Alexander Kluge's 'Film in the mind of the spectator,' or after-(dialectical)-images in News from Ideological Antiquity: Marx – Eisenstein – Capital

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Alexander Kluge's 'Film in the Mind of the Spectator,'[1] or After-(Dialectical)-Images in *News from Ideological Antiquity: Marx – Eisenstein – Capital*

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'We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes.' (Kafka)

'Whence the shadowy light? What company in the dark! To close the eyes and try to imagine that.' (Beckett)

'I love to go to the movies; the only thing that bothers me is the image on the screen.' (Adorno)

'Half the time in a movie theatre is spent in the dark' (Kluge)

Introduction:

In a recent interview, the author, philosopher, and filmmaker, Alexander Kluge responded to a provocation about his friend and teacher[2] Theodor W. Adorno's 'appreciation, or lack of appreciation, for film' thus:

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[1] Kluge, A., 'On Film and the Public Sphere,' ed. and trans. Miriam B. Hansen and Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique,* No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema, Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982, (Durham: Duke University Press), 207.

[2] Miriam Bratu Hansen makes the important point that Adorno's 1966 essay, 'Transparencies on Film,' is best read as a defense of 'Young German Cinema, which Adorno refers to as the "Oberhauseners," and the enemy is clearly the moribund West German film industry. 1966 (…) saw the production of first feature films by independent directors such as Volker Schlöndorff (*Der junge Törless*), Edgar Reitz (*Mahlzeiten*), Vlado Kristl (*Der Bried*) and Alexander Kluge (*Abschied von Gestern*). (…) [T]he Film Subsidies Bill of 1967 introduced a system which favoured previously successful film-makers and subjected non-commercial projects to a screening process likely to encourage political censorship. (…) Adorno's publication of this essay in *Die Zeit* was undoubtedly perceived as an intervention on behalf of the independent film-makers. (…) The person whom Adorno seems to be lending his support for the cause is Alexander Kluge (…). Kluge's aesthetics and politics of film were themselves significantly formed by his friendship with Adorno.' Hansen, M. B., 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1966), *New German Critique,* No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema, Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982, (Durham: Duke University Press), 193-4. Hansen also notes that Adorno introduced Kluge to Fritz Lang. 'Defending the relative awkwardness and lack of professionalism of the work of Young German filmmakers (Volker Schlöndorff, Edgar Reitz, Kluge, et al.), [Adorno] elevates these shortcomings to a trace of "hope that the so-called mass media might eventually become something different."'

We actually wanted to write a book about film music together. The films that I'm creating are iconoclastic in a way. Diminishing pictures, never augmenting pictures. Very often I take an image, a scene, and then I say in the commentary the same thing. I repeat it. And I get a relationship between image and text. And if these things are sort of perpendicular to each other, then it's good.[3]

Foregoing, for the time being, the question of Adorno's *appreciation, or lack of appreciation, for film,[4]* this chapter positions Kluge's *iconoclastic, diminishing, and perpendicular* films or pictures as *after-(dialectical)-images,* which is to claim that they are best encountered as poetic/political pictures operating between Adorno's conceptualisation of *after-images* and Walter Benjamin's *dialectical image.* To achieve this end, I focus my analysis on just one film or picture by Kluge: *News from Ideological Antiquity: Marx – Eisenstein – Capital*, from 2008.

I: News from Ideological Antiquity

Kluge's picture is divided into three parts. Part One, which runs for just over 3 hours, is subtitled 'Marx and Eisenstein in the Same House.' Part Two, which runs for a mere 2 hours,

Hansen, M. B., *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 218. '[T]he *lack* of a virtuoso mastery of means and thorough planning is taken to allow independent film to develop "other means of conveying immediacy." These prominently involve improvisation, or "the planned surrender to unguided chance."' (Ibid).

[3] Kluge, Alexander [2016], 'Can We Talk About Angels A Little Bit? A Conversation with Ben Lerner,' *The Snows of Venice* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2018), 74.

