

On the Possibilities of Political Art: How Žižek Misreads Deleuze and Lacan

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Reading Savoj Žižek's *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, we gain insight on why and how so many scholars have misread Deleuze's film theory. I will argue that there is an inherent logic and system to Deleuze's theory, and this logic is Lacanian. Moreover, contemporary readers, like Žižek, continue to ignore Deleuze's system, and instead, they simply sample and remix fragments of his work in order to locate predetermined ideologies. Furthermore, I read Žižek's misreading of Deleuze as paradigmatic of the post-postmodern backlash against progressive social movements, social construction, and minority discourses. In turn, by illustrating Žižek's repression of the political aspects of Deleuze's film theory, I will elaborate a theory of political cinema. Thus, I will use Žižek's misreading of Deleuze and Lacan to show how contemporary film theory is dominated by the desire to turn to the socio-symbolic order only to repress the significance of social mediation.

Strategies of Misreading

To see how Žižek misreads Deleuze, we can look at Žižek's discussion of Robert Altman, which not only ignores the fact that Deleuze has analyzed the director in question, but also that Žižek's analysis is in complete opposition to Deleuze's own commentary. For example, near the start of his book, Žižek posits that Altman is one of the contemporary

filmmakers “who lends himself ideally to a Deleuzian reading” because films like *Short Cuts* and *Nashville* reveal how contingent encounters produce “meaningless machanic shocks, encounters, and impersonal intensities that precede the level of social meaning” (6). This stress on the lack of social meaning in Altman’s films is followed by an examination of *Nashville*, where Žižek refers to Brian Massumi’s argument that songs in the film display the autonomy of affect, and that “we totally misread *Nashville* if we locate the songs within the global horizon of the ironico-critical description of the vacuity and ritualized commercial alienation of the universe of American country music” (6). In other words, Žižek turns to another critic’s work (Massumi) in order to imagine how Deleuze would read this particular film, and it just so happens that the imagined Deleuzian interpretation matches Žižek’s own theory stressing emotion and enjoyment over social signification.

What Žižek’s analysis does not mention is that in his book *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Deleuze writes about *Nashville* in the following manner: “Altman’s film *Nashville* fully grasps this operation which doubles the city with all the clichés it produces and divides in two the clichés themselves” (210). In other words, instead of arguing that Altman’s films represent the dominance of affect over social meaning, Deleuze posits that the city Nashville circulates and critiques symbolic clichés. Moreover, Deleuze continues by arguing that this depiction of clichés in Altman’s films is a central aspect of the transition from the classical films based on the movement-image to the new form of film introduced after World War II. In other words, *Nashville* is used to examine the central thesis of Deleuze’s first book on film, which is that the transition away from the movement-image was caused in part by the downfall of the “American Dream”; however, to understand this idea, one has to first understand Deleuze’s notion of the movement-image and his particular way of examining film. Yet, Žižek appears to be either uninterested or unaware of Deleuze’s actual texts and theories, and so he can write several pages on Deleuze’s film theory without consulting Deleuze’s actual texts. While one could argue that this is only a minor problem, I posit that this form of secondary misreading represents a very revealing aspect of contemporary culture and scholarship. Furthermore, while Deleuze himself developed a theory of interpretation that tried to go behind the back of authors in order to give birth to a new creature, Deleuze’s own writings on philosophers like Bergson and Nietzsche spend a great deal of time repeating and acknowledging the arguments of the original text.

To restate my case against Žižek’s reading of Deleuze’s film theory, I am arguing that Žižek simply ignores Deleuze’s own theory and system in order to refind his own theory, and this secondary reading involves the

emptying out of content from cultural analysis so that one can concentrate on the pure form and experience of nonsignifying elements. In my book *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory after Postmodernity* (2010), I argued that Žižek's general interpretative strategy is to reduce most matters to an opposition between social signification and real enjoyment, and in this binary, meaningless enjoyment is privileged over social meaning. For example, Žižek divides Lacan's work into the bad Early Lacan of the Symbolic and the good Late Lacan of the Real. Not only does this division leave out the importance of the Imaginary, but it imposes a linear and progressive reading onto a system that is synchronic and interconnected. Moreover, Žižek often confuses the pre-Symbolic and the post-Symbolic Real, and the result of this confusion is that the original Real, which is defined by its resistance to symbolization becomes the effect of the Symbolic order. For example, nature as part of the Real is turned into a product that is determined by the Symbolic social order as an internal limit. Thus, we see nature as something that society cannot completely colonize; yet, this resistant aspect of nature is itself a result of a symbolic definition. To be precise, societies produce their own outsides and limits as an element of social control.

One way of thinking about Lacan's conception of the pre-Symbolic Real is through his use of Sartre's claim in *Being and Nothingness* that the real is always where it is, and, therefore, it is never missing or out of place. In his early works, Lacan refers to Sartre's in order to argue that loss and absence are introduced into the Real only through the Symbolic order of language and symbolization. Thus, a book is missing from its place in a library only because its symbolic place has been marked and catalogued; however, the book in the Real is wherever it currently resides. In Lacan's temporal logic, this natural Real has to be distinguished from the Real that is produced from within the socio-Symbolic order, but Žižek often fails to make this distinction.

