constant sound of rain and chirping birds, except for momentary interruptions by the sound of the explosions (composed of one hundred and twenty love songs digitally layered). In both series, *Vestigium II* and *Start Dreaming*, I pursue an interest in urban architecture in

³ Cited by Kim Sichel, *From Icon to Irony: German and American Industrial Photography*, Ex. Cat., (Boston: The University Art Gallery, 1995), p. 67/

relationship to the history and politics of the industrial revolution in the 20th century, with a specific focus on the element of time as defined by the acceleration of production that characterizes industrial and post-industrial capitalism and its effects on our daily life. These two bodies of work are highly informed by ways in which the problems of time, labour and everyday life were posed in the 1960s by Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Smithson, Bernd and Hilla Becher and more recently, Allan Sekula.

In the early 1950's the rebuilding of Europe and the construction of suburban America were the order of the day. Recovering from the aftermath of the Second World War and the depression, respectively, demanded new ways to define progress and modes of production, which inspired grand rebuilding and expansion. This time period represents the peak and the demise of the modern conception of time as inseparable from the notions of progress and the future. Around that time, and in contrast with artworks from the camp of socialism, Western Modernism rejected the representation of labour and of workers. In the 1950s and 1960s, high art recycled the forms and strategies of the earlier avant-gardes: collage, assemblage, readymade, the grid, monochrome painting and construction sculpture. Moreover, post-war art continued the vanguardist critique of the bourgeois notions of autonomous art and expressive artists, embracing everyday objects, transforming the function of artists, questioning the institution of art or attacking it anarchically. In a way, art from the 1950s and 1960s represents the failure to destroy the institution of art, as well as the institutionalization of the avant-garde, as art became embedded into life under the terms of mass capitalism while it came to be appropriated by

the culture industry.⁴ What interests me, however, is the manner in which subjectivity, time and labour related to industrial and post-industrial landscape were expressed in that era, in both art and cinema. Specifically, I am interested in how Robert Smithson, Bernd and Hilla Becher and Michelangelo Antonioni explored the industrial landscape – as a ruin as well as signifying the temporality inherent to capitalism in terms of the acceleration of time and its relationship to life. What also became a ruin was the 19th century idea that industrialization would bring progress and thus, in the 1960s, the future also collapsed. As we will see, time, subjectivity and capitalism are central to the work of Smithson, Becher and Antonioni; differently than in these artists, in Sekula, temporality is trapped in a perpetual present without futurity. This is because with globalization, capitalism had reached its material limit in terms of time: for example, the ocean both accelerates the passage of goods and yet limits it, as it will always take eight days for a cargo ship to cross the Atlantic – that cannot be accelerated further. But acceleration in capitalism now pertains to the realms of information and communication that constitute its immaterial form.

1.1 The Post-War Era: A Rapidly Changing Industrialized Landscape, the Disappearance of the Worker, Post-Fordism

In industrial capitalism, time is measured by blocks of production and cycles of consumption. In order to increase the capabilities of production, speeding up production by way of technological innovations and accelerating consumption cycles by way of the

⁴ Hal Foster, “What’s Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?” *October*, Vol. 70, The Duchamp Effect (Autumn 1994), pp. 5-32.

insertion of programmed obsolescence into commodities was necessary. In sum, capitalism is an ever-increasing acceleration of time and thus, it veers toward post-historicity. This is how, in a way, Fordism is the beginning of post-historical time – or the fragmentation of our sense of organic time conceived linearly.

The decade of the 1960s was the peak of Europe’s post-war reconstruction and industrialization processes. Taylorism “Scientific Management” had been implemented in the factories, giving leeway to a second phase of European industrialization. Taylorism implied maximized profit within the manufacturing sector, turning labour into an abstract force. These changes in post-war Europe were parallel to an unprecedented moment in North America of massive housing and infrastructure development. Fordism is said to be the era of mass consumption and production as the promise of political as well as economic democracy. Through the building of “an economy, culture, and politics around the promises of mass consumption,” according to political scientist Lizabeth Cohen, in the second half of the 20th century the ideals of the “good consumer” and the “good citizen” became intrinsic to each other.⁵ The scale of new residential construction was made possible by a mixed economy of private enterprise bolstered by government subsidy – in the form of mortgage guarantees with low interest rates and no down payment. This came along with the construction of highways from cities into the farmlands that were transformed overnight into vast suburban tract developments.

By many accounts, however, the factory system had taken away the autonomy of workers who had lost control of the means of production and patterns of work. Rigid

⁵ See: Hal Foster, “What’s Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?” *October*, Vol. 70, The Duchamp Effect (Autumn 1994)

working schedules, punch cards, the centralization of work and the introduction of specialized machinery and new techniques made workers feel that they had been systematically deskilled, dehumanized, mechanized and alienated, having further lost control over their own work. These working conditions partly prompted the May-June 1968 revolts, and according to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello⁶, opposition to the system and the crisis of authority were quickly neutralized. Further, the level of profitability was increased when firms began to reorganize the production process and wage contracts, introducing flexible labour systems, sub-contracting, team-working, multi-tasking and multi-skilling, ‘flat’ management etc.⁷ Capitalism re-invented itself, adopting the so-called Post-Fordist model characterized by flexible production and accumulation and a horizontal work hierarchy, and opening up toward cognitive or intellectual labour as well as an international division of labour, offshoring and outsourcing factory work.

The shifts prompted by these new forms of capitalism materialized first in the relationships between labour and landscape, insofar as factory work disappeared for the most part in the first world and factories were either left to ruin or became cultural spaces. Secondly, if during the 1960s machines were thought to alienate subjects from themselves, with the incipient dominance of immaterial capitalism, machines came to be considered prostheses to the workers. Third, the potential for political action and politics’ relationship to aesthetics had changed. As I already mentioned, in the 1960s the avant-

⁶ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, (Verso, 2007).

⁷ See: Sebastian Budgen, “A New ‘Spirit of Capitalism’”, *New Left Review* 1 (January-February 2000).

garde was institutionalized and later on, politicized struggles in the realm of culture focused on the visibility of minorities constituting the utopia in the 1990s of a multicultural, tolerant globalized world. These shifts caused the “disappearance” of the figure of the worker as a political category, giving way to the invisible and de-politicized cognitive or immaterial worker. Post-Fordist cognitive work (or intellectual labour) is characterized by the elaborations, transmission and manipulation of information. In Post-Fordism our understanding of technology is both as tool and prosthesis, man and machine are thought of as an integrated circuit of information.⁸ This is contrary to the Fordist vision of alienating machinery, and also to the earlier utopian vision of technology as carrying the potential for emancipation.

1.2 The Problem of the Representation of Labour, Time and Space Under Capitalism

Labour and time are two of the main components of the capitalist machine, yet in Western Modernism, the former disappeared iconographically and discursively. According to Benjamin Buchloh, a prohibition against the iconography of labour was imposed by the modernist aesthetic restriction against historical narrativity.⁹ Debatably, this “iconographic prohibition” comes from not only distaste for Socialist Realism (within the context of 1950s McCarthyism), but from the suspicion toward referentiality and its expulsion from the photographic image. Now foreign to a new conception of our

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Grant (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 51.

⁹ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Allan Sekula: Photography between Discourse and Document” *Fish Story*, Ex. Cat., (Rotterdam, Witte de With, 1994), p. 194.

relationship to machines, the figure of the “worker” as a political entity had disappeared by the 1960s and it was substituted by an exploration of the new forms of subjectivity that emerged in relationship to space and time. The ban on the representation of labour is also tied to the evident inadequateness of Historical Materialism (a view of history from the point of view of class struggle) to account for the new form of capitalism and post-historical temporality, which is embedded in the acceleration of the production and consumption process and cycles of the Fordist era.

Regarding time, in a key 2006 study art historian Pamela Lee discusses the way in which temporality was dealt with in art from the 1960s as a matter of chronophobia or chronophilia. In her account, artists influenced by George Kubler’s influential book on the progression of stylistic changes in art history titled *The Shape of Time, Remarks on the History of Things*, (1962) and Norbert Wiener’s notion of cybernetics,¹⁰ rejected linear art history and expressed anxiety about historical time. In Lee’s reading of Robert Smithson, his obsession with entropy stands symptomatically at odds with Norbert Wiener’s theory of cybernetics, that considers entropy as an “evil” to be avoided. The efforts to rethink linear time are linked, in Lee’s view, with an anxiety of historical time, which was rethought in the sixties either as “organic” or as systematic by way of systems

¹⁰ Cybernetics is a term that became highly popular in the 1960s to analyze a wide variety of phenomena. Norbert Wiener defined it as the study of communication and control in a system, bearing in mind that the system changes according to varying conditions by way of feedback. The notion of feedback precisely tries to avoid entropy, by enabling a system to assimilate and learn new behaviors with the introduction of new messages. In other words, feedback is a system conceived as a loop that conceives, admits and regulates its own decay and breakdown. See Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, (Hermann & Cie Editeurs, Paris, The Technology Press, Cambridge, Mass., John Wiley & Sons Inc., New York, 1948).

of taxonomy and serialization.¹¹ The crisis of historical time translates, in her account, into a “belated loop” in which, after Robert Smithson, “The fullness of the present is forever at a loss.”¹² In Lee’s reading, the question of futurity and belatedness in Smithson, through the presentation in his work of a horizon of accelerated technological entropy, begs a return to such problems in the present. Thus, for Lee, temporality becomes a matter of grappling with an actuality, coming to terms with a “presentness” that is forever at loss, which means that time is perceived as a perpetual present that never fulfills itself – like a looped action that repeats itself endlessly.

Taking into account Lee’s valuable insights on 1960s historical uncertainty, and Buchloh’s account of the evacuation of labour as a referent from aesthetics, I will argue that the concern with temporality in the 1960s is linked not only to the new form of relationships of production and consumption and a new post-vanguardist conception of machines, but also to a critical project of trying to come to terms with the post-war industrialized environment. This translates into a pessimistic view of technology and a suspicion of the notion of progress prompted by the new Fordist relationships of production. As we will see, the crisis of the narratives of historical development, evolution and progress are manifest in Robert Smithson’s notion of entropy described in

¹¹ This was influenced by Kubler’s ‘history’ of objects in *The Shape of Time, Remarks on The History of Things*, 1962 built around ‘problems’ and forms that come back. Pamela M.Lee, *Ultramodern*, Grey Room, No.2, (MIT Press. 2001), p.54

¹² Robert Smithsons, *The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 71

his photo-essay, *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967),¹³ and Bernd and Hilla Becher's note of melancholia in their photographic project. A comparison between Smithson's and the Bechers' projects, and bringing them into a relationship with Michelangelo Antonioni's 1964 film *The Red Desert*, sheds light into how in their work, the industrialized landscape signifies a kind of anxious subjectivity that is always out of sync with industrialized time. Arguably, Smithson's, the Bechers' and Antonioni's are attempts to resituate subjectivity beyond class and relationships of production, and within the new capitalistic spatio-temporality. This effort is inextricable from the Fordist transformation of "landscape" into environment. Environment is the temporalizing of space and the spatializing of time, linked to the Fordist political economy of the speeding up of production-consumption cycles. While Antonioni's film constitutes an attempt to depict the physical and mental malaise brought about industrialization, the way in which Smithson and the Bechers posit landscape as environment is an attempt to create new forms of subjectivation as forms of agency, in order to be able to be in sync with the new environment and going beyond reductive subjectivities of "alienated worker" or "suburban mass consumer."

1.3 Photo-Conceptualism: What or Whom is Obsolete?

Arguably, the transparency of the photographic medium as used by the Bechers and Smithson is used to mourn, analyze or psychologize the loss of the utopian view of technology and machines. According to Rosalind Krauss, art and photography came

¹³ Originally published in *Artforum* and reprinted in his *Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

together for the first time with the avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s. Once photography had left behind its “historicizing” capabilities (historical narration, as formulated above, after Buchloh), it reemerged in the 1960s as both an obsolete medium and as a theoretical object with redemptive possibilities. Krauss links the decadence of photography to its becoming-commodity, in having been swallowed by kitsch.¹⁴ Her assertion about photography as a commodity and thus as a ready-made is reminiscent of Smithson’s lines in *Passaic*:

I was controlled by the Instamatic (or what the rationalists call a camera). The glassy air of New Jersey defined the structural parts of the monument as I took snapshot after snapshot.¹⁵

For Smithson, both landscape and camera are symbiotic ready-mades; the landscape is self-manufactured (a Simulacrum), it is there to be “taken.” The environmental experience of the suburban flâneur (he refers to his promenade as an ‘Odyssey’) is like photographing a photograph, as he wrote: “When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel.”¹⁶ Here the “human hand” has been deprived of agency in making, imagining and imaging the surroundings – perhaps due to its being rendered obsolete by photography? The manufactured environment in Passaic stands at odds with another cartographic landscape that Smithson perceives beneath. This is evident when he describes the bridge as: “A

¹⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “A Note on Photography and the Simulacra”, October, Vol.31(Winter, 1984), p. 49-68

¹⁵ Robert Smithson, *A Tour of the Monuments in Passaic, New Jersey, The Collected Writings*, 1967 p. 291.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 70.

monument of dislocated directions.”¹⁷ In the face of the obsolescence of both the human hand and photography, and the landscape’s ready-made quality, the challenge becomes (not only for Smithson, but following Krauss, for the Bechers), how to return subjectivity and agency to photograph-making? This bearing in mind the familiar problems prompted by mechanical reproduction such as reproductibility, “archive fever,” photography’s resilient transparency and its “post-medium” condition.

Photography was rendered post-medium through its conceptualization by extricating the referent. Considering the photographic apparatus as a post-mediatic tool has allowed us to think of photographs as documents, and to categorize photographic practice: as inscription (documentation, factography), as imprint (document, Veronica’s veil, preserving the “this has been”), as a trace (as the trace of an idea that put a system into place), or as an index (of the real as a sign, naming, Duchamp’s pointing finger) and “evidence.” In Conceptual Art, the photographic “document” can further be the documentation of the circumstances of the production, in which the reader becomes active participant.¹⁸ Now visual documentation is history without a narrative, insofar as documentation needs an accompanying text, while the document holds the potential for historical validation. Taking this into account, in the 1960s, photography became part of the industrial culture, and documenting became complicit with the mythology of objectivity – as opposed to painting, which is expressive. By conceptualizing the photograph’s referent, artworks became “dematerialized” and text and contextual

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Alex Alberro, “At the Threshold of Art as Information,” in Alberro and Patricia Norvell, eds., *Recording Conceptual Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 2.

elements began to predominate. Following Alex Alberro, documentation almost became the substitute of the artistic process or was seen as its substitute, be it in the form of putting a system or a set of principles into place and allowing them to unfold, while extricated from the potential of writing history.¹⁹ In Conceptual photography moreover, historical validation is overridden by the fact that many conceptual works are without a concrete or material base: they are more like residual records.²⁰ In documenting-based categorization, serialization, taxonomization of records or traces – archaeology and mapping– came to substitute the linear process of accounting for history. In Smithson, “the photograph becomes an accessory to the event, singling out instances or moments in time and presenting those along with other deposits.”²¹ In Smithson and with the Bechers, photography has the role of the simulacrum, as “representation supplants what was previously known as reality.”²² Thus, photograph-making became the substitute or a sign (trace) of an action or a process, creating a tension between “sign” and the “real,” “documentation” and a non-historicizing narrative.

In Smithson, the relationship between subject, time and landscape produces photographic documentation of the landscape instantly, speedily, and equating the images’ “here and now” to the photographer’s. The “here and now” is mirrored in the poetic narrative of his text: “I saw,” “I walked.” In this manner, the “suburban flâneur” inserts himself subjectively in the landscape. Another strategy he uses is the index, by way of “naming” monuments. In his walk through the landscape the monuments of the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

²¹ Ibid, p. 8.

²² Ibid.

“ruins of the future” become evident to him (like ready-mades revealed themselves to Marcel Duchamp):

Nearby, on the riverbank, was an artificial crater that contained a pale limpid pond of water, and from the side of the crater protruded six large pipes that gushed the water of the pond into the river. This constituted a monumental fountain that suggested six horizontal smokestacks that seemed to be flooding the river with liquid smoke.²³

Ironically, making or naming monuments (which is a suspension in space and time of the ruins of the future, as we have seen) to “failed immortality” (the materials of the landscape resist decay), becomes the means for Smithson to return subjectivity and agency to the spectacularized (B-rated movies), alienating landscape (ready-made image). Naming (indexing) the monuments of the present-past-futurity, the simulacrum replaces reality, as Smithson’s glimpse of the world is enabled by photograph-making, not the other way around. Like factography, the photographic act is given back its potential of “writing of the world.” Extracting himself from “the real,” Smithson’s archaeology highlights the scientific and cartographic elements of photography and its relationship to charts, traces and map-making.

Bernd and Hilla Bechers’ work has been compared to the practice of archaeology. Specifically, Benjamin Buchloh, qualifies their project as “melancholic archaeology,” a project that is limited because it operates following a set of given rules. These rules, according to him, exclude the depiction of human presence and their conceptual principles of taxonomy and seriality limits them from depicting the structures of industrial

²³ Robert Smithson, *A Tour of the Monuments in Passaic, New Jersey*, The collected writings, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996. p. 71.

production in the present. Differently, however, we can put forward their conceptual principles not as restraining but as necessary: by monumentalizing industrial elements, they extricate them from historical time in order to stand at odds with the avant-garde celebration of technology.

Moreover, they place themselves in the ‘in between’ time of contemplation. In my view, their project is also tied to the “return” of subjectivity and agency to photography. The Bechers do so, first, by transforming reproduction itself (photography) and serialized units into statistics. They create a kind of archive of “vernacular industrialized architecture” of heterogeneous building types that are classified by reference to function, creating series of photographs of mine shafts, lime kilns, silos, cooling towers, blast furnaces, grain elevators, tipples, gasometers, etc. Secondly, they return subjectivity by photographing a new perception, by way of distancing from the older means of production. As Rosalind Krauss put it: “they take objects from their shells,” which is a perceptual act. Theirs is a contradictory experience, as the Bechers: while they situate themselves within the temporality of contemplation, they are also objective, even scientific, collectors.

The Bechers’ is a typology of the lost industrial utopia, of the machine’s obsolescence and an effort to render machines legible as archaeology of historical materialism, class and relations of production. The relationship between subject and environment that they lay forth is by inserting a “human hand” through self-imposed shooting assignments, by the establishment of categories of industrial ruins, and by being consistent with the uniformity in lighting and framing, among other things.