[4] *Appreciation or lack of appreciation*, is a most unsatisfying frame of reference for Adorno's enduring engagement with film and the cinema. Adorno certainly believed in the possibility of an alternative, experimental, independent, critical and subversive film practice - in and against film as mass media and the cinema as a culture industry – all of which I detail in my forthcoming book: Hellings, J., *Adorno and Film: Thinking in Images* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024). 'Adorno and Horkheimer's emphasis on the illegitimate and anarchic beginnings of the cinema, its affinity with the circus and the roadshow, their preference for marginal genres like the grotesque and the funnies or even some varieties of the musical, their repeated contrasting of the sound film with the less stream-lined products of the silent era – all these swervings from the main thesis [of 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception'] point to a subversive potential which one day – on a self-conscious level of construction – could provide the negativity essential to a different kind of cinema.' Hansen, M. B., 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1966), *New German Critique,* No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema, Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982, (Durham: Duke University Press), 197. See also: Hansen, M. B., *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 208-10.

is subtitled 'All Things are Enchanted People.' And Part Three, another 3 hours, is subtitled 'The Paradoxes of Exchange Society.' *News from Ideological Antiquity* is certainly epic, both in scope and duration. It is constructed in a way familiar to viewers of Kluge's other productions i.e.: through montage; the juxtaposition of still and moving images; awkward talking head interviews; amateur special effects; improvised, theatrical, and farcical performances; exaggerated didactic or pedagogic lessons and exercises; musical interludes; pictorial interludes; and frames and frames of text, (sub-)titles, and captions constructed out of a dizzying variety of typographic fonts and devices are all on show. There is far too much *news* – both visual, textual, and aural – *from ideological antiquity* to describe in any detail here, so the interviews Kluge conducts focus my analysis.

Part One elaborates upon Sergei Eisenstein's unrealised plan – having just completed *October* (1927) - to film Karl Marx's *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867), loosely using the structure, technique, and form of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). In a talking head interview, between Kluge and the film historian Oksana Bulgakova, one snippet of noteworthy news (from ideological antiquity) is that Eisenstein went blind editing *October.* Eisenstein, so the story goes, had been staring into a Moviola for 48 hours straight, he was totally exhausted, and had even resorted to taking amphetamines to stay awake. Temporary blindness ensued. "Everything he cut, he cut with his inner eye." With eyes shut, Eisenstein cut *October – imagine that*. What was true for Kafka's storytelling, perhaps, held for Eisenstein's filmmaking: *my stories/films are a way of shutting my eyes*?

In the November of 1929, a month or so after Black Thursday and the Wall Street Crash, Eisenstein visited Joyce in Paris.[5] Joyce, himself blind by 1929, "tells Eisenstein (…) that he has seen *Potemkin.*" At their meeting, Joyce played Eisenstein a record of himself reading, and

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[5] See: Werner, G, and Gunnermark, E., 'James Joyce and Sergei Eisenstein,' *James Joyce Quarterly,* Vol. 27, No. 3, Spring 1990, (Oklahoma: University of Tulsa).

they planned to collaborate. "Eisenstein's idea is to film *Capital* as *Ulysses.*" The film was to be structured as "a day in the life of one person." Where Joyce had penned the stream-of-consciousness of Leopold Bloom, Eisenstein imagined filming "an inner monologue of a worker's wife," incorporating the whole of human history! *Capital* as *Ulysses* was to proceed as a chain of associations and stimuli, which the viewer of Eisenstein's film may (or may not) follow. And, these associations were to be imagined, constructed, and cut by Eisenstein who, as Kluge and Bulgakova observe, had recently recovered from blindness brought on by overwork and intoxication.

Part Two of *News from Ideological Antiquity* asks what kinds of images, transformations, or metamorphoses Eisenstein had in mind when planning his unrealized film *Capital.* What would these chains of associations and stimuli look like? The wonderful subtitle, 'All Things are Enchanted People,' comes from the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, in another talking head interview with Kluge. "Something flows into the product," according to Sloterdijk's gloss of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism - much like the nails which were once hammered into wooden figurines, themselves representative of wishes or curses. "Subjective intentions (flow) into the product." There is a mysterious transferral of energy, an impetus, a flow from the subject into the object, the commodity. Sloterdijk speculates that there is no reality beyond or beneath the fairy-tale enchantment of capitalism, which is why he also recommends reading Marx's *Capital* at the same time as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Commodity fetishism further enchants, however falsely, the disenchanted world – but it is, in reality, fairy-tale characters, bewitched people, who hammer fetishes into things, subjective intentions into products. So, if it is the case that *all things are enchanted people,* it cannot be a question of mere disenchantment at the level of things. *We* are always already in the fairy-tale (i.e., the phantasmagorical world of capital, with all of its commodities and its fetishes), so all *we* can do is see the reality of the fairy-tale. For Sloterdijk, "the work of demystification consists in

going back to the point of production," which is to say one has to return to the origins of commodity fetishism - the metamorphoses, the nails, the wishes and the curses.