Understanding Deleuze's System

The reason why Žižek's confusion of these categories is so important to our understanding of a Deleuzian film theory is that Deleuze himself relies on a careful distinction among several layers of reality and experience. For instance, his concept of the movement-image is based on the distinctions among affects, actions, and mental relations. In this structure, affects belong to what the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce called Firstness, and they are equivalent to Lacan's notion of the Real, while action or Secondness relates to the Imaginary duality of an

object and a reaction to an object. This combination of Lacan and Peirce is articulated in *Cinema 1* by Deleuze in the following manner: "After distinguishing between affection and action, which he calls Firstness and Secondness, Peirce added a third kind of image: the 'mental' or Thirdness. The point of Thirdness was a term that referred to a second term through the intermediary of another term or terms. The third instance appears in signification, law or relation" (197). This use of Peirce to define the basic concepts of cinema reveals how at the foundation of Deleuzian film theory, we find a coherent and consistent system, and if one simply chooses to ignore this system, one is no longer really reading Deleuze. Furthermore, there can be no Deleuzian film theory without an active engagement with the system that Deleuze carefully constructs.

While Žižek ignores Deleuze's logic, it is important for us to first understand the basic foundations of Deleuze's theory of cinema, and it is also essential to note the Lacanian nature of the Deleuze's conceptual architecture. For example, in defining the relations among Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, Deleuze turns to the Marx Brothers to posit that the silent Harpo represents Firstness because he is determined by his affects, and he presents the pure affect-image (199). Likewise, Chico represents the Secondness of the action-image since "it is he who takes on action, the initiative, the duel with the milieu, the strategy of effort and resistance" (199). Finally, Deleuze ties Groucho to the presence of Thirdness: "Groucho is the three, the man of interpretations, of symbolic acts and abstract relations" (199). This move from affect to action to mental relation determines the unfolding of Deleuze's first film book, which also traces the history of Western cinema from its inception to late Hitchcock. Moreover, following Lacan's temporal logic, Firstness represents the pre-Symbolic Real, while Secondness constitutes the duality of the Imaginary, and Thirdness stands for the ternary nature of the Symbolic order.

There is thus a certain logical temporality to Deleuze's basic film categories, and this logic is articulated clearly in Deleuze's "How Do We Recognize Structuralism." In this text from 1967, Deleuze shows himself at his most Lacanian and Peircian: "We can enumerate the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic: 1, 2, 3 . . . For the real in itself is not separable from a certain ideal of unification or of totalization: the real tends toward one, it is one in its 'truth.' As soon as we see two in 'one,' as soon as we start to duplicate, the imaginary appears in person" (260–261). While Peirce is not mentioned in this analysis, it is clear that Deleuze is combining Lacan with Peirce in order to determine a temporal logical pointing to the symbolic nature of social relations: "The first discovery of structuralism, however, is the discovery and recognition of a third order, a third reign: that of the symbolic. The refusal to confuse the symbolic with the imaginary, as much as with the real,

constitutes the first dimension of structuralism” (260). According to Deleuze, there is a logical movement from the Real to the Imaginary and to the Symbolic, and this movement is understood through Peirce’s categories and Lacan’s central concepts.

By the time Deleuze publishes *Cinema 1* in 1983, he has purged his work of most references to Lacan, but it is clear that he maintains Lacan’s temporal logic. Moreover, while Žižek would like to divide Deleuze into the good Deleuze of *The Logic of Sense* versus the bad Deleuze of *Anti-Oedipus* (xi), it is clear that Deleuze maintains a consistent system that Žižek simply ignores or represses. In contrast to Žižek’s mis-appropriations, I argue that if we do want to stay faithful to Deleuze’s logic, then, it is necessary to employ his central concepts and to understand how they fit into his more general system.

The Logic of the Movement-Image

Returning to the differentiations among affect-images, action-images, and mental-images, we not only understand how perception works in film production and consumption, but also gain a better sense of the logical history of cinema. In fact, Deleuze’s central historical claim is that the movement-image dominated film until World War II, and as a result of the war and the crisis in modernity, the movement-image was undermined and replaced by the time-image in the works of directors like Rossellini, Fellini, Godard, and Antonioni. Moreover, his second cinema book, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, continues Deleuze’s analysis of what happens after the movement-image, and it is essential to understand that Deleuze combines philosophy with social history in order to develop a temporal logic for the cinema.

In his Preface to the English edition of *Cinema 1*, Deleuze states: “Everything perhaps suddenly appears in a shattering of the sensory-motor schema: this schema, which had linked perceptions, affections, and actions, does not enter into a profound crisis without the general regime of the image being changed” (ix). According to Deleuze’s logic, World War II caused such a profound crisis in modernity that the relations among perceptions, actions, and affects were seriously rearranged, and time became a new variable that replaced space with a fourth dimension. Not only does this concern for time make Deleuze consider Einstein’s theory of relativity, but the issue of temporality is a major emphasis for his whole philosophical project, and the central thinker of time for Deleuze is Henri Bergson. Once again while Žižek seems to either ignore or repress Bergson’s influence on Deleuze, we will see that one can understand little of Deleuze’s work if one does not follow how he reads Bergson.

Bergsonian Time

Throughout his work, Deleuze returns to Bergson's notion that the past coexists with the present and that we are affected by virtual representations that have yet to be actualized. In fact, *Cinema 1* opens with a chapter called "Theses on Movement: First Commentary on Bergson" where Deleuze argues that film combines instantaneous sections or images with the impersonal movement of images in time (1). This dialectic between the frame and the perception of movement is resolved by Deleuze through his conception of the movement-image. From this perspective, the Real or Firstness of film is determined by the material reality of the image: "This in-itself of the image is matter: not something behind the image, but on the contrary the absolute identity of the image and movement" (59). Since the Real is whatever it is and knows no sense of lack or loss, we see that on a primary level, film presents the Realness of the image and the fact that filmic images are always moving. Moreover, for Deleuze, the basic property of cinema is light, and it is the diffusion of light that combines movement and images (60).