This effort to re-insert subjectivity and agency in the production process is inextricably tied to the changing of views of the machine after Hiroshima and the Holocaust, when it began to be seen as not only alienating but an instrument of death and destruction, as opposed to bringing progress and development. In other words, in the 1960s, the belief that technology would liberate humanity was no longer held and in a way, the Bechers mourn the loss of innocence of the emancipatory potential of technology. The classic avant-garde example in that context is Dziga Vertov's celebration of technology and speed in his *Man with a Movie Camera* from 1924, and the Russian and the Futurist avant-garde in general. Similarly, in the 1920s and 1930s, industrial process was compared to a kind of spiritual force in North America; this is evident in Charles Sheeler's photographs and in his comments that show his fascination with the cult of the machine: "...it may be true, as has been said, that factories are our substitute for religious expression."²⁴ This new ideological belief system, parallel to the notion that technology would emancipate humanity, would later collapse with the outcome of World War II. The industrialization of genocide that Hiroshima and the Holocaust represent prompted an aversion to the machine. Moreover, a perceived industrial alienation, during the reconstruction of Europe and the Cold War, resulted in mass demonstrations and factory strikes in the 1960's that manifested disappointment in the glory of the machine or industrialization and their promise of progress. "Progress" came under a huge question mark, and this is the context within which I would like to read the Bechers' project. It is clearly in dialogue with the Weimar photographic tradition of New Objectivity: their

²⁴ Kim Sichel, "German and American Industrial Photography," *From Icon to Irony* (University of Washington Press, 1995), p. 21.

work is an encyclopedia of a past universe; an impossible archive documented neutrally. It is photography at the degree zero, drawing attention to the objects themselves; without being self-reflexive, they are direct, or straight. The social, economical and historical significance of these monuments remain out of image field. The Bechers' objects are abstracted from the environment and acquire a basic function that mimics the logic of mechanical reproduction: seriality and repetition. They further present their photographs arranged in grids containing a category, or present the monuments individually yet in series, drawing attention to variations or to an ideal form.²⁵

With Bernd and Hilla Becher, photography is both a multiple without an original and carries a textual index (“grain elevator”) that allows for taxonomy and categorization. Furthermore, they create singularity by way of seriality, by isolating their “monuments” from context, landscape, and socio-historical conditions in order to point at an awareness of the passage of time and the new environmental conditions prompted by the new form of capitalism. Is the completion of their archive possible? In spite of Bernd Becher's death in 2006?

According to Walter Benjamin, because photography is a medium capable of infinitely reproducing itself, it had the potential of allowing art to overcome the religious aspect of the “aura” and thus be a truly modern medium. Although it was one of the media in which the Surrealists worked, it was not considered seriously as a main medium for art until the 1960s. As we have seen, artists explored its transparency, intentionality and its relationship with language, taking the medium to the limit. When I started to work

²⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

with video stills, I had decided that I was not interested in exploring the specificity of photography. Opposing Modernist sensibility, I sought to make time and movement the media of my work. In *Vestigium II*, I use video stills as opposed to photographs because the pixelated quality of the stills conveys a point of view that is in movement, since the low resolution and sequentiality of the images refer back to the origin of the stills in video. The format I used is eleven by eight inches, a letter size paper, and the entire series is printed in ink jet at home. Every time the series is installed in a show, it is reprinted again, because I present them by directly gluing them on the wall; by the end of the exhibition they are destroyed. The material fragility and ephemerality of *Vestigium II* seek to question the preciousness of documents, the partial knowledge that archives can convey, their status as fabricated truths, and the image's relationship to "truth" and its caption, how we consume archived information, etc. In other words, *Vestigium II* questions "facts" conveyed by photographs as well as our beliefs in the photographic image as bearing "truth," while highlighting the fact that the point of view of any image is always shifting. The series is a false archive of places and locations that lies in order to tell the truth.

In other words, *Vestigium II* is set up as a false archive, a collection of locations/addresses with images that are out of sync: the text does not match the image. The original documentation of actual locations is a four-hour long video. By deciding not to screen the video and only use the stills, I make an attempt to highlight the transient temporality of photography (insofar as the point of view – of the spectator looking at the image – is always shifting) through the low resolution and grainy quality of images.

These qualities are opposed to the crisp, sharp or determined images produced by large format cameras. Another strategy I use to make this false archive more poignant relies on the size of each image and in the way in which they are printed. Although the title “*Vestigium*” in Latin literally translates to “ruins,” since the addresses signify the livelihood of the manufacturing industries elsewhere, the juxtaposition of image and text becomes more of a puzzle rather than simply the depiction of ruins.

In my video installation *Start Dreaming*, the suburban environment is filmed as a single long shot and then projected in real time. Because there is little movement in the scene, it thus appears as virtually a still image, except with occasional wind blowing on the trees or a dog running randomly down the street. Also, since the camera’s position is a mix of fixed and hand-held, the movement of the camera makes the image snap out of being a still image, transforming itself into a moving image: this occasional jolt works as a reminder of the nature of the image as a time based medium.

1.4 Entropy and Melancholia against Acceleration and Progress

If we look at Smithson’s and Becher’s work within the social, economic and historical contexts, their concern with temporality is inextricable from a critical project of trying to deal with the new spatio-temporalized form of capitalism. Going against the time of production and consumption as well as making a leap outside of history, both the Bechers and Smithson suspend time in their work. The centrality of the notion of entropy (the duration of things in decay), in Robert Smithson’s *Passaic* photo-essay, purports a present projected as a future in ruins. With Bernd and Hilla Becher, we see a melancholic effort –

an immobile awareness of the passage of time – to record lost time. Moreover, Smithson and the Bechers share a strategy for extracting subjectivity from historical time, through ritualizing the act of photographing by transforming it into “monument-finding.” Rituals stand out of time because they suspend time to create spaces of remembrance and commemoration. For example, we take days off to commemorate certain events. Smithson and the Bechers’ works in question “stand out of time” since they consider their photographic works of industrial landscapes as “imperative monument-findings,” which is the principle of their photo-conceptual strategies. “Monument” means memorial, a commemoration, something venerated, an object that is placed to make a mark, a boundary, or a written document. “Monument” bears the connotation of death, inscription and spatio-temporalization - like photography, if we conceive photography as a death mask and thus as a monument. Following Roland Barthes and André Bazin, photography preserves the “this has been.” The “this has been” that monument-making and photograph-taking have in common enters into tension when we insert it in the logic of capitalistic progress and development. Smithson’s citation of Nabokov, “The future is but the obsolete in reverse,”²⁶ situates his “monument-making” project as an exploration of the futurity present in today’s ruins. Instead of causing us to remember the past, like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite or other kinds of rock, the new

²⁶ Robert Smithson, *A Tour of the Monuments in Passaic, New Jersey*, The collected writings, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996. P. 11.

monuments are made of artificial materials, plastic, chrome and electric light. They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages.²⁷

For Smithson, the past is not present in the landscape, “Just what passes for a future.” This is for him “a bottomless utopia, a place where the machines are idle.”²⁸ In other words, the future promised by the present suburban landscape, while it is being constructed, is an empty utopia; in the future the machines will have stopped working, and thus, the present is already a ruin. Referring to the fact that he was there on a Saturday and factories were closed, the bottomless Utopia is his criticism of suburbia, which he dismisses as “the perpetuation of the dream from B rated Hollywood movies.”²⁹ Thus, it can be said that for Smithson, capitalistic development is an eternal present maintained, first, by a form of production that fights against entropy and, secondly, through the production of simulacra of the (actual, present) ideal perpetuated by Hollywood. In this way, Smithson unveils the capitalistic reduction – through acceleration – of time: this acceleration collapses past and future into an objective present that eliminates decay by ignoring it and fighting against it. Smithson, moreover, as Pamela Lee stated, grappled with the problem that the fullness of the present is forever at a loss, flagging the crisis of history that is characteristic of late capitalism, situating it as a matter of futurity. This futurity is a present that speeds up toward technological entropy (obsolescence). In other words, his photographs of the idle construction sites in Passaic are the death masks of the future in the present: the image of obsolete machines fighting a

²⁷ Ibid, p. 70.

²⁸ Ibid. p.72

²⁹ Ibid. p.72

battle against organic entropy that is lost to begin with. For Smithson, this is tied to spectacle and to the industrialization of image production and consumption – the ideal of Hollywood, as noted above. If entropy is energy-drain because energy is more easily lost than obtained, then in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness. The “this has been” of making (naming) monuments and of taking photographs enters into contradiction with the logic of capitalism of acceleration, progress and development and with organic time as entropy in Smithson.

Differently, the Bechers’ record or document their own melancholic awareness of the (accelerated) passage of time. In their work, this is inseparable from the death of the future. While the capitalistic temporality of evolution and process are at odds with Smithson’s entropy, the Becher’s melancholia seeks to come to terms with the demise of the utopian ideology of betterment by way of technological progress.

1.5 Landscape, Industrialization and Subject

Smithson’s and the Bechers’ approach to industrialization and subjectivity somehow foreshadows what political scientist Gabriela Kütting recently defined as an “eco-holistic” perspective. This perspective displaces the historical materialist view of class relations. Integrating the environment – the temporalizing of space and the spatializing of time, the new living conditions brought about by industrialization, as I mentioned above – into the political economy and social analysis, it highlights the links between civilization and environmental degradation. Such a perspective is characterized by minding the historical

dimension of the relationships between the environment and society, and consumption and equality. Such a perspective further focuses on the relationship between economic and environmental governance outside of the sphere of institutions.³⁰ For Antonioni, the vanguard of social and environmental relations was to be observed in the industrialized city of Ravenna and in the port of Sardinia – the settings for *The Red Desert*. In his view, capitalism had radically transformed subjectivity. This statement highlights a non-moralizing and post-utopian environmental approach to industrialization in Ravenna, Italy, in *Red Desert*:

When I saw this landscape, I wanted to find out how the people who resided there lived. It was so violent that it had to have changed their morals, their feelings, their psychology. These people are without doubt the most advanced human beings in these areas. Their reactions will perhaps be ours if no accommodation occurs.³¹

Antonioni thus set out to explore in his film the effects of technological advances and scientific knowledge on labour, society and the environment. He envisioned the film as the blueprint for the unavoidable, ever-pervasive hyper-capitalist future. In his movie, industrialization purports anxiety and thus, a suspension of time: for example, Giuliana, the main character, is unable to be in sync with industrial time and landscape. With the character of Giuliana, Antonioni confronts us with the effort of a conscious organism to

³⁰ Gabriela Kütting, “Globalization and the Environment: Moving Beyond Neoliberal Institutionalism,” *International Journal of Peace studies*, Volume 9, Number 1 (Spring/Summer 2004). Available at: www.gmu.edu/academic/ijps/vol9_1/Kutting_91IJPS.pdf. Date Consulted: April 15, 2009.

³¹ Michelangelo Antonioni, quoted by Peter Brunette, “Red Desert” (1964), *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*, Cambridge Film Classics, (Cambridge, UK, 1998), p. 97.

adapt to a changed environment and to readjust the cognitive system to the industrial environment. These readjustments, as Franco Berardi (Bifo) has pointed out, generate pathologies of the psychic sphere (dyslexia, anxiety, apathy, panic, depression) and in social relations.³²

Antonioni in *The Red Desert*, like Smithson, indicates the sense of futurity that is embedded in the present. As we saw above, for him, the subjectivity of the inhabitants of industrialized Ravenna are the blueprints for the future. Furthermore, Antonioni does not hesitate to aestheticize factories and the industrial landscape, while Smithson's and the Bechers' ambivalence toward machines becomes evident in their tendency to "monumentalize" them through their own photo-conceptual strategies.

In Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, the subject of industrial landscape is conveyed through documentation. The "here and now" of the photographs accompanies the inscription of the text. Going around by bus and by foot in the desolate construction sites on a Saturday morning, he conveys the present-futurity of the post-industrial landscape of fossils-to-be. Smithson begins the text that accompanies his Passaic series by discussing Samuel F.B. Morse's "Allegorical Landscape," which he includes in the text as a mechanical reproduction. The landscape is picturesque and after the 17th century convention, it is populated with gothic ruins. In the landscape-image, the present contemplates the past melancholically. In contrast, in his rendering of the urbanizing environment, Smithson underscores the foundations of the future as already in ruins: entropy is thus made visible as an argument caught between the ideal of

³² Franco Berardi (Bifo) *After the Future*, (AK Press, CA, 2011)

development and an iconography of desolation. The “to-be-buried” (or instantaneous reification by way of the photographic act) of the urban landscape, which is under construction but ‘already in ruins’ in Smithson, contrasts with the “monumentalizing” aspect of the Bechers’ photographs of industrial ruins. Along similar lines, the plasticity and sensibility in the factories in Antonioni’s *Red Desert* lay forth the industrial landscape as inextricable from its own production by way of the act of looking. In *The Red Desert*, Antonioni mobilizes the relationships between sound, image and text in the diegetic space (the narrative) of the film as a way to explore the effects of the environment on the subject that fails to be in sync with industrial time. Antonioni’s movie was famously criticized for displacing alienation from one gender and class to another: from the male worker to an anxiety-ridden middle class housewife. Furthermore, the visible in the movie refuses to become a “sign” or a trace and manifests not as external landscape, but as an internalized symptom of illness in the character Giuliana, played by Monica Vitti. Antonioni further stated:

In the countryside around Ravenna, the horizon is dominated by factories, smokestacks and refineries. The beauty of that view is much more striking than the anonymous mass of pine trees, which you see from afar, all lined up in a row, the same colour.³³

Antonioni’s celebratory statement of industrial seriality and sameness in this interview stands at odds with his clear ambivalence to Italy’s rampant industrialization in the 1960s. In the film, he places Giuliana against a backdrop of threatening industrialization. The

³³ Michelangelo Antonioni, quoted by Peter Brunette, “Red Desert” (1964), *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*, Cambridge Film Classics, (Cambridge, UK, 1998), p. 92.

silhouettes of factories, the constant hum of production, steam pipes and a giant cargo ship ultimately drive Giuliana to schizophrenia. Her alienation is psychological (she can't sleep, she's neurotic or schizoid) and phenomenological: the factories threaten her because they are too big, almost sublime, and she cannot process what is around her. Consequently, Giuliana is always at odds with the landscape and disoriented spatially. Antonioni conveys this aurally, through the constant humming and electronic music that threaten the character's emotional stability and at times impede the viewer of the film to hear the dialogue between the characters. Antonioni also conveys the disorientation visually, as he presents to the spectator a confused visual field: the landscape is out of focus and thus the viewer has a hard time making up cohesive meaning between background and foreground. At other instances, the camera neglects the human characters and focuses on the industrial objects embedded in the landscape, conferring to them the status of characters (another device to destabilize subjectivity). Giuliana's failure to adapt to the new environment is evident when she behaves like an animal trying to survive, for example, by voraciously devouring a sandwich. A kind of reversion to a 'primitive' state, the character is de-subjectified, exceeding gender roles as well as the possibility of coherent language. She is unable to work, to have sex, to be a mother, to happen within.

When comparing *The Red Desert* to *Start Dreaming*, it is evident that while Antonioni takes great pains in aestheticizing the industrial landscape, the way in which the camera films the built environment in my piece is rather indifferent to what it frames. The image is produced in a similar way to a surveillance camera, there is no zoom in or zoom out. There is neither any focus on a particular subject or object, but as I mentioned,

we occasionally see the wind blowing on the trees or a dog running by. The image on the adjacent screen depicting the explosion of the models is of a stealth view, preying over the wooden housing models, similar to drone images, caving in on the target, threatening to destroy the living arrangement. It is the surveillance-like image here itself that becomes anxious, to convey fear. This is amplified by insertion of flashes of colors – red, yellow and orange – constituting an attempt to exaggerate the idea of enforced organization and the administration of fear in our lived environment. The closed-off street and neighbourhood in the imagery might suggest that this affects gated communities in particular, but it applies to the quality of all living spaces.

1.6 Globalization and Labour

In *Red Desert*, the ontological reality of the landscape and the epistemological relationship we have to it sketches out what I defined above as “environment.” The act of observation is equated to labour and to life, conjugating work, sight and life as the matter of the movement of capitalism:

Giuliana: It’s never still, never, never, never. I can’t look at the sea for long and not lose interest of what happens in land.

Corrado: At times I wonder if work is the effort we put into it. Don’t you think it’s ridiculous?

Giuliana: My eyes are wet, I think. What should I use my eyes for? To look at what?

Corrado: You wonder what to look at. I wonder how to live. Same thing.³⁴

³⁴ From a scene from *Red Desert*, Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaT46spgdwo&feature=related>. Date consulted: April 29, 2009.

Giuliana's emphasis on looking at the sea further foreshadows the next stage of capitalism: globalization, for which the medium and metaphor are the sea. While Giuliana attempts to escape Ravenna in a ship's cargo, she has a conversation with a sailor. Giuliana asks him if they are going somewhere and if she can go with them. He responds to her in Turkish – which she does not understand – and launches a monologue about separation, bodily numbness, alienation and her inability to adapt. As the character is in constant crisis, Giuliana becomes the allegory of the deterritorializing quality of capitalism, always in crisis and trapped in imminent failure. The permanent drive to adapt to the new conditions propitious for the extraction of surplus value leaves a red desert soaked in the blood of predation: “‘Desert’ maybe because there aren't very many oases left; ‘red’ because of blood. The bleeding, living desert, full of the flesh of men.”³⁵ In *The Red Desert*, the waterfront becomes the last breachable frontier, underscored by a discussion in another scene about workers being shipped to work in Patagonia – anticipating Post-Fordist forms of capitalist production such as outsourcing and offshoring. Along similar lines, for Allan Sekula the ocean is not only a metaphor for globalization, but the sign of the paradox of Late Capitalism: the sea enables and hinders at the same time the acceleration of capitalism; as I mentioned above, it “still takes eight days to cross the Atlantic.”³⁶

In an attempt to render legible the de-centralization and simultaneity of capitalism by pointing at the innovation of shipping companies, Sekula describes cargo movement as

³⁵ Michelangelo Antonioni's explanation about the title of the film, quoted by Peter Brunette, “Red Desert” (1964), *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*, Cambridge Film Classics, (Cambridge, UK, 1998), p. 97.