In Part Three, following some direct references – both textual and pictorial - to Max Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944-47),[6] Kluge is joined by his long-term collaborator, the philosopher Oskar Negt, for yet another interview. There is, for Kluge, a poverty of imagery in Marx's *Capital.* To remedy this blindspot, Kluge suggests constructing or developing image sequences: "show an image, then its variant, then a variant of the variant, etc., so we can learn to comment in images and situations. Language couldn't do that." However, Kluge warns, "film doesn't really lend itself to that – it's too fast." "A new image erases the old one." "Sometimes you're lucky enough that the old ones linger on unconsciously in a memory beneath the memory and sort of colorize the new ones, thus creating epiphanies." "That's basically what Eisenstein wants," according to Kluge - a chain of associations or a sequence of images and stimuli that construct epiphanies in the viewer, "but it's a very weak tool. If someone isn't susceptible to it, it won't work. And music made only for musical people is wrong." So, how could Eisenstein colorize Marx's image-less *Capital*? What chain of associations or sequences of images and stimuli would be required? Kluge suggests a work of "fragments, and hope the viewers fill in the gaps themselves. They have past experience. It's an incredible resource, the imaginative power of experienced people, viewers." Such experienced viewers would, perhaps, act as "attractors. As if it were a dialogue between screen and viewers. That's not entirely utopian. It is very well possible. It could work in a different kind of cinema. That's heterotopia!" Kluge further elaborates upon this, his, *different kind of cinema*, and it is worth quoting him at length,

[6] See: Horkheimer, M., and Adorno, T. W., [1944-47], 'In The Genesis of Stupidity,' *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments,* ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 213-4.

At worst it would arouse such criticism of the medium of film, that the medium itself would change. But maybe the film could also have encouraged people to think. Not like a prosthesis or tool but to consolidate thinking in another way. So that thinking doesn't just take place in studies, doesn't just transpire in words, and is not only done by educated people but in all layers of society and to that end I need *situations*. It's better to anchor situations with images than with words. There's not so much along the lines of situations in *Capital.* They exist. (…) One thing is important: a distant reality like for instance child labour, these little British girls standing on their platforms in a silk factory, working away with their little fingers 10 hours a day, being used up, is not something of our time. But to endure watching something like that, a thing of the past, would change your view of the now. Because you would look for something similar in our time, and you'd find there's no such thing, not even in Bangladesh. At the same time there are other things. That's *cross-mapping,* searching for images based on another image. That's just it with classical antiquity. From Latin or Greek texts, I can learn a lot about my own time exactly because that time has past. (…) It has to be as far away as the moon then I can colonize it with my imagination."

The final half-hour of Part Three, much to Frederic Jameson's dismay,[7] is a kind of farce of Eisenstein's unrealised film *Capital.* Helge Schneider plays a number of characters: 1) an unemployed worker (who attends an evening class on Marx), 2) an actor who has played Hitler and is interested in playing Marx, and 3) a film composer who experiments with setting music to the film. Kluge's *News from Ideological Antiquity* draws to an end with Schneider (as a film composer) saying, "Andrew Lloyd Webber has it down pat, he can do that," i.e., a standardised, Hollywood, happy ending.

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[7] See: Jameson, F., 'Marx and Montage,' *New Left Review,* No. 58, July – August 2009 (London: NLR).