In drawing from Bergson's notion that light is propagated without loss or resistance, Deleuze is able to combine materialism with idealism and argue that with the movement-image, "there are not yet bodies or rigid lines, but only lines or figures of light" (60). Cinema on its most fundamental level allows for a pure perception of space and time, and instead of seeing light as coming from consciousness, cinema sees light as something already present in things themselves (60). Moreover, for Deleuze, the Real is defined by a plane of immanence where a "collection of lines or figures of light" produces a "series of blocs of space-time" (61). In other words, Deleuze wants to start his film theory by beginning with a notion of the pure materiality of the image and movement before consciousness or action interrupts the primal flow of light.

What then blocks the flow of light in a second logical time is an interval separating actions and reactions (61). In his book on Bergson, Deleuze stresses how this interval defines the human subject and allows for a selection of perceptions; in fact, Deleuze calls this gap between reality and consciousness the "cerebral interval," and in *Cinema 1*, the process of framing is equated with the interval since film allows one to select and isolate particular actions (62). According to Deleuze, in film, all actions become reactions, and the initial sensation is separated from a delayed action. In turn, instead of light being propagated in all directions, it comes up against an obstacle (the screen), which in turn constitutes an Imaginary dual relation of Secondness (62). In fact, Deleuze posits that "an image reflected by a living image is precisely what we call perception" (62). Since there is always

delay between a perception and our awareness of a perception, and this delay allows for the filtering and selection of particular sensations, perception itself is never part of the Real and always represents a dual nature or Imaginary relation. Furthermore, due to the interval, the subject is defined as the gap between the cause (sensation, action) and effect (perception, reaction), and this notion of the subject as gap or interval follows Lacan's idea that the subject of the unconscious is a gap or a hole.

This dialectic between light and vision closely follows Lacan's discussion of photography in the *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (105–110). In this seminar, Lacan presents a diagram of two interacting triangles, and at one end, he puts the source of light and the gaze, and at the other end, we find the subject of representation. Part of this structure shows how the screen functions to block light, while the subject becomes an object of the gaze placed in the position of the Other. Lacan uses this structure to argue that the subject becomes an object through being photographed, and in this dialectic, the visual quest for Imaginary mastery is uprooted by the fact that the subject is looked at from multiple points of light. Like Deleuze's distinction between the Firstness of light and the Secondness of subjective perception, Lacan seeks to account for the secondary nature of our perceptions.

For Deleuze and Lacan, perception is, therefore, possible only because there is an interval between the Real and our perceptions of the Real, and this gap does follow Žižek's constant reference to Hegel's and Schelling's notion that the subject must first remove himself from the world and enter into the night or darkness in order to develop consciousness (75). However, it is clear from Deleuze's analysis that unlike Hegel and Žižek, this interval is both neural and Imaginary. Moreover, since the subject of consciousness originates through a gap or interval, consciousness itself is considered to be "indeterminant" and part of an "acentered universe of movement-images" (62). This decentering of the subject, which we also find in Lacan, is according to Deleuze avoided by the ego because we inject our needs and interests into the interval between sensations and perceptions: "[W]e perceive the thing, minus that which does not interest us a function of our needs" (63). From this perspective, subjectivity is "subtractive" and perception is reductive (63).

How Films Perceive

After establishing how natural perception works, Deleuze makes a surprising turn and argues that cinema does not follow natural perceptions because the mobility of the camera and the variability of its framings

allow "it to restore vast acentered and deframed zones" (64). Film is then revolutionary because it gives us access to the primal regime of the movement-image and allows us to experience pure sensations before subjective reduction and selection. At the same time, cinema also exposes how this acentered perceptual universe (the Firstness of the Real) is converted by consciousness (Secondness) and selective framing. Through the use of editing and montage, cinema reveals the selective nature of subjective framing, while it depicts the intervals between actions and reactions.

In another surprising move, Deleuze posits that between the Firstness of the sensation and the Secondness of the action-image, we find affection: "Affection is what occupies the interval, what occupies it without filling it in or filling it up. It surges in the center of indetermination, that is to say in the subject, between a perception which is troubling in certain respects and a hesitant action" (65). For example, a close-up of a face, what is often called the emotion shot, represents the gap between action and reaction. From this perspective, affect is the proof of the subjective and the cerebral, and the affection-image reveals that we have selected some of our organs to receive perceptions from a point of immobility, while other organs are liberated for action (65). Humans are in this sense divided between reception and reaction, and the subject is the split between these two primary activities.

Deleuze affirms that for Bergson, an affection is a motor effort placed on an immobilized receptive organ (66). In other terms, affect represents a reversal of the normal movement from reception to action, and it is in the face, where we find the immobilized organs registering the movements of the affections (66). However, before Deleuze elaborates on the role of affect in cinema and subjectivity, he argues that some filmmakers have been able to remove subjectivity by presenting a pure acentered universe. In looking at Beckett's *Film* with Buster Keaton, Deleuze asks how "we can rid ourselves of ourselves, and demolish ourselves" so that we can enter the "primary regime of variation" where an acentered purity is "untroubled by any centre of indetermination" (66). What Deleuze seeks in certain films is the absence of a privileged image or subjectivity and the presence of a purely objective perception of images as they exist in relation to each other in all of their facets and parts (76). It is in what he calls liquid perception or the "cine-eye" that he first locates the possibility of a cinema where subjective subtraction is itself subtracted (80). What cinema can do, and what the human eye cannot accomplish, is to rid itself from a central point of view. Here the mobility of the camera is opposed to the immobility of the human eye, and it is this mobility that opens up the possibility to be liberated from a privileged image (81). From this perspective, montage and film editing allow cinema to transcend the limitations of the human eye

and consciousness and enter into a realm of universal variation and interaction (81). Here objectivity is constructed, and the Real is encountered through artificial means. For Deleuze, this camera eye is an eye of matter no longer subjected to time, and instead of the interval existing in the subject, it now exists in matter.