³⁶ Allan Sekula, *Fish Story*, p. 48.

the becoming-mobile or ship-likeness of factories, underscoring maritime space as opposed to the Liberal positioning of cyberspace as the locus of the global.³⁷ Sekula's maritime funeral of sorts in *Fish Story* (Smithson and Bechers' will remain earth-bound), mourns the demise of Painting, Socialism and the Sea,³⁸ by way of the totalizing aspect of the Oceanic that has taken over all aspects of life (including looking). Uncoincidentally, Giuliana's eyes are filled with water as Goethe's Faust is offered the total domination of the world by way of supremacy over the seas, linking visualization, the ocean and world domination.

Sekula's *Fish Story* is a critical project that goes against the modernist disappearance of class relationships and sheds light on the international division of labour in the Post-Fordist era of offshoring and out-sourcing. In Sekula, it is neither time, nor the ship nor the ocean but the moving box that becomes the image of the vampiric vitality of capitalism. Sekula sees this metaphor already in Smithson's monument to the Sandbox in the *Passaic* series, which is the "last monument, somehow doubled as an open grave." In Sekula, the moving box – which is the reference to shipping containers, an American invention from the 1950's – becomes the coffin of the fantasy of the bourgeoisie: a world of wealth without workers and of uninhibited flows of capital from afar, which Marx calls the dream of capitalism of "dead workers." According to Sekula, "the container is the very coffin of remote labour-power. And like the table in Marx's explanation of commodity fetishism, the coffin has learned to dance."³⁹

³⁷ Ibid, pp. 48-50.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 137.

1.7 Accelerated Temporality, the Machine, Environment and Politics in My Work

Time affects our behavior as communities and cultures. When the machine was external to the worker, it was potentially a tool to protest and to bring about socio-political change, insofar as workers could strike or sabotage factories in order to negotiate their demands. Nowadays, what is the relationship between our work tools and the potential for socio-political change? While we should not downplay the role of social media in the revolts against the current neoliberal system in the Middle East, the US, Spain, Greece, England and more recently in Brazil and Turkey, as Jodi Dean has stated, the digital media are a “quick fix.”⁴⁰ What social movements need is to confront the system with its failures, as the problems it has cannot be solved by people getting involved through marching onto the street. What is needed, on the one hand, are political solutions, and on the other, to counteract the acceleration of both our everyday lives (indistinguishable from producing), and the speed in which images circulate in the mass media and the internet.

Capitalism’s accelerated temporality is still key to how we live and work, and to how we perceive the images of change and violence that reach us. The time of images, the time of production, and the time to act are all relevant. In my art practice, I propose to pause the flux of images, our perception of images and the moving images themselves, as an antidote to acceleration and as a tool to reflect on life. I propose to

⁴⁰ See: Jodi Dean, “Occupy and UK Uncut: The Evolution of Activism,” *Guardian UK*, December 27, 2012. Available online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/27/occupy-uncut-evolution-activism>.

consider an alternative to “cinematic temporality,” which is time as an external extension of the subject; linear, universal time. Cinematic time has been constructed most often in a narrative, and after Godard, I attempt to devise strategies for disrupting this construction. In chapter four, I discuss in detail my dissertation installation, *Time Caught by the Tail: Fast Forward: Pause*. It employs a split screen with three images that change or repeat in a loop, allowing for different arrangements of any two image at a time; therefore the images take advantage of this fortuitous quality, which allows for the viewer to experience time, time that it takes to engage with the images, time for reflection and lingering. The three images operate on a parallax tandem that compels the viewer to create a montage. In *Time Caught by the Tail*, by juxtaposing images such as an aerial image of my sister’s residence in Tehran seen by Google earth with an image of a cargo train, unexpected time/space connections occur. This is an attempt to see if it is possible to create a moment of reflection in a non-narrative way. The focus point is not singular, like reflecting upon a freight train or a picture from Google earth. Rather, the act of reflection arises from the strange interrelationships of time and space that evoke the transformations of our perception of time and space in industrial and post-industrial capitalism. The image of the train symbolizes industrial time, whereas the Google earth image is a sign of the globalized temporality of instantaneity and acceleration that has permeated contemporary hyper-technologized wars.

Further, I propose a symbolic image, through images that manage to awaken memory and produce other images, such as the images of tiled domes from 16th century Iran. I combine moving images with stills, so that images become a pause in between

stasis and motion, between film stills as document and moving picture as fiction. And when all images turn into a kaleidoscope, this special effect takes the images into a permanent oscillation between referencing their source and their off-stage virtual presence. This is also an attempt to disrupt narrative, time and pre-digested editing, so that the viewer is able to do the montage on her/his own and derive a range of readings.

CHAPTER 2

POST-FORDIST WORK STRUGGLES, DOMESTICATION OF THE “OTHER,” THE MUSEUM FACTORY, THE ART SYSTEM AND THE CRISIS OF THE IMAGE

We know the link between cinema and industrial development in America. We know the production; art and literature reflect the capitalist breadth and construction of the United States of America. And we also know that American capitalism finds its sharpest expression in the American cinema.

Sergei Eisenstein, 1944.⁴¹

2.1 What is a Politicized Art Image?

Between 2009 and 2012 I collaborated with the art collective *Public Studio* and produced with them four video installations titled *Kino Pravda 3G* series, which were exhibited in Canada, NYC and the South Korea Biennale. In this series, I explored further the precarious relationship between seemingly still images and moving images. But the main thrust of the work was to base the videos on images of unrest and protests made available by smart phone camera technologies (3G) uploaded to YouTube. Bearing in mind that this new trend of uploading civilians’ images of unrest to the web had become an alternative to news from the mass media, we were interested in the fact that this was footage by the people, uploaded on YouTube for people. For us, this resonated with Dziga Vertov’s notion of news from the people for people, and his *Kino Pravda* series from 1922, which literally translates *film as truth*.⁴²

⁴¹ Sergei Eisenstein, “Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today”,(1944), Cited by Doyle Green from *The American Workers on Film: a critical history, 1909-1999*, (New York: McFarland, 2010), p 15.

⁴² We could make a reference to the rise of other collective activist video projects, for example, the Indie Media collective projects covering the G-20 protests of the decade,

Considering thus Vertov's format for the newsreel, my collaborators and I started collecting footage from YouTube and organizing it in a non-linear manner, thinking about the global nature of the uprisings and the protests instead of focusing on their countries of origin. Our interest in this project started with the role that the New Media played in Iran's Green Movement, when millions marched in silence in Tehran in the Summer of 2009 asking: "Where is my vote"? Therefore, the *Kino Pravda 3G* series contains and explores images of global struggles that transcend working class demands, such as the Gay movement in Russia, students against tuition hikes in England, the Arab Awakening, Iranian reformists, and so on. The fourth *Kino Pravda 3G* installation was inspired by the Quebec student protest which, in its duration and inspiration, has been compared by many to the May 1968 student protest in Paris. *Kino Pravda 3G* series brings attention to the main tool of organization in contemporary global social unrest: social networking as a tool for dissent and demand for justice. The role that the media played in the struggles determined also our political gestures, as some of the questions we asked in the making of this piece were: what are contemporary political figures if not workers; what is a political image made of; and, what is political art today. If much of the politics of the 20th century were framed by workers' struggle, why was it made invisible then and remains so today, since labour is characterized by precarity as unions have been systematically dismantled for the past thirty years?

post-Seattle; or more recently, the rise of Mosireen -- Since October 2011 Mosireen has published over 150 short documentaries on the revolution. They are all published without credits and can have between one and thirty people working on any one film. Mosireen's Youtube channel holds the record for most all-time views of a non-profit organization in Egypt with over 4 million total views since October 2011 (now they hold the world record since Jan 2012).

In order to elucidate this further, in this chapter, I will expand on and compare two video installations: *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* by Harun Farocki from 2006; and *Workers Leaving the Factory at the End of the Day Shift, General Dynamics, Convair, Division Aerospace Factory, San Diego, California*, by Allan Sekula, a projection of 25 slides from 1972. An analysis of both works will provide an understanding, on the one hand, of the iconography of industrial workers' struggles between 1909 and 1999 in Western visual history and its progressive disappearance, giving form to social struggles that go beyond labour politics. On the other hand, I will posit the relationship of the iconography of workers to cinema, specifically, mainstream Hollywood. As we will see, mainstream movies along with European cinema depicted a change in the mode of production from Fordism to post-Fordism, and science fiction movies imagined the idea of living with machines and ultimately being ruled by them – opposing the Modernist trope of the liberating myth of the machine. As we will see, both Farocki and Sekula acknowledge the history of working class struggle and its situation in the 1960s and 70s, its pivotal relationship to cinema and the fact that, by then, cinema (as Hollywood) had become a well established and ever-expanding industry for the production of images.

Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* was crucially commissioned as a century-of-cinema installation. Each of twelve monitors represents a clip from a key decade in the history of film. Thus the installation is a timeline of how shifting cultural ideologies changed over the course of the century. Farocki observed that his search for images of industrial workers in Hollywood film and television footage for

his commissioned installation ends with his realization that the representation of the working class in cinema is dreaded only “second to death.”⁴³ His starting point for this work was the Lumiere brothers’ famous 45-second sequence *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* in Lyon of 1895, the first film to be shown in public. Farocki wrote:

Over the past 12 months, I set myself the task of tracking down the theme of this film, workers leaving the workplace, in as many variants as possible. Examples were found in documentaries, industrial and propaganda films, newsreels, and features. I left out TV archives which offer an immeasurable number of references for any given keyword as well as the archives of cinema and television and advertising in which industrial work hardly ever occurs as a motif – commercial film’s dread of factory work is second only to that of death.⁴⁴

Farocki’s search into the theme of workers leaving the factory begins with TV and commercial cinema. Examples are: Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936), in which the character accepts the job at a conveyor belt but is dismissed during a strike; there is also Griffith’s dramatization of a strike in a modern version of *Intolerance* (1916), a right wing tale of workers’ protest and police repressing them right outside of the factory while an army of unemployed workers stand by ready to take their jobs. These are, however, isolated cases, and Farocki’s research proves the fact that labor, especially as a struggle, as a global, structural, economic issue as opposed to a moral, personal one or an accessory in a narrative, is mainly absent from Hollywood films and mainstream television.

⁴³ Harun Farocki *Working on the Site-Line*, Thomas Elsaesser ed., (Amsterdam: University Press, 2004), p. 237.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Moreover, almost a century after Griffith's *Intolerance*, Jonathan Beller proposes that cinema and its successor, the media (television, new digital audiovisual media) "brought the industrial revolution to the eye" and located the production of capital in the cerebral cortex. For Beller, the new digital technology has turned Hollywood into an ultimate capitalist mode of production:

Today, mass media functions as a de-territorialized factory, where the maintenance and retooling of transnational, trans-subjective infrastructure composed of human beings, factories, cottage industries, service sectors, as well as programmed software and electronic hardware is *essential* to the valorization of Capital. The cinematicity of objects is harnessed as an alternative force and used to intensify production. The cinema and its technological descendants extract the labor for the maintenance and calibration of the social totality. Without television, as well as fax-modems, telephones, computers and digitized, computerized money, production would grind to a halt. Each of these media burrows its way into the flesh of the global.⁴⁵

Beller takes up the analysis of what new media futurists call the "attention economy" within a Marxist approach to media production that considers *looking* as labour: within this new economy, not only do images produce themselves as commodities, but watching image-commodities is a work that creates value for those commodities. Farocki's dilemma and Beller's analysis reveal a double invisibilization operating in the media with regards to labour: while labour (especially as a struggle) is absent from the media, the media have become another form of (invisible, unpaid) labour: invisibilizing in turn, its workforce.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, (NH: Dartmouth Collage Press, 2006), p. 112.

Beller's notion of the new media as a source of spectators' (unpaid) work could be linked to the assertion made by the well known artist and theorist Hito Steyerl that museums have become factories for the mass production and consumption of political images, as new forms of control have seized the process of production of meaning conveyed by contemporary politicized art.

Acknowledging that politicized images are in crisis, I conclude that the politics of art, currently defined as a politics of exhibition (or institutional critique) resulting in abstract denunciations of capitalism intended to convey images of current struggles, to render minorities visible, or to denounce injustice, etc., needs to take into account the current relationship underpinning its production and validation as a discipline: the Art System. The Art System has been assuming more and more spectacularization as the basis of art making and art marketing, and has given academia the task of politicizing art. I will argue that critical theory has taken up the role of ideology in order to politicize art. Critical theory is a one-track formula without preference for free expression or political alternatives (a tendency to which Hito Steyerl's theoretical and practical work have proven to be an antidote). Further, if workers are no longer the privileged subjects of political struggles, and were substituted by the institutional task to render minorities visible under a politics of multiculturalism, is "bare life" or the wretched of the earth the new site for the political? Third, the struggles to visualize minorities in the 1980s accomplished in the 1990s the utopia of a multicultural, liberal and tolerant world. This utopia, however, was destroyed by the events of September 11, and now the "Other" has come back with a vengeance – as proven by the hardening of immigration laws in North

America and the new waves of right-wing racism and Islamophobia in Europe. As I will argue, politicized artwork needs to take into account the current Art System under global capital within an academic context. Following Sylvère Lotringer,⁴⁶ I will argue that contemporary art has appropriated theory, and this is tied to the market. That is to say, art has become an industry like any other and it has been used as a platform for cross-marketing whose autonomy is precisely sustained by theory.

2.2 *Workers Leaving The Factory: From Fordism to Post-Fordism*

Harun Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades* from 2006 is a twelve screen video-installation showing images of workers exiting from factories or their work place.⁴⁷ Aside from a few Hollywood sources, the images stem from archival and surveillance footage. The fact that factories or workers were rarely filmed by TV and film is perhaps due to the fact of space and movement limitations, as well as rigid work hours and stiff factory environments, as they are highly organized and administered places that leave no room for spontaneity or fiction to take place. Movies and TV programs always refer to the moments and life after the work place. Farocki points out that we should also

⁴⁶ Frieze Magazine No. 125 (September 2009) Available online: www.frieze.com/issue/article/intelligence_agency/ Similar views are shared by John Berger, Okwui Enwezor, and Documenta 13 curator Carolyn Christov Bakargiev

⁴⁷ The twelve screens include footages of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin, 1936), *Dancer in the Dark* (Lars von Trier, 2000), *Moscow, in 1912*, documentary footage. *Vehicle Barriers*' (commissioned by El Kostar, 1987), footage from the Ford facility in Detroit, 1926, Volkswagon in Emden, 1975, unnamed industrial establishment in Lyon, 1957, and from tens of fictional factories including from the films of D. W. Griffith, Charles Chaplin, Robert Siodmak and Fritz Lang. Farocki's endlessly curious work studies how this singular image of workers exiting the factory premises has been captured on film during its hundred years of existence.

take into account how surveillance cameras have recorded and stored thousands of hours of security footage to protect the factories' "private property," but hardly to create an image of workers at work (which is forbidden, as I discussed in chapter 1). The high tech sensors attached to surveillance cameras can recognize the difference in movement between a man climbing over a wall and a bird flying over, but this equipment has never actually recorded people at work. In other words, thousands of hours of archival cinema/surveillance cameras have recorded the motion of machines with little subject material. Farocki realizes that, "This addiction to (filming subject-less) motion is increasingly out of material, a phenomenon which could lead cinema into self-destruction."⁴⁸ The self-destruction of cinema announced by this fixation on subject-less movement, seems also to announce the disappearance of the workers' struggle once and for all.

Allan Sekula's 1972 piece titled *Workers Leaving the Factory at the End of the Day Shift, General Dynamics, Convair, Division Aerospace Factory*, is a slide show of 25 images drawn from 20 minutes of video shot illegally (that he managed to shoot before he was caught filming). The photographs depict workers leaving the aerospace factory industry in 1972, only four years after the students' and workers' uprisings in May 1968 in Paris. The fact that as a child Sekula experienced his father's unemployment as he was dismissed from an aerospace factory, brings these 25 slides to a semi-biographical view. But more importantly, the silent sequence of the images emphasizes the ritualized routine of the labour regime. This work is in direct relation to the Vietnam War, as the factory in question, General Dynamics, manufactures tanks and war aircraft. By 1972, Sekula had

⁴⁸ Ibid. , p. 238.

already gathered an incredible archive of related images; one could even argue that his career was dedicated to the image of workers. The workers' uprising in 1962, with a strong anti-Vietnam war feeling, led to May 1968 students' uprising in France. According to Keith Mann, there are three different versions of the duration of the 1968 protests and he believes that it actually started in 1962 with a miners' strike in Decazeville and ended in 1981 with the election of François Mitterrand.⁴⁹ It is possible that when Sekula took this footage he was actually aware of being in the middle of the struggle. More than three million industrial workers took part in the protests in France, one of the largest historical industrial workers' uprisings that the Western world had ever experienced.

In Antonioni's *The Red Desert* there are brief shots of the inside of a factory, but the camera focuses more on the Italian industrial wasteland, the pipes, turbines, chimneys, gates and the lines and curves of factories rather than on the workers – the only instance in which they appear is at the beginning, when Giuliana walks by a crowd of striking workers. Thus, labour itself is absent from the film. After Farocki's and Sekula's experiences of filming labour, showing workers in action inside a factory is either forbidden or feared, and thus not made at all. What is at stake in this lack of images of workers leaving factories, in strikes, inside the work place? In 2006, a white collar IT professional working for Google discovered that every time he left the Googleplex building, there was a silent crowd walking towards the building next to where his office was located. After some inquiries, he discovered that there is a night shift of blue-collar workers, mostly African-Americans and Latinos paid to scan images and books for

⁴⁹ Keith Mann, "A Revival of Labor and Social Protest Research in France," *International Labor and Working-class History*, No. 80. (Fall, 2011), p. 205.

Google. Their shift started at 5 PM and ended at 5AM. The anonymous white-collar worker borrows a video camera to record the comings and goings of workers for the night shifts. A few days later, after he shares the images with some of his colleagues, he is asked by his boss and the security company in charge of Google security to surrender the video camera and all copies of all the videos in his possession. After writing a letter justifying his actions – and apologizing, he is fired from Google. In a two-channel video he displays images of workers before the sunset arriving and before dawn leaving the factory. The voiceover is the tale of the filmmaker: security services asked him for the material he had filmed; he failed to provide them with a second copy, and we can assume this is the reason he is able to post the images online. The title of this video on YouTube is *Workers Leaving the Googelplex Complex*.⁵⁰ Again the question arises as to what is so threatening about banal images of factory workers?