II The Dialectical Image

According to the art historian Rosalind Krauss, 'the stereopticon,' itself a pre-cursor to the moving-image camera, served as 'Benjamin's model for the dialectical image.'[8] A slide projector or magic lantern, the stereopticon combined two images thereby creating a three-dimensional effect and/or a dissolve between them. This archaic, obsolete, and somewhat forgotten proto-cinematic technology is not entirely out of keeping with Kluge's observation that *sometimes* in film *you're lucky enough that the old [images] linger on unconsciously in a memory beneath the memory and sort of colorize the new ones.* With contemporary film technologies, however, it has become increasingly difficult for the viewer to experience epiphanies constructed out of such chains of association and sequences of images or stimuli precisely because images move *too fast, a new image erases the old.* So, a film or picture that operates through fragmentary, slow, discontinuous, and diminishing pictures (*show an image, then its variant, then a variant of the variant),* together with a perpendicular relationship between such images and text, might offer some hope for a *different kind of cinema*? The cinema imagined by the blind, exhausted, and intoxicated Eisenstein? The cinema of the inner-eye? Almost an anti-cinema (*iconoclastic*), or a cinema of cuts, or a new idea of *film noir* (*shutting my eyes / to close the eyes in the dark and try to imagine that / half the time in a movie theatre is spent in the dark*) wherein *the imaginative power of experienced people, viewers,* may *fill in the gaps.* This is what Kluge means when he speaks of the possibility of a *film in the mind of the spectator,* as Miriam Bratu Hansen notes:

> Kluge himself endorses that position [i.e., Adorno's fundamental mistrust of the
> visual immediacy of film] when he stresses the function of the cuts, the "empty

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[8] Krauss, R., 'Reinventing the Medium,' *Critical Inquiry, Angelus Novus: Perspectives on Walter Benjamin,* Winter 1999, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 304.

spaces between shots," in counteracting the obtrusive referentiality of the image

flow; it is in these ruptures that the spectator's own imagination can insert itself.[9]

Pictures like *News from Ideological Antiquity* are uncompromisingly demanding: the

perpendicular relationship between diminishing images and text(s), *a radical practice of*

montage, asks a lot of the spectator. Indeed, Kluge's 'concept of montage as an interference of

discourses (…) attempts to provoke a more active participation on the part of the spectator'

(Ibid., 197). *The imaginative power of experienced viewers* is, therefore, a presupposition of

Kluge's *different kind of cinema.*

If Benjamin's dialectical image was indeed modelled on the stereopticon, then, this

would place proto-cinematic pictures at the heart of his various attempts at conceptualising the

dialectical image wherein a historically specific *now* constellates or is synchronic with a *then.*[10]

As Benjamin phrases it in his *Arcades*:

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[9] Hansen, M. B., 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1966), *New German Critique,* No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema, Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982, (Durham: Duke University Press), 194. 'The obvious answer for Kluge – as for Adorno and [Hans] Eisler (…) – is a radical practice of montage. Juxtaposing the heterogeneous elements of the cinematic material, translating their inherently antithetical character into expression "raises them to the level of consciousness," in Adorno/Eisler's words, "and takes over the function of theory"' (Ibid). 'Montage,' Hansen writes elsewhere, 'seeks not only to fracture the fetishistic illusionism of narrative cinema, along with the fiction of diegetic continuity and closure, but also to shift the production of meaning from the relationship between image and referent to the cut – the space between shots, the space of difference and heterogeneity. Latent in the cut is a third image that is immaterial, which for Kluge marks the entry point for the "film in the viewer's head."' Hansen, M. B., *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 225.

[10] I am well aware that Benjamin did not conceive of the dialectical image as an image, per se. 'Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image as an image (…) is not a painterly representation, but rather a figure and constellation to be read, as he explains in a letter to Gretel Adorno in 1935: "The dialectical image does not copy the dream in a painterly representation (…). But, it seems to me to contain the instances, the place of the irruption of awakening and to produce out of these places its figure, like a star-constellation by the sparkling dots." This image, then, although called a *Sternbild,* is not a picture or a painting, but instead a figure: it belongs to a graphic sphere in contrast to the sphere of painting.' Nägle, R., 'Thinking Images,' *Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory,* ed. Gerhard Richter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 23. 'In 1935 the dialectical image was conceived as "wish image" and "dream image," a dynamic figuration of the collective consciousness in which the new is permeated with the old in which the collective "seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social product and the inadequacies in the social organization of production." (…) In the expose, these dream images attest that ability of the collective to see into a better future. (…) [T]races of utopia [a classless society], engendered in the intersection or collision of the new and the antiquated, can be read off of untold aspects of contemporary society. "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century" was written as a kind of road map for such divinatory reading of social phenomenon. (…) [W]ish images that hold within them a potentially revolutionary knowledge.' Eiland, H. and Jennings, M. W., *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 491-2. Adorno took exception to Benjamin's understanding of the dialectical image as both a bourgeois projection (the dream) and as romantic anti-capitalism (the classless society): 'If you locate the dialectical image in consciousness as "dream," not only has the concept