While the perception-image concentrates on re-presenting the Real of pure materiality, the affection-image represents the subject being caught between the Real and the Imaginary. For instance, Deleuze argues that the close-up of the face abstracts the image from space and time by focusing our attention on the pure affection of the image/subject (96). Yet, Deleuze is quick to mention that once an affect is located in time and space, it enters into the dual world of the action-image: "that is to say they are actualized in particular state of things, determinant space-time, geographical and historical milieux, collective agents or individual agents" (98). In order for an affect, then, to maintain its Firstness, it must be experienced as something in itself without reference to anything else, and it must be presented as something new, yet eternal (98). In this sense, the Real of affects are virtual for Deleuze, and once they become actualized, they enter the realm of Secondness and become tied to spatial and temporal determinations. This conception of affects allows Deleuze to argue that affections are fundamentally impersonal and distinct from "any individuated state of things" (98).

In Bergman's *Persona*, Deleuze locates the focus on the face in close-ups as an effort to separate affects from individuals and to present people without defined social roles or efforts to communicate: "The close-up has merely pushed the face to the regions where the principle of individuation no longer holds sway" (100). For Deleuze, it is necessary to focus on these moments of pure affect in order to define how individuation comes into being. Thus, he argues that in Kafka's works, modern technologies are split in two: on the one hand, we have the technologies leading to communication that serve to dominate space and time, and, on the other hand, we find the expressions that summon phantoms and affects no longer coordinated in time and space. Deleuze adds that the former order leads to the military and translation of people into social puppets, while the latter allows for the void to enter subjectivity (100–101).

Deleuze summarizes the logic of his first two principal concepts in the following way: "We must always distinguish power-qualities in themselves, as expressed by a face, faces or their equivalents (affection-image of Firstness) and these same power-qualities as actualized in a state of things, in a determinant space-time (action-image of secondness)" (106). The foundation of a Deleuzian film theory would have to start with a recognition of these two very different vectors; the one pointing to the actualization of perceptions and individuals in time and space, and the other

pointing to the pure perception of affects divorced from individuals and the effort to communicate. Furthermore, the Firstness of the Real of cinema appears in what Deleuze calls the “any-space-whatever” (109), which is a singular space that has lost its homogeneity and can be defined as “a space of virtual conjunctions” (109).

The End of the Movement-Image and the American Dream

To understand this notion of the virtual, we can return to Žižek’s reading of the songs within Altman’s *Nashville*. On the one hand, the film does isolate the Firstness of pure affect and a resistance to communication through the repetition of meaningless songs, and yet, this pure affect is placed within a defined historical and social context. *Nashville* then constitutes a constant dual between the affection-image and the action-image, and this duality is itself placed in a series of mental relations that mediate the affects and actions. To understand this third level of movement-images (mental-images), we need to turn to Deleuze’s analysis of Peirce’s Thirdness: “[T]hirdness gives birth not to actions but to ‘acts’ which necessarily contain the symbolic element of law (giving, exchanging); not to perception, but to interpretations” (197). This stress on symbolic mediation and social relations pushes Deleuze to say that in Hitchcock, actions are always done for someone else, and so every action is always an exchange and an interpretation (200–201). Furthermore, Deleuze adds that Hitchcock usually considers three parties, the director, the film, and the public (202). It is then the spectator who always knows the relations in the film, and in this way, the spectator’s expectations and interpretation are an essential part of the film itself.

While Hitchcock represents the actualization of the movement-image and the introduction of the mental-image as the third term completing the classic film sign, for Deleuze, Hitchcock’s work also signals the undoing of the movement-image and the fragmentation of Western culture after World War II. In fact, after discussing Hitchcock’s work as the transitional point between the movement-image and the time-image, he asks what maintains a world after it loses totality and linkage, and his answer is clichés (208). To explain this fourth dimension of film after affects, actions, and relations, Deleuze turns to *Nashville*: “[T]he city locations are redoubled by the images to which they give rise—photos, recordings, television—and it is in an old song that the characters are finally brought together. The power of a sound cliché, a little song, is asserted in Altman’s *A Perfect Couple*” (209). Instead of, as Žižek argues, songs playing the role of pure affect or meaningless enjoyment, Deleuze shows how, they within the context of

Nashville present a reflection on clichés and the failure of social cohesion: “It is a crisis of both the action-image and the American Dream” (210). By linking the crisis of the action-image to the fall of the American dream, Deleuze combines a concern with social history with an emphasis on subjectivity and perception. In this historical version of phenomenology, our perceptual processes are tied to social conditions, and film becomes a place where the dialectic between the Real and the Symbolic is presented.

Deleuze adds that while film is itself a producer of clichés, certain directors are able to use clichés to explore other clichés, and yet he is also aware that “the rage against clichés does not lead to much if it is content only to parody them; maltreated, mutilated, destroyed, a cliché is not slow to reborn from its ashes” (211). The dead end of what is often called post-modern culture is that it is condemned to only parody the clichés that it recirculates; thus media about media and consciousness about consciousness can never escape from the trap of reflexivity. Still, Deleuze posits that this post-Hitchcockian reflection on clichés is not the only alternative, and that after World War II, we find in Germany, France, and Italy an attempt to start cinema again outside of the American tradition (211–212). In the development of a new type of filmmaking, the elliptical and the disorganized were affirmed in order to call into question the dominance of the action-image. For example, in Fellini we begin to lose track of how events are related and why particular actions are significant (212). Likewise, in Antonioni, film locations start to lose their specific significance as they enter into the anyplace whatsoever.