Following Keith Mann, the history of the workers' uprising and its outcomes in France were taken very seriously, and even now, the slightest reference to its history is likely to be dampened.⁵¹ But, Mann argues, the vast labour struggle from that period was marginalized. The often-observed achievements from the 1968 movement included a twenty seven percent increase in minimum wage for industrial workers, seven percent for other workers, and legislation guaranteeing collective bargaining. In Mann's account of this recent history, within it also lies the beginning of women's struggle, occupying movements of both universities and factories by students and workers, and it is also a

⁵⁰ Available online:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0RTgOuo2k>

⁵¹ Keith Mann, "A Revival of Labor and Social Protest Research in France," *International Labor and Working-class History*, No. 80. (Fall, 2011), p. 204.

beginning of understanding the gender gap, identity politics and migrant workers (mostly brought in from Europe's former colonies). These struggles were also embedded in anti-consumerist culture of post-War France.

According to Michel Godard and Benjamin Halligan, Hollywood cinema took a significant role in the transformation of industrial Fordist production into the new IT technology, also known as the Post-Fordist mode of production, the mode of production that has predominated since the 1970s.⁵² They analyze science fiction and popular Hollywood cinema, for example, George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1972), which for them exemplifies the future projected as the time and space in which humans learn to live with robots, and ultimately declare war on machines. In their interpretation, outer space becomes the background to wars and destruction between the good and the bad, the dark (Sith) and the good side (Jedi), and the alien creatures are robots. This fantastical evolution from factory worker to spaceship worker, from the foreman speeding up the conveyor belt to the computer deciding to kill, ran roughly to the years of Western deindustrialization and the decline of the Western manufacturing sector, especially from the 1960s to the 1980s. Thus, the period in Hollywood film illustrated a surprisingly Fordist notion of work and work practices, taking place on the threshold of the transformation from Fordist to post-Fordist modes of production. The utopian "computer age" imagined in these films would further entrench old work practices and exploit the

⁵² Michel Godard and Benjamin Halligan, "Cinema, the post-Fordist Worker and Immaterial Labor: From Post-Hollywood to European Art Film" *The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 53, Nr 1. (Spring 20012), pp.172-189.

physical powers of the workers, therefore stripping inefficiencies out of the factory and prolonging its life indefinitely.⁵³

As we saw in the previous chapter, however, the workers' movement from the 1960s and 1970s prompted the disappearance of the worker from both the political and the aesthetic fields, in parallel. During that decade, the concept of biopolitics was coined which has in a way, substituted the political subjectivity of 'worker' and has been extremely influential on our current understanding of the new models of production. Nowadays, the main political figure is defined not from its working conditions (i.e., precarity, right to unionize, etc.), but from the point of view of citizenship and how states control the movement of goods, money and citizens. The term biopolitics was tentatively use by G W Harris in 1911 when the magazine *The New Age* was first published. Biopolitics refers to the style of government that regulates population through biopower. It is not clear whether Foucault knew about Harris's term or not, but he used the concept in his influential lectures in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The notion of biopower as developed by Michel Foucault differs from the classical understanding of power in a sovereign state; biopower refers to the mode of power that directly governs, manages and monitors life itself, considered in terms of population control and security regimes.⁵⁴ Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* built on the concept of biopolitics introduced by

⁵³ Ibid., p. 176.

⁵⁴ See: Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1973-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Hounndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Hounndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Foucault.⁵⁵ Agamben took further Foucault's idea of biopower, discussing it as the governance of what he calls *bare* or *naked* life⁵⁶. The philosopher borrowed the notion of *bare life* from Aristotle, but points out that it took on a significant particularity in modernity. His examples are of concentration camps and displacement in relation to refugees, who are either outside of or not covered under the term "human rights."⁵⁷ According to Agamben, the first concentration camps in Europe were built in order to control refugees, Jews and Gypsies who could be sent to extermination camps only after having been fully denationalized, that is, when their rights were no longer the rights of a citizen. This is when humans become sacred in the sense that the term used to have in Ancient Rome, that is, "doomed to death."⁵⁸ The governance of stateless populations and even more the administration of the camps is a clear example of biopower, that is, direct power over life itself. This extreme example by Agamben contrasts with Foucault's by limiting biopower to not only the extreme case, but also leaving no space for life or agency, dooming it only to death and, therefore, closed to the ideas of resistance and creativity.

More recently, Paolo Virno and Maurizio Lazzarato have proposed a division between biopower in Foucault's sense and a different sense of biopolitics that refers to

⁵⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer, Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: The University Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ Giorgio Agamben, "Form-of-Life" in *Radical Thought in Italy*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996), p 153. In some translations, Agamben's concept is translated as *naked life*, although it is more frequently known as *bare life*.

⁵⁷ Giorgio Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," in *Radical Thoughts in Italy*, publisher and year p. 162.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.163.

forms of resistance proper to regimes of biopower.⁵⁹ Their concept of biopolitics privileges resistance and creativity as opposed to the connotations of capture and control in the term *biopower* as Foucault used it. It also focuses on the sphere of work, considering the shift from the industrial or Fordist era to Post-fordist transformation.

The emphasis on biopolitics as a mode of production is especially usefully applied to cinema. Cinema as a procedure that coordinates and incorporates bodies in movement can be understood as biopolitical in a sense that it directly incorporates living processes, through a technical apparatus that records and then later projects them. In cinema, the process of capture is the means by which the living bodies of performers, technicians, and viewers become directly caught up in a specific mode of technical organization, even in the process of producing and consuming pleasure. Conflict between desire and creativity of bodies in cinema on one hand, and their capture in a technical apparatus on the other, is what Hardt and Negri call after Lazzarato, “immaterial labour.”⁶⁰ There is a misconception that immaterial labor denies the materiality of Post-Fordist production all together. The term “immaterial labour” is referred to as a shift from Fordist production, the factory assembly line of production, to the more service related professions, or the increasing dominance of producing information and communication rather than material products. Of course, all of this as practice is still fully material and corporeal, but it increasingly tends to produce intangible and virtual objects and operate via affective and

⁵⁹ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 22-41.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 290-294.

informatics modalities.⁶¹ Jonathan Beller addresses the relation between film and immaterial labor as he posits cinema not as one mode of production, but as the model of 20th century capitalist production in general, as in his view, cinema becomes the “capital of the 20th century.”⁶² This expression is evidently a reference to Walter Benjamin’s Paris as the capital of 19th century, a hegemonic position that Beller ascribes not to a place but what he calls the cinematic mode of production. Moreover, “cinema as the capital of the 20th century” replaces the idea of the consumption of industrial production in the Parisian arcades of the 19th century. As we saw above, for Beller, the cinematic production of attention becomes the site of 20th century capitalist production.

In Farocki’s installation, *Workers Leaving the Factory in Eleven Decades*, the spectator sees different scenarios of workers exiting the factories, and they literally appear to be walking right into the gallery/museum space, partly because the twelve TV screens are placed directly on the floor. According to Hito Steyerl, this is a great coincidence because she understands contemporary museums as yet another kind of factory, whose product is culture. The workers are the spectators who are negotiating, taking part in montage and meaning making within the installation space:

Cinema, which integrates the logic of Taylorist production and conveyor belt, now spreads the factory everywhere it travels. But this type of production is more intensive than the industrial one. The senses are drafted into production; the media capitalizes upon the aesthetics and imaginary practices of viewers.⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 292-293.

⁶² Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of Spectacle*, (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth Collage Press, 2006), p. 225.

⁶³ Hito Steyerl, “Is Museum a Factory?” *e-flux journal* Nr. 7 (June 2009) available online: www.e-flux.com/journal/is-a-museum-a-factory/.

Steyerl recalls *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*), Octavio Zetino and Fernando Solanas' 1968 Third Cinema Manifesto against colonialism. At every screening of the film, there was a banner to be hung that read: "Every spectator is either a coward or a traitor."⁶⁴ The gesture of placing the banner was meant to break down the relationship between the maker of the film and the consumer of the film, in order to create a "sphere of a political action." But more importantly, this film was made to be screened only in factories, as it addressed an audience mostly of industrial workers. According to Steyerl, since political films like this one are no longer screened in factories and only in white cubes of art galleries and museums, the museums now have turned into new factories producing merchandise for the cultural industries. Their product is immaterial (signs and affects) and their workers include, besides the staff, the audience.

If according to Farocki, and according to the white-collar worker from Google, factories as private properties and are set under heavy surveillance for their own protection, what are contemporary museums if they too, are under surveillance? Are they private or public spaces? Hito Steyerl's view on this concludes that visibility or invisibility accounts for whether the space is public or private. Again, she brings forth the fact that industrial factories are invisible spaces from the public and highly policed, and so nowadays are museums. Steyerl recounts a remark made by Jean-Luc Godard in 1972, stating that because filming is prohibited in factories, museums and airports, 80% of productive activity in France was rendered invisible and thus, "The exploiter does not

⁶⁴ Ibid.

show the exploitation of the exploited.”⁶⁵ This applies evidently today, as museums also prohibit filming or charge outrageous shooting fees. And not unlike work performed in industrial factories, which cannot be shown, most of the work on display in museums cannot be shown outside of its walls.⁶⁶ This is, in turn, the paradoxical nature of museums: a museum that claims to be showing labour but it is invisible, and cannot be shown, as “The labour performed there is just as publicly invisible as that of any sausage factory.”⁶⁷ In other words, the spectator-worker, has also disappeared in terms of having any agency or power.

But the nature of museums, like factories, is only visible in light of political cinema and its production. If political cinema is no longer exhibited in factories or work places, then what kind of space is activated in a museum space when workers are shown to be pouring in (as in Farocki’s installation)? According to Steyerl, if in a cinematic arrangement the spectator is a captive audience, in cinematic installations in museums they have the freedom to negotiate the space, move around and or abandon the space, and this makes them “traitors - traitors of the cinematic duration itself.”⁶⁸ What becomes then, of political cinema? For Steyerl it could become the screen through which viewers and cultural producers would leave the museum in its function as a “social factory,” a screen that needs to be newly invented, which as an image is currently missing.⁶⁹ In other words, factories producing meaning relentlessly, are blocking any possible exit and a true

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. no.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid

political image. In a manifesto of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement one of their demands was to occupy the art schools and museums.⁷⁰ Hito Steyerl posits the political image today as the exit for the workers (spectators) from the factory (of meaning making/ immaterial labor).

2.3 The Failure of the Domestication of the “Other” and How the “Other” Came Back with a Vengeance

The 1990s utopia of multiculturalism, based on the liberal idea of different cultures coexisting together in peace with equal rights, in a single country, was shattered by the events of the 9/11. A decade later, Barack Obama’s presidency has forcefully and violently expelled paperless immigrants from the US, mostly parents whose children have been left behind. A law has been passed recently by congress to legalize 11 million immigrants, while the Mexican-American border is militarized. Moreover, Germany, The Netherlands and England announced reforms in their immigration policies regarding Muslim immigrants, while declaring the failure of multiculturalism.⁷¹ Within the past decade, Hollywood has produced dozens of movies to reinforce the idea and the image of The Middle Eastern Muslim as fearful and an enemy to be reckoned with. *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Argo* are two examples of Hollywood movies depicting the new “Other”. Film director Kathryn Bigelow includes images of torture in the *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), which is portrayed as a legitimate means to search for Osama. In *Argo* (2013), Ben

⁷⁰ *Occupy Wall Street Manifesto* (May 2011) available online: <http://dailycaller.com/2011/10/17/occupy-wall-street-the-draft-manifesto/>.

⁷¹ “Merkel says German multiculturalism has failed”, BBC Online, 17th October, 2010.

Affleck manages to portray Iranians as fanatic Muslims who are impossible to relate to. In a recent article, Slavoj Zizek examines Bigelow's claim that by portraying torture one will understand that the act of torture also saves lives, that is, torture is the means to extract information in order to save lives. Bigelow wrote in a letter to the LA Times: "Those of us in the arts know that the depiction is not endorsement."⁷² In his response, Zizek presents a proposition to Bigelow:

Imagine a documentary that depicted the Holocaust in a cool, disinterested way as a big industrial-logistic operation, focusing on the technical problems involved (transport, disposal of the bodies, preventing panic among the prisoners to be gassed). Such a film would either embody a deeply immoral fascination with its topic, or it would count on the obscene neutrality of its style to engender dismay and horror in spectators. Where is Bigelow here?⁷³

Zizek further states that, without a shadow of a doubt, Bigelow is on the side of normalization of torture. The "Other", once to be domesticated to enable peaceful coexistence, has now returned with a vengeance as the enemy who deserves to be tortured. Zizek's examination of the image of torture in Bigelow's film goes beyond the politics of fighting terrorism, and claims that the normalization of torture in "Zero Dark Thirty" is a sign of the moral vacuum we are gradually approaching. "If there is any doubt about this, try to imagine a major Hollywood film depicting torture in a similar way 20 years ago. It is unthinkable."⁷⁴ Zizek is referring to the 1990's politics of multiculturalism and political correctness, the utopian approach to understanding differences.

⁷² Slavoj Zizek, "Zero Dark Thirty: Hollywood's gift to American Power", The Guardian, January 25, 2013.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Argo is a tale of an FBI agent sent to Iran to save six Americans who managed to escape the hostage crisis in 1979, are in hiding at the Canadian Ambassador's house in Tehran, and are in need of help to leave Iran. The movie portrays Iranians as constantly shaking fists in authoritarian extravaganzas. This is not only shameful to watch but it also slightly slips into comedy, since the plot dismisses historical facts in favor of spectacle. President Reagan not only negotiated the American hostages' release with the Revolutionary government in Iran, but also exchanged arms for their freedom. This of course is not depicted, and it is important to consider *Argo* within the light of historical inaccuracies. It is interesting that Affleck's decision to cast himself as Tony Mendez, a Mexican American, was criticized by Hispanics and by some film critics, who considered that in his role as Mendez, Affleck failed to convey a sense of the cultural dynamic behind the character he played. Most likely *Argo* was made to boost American public opinion, in the light of heavy economic losses Americans are enduring with no clear end to two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) in the Middle East.

2.4 The Art System: Theory as Medium and the Crisis of the Image

In an interview with Nina Powell for Frieze Magazine in October 2009, French theorist Sylvère Lotringer diagnosed the current situation of the "Art System" as being embedded in relationships drawn between art, the market and critical thinking.⁷⁵ Lotringer stated that academia has become a worldwide business, a money-making machine that the US has exported to the rest of the world like they have (violently or by other means) the concepts

⁷⁵ Frieze Magazine Nr. 125 (September 2009) Available online: www.frieze.com/issue/article/intelligence_agency/

of democracy and of the free market. In his assessment regarding the link between art, the market, theory and education, Lotringer wonders cynically, “Why should not art have a go in this education market – if it is already part of a market anyways?” Lotringer’s assessment not only conveys a sound diagnosis about the current conditions of artistic production which perhaps need to be taken into account by producers of art within academia. Lotringer also makes us wonder whether we should be cynical with him, give up the idea of the critical potential of art, and accept its subjection to the Culture Industry? And, since any critique of art’s and of artists’ complicity with institutions and the market appears to be futile, should we artists just ride the wave and make artistic work based on “applied theory”? Moreover, within academia, theory and the production of knowledge have become inextricable from artistic practice. Whereas perhaps in the 1970s and 80s it was progressive and fruitful to link critical theory and artistic practice, nowadays, via artists’ statements and critiques, artworks are demanded to demonstrate a “theoretical pedigree”, which tends to rend both art and theory perfunctory. Bearing this in mind, what are the consequences if we consider theory itself as having become the “medium” of art? Finally, what are the stakes if we oppose academic art production with recent trends prompting the collusion between contemporary art and the major industries of image-production (Hollywood, television) – which also relies on theory to validate itself?

According to Lotringer, because there are so many things that are happening at the same time and in different places in the world, the avant-garde in art has ceased to exist. The reason for this is because our current world is ruled by shallow individualism,

cynicism and rapacity, all of which are thriving in a complete vacuum that is ruled by market interests. Now when we think of the state of affairs in art, we realize that paradoxically, art has fulfilled its Dadaist avant-garde ideal insofar as it has become completely embedded into life by encompassing everything, including society. In other words, art has grabbed anything it can to use it for its own purposes: from recycling garbage, to forming communities, to investigating political issues and perfumes, to playing with television, anthropology, biology and technology.⁷⁶ This has allegedly given leeway, on the one hand, to the genre that we could call “research-art,” which along with theoretical elucidation, has become the operational basis for art education and art production within the academic domain. Moreover, the appropriation of theory by contemporary art and its having become the “medium” of the Artworld is tied for Lotringer to the market and constitutes a turning point in art production. Lotringer located this “theoretical turn in art” at the moment when a certain reception of Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulations* by the New York Artworld made itself evident. In his introduction to Baudrillard’s polemical response to the New York Artworld’s appropriation of his theoretical work, *The Conspiracy of Art* (1995), he wrote:

The year 1987 happened to be a real turning point for the New York Artworld, throngs of young artists were flooding the art market desperately seeking Cesar, a “master thinker”, a guru, anything really to peg their career on they took Jean Baudrillard’s book, *Simulations* for an aesthetic statement (while it was an anthropological diagnostic) and rushed to make it a template for their art.”⁷⁷

According to Lotringer, the power of theory lies in its potential to spare us disasters

⁷⁶ Examples are found in the work by Eduardo Kac, Thomas Hirshhorn, Raqs Media Collective, Santiago Sierra, etc.

⁷⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1995), p. 8.

because it can give us a handle on the way in which contemporary society operates, how we occupy it, where we are going and how we can possibly affect it. Once appropriated by the Artworld, however, theory (especially post-structuralism) started to play a role in the Artworld's need to project itself as something special separate from socio-economic relationships, and "since anything goes" in terms of the medium of art, as a way to distinguish art from other domains, like marketing. 1987 is the year when the art market began to move toward becoming an industry like any other.⁷⁸ Considering art's subsequent dependence on Capital the question becomes: What is special about art? When this question arises, it is when art needs theory so it can claim a special privilege and to be a space for critical thinking outside of "everything else" within the Capitalist system.

As indicated earlier, on the other hand, insofar as art has become an industry like any other, it has been used as a platform for cross-marketing whose autonomy is precisely sustained by theory. What I have in mind here is the June 2010 event overseen by former Deitch Projects director, Jeffrey Deitch in his opening function as the new director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Deitch's event is reminiscent of the work of the Italian video-artist Francesco Vezzoli, who in his work has collaborated with celebrities like Sharon Stone, Gore Vidal, Lady Gaga, etc. The video that resulted from the collaboration with Lady Gaga, interestingly enough, was filmed and launched at

⁷⁸ Although many commentators mark this shift around 1989, with the Berlin Wall/Tienamen Square becoming the demarcators for a turn in the art market's industrialization through the accelerated embrace of globalization via the biennales and art fairs.