It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical.[11]

Is Kluge's *News from Ideological Antiquity* genuinely historical? Does it operate as something of a 'found ark of lost moments in which,' according to Hal Foster, 'the here-and-now of the work functions as a possible portal between an unfinished past and a reopened future'?[12] Does Kluge's picture redeem, retrieve, or bring into focus the unfulfilled potential of ideological antiquity? *What has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.* Is this, perhaps, what Kluge is trying to get at when he says, *sometimes you're lucky enough that the old images linger on unconsciously in a memory beneath the memory and sort of colorize the new ones, thus creating epiphanies*? And, isn't this epiphany also the shock of the stereopticon, itself a prototype for Benjamin's conceptualisation of the dialectical image?

According to Esther Leslie, in his *Berlin Chronicle* Benjamin likened the proto-cinematic devices and processes of photography to 'the irruption of the forgotten past into the present'[13] wherein, perhaps, *old images linger on unconsciously in a memory beneath the memory.* Benjamin remarks that,

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thereby become disenchanted and commonplace, but it has also forfeited its objective authority, which might legitimate it from a materialist standpoint. The fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness, but is dialectical in the crucial sense that it produces consciousness.' Adorno, T. W., [1935], 'Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno on the Essay "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century,"' *Selected Writings: Volume 3: 1935-1938,* eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 54.

[11] Benjamin, W., [1927-40], *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), [Convolute N3,1], 463.

[12] Foster, H. 'An Archival Impulse,' *October*, No. 110, Fall 2004, 15.

[13] Leslie, E., *Walter Benjamin: Critical Lives* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 130.

Anyone can observe that the length of time during which we are exposed to impressions has no bearing on their fate in memory. Nothing prevents our keeping rooms in which we have spent twenty-four hours more or less clearly in our memory, and forgetting others in which we passed months. It is not, therefore, due to insufficient exposure time if no image appears on the plate of remembrance. More frequent, perhaps, are the cases when the half-light of habit denies the plate the necessary light for years, until one day from an alien source it flashes as if from burning magnesium powder, and a snapshot transfixes the room's image on the plate. It is we ourselves, however, who are always standing at the centre of these rare images. Nor is this very mysterious, since such moments of sudden illumination are at the same time moments when we separated from ourselves, and while our waking, habitual, everyday self is involved actively or passively in what is happening, our deeper self rests in another place and is touched by the shock, as is the little heap of magnesium powder by the flame of the match. It is to this immolation of our deepest self in shock that our memory owes its most indelible images.[14]

Sometimes you're lucky, and a moment, a situation, or an image is 'seared on to memory' by 'something akin to a magnesium flare.'[15] The *half-light of habit* is pierced by a flash of bright-light, which suddenly illuminates *our deeper self* (*the imaginative power of the experienced viewer)*. 'The flare of light, intrinsic to flash photography – in the magnesium explosion or the ready-made flash bulb – parallels the act of perception, and it constitutes an illumination.'[16] *Whence the shadowy light?* As Leslie observes, it is 'as if memory' itself 'were

[14] Benjamin, W., [1932], 'Berlin Chronicle,' *Selected Writings: Volume 2: Part 2: 1931-1934,* eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 632-3.

[15] Leslie, E., *Walter Benjamin: Critical Lives* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 130.