The New Wave against the Action-Image

In the case of the New Wave in France, Deleuze emphasizes the role of meaningless journeys where “the voyage is freed from the spatiotemporal coordinates” (213). In this depiction of a transitional society, we see the emergence of a “new pure present” where characters seem unaffected by what happens to them (213). Deleuze also stresses that in these French films, there is a proliferation of sensory-motor disturbances and a slowing down of time (213). As a direct attack on the American action-image, European “art” films reveal that “Under this power of the false all images become clichés, sometimes because their clumsiness is shown, sometimes because their apparent perfection is attacked” (214). Deleuze reveals here the true political character of what we can call postmodern or Late Modernist cinema, which took on the growing dominance of American cultural capitalism by deconstructing the foundations of the action-image. Thus, near the end of his first cinema book, Deleuze asks what an image

can be that would not be a cliché (214). For him, this is clearly a political and philosophical question that needs to be answered. It is then the task of the second cinema book to answer this question and provide the grounds for a truly political cinema.

On the Possibility of a Political Cinema

The preface to *Cinema 2* begins by tracing two historical movements; the first describes the philosophical revolution of reversing the subordination of time to movement, while the second concerns the transition from the classical cinema's stress on the movement-image to the post-World War II emphasis on the time-image (xi). In making this correlation between the history of philosophy and the history of film, Deleuze is able to equate the temporal logic of cinema with that of philosophy. From this perspective, there is little difference between film theory and philosophical analysis, and both areas of culture are tasked with combining historical analysis, scientific understanding, and aesthetic categorization. This interdisciplinary approach to film can be quite taxing for the reader who is used to the Kantian distinction among foundational philosophy, aesthetics, and ethics. Moreover, while a contemporary thinker like Žižek appears to follow this interdisciplinary approach, it is clear that he does not derive his analysis from an integrated system or philosophy. In other words, contemporary thinkers often suffer from a lack of systematic thinking, and the result is often a fragmentary form of analysis that does not hold onto any sense of philosophical and historical consistency.

One reason why Žižek misreads Deleuze, then, is that Žižek does not understand or value Deleuze's systematic approach, and once a reader lets go of the author's system, one can make an author say almost anything. However, before we get back to the consequences of Žižek's misreadings, we should first turn to the logic of *Cinema 2* that follows the logic of *Cinema 1* and begins with an analysis of what happens after the fall of the American movement-image. Deleuze's first observation on this point is that after World War II, Europe becomes dominated by "situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe" (xi). We can call this failure of knowledge "postmodern" because it represents a countermovement to the modern stress on knowledge and the mapping of space.

Deleuze's postmodernity, then, is not the consumption and parodying of clichés; rather, before the dominance of a self-reflexive media culture, we find the emergence of a political cinema dedicated to showing the discontinuities of perception and social relations. Deleuze's central argument

here is that the first result of the break-up of the movement-image is the emergence of time on the surface of the screen (xi). Not only is time to be shown to be "out of joint," but the continuity of images in films is undermined by "irrational cuts." Through the presentation of missed encounters, fragmentary images, and thematic disruptions, we see the disuniting of perception, action, and thought in post-World War II cinema (1). In this structure, the actor's actions no longer lead to a resolution; instead, "the character has become a kind of viewer. He shifts, runs, and becomes animated in vain, the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of response or action" (3). From Deleuze's perspective, in postmodern cinema, the audience identifies with the character, but the character on the screen is immobilized and subjected to sounds and images that appear to be displaced in time. Deleuze adds that in the classical cinema of the action-image, objects and settings always fit the demands of the situation, but in postmodern film, "objects and settings take on an autonomous material reality which gives them and importance in themselves" (4). This break with a functional realism allows directors to experiment with sounds and images that no longer have to serve the plot or character development. For Deleuze, the result of this new aesthetic is that "it is no longer a motor extension which is established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of liberated sense organs" (4). Here, the cultural revolution that will take off in the 1960s is shown to have some of its roots in an aesthetic movement motivated out of historical, philosophical, perceptual, and political concerns.

Not only do people desire to be liberated from constraining structures, but according to Deleuze's theory, our senses seek to be liberated from their immobilized roles and situations. Therefore, in post-World War II Italian cinema, Deleuze finds constant disruptions of time and place; in the case of many of Antonioni's movies, subjects are placed in dehumanized landscapes and empty places that absorb the character into the geographical location, while in many of Fellini's films, not only does reality turn into a spectacle, but subjects are invaded by multiple temporalities and pasts (5). In this sense, Neo-Realism is tied to an aesthetic of disruption, and the concentration on the trip or the stream of consciousness in postmodern film shows that the aesthetics match what is often called late Modernism. Just as in Faulkner, Joyce, and Woolf, the dominance of a subjective view is coupled with a loss of intentional control; what we find in postmodern film is the desire to match form with content. Thus, instead of simply describing the loss of subjective and cultural unity in traditional narrative order, the postmodern filmmakers and the late modernist writers experiment with form and present their material in a disruptive fashion.

Deleuze posits that these experiments in form result in an aesthetic and politics where traditional cultural and philosophical oppositions are undermined: "We run in fact into a principle of indetermination, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask" (7). In this passage, Deleuze points to the central political problem facing postmodern art: while art after modernity opens up possibilities and liberates us from modern restrictions, it can also undermine our ability to take on a stable perspective with certainty and predictability. Furthermore, in post-postmodern culture and politics, this merging of the real and the imaginary will be used to promote imaginary solutions to real social problems.