MoCA LA in November 2009.⁷⁹ In it, Lady Gaga plays a Damien Hirst grand piano wearing a Prada outfit and a Frank Gehry hat, performing a real-fake spoiler of “the shortest musical you’ll ever see.” Along similar Vezzolian trans-mediatic lines, the event hosted by Deitch last June involved filming a series of scenes for the soap opera *General Hospital* at the museum. The actor James Franco had appeared in the show as the character “Franco,” a contemporary artist who has an exhibition at MoCA. Operating within a complex trans-institutional schema and for ambiguous conceptual reasons, the actor declared that his appearance in the show was a “guerrilla performance art piece” in an attempt to “smuggle conceptual art into middle-American living rooms.”

If already former gallerist Jeffrey Deitch’s appointment as the fundraiser and director of MoCA had erased the boundaries between directing museums, fund raising and selling art, Franco’s (and Vezzoli’s) cross-intervention in *General Hospital* and the Contemporary Artworld has too erased the boundaries between the culture and entertainment industries. (The intervention is, by the way, suspected to be authored by New York based artist Kalup Linzy, who also appeared in *General Hospital* in the episode in which Franco’s character had his show at MoCA). The event at MoCA, which consisted of taping Franco’s final *General Hospital* episodes, became a live meta-performance staged before an audience of invited art-world guests, the soap-opera camera crew and *General Hospital* fans. The *Artforum* reviewers (from their online “Scene and Heard” journal) described the massive image of Franco’s face that was projected all night in front of the museum collapsing the figure of the “actor-image” with the “contemporary

⁷⁹ Available here, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKONsZsFmHk>

artist-big brother character;” they also saw it as a Warholian encounter between pop culture and vanguard art. And we may add, all met at the mythical intersection of “celebrity” culture. New York Times reporter Randy Kennedy’s article on Deitch’s appointment to MoCA points at this fusion between Artworld and celebrity culture when he describes Deitch’s transfer from New York to Los Angeles:

[...] He has given up his New York apartment on the Upper East Side, a studio rental that became famous in the art world because it was so tiny, spartan and completely devoid of art. He now lives in a rambling Spanish revival house, also rented, that once belonged to Cary Grant in the trendy Los Feliz neighborhood here, with a kidney-shaped pool. From his balcony he can see the Hollywood sign to the north and, to the south, the tennis courts of his new neighbors, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.⁸⁰

Deitch’s transition from New York to Hollywood fantasy invites us to make an interesting opposition to characterize two current operative arenas of Contemporary Art: Hollywood (and thus, the celebrity and jet-set worlds) and academia. The problem is that in both realms, the Artworld has become a black hole that sucks up theory getting clogged up by half-truths; the half-truths part is also tied to the fact that artists and theorists have been replaced by publicists busy building their own careers within the Culture Industry, all the while falling short in creating theories and practices that could help us understand the world, diagnose the future or operate in communities at the local level (in spite of the Internet, which has the negative effect of ostracizing individuals and creating a state of “hyper-communication”). For these reasons, in Lotringer’s view, art has become unable to digest any more data, causing it to become ambivalent and indeterminate. Art’s ambivalence is due to its increased dissemination through the Internet and people’s

⁸⁰ Available online:
www.nytimes.com/2010/07/04/arts/design/04deitch.html?pagewanted=all&r=0.

mobility across the world. And even though Artworld figures like “independent curators” or “nomadic artists” may seem to embody or put into practice “radical” theoretical concepts (radical in the 1970s’!) such as “rhizomatic networks,” the Art System has reached a stage in which we cannot think of art as separate from the point of view of the Art System. The problem is that the Art System feeds upon itself like capitalism, absorbing critique for its own benefit and growth and so far, nothing has proven that the systemic elements of the Art System could be undermined. The consequence being: Art has metastasized in every possible direction it occupies. In this light, contemporary art, as Baudrillard foresaw almost twenty years ago, is not just insignificant but *null*: obsolete, worthless, without merit or effect. Furthermore:

Art has confiscated banality, waste and mediocrity to turn them into values and ideologies... The New Art Order [is all about] power and glamour, which have managed to entice, subdue and integrate any potential threat. Criticizing art, in fact, has become the royal way to an art career...⁸¹

Moreover, the ambivalence and indeterminateness of contemporary art have nothing to do with individual works of art and whether they are good or bad, or whether they possess “singularity” in the sense Thierry de Duve defines it – as art’s “trueness” which resides in aesthetic judgment. On the one hand, the indeterminateness of art is due to the change of scale in production, circulation and consumption of art at the international level. The Art System has taken monstrous proportions, having expanded exponentially since the 1980s. This situation makes us wonder as well, what does it mean to read Rosalind Krauss on the “post-medium condition” in Guatemala, Jacques Rancière on aesthetics and democracy in

⁸¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, (Semiotext(e), 2005), p.10.

Poland, Gayatri Spivak on the subaltern in Paris or Gilles Deleuze on the time-image in Johannesburg, beyond the homogenizing trend in global cultural production? After Baudrillard, contemporary art's ambiguous status is "half-way between a terrorist critique and de facto cultural integration."⁸² On the other hand, art's ambivalence may be linked to the fact that today, "art is free to morph everywhere, even into politics, as the aesthetization of politics isn't a sign of fascism anymore, nor is politicization of aesthetics a sign of radicalism for that matter; they are rather a means of integrating art into the economy, into the media."⁸³

The ability of art to "morph everywhere" diagnosed by Baudrillard somewhat echoes Rosalind Krauss' argument of art's "post-medium condition." According to her, this condition emerged from a critique of the corrupt alliance between the capitalist valorization logic and the modernist ideal of the autonomy of the artistic sphere. This critique relies therefore, on the "medium's performativity" on which much Conceptual art is based. This performativity is exemplified by Jeff Wall's appropriation of the light box format in advertising, Dan Graham's taking up of the genre of photo-reportage in *Homes for America* (1966-67) or Sophie Calle's use of arbitrariness to trigger her projects. The "post-medium condition" refers, moreover, not only to "non-medium specificity" but to the inclusion in art production of discourses, institutions, physical support structures and their technological implications as well as other factors that contribute to the individuation of works of art. Other examples of "post-mediatic artists" discussed as such by Krauss are: Marcel Broodthaers, Ed Ruscha, Christian Marclay, William Kentridge

⁸² Ibid., p. 11.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

and James Coleman.⁸⁴ For Krauss, artists who work within the “post-medium condition” contribute to the invention of new apparatuses or assemblages for art. We can oppose Krauss’ notion of the “post-medium” in art to Baudrillard’s negative assertion that art has “morphed everywhere.” Where can the line be drawn, between art’s autonomy as self-referentiality based not on the medium but on the creation of its own medium, and art becoming indistinguishable from other domains, insofar as the creation of new apparatuses or discourse and image-dispositifs is not exclusive to art?

Perhaps the midway point between Baudrillard’s negative take on contemporary art as “morphing everywhere” and thus as null, and Rosalind Krauss’s modernist vouching for a constant reinvention of the medium, is found in Thierry de Duve’s redefinition of medium-specificity based on his reading of Marcel Duchamp’s readymades. De Duve’s implies a notion of the medium that relies on the “found object” and on the indexical and thus nominalist operation of declaring, “this is art,” an address that invites the viewer to judge aesthetically with the artist whether “this is art.” De Duve however, noted in a lecture in 2007 that the situation of contemporary art has become that of a dubious “aesthetic liberalism.”⁸⁵ By this he means, not the pejorative and clichéd “anything goes” assessment in art since Duchamp but rather, an “anything is allowed liberalism” that is tied to today’s “post-ideological” cultural battles, a new form of “respect” based on the mutual recognition of differences and identities that implies: “I shall not infringe on your private domain so don’t mess up with mine.” De Duve’s

⁸⁴ Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage to the North Sea – Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (Cambridge Mass., The MIT Press, 1999).

⁸⁵ Thierry de Duve, “Theory and Practice,” *Frieze Art Fair*, October 2007; Podcast available at: www.friezeartfair.com/podcasts/...theory_practice_thierry_de_duve/.

diagnosis of the problem goes well beyond the current status of medium-lessness of art and displaces the question of the medium to the level of ideology. Because of this “aesthetic liberalism,” artworks tend to exacerbate idiosyncrasies, promoting a kind of fake singularity that one should expect of “true works of art.” In an era in which art mirrors the liberal claims of being post-ideological and in which politics mean politically correct visibility, the task at hand being to assert one’s or someone else’s identity, theories and critical thinking become not only the validating medium of art (within academia, the market, Hollywood) but also an alibi to art’s simulation of the political.

For Lotringer, the avant-garde is merely a Modernist concept whose elements can nonetheless still be applied to creative political groups and social movements (for instance, the Italian Autonomia movement from the 1970s). For him, these movements can be potentially opposed to the Art System insofar as they are an attempt to bring out the communal part of the creative social impulse that is absent from our world today. As much as the conceptualization of social movements – and their form of visibility – are at stake here, so is an urgent reconceptualization of the image in the intersecting domains of the academic, culture and entertainment industries, well beyond applying theory to art (or using theory as a justification of art, or to sell it) and the question of art’s autonomy, medium specificity or its medium-lessness.

The Hollywoodization of the Artworld (its spectacularization) was recently met, however, with resistance. In 2012, curator Paul Schimmel and MoCA board members Barbara Kruger and Catherine Opie, John Baldessari, Christopher Knight, and Jerry Saltz resigned from the board, amongst other board members. They questioned Jeffrey Deitch’s

celebrity-driven program and entertainment mentality in his attempt to create exhibitions that would dramatically increase attendance.⁸⁶ This resulted in Jeffrey Deitch's resignation.⁸⁷ Moreover, in a recent *Artforum* article Benjamin Buchloh denounced spectacularization as both the basis of contemporary art as well as of contemporary subjectivity. In this context, where is a true political image to be sought?⁸⁸

Farocki and Sekula both try to bring back the images of work and workers lost in the course of the 20th century – amongst other topics that I have already discussed, by the spectacularization of workers' struggles. In the 1979 Hollywood film, *Norma Rae*, Sally Field plays the part of a minimum-wage worker in a cotton mill who promotes efforts to unionize her factory, resulting in a victory for the union. 1979 also marks the beginning of the implementation of neoliberal reforms across the world, from Chile, Argentina and Mexico, to England, the U.S., and to the rest of the world. If *Norma Rae* could be said to be the last appearance of the worker on the screen, with the implementation of precarious working conditions by neoliberal policies, workers across the world are not likely to organize a political movement anytime soon.

In the light of Hito Steyerl's argument that museums contribute to the social factory of consumable signs, and Sylvère Lotringer's assessment of the spectacularization of contemporary art, I understood my collaboration with Public Studio, the *Kino Pravda*

⁸⁶ See Jori Finkel, "Kruger, Opie Call for More Transparency in MoCA Resignation email," *Los Angeles Times* online, July 15, 2012. Available online: www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-kruger-opie-call-for-greater-transparency-in-moca-resignation-letter20120714%2C0%2C925669.story

⁸⁷ Jerry Saults on the End of Jeffrey Deitch's Doomed MoCA Tenure: July 23, 2013. <http://www.vulture.com/2013/07/jeffrey-deitch-leaves-moca-jerry-saltz.html>

⁸⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, "Farewell to an Identity," *Artforum* (December 2012).

3G Series, as an attempt to seek the new political figures of the 21st century. In retrospect, the images of demonstrating masses uploaded on to YouTube did not crystallize into a political movement, and thus these images do not form a political figure. Yet, our experiment was an attempt to look for images outside of the realm of spectacle that describe political processes along the lines of Vertov's notion of true cinema: for the people and by the people. The quest is ongoing.

CHAPTER 3

POST-INDUSTRIAL TIME, IMAGES AND POWER IN THE AGE OF SPEED AND TOTAL WAR

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint and it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures of the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power”⁸⁹

The split screen video projection titled *Start Dreaming* that I produced in 2007 shows surveillance-like images of the city of Vaughn, one of the many suburbs of Toronto, intercalated with images of pre-World War II housing in Berlin. Subliminal flashes of colours that I inserted – red, yellow and orange – represent a state of high alert. On a second screen projected on another wall, we see rotating small-scale models of communities made up of Bauhaus toy housing.

For my dissertation artwork, I have taken further some of the theoretical and formal aspects of this installation. Here, I will elaborate on the political and theoretical premises of the images that can be seen on the second screen: the camera shows an image captured from an aerial point of view that is similar to a stealth camera view or an aerial shot. The image shows a model city made of wooden blocks arranged to mimic the *cul de*

⁸⁹ Foucault, Michel, “Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978”. Cited by Neil Balan in *Apprehending the Visible: Logistical Histories of War and the Aerial Reconnaissance Archive*, Dissertation, Concordia University, 2005. p. 71.

sac suburban structures that characterize the North American suburban living arrangement. In contrast to row houses in real suburbs, the models made of wood blocks are seemingly threatened, as the diving motion of the camera suggests a surreptitious view of the suburbs, associating the image with aerial photography and war. Eventually, the city models explode in an animated and an unrealistic fashion. Yet, although apparently destroyed, the houses maintain their shape as seen from above. This visual effect makes the explosions seem closer to an animation than to a realistic rendering, since the viewer has the knowledge that in real acts of destruction of cities there are casualties, charred matter and other ugly visuals associated with wars elsewhere, not at home.

The disjunction between the aerial views of the housing models and the images projected on the adjacent screen was intentionally made to confront our ultimate fear of destruction. The juxtaposition seeks to question the images of everyday life and living beings that are missing from actual aerial images of cities that are made possible by technologies such as drones, satellites and Google Earth. These imaging technologies are intrinsically linked to warfare. Since World War II (1939-1945), warfare is premised on attacking from far away. The last war that was fought making bodily contact and inside the battlefield before bare eyesight was the Great War (1914-1918). As British Historian Alexander Kinglake wrote:

...In such conditions, each separate gathering of English soldiery went on fighting its own little battle in happy and advantageous ignorant of the general state of the action; nay, even

very often in ignorance of the fact that any great conflict was raging.⁹⁰

WWII introduced the warfare technique of aerial surveillance, and thus aerial photography became necessary as “evidence.” In that sense, *Start Dreaming* is an expression and reflection about the links between surveillance and war in the era of information technology. This era has been debatably dominated by an impulse to render everything visible from any possible point of view for the sake of knowledge (as a form of power) and security – a more insidious form of power, which is intrinsically tied to fear as a form of social control.⁹¹ Moreover, the production of images – as signs – is at the center of the current Post-Fordist mode of immaterial production. In my work, I am interested, on the one hand, in exploring the stakes in the conjunction between this obsession with visibility (from the point of view of power) and the fact that images not only have inundated our everyday life and pass through at an ever-accelerated speed, but in our current stage of globalized capitalism, signs are the main source of surplus value. On the other hand, I am interested in elucidating how is it possible to “make an image” that is politicized when alterity has come to mean a tolerant, politically correct attitude towards different cultures, at a time when the financial crisis has made hyper-racism flourish, as we saw in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, I will argue that in times of war, aerial images pervade the popular culture imaginary. For instance, the Futurists were painting aerial images in the late 1910s

⁹⁰ Quoted by Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema, The Logistics of Perception*, (London: Verso, 1989), p.41

⁹¹ For an account of fear as a form of social control, specifically after September 11th see: Brian Massumi, “Fear (The spectrum said),” *positions* Spring 2005 13(1), pp. 31-48

and 1920s, when wartime aerial reconnaissance techniques and operations were being adapted to a range of civilian uses for urban planning, land use analysis, traffic control and a number of other various uses. “Photomosaic” was at the center of this practice. Photomosaic is a patchwork technique for overlapping aerial photographs that have been rectified and fit together so as to form a continuous survey of a territory, and it was initially developed during the WWI to provide coverage of fronts. Paul K. Saint-Amour argues that the civilian use of aerial surveillance eventually became a rhetorical language in advertising and other images that we confront daily. In Hito Steyerl’s view, this vertical view of the world and the earth not only belongs to the position of godly power, he who is able “to fly or float above the air”, but also is one that disorients both the viewer and the subject of the view. For instance, current routine drone surveillance of Gaza city and the Occupied Territories in Palestine, or in the Mexican-American border are constant reminders of the omnipresence of the enemy. In the case of Gaza, it embodies a constant threat to Hamas militia of “targeted assassinations.” With regards to the Mexican-American border, it preempts illegal immigrants from crossing, constantly announcing what will happen to them if they do. In both cases, the drones are a reminder to the civilians that “Big Brother” is watching them.

With the imaging satellite technologies that have contributed to enable a vision of the world from the point of view of Google Earth, we now have readily at our disposal images of bird’s eye views of cities. The availability of this new form of omnipresent visualization of the world is intrinsically tied with how technology has dramatically changed our relationship to time, speed, power and war. According to French theorist

Paul Virilio, the logistics of perception have been enhanced by means of technological advances (accelerated time, as I will further describe below) and it is owned by the position of power. He describes it in the following way in his interview with James Der Derian:

The logistics of perception began by encompassing immediate perception, which is to say, that of elevated sites, of the tower, of the telescope. War is waged from high points. The logistics of perception was from the start the geographic logistics of domination from an elevated site. Thus the “field of battle” which is also a “field of perception”- a theater of operation- will develop on the level of perception of the tower, of the fortified castle or on the level of perception of the bombardier.⁹²

Virilio’s notion of speed as a “matter of movement and circulation of information,”⁹³ that equals power’s “possession of a territory from an elevated site,”⁹⁴ equals a change in forms of seeing. Hito Steyerl translates these concepts to the logic of aerial images when she argues that our exposure to aerial images on a daily basis is a result of technological advances that serve the war machine.⁹⁵ According to her, in the financial crisis of recent years in the Western hemisphere, we are witnessing severe cutbacks in social services because the fear of losing our security is fueling the arms-race and inflated budgets for the armies. But perhaps more importantly, Steyerl argues that the aerial form of seeing the world destabilizes the viewer’s position. In other words, traditionally, the spectator

⁹² Paul Virilio and James Der Derian (Interview, 2004). “Future War: a Discussion with Paul Virilio” *Watson Institute* website from Brown University available online: <http://www.watsoninstitute.org/infopeace/vy2k/futurewar.cfm>.