[16] Photography, for Leslie (following Benjamin), produces an illumination 'more intense than the wan mimicry of art. This process provides the chemical imprint of matter in all its new and revolutionary beauty. Matter has

a photographic plate. Some time later that image,' *from an alien source, as far away as the moon,* 'flashed again into consciousness' view.'[17] *What has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.* Can this constellation be read? Is it legible, decipherable? Can a spectator fill in the gaps? Perhaps, Kluge's *iconoclastic, diminishing, perpendicular pictures* flash – 'something momentary and sudden' – becoming 'appearances in the pregnant sense of the term – that is, as the appearance of an other – when the accent falls on the unreality of their own reality.'[18] *That's just it with classical antiquity. From Latin or Greek texts, I can learn a lot about my own time exactly because that time has passed.* The accent must fall on *the unreality of their own reality* (liberation from capital, commodity fetishism, phantasmagoria is blocked), which is a kind of negative capability. This *appearance of an other - as far away as the moon -* best accounts for Kluge's *News from Ideological Antiquity*. Certainly, it is this process that is required for Kluge's model of the *film in the head of the spectator* and his *different kind of cinema.* Elsewhere, Leslie notes that,

> Benjamin insists that the most important images in our lives are those that develop
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> later. The darkroom where this process of development takes place is the darkroom
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> of our subsequent lives, the 'after-image' of the moment of the image.[19]

The moment an image becomes dialectical, when it becomes colorized, three-dimensional, or made powerful in the imagination of the experienced spectator, it may transform, perhaps, into an after-image. This metamorphosis - from the dialectical image to an after-image - occurs, perhaps, when a spectator feels 'overwhelmed when faced with an

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come to voice, and it speaks of itself. The most precise mechanical act produces something quite magical, just as it is material, physical and real, and, furthermore, it is owned by no one. This is not property. It is an art of "luminous values" in "passionate progress" that no modern art, no painting, can halt.' Leslie, E., 'Introduction: Walter Benjamin and the Birth of Photography,' *On Photography: Walter Benjamin,* ed. and trans. Esther Leslie (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 16.

[17] Leslie, E., *Walter Benjamin: Critical Lives* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 130.

[18] Adorno, T. W., [1970], *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 79.

[19] Leslie, E., *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 82.

important work. (…) Under patient contemplation artworks begin to move. To this extent they are truly afterimages of the primordial shudder in the age of reification.'[20]

III After-Images

The flash or spark of the dialectical image shocks. On that point, Benjamin and Adorno were in agreement. Benjamin viewed this shock in-itself as a positive, whereas Adorno did not. As is familiar to any reader of Adorno, the negative is privileged and/or made capable. The shocking flash of the dialectical image, in Kluge's phrase, diminishes the picture – it is a resolutely negative vision. Given the wretched state of contemporary film as mass media and cinema as the culture industry (*augmenting pictures, Hollywood happy endings*), this negative vision acts as something of a counterweight thereby affirming (via determinate negation) the possibility of *a different kind of cinema.* Diminishing pictures, and a radical practice of montage, 'negates the affirmative appeal of the image and interrupts the chains of associative automatism,' which for Miriam Bratu Hansen, is how 'film becomes a medium of cognition.'[21] Film thinks, through flashes, sparks, and shocks, but it does so in the head of the spectator. Something of this diminishing, negative vision, is evident in Kafka's work, according to Adorno:

It expresses itself not through expression but by its repudiation, by breaking off.

(…) Each sentence says 'interpret me,' and none will permit it. Each compels the

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[20] Adorno, T. W., [1970], *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 79. 'Artworks are afterimages of empirical life insofar as they help the latter to what is denied them outside their own sphere and thereby free it from that to which they are condemned by reified external experience. Although the demarcation line between art and the empirical must not be effaced, and least of all by the glorification of the artist, artworks nevertheless have a life sui generis' (4). 'Through correspondences with the past, what resurfaces becomes something qualitatively other' (36). 'Though it will not acknowledge it, for the disenchanted world the fact of art is an outrage, an afterimage of enchantment, which it does not tolerate' (58). 'Because the shudder is past and yet survives, artworks objectivate it as its afterimage' (80).

[21] Hansen, M. B., 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1966), *New German Critique,* No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema, Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982, (Durham: Duke University Press), 194-5.

reaction, 'that's the way it is,' and with it the question, 'where have I seen that before?' the *déjà vu* declared permanent. Through the power with which Kafka commands interpretation, he collapses aesthetic distance. (…) Among Kafka's presuppositions, not the least is that the contemplative relation between text and reader is shaken to its very roots. His texts are designed not to sustain a constant distance between themselves and their victim but rather to agitate his feelings to a point where he fears that the narrative will shoot towards him like a locomotive in a three-dimensional film. <mark>Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka,' *Prisms,* p. 246.</mark>