As Deleuze posits, already with Fellini, the formation of a spectacle culture is developed, and yet Fellini's spectacles are disruptive, while contemporary pos-postmodern productions represent seamless combinations of fact and fiction. This difference between disruptive and nondisruptive aesthetics can be best understood by looking at the work of Jean-Luc Godard and his ability to isolate sounds and images from their functional roles in plot and character development. For instance, in the summary of Godard's *Made in USA*, we are introduced to "a witness providing us with a series of reports with neither a conclusion nor logical connection . . . without really effective reactions" (9–10). It is hard to image a mass audience sitting through this type of structure, and yet, postmodern filmmakers in Europe did present a disruptive art form for a nonelite audience.

As Deleuze highlights, Godard's disruptive art not only presented itself through stuttering speakers, coughing protagonists, and inhibited actions, but this aesthetic and political cinema sought to decompose and not compose fantasies and realities (10). By isolating sounds and images from the plot, Godard was able to attack the action-image and the ideology of closure that maintained the classical American film. As Deleuze insists, the mutations in Godard's films represent the mutation of European culture after World War II, and this matching of form and content makes cinema political (19). By presenting the intolerable and the unpleasant, postmodern film tried to disrupt our normal way of turning away from negative stimuli: "We have schemata for turning away when it is too unpleasant, for prompting resignation when it is terrible and for assimilating when it is too beautiful" (20). Deleuze continues his text by insisting that clichés play the central role of allowing us to use our sensory-motor system to deny the unpleasant and disruptive: "We perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what is in our interests to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally only perceive clichés" (20). Since film produces and

circulates clichés, it tends to reinforce our economic, ideological, and psychological interests, and yet political art can challenge these interests by getting us to encounter the unpleasant, while we witness the undoing of the action-image: “But, if our sensory-motor schemata jam or break, then a different type of image can appear: a pure optical-sound image, the whole image without metaphor, brings out the thing in unjustifiable character” (20). In this jamming of our sensory-motor schemata, Deleuze posits the possibility of a politics of the image and an attention to the materiality of representation.

In turning to his conception of the time-image, Deleuze focuses on how the disruption of the linearity of the movement-image (and the sensory-motor schemata) allows for a Bergsonian coexistence of multiple temporalities. Not only does the past coexist with the present, but multiple virtual pasts are put into a circuit through the process of montage and editing (48). However, Deleuze reminds us that we have to distinguish between the conservative way the action-image classical film places flashbacks into the linear narrative of a movie, and the way postmodern films disrupt narrative closure by presenting multiple pasts: “In short, it is not the recollection-image or attentive recognition which gives us the proper equivalent of the optical-sound image, it is rather the disturbance of memory and the failures of recognition” (55). What Deleuze then seeks out in the time-image is the disruptions of consciousness by memory and the inability of the subject to control mental representations. Thus, like Woolf, Faulkner, and Joyce, disruptive postmodern cinema invokes multiple pasts not to show the subject’s mastery of time, but rather, the intentional control of the psychological ego is undermined by the intrusion of the past.

Through the cinematic use of dreams, fantasies, delusions, and hallucinations, European cinema showed how “a character finds himself prey to visual and sound sensations . . . which have lost their motor extension” (55). In upsetting the classical motor-image structure, these films present images that float outside of time, and they, therefore, take on the structure of the unconscious. Not only do these films present a lack of negation and temporal order like dreams, in postmodern cinema, abstract ideas are rendered concrete as mental images are translated back into material perceptions. While Deleuze appears to be approaching a psychoanalytic theory of the cinema, he is quick to distinguish his project from what he sees as the reductive intentions of psychoanalytic theory and practice. Even as Deleuze affirms the Freudian and Lacanian notion that the images in dreams all represent other images and, therefore, every image is actually a symbol of displacement or substitution, Deleuze uses Bergson to distance himself from psychoanalysis because he sees classical analysis as centered on the motor-image and the translation of unconscious impulses into

static representations. From this perspective, Deleuze goes against Žižek's desire to oppose the good Deleuze of pure philosophy to the bad Deleuze of political, antipsychoanalytic *Anti-Oedipus*. It is clear that Deleuze's philosophical work is political and psychoanalytic, but Deleuze's version of psychoanalysis is highly critical of the imposition of set structures like the Oedipus complex.

Deleuze's Virtual Realities

Not only does Deleuze differentiate himself from classical psychoanalysis by rejecting any set interpretation of dream images, but he also adds a Marxism component to film theory and philosophy by identifying time with money. From this perspective, since cinema must always pay for its time with money, and time has been equated with money in modern culture, the central drama of the time-image is the battle between images and money (78). Deleuze posits that cinema gives images for money and gives time for images, and in this structure an endless circuit is generated out of an impossible exchange. This dissymmetry between images and money (time) is doubled by the coexistence of real and virtual images since the virtual images represent the presence of the past in the present (79). In using Bergson's theory of the *deja-vu*, Deleuze posits that this perceptual distortion actually provides the truth of our relation to time, which is that as we remember the present, we also coexist with the past. To prove this point, he cites the following passage from Bergson: "Every moment of our life presents the two aspects, it is actual and virtual, perception on the one side and recollection on the other" (79). This conception of the virtual is at odds with Žižek's pithy summarization of Deleuze's theory: "What matters to Deleuze is not virtual reality but *the reality of the virtual* (which, in Lacanian terms, is the Real)" (3). If for Lacan, the Real means that which is impossible to symbolize, then clearly what Deleuze is describing as the virtual has no relation to the Lacanian Real. In contrast to Žižek, Deleuze turns to the virtual and the unconscious in order to locate memory systems represented through a network of images, and while these images may not be actualized or conscious, they act as a symbolic structure of mental associations.