⁹³ John Armitage, The Kosovo War took place in orbital space: Paul Virilio in conversation. *Ctheory*. October 18, 2000.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Hito Steyerl, “In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective,” *e-flux journal* (April 2011) Available online: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>.

perceived reality in relation to central perspective and a horizontal position (that is, linear perspective, which situates the viewer in a central and horizontal relationship to the object viewed). With aerial perspective, this relationship became wide and vertical, as if the viewer is either floating or falling above the object viewed. And since no one experiences either of these positions in daily life, below I will examine the implications of this new form of vision with regards to the war machine and to art of the early 20th century.

To conclude this chapter, I will also discuss the stakes in the “visual turn” diagnosed by WJT Mitchell, as informed by Virilio as well as by Jean Baudrillard’s notion of hyper-reality in a historical moment, considering the way in which images (and images of war) are rendered legible, as well as uncertain because they lack ground. As we will see, Post-Fordism and the current predominance of cognitive or immaterial production have given leeway to the fetishization of perception: not only is the spectator the worker producing and reproducing (more and more) meaning, but attention has been accelerated to the point of saturation. The discussion in this chapter will foreground the theoretical, political, and aesthetic-cognitive aspects of my dissertation artwork.

3.1 War, Images and Power

Paul Virilio lived his childhood through the horrors of WWII, and has written extensively about war, technology and speed. As a cultural theorist, he developed the “war model,” which refers to the modern city and society in general as being governed by the logic of speed due to technological advances. Virilio calls this form of governance “dromology.” Amongst many other ideas, he argues that military projects and technologies are what

drive history. In *War and Cinema*, he establishes the idea that “the history of battle is primarily the history of radically changing fields of perception.”⁹⁶ While he addresses the “logistics of perception” in the First and Second World Wars, the recent Gulf Wars prove this basic premise on the relationship between war, technology and changing fields of perception by means of the distinct military and perceptual technologies that were put to work in both wars. The most obvious example that comes to mind is the aerial images of Iraq right before the second Gulf War, which were used to support the claim that the trucks that could be seen on surveillance aerial images were proof of the transportation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. This turned out to be a fabricated truth that served as an excuse to invade Iraq in 2003. The perceptual logic has similarities and differences in each war.

Discussing the First Gulf War, Jean Baudrillard made a similar point as Virilio’s.⁹⁷ He wrote an article in the French newspaper *Libération* titled “The Gulf War did Not Take Place” (1991), referring to the way in which the war was being presented by the media. Because spectators could watch the war in real time on CNN, Baudrillard argued that the Gulf war did not really take place, but rather was an atrocity (before the eyes of millions of passive viewers), which had been *masqueraded* as a war – for their own entertainment. Moreover, using overwhelming air power, for the most part, the US army did not engage directly in combat with the Iraqi army. Thus, from the point of view of the West, no fighting (and very few casualties) really took place. Therefore, for Baudrillard,

⁹⁶ Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 7

⁹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, “The Gulf War Did Not Take Place” in Mark Poster (ed.) *Jean Baudrillard Selected Writings*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 231-253.

the Gulf War was distanced and cleansed by image technology to the point that it became a purely virtual war:

So war, when it has been turned into information, ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war, in some way symptomatic [...] everything which is turned into information becomes the object of endless speculation, the site of total uncertainty.⁹⁸

All that the spectator got to know about the war was in the form of propaganda imagery. Journalists were embedded within the army and their reports were impossible to distinguish from the experience of what was truly happening in the conflict, in their stylized, selective representation of “simulacra.” This vision of a waning reality, however, needs to be revised in the light of the latest developments in perceptual technology and urban warfare during the Second Gulf War.

It is important to recall that the First Gulf War had a completely different strategy towards perceptual logistics than the Vietnam War (1959-1975). In both wars, television played an important role. As it is well known, during the Vietnam war, photojournalism and television images changed the perception of war: images of the atrocities of napalm attacks and other horrific events established a turning point in public opinion which changed from seeing a “just war” to a “dirty war.” Having learnt from this, military perceptual logistics were quite different in the First Gulf War. In the intervening years television had become a 24-hour business and the Gulf war made CNN world famous for their 24-hour around-the-clock reporting. Television audiences worldwide were glued to their screens on which there was actually nothing much to see. Operations “Desert Storm” and “Desert Shield” were operations of a so-called “clean war” and the camera stayed at a

⁹⁸ Ibid.

distance to reiterate such a view of the war. In “clean war”, the images of the dead bodies, the smoke and blood were never filmed or broadcasted, the civilian misery unseen and unrepresented, and even the army casualties remained unreported. Therefore, Baudrillard characterized the First Gulf War as one in which the reported hostages took the places of combatants, and “hostage value” became synonymous with media simulation of war. The reporters become hostages to the army (since they are embedded within the army) and the viewer becomes hostage to the media (since the 24-hour around the clock news on war becomes inescapable):

We are all hostages of media intoxication, induced to believe in the war [...] and confined to the simulation of war as though confined to quarters. We are already all strategic hostages *in situ*; our site is the screen on which we are virtually bombarded day-by-day, even while serving as exchange value.⁹⁹

Comparing CNN to a stethoscope attached to the hypothetical heart of the war, Baudrillard denounces the spectacular logistics of a war that has no other object than deterrence and deception:

The war, along with fake and presumptive warriors, generals, experts and television presenters we see speculating about it all through the day, watches itself through a mirror: am I pretty enough, am I operational enough, am I specular enough, am I sophisticated enough to make an entry onto the historical stage?¹⁰⁰

Baudrillard concludes that our screens are invaded by an uncertainty, similar to that of the sea bird stranded on a beach in the Gulf, which remains a symbolic image of what we are confronting in front of our screens: an unintelligible event. We are left with the effects of

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

war, or the effects of the discourse of war, or the speculative strategic evaluations of opinion provided by the polls.

A parallel can be drawn between Baudrillard's assessment that the Gulf War did not take place and Virilio's discussion of the relationship between war and perception during the First and Second World Wars. Virilio focuses on cinema, and in his view, war, spectacle and propaganda are closely related: the first film studios in Germany were established during WWI, and color films multiply during WWII when "they were the direct result of acts of logistical piracy"¹⁰¹ in a competition between Agfa and Technicolor. Further, military observation techniques have historically led to creative cinematographic applications. The first battlefield observation balloon was used in 1794 during the French Revolution, and this indicates the close connection between the development of perceptual instruments and aviation. The military study of movement was inspired Jules Marey's – one of the founding fathers of the cinematograph – chronophotographic rifle camera. These are but a few examples that demonstrate that in the history of cinema, technology and war logistics are entangled in many ways: "aerial reconnaissance both tactical and strategic became chronophotographic and cinematographic;"¹⁰² film directors (D.W. Griffith) became war filmmakers, as war pilots (Howard Hawks) became filmmakers.

In his account of the Gulf War, Virilio posited war as a spectacle that can only take place in a stadium, as a show. Moreover, both Baudrillard and Virilio believe that the image had been dehumanized by a lack of both subjective eyes behind the camera as well

¹⁰¹ Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema*, Verso, 1989, p.8

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.17

to the human subject in front of the camera. Furthermore, for Virilio, the screen serves as a locus of the technological transformation of space and time, a metaphorical site of acceleration and disappearance. Anne Friedberg has argued, however, that in the course of his work, Virilio never makes a distinction between cinema, television and computer screens: “As Virilio’s screens have multiplied in global extension, distinctions between them disappear.”¹⁰³ In times of media convergence, this might perhaps not be such a strange conception of the screen. Films such as the controversial 2007 footage from Iraq posted by Wikileaks,¹⁰⁴ however, may suggest that different types of screens have different aesthetic, epistemological and ethical implications (as well as the channels in which they circulate). The footage shows American soldiers on the ground talking to a drone operator (somewhere in an American army base), asking him to get permission to shoot. The operator is looking at a small crowd of men gathered at an intersection being surveilled by soldiers sheltered on a rooftop. The drone operator is not sure what he is looking at, and before he is able to make sense of the images before his eyes, the soldiers start shooting. Later on, it was clarified that the soldiers had shot and killed unarmed Iraqi civilians.

3.2. Aerial Images, Google Earth and War

When almost a hundred years ago the Futurists claimed that the future would be glorious in the light of living with the machine, and promoted cars and the cult of speed, they

¹⁰³ Anne Friedberg, *Virilio’s Screen: The work of Metaphor in the Age of Technological Convergence*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 2004, p 183-193

¹⁰⁴ See the analysis of the video available online:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=20LkYvEZOZs

sought to mobilize social energies towards the acceleration of productivity.¹⁰⁵ At the beginning of the 20th century, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote the manifesto for the Italian Futurists. The manifesto was both an articulation and a celebration of speed, technology and the war machine, intended to mobilize what Franco “Bifo” Berardi refers to as “social energies” or enthusiasm, which was vehicled through an aesthetic that sought to encourage collective support for the war machine:

We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath...a roaring motorcar, which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace. (*Futurist Manifesto*, Clause 4)¹⁰⁶

The Futurists fantasized destruction and imagined war for a better future. They eventually joined the Fascist Party of Mussolini. Marinetti joined the army and after two years came back from the front line of war to witness the failure of Fascism. What is more important for us today, aside from considering the dangerous Futurist political interest in war and how they were aligned with the fascist ruling party in Italy, is their aesthetic interest in images and the art they produced. Berardi writes:

The Futurists’ manifesto declared the aesthetic value of speed. The myth of speed sustained the whole edifice of the imaginary of modernity and acceleration played a crucial role in the history of Capital, that is, the history of acceleration of labour time. Productivity is the growth factor of the accretion of relative surplus value determined by the speed of the productive gesture and intensification of its rhythm.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Franco (Bifo) Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody, Semiocapitalism and the pathologies of the post-alpha generation* (London: Minor compositions, 2009), p. 127.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted by Franco (Bifo) Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody, Semiocapitalism and the pathologies of the post-alpha generation* (London: Minor compositions, 2009), p.14.

¹⁰⁷ Franco (Bifo) Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, p. 127.

The “rhythm” Berardi mentions refers to the speed of productivity and, therefore, to the fact that power has its own representational logic within its visual culture, thereby dominating our everyday through images. The Futurists’ celebration of speed and glorification of war is best seen in their art. The sharp angular shapes in their paintings suggest speed. The aerial images they obsessively painted of cities from the bird’s eye view is best seen in paintings such as *Simultaneous Vision* by Umberto Boccioni from 1912, *Burning City* by Gerardo Dottori from 1926, *Impressions of Bombardment (Shrapnels and Grenades)* by Luigi Russolo from 1926, and *Nose Dive on the City* by Tullio Crali from 1939.

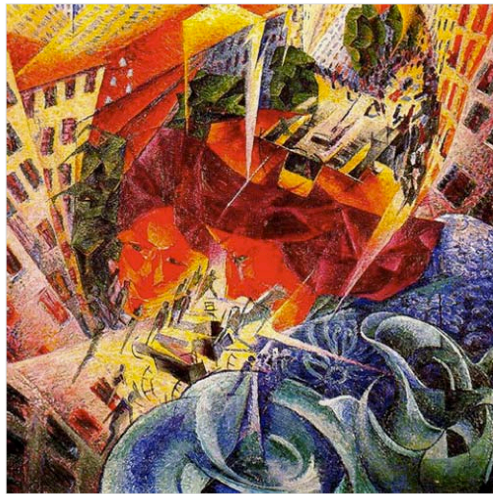
Nose Dive on the City [Tullio Crali, 1939]



Impressions of Bombardment (Shrapnels and Grenades) [Luigi Russolo, 1926]



Simultaneous Visions [Umberto Boccioni, 1912]





While we see aerial images as connected to war and its objectives of total dominance on the ground and total vision from the air, they beg the question of what position is being established for the viewer. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, according to Hito Steyerl, the central perspective which was established around the horizon line in the 14th century, which established its own regime of visual culture, is now changing to a bird's eye view which is establishing itself around the vertical line: the ground, above the ground and underground.¹⁰⁸

Arab scientist Abu al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (965-1040), also known as Alhazen, wrote a book of visual theory, *Kitab al-Manazir*, which speaks to the establishment of the horizon line as a stabilizing device. After 1200 it became available in Europe, in the form of the Latin translation of the book of *Optics*, and exerted a great influence, for example, on the work of 17th century scientists Johannes Kepler and Pierre de Fermat. It also

¹⁰⁸ Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen, In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment On Vertical Perspective*, (New York and Frankfurt: e-Flux Journal and Sternberg Press, 2012), p. 18.

brought great progress in experimental methods. Alhazan's research is on mirrors and reflective surfaces that are centered on optical illusion, spherical and symmetrical reflections. He made the important observation that the ratio between the angle of incidence and refraction does not remain constant, and investigated the magnifying power of a lens.¹⁰⁹ Steyerl observes that one of these visual experiments in Europe based on Alhazen's findings, which took place between the 13th and 14th centuries, resulted in linear perspective. In a painting by an Italian artist, Duccio's *Last Supper* from 1311, the multiple vanishing points are still evident. But by 1469, another Italian artist Paolo Uccello painted the *Miracle of the Desecrated Host*, which demonstrates perspective that is aligned to gather in one single vanishing point.

In *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Erwin Panofsky explains that linear perspective was invented based on scientific understanding theories. For one thing, the curvature of the earth is eliminated by linear perspective, since the actual horizon is not a straight line, but it is assumed to be for easier mathematical references in navigating the sea. He argues that the construction of linear perspective normalizes the position of the viewer as a one-eyed and static entity. Therefore, the construction of linear perspective is also based on an abstraction, since it does not correspond to subjective perception.¹¹⁰ Panofsky points out further:

Linear perspective instead, computes a mathematical, flattened, infinite continuous, and homogenous space, and declares it to be reality. Linear perspective creates the illusion of a quasi-natural

¹⁰⁹ Erik Hog, "650 years of Optics: From Alhazen to Fermat and Romer," contribution to the symposium: *400 Years of Telescopes* (October 2008), p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

view to the “outside”, as if the image plane was a window opening onto the “real” world. This is also the literal meaning of the Latin *perspectiva*: to see through.¹¹¹

In Steyerl’s account of the establishment of central perspective and its change to a vertical view of the ground, along with the predominance of the aerial view, she argues that if sea navigation in the 12th to 14th century was in need of establishing a stabilized viewer rather than a shaky one for practical reasons, therefore it is evident that since the early 1900s with the start of aviation and invention of planes we see paintings and images celebrating the bird’s eye view and assuming an unstable position for the viewer. This is a point of view that is a mix of a floating man’s view of the horizon line with that of a falling man’s view of the horizon line. Josef Kittinger, the first American astronaut who in the 1960s sky dived from an airplane in a free fall, describes his experience while falling thus: his right hand was losing its feeling and he was not feeling much with his body, only the feeling of weightlessness, and the horizon kept moving above, beneath or on the left or the right.¹¹² This to Steyerl, I would argue, would be another fragmented, multiplied and distorted view of the horizontal line.

In his stylized images, the Futurist artist Crali (1910-2000) combines speed, aerial views and the mechanics of aerial warfare (see image above). His paintings focus on depicting cosmopolitan large-scale cities from a bird’s eye view, and these cities are either about to be bombed, bombed, or on fire. The glorification of aerial assault on a city, using red, yellow and black, makes these images visually exciting, unconventional in their own

¹¹¹ Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, p. 18

¹¹² Joe Kittinger, describing his experience while skydiving, can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABdOo2wxwNY>

time and curious, since there is no gravity or a point of reference for the viewer's position. In examining the position of the viewer looking at Crali's 1939 painting *Nose Dive on the City*, although there is a lack of horizon line as a point of reference, the viewer is still able to see the back of the pilot's head. In other words, the viewer *is* the pilot, and can relate to the position of the bomber. In contrast, in Google Earth images, this point of reference has vanished – in other words, now the viewer's position is more like a floating man in free-fall, like a skydiver, as Steyerl notes. The floating position equals the bird's eye view, and free fall is a complicated one that makes the horizon line fragmented, multiplied and disorienting. She concludes that the combination of these two positions best describes the viewer's position when looking at Google Earth images today. The predominating viewer's position has implications with regards to surveillance (a new technology has been developed to market 'private' drones for making photographs),¹¹³ as well as to embedding war in our everyday lives: the contemporary viewer's sight is equated not only to the pilot's but also to the bomber's point of view, as we saw above, in the case of Crali's painting.

Steyerl, furthermore reminds us about Eyal Weizman's argument that there is a vertical line inherent to the Israeli architecture of occupation of Palestine. The ground, above the ground and the underground all become the front line of the conflict:

Occupation of the skies therefore acquires a critical importance, since most of the policing is done from the air. Various other technologies are mobilized to this effect: sensors aboard unmanned

¹¹³ See Chris Anderson, "Mexico: the New China" *New York Times*, January 27, 2013. Available online: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/27/opinion/sunday/the-tijuana-connection-a-template-for-growth.html?_r=0

air vehicles (UAVs), aerial reconnaissance jets, early warning Hawkeye planes, assault helicopters, an Earth-observational satellite, techniques of “hologrammatization.”¹¹⁴

What is at stake when our vision experiences the fragmented and multiplied views of the horizon line when faced with verticality? In her text, Steyerl encourages her readers to perform the following thought experiment that describes the experience of perceiving from the point of view of aerial images: “Imagine you are falling. But there is no ground.” The consequence of the prevailing of this point of view, she argues, is a condition of groundlessness.¹¹⁵ The problem is that from this standpoint, “we cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths.”¹¹⁶ Following Steyerl, what we are left with in this intermittent state of free fall, for both subjects and objects, are attempts at grounding. The problem is that this point of view feels like perfect stasis, which distorts our sense of orientation. The condition brought about by this point of view, therefore, is characterized by disorientation, loss of a stable horizon and departure from a stable paradigm of orientation. Moreover, Steyerl points out, this point of view is a “perfect metonymy for a more general verticalization of class relations in the context of an intensified class war from above.”¹¹⁷ In conclusion, the new views from above brought about by the military, entertainment and information screens,

¹¹⁴ Eyal Weizman, “The Politics of Verticality” Open Democracy (April 2002) available online: http://www.opendemocracy.net/ecology-politicsverticality/article_801.jsp.