Adorno likens Kafka's surrealist, shocking, images to photography and film – to the early film by the Lumière brothers, *The Arrival of a Train (at La Ciotat)*, 1895. It is impossible to contemplate such images and pictures, which *collapse aesthetic distance*. They move too fast, they snap at speed, they overwhelm. But, the diminishing return of such images is negatively capable – *It expresses itself not through expression but by its repudiation, by breaking off. Show an image, then its variant, then a variant of the variant. Very often I take an image, a scene, and then I say in the commentary the same thing. I repeat it. And I get a relationship between image and text* (Kluge). *The* déjà vu *declared permanent* (Adorno). The perspective is perpendicular, somewhat surreal. The relationship shocks the spectator. The spectator, perhaps, fills in the gaps.

Roland Barthes, much like Adorno, also connects Kafka's work to photography: Ultimately – or at the limit – in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes. "The necessary condition for an image is sight," Janouch told Kafka; and Kafka smiled and replied: "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes." (…) The photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah (…) to say nothing,

to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness.[22]

What else is an after-image if not a *detail rising of its own accord into affective consciousness*? What else is a *film in the head of the spectator*? Images of the imagination, then, whose accent falls on *the unreality of their own reality* are certainly required for *a different kind of cinema*. If photographic film is too augmenting, too in your face, too immediate, too blah-blah, then, spectators would do well to see by shutting their eyes. And filmmakers would do well to edit by opening their inner-eye. Hansen, again, one last time:

> Kluge has suggested that the fact that we spend about half the time in the movie theatre in the dark means that our eyes, trained to look outward have a chance to look inward during that time.[23] Another trace of Adorno's dialogue with Kluge can be seen in the attempt to base an aesthetics of film on its structural affinity with the stream of associations in the human mind. The raw material of film, as Adorno suggests, should be defined by the movement with which involuntary images succeed each other before the inner eye.[24]

And, to end (happily) with Adorno, who puts it thus:

> Irrespective of the technological origins of the cinema, the aesthetics of film will do better to base itself on a subjective mode of experience which film resembles and which constitutes its artistic character. A person who, after a year in the city, spends a few weeks in the mountains abstaining from all work, may unexpectedly

[22] Barthes, R., [1980], *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), 53-5.

[23] Hansen, M. B., *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 237.

[24] Hansen, M. B., 'Introduction to Adorno, "Transparencies on Film" (1966), *New German Critique,* No. 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema, Autumn 1981 – Winter 1982, (Durham: Duke University Press), 195. 'For Kluge, the structural affinity between film and the stream of associations establishes a utopian tradition of cinema in people's minds to which technological inventions like camera, projector and screen only responded on an industrial scale; the trope of "the film in the head of the spectator" provides a link between Kluge's concept of montage and his program of the cinema as an oppositional public sphere' (Ibid).

experience colourful images of landscapes consolingly coming over him or her in dreams or daydreams. These images do not merge into one another in a continuous flow, but are rather set off against each other in the course of their appearance, much like the magic lantern slides of our childhood. (…) Such movement of interior images may be to film what the visible world is to painting or the acoustic world to music. As the objectifying recreation of this type of experience, film may become art.[25] Thus even the cinematographic gaze may appear innate.[26]

Whence the shadowy light? What company in the dark! To close the eyes and try to imagine that. Have you heard the news from ideological antiquity? Perhaps, Beckett's prose, much like Baudelaire's poetry, Kafka's stories, and Kluge's pictures, 'is full of those lightning flashes seen by a closed eye that has received a blow'?[27] Imagine that.

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[25] Adorno, T. W., [1966], 'Transparencies on Film,' trans. M. B. Hansen, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture,* ed. J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 180. 'The choice of example,' according to Hansen, 'is no coincidence. The mode of experience expressed in the movement of images is one of displacement, transience, and loss. The colourful images that appear without being called up are not of a timeless idyllic nature but of a nature segregated as refuge from urban living and labor. Adorno's example may seem privileged and harmless, but it also calls to mind examples drawn from a worldwide history of rural flight, migration, and exile.' Hansen, M. B., *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 223.
[26] Adorno, T. W., [1970], *Aesthetic Theory,* trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, eds. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 193.
[27] Adorno, T. W., [1951], *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 236.