To understand the virtual in Deleuze, it is important to comprehend his view of structuralism and the Symbolic order. For example, in his text on structuralism, he posits that symbolic structures have no relation with a sensible form or an intelligible essence; instead, structural elements are differential relations determined by topological locations (261). From this perspective, the Symbolic order is virtual, and it is actualized only when

particular people or objects fill predetermined positions and functions. As Lacan argues, we are born into a world that is already structured by symbolic relations and differences, and so the subject affirms his or her position by being subjected to a place within the predetermined social structure. In fact, it is Lacan's structuralism that Žižek rejects when he opposes the bad Early Lacan of the Symbolic to the good Late Lacan of the Real. In turn, Žižek's desire to equate Deleuze's notion of the virtual with the Lacanian Real can be seen as the result of his dismissal of Deleuze's understanding of the Symbolic order.

Lacan's and Deleuze's Conceptual Structuralism

If we do grasp that for Deleuze the virtual is the Symbolic, and the Symbolic represents the Thirdness of social structures, we can also affirm that Deleuze's film theory is Lacanian because both theories share the same structuralist understanding of the Symbolic. This closeness between Lacan and Deleuze can be located at the end of *Cinema 2*, where Deleuze posits that "a theory of cinema is not 'about' cinema, but about the concepts that cinema gives rise to and which are themselves related to other concepts corresponding to other practices, the practice of concepts in general having no privilege over others" (3). Just as Deleuze sees Hitchcock as presenting mental relations as the culmination of the action-image, he posits that the virtual network of interdisciplinary concepts determines the role of film theory. Like Lacan, Deleuze asks what the fundamental concepts are that determine a domain and how these concepts relate to other conceptual areas. In turn, each concept must be placed within a differential network, and thus, a concept means nothing in itself and can be understood only through its relation to other concepts.

The question then of what a Deleuzian or Lacanian film theory would look like must be understood by the interaction between each thinker's central concepts and the conceptual relations that are generated out of individual films and film history. While Lacan and Deleuze often share a similar conceptual framework, a secondary interpreter like Žižek can impose his own meanings because he simply rejects or neglects the predetermined conceptual system. Moreover, this rejection of the symbolic structure is symptomatic of our post-postmodern culture where automation leads to a heightened sense of individual autonomy. I have called this new cultural period "automodernity" not only to distinguish it from postmodernity, but also to show how the seemingly seamless combination of automation and autonomy represses social and symbolic mediation as it hides the disruptive aspects of postmodern culture.

Žižek's Automodernism versus Deleuze's Postmodern Politics

In seeing Žižek as an automodern philosopher, I posit that his rejection of the postmodern is based on four unrelated strategies: (1) he wants to differentiate his theories and intellectual product from what is often called postmodernism, post-structuralism, and post-Marxism; (2) he rejects the new social movements based on minority rights in favor of a totalizing Marxist fight against global capitalism; (3) he affirms a Hegalian interpretation of Lacan that stresses the universal void of subjectivity; and (4) he provides intellectual entertainment by being politically incorrect. All of these four automodern components are clearly at play in Žižek's misreading of Deleuze's theory of the cinema, and just as the automodern subject rebels against minority rights and social determinism in order to affirm the power of the liberated individual, Žižek avoids dealing with the political dimensions of Deleuze's work.

A central aspect of Deleuze's film theory that Žižek and other commentators have missed is his stress on how the disruptive nature of postmodern films is tied to the emergence of minority-based discourses: "The death-knell for becoming conscious was precisely the consciousness that there were no people, but always several peoples, an infinity of peoples, who remained to be united, or should not be united, in order for the problem to change. It is in this way that third world cinema is a cinema of minorities" (220). What then breaks up the classical action-image after World War II is not only the destructive nature of the war, but also the emergence of multiple minority-based movements calling into question the universality and equality of the modern world.

One of the results of this postmodern emergence of minority discourses is that "private business immediately becomes public" (220). Here, Deleuze echoes the call of the women's movement that the "personal is political," and by calling for this recognition of the political foundation of everyday relations, we see how a structuralist interpretation of culture can lead to a call for collective action. Since structuralism tells us that society is ruled by symbolic relations and not by any natural or religious foundation, it becomes possible to imagine changing these symbolic social structures. In terms of film, Deleuze argues that the third world artist has to produce a new social utterance that breaks away from the dominant Symbolic order of the colonizer (221). The role of the postmodern speech-act is here posited as creating a people through the social construction of a new collective memory: "Not the myth of a past people, but the story-telling of the people to come. The speech-act must create itself as a foreign language in a dominant language, precisely in order to express an impossibility of living under domination" (223). Deleuze thus posits here two opposing functions of

postmodern political cinema: on the one hand, it must disrupt our normal way of seeing the world through action-images and clichés, and, on the other hand, it must build a new collective voice.

What the break-up of the action-image and the emergence of the postmodern time-image produce is the possibility of political art through the process of denaturalizing symbolic representations: “[I]nteractions caught at the point where they do not derive from pre-existing social structures are not the same as psychic actions and reactions, but are the correlate of speech-acts or silences, stripping the social of its naturalness, forming systems which are far from being in equilibrium or invent their own equilibrium” (227). Disruptive art, therefore, denaturalizes social relations and opens a space for new relations to be formed.

In response to Deleuze’s combination of the breaking up of the action-image and the promotion of a new collective voice forged out of the speech-acts of minority discourses, Žižek presents only the negative side of Deleuze’s discourse. For instance, after noting that Hitchcock plays a decisive role in Deleuze’s cinema theory, Žižek adds that the passage from the movement-image to the time-image shows that the “subject is excessively overwhelmed by the shock of the Real; the intrusion of the Real disturbs the unity of the action/reaction, the subject’s direct insertion into a reality in which he can simply (re)act as an engaged agent” (151). Instead of seeing how the postmodern experimentations with images and sound serve to denaturalize Symbolic social relations, Žižek focuses on how the intrusion of the Real renders the subject immobile and passive: “Overwhelmed by the Real, the subject is transformed into a passive spectator of himself and of the world” (151). While this stress on the passivity of the subject fits in well with Žižek’s theory of contemporary subjectivity, it is at odds with the way that Deleuze turns the seeing subject into an active agent of collective storytelling. Moreover, Žižek mistakenly argues that for Deleuze, Hitchcock represents the emergence of the time-image, while in fact, Deleuze posits Hitchcock as the culmination of the action-image.