¹¹⁵ Hito Steyerl, “In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective” e-flux journal, 2011. Available online: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/>

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

embody the view of societies that are free-falling into urban abysses, surveilled and policed, and who do not seem to notice because this point of view conveys the pleasant feeling of the suspension of a present in perfect stasis.

In this context, another problem that becomes pressing to address is the full development of a global tele-surveillance network that, following Virilio, is quickly overtaking the role formerly held by the mass media. The multiplication of over-exposure, the advent of universal real time (over the historical primacy of local time), and a fragmented present have given leeway to a new audiovisual continuum. This continuum is fed by online cameras, Google Earth, private drones and other imaging technologies intrinsically tied to the techniques of power. Virilio characterizes this new regime of control as “the ubiquity of the *live*,” having been brought about by the banalization and popularization of global surveillance (or as he put it: the democratization of voyeurism at a planetary scale).¹¹⁸

3.3 Hyper-Acceleration and Hyper-Attention

As we saw in chapter one, in the industrial revolution acceleration meant profit. In global capitalism, speed and immaterial labor – the predominating form of capitalist production in our era – are being translated into power. According to Berardi, it is the industrial relationship between time, work and value that is changed in globalized capitalism. The strong, muscular work of industrial production is no longer the main source of surplus value but the production of signs – and as it is discussed in chapter two, commodities are

¹¹⁸ Paul Virilio, “The Visual Crash,” *CTRL [SPACE] The Rhetorics of Power in the Age of Surveillance* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 108.

no longer material, but semiotic. The problem is that we do not know how much time is needed to produce an idea (as opposed to a commodity) and thus, since the production process has become semiotic, the relationship between time and work that was used as the measure of value has disappeared.¹¹⁹ In other words, the value of things can no longer be equated to the amount of time needed to produce them. Nixon's abolition thirty years ago of the gold standard and the Bretton Woods system (which fixed the relationship with different currencies in the world), and the disappearance of the measurement of the amount of time needed to produce a commodity, both mirror the dissolution of work and value into signs. Parallel to this, Baudrillard's already 30-year old work on the simulacrum tells us that signs have lost their referent and constitute hyper-reality. If with the Industrial Revolution the dominant simulacrum was the product, the series which can be propagated on an endless production line, in current times, the dominant simulacrum is the model, which by its nature already stands for endless reproducibility, and is itself already reproduced.¹²⁰ This is because Capital transforms everything into signs and thus, perception has been fetishized. In this sense, the media are giving shape to the world as they are controlled by global markets and by the military industrial complex, which have taken over the political powers. After Berardi, only violence and competition can decide the value of time. Hyper-acceleration is a crucial capitalist tool, because an increase in semio-capitalist productivity (which involves cognitive labor) implies the acceleration of

¹¹⁹ Franco Berardi (Bifo), "Time, Acceleration and Violence", *e-flux journal* #27 (September 2011), available online: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/time-acceleration-andviolence/>.

¹²⁰ See: Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations", *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: The University Press, 1998), pp. 166-184.

the environment from which information arrives in our brain (what Berardi calls the “info-sphere”).¹²¹ With acceleration, an increase of the images that we perceive daily has come, and at an ever-augmenting speed, the human nervous system is confronted with a proliferation of cognitive stimuli. Because attention cannot be accelerated, the attention economy is saturated and this is why we need more and more signs to buy less and less meaning.¹²²

Katherine Hayles has posed the problem of attention as a generational mutation. In her view, the media and networks, among other things, have changed the way in which we communicate, think and perceive. This is a problem of cognition that encompasses the contrast between deep attention and hyper-attention. For Hayles, deep attention is “the cognitive style traditionally associated with the humanities and it is characterized by concentrating on a single object for long periods, ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times.”¹²³ In contrast, hyper-attention “is characterized by switching focus rapidly among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom.”¹²⁴ For Hayles, both modes of attention have pros and cons. However, hyper-attention is generally regarded as defective behavior, since a shift towards it is prompted by the increasing role the media have in

¹²¹ Franco Berardi (Bifo), “Time, Acceleration and Violence”, *e-flux journal* #27 (September 2011), available online: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/time-acceleration-andviolence/>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ N. Katherine Hayles, “Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes” *Profession* 2007, p. 187.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

everyday environments.¹²⁵

The excess of cognitive stimulation is not only part of the current immaterial economy, but linked to acceleration in general. Over the past 25 years we have learned how to fly faster and faster at twice the speed of sound and now into outer space, so that virtual time has compressed both time and space. The consequence is that the present feels endless, the future appears impossible, memory has been lost, and there are fewer and fewer opportunities for reflection. Due to the acceleration of speed in digital age, our lives are more frequently set in fast-forward: we are compelled to produce, to work, to consume more, in contrast to other natural rhythms like wind, water and other kinds of fluxes existing in nature. Bearing this in mind, two questions that I had in mind while conceptualizing my dissertation artwork are: How is time experienced through the heightened awareness of digital communication both aurally and visually? What are the effects of the compression of space and time on the experience of the visual arts?

3.4 Multiplicity of Coexisting Images

Virilio declares that “people no longer believe their eyes,” as faith in perception has been enslaved to faith in the technical, because technology nowadays has substituted perception, which in turn, registers the disappearance of reality.¹²⁶ Moreover, the substitution of perception (by means of Virtual Reality, the Internet) has been developed by the military-industrial complex, from its original contribution to the speeding up of the

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

¹²⁶ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (2006), p. 69. publicaiton

many ways of representing the world, to the point of having eclipsed the real.¹²⁷ The substitution of perception implies that presence is “presence only at a distance” or tele-presence, which is established across the widest possible gap, stretching out to the other side of the world. In Virilio’s view, these substitutes of perception convey meta-geophysical reality that strictly regulates virtual reality monopolizing the greater part of economic activity of the nations.¹²⁸

Bearing this in mind, WTJ Mitchell’s diagnosis of a “pictorial turn” in the early 1990s allows me to recuperate image-making in my practice. Mitchell characterized a culture dominated by visual images at a time in which modern thought reoriented itself around visual paradigms that seemed to threaten discursive mastery. Putting aside concerns about the technologies for conveying images and how they have become credible substitutes for perception, Mitchell argues that this turn is not “a return to naïve mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial ‘presence,’” but rather, “a post-linguistic, post-semiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality.”¹²⁹ In this context, the “pictorial turn” implies further the positing of the notion of *spectatorship* (which implies the look, the gaze, the glance, observation, surveillance, visual pleasure) to a problem akin to forms of reading (deciphering, decoding, interpretation), acknowledging the lack of correspondence between the models

¹²⁷ Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 2-3.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 9.

¹²⁹ WTJ Mitchell, “The Pictorial Turn,” *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University Press, 1994), p. 15.

of “visual literacy” and “textuality.”¹³⁰ This shift raises the questions: How have the predominance of visual culture and the omnipresence of photography and moving images affected the way in which we perceive and remember? How has they affected our experience of images? Debatably, the “visual turn” coincides with what Serge Daney termed the “third function” of the image, defined by him as a set of relations in which the issue is no longer what we can see behind the image (representation, presupposed by perspective, “the window behind which...”), nor how can we see the image in itself (contextually: what is the surface of the image once the image has been deconstructed?), but how “we can find a way into it, how we can slip in, because each image now slips across other images.”¹³¹

For Daney as for Mitchell, the visual is “at once reading and seeing: it’s seeing what you’re supposed to read, an optical verification and a procedure which calls for no other than reception.”¹³² For Daney, however, the visual does not make an image, and the essential condition of the image is alterity, a “way of seeing.”¹³³ “Image” is “what still holds out against an experience of vision and of the ‘visual.’”¹³⁴ An *Image* (in Daney’s sense) is the field of vision constituted by images that are constantly slipping into one another. What happens when this slipping of images into one another is accelerated,

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Serge Daney quoted by Gilles Deleuze in his “Letter to Serge Daney: Optimism, Pessimism and Travel,” *Negotiations*, 1972-1990 transl. Martin Joughin, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) pp. 68-79. Deleuze is quoting Daney’s 1983 book, *La Rampe*.

¹³² Serge Daney, “Before and After the Image” printed in the *Dokumenta X Ex. Cat.*, available online: http://home.earthlink.net/~steevee/Daney_before.html. Date consulted: September 6, 2011.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

immediate and the images are so many that we may be overwhelmed? One could draw a link to Lotringer's and Baudrillard's indictments against the mercantilization of the artworld. In this context, however, I consider the production of images to be already industrialized, since the condition of their circulation is their massification. Here the mass of images refers to "spectacle," and an Image is something with the ability to stand out, both from "cultural" as well as "commercial" images.

How is it possible to *Image*, when alterity has come to mean a tolerant, politically correct attitude towards different cultures, at a time when the financial crisis has made hyper-racism flourish rapidly in Europe and North America? According to Berardi again, the organism's exposure to the increasing mass of neuron stimuli has thinned out our sensibility, and thus our capacity for empathy. In his view, one of the consequences of communication through the new technologies is that symbolic exchange amongst human beings is elaborated without empathy, because it is difficult to perceive the existence of the body of the Other, as "in order to experience the other as a sensorial body, you need time, time to caress and smell."¹³⁵ As we will see in the next chapter, my thesis artwork is an attempt to implement strategies to create images by giving them back their flesh, their memory and the possibility to paint (or imagine) a future. There is an image of cargo trains in a constant motion, post-industrial landscapes, and the suburban structures built or imagined, all moving in a similar speed and direction to make it possible to see and remember. The duration of each image combined with repetitions and juxtapositions, and the limited selection of images, makes the vortex of the kaleidoscope effect affectively

¹³⁵ Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009), p. 84.

work as a point in which all images either blend or disappear, a point in which the viewer is given a chance to reflect – or Pause.

CHAPTER 4

TIME CAUGHT BY THE TAIL: FAST FORWARD: PAUSE: EDITING, EFFECTS, INFLUENCES

The relation of the thing to the thing signified is being destroyed; the game of exchanges between signs is multiplied by itself and for itself. And the increasing complication demands that there should be more signs for signs... we have lost all poetry of the universe. Money, mechanization, algebra, are the three monsters of contemporary civilization. Complete analogy. Algebra and money are the essential levelers.

Simone Weil¹³⁶

4.1 Time Caught by the Tail: Fast Forward: Pause

Time Caught by the Tail: Fast Forward: Pause is a three-split-screen video projection that is exhibited in a loop as a gallery installation. Besides showing a collection of images assembled on the screens, their editing pays attention to the speed of the moving images and of their juxtaposition. My interest in the question of speed stems from a consideration of the speed with which we consume images that flicker in front of our eyes on a daily basis. The constant acceleration of everything promises a better (or apocalyptic) “future,” keeping the “present” hostage to a perpetual state of conflict, while at the same time, the “other” as enemy is constructed, deconstructed and constructed again. In *Time Caught by the Tail*, I propose to “pause,” creating a moment of reflection. As opposed to “full stop,” the “dynamic pause” I experiment with here involves slowing down the flow of images through editing, and by making references to iconic and symbolic images. Dynamic Pause

¹³⁶ Simon Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (1947), Quoted by Chris Kraus in *Aliens and Anorexia* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2001), p. 39.

is a concept proposed by Hou Hanru, a contemporary Chinese curator, and critic, according to whom pausing can be a “time bomb.”

French artist Sylvie Blocher was invited to a talk show *France Culture* on the radio. In the middle of the program she suggested: “Let’s have a 30 second silence”... the participants of the program were shocked: how’s that possible when every second of a radio program is worth of a lot of money? Silence, or Pause, can be a bomb, a time bomb full of dynamism. *A Dynamic Pause*.¹³⁷

In the way that I compile moving and still images in *Time Caught by the Tail*, I have made an attempt to explore the possibility of making symbolic images instead of fleeting or flickering images. By symbolic images, I mean images that stir the viewers’ memories in the sense of conveying an awareness of the past, as well as of the passage of time. This is why in the process of montage and juxtaposition of the three screens, I have played with slowing down movement and the passage of images, away from the temporality of the ever-speeding up consumption of images, and striving toward a temporality of images folding into one another. The timing of each screen as well as of the footage are differentiated from each other, and this allows the viewer to negotiate his or her own reading of the juxtaposed images, positing him or her as an active subject. The three tracks of the split screen create a montage codified by the viewer’s own interests, knowledge, awareness of references, and memories.

I conceived the footage and the editing of installation as a meditation on time: industrial time is juxtaposed to post-industrial temporality, that is to say, the temporality of the production and transportation of goods, money and people and the acceleration of

¹³⁷Hou Hanru, *On The Mid-Ground, Selected texts edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei*, Timezone 8 (London: Ltd, 2002), p. 272. Emphasis mine.

perception as a form of labour; the immediacy of surveillance, information, rebuilding and destruction. In my view, the intermingling of these temporalities marks the rhythm of the pulses of our recent history as well as our everyday. Images of a cargo train relentlessly traveling through the landscape are as persistent in the video as images of housing models that are reminiscent of the public housing post WWII in both the Eastern and the Western blocks. Similarly to a painting, the slow but determined movement of the cargo train and the spinning-housing complex become the background of other images that appear and disappear in the foreground.

“Dynamic Pause” allows the viewer to reflect upon the images as they are transformed by the kaleidoscope effect, which is a tool available in the editing software FCP (Final Cut Pro) that transforms representational images into geometric abstract shapes. In my installation I use this effect to transform aerial images of Tehran visualized through Google Maps into an intricate moving tapestry pattern similar to Persian carpets and Islamic tile motifs. These images treated by the kaleidoscope effect structure the entire piece, and their transformation is contagious to other images that also appear on the screens. My purpose in using this effect is to create a contemplative and also hypnotic effect on the act of looking and thinking.

The lack of human subjects in my video is akin to the kind of subjectivity projected by the popular media. With its self-referentiality, mass media can be characterized as being mesmerizing, addictive and vacuous; it suspends time: it happens in the ‘now.’ By recycling rhetorical language from WWII and the Cold War, it posits reality as a struggle between the good and the bad guys (be it terrorists, rapists or

criminals). If the image of the working class disappeared from modernist aesthetics as we saw in chapter one, the misrepresentation of the image of the “Other” has been ferociously reconstructed over and over again by the Hollywood movie industry. Thus, by taking human subjects out of my images I intend to invite the viewer into a blank canvas where symbolic images of the past would open a possibility to “pause”, and to allow the viewer to glide in and out of images as they wish in an act of reflection.

The audio component of the video largely consists of electronic noise combined with faint melodies of folk songs from Iran, Johan Sebastian Bach’s *Ich Ruf Zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ*, and the buzzing noise of a drone airplane.¹³⁸ The electronic sound is mixed with folk songs from Northern Iran as we see images of mosques, the Grand Bazaar or mundane everyday images of the cityscape; we also hear the drone as we see Google Maps images of Tehran focused on either the House of Parliament or my sister’s house. Bach’s *Jesus Christ* that is incorporated into the electronic mix is a melody that also appears in the films *Solaris* (1972) and *Melancholia* (2011), at moments in which the main character in each movie is completely disoriented and has no recollection of time and space. In my installation, Bach’s music is synched toward the end of the video, as the camera pans over a 1970’s modernist public housing complex located on the West side of the city of Tehran, commissioned by the late Shah of Iran.

The title *Time Caught by the Tail: Fast Forward: Pause* is inspired by a play written by Picasso titled *Desire Caught by the Tail* from 1940. Picasso’s “desire” refers to the hunger endured by the French during the German occupation. The play has no clear

¹³⁸ Sound is produced in collaboration with Zev Farber, Musician, New Media artist and educator.

reference to any political ambition but the effects of war. Characters in the play are named after foods and they are constantly expressing a desire to eat. By substituting “time” for “desire,” my title refers to the scarcity of “time” instead of food through the effects of digital technology – the acceleration of time – in our subjectivities and everyday lives, and how it molds our perception of the war machine. The title puts forth the idea of “pause” both literally and metaphorically, related to both the time of the video, moving images in general, and our perception of images. Pausing gives us time to reflect, contemplate, understand, feel, smell and re-examine images.

In this chapter I will discuss the relevance of Laura U. Marks’s research on the similarities between Islamic motifs and digital media, as she concludes that both share mathematical algorithms as the basis of their existence. According to Marks, both digital media and Islamic art reflect upon the complexities of power structures of what she describes as “Absolutist States.”¹³⁹ Further, she draws an analogy between baroque art and contemporary digital art, as in her view, they are overtly detailed and intricate in design but only refer to themselves, dazzling and overwhelming the viewer. I will link the fact that baroque art does not provide a fixed point of view for the viewer to Hito Steyerl’s argument that Google Earth’s visualizations of the world have de-centered our point of view: from horizontal and central perspective brought about by Renaissance perspective, to a vertical and groundless one. As we have seen in previous chapter, aerial views are weapons, and such views have become normalized and part of our everyday

¹³⁹ Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity, An Islamic Genealogy and New Media Art*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010), p. 174.

lives. In order to highlight this in my installation, it was important for me to transform such views into intricate patterns similar to Islamic motifs in carpets and tiles.

In order to deepen the stakes in my discussion on aerial images, I will address Allan Sekula's discussion on Edward Steichen's popular aerial photographs shot when he was embedded in the army during WWII. According to Sekula, because the camera's shutter was unable to register the image from the time it was pushed in relation to the speed of the airplane, these images work as instrumental to war by purposely abstracting bombed cities for a romantic effect. Thus, since no human is able to *see* the referents of the images, they are "abstractions of violence" – and thus, I conclude, in their romantic and mesmerizing qualities they are instrumental to war and to the "Absolutist State".

4.2 Editing: Cinematic Temporality

From the beginning, cinema was drawn towards capturing time and celebrating movement, increasingly tending toward exploiting developments in cinematic technology in order to make possible a "seamless" cinema, inducing ever more persuasively "realistic" effects through the pursuit of technological perfection in visual and sound reproduction. This drive toward seamlessness – a drive both aesthetic and commercial – led Jean-Luc Godard and other New Wave directors in 1960s France to act against the technical perfection epitomized in Hollywood's slick "realism," for example, by abandoning directional microphones and carefully mixed sound tracks in favor of a single omni-directional microphone, and by employing a style of editing which would allow the editor's work to show. Godard equates film to thinking, and video, with which he has

experimented widely, “is obviously a tool and a technique for seeing and thinking.”¹⁴⁰ As Godard’s work evolved, his style became a reflection on the cinematic process, filmed by an increasingly self-conscious apparatus that sought to express, rather than conceal, the site of production.