It is very telling that after Žižek himself misrepresents Deleuze’s theory, he discusses how certain film theorists tend to misrecognize what happens in Hitchcock’s films because of an “excessive subjective engagement” (152). According to Žižek, since the facts do not match the theory, the theorists invest the screen with their own “hallucinatory distortions” (152). Of course, it has been my argument that Žižek is often guilty of misreading Deleuze and other theorists in order to find proof of his own theories; furthermore, I have tied this type of misrepresentation to the dominance of secondary interpretations in our post-postmodern culture.

If we look at what Deleuze actually says about Hitchcock, we find that his central argument is that films like *Vertigo* display the dominance of

the mental-image and the idea that for Hitchcock, everything has be read on the level of a symbolic exchange. For example, the detective played by Jimmy Stewart desires a woman after he has been hired by another man to investigate that man's wife. In this structure, the detective desires through the desire of another, and his actions must be read as a social exchange. However, when Žižek reads this same film, he does not stress the social mediation of individual desire; instead, he emphasizes how many of the images in the film represent a subjectivity without a subject or an organ without a body (153). In other terms, Žižek replaces the Symbolic realm of the mental-image with the acentered return to the presubjective Real.

In stressing the Real over the Symbolic, Žižek is able to argue that what Deleuze locates in Hitchcock is the disruption of the Real disconnected from any type of social history or social context. Furthermore, Žižek posits that what political films should do is to present this return to the Real through the presence of a cinema-eye no longer tied to any subject: "This, precisely, is what revolutionary cinema should be doing: using the camera as a partial object, as an 'eye' torn from the subject and freely thrown around" (154). This theory of political cinema ignores Deleuze's careful distinction between how classical film used a subtractive method to return to a presubjective vision, and how postmodern cinema uses disruptive techniques to denaturalize the Symbolic and open a space to articulate new collective speech-acts.

Instead of locating political cinema in the social and Symbolic order of exchanges and mental relations, Žižek confuses the Real and the Imaginary as he excludes the Symbolic. For example, in another passage discussing *Vertigo*, he displaces Deleuze's understanding of the social exchange with his own interpretation of the self-oriented gaze: "In *Vertigo* also Scottie has to accept that the fascinating spectacle of Madeleine, which he was secretly following, was staged for his gaze only" (158). This idea that the image of the woman was designed for only the main character's gaze can serve as an example of how contemporary global consumer capitalism has been able to convince subjects that mass produced objects respond to individual desires. In other words, instead of seeing Hitchcock as an example of disruptive cinema, Žižek reads *Vertigo* as a metaphor for how ideology works today. As Althusser posited, ideology represents the imaginary resolution of social conflicts, and what we find in Žižek's description of *Vertigo* is that even in the face of the decentering gaze placed in the field of the Other, the subject is able to personalize and internalize the potentially disruptive image.

While Žižek is fond of locating the present of the traumatic Real in our lives, what his automodern texts actually do is to show how our contemporary culture is able to translate all disruptive social tensions into Imaginary structures where real sensations are subjected to individualizing

perceptions. In fact, in the concluding sections of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze points to how the new cybernetic culture enables this type of Imaginary appropriation through the development of a new type of vision and information: "Power was diluted in an information network where 'decision-makers' managed control, processing and stock across intersections of insomniacs and seers" (265). In this early anticipation of the logic of the Internet, Deleuze posits that as information spreads through decentralized networks, a new type of control society is born, and central to this new cultural formation is the transformation of the human and nature into pure data projected on screens: "And the screen itself, even if it keeps a vertical position by convention, no longer seems to refer to the human posture, like a window or a painting, but rather constitutes a table, an opaque surface on which are inscribed 'data,' information replacing nature, and the brain-city, the third eye, replacing the eyes of nature" (265). The dehumanization of our world is here coupled with the development of a brain-city where information is presented on an opaque surface, and due to this type of data representation, subjects are given the Imaginary illusion that they control all aspects of the world.

What most commentators of Deleuze's work have missed is this historical and political consideration of media that pits the disruptive function of the pure speech-act against the reduction nature of computer-mediated information: "It is thus necessary to go beyond all of the pieces of spoken information; to extract from the pure speech-act, creative storytelling. The life or afterlife of cinema depends on its internal struggle with informatics" (270). Here, Deleuze posits that political art must now find a way to combat the dominance of information in our cyber cultures, and one of the central places for this confrontation is how images are produced and consumed. For example, in his description of the computerization of the filmic image, Deleuze critiques the way images are now being processed: "But, when the frame or the screen functions as instrument panel, printing or computing table, the image is constantly being cut into another image, being printed through a visible mesh, sliding over other images in an incessant stream of messages, and the shot itself is less like an eye than an overloaded brain endlessly absorbing information" (267). As the subject of automodernity becomes overwhelmed by the information and the gaze of the Other, the image and the eye become replaced by an interactive network that excludes the cerebral interval. In other terms, the incessant coupling of images produces a cultural information overload that prevents the opening of a space for social disruption and the formation of a collective speech-act: "Redemption, art beyond knowledge, is also creation beyond information" (270). By tying art to political revolution, Deleuze seeks to offer an alternative path to our media information culture.

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