In her doctoral dissertation, *Before Our Eyes: Les mots, non les choses: Jean-Luc Godard’s Ici et ailleurs and Notre musique*, Irmgard Emmelhainz discusses Godard’s approach to editing and montage within the context of the 1960s. Mechanical reproduction represented a transformation of perception and knowledge, along with the creation of a new middle class, a public that consumed cultural production. This has to do with a relative democratization of culture brought about by Modernity, as being able to consume culture enabled the postmodern citizen to incorporate to its own image – by way of Spectacle – signs of “culturization.” In late Capitalism, equating mimesis to social power, this new class of consumers overcame the bourgeois “exclusivity of signs” by consuming signs that challenge exclusivity through copies, imitations and counterfeits,¹⁴¹ but also by consuming culture. Emmelhainz writes that Godard and his collaborator and partner Anne Marie Miéville would not disagree with the idea that perception had been rendered redundant by mechanical reproduction, or that capitalism had reached the stage of ultra-importance of “sign-exchange value.” For Godard and Miéville, Emmelhainz writes:

¹⁴⁰ Irmgard Emmelhainz, “Before Our Eyes: Les mots, non les choses: Jean-Luc Godard’s *Ici et ailleurs* and *Notre musique*,” Doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto, June 2009, p. 264.

¹⁴¹ Jean Baudrillard, *La Societe de consommation: ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 60. Quoted by Irmgard Emmelhainz, “*Before Our eyes*”, 2009, p. 275.

...Images are neither true nor false; rather, images transform each other constantly insofar as they are events that transmigrate autonomously in the media.¹⁴²

She further writes that for Godard's images are a social relationship, insofar as images are subjects and he insists on "an understanding of images as relational and as acts of communication."¹⁴³ Emmelhainz explains that montage for Godard and Miéville starts within the realm of reproduction by means of appropriation aimed at "stopping the flow of information," examining the layers behind the images, and exploring how images, discourse, the editors, and the viewer could glide into one another. In Godard's montage, she writes:

Images function as tables of information in which the editors glide in and out and ... as viewers-images, we insert ourselves inside the images. Along the lines of Deleuze's question that posits images as subjects: "How to insert oneself, how to glide inside it, because all images fold into one another?"¹⁴⁴

On history and the importance of "memory" or images that evoke a "memory," Emmelhainz reminds us of Guy Debord's articulation of Spectacle as "the annihilation of historical knowledge." In the age of Spectacle or of hyper-reality she paraphrases Susan Sontag: "remembering" is not to recall a story, but to be able to invoke an "image." Aside from Godard's experiments with the mediums of cinema, video and montage contemporary video production and art practice have been inspired by experimental filmmakers such as Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton and Jonas Mekas, who understood film as an extension of consciousness and explored the medium's qualities.

¹⁴² Irmgard Emmelhainz, "Before Our Eyes: Les mots, non les choses: Jean-Luc Godard's *Ici et ailleurs* and *Notre musique*," Doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto, June 2009, p. 264.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 277.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 279.

In my installation, *Time Caught by the Tail: Fast Forward: Pause*, following contemporary experimental video, I have made an attempt to evoke images within their historical and cultural context. By choosing a limited palette of images, extending the duration of each image lingering on the screen as well as repeating them on the three screens, I open up the possibility to the viewer to immerse herself within the images, to open up a space for contemplation and reflection brought up by the image itself. For example, the effect of images of the train lingering, or the repetition of the vortex caused by the kaleidoscope effect that occupies a virtual visual amalgamation of all other images, keeps coming back and insists on being read within a new set of relationships: coded and re-coded.

To make this point more clear, I refer to the video installation of Chantal Akerman titled *D'Est*, from 1993, a 107-minute looped film projected on multiple screens. On one screen there is a long take, slow-tracking shot of people in a lineup waiting or walking on the street. The installation slows the consumption of the images in a predictable repeating format: for example, we see thirty or more people, individual portraits of characters waiting for an event that never materializes. On another screen running at the same time there is a fixed camera on a tableau of a room with three individual characters interacting in a domestic scene, and on yet another screen we have a distant shot of people waiting in a train station while the camera zooms in on individual portraits and small groups and clusters of a waiting crowd. On a fourth screen there are dancing figures, where the action is in the moving figures and we are not aware of the camera's movement. Because of the multiple screens in this installation the viewer will never encounter the same image

combination on two or more screens. This creates a sense of journey in time. *D'Est* has also been presented as a movie in which the scenes follow consecutively. This feature film was shot in Germany, Poland, and Russia in three trips during 1992 and 1993.

“*D'Est*, or *From The East*, retraces a journey from the end of summer to deepest winter, from east Germany, across Poland and the Baltics, to Moscow. It is a voyage Chantal Akerman wanted to make shortly after the collapse of the Soviet block, reconstructing her impressions in the manner of a documentary on the border of fiction.”¹⁴⁵

Choosing a three-track split screen in my installation, which allows the viewer to draw variable interpretations from the juxtapositions of images, is an example of a well-established concept along the lines of Akerman's. The looped video serves the purpose of giving images no clear start or ending. The idea of looping the video is inextricably tied to the subject of time, and another device to invite the viewer to take part and locate herself or himself within that time and to highlight the importance of *duration*, that is, the subjective experience of time. In Akerman's *D'Est* there is no spoken narrative or text and little incidental sound. In my installation there is no spoken narrative or text, but the sound and the three screens are linked in an evolving form.

Akerman reconstructs the history of the Jewish diaspora from the East and her own past by documenting the present. My work by comparison, on the theme of time, revisits industrial time and it takes us on a journey into current virtual time where its speed becomes crystallized and fractured as represented in the kaleidoscope effects. As Akerman floods her screens with human subject, in my work a human presence is only

¹⁴⁵ Quoted by ICARUS Films, Can be viewed:
<http://icarusfilms.com/new2003/from.html>

implied, in the images of the cities, housing complex and the shipping containers connected to labour. The kaleidoscope image is not tied to memory or looking back but to a nuance of action that calls for “pause”, in other words it is a Dynamic Pause with potential – a potential to reflect.

At the heart of Ackerman’s multi screen message is a lament for the displaced life and loss of purpose where the everyday has become a crushing routine, like a Gulag prison. My work in comparison is a different kind of journey centered on a condition we are facing today with the machine. The control of time has opened up possibilities for information to control perception and it is this alarming “present” that makes my work both a warning and a celebration of possible consequences of the information overload. The work is a call to re-assert the importance of humane natural rhythms of time.

4.3 The Kaleidoscope Effect

The kaleidoscope effect in my video came from experimentations with FCP effects. The abstraction that results from it is curious, since it does maintain the ghost image of the original image and its movement, yet the abstractions caused by the effect seem to be imploding or exploding. The similarities between the images distorted by FCP’s kaleidoscope effect and Islamic patterns in tiles and rugs are uncanny, and in parallel these video editing effects recall the origins of Islamic patterns: the mathematics and algorithms that are also the basis of computer programming. Laura U. Marks’s in-depth research on the relationship between aesthetics and politics, and specifically on Islamic history and patterns, suggests that historically, Islamic geometric patterns started as a

reference to the observation of stars and looking up to the heavens. When political changes and struggles for power brought about the differentiated interpretations of the Quran Sunni factions in Baghdad in 1036, Sunni theology gained power and the thought of the *Kalam* (words) and *falsafa* (philosophy), as well as Shi'ism, was suppressed. The new religious constraints in the Sunni world shaped theology and art, with a new emphasis on artifice and extreme complexity. Geometric art dominated visual culture across the disparate lands that bore allegiance to the *Abbasid* and their orthodox Sunnism: these included the Seljuks, who ruled many regions from Anatolia to Persia until the Mongol invasion of 1258; the Almoravids, who ruled the Maghreb and Spain from 1056 to 1137; and the Mamluks, and an *Abbasid* shadow caliphate in Cairo from 1260 to 1517. Marks reiterates that “the artwork sponsored by these powers favors geometric interlaced patterns and articulates the ideological statement of Sunni Islam”¹⁴⁶ With these social, political and religious shifts, tile and rug patterns became more intricate and complicated, to the point that they started to reference themselves more than anything else.

Marks evokes Abd al-Qhir al-Jurjani, an influential poet and philosopher from the 9th century from Gorgan, Iran. Al- Jurjani’s texts were influential not only in his time but in a 20th century revival of Arab poetics which, scholar Kamal Abu Deeb argues, are well suited to modern aesthetics. For Al-Jurjani, the perception of beauty arises from mental operations. Rather than value morality and truth, as do Aristotelian poetics, which were also influential in the Muslim world at this time, Al-Jurjani valued creativity and imagination above all (*takhayil*). According to Marks, “Al-Jurjani’s criteria point inward

¹⁴⁶ Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2010), p. 168

to the work of art rather than outward from the work of art to the world: in order to appreciate a poem, a listener must accept the universe of images that the poet establishes.”¹⁴⁷ She later applies his theory of creative reception to visual arts as well: as an imaginative viewer gazes upon a work of art, he/she gradually discovers subtle affinities among its parts. “Aesthetic pleasure results from unexpected unfolding, from the revelation of hitherto unseen relationships. Creativity, in this scheme, lies not in creating anew but in a pleasingly subtle transition from information to perceptible image.”¹⁴⁸ According to Marks, Al-Jurjani’s poetics lead to a sense of divine harmony only if the recipient is willing to pursue a demanding process of mental comparison. His aesthetic theory emphasizes the in-between status of geometry and other forms that mediate between the world of the senses and the world of abstract ideas. And these, to Marks, are qualities in Walter Benjamin’s use of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: “Allegory functions for Benjamin as geometry does for Islamic art,”¹⁴⁹ divesting phenomena of their sense qualities in order to reveal their connection to a greater, “abstract truth.”¹⁵⁰ Marks explains that the addition of geometrically shaped floral patterns to Persian tiles no longer invite the mind toward structure, but to ornament: “The Persian tiles on the Mosques’ ceilings no longer invite a calm contemplation of the ornamentation or the orderliness of universe; instead they delight and baffle.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 170.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p 171.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 171.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.171.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.172.

Marks further compares elaborate floral and geometric patterns in Persian Mosques, to European Baroque tradition. She concludes that baroque images “tend to invade space in every direction, to perforate it, to become as one with all possibilities.” Drawing from Gilles Deleuze’s *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, she concludes:

Like computer art and Islamic art, in baroque art the visible skin is the expression or unfolding of a legible level of information. All being is surface...a fabric is stretched to infinity. There is no meaning to dig for, for sense is simply the other side of the lining of the surface.¹⁵²

She further claims:

Islamic and computer art have in common the baroque quality that the perceptible surface is not a window into depth, as in Renaissance paintings and the cinema, but opaque.¹⁵³

Perhaps the most pivotal claim that Marks makes based on her research in Islamic and computer art is when she discusses the relationship between aesthetics and politics in baroque art. Drawing out similarities of both digital media and Islamic patterns with baroque art she writes:

Art works of baffling complexity, most commonly the baroque art of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe and Latin America, are associated with an absolutist state...Hence this parallel requires a discussion of the relationship of politics and aesthetics in three place-times: the Sunni revival of the eleventh century, the Spanish and Italian baroque of the seventeenth century and the neobaroque spectacles of our age. The baroque parallel is political as much as aesthetic, describing the dazzling and incomprehensible mass art promoted in times of strong state control.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Sean Cubitt also characterizes digital mass media images as baroque, for similar reasons to Marks. In his analysis, neobaroque cinema is an entirely contemporary phenomenon, reflecting both database and algorithmic qualities of digital media and contemporary corporate capitalism's tendency toward closure. "In creating a world rather than a narrative, the neobaroque seeks.... a circumscribed perfection removed from history and thence from dialectic process."¹⁵⁵ Neobaroque digitally generated blockbusters like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* series are a few examples that he gives.

Taking into account Marks's comparison of computer generated art to that of Islamic patterns, as forms of art similar to the Baroque, which not only is an overwhelming experience of the visual senses but also arises from absolutist states, I will argue that my work is a crystallization of her argument in parallel with its focus on temporality. My work not only is enabling the intermingling of both abstracted and representational forms, but also, the special effect of the kaleidoscope is presented in contrast to the representational images of a cargo train, housing complexes, Google Maps images of Tehran, and 16th century Persian mosques from Isfahan. Both the abstraction brought about by the kaleidoscope effect and the slowed-down motion of the montage invite the viewer to "pause," to question the images and examine the nature of the medium. Although Modernism meant that with abstraction the viewer is able to self-reflexively examine the medium of art itself, with digital art, images exist in only a virtual realm.

¹⁵⁵ Sean Cubitt, "Neobaroque Film", In *The Cinema Effect*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, P.217-244, and *The Relevance of the Baroque*, (September 2013), available online: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/digita/baroque.html>

If the dazzling baroque patterns either in Islamic art or in digitally-generated images can be an indication of a state of absolutism to Marks, to Sekula, Edward Steichen's abstracted aerial images of bombed cities imply the abstraction of violence. And this ties in with the images I have used in my video, both representational and abstract, to question the state of political economy we are faced with under a globalized, neoliberal ideology, with its re-construction of the "other" and availability of programs such as Google Earth to imagine air assaults on any place on the planet as our daily entertainment. About Edward Steichen's aerial photographs from WWI, Sekula writes that the abstracted images of bombed cities become romantic because it is hard for the eye to comprehend the depicted houses or streets, as: "The aerial landscape lacks specific meaning for the untrained viewer, for whom this is an alien view of the earth. The print will only yield its information, feature by feature, bit by bit."¹⁵⁶ Sekula then describes how the Central Intelligence Agency is using computer technology to restore the aerial images so as to extract information:

Today the Central Intelligence Agency funds research into "image restoration", a body of techniques by which a motion-blurred or unfocused image can be computer processed to obtain a picture of improved quality. With this the search for truth transcends the limitation of the medium.¹⁵⁷

He then further examines the difficulties for the eye and viewer's perception to synch and relate the photographs as human experience, as for him, "aerial photography can be seen

¹⁵⁶ Sekula Allan, "The Instrumental Image, Steichen at War," *Photography Against The Grain* (Halifax: Nova Scotia University Press, 1984), p. 41

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 36.

as the triumph of applied realism.”¹⁵⁸ He continues, “The logic of human language is less evident than the logic of factory.”¹⁵⁹ Sekula’s understanding of computer-manipulated aerial images being further from not only the “truth” but also from the “logic of human language” is in line with Marks’s understanding of the overwhelming nature of baroque images (Islamic patterns or computation art) that the mind is not able to comprehend. This brings my use of Google Earth aerial images of Tehran focused on the House of Parliament, paired next to the cargo train or the intricate abstracted image of the aerial image, to a new understanding of our globalization: the state of absolutism, relying on a “logic of factory” for reconstructing the image of the “other.”

4.4. The Sound Effect

Sound in *Time Caught by The Tail* works as the fourth screen, as images and sounds keep folding onto one another. The undertone sound is an electronically generated noise that is divided or organized into three parts, each part bringing into the foreground faint but recognizable melodies, such as folk songs from Northern Iran or J.S. Bach’s *Jesus Christ*. The electronic noise mixes with the buzzing noise of a drone airplane halfway into the video and remains there to the end. The choice for using Bach’s music is two-fold: first, it is a reference to the baroque style of music that Bach composed. Unlike other baroque musicians who wrote the frameworks and structure for either symphonies or concertos, Bach notated almost all his melodic lines, leaving little for performers to interpolate. Performers embellished the frameworks of other composers with ornaments and other

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

elaborations. This accounted for Bach's control over the dense contrapuntal textures that he favored, and decreased leeway for spontaneous variation of musical lines.¹⁶⁰

Second, in Lars Von Trier's film *Melancholia* (2011), Justine suffers from depression and, in her closed off personal world, she sees the end of the world as she knows it. In Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), Russian astronaut Kris Kelvin is sent to a space station hovering on an oceanic surface of a planet named Solaris, to investigate the space mission to see if it is worth continuing. In his first night of arrival on the spaceship he starts encountering the replica of his dead wife Hari, who seems not to understand how she ended up in the spaceship with him. Kelvin makes many attempts to destroy the replica, only to find himself with her again. At the end of the movie he is standing near a lake where his father lives and realizes that his father is indifferent to the rain drops pouring into the room from a damaged ceiling; when he looks over his father's shoulder, Kelvin sees the oceanic surface of the planet Solaris. Kelvin seemingly is not able to set aside the effect of the planet Solaris in his mind, seeing himself at his father's place back on earth or being with his dead wife. The loop suggested in the plot is the blurring of boundaries between memory, perception and the real. In both movies, the piece by Bach is played whenever the disorientation of mind is most intense. In my video, at the end when it is no longer clear or the viewer is not able to place the half generic-half iconic images of public housing, there are images of the city of Ekbatan, a suburb of Tehran. An American architect, Jordan Gruzen, designed Ekbatan in 1975 and the construction of its first and second phases (designed for three parts, called phases) was finished in 1979 right

¹⁶⁰ Robert Donington, *Baroque Music Style and Performance: A Handbook* (London: Faber, 1982), p. 91.

before the Islamic Revolution. This modernist structure is perhaps the largest project realized in its time. Such a structure, a dream of Corbusier – designer of vertical living – is hardly associated with a Middle Eastern country. Yet it appears not only in the city of Tehran but is also maintained and used by a large middle class population. Bach’s music is synched to this image to evoke the disorientation of politics of images in relation to memories and how we may relate to an image as information. Similar to Kelvin, who is not able to rid himself of the effects of the planet Solaris, we may not be able to shake off the stereotypic association of Western culture whenever we see a Modernist structure.

My art practice questions what fuel is driving our language of images, and how these images shape our perception of power and control. Are we so conditioned by the flickering images of the media that it is impossible to distinguish between what is “real” (experience) and what is “image” (reflection)? The installation *Time Caught by the Tail: Fast-Forward: Pause* and this research study critically address the impulse to fast forward. In a world where time cannot be halted, the element of Pause or Epoché¹⁶¹ as an alert for a change of direction becomes more imperative than ever.

¹⁶¹ “An ancient Greek term which, in its philosophical usage, describes the theoretical moment where all judgment about the existence of the external world, and consequently all action in the world, is suspended. The term was popularized in philosophy by Edmund Husserl. He elaborates the notion of “phenomenological Epoché” or “bracketing” in ideas through the systematic procedure of “phenomenological reduction”, one is thought to be able to suspend judgement regarding the general or naïve philosophical belief in existence of the external world, and thus examine phenomena as they are originally given to consciousness.” Available on: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epoch%C3%A9>

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